BENEFACTORS' SHIELDS OF ARMS IN THE NAVE OF THE CHURCH OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

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NEARLY seven centuries have elapsed since King Henry III commenced re-building on a more splendid scale the church which his predecessor Edward the Confessor had erected at Westminster to the glory of God and the honour of St. Peter, and which is known to-day as Westminster Abbey or more correctly the Collegiate Church of St. Peter at Westminster. Centuries which have been marked by some strange vicissitudes as regards the fabric of the building and long periods of neglect, so that to-day the interior of the great church retains little of the beauty with which he adorned it. It is not, however, of the church as a whole that this notice proposes to treat, but only of one feature of its original decoration. That decoration (*i.a.*) included an elegant arcading on the walls of the aisles of the nave, enriched by diaper work between the spandrels of the arches, but varied at regular intervals by shields of arms cut in stone and standing out in high relief from the surface of the wall. These shields were represented as suspended by guiges or straps from two heads, one on either side, which served as supporters. The bearings on the shields were also in relief and coloured according to the blazon of the coat of the person intended to be commemorated.

In that portion of the nave which the King himself completed 16 such shields were erected, 8 in either aisle, and of these 14 still survive, affording unrivalled examples of early English heraldry. Those in the north

aisle retain their original positions, but this does not appear to be the case in the south aisle, where most of them now occupy spaces on the wall above the line of the original arcading. Had King Henry lived to complete the rebuilding of the whole of the church, similar heraldic shields would no doubt have been displayed down the entire length of the nave. Those who carried on the work, however, while adhering in the main to the royal plan, were content with a less ambitious treatment of the wall arcading; for the 12 additional coats of arms in each aisle which completed the series were not executed in relief but painted (of a smaller size) on flat stone surfaces within the spandrels of the arches. That the whole series (40 in number) were included in the original scheme of decoration can hardly be doubted, for (with the one exception of King Edward the Confessor) all the persons thus commemorated were living during some period of Henry's reign. There is apparently no contemporary record to show why these particular persons were selected for this honour, but the reasonable inference (supported by tradition) seems to be, that these shields were intended to commemorate benefactors who had contributed towards the cost of rebuilding the church.

So long as these interesting memorials remained in the safe keeping of the benedictine monks they appear to have been carefully preserved and the colours upon them no doubt renewed from time to time as occasion arose. To-day, unhappily, such of the lesser shields as still survive are in very poor condition; while many have disappeared altogether, sacrificed, with two of the larger shields, to make room for the erection of those modern monuments whose heterogeneous appearance has so greatly defaced the original beauty of the nave. Fortunately before this vandalism set in, a record was made in 1598 (by John Holand) of the complete series of these memorials, together with the names in Latin then inscribed above them, in the hollow of the moulding

along the top of the arcading, so that their several devices and the persons they respectively commemorated are known to-day, even where the shields themselves have perished. The same careful observer also recorded the tradition of his own day that the bearers of these arms were benefactors, who contributed towards the cost of rebuilding the church in the time of King Henry III. That great undertaking involved enormous expense and it is not to be doubted that the royal revenues devoted to the purpose were supplemented by many handsome gifts from the great and noble of the time.

It will be of interest to consider who these early benefactors were. Much is known regarding them from contemporary writers, but here it must suffice to touch lightly upon some salient facts, for to narrate all that might be told would almost involve writing the history of Henry's long reign. At the outset it should be noted, however, what a remarkable number of these benefactors were closely related to the King by kin or marriage. Taking first the 13 shields of arms erected by Henry himself, those in the south aisle commence with the arms of Edward the Confessor—a cross patonce between five martlets all of gold upon a field azure. These arms were no doubt invented by Henry's heralds to commemorate the original royal builder of the Monks' Church, for the science of heraldry is of later date than the Confessor's reign. After the lapse of seven centuries they still appear wonderfully fresh and vigorous in their presentment, though the blue ground of the coat is lacking. The second shield in this aisle carries the royal arms of England—three golden lions (or leopards as heralds then called them, for they are represented passant and not rampant) upon a field gules. This commemorates Henry himself, and is also in good preservation except that a fore leg of one of the lions is missing. Number three formerly displayed the royal arms of Scotland—a lion rampant, gules within a bordure flory, counter flory of the same upon a golden ground.

