

## NOTES ON THE CHALDON PAINTING.

By J. G. WALLER.

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A FEW additional notes on the Chaldon Painting may now be desirable, as some further information has been obtained since the publication of the account in Vol. V. of the Society's *Collections*; especially as this curious work is as yet without a parallel, even its analogies must be sought for far and wide, and are found in fragmentary particles rather than as a whole. It is certainly the most valuable relic of ecclesiastical art yet found in England, and, as far as we know, the subject has not been met with on the Continent.

It is interesting to feel that we can assign to it a date within a few years of its execution. The original story of The Drunken Pilgrim is first given by Cæsarius, the Monk of Heisterbach, and this, which is really but a dream, gives reference to both persons and time, and the latter will place the painting after 1198, that being about the period alluded to. The style of execution will not allow us to fix it beyond the earlier part of the 13th century. The story is now given entire. It is entitled "The Punishment of the Abbot of Corbey."

At the time of the schism between Otto and Philip, kings of the Romans, a certain pilgrim coming from parts beyond sea, selling his cloak for wine, which in those parts is very strong, drank so much that, being drunk, he went out of his mind, and was thought to be dead. At the same hour his spirit was led to the place of punishment, where he saw the Prince of Darkness himself, sitting upon a well covered with a fiery lid. In the meantime, amongst other souls, is led forth the Abbot of Corbey, whom he much saluted as he pre-

sented to him a sulphurous drink in a red-hot chalice, who, when he had drunken, the lid being removed, was sent into the well. But the pilgrim, as he stood before the infernal threshold, and seeing such things, trembled, the Devil loudly calling out, "Bring over to me that lord who stands outside, who of late, selling his garment of pilgrimage, got drunk." On hearing which the pilgrim, turning to the Angel of the Lord who had led him thither, promised that he would never more get drunk, since now at that hour he delivered him from imminent peril, who, presently returning to himself, noted the day and hour, and, returning to his country, knew that the aforesaid abbot had died at the same time. "I saw," says Cæsarius, "the same abbot at Cologne, and he was a very secular man, more conformable to a soldier than a monk."<sup>1</sup>

This very curious story, being one out of several related by this Cistercian monk, leads us to another inference of much interest respecting the author of the painting. He must have been one of those artist monks of the same order who frequently wandered about in the practice of their art, as related in the *Dialogus Miraculorum*, Dist. 8, c. xxiv. No secular person could then have been acquainted with the numerous stories of Cæsarius, nor is it probable that anyone, out of the order to which he belonged, was familiar with that which could not have been published out of it so early as the close of the 12th century. It is very possible he was German or Flemish, as Cæsarius himself became the Prior of Villers, in Brabant, and art influences travelled a good deal by the Rhine, it being a natural highway to the West. The very great importance of the Cistercian order in the 13th century may also have tended to disseminate such religious teachings as are found in the *Dialogus Miraculorum*.

The "Ladder," which is the principal symbol in this painting, I have already shown was of early use. The metaphor is indeed most natural, and it would not be correct were we to ascribe the origin of the "Ladder to

<sup>1</sup> Cæsarii Heisterb. *Dialogus Miraculorum*, Dist. 12, cap. xl.

Heaven" to the dream of Jacob related in Genesis, chap. xxviii. 5. The mystic Ladder was a symbol in the religious system of Mithras, as well as in that of Egypt—to which attention has already been directed—and subsequently in the religion of Mahomet. In the *Sequentiæ* of St. Gregory, it is called "Scala Peccatorum," and in the Psalter of the Virgin is this, "Esto illi *scala* ad regnum cœlorum et iter rectum ad Paradisum Dei." In the collection of stories called the *Acts of St. Francis* is that of a vision, in which are *two* ladders: at the summit of one is Christ, at the other the Virgin Mary. The monks ascending the first are repulsed, but are then directed to the other, whereon they are received and "enter the kingdom without labour," the object of which is of course to exalt the saving power of the Virgin. There are also stories of the ladder as a punishment in Hell.

