# WALL PAINTINGS IN THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST, CORBY, LINCOLNSHIRE

By E. CLIVE ROUSE

The paintings which form the subject of this paper first came to light in 1939 in the Parish Church of St. John the Evangelist, Corby—a large village, formerly a small market town of some importance with a castle mound adjacent to the church—in South Lincolnshire. The building, though not remarkable in any way, is a large and handsome one like many in the area (pl. I, *a*).

The Vicar, the Rev. H. S. Goodrich, had decided to have certain repairs carried out and the interior of the church cleaned and re-decorated. The walls were covered with layer upon layer of whitewash and colourwash, extremely dirty, and cracked and flaking in many places. Some faint appearance of medieval colour beneath the peeling coats of limewash above the chancel arch, and the general impression that the plaster beneath was original, made the architect in charge of the work (Mr. Lawrence H. Bond, of Grantham), decide that no risk should be run of destroying any medieval paintings or other features that might remain, particularly as the church had never been the victim of a really serious restoration. Accordingly, before the plaster repairs, brushing down and re-colourwashing were begun, I was called in to make a thorough investigation and to submit a report ; and it very soon became apparent that most extensive remains of paintings were present in almost every part of the church.

The discovery appeared likely to be important and to involve so much time and labour that the patron of the living, Sir Walter Benton Jones, Bart., of Irnham Hall, was approached. After some preliminary work had been done, he most generously consented to be responsible for whatever work was necessary for the complete recovery and preservation of the paintings, and authorized me to proceed. It is, therefore, largely thanks to him that it was possible to add this valuable set to the list of schemes of painting in English churches.

The work was completed in August, 1940, and in the end involved the investigation and treatment of almost 1,200 square feet of plaster.

The discovery is one of the most important and extensive made in recent years, though it is not claimed that the Corby

paintings, with two exceptions, exhibit any outstanding artistic merit ; and all but two or three of the subjects are of a normal kind. There are, however, two subjects of great rarity and interest in this country, and a third is treated in a most original and striking way. Their chief interest lies in the unusually complete picture they give of a medieval scheme of painting throughout nave and aisles ; in the light they throw upon medieval art and ecclesiastical teaching ; and in the sources that were used for their presentation to an unlettered congregation.

In describing these paintings I propose to deal with those in the North Aisle (of two periods) first, then with those in the South Aisle (very fragmentary and of several periods), and finally with the great scheme in the Nave. In conclusion it may be of value to give some details of technique, pigments and plasters, and of some of the problems encountered in the course of preservation and recording.[1]

## The North Aisle

The North Aisle contains paintings of two periods, separated by roughly a century. The aisle was probably an early fourteenth century addition to an aisleless Norman Church and seems to have been built by Dame Margery Crioll or Kyriel, the altar there serving as a Lady Chapel, for her Will, preserved at Lincoln, is dated 1319 and mentions the Chaplains ' in the Chapel of our Lady, which I have built ' in Corby Church.[2] A scheme of painting evidently accompanied the work ; and two exquisite subjects—the St. Anne and the Virgin, and the first St. Christopher—remain, together with the painted decoration of the image-niche and the window-splays and mouldings.

During the first quarter of the fifteenth century the aisle was lengthened eastwards, the North wall of the Chancel was pierced, and a new Lady Chapel was formed, as at Irnham nearby. The whole length of the old aisle wall was at the same time raised to accommodate the new roof of flatter pitch (as may be clearly seen on the exterior). This resulted in considerable damage to the original paintings, particularly at the top. With that superb disregard for the work of their predecessors which is so remarkable a characteristic of medieval craftsmen, no attempt was made to restore Dame Margery's scheme of paintings. A completely new scheme was decided

[1] A very brief account of the discovery was given in the *Lincolnshire Architectural and Archaeological Society's Reports and Papers*, vol. ii, part 1, 1938, pp. 7-12.

[2] Arthur Abbott, *History of the Parishes of Irnham and Corby.*

on. What was left of the old subjects was covered with a thin wash of lime putty, and the whole wall was re-painted.

SUBJECT 1. The first of the early subjects is found on the North wall just east of the North door, occupying the space between it and a window with geometrical tracery (pl. III). It is of unusually large scale, measuring approximately 8 feet by 4 feet, and represents a normal treatment of a very popular subject frequently found in Lady Chapels, namely St. Anne teaching the Virgin to read.[1]

The subject, though much faded and a little damaged by having been covered over with a later painting of St. Christopher and by damp and plaster failures at the base, is essentially complete. It is, artistically, the finest painting in the Church, and clearly the work of an artist of repute, exemplifying the skill of line that characterizes this period of English painting. The drawing is masterly, and the subject treated with grace and sympathy. It is somewhat reminiscent in colouring and pose, of the ante-reliquary chapel paintings in Norwich Cathedral, and has the typical East Anglian delicacy, and tone of blue-green. The clever balancing of the contrasted S curves of the two figures is particularly notable. The work is executed on a plain cream plaster base, though there may have been a painted niche now lost. St. Anne is clad in a long gown of white or cream shaded in blue-black or grey, with a girdle having jewelled enrichments in green and black, and a cloak also white or cream, fastened by a green jewelled morse. She wears a white linen head-dress or veil. The halo is in yellow and green, and the whole has black outline, the features being in red. Her right hand was probably pointing to an open book (now perished) and her left rests on the Virgin's shoulder. The Virgin, a slender figure, stands looking down at the book, which was apparently held in both hands, clad in a gown of green and brown ; there are pockets in the front. Her hair, confined by a head-band, and features are painted in red. Both figures stand on a pedestal or dado band of quatrefoils, painted in blue-black. It should be noted that the lines of the girdle and of the enrichments on it and of the morse are incised in the plaster.

SUBJECT 2. The second of the early subjects, also forming part of the original decoration of the Kyriel Lady Chapel, occurs East of the first, in the space between the two aisle windows. It is of monumental proportions, being in its present

[1] Compare Chalfont St. Giles, Bucks., E. end of S. Aisle, part of a series depicting the life and Miracles of the Virgin, c. 1320-30, (*Records of Bucks.*, xii, 110-11) ; Croughton, Northants, E. end of S. Aisle c. 1300-1320 (*Archaeologia*, xxvi, 196 and pl. xlvi).

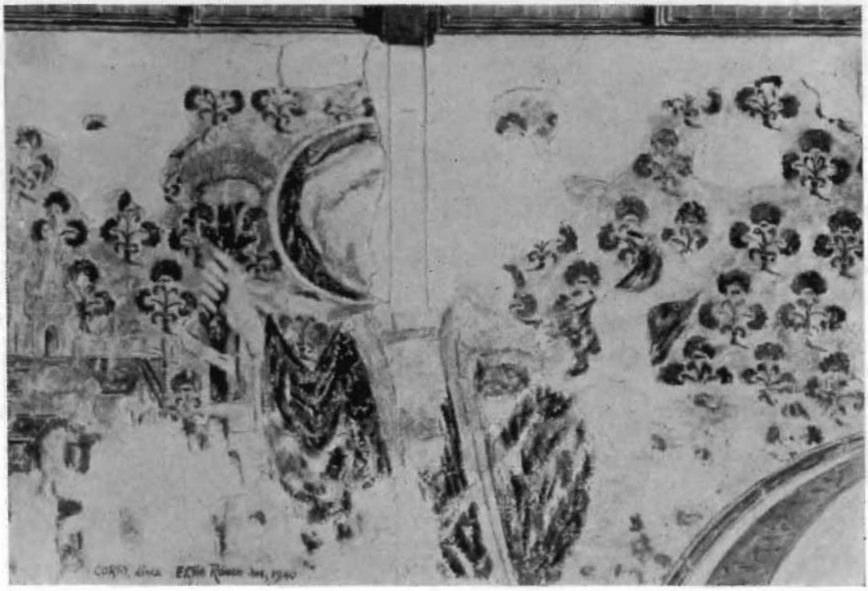
*a.* Corby, Lincolnshire. The church from the north-east, showing eastward extension of the north aisle and line of the original gable over the chancel arch.

*b.* North wall of the north aisle, showing subject 5 (The Warning to Swearers and the Seven Deadly Sins) superimposed upon the early fourteenth century subject 2 (St. Christopher and the Holy Child (i).

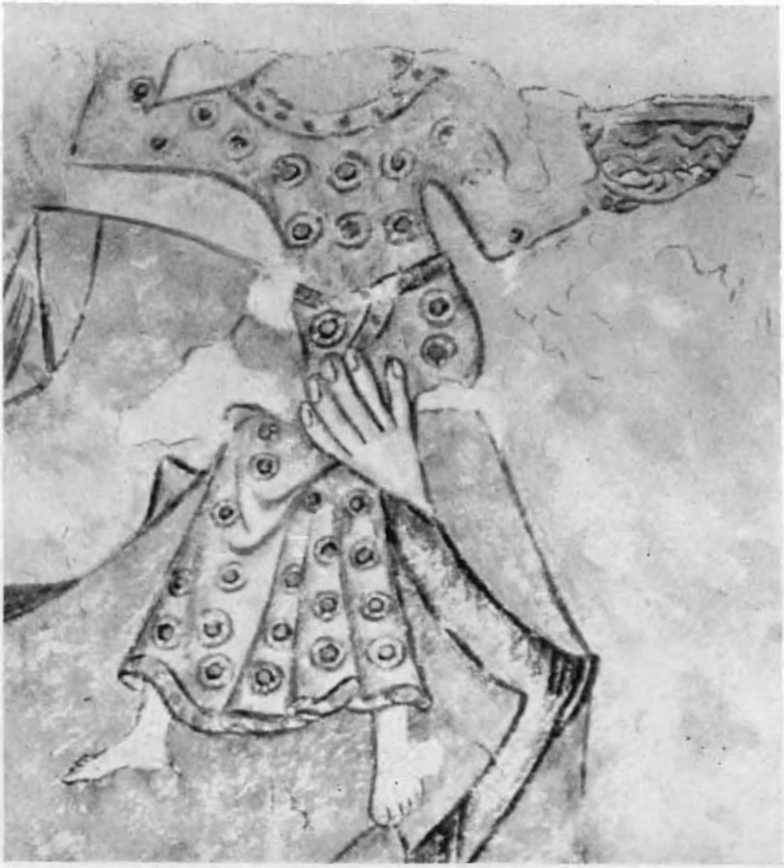
*c.* The east wall of the nave and north clerestory while work was in progress on the uncovering of the paintings and extensive plaster and structural repairs.