This shield no longer exists, having been destroyed apparently some time prior to 1823, in the erection of a modern monument. It was the shield of Alexander III, King of Scots, Henry's son-in-law. Succeeding to the throne and crowned in 1249 when barely 8 years of age, he was two years later knighted by Henry at York, and married to Henry's young daughter, Margaret, an occasion celebrated with lavish display and great feasting. In later years Alexander with his Queen repeatedly visited the English Court, and their eldest child, Margaret (the future Queen of Norway), was born at Windsor in 1261. The royal pair were also present at the coronation of Edward I in 1274, when the contemporary chronicler records that the splendour of their retinue and gifts excited general admiration. The fourth shield in this aisle commemorates Count Raymond of Provence, the father of four beautiful daughters, the second of whom, Alianore, in 1236, was married to Henry at Canterbury, and afterwards crowned as Queen, in the Confessor's Church at Westminster. The fifth shield is that of Roger de Quincey, Earl of Winchester, and the sixth that of Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, both great nobles of the reign. Number seven commemorates Henry's brother, Richard, Earl of Cornwall, chosen King of the Romans, and who married as his second wife Sanchia, the youngest daughter of Count Raymond and sister of Queen Alianore. Number eight carries the arms of the ancient Scottish Earls of Ross—three silver lions rampant upon a field gules. This noble accompanied King Alexander to England and seems to have been in close relations with the English Court.

Passing now to the north aisle the first of the shields erected there commemorates the famous Hohenstauffen, Emperor Frederick II, the last "who ruled from the sands of the ocean to the shores of the Sicilian Sea." Best known in history by his long drawn out duel with the Papacy, he married, in 1231, King Henry's sister, Isabella. The match was popular in England as an

alliance flattering to the national pride and the contemporary chronicler tells of the bride's sumptuous trousseau, her voyage from Sandwich to Antwerp, and her progress to Cologne, followed by the royal nuptials at Worms, where four kings attended to honour the occasion. A man of refined and subtle intellect, far in advance of his time, Frederick has been described as the marvel of his own generation and one to whom succeeding ages looked back with awe. This shield, upon which the figure of the imperial eagle is shown with a fine simplicity, has suffered some mutilation. The head and left foot are wanting. The sable of the eagle and the gold of the field have also disappeared. Number two is likewise of great interest, for it carries the ancient arms of France—a field azure sewn with golden fleur-de-lis and commemorates another brother-in-law of King Henry, Louis IX, who married Margaret of Provence, the sister of Henry's Queen. Renowned for his piety, an ardent crusader (giving his life for the cause), and canonised by the Church, St. Louis is one of the heroic figures of the Middle Ages. This shield, which appears to have been recently cleaned has no vestige of colour remaining upon it, but the fleurs-de-lis still stand out in good effect. Number three is the shield of Richard de Clare, Earl of Gloucester. His mother, Isabella, a daughter of the great Earl Marshal, the guardian of Henry's early years, married as her second husband, the King's brother, Richard, of Cornwall, whose shield has been already noticed in the south aisle. Number four commemorates Roger Bigod, Earl of Norfolk, one of the greatest English barons of the thirteenth century; married to a Scottish princess, the sister of Alexander III, he received from King Henry in right of his mother, Matilda, the eldest daughter of William the Great, Earl Marshal and guardian of Henry's youth, the office of hereditary Marshal of England, on the failure of the male issue of the old earl. Number five, to the modern mind, is perhaps the most interesting of all, for it displays

the arms of Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, the famous leader of the Baronage in their revolt against Henry's mis-government. As the first to summon burgesses from the town to sit in Parliament, he has been honoured as the founder of the present system of popular government. He was the king's brother-in-law, for he married Henry's sister Eleanor, the widow of William Marshal the younger. The bearing on his shield, a silver lion rampant on a field gules, is of special interest, for it shows the lion queue fourcheé or double tailed. Number six commemorates John, Earl of Warrene and Surrey. This noble married Henry's half-sister, Alice de Lusignan, the daughter of Queen Isabella of Angouleme—by her second husband, County Guy de Lusignan. Together with the King, his two sons, Edward and Edmund, and Earl Richard of Cornwall, Earl Warrene acted, in 1269, as a bearer of the venerated body of the Confessor on its translation to the new church. Number seven of the north aisle is wanting; having been destroyed to give space for a modern monument. It commemorated Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford. In the struggle between Henry and his Baronage, Bohun at first adopted the popular cause, but afterwards reverted to the support of the Crown. Number eight displays the arms of William de Fortibus, Earl of Albemarle, the holder of vast estates, which after his death passed into royal hands through the marriage of his daughter and sole heiress, Aveline, to Edmund Plantagenet (surnamed Crouchback), Henry's second son, created Earl of Lancaster. The young Countess, who only survived her marriage three years, lies buried on the north side of the Sanctuary; where the tomb of her husband may also be seen.

