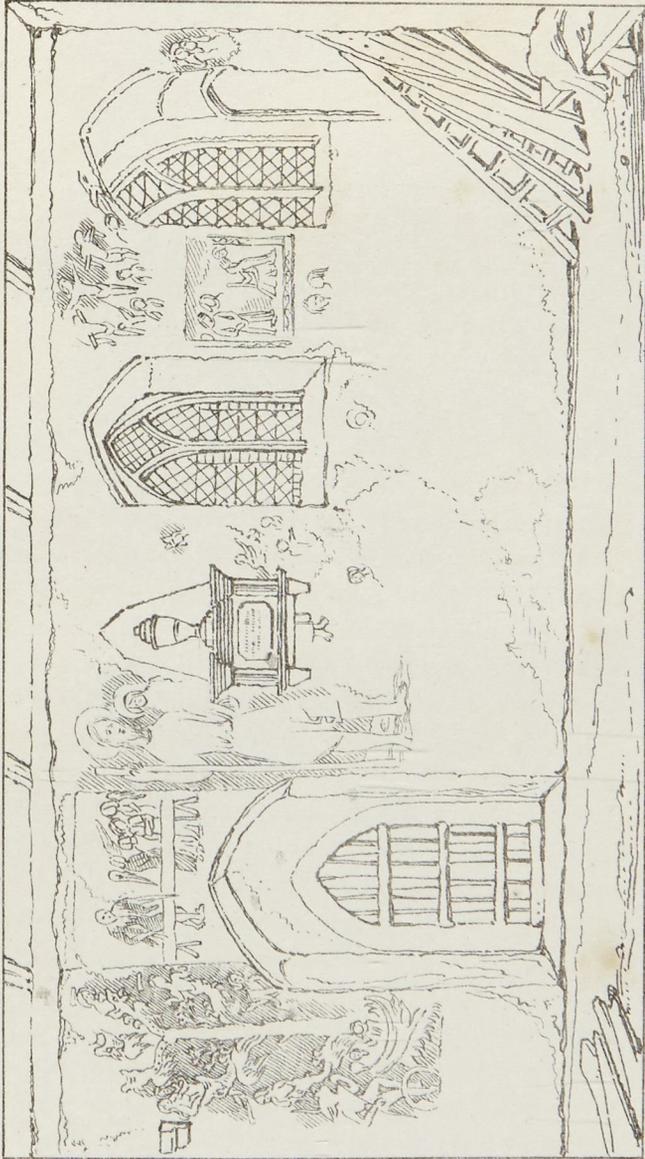


DRAWINGS BY MRS. GUNN
OF
Mural Paintings in Crostwight Church.

COMMUNICATED BY
DAWSON TURNER, ESQ.,
VICE-PRESIDENT.

REMARKABLE, and even unique, as I have always been led to regard the Tree of the Deadly Sins in Catfield Church,* it will readily be imagined, that it was with no less surprise than pleasure that I heard of a painting, similar in subject and very analogous in design, having lately been brought to light in the neighbouring church of Crostwight. The discovery we owe to the active, persevering industry of Mr. Gunn, to whom we were greatly indebted in the former instance. He was told that some traces of colour had been detected in scraping the walls, preparatory to their receiving a fresh layer of whitewash: his experience taught him what most probably was concealed beneath; and he applied himself personally to the task of removing the former coats. The consequence was, that he had soon the satisfaction of seeing the North wall of the nave exhibit the appearance represented in the first of the accompanying plates. On the opposite side, it is probable, he would have been equally successful; but the order given to the masons allowed of their going no further, except to the narrow projections which confine the

* See the figure of this in *Norfolk Archaeology*, I., p. 133.



COWELL'S ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING

View of the North Wall of Crostwight Church, Norfolk.

1847.