*d.* North arcade and clerestory at an early stage of the work, with a fragment of one of Magi and the Virgin and Child only partially disclosed.

*To face page* 153



*a.* SUBJECT 4. ST. CHRISTOPHER (ii), EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY. NORTH AISLE



*b.* SUBJECT 2. DETAIL OF THE CHRIST CHILD'S ROBE
(See pl. IV).

mutilated state about 9 feet by 5 feet (originally probably 2 feet higher) and represents St. Christopher carrying the Divine Child (pl. IV).

The subject is an almost universal one, and the general treatment and position (opposite the main (South) doorway), quite normal. But many of the details are remarkable. The Saint wears a tunic, reaching to the knees, of cream and brown with a neck-hem of black spots in a double black line border, all with blue-black shading and black outline. His cloak is of pink, lined with green, with heavy folds. The staff is slender and straight, and is coloured green with black outline. The Christ Child is seated on the Saint's left shoulder, supported by his hand. His right hand was raised in blessing, and the left holds an orb of most unusual if not unique type, the lower half being composed of alternate wavy lines of green and yellow separated by black to represent the sea, the upper half being yellow to represent the earth. The Child's robe is remarkable, being of cream, the folds shaded boldly in grey, and having a ' peacock ' pattern all over it consisting of green spots outlined in black surrounded by a circle of vermilion dots the whole enclosed by a black line. The hem, neck and wrist edging is a border of green and vermilion or red-brown dots between black lines with a belt or girdle of the same type (pl. II, *b*).

The treatment is very simple as one would expect at this date, though the details of the water at the base are mutilated.[1] The attitude of the Saint is striking, the full weight being put on the staff and the knees being bent with the effort of forging through the water, and affords a further proof of the graphic skill of the same artist as painted the St. Anne.[2]

The subject is unhappily much mutilated, first by the raising of the aisle wall which destroyed the heads both of the Saint and the Christ Child, secondly by the painting over it of a fifteenth century subject which could not be removed on account of its interest, thirdly by damp and plaster failure at the base, and finally by the insertion of a nineteenth century mural tablet, which it was, however, possible to remove elsewhere.

It will be noticed that the subject is deliberately set out to one side of the wall, not in the centre, so as to balance the little ogee-headed image niche which doubtless held a statuette of of the Virgin.

Also belonging to the fourteenth century scheme is some good

[1] Compare Little Missenden, Bucks., c. 1300 (*Records of Bucks.*, xii, 310 and pl.)

[2] For a similar attitude compare the Westminster St. Christopher (*Burl. Mag.*, May 1937).

red colour on the two window mouldings, and traces of double-line masonry pattern with roses in the splays, as well as the colouring on the little image niche.

We come now to the second series of paintings, undertaken after the structural alterations already described.

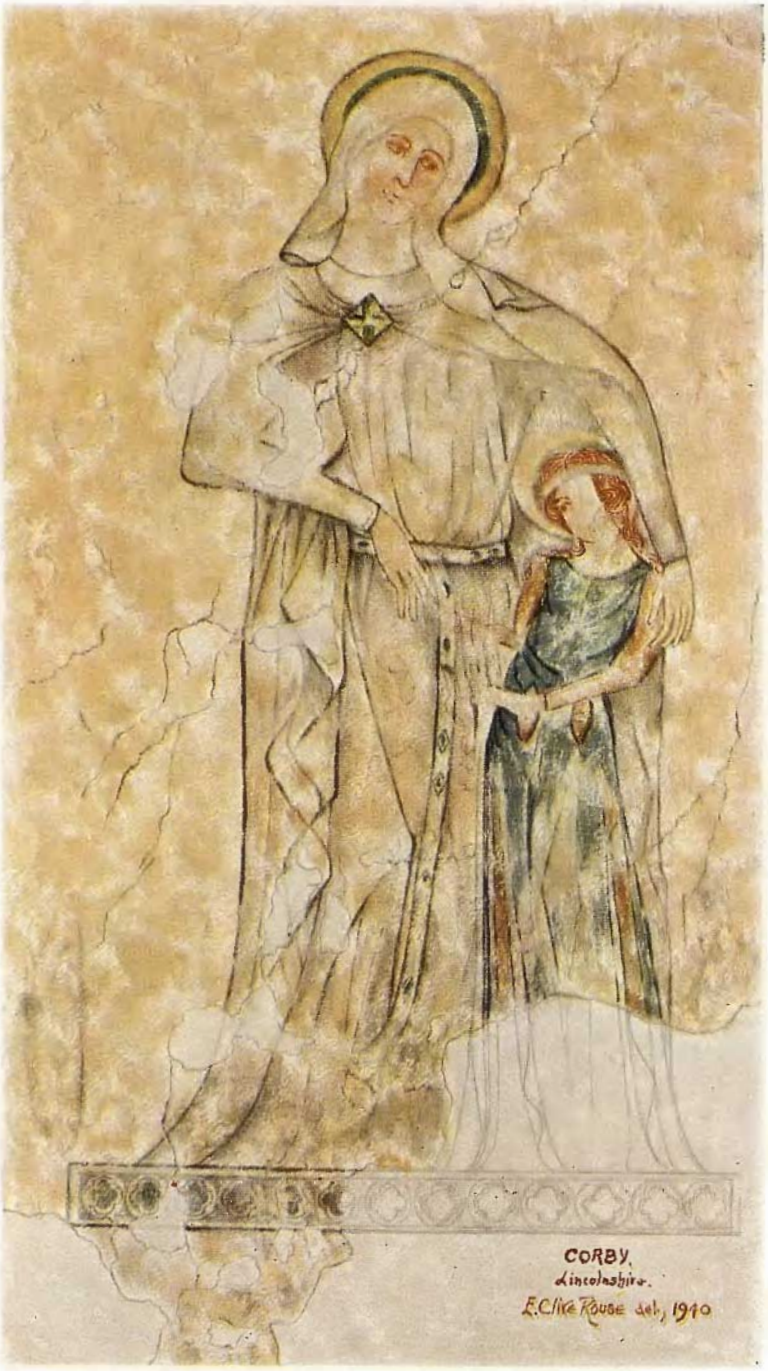
SUBJECT 3.—Commencing at the West end, we find the first subject occupying the upper part of the wall partly over the North door and the little quatrefoil window to the West of it. It is a representation of the Weighing of Souls, with the Virgin interceding, and measures approximately 9 feet by 7 feet 3 inches (pl. VI).

For the main part of the subject the treatment is quite normal ; and it is not unusual to find this scene detached from the general representation of the Doom, and when treated separately thus, its position is not out of the ordinary.[1]

St. Michael, in fringed and apparelled vestments, stands on the left of the subject holding a large balance. On the left-hand side of the beam sits a devil endeavouring to push the scale down. On the right of the painting stands the Virgin, placing the beads of her rosary on the right hand end of the beam, thus tilting the scale in favour of the soul indistinctly seen in the pan beneath. She is at the same time protecting about 30 souls arranged in pairs on each side under the ample folds of her cloak. A diminutive figure of a priest kneels at the foot of St. Michael and is presented to the Virgin. The whole painting has a brocade pattern background in deep red painted with a stencil, with a red outer border. Black outline is used throughout, and there has been a wide range of colours the more subtle of which are now only faintly traceable. St. Michael's wings are in deep red, pink and black, with spots on some of the feathers. There is a black fringed vestment apparently a dalmatic or tunicle in shades of red and brown with traces of vermilion, and there is an elaborate black, red and brown apparel to the alb. Traces of a circlet with a cross on the front are visible at the top. The devil is in deep red. The Virgin is shown crowned, with long hair falling over the shoulders (compare the two other contemporary subjects in which she appears) with a pinky-cream, tight fitting bodice and kirtle (possibly once lightly brocaded in black) with a deep browny-red and vermilion cloak lined with ermine. The small figures are in red, and the Priest in brown, white and black.