The symbol of the Bridge, as a punishment, is undoubtedly of the most reverend antiquity, and has had a remarkable persistence. The stories illustrating it are very numerous, but the idea must have had a common origin. It is sometimes a narrow bridge, no broader than a thread or a hair, and as sharp as a scymetar or razor, or as smooth as glass, or with sharp spikes. It is found in the religious system of Zoroaster, and perhaps this is the earliest tradition of its use known to us; but we must assuredly look still further back to seek for its origin. That it was widely spread over the East is certain, and that it has kept its place there down to our own times will be seen in the following notice, given by a correspondent of the *Times* writing from Wuchang, China, Dec. 14, 1872. He speaks of a representation of Hell, in a temple, thus:—"Here is a bridge of El Sirât, over which wretched ghosts are being urged by green demons, who evidently find sport in the occupation, knowing that the victims cannot cross but will inevitably fall over among the serpents, which are stretching their necks up greedily from below." How long it lasted in our own country, surviving the storms of time with all its revolutions, may be seen in a tradition which remained in Yorkshire down to 1624, that a person after

death must pass over Whinney Moor.<sup>1</sup> So, at a funeral it was the custom for a woman to come and chant over the corpse some verses, from which the following are taken :—

“When thou from hence doest pass away,  
Every night and awle,  
To Whinney Moor thou com'st at last,  
And Christ receive thy sawle.

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From Whinney Moor that thou mayest pass,  
Every night and awle,  
To Brig of dread thou com'st at last,  
And Christ receive thy sawle.  
From Brig of dread, na brader than a thread,  
Every night and awle,  
To Purgatory fire thou com'st at last,  
And Christ receive thy sawle.”

It may be desirable to add a few words more in illustration of the remarkable figure of the Usurer. It was probably the custom for a money-lender to wear his leathern bag (*crumena*) of coin round his neck. It was handy for him, and also easy to be protected. Thus it is therefore that the Usurer is always represented, and thus Dante speaks of him in his *Inferno*, c. 17.

“Cosi ancor su per la strema testa  
Di qual settimo cerchio tutto solo  
Andai ove sedea la gente mesta.

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Non ne connobbi alcun, ma io m'accorsi  
Che dal collo a ciascun pendea una tasca  
Che avea certo colore e certo segno.”

He further indicates that these bags had armorial bearings upon them, but he alludes to no names, leaving that to be inferred. There was no one in mediæval times held up to more condemnation than the usurious money-lender, and the “Merchant of Venice” is founded upon this hatred.

I could have wished to have been able to throw more light upon one or two still obscure points in this very

<sup>1</sup> Brand's *Popular Antiquities*, vol. II. p. 275. Sir H. Ellis, Lond. 1844.

remarkable painting, but the two falling figures of a man and woman holding a horn between them still eludes inquiry. There must exist a special story respecting this group, and it may some day be discovered. The horn was often a symbol of trust and of tenure of land, as that of Ulphus at York. The female is offering coin with one hand whilst she places another upon the horn. That is so far significant that the idea would seem to indicate a betrayal of some trust by feminine seduction, and, it might be, land belonging to the Church was therefore lost. Conjectures are never satisfactory, but this view is, I think, more so than that I previously gave.

I have also to correct an error in my first account, which puts "Tree of Life" instead of "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil." The Rev. H. Shepherd called my attention to this oversight.

One might dwell a long time on the many thoughts that are embodied in this very curious composition. The obscurity veiling their origin, which nevertheless we can trace to the remotest antiquity and to the very verge of historic times, gives us still more matter for reflection. Whence came the *first* apostle or the Evangel?—the teacher who has left traces of this primæval gospel in every great system of religion with which we are acquainted? We can but surmise. We know it must have been antecedent to the system of Egyptian Mythology, or the teaching of Brahma or of Buddha, or of that of Zoroaster; because we cannot trace any common connection between them. It is more reasonable to conclude, that we have in them the relics of an anterior faith held by a more primitive people, just as the relics of language may be found in modern forms and traced backwards to an unknown antiquity, and referred hypothetically to a so-called Aryan race.

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