*Mural Painting, representing the Seven Deadly Sins,
on the South side of the North Door,
of Crostnight Church, Norfolk.*



*Mural Painting over the North Door
of Crostwright Church, Norfolk.*

rood-loft screen. On the Western face of the Southernmost of these he found a really graceful and very perfect figure of St. Michael, trampling upon and transfixing the prostrate fiend: the execution good; the face, beautiful. The whole body and thighs of the Archangel are covered with the same long silvery feathers that compose his flapping wings: on his breast he bears his argent shield, charged with the sanguine cross. The rebel spirit is similarly feathered and winged: his form is that of a fabulous monster of the deep. I have indulged in this description, not recollecting to have seen elsewhere the heavenly warrior and his antagonist delineated in a similar manner. At the same time, I have hardly regarded the deviations from what may be considered the standing type, as of sufficient importance to justify the introduction of an additional plate; and I have therefore confined the engravings to the general view already noticed and to the two most Western subjects. These, by far the most interesting of the series, are likewise the most perfect. Scarcely more perfect are they, however, than the adjoining St. Christopher, represented, as usual, of colossal stature, and supporting himself with his enormous staff, while traversing the river, which, full of fish, is seen behind him nearly upon a level with his knees; whereas, in front of him, there is not even a drop of water to moisten the soles of his feet. Great inconsistencies these; but "nought uncommon nor held strange in the old painters' day." They, men of genius, but untaught, not unfrequently united in their works much that is to be admired, particularly in composition and expression, with absurdities altogether unaccountable. Our Society can scarcely fail to wish that our countryman, Hogarth, had been a Norfolk archæologist and had studied these performances; so delighted would he have been, not only to have drawn from this source fresh illustrations to his treatise on False Perspective, but most probably to have added to it a *pendant* upon unlooked-for contrarieties. A fourth picture, consider-

ably perfect except as regards the accusing Jews, is that of our Saviour before Pilate, in which both the attitude and the face of the Divine Redeemer are deserving of praise. So, likewise, the Crucifixion, placed immediately over the last-mentioned one, is in a state of fair preservation, and has portions of much merit. The rest are too seriously injured, and in parts effaced, for it to be possible even to decide upon their subjects with any certainty.

To return to those of my plates, it will at once be seen how much the demon-tree in the second has in common with the scarcely more extraordinary one at Catfield. They both originate from the jaws of hell, within which their roots are fixed: both have seven branches, equal in number to the deadly sins; and, in both, these branches are formed of fiends, whose gaping mouths hold an unfortunate transgressor, the votary and victim of one of these fatal passions. The same idea, in fact, pervades alike the one and the other; but the resemblance goes no further. In passing from generalities to details, there is a discrepancy throughout; and of such a nature as to render it highly improbable that we see in the two the workmanship of the same hand, or the emanations of the same mind. What I suppose intended for the gaping mouth, "*per che si va nell' eterno dolore,*" takes at Crostwight so much the form of a boat, that, but for the tree, the observer might fancy it designed for the infernal ferry-boat, conveying sinners, among flames, to their final doom.* Here, too, the tree is more grand in size and more

* Nor would it be at all extraordinary to meet in our churches with such a mixture of heathen and Christian mysteries in those times, as would allow of Charon himself being introduced on this occasion. We have him by name in Dante, who, "in common with many fathers of the church, under the supposition, that paganism, in the persons of its infernal gods, represented the evil angels, made no scruple to adopt its fables. He thus blended with the terrors of the Catholic faith all the brilliant colouring of the Greek mythology, and all the force of poetical association. Michael Angelo, too, in his picture of the Last Judgment, represents Charon carrying over the

graceful in its proportions than at Catfield; and its branches, instead of maintaining stiff, straight right-angles with the stem, rise in a pleasing curve, accompanied by smaller shoots, that end in what may equally be taken for leaf, flower, or fruit.* The poor heedless victim is, at Catfield, attended by an evil spirit, seated by his side and watching an opportunity to engulf him in the monster's bowels; but, at Crostwight,—except in a single instance where the personification of lust required an associate,—the culprit sits solitary; the half of his body only seen rising from the mouth of the fiend, which is not large enough for the reception of more. Again, the two Catfield demons, more burlesque than terrific, who, on either side the gulf, are tugging with all their might and main to drag down the criminals as they emerge from their incarceration, are replaced at Crostwight by a single, unmistakeable, gigantic devil, duly horned and hoofed, and grasping what may be a rod—may be a portion of a chain. The picture is, in this part, unfortunately, so injured, that little can be pronounced with positiveness respecting him, or respecting the wheel by his feet,—a probably symbolical adjunct. The same observation, touching the imperfect state of the painting below, is equally applicable to the upper portion, where there are now no traces of an angel blowing the last trumpet; though it is not by any means therefore certain that none ever stood there. Still farther, the names of the

condemned souls; and, forgetting that he is introduced, not as an infernal god, but as the evil spirit of the stream, it has been objected to the painter of the Sistine Chapel that he has confounded the two religions, when, in fact, he has not transgressed the strict rule of the church."—SISMONDI, *on the Literature of the South of Europe*, I., p. 248.