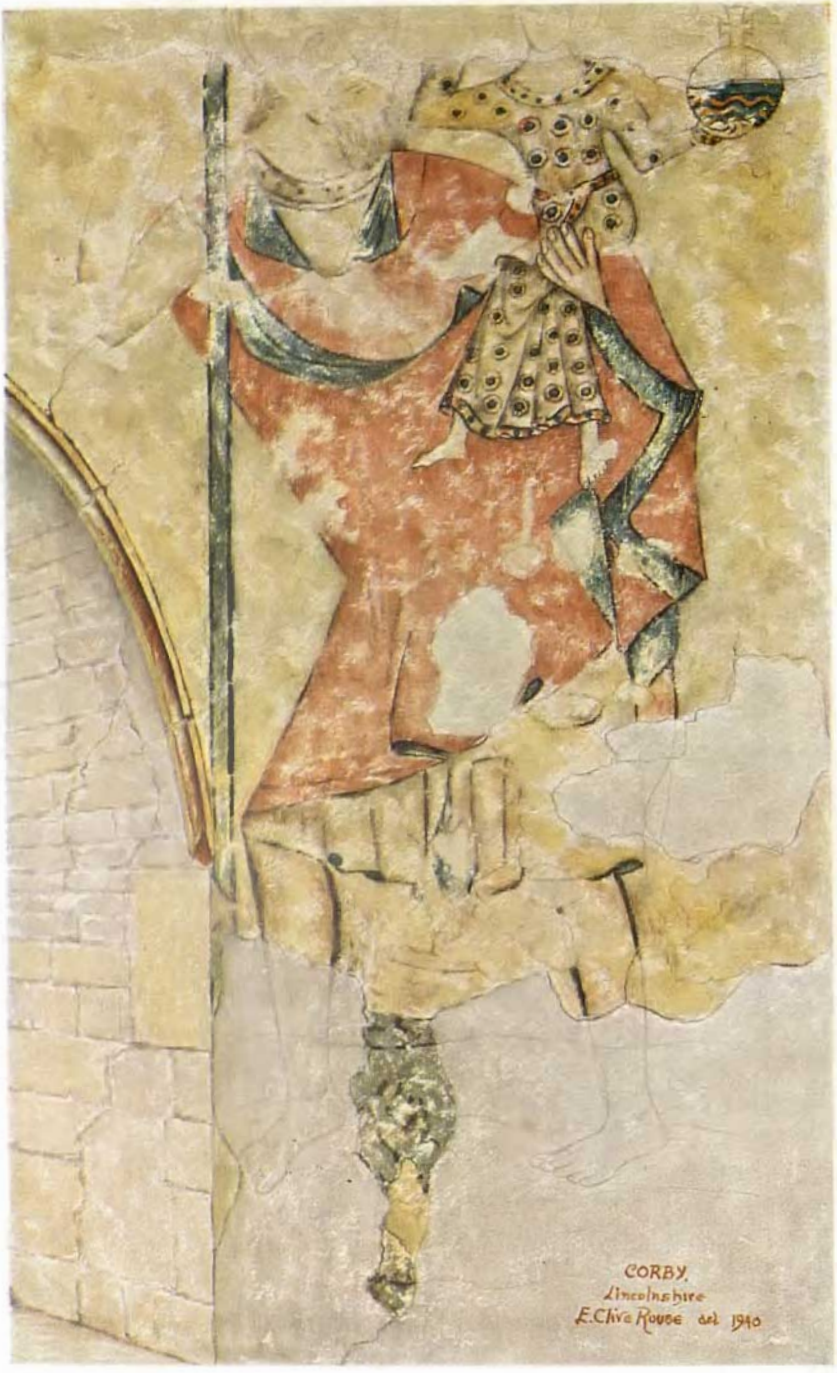
The latter figure is clearly a donor, and probably represents

[1] Compare South Leigh, Oxon., on S. wall of nave, with Doom over chancel arch (J. C. Wall, *Medieval Wall Paintings*, 190-1, 216) ; Toddington, Beds., over S. door, etc.




SUBJECT I. ST. ANNE AND THE VIRGIN, EARLY FOURTEENTH CENTURY. NORTH AISLE

*To face page* 155




SUBJECT 2. ST. CHRISTOPHER AND THE HOLY CHILD (i), EARLY FOURTEENTH CENTURY. NORTH AISLE
(For detail see pl. II, *b*).

the Vicar of the time. On a scroll above his head can be faintly read the words (in black-letter) '**Of Your Charite Pray for Ye Soull . . .**' The inclusion of a kneeling donor is much less common in wall painting than in stained glass; the best known examples are perhaps at South Newington, Oxon.[1]

The most interesting feature of the painting is the representation of the Virgin protecting souls under her cloak. This,

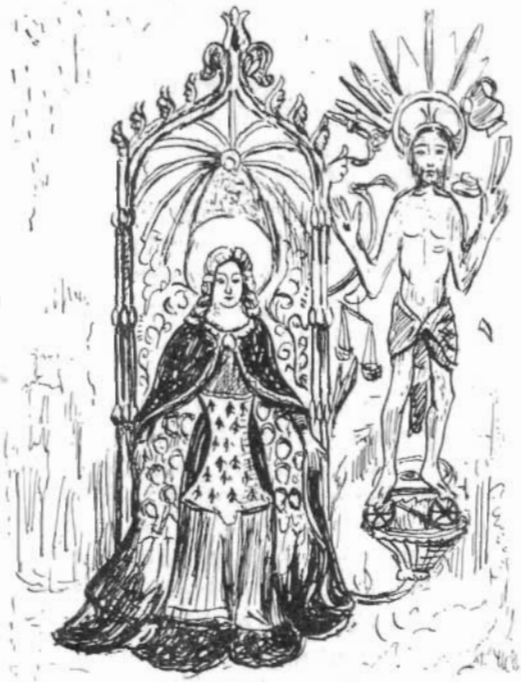


FIG. 1. STEDHAM, SUSSEX. THE VIRGIN OF MERCY AND CHRIST OF THE TRADES.
(now destroyed).
From a sketch by Professor E. W. Tristram.

as far as I know, is the only surviving example of the subject in English medieval painting. It is possible that some of the numerous screen paintings identified as St. Ursula and the Eleven thousand Virgins are in fact intended for the Virgin of Mercy, but no conclusive proof is yet forthcoming. There was formerly an example of this subject at Stedham, Sussex, which was sketched by Professor Tristram,[2] but it is now destroyed (Fig. 1). The theme of La Vierge de Miséricorde

[1] See E. W. Tristram in *Burl. Mag.*, March 1933.

[2] Boerniusand Tristram, *English Medieval Painting*, 33.

or La Vierge au Manteau Protecteur was one originally of thirteenth century Cistercian origin, and became immensely popular on the Continent.[1] The most similar to the Corby example is that at Fribourg, Switzerland, a stone statue of the fourteenth century showing the Virgin, crowned, sheltering about twenty people standing in ranks, two by two, men on the left, women on the right. A fresco in the Baptistry of Parma, Italy, and another in the parish church of St. Céneri-le-Gérei (Alençon), France, also provide close parallels. At Corby the figures are naked showing them to be souls ; men and women are mixed, and some tonsured priests are included. Unfortunately the subject is much damaged by plaster repairs at the top, and the insertion of later roof-brackets.

SUBJECT 4. Adjoining this immediately to the East and formerly occupying the whole space between the North door and the first window are the remains of another of the second series of paintings. The present fragment measures about 11 feet by 7 feet, but it formerly extended the full height of the wall, or some 14 feet. It is a gigantic representation of St. Christopher and replaced the fourteenth century painting further East, already described (pl. II, *a*). The lower part of the subject was itself painted over the earlier St. Anne. This lower portion, being only carried over the old work on a thin skim of lime-putty had very largely perished, and the excellence of the original subject beneath justified the removal of the later painting in this area.

The upper part, being painted on the newly-heightened part of the aisle wall was of course not confused with other work and was in better condition, though mutilated by the wall brackets, as were all the subjects.

The painting needs little description. Its much greater elaboration of treatment is interesting to compare with the simplicity of the one it replaced after a century.

The whole plaster is here of a pinky tone, and the background is covered with a stencilled design of a conventional three-branched flower in deep red. Black outline is used here as elsewhere, and in this subject there has been a very wide range of colours, many of them merged to produce subtle tones now largely lost except under very close examination. Pinks, greys, browns and yellows are all present with some traces of vermilion turned in places to black. The saint's halo has an elaborate design, and his right hand grasps the top of an enormous red staff shown flowering in yellow, pink and blue-grey. Some traces of the hermit's cell are visible on the left, with a

[1] Paul Perdrizet, *La Vièrge de Misericorde*, Paris, 1908.

porch and a little tower and spire. The cloak was in brown and and red-purple, lined with pinky-cream. The Holy Child was evidently placed on the Saint's left shoulder, supported by an upraised hand from which the drapery folds of the cloak, with some traces of elaborate floral patterning, fall. But of this figure there is now no trace. It was presumably painted over the diaper or brocade background (which is continuous here), probably with a thick impasto of lime-tempered colour to give it depth and brilliancy. This superimposed colour has evidently flaked away entirely, as the lower parts of the painting (carried in the same way over the early subjects) had done.

SUBJECT 3. Passing further East again, we now come to the last of the fifteenth century series in the North Aisle now considerably confused by having been painted, as to its lower part, over the fourteenth century St. Christopher, and occupying the whole space between the aisle windows, namely about 14 feet by 11 feet 6 inches, extreme measurements.

It is without doubt the most interesting subject in the Church, and, as I interpret it, represents a combination of the Seven Deadly Sins, and a Warning to Swearers (pl. VII). It provides an admirable example of the teaching of the Medieval Church (particularly against prevalent sins or tendencies) by way of the Morality.

The whole subject has a brocade-pattern background, in which the same stencil is used as in the Weighing of Souls, but with certain differences. The upper part of the stencil is used in deep red as before, but with the addition of a black star in the centre; the lower part (the larger leaves) is now painted in grey or blue-grey, and with the addition of some leaves and tendrils is placed diagonally so as to frame the red part of the design and make an all-over diamond-shaped brocade pattern on the pinky-cream plaster. The whole design, in red, as in the Weighing of Souls, is used as a dado for the base.

