

## THE JERUSALEM CHAMBER,

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[*Read in the Jerusalem Chamber, at the Meeting of the London and Middlesex  
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A GREAT majority of the strangers who visit the Abbey Church of Westminster are profoundly ignorant of the fact that, sumptuous and magnificent as it is, it formed but a portion of the edifices belonging to a vast monastic establishment, whose members attended Divine Service within its walls. One of the most important, therefore, of the labours of our Society is the investigation of those parts of the ancient Conventual Buildings which yet by good fortune remain. Many of the original structures have been destroyed altogether; and some are yet existing, but in fragments, or have been converted to other uses, widely contrasting, in some instances, with those for which they were originally designed. Much, however, is yet preserved to reward the explorer. The chapter-house, or the mutilated structure which once was it, we shall visit to-day. The present library is said to have been the monks' parlour; the dormitory is now altered into the schoolrooms of the King's scholars; the cloisters yet exhibit much of their primitive beauty; one wall of the refectory, with its noble windows, yet remains on their south side; and the abbot's lodgings are still existing in the house of the dean, the dining-hall of the scholars, and the chambers which adjoin them. It is specially to one of these latter that I desire to draw the Society's attention, the one prominent above all for historical interest,—the famous Chamber in which, by the kind permission of the dean, our vice-president and chairman, we have been permitted to assemble,—the Chamber called "Jerusalem."

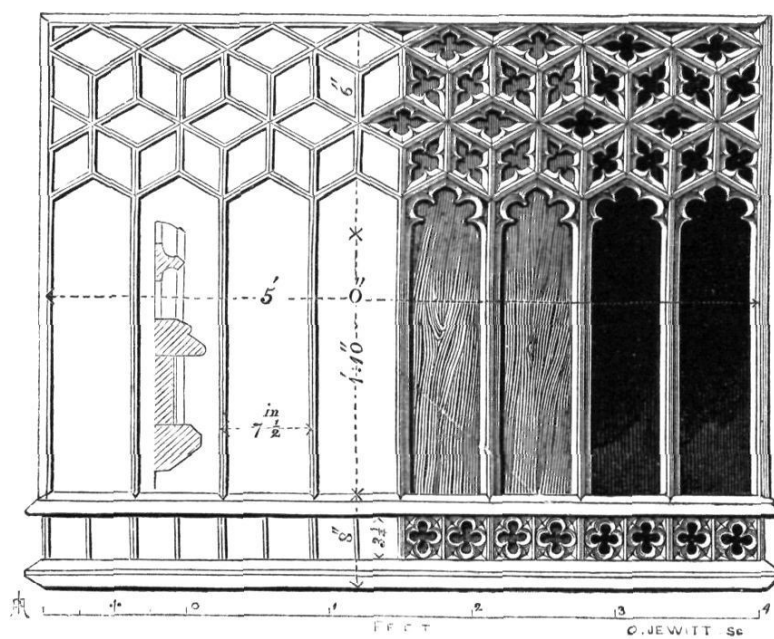
The Jerusalem Chamber now existing was built shortly after the year 1362, by Nicholas Litlington, abbot of Westminster. Few details of his life and good works have been committed to the press; but I have found amongst the Cottonian Manuscripts a very interesting record, in which many of his benefactions are enumerated, and an opportunity is thereby afforded us of entering in a measure into the peculiarities, and in estimating the excellences of his character. A short *résumé* of these will not unfitly introduce the

history and description of an edifice with which his honoured name is indissolubly associated.

Nicholas Litlyngton was prior of Westminster at the time of Abbot Simon de Langham's elevation to the see of Ely, and was thereupon elected abbot in April, 1362. He had greatly benefited the house while he was simply one of the brethren, especially by procuring the custody of the temporalities during three vacancies. On his advancement to the chief place of government in his monastery, he shewed himself a most careful and judicious defender of its rights, and an unwearied improver of its possessions. It appears that a great storm of wind had just then made havoc of the manor-houses and other buildings, but within three years he rebuilt them, and left them in better order than they were before. The abbot's house, from the foundation, was among his new buildings, with the west and south sides of the cloister, the houses of the bailiff, infirmarer, sacrist and cellarer, a great malthouse with a tower, a watermill and the dam, with stone walls, and a stone enclosure of the garden of the infirmary. In these works he was much assisted by the funds left by his predecessor. He also gave a mitre of the value of a hundred marcs, a pastoral staff of the value of 15*l.*, a great missal for the high altar, and two silver gilt chalices. Also other books of the Divine Offices to the chapel of the abbot and house of the infirmary; and to his own chapel, vestments and other sacerdotal ornaments, chalices, censer, incense-pyx, bell, basin, and a pyx of silver gilt. He also gave to the convent for their use in the refectory, there to be enjoyed and nowhere else, 48 dishes and 2 chargers, and 24 saltsellers of silver, of the weight of 104 lbs. To the same brethren also, for the misericordia house, and nowhere else, 24 dishes, 12 saltsellers, and 2 chargers of silver of 10 lbs., weighing 40 lbs., and two books of coronations marked N and L. Also to his successors in the abbacy he gave 24 dishes, 12 saltsellers, and 4 chargers of silver, of the weight of 64 lbs.; 2 silver jars for wine, of the weight of 8 lbs.; one silver cup with a water-jug of silver gilt, value 100*s.*; 12 silver plates, of 12 lbs. weight; 2 basins, with 2 water-jugs of silver of 10 lbs. weight; and 2 silver basins for lavatories, of 7 lbs. weight. The grant was dated at Westminster, 9th May, 1378. In return for these benefactions it was ordered by the convent that after his decease he should daily be remembered by them in their graces after dinner and supper, and at mass, together with the souls of the faithful departed. He