* In describing what I have just mentioned as shoots, a friend, to whose opinion I am always disposed to pay deference, considers me mistaken, and believes them to be the multipartite, sting-pointed tails of the *ramiform* demons. The idea is at all events ingenious, and perhaps just: in the words of the Italian proverb, "se non è vero è ben trovato;"—but who shall solve or cut the knot?

deadly sins are all now effaced, with the exception of *Socordia*,* here personified by a female, supporting her chin

* I recollect no other graphic representation of the Deadly Sins, save Fisher's engraving (t. 19) of the painting on the walls of the Chapel of the Trinity at Stratford-upon-Avon. There, too, their names were attached; and five of them still remain. No needless precaution this; for very inferior is the performance in every respect to those at Catfield and Crostwight; and in none more so, than in the evident inability of the artist justly to conceive what he has undertaken to portray. Remove, therefore, but the inscriptions, and his intention disappears. He has given no one of the culprits an attribute; nor has he marked the peculiar sin by any corresponding form or action. *Avaritia* is designated by a group of sixteen individuals, whom a demon is dragging along, encircled by a chain: *Ira*, by five others, entering "la Città dolente;" itself all red with flames, within and without: its portal, an enormous gaping mouth. *Superbia* is mounted on the neck of a devil in the form of a goat. *Invidia* is suspended from the wall, by a rope tied round the waist, so that head and feet hang equally low; and *Gula* is fastened against the same wall, both of them smarting under the lashes of a demon who stands beneath them. *Socordia* and *Libido* there are no means of appropriating. Other devils, scattered about the picture, are variously tormenting other sinners, most of whom, as at Crostwight, are females. How would this have been, had *lions* been painters? On the dexter side of the piece the case is very different. There all is beatitude; and Popes, Prelates, and Monks, are seen rising from their tombs in extacy, or welcomed by St. Peter at the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Before dismissing the subject, let me observe that thanks would be due to any English antiquary, who, on visiting the continent, would use the opportunity that I let slip, and observe how far similar representations of the infernal regions are to be found elsewhere, and particularly in Italy. Seronx d'Agincourt, in his engravings of many hundred early paintings, chiefly from that country, furnishes none such. Cisalpine art, to judge from his work, is confined to the sacred and classical; or, if hagiology is occasionally admitted, it is restricted to what may be considered its legitimate bounds; except where, as in Orcagna's noble fresco in the church of Santa Maria Novella, at Florence, admiration and consequent imitation of Dante has led to deviations. It might so be possible to ascertain, whether these pictures of the mouth of hell, with its attendant horrors, well described and illustrated by my late friend, Mr. Sharp, in his *Coventry Mysteries*, originated in England or Denmark, the fruit of the fearful traditions of the religion of Odin; whether they equally occur in Germany and France, where the Macaber Dance, and the legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead, and other similar legends are often painted; or whether,

with her right hand. There is no difficulty, however, in referring a second female, grasping a bag of money, to *Avaritia*; or a third, who is lifting a goblet to her mouth, to *Gula*; or the couple noticed above, to *Libido*. *Invidia*, *Ira*, and *Superbia* it were difficult to appropriate, unless we consider the lowest figure on the sinister side intended for the last-mentioned. His sex, his size—double that of the rest—and his bright green tunic, would seem to justify such a conclusion. Much care too has evidently been bestowed upon his beard; which, in the absence of all architectural ornaments and costume, is the only object I can see to help us to date the painting. Judging from it, we must regard the work as a production of the fourteenth century, when the effigy of Edward II. was placed in Gloucester cathedral, with a beard of the same form, and parted and curled in the same manner. This, as is well observed by Mr. Fairholt, in his very useful publication upon *Costume in England*, p. 428, “forcibly brings to mind the King’s foppery, and the cruel manner in which it was rebuked after his fall by Maltravers, one of his keepers, who, upon a certain occasion, while on a journey, ordered him to be shaved with cold water from a ditch; whereupon the unfortunate monarch exclaimed, bursting into indignant tears, ‘Here is at least warm water upon my cheeks, whether you will or not.’”