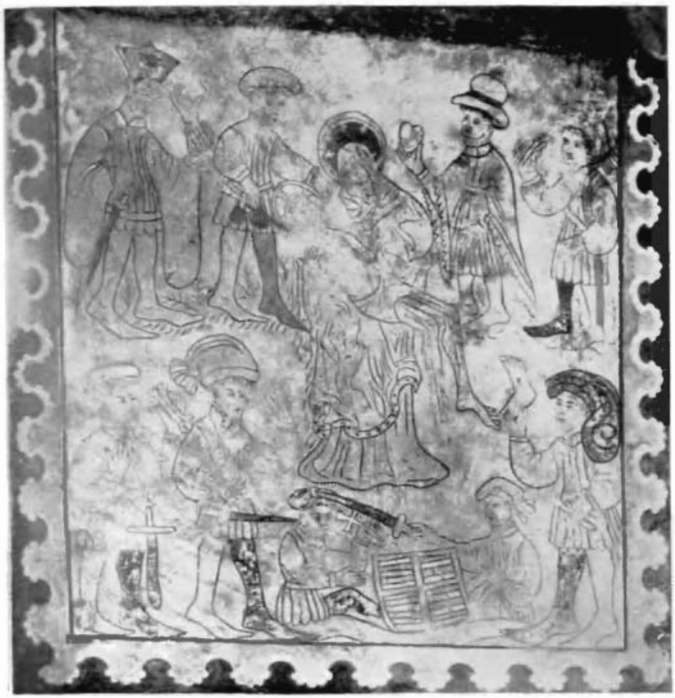
The composition is grouped as follows: In the centre is the Virgin, crowned, nimbed in black,[1] and enthroned, with long hair falling over her left shoulder, dressed in a tight-fitting bodice of pale green, with elaborate neck-band, and a cloak of pink. She holds the body of the dead Christ, with cruciform nimbus in black, on her knees. Beneath the elaborate pavement round the throne is a scroll with black-letter inscription, illegible but for a few letters. Surrounding the central figures are devils and fashionably dressed youths on a smaller scale arranged in three tiers as follows: Top row left to right—

[1] But see post, p. 174, on the subject of vermilion turning to black.

a red devil with a bushy tail addressing a youth in short tunic, party-coloured hose of grey and brown, black ankle-boots and a small red hood and shoulder cape, with a short liripipe. A sword appears to pierce the youth's hands or wrists, from which blood drops. A scroll, issuing from the mouth, is placed above the figure. Next is a pale devil, with red eyes and mouth and black, pointed claw-like feet close to a second youth in a knee-length tunic, party-coloured, his hands on his belt, black and red party-coloured hose and long, pointed shoes. His hair appears to be worn in a longish 'bob'. The scroll is arranged as in the first figure. On the right of the Virgin now comes a youth in very elaborate garments—a very short tunic or doublet with furred or embroidered hem, a belt and long hanging sleeves, probably scalloped or dagged. His hose are party-coloured black and brown, his shoes have exaggerated points and he also affects the full 'bob' as a hair style. There is also the scroll above him. Behind him, touching him on the shoulder, is another red devil, this time with a more spindly tail, who seems to ape, with his long-pointed feet, the exaggerated shoe fashions of the period. Immediately behind him is a fourth young man again in party-coloured tunic and hose and black shoes, but wearing a hood bunched up on the top of his head, Chaucer fashion. His attitude is an unseemly one of bold and swaggering abandon, and there is the scroll above once more. The figure is somewhat mutilated by the insertion of a roof-bracket.

The second or centre row commences on the left with a curious figure—a nude woman with long hair holding some indistinct object in her left hand, riding on a red devil-horse or some such queer horned beast. There is a scroll over the creature's head.

Next is another devil, with red body and brown head and horns holding his accompanying youth by the elbow and piercing his side with a sword. He also has the young man in one of his claws by the toe of his absurdly long shoe. The youth, his feet straddled apart, is clad in a very brief white tunic with blue-grey belt, red and white hose, and a red collar, and he wears his ample hood over his head. Blood drips from his body; and there is the usual scroll over the figure with the indication that the words on it (now illegible) came from the mouth. On the other side of the throne is a sixth youth, in red and white doublet and red and brown hose, his feet planted apart, hands on hips or stomach, and scroll above. His accompanying devil is of the pale variety like No. 2, but much mutilated; and beyond is a large brown figure too imperfect for identification. The third or bottom row of figures is much damaged



*a* (above). BROUGHTON, BUCKS. PAINTING ON NORTH WALL OF NAVE, *c.* 1400. A WARNING TO SWEARERS
(From a photograph in the possession of the Bucks. Arch. Soc.)

*b* (right). SUBJECT 6. A SCROLL AND BORDER, *c.* 1300. EAST WALL OF SOUTH AISLE

*c*. SUBJECT 8*a*. FRAGMENT OF KNEELING DONOR AND INSCRIBED SCROLL, MID FOURTEENTH CENTURY. SOUTH WALL OF SOUTH AISLE


SUBJECT 3. THE WEIGHING OF SOULS AND THE VIRGIN OF MERCY, EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY
WEST END OF NORTH AISLE

*To face page 159*

by perishing of the limewash on which it was painted over the early St. Christopher, by the insertion of a wall tablet in the nineteenth century, and by plaster failures due to damp. However the main outlines of the subject matter here can be traced. On the left is a youth in costume similar to the one above him, except that he wears no hood ; the legs are straddled apart and the hose are party-coloured. The scroll is again present.

The devil next to him is a red one, and is shown piercing the youth's foot with a sword. The next two figures have almost disappeared, but the leg and foot and part of the second leg of an eighth youth are visible together with the horns, ear and legs of a brown devil next him. The little image niche which was part of the Kyriel Lady Chapel was at this period filled in, and plastered over, the present subject being carried over it. As no figure remained, and very little pigment of the brocade background, the niche was re-opened and was found to have been outlined in red, yellow and black, and to have its interior painted in purple-red and yellow. Below the bottom figures the red stencil brocade border indicates the termination of the subject.

No precise parallel exists, to my knowledge ; but three examples provide very close analogies, and all taken together give ample material for the interpretation of the subject and for its probable sources of inspiration. On the North wall of the nave of Broughton Church, Bucks.,[1] is a painting of *c.* 1400 which has much in common with the Corby subject (pl. V, *a*). The exact significance of this painting for long remained obscure until interpreted by the late Dr. M. R. James.[2] There, the central figure is also the Virgin holding the dead Christ as at Corby ; but at Broughton the body is mutilated and is surrounded by fashionably dressed youths holding portions of the dismembered body. This, as Dr. James has pointed out, is clearly a reference to the ill-fashion of swearing by God's wounds, by His death, by parts of His Body and so on. This practice is referred to by Chaucer, Langland and others, who all present the idea of injury done to Our Lord by blasphemy, the ' re-crucifying of Christ ' by the evil deeds of men, and the consequent addition to the Sorrows of Our Lady. The following quotation from Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* will suffice to illustrate the point :

> ' Hir othes been so grete and so dampnable
> That it is grisly for to here hem swere :
> Our blissed Lordes body they to-tere ;
> Hem thoughte Jewes rente him noght y-nough.'

[1] *R.C.H.M.*, Bucks., N., 71, and pl.

[2] *Records of Bucks.*, xii, 288-9.

It cannot be seen whether Christ's body is mutilated at Corby—probably not—but the parallel is obvious.

Blomefield[1] records in great detail a window at Heydon, Norfolk now destroyed, in which there were twelve youths—'Many young swearers, drunkards, dice-players, etc.'—with scrolls issuing from their mouths having verses in English on them, thus :

> 'Be the body of God I wyl go to towne
> Be the sydys of God the dyes (dice) arn here
> Be the nie of God this was good ale
> Be Goddys feet no me thowt it but smale.'

They also swear by God's heart, soul, knees, etc. In the centre came a scroll with a lamentation of the Virgin over the Body of her Son :

> 'Alas my Child, have they the thus dyth
> The cursed swererys, al be hys lemys be rent asunderyth.'

Accompanying the subject there was also a representation of hell.

Again, at Walsham-le-Willows, Suffolk, there was a wall painting, also now destroyed, but recorded by Mr. H. Munro Cautley,[2] in which there was a Christ of the Trades and at the base groups of people with scrolls coming from their mouths and again the lamentation—'The cursed Swearers, albeit his limbs be rent assundered.' The parallel with Corby is, I think, sufficiently clear, though the scrolls cannot be read with one exception—that over the sixth youth (second in the centre tier) on which the letters '. . . ones' can be distinguished, and this may well have been '**By God's Bones.**'

But at Corby the matter goes further. The introduction of the devils is a feature not found in the other recorded examples. It will be seen that there are seven of them (not counting the woman on the devil-horse about which I shall have something to say later) ; and we have here I think a novel representation of another Morality, very often met with, combined with the Warning to Swearers, namely the Seven Deadly Sins.

It was a special injunction to the medieval parish priest[3] that he should at certain seasons of the year 'expound to the people in the vulgar tongue, without any fantastic texture of

[1] Blomefield, *Hist. of Norfolk*, edn. 1769, iii, 573.

[2] H. Munro Cautley, *Suffolk Churches and their Treasures.*

[3] D. Wilkins, *Concilia*, ii, 54 (Synodal Decrees of Archbp. Peckham, 1281).

subtlety, the fourteen articles of the Faith, the Ten Commandments, the two Evangelical Precepts of Charity; the Seven Works of Mercy; the Seven Deadly Sins with their Progeny; the Seven Chief Virtues and the Seven Sacraments of Grace . . .' as instanced by Dr. Coulton.[1] It was natural that many of the subjects selected for paintings on the Church walls, mainly for purposes of instructing an illiterate congregation, should derive from these themes often dwelt on by the Priest. The Seven Deadly Sins are represented in a variety of ways, the most common of which are as a wheel (Padbury, Bucks.; Ingatestone, Essex[2]; Arundel, Sussex, etc.) as a tree or dragon with its roots in Hell, sprouting or branching limbs or smaller dragons in whose mouths the seven scenes are enacted (Ruislip, Middx.[3]; Hessett and Hoxne, Suffolk; South Leigh, Oxon., etc.); or as a human figure with scrolls or dragons proceeding from the part of the body concerned (Little Horwood, Bucks.[4]; Raunds, Northants; Wisborough Green and Trotton, Sussex, etc.). These are often balanced by the seven Corporal Acts of Mercy (Trotton, Ruislip), or the Seven Sacraments (Lathbury, Bucks.). Each of these, and the many other varieties, derives from one of the numerous medieval treatises on the Seven Deadly Sins that were undoubtedly the source or basis of their pictorial representation. The *Handlyng Synne*, Caesarius of Heisterbach in the *Dialogue on Miracles* and *Dialogue on Temptation*; Dan Michel in the *Ayenbite of Inwyt* and others all have elaborate descriptions of Pride and her Six Daughters, The Seven Daughters of the Devil, the Branches, Boughs and Twigs of the Evil Tree having its roots in hell, the Seven Dragons into one of whose mouths scarce any of us can help falling, and the Apocalyptic references to the Seven-Headed Beast. One such account is to be found in Chaucer, in the *Parson's Tale*, which seems to have a particular reference to the Corby subject in its condemnation of elaborate clothes (part of the Sin of Pride, Superbia), whether it be 'in superfluitee of clothinge . . . costlewe furringe . . . and dagginge of sheres . . . .' or in 'the horrible disordinat scantnesse of clothing . . . that thurgh hir shortnesse ne covre nat the shameful membres of man, to wikked entente . . . .' The 'departing of hosen' into red and white and other colours is condemned, and also the long-pointed, extravagant shoes.

