

Two Ancient Embroidered Copes now changed into Altar Frontals.*

BY MR. M. J. C. BUCKLEY OF BRUGES.

THE art of depicting, or working, the delineation of flowers, fruits, human or animal forms by means of the needle, has been known and practised since the pre-historic times. The designs on the dresses of the figures painted on the Etruscan vases are those of embroidered patterns. We see also that the Israelites embroidered their sacrificial garments—"And thou shalt make a hanging . . . wrought with needlework." EXODUS xxvi, 36. The Romans also wore richly broidered dresses, as Virgil mentions such in the *Æneid*, where he represents the Queen Dido as bringing forth very richly dight garments from amidst her treasures, and presenting them to her warrior guests. Several places in antique civilisation were famous for their embroidery. I will just cite the names of Phrygia and Babylon. Gold embroidered tissues were first introduced from Phrygia or Western Asia, hence all such gold stuffs were called "Phrygian"—hence the word "Auriphrygium" or orphrey, which was applied to the bands of a cope, on account of their being composed of such gold tissue. Josephus, the Jewish historian, mentions that in his time there was a very rich curtain of Baby-

* These copes were exhibited during the meeting. One is now in use in the Parish Church of Chedzoy, and the other is deposited in the Museum of the Society, by the Rev. J. Coleman, of Chapel Allerton.

lonian embroidered stuff, hung in the temple; this was in the second century of our era.

Now if we descend to more recent times we find that art progressed in Europe, so did the design and workmanship of embroidery. Moved by the purest zeal for the glory and splendour of God's church, the Christian artists of the Middle Ages produced the most marvellous works of this kind. It was during this period (thirteenth century) that we find embroidery first getting technical names, and being divided into various branches. In an inventory of vestments, in the Church of St. Paul, at London, in the year 1295, we read of the various sorts named "Opus plumarium," or feather work; of "Opus pectineum," or comb work; of "Opus pulvinarium," or cushion work; and of "Opus consutum de serico," or cut silk work. Now all true embroidery was called "feather work," because the stitches were always laid down lengthwise, and so lapping as to resemble feathers; we see examples of this work in the copes before us, of which the flowers and figures are composed of long stitches. The "cushion work" or cross stitch was the same as our modern Berlin-wool work, and was generally used in working heraldic designs on cushions. The comb work was a most curious and beautiful manner of employing the threads of the tissue, so as to produce various designs, and was so called from the comb which was used in working them.* The cut silk work was the same as is now called, "Appliqué," and was much used for banners and knights' surcoats. It was also employed for faces, as you may see in the beautiful modern cope, worked by our German artists.† If we now examine our two copes, at present mis-called "Altar

* It was usually employed in linen tissues.

† A large collection of richly embroidered copes, etc., was shown by Mr. Buckley in the Museum.

Frontals," we find that all the work is "Opus plumarium." The cope from Allerton Church, as well as that from Chedzoy, I consider as having been made in Flanders. In our Cathedral of St. Saviour, at Bruges, we have two copes of precisely the same character and style of work. Large mercantile relations existed between Bristol and Flanders, on account of the staple trade in Irish wool, which was woven by the Flemings. So that those two copes may very probably have come from the old "Citie of Bryges" or Bruges.

The ground of the Allerton cope is white satin, or rather "Baudekyn" in the old phraseology. The "trame" or weft is of linen, as the silk still woven in Lyons and Vienna for ecclesiastical use, called "*Lampas*." We find such stuff mentioned in an inventory of Haconbie Church, A.D. 1566, which speaks of "one white vestment of Bruges satten." And again in 1520, York Cathedral possessed a "vestment of Baudekyn, and a cross of green satyn of Bryges." Now I consider that this Allerton cope belongs to the latter part of the fifteenth century. In the centre is represented the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Two angels support her on either side; a glory and a nimbus surround her body and head; thirty-one rays, mixed with spangles, dart from the glory; three kerubim, standing on wheels, are at her feet, thus representing one of the nine choirs of angels. The rest of the ground is powdered over with pomegranate flowers, of which the green and blue colors are still remaining in parts. These pomegranate flowers were much used in Flemish work, as they are copied from Spanish stuffs, in which this flower figures as emblem of the Conquest of Granada, by Isabella, who was so popular in Spain, as also in Flanders, which was also one of the Spanish allies.