Admitting the justice of these data, the paintings in the interior of the churches of Catfield and Crostwight are brought to the same, or nearly the same, period; and it may be observed, *en passant*, that we have here a fresh exemplification of the fact more particularly proved by our rood-loft screens, that, however little is known of the history

of Italian birth, they have come to us through those regions, gradually assuming more and more of a barbaric character in their northward course—as the Romanesque architecture varied in like manner in the same transit—till, safely housed in our ecclesiastical edifices, it rioted uncontrolled in all the exuberancies of Norman arches and shafts and capitals.

of British art in the days of the Plantagenets and their immediate successors,—however the obscurity of those dark ages may have enveloped and overshadowed the country,—there cannot but have been several painters, and those no ordinary men, at that time in Norfolk. Whether they were natives of the county or otherwise, and whether there was any school or guild to train and to connect them, will most probably long remain open questions. Our town-books, which would be most likely to decide these points, are silent. I am not aware that they in any case go sufficiently far back to state the fact of works of this description being anywhere in hand. It is, at all events, highly improbable that the artists should have been imported from abroad, like the greater number of those enumerated by Horace Walpole or Vertue. Such may have been generally the case for important works or buildings; though even there it was not always* so; but is it to be supposed that the churchwarden of a remote village would cast his eyes far and wide for foreign art, or that the squire would untie his purse-strings for the purpose? There are at the same time grounds for believing, that a considerable number, perhaps the greater proportion, of the churches in the county were painted.† The

* Thus, in the singularly beautiful and curious account of the *Painted Chamber*, published by Mr. Gage Rokewode in the *Vetusta Monumenta*, although the painter first mentioned was a Spaniard, Peter de Hispania, whose name occurs in 1255, we find him succeeded, before the close of that century, by Thomas of Westminster and William of Sudbury, who, there can be no doubt, were of this country. So, likewise, in Lord Braybrooke's interesting volume descriptive of Audley End, the extracts from the parish-books of Walden give us in 1440 the name of Robert Stystede, as having painted a linen cloth for the Holy Sepulchre; and again, in 1460, that of William Grene, as painter of the tabernacle of the Blessed Virgin; and they must have been Englishmen; and England must have had native artists, *q. e. d.*

† Among those known to have been so, is that of Potter Heigham, where, as I was informed, in 1822, by the Rev. James Layton, then curate of the parish, "the fall of the plastering from the wall of the South aisle

spirit called forth by this Society has already succeeded in proving the fact with many; and it cannot be doubted but that others will soon follow. Nor will the pictures now be treated as of yore,—*un-covered*, only to be *re-covered*, and perhaps permanently;—for, however the enlarged piety and good taste of the present age may forbid their remaining long exposed, the fact of their existence will be made known, and at the same time their subjects, and whatever is remarkable in connection with them. Indeed, all that may tend to instruction, will assuredly be perpetuated by descriptions and drawings, now that the widely-extended influence of the schoolmaster is rapidly causing the white lions and blue boars and two-necked swans to descend each after each from our sign-posts, and that to read and to write is gradually becoming universal, and the book of God is an inmate of nearly every cottage. Far, very far, was it from being so at the time of those paintings, when pictures were the books of the multitude, the only ones they could read; for “letter or line knew they never a one;” and right well has it been observed in a recently published work of equal elegance and instructiveness,* that “the first object to which reviving art was destined, was to render the Christian places of worship a theatre of instruction and improvement

brought to light four paintings between the two Eastern windows. They were about two feet square, each, and had been executed in the latter part of the fourteenth century. Their subjects were works of Piety and Mercy, exercised by a female. In one, she is receiving the consecrated wafer from the hand of a priest. In another, she is administering medicine, with a spoon, to a sick man. In a third, she is inviting, or rather leading, a traveller into a house; and in the fourth, is giving money to a prisoner, seated upon straw, whose hands are encumbered with an iron bar, and his feet are in the stocks. The former windows were evidently smaller than the present, as a part of these paintings has been cut away.” I insert this statement, in the hope that some of the members of our Society will exert themselves, and cause them again to become visible.