This latter point seems to be emphasized by the first devil

[1] G. G. Coulton, *Social Life in Britain from the Conquest to the Reformation*, 264, 265.

[2] J. C. Wall, *Medieval Wall Paintings*, 198, 199.

[3] *The Times*, 19th June, 1937.

[4] *R.C.H.M.*, Bucks., N., 176 and pl.

in the centre row clutching his victim by the toe of his exaggerated foot-wear ; and by the third devil in the top row who seems to mimic the sinful garment by his own long-pointed feet.

The whole subject is a mass of allegory, the precise sources of all of which one's wartime pre-occupations and the inaccessibility of manuscripts and reference books makes it impossible to identify. A further point of interest is the clear allusion to the wounds of Christ by the devil's piercing the hands, feet and side of three of the young men.

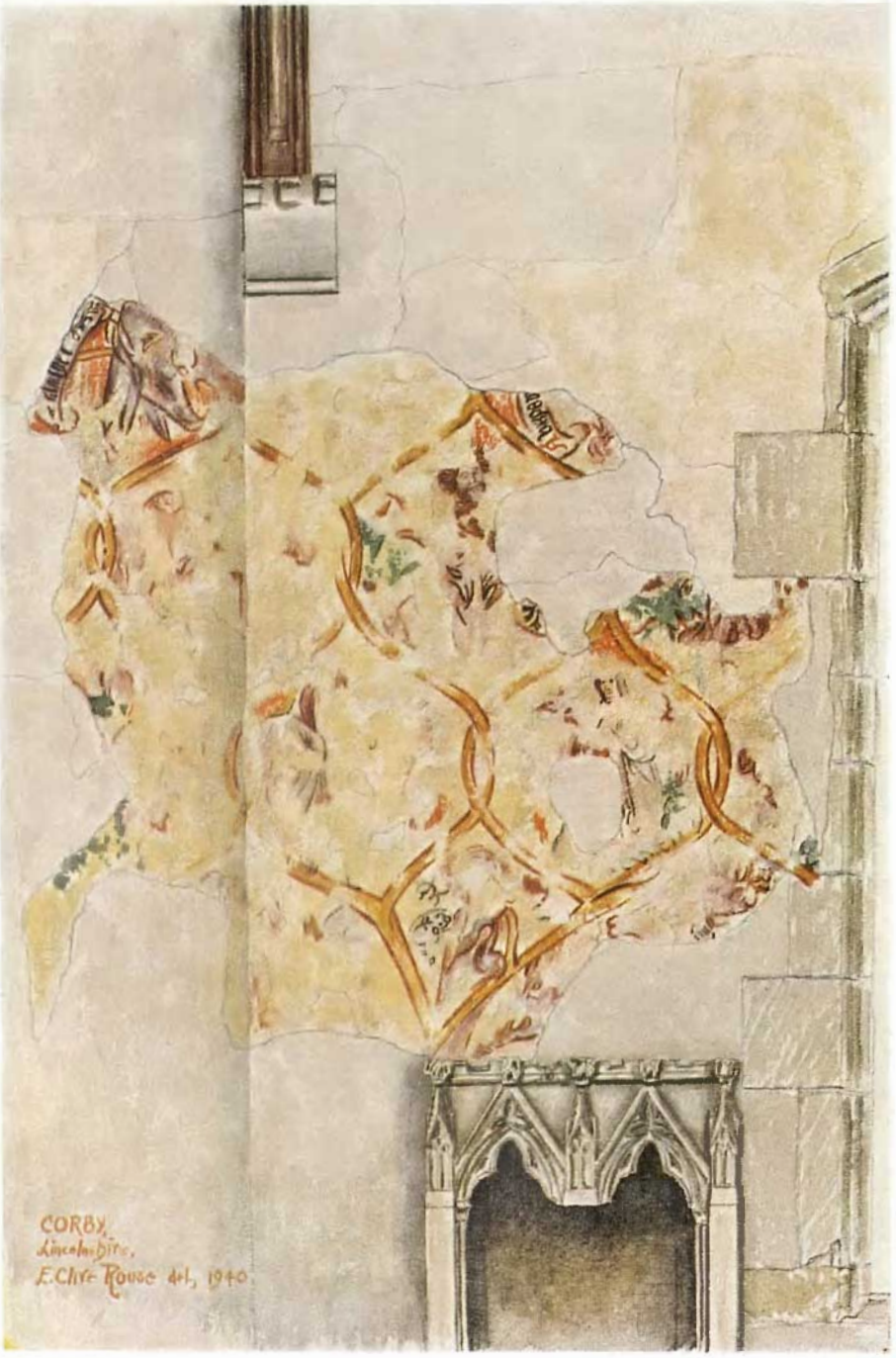
The scene of the nude female on the Devil Horse can I think be explained by a reference to a passage in the *Compendium Maleficarum*—a book dealing with witchcraft.[1] This work quotes from Vincent de Beauvais's *Speculum Maius* the story of a young and rich nobleman who was bewitched or tempted to lechery by the Devil. He saw a cavalcade in which the Devil was accompanied by ' a woman clothed like a harlot, riding upon a mule with her hair flowing loose over her shoulders, and bound with a golden fillet in front, carrying in her hand a golden rod with which she drove the mule, and appearing almost naked because of the thinness of her garment ' . . . This description fits the Corby painting perfectly, and the first three figures together in the middle row are clearly intended to represent one of the Seven Deadly Sins, namely Luxuria (Lust or Lechery). It may be remarked that a nude woman, usually blindfolded, riding on one of the horses of the Apocalypse, is occasionally used, particularly in Continental iconography, to represent Death. This may be seen in the central portal of the West Front of Notre Dame, Paris, on the South side, as part of the Last Judgment, where a figure of Luxuria or Gula is also included.

From this general indication that a Mortal Sin is represented at Corby it is possible to identify, tentatively, one or two others. The devil between the two youths on the right of the top row may be inciting them to fight, thus representing Ira (Anger) ; the second youth in the same row (accompanied by a fat and unhealthy devil) his hands on his stomach may be Gula (Gluttony), and the first youth in the same row whose hands seem to be pierced by the devil's sword might represent Avaritia (Avarice), the grasping of wealth or property.

The last youth in the centre row might represent Superbia (Pride) itself with elaborate clothes and swaggering attitude—but the details are too imperfect for a positive attribution. However, the interpretation to be put upon the painting is

[1] *Comp. Malefic.* (edn., London, 1929), bk. II, ch. iv, 93.


SUBJECT 5. A WARNING TO SWEARERS AND THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS. EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY. NORTH AISLE




SUBJECT 8. THE TREE OF JESSE. MID FOURTEENTH CENTURY.
EAST AND SOUTH-EAST WALL OF SOUTH AISLE

abundantly clear—a condemnation of the sin of blasphemy, a reminder that it is the Devil who tempts to each one of the Seven Deadly Sins, and the central thought that such acts or words re-crucify Christ and add to our Lady's sorrows.

This second series of paintings in the North Aisle cannot be dated as closely as the first series; but combining the iconographic, stylistic, and corroborative structural evidence, we may place the work in the first quarter of the fifteenth century.

The plaster further east in the North Aisle had all been renewed except for a few patches, and no further medieval painting was encountered.

## The South Aisle

The South Aisle was another addition to the twelfth century church, perhaps slightly earlier than the North aisle, but having been altered, and windows inserted at least twice.

Fragmentary Subjects. As far as paintings were concerned this area proved a great trial and disappointment. There was ample evidence of painting throughout the length of the aisle; but the work was everywhere fragmentary and in shocking condition. Between the windows towards the west and centre there were three or four layers superimposed, and further mutilated by mural tablets let into the wall and later roof-brackets obliterating the whole centre of the subjects. After the most careful examination and consideration I decided that the remains did not justify the great expenditure of time and materials that would have been necessary to make the wall at all intelligible or presentable. After all had been uncovered that was possible and careful notes had been taken, the faulty plaster (which was in many places free from the wall) was renewed and the rest colourwashed. There was evidence of elaborate work in a wide range of colours, green being again prominent. At the top of the wall there were some traces of a scroll band probably of early fourteenth century date. At least two subjects in the spaces between the windows represented almost life size figures in frames or buttressed and canopied niches—one carried a staff and probably represented St. James Major while another may have been St. Margaret. A later fragment painted over two other series seems to have been a single figure with hand raised in blessing, and perhaps a crosier, possibly St. Thomas of Canterbury or a Bishop.

At the East end of the aisle a complex of no fewer than five layers of painting—three medieval and two post-Reformation—was met with, giving ample evidence of architectural changes, structural failures requiring repair and consequent re-decoration,

and changes of fashion and belief. Almost all were in shocking condition. Amid this confusion it was possible to decipher certain schemes, and to preserve several fragments.

