

## A brief Account of the Painted Glass in Wells Cathedral.

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**I**N the following short account of the Painted Glass in Wells Cathedral, I am, I fear, incapable of offering more than a bare inventory of the existing specimens, and of their local position. I can only hope that, in the absence of any other, this attempt may prove in some degree useful as a guide to those whose superior knowledge may supply what is wanting, when the position of the glass itself has been thus pointed out.

The varieties of glass painting, if the classification of Mr. Winston be followed, are arranged under five styles, which in the earlier instances coincide with the divisions of Gothic architecture in this country. These five styles are :—

The Early English, which comprises all specimens executed before the year 1280.

The Decorated, from 1280 to 1380.

The Perpendicular, from 1380 to 1530.

The Cinque Cento, from 1500 to 1550.

And lastly, the Intermediate, which includes the specimens executed from the close of the Cinque Cento period to the present time.\*

Of the first of these styles, the Early English, it is probable that the Cathedral of Wells does not possess a single fragment.

In glass of the second, or Decorated style, it is extremely rich ; and detached specimens of all the succeeding periods are to be found scattered about in different parts of the church.

The Decorated glass is contained in the great east window of the choir, that, viz., over the altar, and in the two clerestory windows adjoining on either side ; in the east and side windows of the ladye-chapel ; in the windows in the presbytery at the eastern extremity of the two choir-aisles, and in the tracery of the two windows on the north and south sides adjoining ; in some of the side windows of the aisles on either side the choir ; and lastly, in the windows of the chapter-house, and in the tracery of the two windows of the chapter-house staircase.

Of these examples, the east window of the choir, from its size and comparative perfection, demands the first attention. This beautiful window belongs to the class known as "Jesse windows," from the representation which they exhibit of the principal personages in the family of our Lord in or among the foliage of a vine, which springs up from the body of Jesse, who lies prostrate at the bottom of the composition. In the present instance each window-light is surrounded by a border of a pattern repeated elsewhere in the Cathedral. In alternate lights the border consists of yellow lions arranged between pieces of red

\* Vide *Winston on Painted Glass*, Vol. I.

glass, and yellow crowns between pieces of blue glass. Within the border, surrounded by the foliage and tendrils of a vine, which sometimes cross their bodies, the principal figures stand under canopies. These figures, which are arranged in two tiers (exclusive of Jesse, who lies below), represent various Scripture personages in our Lord's genealogy, including Abraham, David, Solomon, Daniel, Hosea, and the Virgin and Child. It is worthy of remark that while the faces of the subordinate characters are, with the exception of a female (perhaps Ruth), formed of pink glass, those of the Blessed Virgin and her Child, as if by the force of contrast, to give them a greater prominence, are of a white colour. This truly splendid window, which is much out of repair, has been copied for the new church of All Saints, London, from tracings made by the late lamented Mr. Gerente. The lights of the four easternmost clerestory windows of the choir are ornamented with large figures of Saints standing under canopies. In one window the central figure is St. George; in another the middle figure is King Ethelbert. In the tracery of the two windows next the east, is portrayed the resurrection of the dead: above are angels blowing trumpets, while below the dead are rising from the opening tombs. The top of one of these tombs is marked with a cross flory. The waving patterns, principally of blue and white and red and white glass, in the tracery of the two remaining windows of this series, are remarkable for extreme elegance and beauty both in point of design and of harmonious colouring. The east window of the ladye-chapel has been restored by Mr. Williment. This window contains two rows of figures under canopies. In the upper tier are Noah, Abraham, David, Isaiah, and Malachi. In the lower tier are Eve, the Deceiving Serpent, the Virgin and Child, the Brazen

Serpent, and Moses. The Serpent tempting Eve is twining round a tree, and has a human face. Moses is depicted with horns, according to the old belief, combatted by Sir Thomas Browne of Norwich, in his quaint treatise on *Vulgar Errors*. In the lower part of the side windows of this chapel, little, beside some beautiful canopies, remains in situ ; in the tracery, however, some curious mitred heads and some elegant leaf-patterns still preserve their original situation. The windows of the east ends of the north and south choir-aisles, those, viz., next the ladye-chapel, are a jumble of broken pieces of glass from various places, but some of these are of value and interest. In the tracery of each of the two windows adjacent on the north and south sides, are some heads of Saints and Bishops, and a figure of our Lord seated. The tracery of three windows of the north aisle of the choir contains Decorated glass, which is as curious as it is beautiful. In two of these are Saints, (SS. Michael and John Baptist ?) surrounded with an intricate pattern of conventional foliage. In the third is depicted the Crucifixion, with Saint John and the Virgin Mary. In this last design a great deal of light green glass is used, with very happy effect. To judge from the mutilated relics which still remain, the windows of the chapter-house must once have presented a truly glorious appearance. *Now* the upper part of the lights and the tracery alone possess any part of the beautiful ornament with which they were once adorned. The patterns are designed in red and white ; and a few medallions containing figures still remain ; but these last are much broken and sadly defaced. The chapter-house is commonly supposed to have been built by Bishop William de la Marchia, who was elected to the see in 1293, and died in 1302. The date of the glass is therefore subsequent to the latter

period ; as, however, in a shield of the royal arms those of France are emblazoned with those of England, it may be concluded that it was executed after the 10th year of King Edward III, A.D. 1337.

Of the Perpendicular style, there is little glass left in Wells Cathedral. The best earlier specimens are found in the south transept, where there are some elegant figures and some ornamental quarries, and in the clerestory window next the central tower on the north side of the nave. In this last position there are two figures, male and female, crowned. Later specimens of Perpendicular glass may be found in the choir-aisles ; the best of these represent the arms of England, and the badge of a couching stag. In the west window of the chapel of St. John, near the tomb of Deans Gunthorpe and Jenkyns, are some curious late Perpendicular quarries. Some of these display plants, others birds—such as eagles, ostriches, cocks, hens. One of the cocks is crowing, and holds a label, inscribed *Memento*, in black letter characters—in allusion, no doubt, to St. Peter, who *remembered* his Lord's words when the cock crew. In the windows of the Cathedral library there is a considerable quantity of glass of this period. In them the arms of Bishop Bubwith (a fess, engrailed, between three groups of conjoined holly-leaves, four in each) alternate with the arms of England ; each shield is surrounded with an elegant pattern. The remainder of each window is filled with quarries, on each of which is a plant of uniform type throughout. This series of windows supplies an excellent example for modern imitation, and for introduction in domestic buildings.

Of the Cinque Cento style there is some foreign glass in the central lancet at the west end of the nave.

Of the Intermediate style there are various shields of

arms in different windows, and two miserably washy figures of King Ina in the court costume of the eighteenth century, and of Bishop Ralph de Salopia in the western lancets. In the clerestory range of the choir are two modern memorial windows; and in St. John's chapel a window of painted glass has been placed at the expense of members of the Theological College. None of these last require especial comment. It is, however, much to be regretted that more care is not bestowed upon the ancient glass. The splendid Jesse window in the choir is far from being in a secure state, while the condition of the Perpendicular glass in the library is most precarious. Unless the lead-work of this last glass be speedily looked to, it will inevitably drop out, and then another memorial of the taste and munificence of former ages will be irretrievably lost. This would be the more lamentable, as signs are not wanting that the importance of preserving national antiquities is becoming daily more and more recognized, and that the rising generation is far more interested in the memorials of past ages than were their fathers.

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