* *Sacred and Legendary Art*, by Mrs. Jameson, I., xx.

for the people, to attract and to interest them by representations of scenes, events and personages, already so familiar as to require no explanation, appealing at once to their intelligence and their sympathies; embodying in beautiful shapes (beautiful at least in their eyes) associations and feelings and memories deep rooted in their very hearts, and which had influenced in no slight degree the progress of civilization,—the development of mind.”

But, it will fairly be asked, do the foregoing remarks equally apply to the one as to the other of the drawings here submitted to the Society? To the first there is no doubt of their fitness. The tree of sin, whose fruit is death, is an allegory clear to the dullest comprehension; and, when portrayed with those appalling accompaniments—the demon’s jaw, the widely distended mouth of hell, the sinners in flames, and Satan himself by their side prepared to drag down others to the same doom,—the conscious culprit could not but shudder with affright, however speedily afterwards he might

“forget and smile,

His quick returning folly cancling all;

As the tide rushing raises what is writ

On yielding sands, and smooths the letter’d shore.”

Here then we have a book, whose lessons are printed in a type and conveyed in a language that he who runs can read,—a lesson that every living man can feel and understand, and may apply to himself. The other picture can only be supposed to have been generally intelligible, under the belief that its story was intimately connected with the popular traditions of the times, traditions not sufficiently important to have been preserved to an after period; so that, however the subject may have been clear and impressive and instructive in its day, the case is altogether the contrary at present. It appears to me to have reference to the state of the soul after death, as shown by a young

female, recently deceased, here brought to the bar—for a bar there evidently is—and recommended by her patron saint or attendant spirit to a couple of angels, who have taken her under their protection; while the demon, balked of his prey, stands sulkily aloof, and views the scene with unmistakeable disappointment and dissatisfaction. Admitting this explanation to be correct, the picture affords no bad contrast to its more painful neighbour.

The paintings, my principal object, being thus disposed of, I will beg indulgence for a few remarks upon the Church itself; and the rather, as what is said of the one may possibly tend to throw light upon the other. This is most simple and unpretending, in due accord with the village it sanctifies,—small, low, built of rubble, thatched with reed, entered by a porch to the South, and to the West terminating in a short, unornamented, square tower, the receptacle of three bells. Its date, to judge from the East window, now in great measure closed, is that of the Decorated style; but the fragments of tracery left in the windows of the nave, and, still more, the form of another window long since blocked up, might justify us in referring it to the preceding century, and so more reconcile it to the time of the pictures. The font too, with each of the sides of its octangular basin occupied by a couple of shallow Early English arches, indicates the latter æra. On the other hand, the wooden rood-loft screen, elegant in workmanship and design, cannot be placed earlier than the reign of Edward III. Its spandrils yet retain the winged heart, and goblin, and other fantastic ornaments; but all traces of painting are obliterated. Not so in the windows, in which are still to be seen two busts of angels playing upon guitars, and a third bearing a scroll, inscribed “*Date gloriam Deo;*” all of them executed with care and knowledge. On the bosses of the roof are the heads of a King and Queen, more than usually good; and on the entrance-door are some not inelegant

specimens of iron work. To conclude this long story,—when my daughter made her drawings of the mural paintings in 1847, she found in the church two broken enamelled bricks, with designs I never saw elsewhere; the one, a rose, with four lance-shaped points—might they be rays?—projecting from it; the other, a central fleur de lys with a trefoil at each corner; the surface pale yellow, the designs green. In the pavement are two stone coffin-lids, with crosses of different, not uncommon shapes, and a brass plate not mentioned by Blomefield, bearing “*Hic jacet Thomas Cressenym armiger, filius et heres in parte Johis Cresseñm militis, cuj^s aiē ppicietur Deus.*” In the churchyard is a remarkable stone of considerable thickness, in the shape of a cross, about six feet long, on whose surface was originally sculptured another cross, now well-nigh effaced. I know nothing like it in Norfolk; nor indeed elsewhere, except the support to the monumental effigy of Strongbow at Dublin.