SUBJECT 6. The earliest is a fragment (only 2 feet by 8 inches) of a scroll and ornamental border, which occurs on the South side of the East window of the aisle, and is the earliest work in the Church, *c.* 1300 (pl. V *b*). It consists of a beautiful and very delicate black vine-leaf and tendril scroll (double) on a pinkish-buff ground, with a border of lozenge diaper enclosing angular quatrefoils in deep red and pink, bordered by red, pink and white lines.

SUBJECT 7. On the North side of the same window is much red-ochre colouring, with indecipherable remains of a figure in a canopied niche, probably contemporary with the scroll and border.

SUBJECT 8. Occupying the South-east corner of the aisle are the fragmentary remains of what must have been an exceptionally beautiful representation of the Tree of Jesse, or the Ancestry of Christ (pl. VIII). The remaining fragment is mainly on the most easterly section of the South wall, but is continued on to the East wall, South of the East window and apparently occupied the window-splay as well, to judge by considerable fragments remaining there. It also seems to have extended further West along the South wall, being cut into by the large fifteenth century window, as a fragment of a kneeling donor with inscription remaining on the West side of the window seems, in its range of colour and general technique, to belong to the same subject. The present fragment measures about 6 feet 6 inches by 6 feet.

The method of treatment is well developed and formalized. In earlier examples, as at Chalfont St. Giles, Bucks., *c.* 1300, and elsewhere, the Tree is treated as a central stem, with branches represented as fairly free scroll-work and foliage on which the Kings and Prophets stand. In this case the method is clearly later, and is more akin to that in the Chancel at Chalgrove, Oxon., *c.* 1325-30 or in the numerous instances of stained glass and window tracery, as at Dorchester, Oxon. and Leverington, Cambs. The figure of Jesse was formerly lying at the base (now mutilated by the re-insertion of the piscina) and from his body sprang the branches of the Tree which interlace regularly to form a kind of trellis, in each compartment of which stood the figure of a King or Prophet holding a symbol or a scroll inscribed with his name. Though the whole subject is very fragmentary, remains of several scrolls and of three figures can be deciphered.

The work is of a very high order with beautiful detail, especially in the two heads that remain, unlike anything else in the Church. The colouring is rich and varied, the foliage being in bright green with pink and chocolate buds, the stems of yellow and olive-green outlined in red ochre, while the figures seem to have been painted on a vermilion or crimson background. There was some evidence that the crown of the central remaining figure—possibly King David—was of gold. The little scrolls have beautiful lettering with red initials, and are themselves decorated with minute and delicate scrolls and patterns. One appears to read Ahaziah. Subtle shading in a wide range of tones, and the unusual brilliance of the colour suggest that something more akin to an oil rather than a lime medium was used—perhaps a size of boiled parchment cuttings. The artist was clearly a miniaturist ; and the figure details that survive and other evidence point to a distinct affinity with the St. Omer Psalter—East Anglian work of the second quarter of the fourteenth century. Compare especially the treatment of this same subject in the initial B of the Beatus page.[1] The Corby painting is however, somewhat later, and may be dated about the middle or third quarter of the fourteenth century. It is now the only work of this period in the Church, though from evidence in this aisle it once extended further West.

SUBJECT 8*a*. On the South wall, near to the first window and below the more easterly mural tablet, is an interesting fragment perhaps belonging to the Jesse Tree subject and certainly of the same date, as stated above (pl. V *c*). It is an inscribed scroll below the fragmentary remains (no more than the bottom folds of a robe and the point of a shoe) of a kneeling figure in the same colour-range as the Jesse Tree. The scroll is inscribed in neat and well-formed black-letter characters with red initial Orate p Aiā . . . (orate pro anima . . .), and thus proves the former existence of another kneeling donor.

Overlying these subjects was much disintegrated late medieval red ochre and other colour ; and the usual confusion of post-Reformation texts—the latter to be recorded later.

## THE NAVE

Finally we come to the great scheme in the Nave, which was executed with that in the North Aisle and probably work elsewhere in the Church now perished, following the great rebuilding scheme in the first quarter of the fifteenth century. The Nave arcades and clerestory, the windows in the South

[1] Brit. Mus. Add. MSS. 39810. Illustrated as fig. 44, opp. p. 151 of *English Art in the Middle Ages*, by O. Elfrida Saunders (Oxford, 1932).

Aisle, and the South porch and parvise were undertaken probably soon after 1400 ; and a little later came the lengthening of the North Aisle and the piercing of the North wall of the Chancel to make a new Lady Chapel further East, the detail here being slightly different and later in date than the nave arcades.

Here we have no complication of several periods overlapping, or confusing backgrounds, but have a rare instance of an early fifteenth century re-building scheme with the whole of its accompanying painted decoration more or less intact.

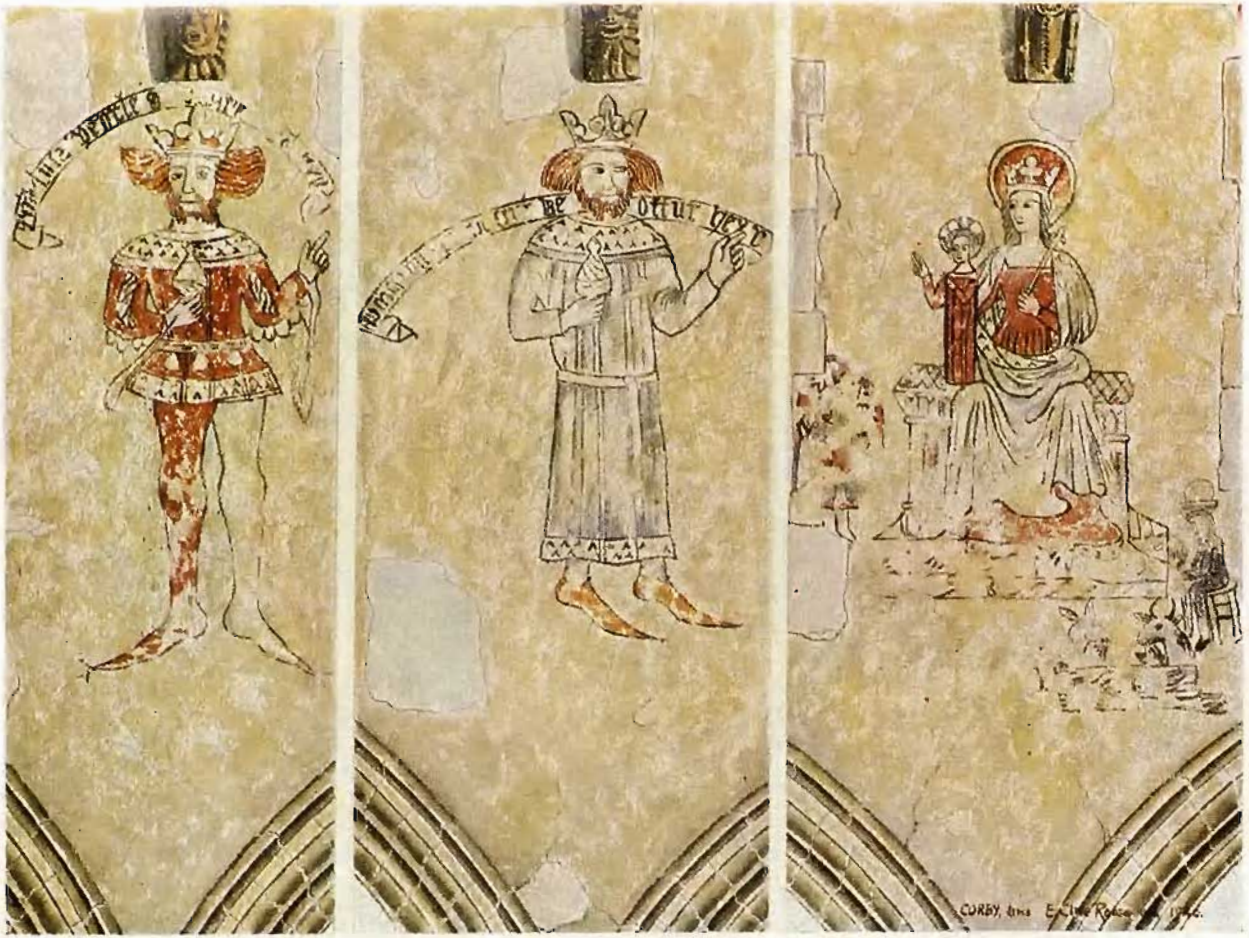
SUBJECT 9. Occupying its normal position over the chancel arch, and returned on to the North and South clerestory walls adjacent, is a great representation of the Doom or Last Judgment (pl. X). The painted area is actually something like 400 square feet.

The wall here was the original East wall of the Nave, and had undergone a number of alterations, so that the painting was in very bad condition. Large areas of the plaster had cracked and become detached from the wall where the under-surface had perished, much of it being, in fact, only held together by the accumulation of successive layers of whitewash on top of it. However, sufficient was recovered to make the original setting-out of the whole composition perfectly clear, and to give back some of the fine impression of colour that this wall must once have presented.

The successive developments here, as they emerged in the course of the recovery and treatment of the paintings are perhaps of sufficient interest to record in some detail. The first change was the replacement of the twelfth century chancel arch by a much larger opening of late thirteenth or early fourteenth century date having an acutely pointed head of two chamfered orders. The Norman or Transitional imposts were re-used, and the wall was just roughly cut through and the new arch inserted. The arch itself has remained quite sound, but the cutting of the wall produced two alarming settlement cracks that must have disturbed the medieval builders a good deal. These cracks were roughly filled up and plastered over. There was, at this time, apparently a gable window in the apex of the wall. When the early fifteenth century re-building was done, this window was blocked, leaving the jambs, which were subsequently discovered. The ends of the gable were then raised and squared off to match the height of the new clerestory, making a roof of almost flat pitch. The old steep pitched roof-line can be seen on the exterior.

