



BRAZEN ALMS-DISH AT TIDESWELL.

Brazen Alms-Dish, Tideswell.

By G. LE BLANC SMITH.



AIDESWELL CHURCH, which has obtained the title of "The Cathedral of the Peak," contains somewhat of a curiosity in the form of an alms-dish, richly embossed, with a representation of Adam and Eve in the centre. It is rather larger than most dishes, being no less than $20\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter. As regards its date, it is unsafe to hazard any conjectures, for there is really nothing to guide one. The ornament consists of two rows of a very handsome design—best explained by reference to the photograph—evidently intended to represent a jewelled border, which surround the raised edge of the dish. The centre is raised, and in the hollow left between the raised centre and edge of the dish is an inscription. This inscription clearly shows the country which gave it birth to be Holland, for the inscription is in Dutch, and reads: "NYT SONDER GODT YS VAN ALLEN SCHRYFTHREN HET SLODT," which, Anglicised, reads: "The key to all the Scriptures is, there is nothing without God."

The central raised portion contains the picture of the Fall. Here we see Adam and Eve, on the left and right-hand sides of the tree respectively. In the centre is the Tree of Knowledge, round which is wound the serpent; in his mouth he holds a branch, on the end of which is the Apple of Eden. To make his meaning quite clear, the craftsman who executed this piece of metal work has shown a whole series of events in one picture. Firstly, the Serpent plucks the Fruit; secondly, Eve

receives it in her left hand; thirdly, she hands it to Adam with her right hand, he receiving it in his outstretched left hand; fourthly, Adam is shown dressed in his scanty attire of leaves, which argues that he has received and eaten the fruit.

Thus we see (1) the temptation by the serpent; (2) the fall of Eve; (3) the temptation of Adam; and (4) his fall. Eve's wavy hair is curious, and, for that matter, so is Adam's, for it is done up in a sort of "bun" behind his head. The curious method of showing the joints in the limbs of both Adam and Eve is worth notice, for the artist has shown them as having pegs through elbows and knees much on the principle of the "Dutch doll." The Serpent has a scaly body, and exactly resembles that on a similar type of alms-dish at St. Ninian's, near Stirling. The roots of the Tree—like the fangs of a tooth—are remarkable, and resemble those in the similar tree on a dish at the little Devonshire village of Dunsford. It is a very curious thing that, besides this Derbyshire dish, I can only hear of three other similar examples of Adam and Eve alms-dishes in the United Kingdom. They are at Christ Church Priory, near Bournemouth; St. Ninian's, near Stirling; and Dunsford, Devon. And it is also remarkable that we have here a dish of Dutch workmanship and design which is repeated almost in *fac-simile* at St. Ninian's (the border, in fact, being a perfect likeness); and this very border is likewise repeated on another dish at Gargunock, also near Stirling—but in this case the centre is occupied by two busts of persons in large hats, and one of these is playing the bagpipes. This stamps the Gargunock dish as Scotch, and leads up to the query as to whether the St. Ninian's dish (which so closely resembles this at Tideswell) was likewise a Scotch copy of a Dutch dish, or was imported from the land of its origin. The St. Ninian's dish lacks the Dutch inscription which characterises Tideswell's specimen, and *may* be a copy, but if so it is a remarkably good one. If there were but a few of these alms-dishes imported—as seems to be the case—it is perhaps unlikely that one would have strayed as far north as Stirling. Yet, on the other hand,

they may have been much more plentiful in a more lenient age, and the prudish ideas of later days may have seen the destruction of many a fine specimen.

The connection between the Fall of our forebears and the act of charity, or alms-giving, is far from apparent.¹

In three of the four specimens which have come to my knowledge the figures of Adam and Eve occupy the same sides of the tree as here ;² the Serpent is similarly coiled, but lacks scales in the Devonshire example ; and in the cases of the two English examples Eve receives the apple while Adam's hand is outstretched to grasp it, but in the Scotch specimen Adam plucks an apple himself with his left hand. On the Devonshire dish the figures are entirely unclad ; while in that at St. Ninian's they are partly hidden by foliage growing from the ground.

¹ Probably because poverty is one of the results of the Fall.—EDITOR.

² In *Early Christian Symbolism*, by J. Romilly Allen, the author says : "Throughout all periods of Christian Art, Eve is generally shown on the right hand side of the tree, and Adam on the left ; but the rule is not always adhered to." We thus see an arrangement which has been more or less in force since A.D. 50, but why ? What does it symbolize ? The curious round leaves here, and particularly at Dunsford, seem to be a survival of the berries or fruit universally shown in early Celtic Art, when this subject was under treatment.