

## ON THE CHARACTER AND BEAUTIES OF MEDALLION WINDOWS OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY.

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Before commencing the subject of this paper, allow me to express my deep sense of the honour which has been conferred upon me by the request of your secretary that I would select a subject for consideration, and give you my thoughts upon it. It appears to me that I cannot do better (as I am unacquainted with the objects of interest in this neighbourhood) than bring to your notice the characteristics and beauties of the medallion windows of the thirteenth century; for though there are not very many examples of them existing in England, and the opportunities of reproducing them at the present time on a large scale are not frequent, still some very fine specimens remain in the cathedrals of Canterbury and Lincoln, and on the Continent there are many which have escaped the various dangers to which those in our own country have been exposed, and which are consequently perfect both in composition and detail, and are therefore worthy of the careful study of those who are interested in this subject; and I think that a modification of the large medallion windows which I propose to speak of may be adopted with very excellent effect in many of our parish churches.

The process of the manufacture of stained glass windows is now pretty generally known, but as those of the thirteenth century carry out the mosaic principle more perfectly than any others, it may be well briefly to describe it, so that the beauties to which I desire to draw your attention may be more thoroughly appreciated.

A design being first made, and the general arrangement of colour being decided, the full-size drawing, both of subject and ornament, showing the exact position of

each lead, as well as the disposition of the geometrical iron work (which in these windows is a very important feature), must be prepared and coloured, a second full-size drawing is then made, showing the arrangement of the leading only, and from this the glass is cut, each separate piece being of the colour required. The outlines and shadows are then painted upon the surface of the glass in an opaque enamel, and the separate portions are placed upon the shelves of the kiln to be fired, the front of the kiln is built up with fire-bricks and plaster of Paris, and the fire lighted below, so that the flames encircle the whole, and the glass attains one uniform heat throughout. This occupies about eight or ten hours, according to the size of the kiln, and the proper moment for reducing the heat is decided by the appearance of the glass, which is examined through "proof-holes," which are left in the front of the kiln for that purpose. The fire is then raked out, and the front taken down, and after a few hours the shelves are partially drawn out, so as to allow the glass to cool gradually. The various pieces (several thousands in number) are then again laid out upon the drawing, and put together in lead by the glazier; the joints being soldered on both sides, a moist cement is brushed in, which afterwards hardens and renders the whole perfectly secure and weather-proof. The geometrical arrangement of these windows is so wonderfully varied, that it is difficult to find two in which the same design occurs; indeed, I do not know of a single instance of the same form being repeated, though I have carefully studied the various examples at Canterbury and Lincoln, as well as those at Rouen, Chartres, Le Mans, Bourges, Tours, and other French churches. I have selected some for illustration, but they are so numerous, that it is only possible to show a few of them. It will be observed that in some windows the subjects are nearly uniform in size, and that in others there are two series of subjects, the one large, the other smaller; in this case the smaller medallions contain figures of prophets or other personages having some connection with the general subject, as in the Eustacius window at Chartres. The scheme of subjects also is most interesting, and may be made the means of much religious teaching. In some instances we find a series of events

in the life or passion of our Lord, with the Old Testament types of each event surrounding it (as in the east window of à Becket's Crown at Canterbury, the Lady Chapel, Le Mans, etc.); in other cases, the history of some Old Testament worthy or Christian saint fills the whole window, a legend descriptive of each incident being placed below it. The subjects are (I think almost invariably) read upwards, beginning at the dexter base of the window.

The tree of Jesse is also a favourite subject, and some of the most effective windows of the period are illustrative of the genealogy of our blessed Lord in this manner. One of the finest examples is the south light of the western triplet of Chartres Cathedral. This dates from the twelfth century, and perhaps comes less strictly under the denomination of a medallion window than one of great beauty in the Lady Chapel of Le Mans, in which are figures of Jesse, David, Solomon, etc., in the centre, with a prophet in each of the half quatrefoil medallions on either side of them, the upper medallion being occupied by a figure of our Lord, whose head is surrounded by the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit,\* represented by as many doves. The medallions in the centre of the light are formed by the branches of the tree, which break into beautiful conventional foliage wherever it is required to complete the composition. The half quatrefoils are formed of beaded fillets of white, etc., laid upon a background of red and blue mosaic. I have a small drawing of a portion of this window made on the spot, but there is a careful reduction of the whole, and full-size drawings of the separate figures, in Hucher's "Vitraux du Mans," which may be seen in the library of the Kensington Museum. There is also another window of this subject in the triforium of the same cathedral, in which the colouring is very cleverly arranged, and has an excellent effect from the floor. Here also the head of our Lord is surrounded by the seven doves.

We must now speak of the general arrangement of these windows, which, as I have before said, is varied in a wonderful degree. In the nave of Chartres Cathedral medallions are exclusively used, the geometrical forms

\* Sapientia, Intellectus, Fortitudo, Pietas, Consilium, Scientia, Timor.