In the Chedzoy cope you will notice that there is a very beautiful detail introduced into the workmanship of these flowers, namely: that the centres are diversified with "chevrons" of raised work, formed by a cord underneath. This is another instance of how the artists of those days gained good effects by very simple means. These flowers of pomegranate, or rather the leaves of the artichoke, and the petals of the pomegranate, are very common in the Sicilian woven stuffs, of which we have a specimen in the splendid tissue of one of the modern copes in the Museum. It has often been inaccurately called the pineapple pattern, but such a thing as an anana or pine was quite unknown in Europe up to the fifteenth century, and was even regarded as a great rarity in the days of Lady M. W. Montagu; and was never seen in Sicily or Italy till the close of the sixteenth century, having been only recently introduced from Peru, whilst these stuffs were woven in the ninth century. The figures of the kerubim on the Chedzoy cope were formerly powdered or spread over the surface of the velvet tissue on which they were worked. They bear phylacteries or scrolls, with the words "Sanctus, sanctus, etc." Bradshaw, a monk of St. Werburga's Monastery at Chester, at the end of the fifteenth century, speaks of tapestry, with the nine angelical choirs, "not cessynge to call Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, Blessed be ye Trynité, Dominus Deus Sabaoth, three persons in one Deityé." Such kerubim are very common in all late English works, and such formerly stood over the reredos of the high altar in Westminster Abbey, the wheels under their feet representing their swiftness in executing the commands of God.

The tabernacle work of the Chedzoy cope is of a late date, almost "renaissance" in its character. I am inclined

to assign to it the date of circa 1500. An effort is made at perspective in the groining of the arches at the back, and the lines of the roof. The working of the gold shows some curious examples of different stitchings. All the gold consists of thin gilt silver ribbons,* twisted round silk thread, and the work is "Opus plumarium." No traces of the former faces and hands are remaining; all is of modern restoration, and of a most deplorable description is this same restoration. In consequence of this I cannot decide whether the work be Flemish or English, but I am inclined to say it is Flemish on account of the style.

The famous "Opus Anglicum" or English work for embroidery, was produced by a process of heated bulbs of iron, by which the appearance of raised lines was given to the outer sides of the faces and robes, and the stitching was executed in circular lines which began in the centres of the faces, as we may see in the beautiful Sion cope, now in the South Kensington Museum.

This Chedzoy cope when intact must have been a very sumptuous one, similar to that which was in the Chapel of Charles de Bourgogne, "Une chape de bordeuré d'or façon d'Angleterre, à plusieurs histoires de N. Dame, et anges et aultres ymages, estans en lanceurs escriptes, garnie d'un orfroi d'icelle façon fait á apôtres, desquelles les manteux sont tous couverts de perles, et leurs diadesmes parfilés de perles, estans en manières de tabernacles, etc., etc."

Copes as a garment for Church use are first mentioned in the reign of St. Edward the Confessor, and they continued to be used in Durham Cathedral up to the middle of the eighteenth century. We read of hundreds of superb copes and other vestments in the rolls of Abbeys and Churches in this county alone. There was amongst others a cope

* Gold thread known in 1271.

of silk, beaten or sheathed all over with silver lions, given by a well-wisher to Glastonbury Abbey.* Henry III in 1241 paid £360 for a cope for Hereford Cathedral. There was a cope of rich red Bruges velvet, covered all over with stars and archangels of gold in Lincoln, in 1437. Magnificent copes and tapestry, now in the Cathedral of Aix en Provence, were given by Prior Goldston, in 1595, to his Church at Canterbury. These superb trophies of old English art were sold out of England, (as were the superb candlesticks of Whitehall to our Cathedral at Ghent) in the days of the devastations of the reigns of Edward VI and of Cromwell.

Commissioner Giffard in the reign of Henry VIII, on being sent to expel them, said that he found that the monks of Wolstrop Priory in Lincolnshire, as well as of many other houses, excelled in "embroidery, in painting, and in all useful arts." Edward II paid 100 marks, a goodly sum, to one Rose, wife of John de Bureford, citizen of London, for one choir cope, that he sent to Rome, as a present to the then Pope, on the part of the Queen. There are some ancient copes and vestments at Florence still in the church of San Giovanni, which cost 26 years of labor to finish in 1498. And in this English land of ours there were famous workers too, as we see by the splendid execution of the famed Sion cope, and the magnificent cope formerly in Westminster Abbey, and now in Stonyhurst College. The English ladies were amongst the most famous workers of mediæval times; amongst others I may mention the name of Helisand waiting maid of Maud, wife of David of Scotland in 1150, who was renowned for her skill. And now once more many fair and noble-minded English maidens rival

* See John of Glastonbury's Chronicle.

their sisters of old for their skill, witness many of their beautiful works in our village churches such as at Curry Rivel, Taunton, and at Bristol. The glory and beauty of the dear old churches, of the venerable shrines of this land, is once more reviving, and many earnest minds are striving to render them beauteous, and fair, and fitting for all the æsthetic feelings that are attached to the most hallowed associations of the human soul. May they be endowed with much knowledge and skill, and may their labors give us many things of beauty to be joys for ever.

A paper on Montacute by Mr. John Batten was then read, after which the meeting broke up.