Part of the Roof of the Hall of Abbot Litlington, A.D. 1376—1398.



Part of the old Screen of the Hall.

died on the vigil of St. Andrew the Apostle, A.D. 1386, and was buried within the entrance before the altar of St. Blase, under a marble slab, decently adorned, that bore a long epitaph which is given by Sporley in the MS. from which these details are taken <sup>a</sup>.

Among the rooms of the abbot's house, already mentioned, was the famous Chamber in which we have now met. It abuts at a right angle on the southernmost of the two towers which adjoin the great western entrance to the nave of the abbey, and is thirty-six feet long and eighteen wide. It has two modern pointed windows on the west, and on the north a large square window, divided by several mullions, between which are inserted among the white quarries some very interesting specimens of ancient glass, to which I shall presently draw attention. The chamber formed, I think, either the withdrawing-room to the abbot's hall, to which it is contiguous, or else was itself a Gesten Hall for the constant influx of strangers who enjoyed the good abbot's hospitality. Some imagine it to have been the abbot's chapel, but its position militates against the accuracy of such a supposition. It was not, I believe, the first time that a chamber of a similar name existed either on the same or a neighbouring spot, a fact of which I shall presently furnish some presumptive evidence. But before doing so, I will briefly state the more prominent events in the history of our country, of which this apartment has been the scene, and then I will point out the objects most worthy of notice in the place itself.

The earliest historical reference to this chamber with which I am acquainted, is in the account of the death of Henry IV., in the *Continuatio Historiæ Croylandensis*, where it is said that the King, relying upon a deceptive prophecy, proposed to set out for the Holy City of Jerusalem; but, falling into mortal sickness, died at Westminster, in a certain chamber called of old time Jerusalem, and so fulfilled the vain prediction <sup>b</sup>. Fabyan, one of the most valuable of our old English chroniclers, gives us a very curious and minute account of this interesting circumstance. He is recording the events of the fourteenth year of Henry's reign, and thus describes its sudden termination:—

“In this year, and 20th day of the month of November, was a great council holden at the White Friars of London, by the which it was among other things concluded that, for

<sup>a</sup> MS. Cott. Claud. A. viii., ff. 63, 63 B, 64.

<sup>b</sup> *Rer. Angl. Scr. Vet.*, Oxon. 1684, tom. i. p. 499.

the King's great journey, that he intended for to take in visiting of the Holy Sepulchre of our Lord, certain galleys of war should be made, and other purveyance concerning the same journey. Whereupon all hasty and possible speed was made; but after the feast of Christenmasse, while he was making his prayers at S. Edward's shrine, to take there his leave, and so speed him upon his journey, he became so sick that such as were about him feared that he would have died right there. Wherefore they for his comfort bare him into the abbot's place and lodged him in a chamber, and there upon a pallet laid him before the fire, where he laid in great agony a certain of time. At length, when he was comen to himself, not knowing where he was, he freyned [asked] of such as then were about him, what place that was; the which showed to him that it belonged unto the Abbot of Westminster, and for he felt himself so sick he commanded to ask if that chamber had any special name, whereunto it was answered that it was named Jerusalem. Then said the King, 'Loving be to the Father of Heaven; for now I know that I shall die in this chamber, according to the prophecy of me before said, that I should die in Jerusalem.' And so after he made himself ready and died shortly after <sup>c</sup>."

The account of what may be considered the most interesting occurrence connected with this chamber would hardly be considered complete were I to omit all reference to the scene of our great dramatist, although it varies from the authentic narrative, in his play of "Henry IV." The dying King inquires, as though half expectant of the answer,—

"Doth any name particular belong  
Unto the lodging where I first did swoon?"