are varied in every case, and the ground upon which the medallions are laid is composed in alternate windows of conventional foliage of exquisite design, and of varied and rich mosaics, the border in every instance being composed of foliage with—in some instances—figures introduced among it. These windows are 7 ft. 6 in. wide, so that there is ample space for a good and well-proportioned design. The borders are 10 in. wide, and the upright bars of the iron frame divide them from the inner portion of the composition; the same size and proportion exist in the windows of the eastern transept and choir aisles of Canterbury, where the designs are very similar in character to those already referred to, though equally varied in detail. There is one in particular which is very satisfactory both in composition and colour, and which, though mutilated, has had its deficient parts cleverly replaced by Mr. Austin. I allude to the one illustrative of the miracles of St. Thomas of Canterbury. The medallions in this window are pear-shaped, in groups of four, the points being placed in the centre, and the four medallions forming a quatrefoil, laid upon a red and blue mosaic, surrounded by a border of foliage. The colours of the mosaic grounds in these windows, as well as in those of Chartres, are so well proportioned, and the colours themselves are so well chosen, that the windows have not in any instance a purple or plum-colour effect from a distance—a defect so common in modern mosaic windows and one which entirely destroys their beauty. This is not the case in all instances at Bourges, where there is one window in particular in which this defect is so remarkable, that it is difficult to persuade oneself that it is not a modern work. It is situated in the north choir aisle, near the entrance to the sacristy. If the blue and ruby are equally proportioned in a mosaic, or if the blue be of a purplish instead of a grey tone, and the ruby rather pink than scarlet, the result is sure to be unsatisfactory. In the best of the ancient examples the proportion is generally about one-third of blue to two-thirds of ruby, or *vice versâ*, and the colours are not so deep as one is apt to imagine, judging from the rich and mellow effect of the whole, but of a delicate and pure tone, making a rich effect when combined. No doubt, the decay of the outer surface of these old windows, and the accumulation of

dust and dirt, have much to do with the depth of tone which they possess; but close examination, or thoroughly cleaning portions of the glass, will prove the truth of what I have stated.

The subjects are treated in a very simple manner, which renders them very distinct when seen from a distance, the figures are in most instances clearly relieved by the background; and when this is not the case, the draperies are so coloured that each figure separates itself from its neighbour. They are generally all on one plain, and stand upon a sort of bridge which carries the legend, and admits of the background of the medallion being shown through the arches and so dispersed uniformly over the whole space. Architecture or trees are frequently made use of with good effect, to break up the background in the upper part of the medallion. The colours used by the early artists are very few, being limited to blue, red, green, yellow, a rich brown, and various tones of white: besides these, one occasionally meets with a brown pink of delicate tint, but this is generally used in small proportion to the other colours. It would be well if the colours at our disposal in the present day were equally limited. I look upon the great variety of colours now in use as a snare to the artist, tempting him to obtain a *pretty* effect rather than breadth and simplicity; and though many of the modern colours are exceedingly beautiful in themselves, they require to be combined with the most consummate skill and taste, in order to produce an harmonious and pleasing result. It is a matter of regret that we know so little of the artists of the thirteenth century, who have left so many of their works for our study and admiration. I believe that only two are known even by name. M. Bourquelot\* mentions Ballardus and Clement as having both been engaged upon the windows of Chartres Cathedral. The former has not signed any of his works, but there is evidence of the latter having been engaged at Rouen, where a window in the choir aisle of that cathedral contains a figure bearing a scroll, on which are the words "Clemens vitrearius Carnutensis me fecit;" and many of the windows of Chartres are so similar in character that one may reason-

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\* "Histoire de la Peinture et des Arts du dessin."

ably presume that they were designed and executed by him or under his direction. M. Bulteau, in his interesting work descriptive of the cathedral, says, that it is supposed that Clement was engaged upon the windows of Chartres before going to Rouen. It is imagined that most of the examples which exist in this country were the work of French artists, but I doubt whether this supposition is entirely correct; and I think we may fairly argue that some of those in Canterbury Cathedral were designed by Englishmen, and even Kentishmen, from the fact that in two medallions illustrative of the parable of the sower, the "stony ground" is represented as *chalk*.

The artists of the middle ages were much influenced in their designs by the objects around them, as is evident from the frequent introduction of the leaves of the oak, the maple, the ivy, and the ash in decoration and carving; and I believe that the abundance of chalk in Kent suggested to the artist of this window the representation I have mentioned of the "stony ground." There is a peculiar beauty which I have observed in some windows which I must not omit to mention, and of which this one of the "sower" is a good example, viz., the clever way in which the various medallions are united, by an ingeniously contrived and elegant knot.

I have said, that I think a modification of the general arrangement of the windows I have attempted to describe, may be used with very good effect on a smaller scale in our parish churches. The design must be simple and distinct, and an over-crowding of subjects, or of figures in each subject, must be carefully avoided; and I think we may take as excellent examples in this respect the windows of the south transept of Lincoln Cathedral, where the figures are all draped in white on a deep blue ground; and some of the clerestory windows of the nave of Chartres Cathedral, where there are only two figures of apostles in each medallion, seated, and separated by a shaft from which springs a double arch. The figures in these cases are perfectly distinct when seen from a distance, a result which should always be aimed at. When the mosaic portion of the window and the ground of the medallions are rich in colour, the effect of figures entirely in tones of white is very sparkling and satisfactory.

The scheme of subjects affords much opportunity for

thought, whether in an individual window or as applied to a whole church. An arrangement of New Testament subjects, with events from the Old Testament, typical of them and showing the connection between the two covenants, may be made very interesting and instructive, as well as capable of artistic treatment. The miracles and parables of our Lord also afford good scope for design, and the Acts of the Holy Apostles are full of incidents for illustration.

I trust that in all respects the art of glass-painting is advancing, and that those who have devoted themselves to it, are striving to produce real works of art, and such as will be at the same time worthy of a place in houses dedicated to the glory of God, and capable of suggesting thought and affording instruction to those who see them.

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