The whole wall was then re-plastered, washed with lime-putty as a surface, and finally painted. There were, however,

*To face page 166*



SUBJECT 10*b*. THE NATIVITY. THE MAGI AND THE VIRGIN AND CHILD, EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY.
NORTH CLERESTORY ABOVE NAVE ARCADE


SUBJECT O. THE DOOM, EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY. EAST, NORTH-EAST AND SOUTH-EAST WALLS OF NAVE

*To face page* 167

three very unsound areas—the filling of the old settlement cracks, the joins of the old roof-line and the new heightened clerestory, and the filling of the gable window. The mortar used in these places was of a poor quality, and had largely perished, thus causing the failure of the plaster bedded upon it. These areas can be seen in the drawing, and since the upper centre of the painting had almost entirely disintegrated, this part was cleared to show the structural evidence of the gable window. In places the painting still adhered to the medieval filling of the settlement cracks and was retained wherever possible; but these alarming areas had mostly to be thoroughly raked out, grouted with cement and stone-rubble and re-plastered in order to make the wall sound and presentable. I cannot speak too highly of the work of Mr. Ambrose Harwood, a local builder, who, working under my direction at this unusual, delicate, and difficult task with plaster repairs connected with the paintings all over the church, brought enthusiasm and skill to bear in the successful solution of many problems. Some idea of the scale of the work and the state of the East wall of the Nave before its completion may be seen from the photograph (pl. I *c*).

The Doom is treated, as usual, as a great drama in several scenes and requires little comment, each having its recognized place in the general composition. In the centre at the top was Christ in Majesty seated on a rainbow. Part of the rainbow in yellow, red and black, some drapery of a white robe and red cloak, and the right hand upraised remain. This figure was flanked by a row of five or six Apostles on each side, barefooted, in robes of white, orange, yellow, red and brown, all with black outline, and apparently carrying symbols of which two, having long shafts, may be the spear or lance of St. Thomas and the staff of St. James or the halberd of St. Matthew or Matthias. In the zone below this are two flying angels at the side beneath the roof-bracket corbels. They are clad in amice and alb of white, and have red wings, yellow hair and white halos. Each blows a yellow trumpet, which is of some interest as they each have small mouthpieces like the reed portion of an oboe. Below the angel on the left and above the one on the right are scrolls inscribed **Resurgite Mortui.** Below the angel on the North side is a group of resurrected souls, headed by male and female crowned figures, about to be received into the Heavenly Jerusalem by St. Peter, a mitred figure. The upper part of the North-east clerestory is devoted to this part of the subject, the Heavenly City being shown with masonry walls, towers and gates, with angels having yellow hair at intervals. The lower

part of this wall, and the lower part of the North side of the East wall shows the General Resurrection with one or two naked souls but mostly shrouded figures with a cross on the front rising from black, grey and purple-red coffins, on an orange-yellow background. It is unusual for the majority of resurrected souls to be shown in shrouds; but they do occur in a number of Dooms, notably at St. Thomas, Salisbury, and Dauntsey, Wilts.

The actual Weighing of Souls was, as we have seen, extracted, and separately depicted in the North aisle. On the South side of the East wall are shown the Torments of the Damned in Hell. The medieval artist has shown with considerable relish and gusto a demon in an elaborate pointed cap stirring souls in a purple-red cauldron, while a smaller red devil fans the flames beneath with a pair of yellow bellows. The South-east clerestory wall is occupied in its lower part by a representation of the Mouth of Hell, depicted us usual as a great monster's jaws; and above it is a figure holding a bird in each hand being hung from a gibbet by another demon, on a pale-brown background. In the Doom at Oddington, Glos., there is a figure hanging from a gallows; but at Corby the presence of the birds suggests a warning to would-be poachers on the neighbouring Luttrell Estate of Irnham Hall.

The lower three-fourths of the central section of the East wall consisted of a red background, possibly diapered or brocaded in black, for the carved wooden figures of the Rood Group. These latter, standing upon a Rood Beam or upon the top of the Rood Loft, stood out against spaces or silhouettes purposely left for them in the painting behind. The outline of part of the cross, and the niche-like spaces left white for the figures of St. Mary and St. John are clear. This was a normal arrangement, and may be compared with another Lincolnshire Doom nearby, at Carlby, which had originally a plain red background painted over with the Doom subject in the mid-fifteenth century, the plain spaces being left for the carved figures.[1]

We have no details of the painting of the Corby Doom, but there is a record of the destruction of the Rood Loft, and the figures of the Rood Group which stood before it and were an integral part of it, in an Inventory of Church Goods taken the 14th of March 1565.

'. . . Itm, the Image of the roode wi the Images of Ma(ry) and Johnne, and the Image of St. Johnne the Evang(elist patron) of the Churche wt a portesse a manuall and a . . . . were burnte in the first yere of the quenes Maiest(y) that now is

[1] *Lincs. Archit. & Arch. Soc. Reports and Papers*, vol. i, pt. ii 1937, 3, pl. ii.

To face page 168

SUBJECT 10*a*. THE NATIVITY. KING HEROD AND THE SHEPHERDS, EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY.
SOUTH CLERESTORY ABOVE NAVE ARCADE

in the presence of the whole pīshion Anthonie dericke and will Nicol being churchw(ardens).'[1]

It looks as if the painting had survived at any rate until the middle of the sixteenth century, when it was whitewashed over, and texts and Royal Arms, to be noticed later, were painted over it.

SUBJECT 10. The rest of the Nave was occupied by a most unusual and effective representation of the Nativity (pls. IX and XI).

Life-sized single figures are placed in the spandrels of the nave arcades, between the clerestory windows on the plain plaster background. One figure is missing on each side at the West end. These were a King on the North and a Shepherd on the South. There was evidence of their presence; but the plaster had been so damaged by works in connection with an extensive restoration of the tower in 1926 that their condition was too fragmentary to justify preservation.

Commencing at the west end on the South side, the first Shepherd is missing as stated. The second is an old man with a beard, bare-headed and clad in a long gown of deep red. He wears a russet cloak with cape-like sleeves of grey, probably intended to represent lamb- or goat-skin. The hood is thrown back. He carries a crook over his left shoulder with a lamp (to indicate the night) hanging from it, having apparently a floating wick. He points up at the star or the apparition of the Angel with his right hand. His flock is around and beneath him, and includes a strange variety of horned sheep or goat. His companion shepherd is a young man in a belted tunic, knee-length, and party-coloured in red and slaty-blue-grey, red and white hose, and ankle books of black or dark grey; and he wears a blue-grey shoulder cape with scalloped edge with his hood over his head. He has a gauntlet glove on his left hand and points upwards or possibly holds the other glove in his right hand. He also is accompanied by his flock represented by a ram and two ewes, one looking round at him, and has in addition a shepherd boy in red, playing a pipe, and a sheep-dog, represented like a talbot with long ears and red spots. In the next spandrel eastwards (appropriately next to the Mouth of Hell) is shown King Herod sitting cross-legged on an elaborate dark yellow or brownish throne, with panels and ornaments in black.

He is gorgeously attired in a very brief doublet of bright red having an ermine tippet with inverted scallops, and a narrow hem of ermine. He wears a high crown or eastern

[1] A. Abbott, *op. cit.*, 103.

tiara of deep brown (damaged by a plaster repair) with traces of a scroll at the top. His trunk hose are red and white; the shoes, with enormously long toes having an ornament on the end, are white and grey; and he carries a great curved sword or falchion over his right shoulder, the left hand open in judgment, clearly ordering the Massacre of the Innocents.

On the North side, commencing at the west end, the figure in the first spandrel has perished—it was the first of the Three Magi. The second is represented sumptuously clad in very short doublet of brown ornamented in black and having slashed sleeves, the long, hanging undersides being dagged or scalloped. There is an ornamented belt with some enrichments depending from it, and an ermine hem and tippet. The trunk hose are brown and white, the shoes long and pointed, and with ornamented tips. The figure is crowned and has an elaborate swept-up coiffure. He carries a covered cup in his right hand, and points with his left to an inscribed scroll above him.

The other King is more simply habited in a long, white, sleeved gown of ankle length, girdled, and with an ermine hem and tippet. His shoes are of bright yellow and long and pointed like the others. His coiffure is more shaggy and hangs down but he has the same fashionable forked beard. His attitude is similar, and a few words can be read on his scroll—'. . . . **We offur heyr,**' proving the inscriptions to have been in English. It is a further point of interest that English was so extensively used at this comparatively early date.

The scheme culminates with a charming representation of the Virgin and Child at the East end of the North clerestory next to the Heavenly Jerusalem. Our Lady is shown on an elaborate throne with diapered cushion or seat, in black and white. She wears a close-fitting bodice and kirtle of pinky-red with an ermine-lined cloak. She is crowned and holds a little sceptre with fleur-de-lys finial (as Queen of Heaven) in her left hand, and with the other supports the Christ Child (in a red gown striped with black), His hand raised in blessing, on her knee. Her nimbus is red with a white border and black outline; the Child's is of black and white and is cruciform.

At one side of the throne are fragmentary remains of a figure, perhaps St. Joseph, while on the other is probably represented the unbelieving midwife. Below and to the right, in the manner of a vignette, are the ox and the ass feeding out of the Manger. Pl. I *d* shows the setting of these paintings when the work of uncovering had only just been begun.