The Earl of Warwick answers:—

"'Tis called Jerusalem, my noble lord."

And the King replies:—

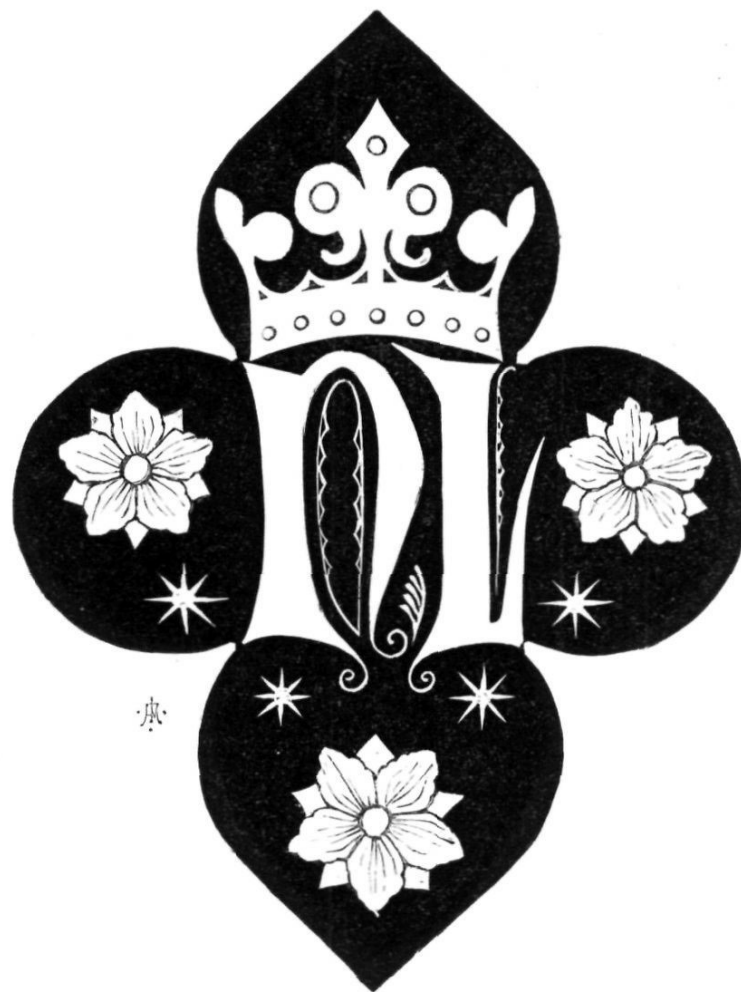
"Laud be to God! Even there my life must end.  
It hath been prophesied to me many years,  
I should not die but in Jerusalem;  
Which vainly I supposed the Holy Land.  
But bear me to that chamber; there I'll lie;  
In that Jerusalem shall Harry die <sup>d</sup>."

There is an ancient tradition that Edward V. was born in this room, and baptized here shortly after his birth by the Abbot of Westminster.

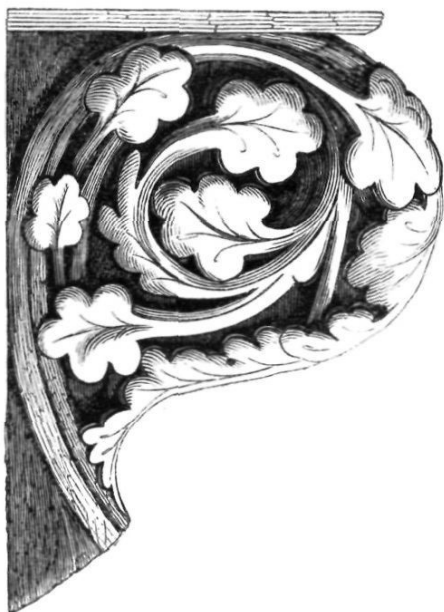
We have no mention of any use made of the chamber for a long time subsequent to this occurrence. In the year 1624 John Williams, Bishop of Lincoln and Dean of Westminster, entertained the French ambassador here with great splendour and at considerable cost. And it is probable that the architectural pecu-

<sup>c</sup> Fabyan's Chronicle, ed. 1559, pp. 388, 389.

