

WALL-PAINTING AROUND THE CHOIR OF  
ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL.

UPON removing the stalls, during the recent restoration of Rochester Cathedral, it was discovered that the choir walls had at an early period been decorated with painting, of a bold and effective design. Through the kindness of Mr. Stephen Aveling, of Rochester, who generously undertook to make a facsimile drawing of the ancient design, for 'Archæologia Cantiana,' we are enabled to obtain the annexed representation of the painting.

When the whole of the panelling at the back of the stalls had been removed, the painted decoration was found to have extended over the entire length of the choir walls, from the western screen to the eastern transepts. Traces were found of upper borders, which proved that it also reached from the stalls to the string-course beneath the windows. It was lastly discovered, behind the return stalls, upon the western screen, which is of wood.

The backs of the ancient stalls were so much lower than the more modern panelling of the choir, that the portion of wall-painting protected from injury by the panelling comprised, not only the entire border at the base, but a complete specimen of the pattern which had been employed in the decoration of the

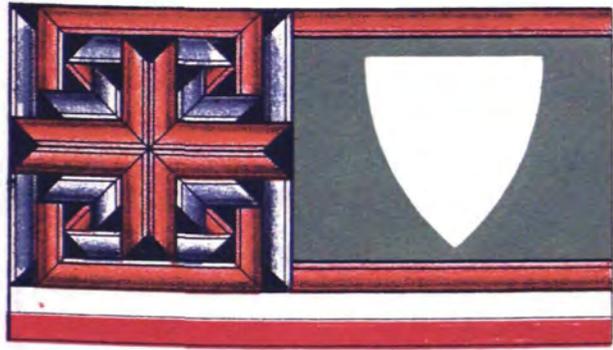
WALL PAINTING IN THE CHOIR OF ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL.

Top 12ft. High St. George's Window

Scale 1/4 Inches to 1 foot



Upper Border on North Wall.



Upper Border on South Wall.

whole space. The upper borders, afterwards discovered, differed one from the other, and both were unlike the lower border. The latter is uniformly the same on both sides of the choir, but the upper border on the north is unlike that on the south.

Sir Gilbert Scott, who directed the works then in progress in the Cathedral, caused the whole of the ancient painting to be preserved intact, and upon the space from which it had been obliterated, he renewed the decoration exactly as it had been originally. In the upper borders, however, the shields which seem to have been left blank in the original painting, are now filled in with the arms of the Bishops of Rochester.

In the bold and handsome pattern, formed of golden lions in quatrefoils, alternating with golden lilies in octagons, several features are worthy of notice. We observe that there are three points in which the lions might have been greatly varied, viz., in colour, attitude, and back-ground or field. In each and every one of these three points, the lions in this painting agree with those which appear upon the flag of England. They may be described as lions *passants regardants or*, upon a field *gules*. The lilies, again, at once remind us of the shield of France. In field, or background, and in their own colour they agree with that shield, being *fleurs de lis or*, upon a field *azure*. But as the flag of England bore three lions, and that of France was charged with three or more lilies, it becomes interesting to inquire whether one French lily, or one English lion, was ever used alone? The first English king who united the lions and lilies, by quartering them upon his shield, was Edward III.; and when we examine the Great Seals of that king we find a reply to our inquiry.

Upon the second Great Seal of Edward III., which was in use from 1328 to 1338, the king is represented as sitting enthroned, and having on each side of his throne *one fleur de lis*.\* Upon the fourth Great Seal of the same king, used in 1340, he appears similarly enthroned, but has on each side of his throne *one lion*.† These facts seem to point to the reign of Edward III. as the period when this pattern was painted upon the walls of Rochester Cathedral. Sir Gilbert Scott is decidedly of opinion that it is work of the fourteenth century.

Greater interest attaches to the pattern of this Rochester painting, from the fact that the nascent idea of its design may perhaps be traced, in some decoration discovered on Henry of Eastrý's choir-screen, in Canterbury Cathedral. Behind the existing woodwork of the returned stalls, at Canterbury, Sir Gilbert Scott found that the middle space of Prior Eastrý's screen had been panelled with painted oak, (between the tops of the stalls and the string-course beneath the traceried openings). The pattern, painted upon this oak panelling, was simply formed of gilt rosettes upon a green ground, but it was surmounted by a handsome border, formed of gilded lions and lilies alternating in a horizontal band. In this Canterbury border there is not, as at Rochester, any marked allusion to the French flag; both lions and lilies being on one, uniformly red, ground. Yet there may be in them some allusion to the marriage of Edward II., in 1308, to Isabella of France. Sir Gilbert Scott believes this decoration at Canterbury to be original work of the fourteenth century. Is

\* 'Archæological Journal,' ii. 37, iii. 372.

† 'Archæological Journal,' ii. 37.

it not probable that the French claims and conquests of Edward III. caused the idea, nascent and very sparingly used at Canterbury, to be dwelt upon, and developed, in the mind of the artist, until he conceived the grand work executed at Rochester?

In connection with this pattern, of lions and lilies, it may not be without interest to remark its use in embroidery, as exemplified in some altar cloths which once belonged to Westminster Abbey. In some Inventories, made during the reign of Henry VIII., are the following entries:—

“A riche ffronte for beneth of cloth of gold pouderyde with lyonnes of golde and fflower de lyce of gold, and a scouchynne of the armes of Abbotte Islippe, and the armes of the place, of the gift of Abbotte Islippe.”

“A rich fronte for above of cloth golde powderyd with lyonnes and flower de lucys of gold with a riche image of o' Lady of Pitye garnished with perle and stone whiche ymage dan John Cornyssh dyd geve and the saide Abbotte Islippe dyd geve the ffrontell.” (London and Middlesex Archæological Society Transactions, iv. 314.)

“A nother [fronte for beneth] of blewe velvett with ffoure de lyces and lybards.”

“A nother for beneth with flor de lyces and lybardes of nedyll work fashenyd like losengys.” (*Ibidem*, p. 326.)

The exquisite arrangement and variety of the borders at Rochester deserve especial study. The main devices are formed of ribbons, or fillets, intricately but gracefully intertwined. Their colours, red and blue, may perhaps contain an allusion to the junction of the English and French flags by Edward III., the fields of these flags being of those colours.

Mr. R. C. Hussey has kindly favoured me with the following observations upon this wall-painting:—  
“Unquestionably it is a production of the fourteenth century. The Roses in the lower border are of a

character that helps to mark the date. The interlacing of fillets, as shewn in the square figures of all three borders, was common in glazing of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, though not used quite in the same way as in this painting. In glass, a narrow fillet or margin was painted, following the lines of the leading, and helping it to define the general pattern of the design. Where these fillets impinged on each other, they were represented as interlacing. Two of the paving tiles from Frittenden Church, figured in 'Archæologia Cantiana,' ix. 203, shew something of the same principle. The artist, who designed the Rochester wall-painting, understood how to apply his colours so as to give the utmost distinctness to his design. He has edged the red quatrefoils with green, and the blue octagons with orange, the most contrasting tints, and therefore those best fitted to define the outlines of the patterns."

The wall painting represented in our illustration, was not the earliest decoration of the Rochester choir. Upon the western screen a fragment of an earlier pattern, resembling a rough copy of some Scottish tartan, was discovered; this was probably the original Early English decoration of the choir.

W. A. SCOTT ROBERTSON.