

Mural Paintings in Norwich Cathedral.

COMMUNICATED BY

THE VERY REV. F. C. HUSENBETH, D.D.

IN the latter part of November, 1862, the workmen employed in fixing a new monument to the Wodehouse family, in the south aisle of the Cathedral at Norwich, while removing a portion of the wall and a coating of plaster, came upon the remains of some old mural paintings. They were three in number, each occupying one of the arches along the south wall. They were very faint and imperfect; but were carefully copied by Mr. F. B. Russel, before they were again covered up by the new monument. A tracing was also made of the principal subject by another hand. I inspected them very carefully, and proceed to give what explanations occur to me of the three paintings.

The first, the most eastward of the three, most fortunately had the name of the saint which it represented still quite legible. It stood thus: SCS WLSTANVS; so that it evidently referred to some event in the life of St. Wolstan, who was Bishop of Worcester from 1062 to 1095, when he died, about 87 years old, being the last saint of the Anglo-Saxons. There are two circumstances related by his biographers, St. Aelred, William of Malmesbury, Florence, and Capgrave, which it may be well to relate in elucidation of the painting.



F.B. Russell del.

H. Nimham litho.

Fresco Painting, Norwich Cathedral.

The saint received his crosier from the hand of St. Edward the Confessor, the last of our Anglo-Saxon kings; and was consecrated bishop by Archbishop Aldred, who had just been translated from the see of Worcester to that of York. When William the Conqueror was in possession of the kingdom, he everywhere promoted his Normans; and he would have removed St. Wolstan from his see, to make way for some Frenchman, had not the Almighty by an evident miracle declared in his favour.

A synod was held at Westminster, at which Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, called upon St. Wolstan to resign his crosier, on the ground of his want of learning, his great simplicity and unfitness for secular affairs. The aged bishop rose, and humbly acknowledged himself unfit for the pastoral office, but declared that St. Edward, by the authority of the holy Apostolic See of Rome, had given him his crosier, and forced him to submit to so great a burden. "You now," he continued, "require from me the crosier which you did not deliver, and take from me the office which you did not confer: and I, who am not ignorant of my own insufficiency, obeying the decree of this holy synod, resign them,—not to you, but to him by whose authority I received them." He then advanced to the tomb of St. Edward, and after an animated address to that holy king, he struck the end of his crosier into the stone, and putting off his pontificals, humbly seated himself among the monks. The crosier remained upright, and firmly fixed in the stone of the monument. No one could move it. Lanfranc sent the Bishop of Rochester to bring the crosier, but he was unable to draw it out. Lanfranc brought the king to the place, and after praying, tried to move the crosier, but in vain. The king cried out in amazement, and Lanfranc, bursting into tears, and humbly acknowledging his fault, entreated St. Wolstan to resume his crosier. The saint approaching the monument, again addressed himself to St. Edward: "Behold

me, my lord Edward, here I am, who entrusted myself to thy judgment, who submitted myself to thy decision, who resigned to thee the staff which thou gavest. What is now thy pleasure and will? Thou hast in truth guarded thy honour, and declared my innocence, and shown thy greatness; if, therefore, thy former judgment of me stands, restore the crosier; if it is changed, say to whom it shall be given." He then drew out the crosier with as much ease as if it had been imbedded in soft clay. The king and Lanfranc falling at his feet, begged his forgiveness and his prayers; and the Conqueror from that time honoured him as a father, and called him so.

Now, which of these events is depicted in the painting under consideration? We have St. Wolstan, and the crowned head of a king standing before him. Is it St. Edward, or William the Conqueror? I have no hesitation in determining it to be the Confessor; and that the picture represents the saint originally receiving his crosier from St. Edward. The king is evidently presenting it to him; and in the painting itself, there was a tolerably plain outline of the arm, and of the hand of the king on the crosier, just above the saint's hand, who is receiving it. St. Wolstan holds the crosier in his left hand in the usual way; but if the painter had intended to represent his surrender of the crosier, he would most likely have made the saint raising it in his right hand, to drive it effectually down into the monument. In this case also the monument would have appeared below; whereas nothing is there represented, but part of an oval border of foliage, or scroll-work, which was originally continued, and rose again behind the figure of St. Wolstan. It evidently included some other figure or figures, of which no traces now remain. We may therefore safely conclude that the painting represents St. Wolstan, in the act of receiving his crosier from the hand of the holy king St. Edward the Confessor; and it is curious and

valuable, as being the only mural painting that has been discovered of St. Wolstan.

The other two paintings have no connexion with the first, nor with each other. The middle arch contains a faint outline of a female figure kneeling in prayer, under a vaulted roof supported by cluster columns, of which one only remains on the right. She has apparently before her a desk, or *prie-Dieu*, on which I thought I could distinguish a book. Behind this desk is something very like the head of a crosier, apparently resting against the wall. The head of the female is entirely effaced; the whole figure is coloured red. Above the head there appeared to me to be some remains of a crown, but the artist who has copied the picture has given something like the head of an animal. Supposing it to be a crown, I think the figure represents St. Etheldreda, queen, and afterwards abbess. The name was inscribed above; but all that can now be traced are the letters SCA and portions of two more letters and an L, which may have made up the name *Sancta Etheldreda*. Her red robe would indicate her royalty; her kneeling in a church or cloister in prayer would commemorate her devoting herself to a religious life; and the crosier before her would show that she eventually became abbess of Ely. If the object above her head is a crown, it will aptly convey the memory of the great sacrifice she made in exchanging a throne for a conventual stall.

The remaining figure to the westward is that of a bishop in pontificals, holding his crosier in his left hand, and giving his blessing with his right. Faint lines of red and bluish-black are all that remain: the face is entirely gone, but the mitre is plainly traceable. The only letters remaining are the concluding ones of the name, *us*, a termination which certainly allows a very wide field for conjecture. It is not an archbishop, as it was usual to represent archbishops holding their cross for distinction, though in reality it was never carried by them, but borne before them; nor are there

any vestiges of a pallium. It cannot therefore be either St. Augustine, St. Thomas, or St. Edmund, all archbishops of Canterbury; nor St. Felix of the East Angles, from the termination. I have generally found that a bishop without any distinctive emblem in our churches is intended for St. Nicholas, and the name written may have been *Nicolaus*. This, after all, is mere conjecture; but I have nothing better to offer from data so imperfect.

It only remains to give some statement of the age of these paintings. They do not belong to a remote period; for the mitre of St. Wolstan is almost of modern shape and fashion; and the crosiers are more elegantly shaped than those of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which were quite plain, and simply curved round at the top. The mitre of the other episcopal figure appears to be of more ancient form, but it is not perfectly traceable. I am of opinion therefore that these paintings are not older than the latter part of the fourteenth century.

Cossey, Dec. 18, 1862.