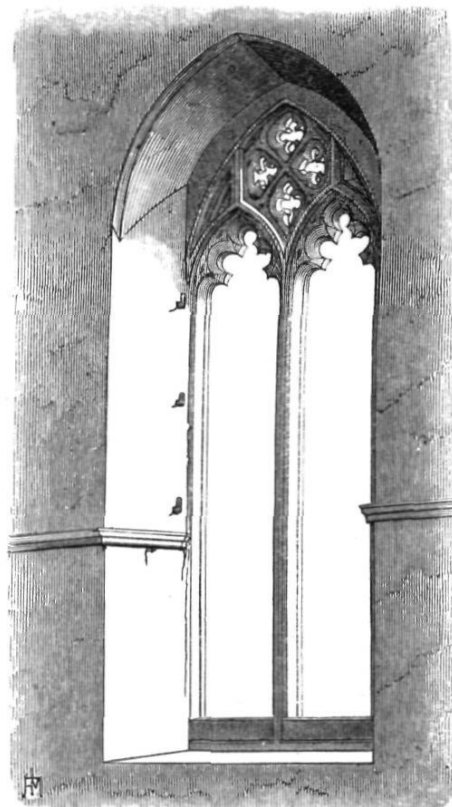
<sup>d</sup> Second Part of Henry IV., Act iv. sc. 4.



Initials of Abbot Litlington in the Head of a Window of the Hall, A.D. 1376—1386.



Part of the old Carved Woodwork, now built in with Modern Work at the end of the Hall.



Window of the Hall of the Abbot's House, A.D. 1376—1386, now the Scholars' Hall.

liarities of the room, as we now see them, which are of the period of James I., the alterations in the fireplace before which, according to the chronicler already quoted, the couch of the dying King was laid, the ceiling, and the armorial bearings in the north window, were the work of this dignitary. In March, 1640-1, an assistant or sub-committee of about twenty individuals, partly Episcopal and partly Presbyterian, was appointed to prepare matters for the cognisance of the superior committee, established to examine into "innovations in matters of religion." The afore-mentioned Bishop Williams was chosen to preside over both assemblies, and the sub-committee held for awhile its meetings in this chamber. The violent behaviour of the Presbyterian faction in the House of Commons wholly prevented any good that might have resulted from these deliberations, and the sittings were soon and abruptly terminated. In later times the chamber has been used for the custody of the regalia during the night before a coronation. The abbots were the official keepers of these insignia of royalty, a privilege which is thus in some degree exercised by their modern representatives. The room is also used for the sittings of Convocation, and for the meetings of the Dean and Chapter.

The objects to which, in conclusion, I shall direct your attention are the painted glass in the north window, the tapestry on the east and west sides of the room, and the original portrait of Richard II. suspended on the south wall. I have already spoken of the architectural details, and the period of their construction. The painted glass is much more ancient than any portion of the edifice in which it now finds a place. There was probably a Jerusalem Chamber in this church as erected by Henry III., for the "Continuator" already quoted speaks of one so called "*ab antiquo*;" and these may have been among its ornamental accessories. The costume of the figures bears out this supposition. The first Jerusalem Chamber was, as I suppose, furnished with decorations from subjects in the Gospel narrative painted upon its walls, and hence obtained its characteristic title. And by means of these and other adornments the windows themselves were made to harmonize with the rest of the structure, and to play their part in the general design. The subjects of the painted glass are:—1. The Slaughter of the Innocents. 2. The Stoning of St. Stephen. 3. The Last Judgment. 4. The Descent of the Holy Ghost. 5. The Ascension.

6. St. Peter Walking on the Sea. 7. The Beheading of St. John the Baptist. 8. A mutilated shield of later execution, bearing the arms of Bishop Williams, the arms of the see of Lincoln, and those of the deanery of Westminster. All these are more or less patched, and the heads of the seven Scriptural subjects are filled up with blue glass of the period of James I. Many of the figures have also received sundry renovations within the last few years. The tapestry is of the time of Henry VIII., with the exception of one piece, which is of the period of the first James, and is very similar to the well-known examples in the Great Hall at Hampton Court Palace. The portrait of Richard II., now suspended on the south wall, is one of the most interesting of its class. It was formerly in the choir, where it seems to have been in danger from coming in too close a contiguity with the backs and heads of divers Lord Chancellors and others who occupied the stall behind which it was placed. Dart's description of it in its then condition is valuable, as it was written before the renovations to which it has since been subjected :—

“On the south side of the choir, by the pulpit,” he says, “is an ancient painting of that unhappy beautiful prince, Richard ij., sitting in a chair of gold, dressed in a vest of green flowered with flowers of gold and the initial letters of his name, having on shoes of gold powdered with pearls, the whole robed in crimson lined with ermine, and the shoulders spread with the same, fastened under a collar of gold ; the panel plastered and gilt with several crosses and flowers of gold embossed. The length of the picture is 6 foot and 11 inches, and the breadth 3 foot 7 inches<sup>e</sup>.”

Such is the famous Jerusalem Chamber, of which it may be said, great as the commendation is, that for historical associations and artistic accessories it is second in interest only to the venerable Abbey with which it has been so long and so intimately connected.

<sup>e</sup> Vol. i. p. 62.