

Bakewell Font.

By CANON C. T. ABRAHAM.



IN the notes, with beautiful photographic illustrations, by Mr. G. Le Blanc Smith, under the title of "Derbyshire Fonts," vol. xxix. of this *Journal*, there are some points which, by the courtesy of the Editor, I am allowed to comment briefly upon.

The font is undoubtedly Decorated work of the fourteenth century, though perhaps rather early. The canopies on each face of the octagon under which the figures are carved are quite decisive on this point, for the moulding of pillars and capitals, and the cusps, crockets, and finials, belong to that period. We have been wont in Bakewell to attribute the rough archaic look of the work as a whole to the probable fact that it was done by some local mason of the period, whose handicraft was not equal to his desires and knowledge of the kind of decoration which was being done elsewhere, and not to its being Saxon, which some of our many visitors tell us it is, or Norman, neither of which could it be. There appears nothing to substantiate the description that the "canopies are unorthodox, formed by the interlacement of natural foliage." They seem in intention to be rigidly orthodox, and the crockets are conventional.

In dealing with the persons represented on the font, Mr. Smith brings forward the strong authority of Dr. Cox, and no one would lightly venture to differ from him on such questions in a Derbyshire church. But I venture to believe that further renewed study, from a slightly different point of view, might lead him to give up the suggestion that fig. 3 is King Edward the Confessor, and fig. 4 St. Augustine in an Anglo-Saxon attitude.

The facts which govern the suggestions I am about to offer are these:—

- (1) The church is dedicated to All Saints.
- (2) Baptism is the sacrament whereby God "makes us members of Christ," and is the means of extending to all generations the benefits of His Incarnation, in the Church and the communion of all saints.
- (3) The general idea of that communion of saints centreing in the Person of Christ was universally familiar to the men of the fourteenth century.
- (4) The font has been inadvertently or carelessly turned at some time—the central figure is now facing south-west instead of west.

The evidence of this lies in the position of the leaden filling in the rim of the font, where the iron hinges and staples of the lock of the old wooden locked font cover remain. They are askew now—they would be straight north and south if the font were in its right orientation.

Starting, then, from this central figure (fig. 4 in Mr. Smith's numeration)—which should be facing west—it is the figure of our Lord seated in glory with both hands lifted in blessing.

The evidence is that it is the only nimbed figure, *and that the nimbus has got the outline of a cross* incised in it, which belongs to representations of our Lord alone. In working out the line of thought suggested above, fig. 3 would naturally appear to be the figure of the Blessed Virgin Mother, the divinely-chosen means and instrument of the Incarnation.

The evidence is that it is the only woman's figure on the font with a wimple thrown over her head and covering the hair and falling over her shoulders. She is crowned as Queen of Heaven, according to the custom of those days; in one hand she bears the lily branch, with the dove resting on it; in the other the Gospel, perhaps, as is often the case, with the idea of the words of the Magnificat upon it.

Then follow in order, St. Peter and St. Paul, the apostles to Jewish and Gentile world, one upholding the Church and the

keys, the other the sword of the Spirit and the word of the Gospel message which he preached. Next come the bishop and the monk, the representatives of the secular and regular clergy of the Church. After them St. John Baptist, with right hand pointing to the medallion of the Agnus Dei he holds in his left; and, lastly, the figure grasping the long, unrolled scroll. This may be Isaiah, the Evangelical prophet, or it may be St. Matthew or St. Luke, as the Evangelist of the Nativity and Incarnation. And thus we come round again to the central figure of our Lord in blessing.

Is it not likely enough that these two last figures fall into their place as introductory, preparing the way for the Incarnate Son of God?

I submit that this line of thought fits in with the symbolism of the figures, roughly, not slovenly, carved, and gives unity and the right sequence to them as embodying a great idea, and that idea very closely connected with the use of the font in Christian baptism.