There seems to have been no particular rule governing the choice of subjects represented above nave arcades in churches,

an enormous variety being met with. Flamstead, Herts., had a thirteenth century set of Apostles, Chalgrave, Beds., heraldry and ornament of *c.* 1300 :[1] Pickering, Yorks., St. Christopher, St. Edmund and other subjects ; Ruislip, Middx., the Life of St. Martin, the Seven Deadly Sins and the Seven Corporal Acts of Mercy, these latter two subjects occurring in the same position in several instances like Hoxne, Suffolk, etc. ; Friskney, Lincs. a most unusual set with a Life of Christ on the North, and subjects related to the Lord's Supper on the South[2] ; to mention only a few. But the Corby series is the only one to my knowledge which treats the Nativity story in this manner or this position.

It remains to say something as to the sources for this unusual treatment ; and I have little doubt in my mind as to what these were. The Moralities and Miracle Plays performed in the larger towns by the Merchant Gilds must have been familiar to a great proportion of any medieval congregation. And it is reasonable to suggest that scenes, incidents or allusions to such should be incorporated in the pictorial representation of similiar biblical scenes on church walls, since the subjects were rigidly conventional so as to perform their primary object of pictorial education of largely illiterate parishioners.

In the Wakefield Second Shepherd's play there are three Shepherds and sundry other characters. The Shepherds offer the Christ Child such simple gifts as they can—one cherries, the second a bird, the third a ball. In the Coventry Nativity Play of the Company of Shearmen and Tailors, the characters include Joseph, Mary, the three Kings, the three Shepherds, King Herod and a few more. This is a very close parallel with Corby as the Shepherds present a pipe (this may well be the one destroyed at the west end), a hat (the second shepherd is bare-headed), and a mitten (the third shepherd wears one glove and appears to be holding something in his other hand). The three kings offer gold, frankincense and myrrh in covered cups just as shown at Corby, and each speaks a verse which may well have corresponded to the wording on the scrolls in a shortened version. Finally there is Herod, of whom the description fits perfectly, the prominence given to his sword and his ultra-fashionable clothes being especially marked. He says of himself :

> '. . . Magog and Mandroke both them did I confound
> And with this bright brand their bones I brake asunder . . .'

[1] *Arch. Journ.*, xcii, 1936, 81, et. seq. [2] J. C. Wall, *op. cit.* 87, et seq.

and later :

'. . . That often for very dread thereof, the very earth doth quake
Look, when I with malin this bright brand doth shake . . .'

and again :

'. . . Where can you have a more greater succour
Than to behold my person that is so gay,
My falchion and my fashion with my gorgeous array. . . .'[1]

So we have the Nativity story simply shown by single figures in a convention that would have been familiar to almost every member of the congregation. The date is substantially the same as that of the later North Aisle paintings, namely the first-quarter of the fifteenth century.

Exhaustive tests were made elsewhere in the Church, but no further medieval painting survived, the plaster having been patched or renewed, or, as in the North Chapel and Chancel, the walls having been entirely re-plastered in Victorian restorations.

## Post-Reformation Painting

At Corby, as elsewhere, the medieval work was covered with whitewash at the Reformation, and texts in elaborate frames were painted upon it, known in the seventeenth century as 'sentencing'—i.e. painting with sentences of scripture. Most of these texts had, of course, to be removed in order to expose the medieval work ; but notes were taken and it was possible to preserve a few examples. The East wall of the Nave, had received a number of layers on top of the Doom, amongst which it was possible to distinguish Elizabethan work by the black-letter lettering, and remains of what had probably been an elaborate Royal Arms of the Stuart Period. There were traces of texts all over the North aisle paintings, and at the East end is a fragment of an elaborate frame. In the South-east corner of the South aisle is a Lord's Prayer above the other paintings ; and further West, over the South door, are parts of two super-imposed texts, one in an oval frame, one of sixteenth, the other of seventeenth century date.

Some medieval colouring remains on a corbel stated to have come from the North Aisle and now bedded in the wall of the South Aisle just east of the South door.

[1] For texts of these Plays, see *Everyman and other Interludes and Miracle Plays*, Dent, 1909.

## The Technique of the Paintings: Plasters and Pigments

A few words about technique, plasters, and pigments may not be out of place.

The Church walls are mostly of local stone-rubble, and the whole interior was of course plastered, even over the dressed stone window-jambs and carried right up to the edge of the mouldings. The earlier plasters (as is often the case) were of better quality than the later, having a harder and smoother finish; but in a great many areas the plaster was of poor quality and there were many failures. These were in part due to the use, in the later work, of a 'pug' or poor quality natural mortar still dug in a field near Osgodby, in the laying of the stones. This had often perished, and the covering lime-plaster had thereby become detached in places from the wall, or holes and cracking had occurred. The stonework of the clerestory in particular was very rough, and in order to get a reasonably smooth surface to paint on, layer after layer of lime-putty had been roughly and thickly applied to the original lime-plaster under-coat. It was apparent that the brushes used for this purpose were made of long hog's bristles, as a number were found embedded in the surface. In some places, it was evident that the wall had been insufficiently wetted before the application of the colour to this very porous surface; and much flaking had taken place in consequence. In some cases it was clear that the paintings had become dilapidated actually before they were defaced, as whitewash and even parts of texts and other post-Reformation painting were not infrequently found on the same level as, or below the medieval work.

It is worth noting that parts of the early subjects of St. Anne and the Virgin (the girdle, morse and enrichments) were set out by lines incised in the plaster.

The actual medium of the Paintings is distemper or tempera, the vehicle used being in most cases lime. But, as has been stated, there is a suggestion of something more akin to oil——a parchment size perhaps—being used in the Jesse Tree subject.

The colours predominating are naturally the ochres (red and yellow) and their derivatives; with lamp black and chalk white. But in the early paintings in both aisles a good deal of green was used. This was a fairly rare and expensive colour, and argues both a lavish patron and a skilled and experienced artist. For example in 1352 the sum of ijs. ivd. was paid on April 10th

to John Matfroy for two pounds of 'Vert de Grece' (a copper acetate) for the paintings in St. Stephen's Chapel, Westminster.[1] This was a considerable sum at that period.

In the Jesse Tree a fine vermilion occurs, as well as in the later series in the North Aisle. In the latter case, we have the interesting phenomenon of vermilion turning black or rust colour caused by a re-arrangement of the particles to form the black instead of the red sulphide of mercury.[2] This change (particularly liable to occur in lime painting) was interestingly illustrated in the great wall painting of the Life of St. Catherine at Sporle, Norfolk. When Mr. C. J. W. Winter made his careful drawings on the first exposure of the painting in the 1860's large areas were shown as vermilion. When I was called in to treat the painting recently I found that every area shown as vermilion in the old drawing had turned black.

At least two, and probably three men were engaged on the later paintings as was proved by differences of technique within the same subject. The master craftsman would set out the scheme, and probably be responsible for the chief figures or features, his assistants attending to the larger areas of background, and subsidiary work. It must not be supposed that apparently grotesque or clumsily-drawn figures were necessarily the result of incompetent artists. There was a rigid convention by which the Virgin, Saints and Angels were idealized; and devils, demons, torturers, executioners, wicked Emperors and the like were deliberately malformed or caricatured so as to make their identity quite plain to the unlettered congregation. This is well borne out by contrast of the various figures in the Warning to Swearers and Seven Deadly Sins subject. That the artist appreciated the value of general effect is clear from the much broader way in which the great Doom subject and the Nativity figures (life-size) 20 or 30 feet above the Nave floor, are handled by contrast with the more detailed work, which would be seen at closer range, in the aisles. It was clear, however, from certain mannerisms in the drawing of the eyes and mouth, in the treatment of cloak drapery over the arm, and in the remarkably similar representations of the Virgin (three times) that the same artists were engaged both on the later North Aisle series and the Nave. The use of a different vehicle by the artist of the Jesse Tree subject, and his miniature-like technique, unexampled elsewhere in the Church, have already been referred to.

[1] *Fabric Rolls, Chapel of St. Stephen, Westminster.*

[2] See Daniel V. Thompson, *The Materials of Medieval Painting*, 107.

## Policy of Preservation and Record

The policy adopted in dealing with the paintings was to uncover, clean and preserve with fixative whatever justified it. It should be emphasized that no re-painting or restoration was done. Where heavy plaster repairs interfered with a subject, these have been toned with colour scumbled on them, and surfaced in with the rest so as not to distract the eye. In a few cases, where important lines were still present, but so faint as to be invisible more than a few feet away, these have been emphasized to make the subject intelligible.

A palimpsest painting is always a difficult problem to deal with. I had no compunction in removing the lower portion of the later St. Christopher (which was already fragmentary and added nothing to our knowledge) to reveal the exquisite St. Anne subject. With the early St. Christopher and the Warning to Swearers, it was not so simple, as both subjects had to be retained, and a compromise was arrived at. Careful notes were taken, and a few unimportant parts of the later subject (portions of brocade background, drapery, the throne and other areas that did not vitally affect the subject matter) were then removed to show sufficient of the under subject to make it intelligible. Pl. I *b* shows the actual condition of the wall with the two subjects as completed.

Clearly, the most important part of dealing with a set of paintings is to make an accurate record of them. Photography is quite inadequate for this, as all blemishes cracks, stains and unevennesses in the plaster are reproduced and merely confuse the subject ; and the vital element of colour is absent.

While the paintings are fresh under treatment and while scaffolding allows minute examination and access, measured drawings should be made. This was done at Corby with every painting that could reasonably be recorded. In the case of palimpsest paintings, I have made separate drawings of each subject, for the sake of clarity, and small parts removed to show more of the under paintings have been incorporated. A further convention I have adopted in cases where the subject is continued on more than one wall (i.e. the Doom, and Jesse Tree) is to show the whole area on one plane.

At the same time as the work on the recovery of the paintings, certain long-overdue structural repairs were carried out. Faulty plaster was everywhere renewed ; exterior pointing was done ; and roofs and gutters attended to so as to minimise the risk of damp and injury to this remarkable addition to our medieval painted church interiors.

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