The smaller shields in the lower bays of the nave have suffered more cruelly from the erection of modern monuments. Those in the north aisle commemorated the following persons and were erected in the order from east to west in which they are here mentioned,

viz., Edmund Plantagenet Earl of Lancaster, Hugh de Vere Earl of Oxford, John de Dreux Earl of Richmond, Henry de Hastings, Roger de Mowbray, Robert de Stafford, Robert de Ross, Robert FitzWalter, John de Balliol, Gilbert Talbot, Warin de Vernon and Hugh de Malpas. Among these, the shields of Lancaster, Stafford, Ross, FitzWalter, Vernon and Malpas no longer exist, while those of De Dreux, Mowbray and Balliol are hardly recognisable. John de Dreux, of the reigning house of Brittany, was a son-in-law of King Henry, being married to his second daughter, Beatrice. John de Balliol, father of the competitior for the Crown of Scotland and founder of an Oxford college, acted for a time with Robert de Ross as regent of Scotland during the minority of Alexander III. The Ross shield in this aisle differed from that in the south aisle, already mentioned, being charged with three water bougets, the distinguishing device of the English Ross barons. A fine example of this device may still be seen in the Temple Church. The twelve smaller shields in the south aisle of the nave have not fared any better. Taking them in the same order, they included the following persons: William Earl of Ferrars and Derby, William Longsword Earl of Salisbury, William de Valence Earl of Pembroke, Roger de Mortimer, William de Percy, Roger de Clifford, Roger de Somery, John de Verdun, Robert de Thwenge, Fulk FitzWarrene, Roger de Montalt and Roger de Venables. Among these shields, those of Pembroke, Percy, Clifford, Somery and Verdun have totally disappeared. That of Mortimer, if surviving, is hidden from view and the colours in the coats of Salisbury, Montalt and Venables have sadly deteriorated.

William Longsword descended from a natural son of Henry II and fair Rosamond, was one of the most renowned warriors of his time. An enthusiastic crusader he fell at the Battle of Mansourah in 1250, fighting gallantly against desperate odds. The victors in recognition of his valour gave him honourable burial, and a

miraculous light was believed to shine over the spot where his bones were laid. William de Valence, closely related to Henry, as his step brother, lies buried in the Abbey in St. Edmund's Chapel (south ambulatory), and the effigy on his tomb adorned with Limoges enamel is one of its treasures. The shields of FitzWarrene, Montalt and Robert de Thwenge should also be noticed. Fitz-Warrene, a rough baron of the stormy Welsh Marches, took a leading part in voicing the popular discontent with Henry's weakness in not resisting excessive Papal taxation in England. Matthew Paris narrates a remarkable story of the visit this redoubtable baron paid to the Temple in 1245, where Martin the Pope's tax-collector was then residing, and of the interview which followed and eventually drove the terrified Martin out of the kingdom. The same industrious chronicler tells how Roger de Montalt, "one of the nobler barons of England," irrevocably alienated much of his property to raise the money necessary to take part in the 6th Crusade. He also describes Robert de Thwenge as an elegant young man of noble birth and a valiant soldier. The bearings on this last shield (not inappropriately it would seem) include three popinjays. But their appearance has hardly been improved by a clumsy restoration.

The shields which thus commemorated so many of the leading men of King Henry's reign occupied but little space on the Abbey walls and were carefully adapted to prevent interference with the general scheme of the church's decoration. It would have been well if later memorials had been characterised by a like modesty and regard for the beauty of the building, for then this noble House of God would not have been disfigured by such extravagant and meaningless masses of marble as offend the eye to-day and well-nigh justify the criticism that it resembles a masons' stone-yard.