

ANCIENT CHEST IN HARTY CHURCH.

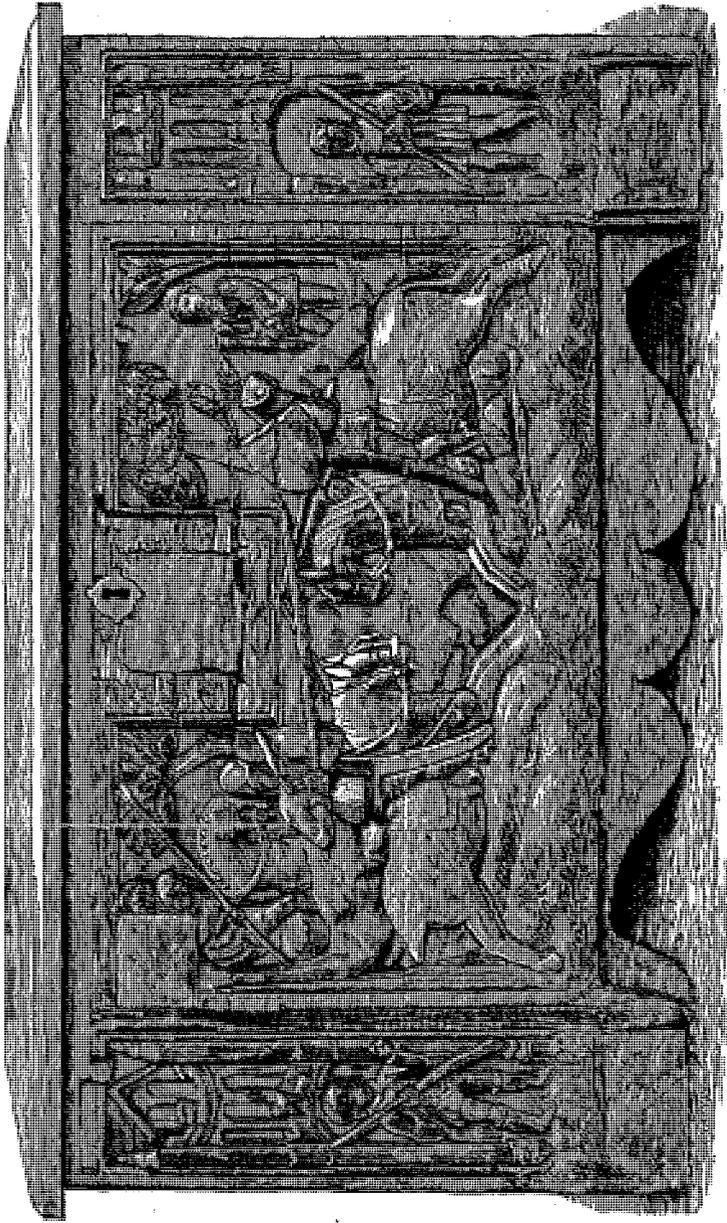
KENT contains many interesting Church Chests, but that which belongs to the Parish of Harty in Sheppey is probably unique, not only in Kent but in England. It is not so old as the Early English chest at Graveney; it is not remarkable for its simple construction from the hollowed trunk of a tree, like that at Elham, or the curved lid of that at Lower Halstow. It is not bound with such numerous vertical bands of iron as nearly envelope the trunklike chest at Newington by Sittingbourne, or that at Fawlkham: nor does it exhibit elaborate carving of window-like tracery, such as adorns the church chests of Rainham, Faversham, and Wittersham. Unlike all these, it is elaborately carved with a scene from a tilting match between two knights, whose esquires are in attendance, with fresh lances, outside the lists which are guarded on each side by a sentinel, who is simply armed with a long thick staff.

The tradition that this carving represents a duel, is disproved by the foils which appear upon the tips of three of the lances. One lance, broken in a former encounter, lies shattered upon the ground; it bears the foil as a protection against its inflicting mortal injury. The mounted esquire of the victorious knight, and the foot-page of his adversary, each bears a foil-tipped lance. The object of the encounter then,

clearly, must have been to unhorse an opponent, not to kill him. The difficulty of effecting this object was greatly increased by the peculiar construction of the saddles used by these knights. They are so made as to clasp the rider completely round his thighs, and thus hold him firmly in position. Their seats, also, are slightly elevated, though not so much as the cruppers and pommels; the rider, therefore, could easily obtain greater power for his thrust, almost standing in his stirrups when seated on the saddle. He probably was obliged to creep into such a saddle from the horse's back, his legs descending both at once, and at an equal pace. Such tilting saddles were used in England during the fourteenth century, and are seen in the representation of a tournament, held before Richard II. at Smithfield, depicted in the 'St. Alban's Chronicle' (folio 233) in Lambeth Palace Library.

There appear, however, upon the saddles in the Harty carving, peculiar appendages which were never used in England. They are long curved defences for the rider's legs, and they reach on each side of the horse, from the knight's waist to his ancles. This proves that the Harty chest was not carved in England. Whence then did it come? A German saddle, possessing similar appendages, may be seen in the Tower of London, and it seems to afford a reply to our query. It has been minutely described by Mr. John Hewitt,\* who believes it to have been made in the fifteenth century. This saddle, however, seems to be a later development of the form shewn in our Harty carving. Mr. Hewitt describes some saddles of this kind as bringing the rider's knee upon a level

\* 'Archæological Journal,' xv. 45.



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*Length, 3 ft. 0½ in.; breadth, 2 ft. 2½ in.; height, 2 ft. 5 in.*

with the horse's back, and says that the seat of the saddle in the Tower is elevated ten inches above the saddle-proper, that is about eleven inches above the horse's back. There is no such extreme elevation in the saddles represented on this chest. I find more resemblance to the carved figures, of the saddles and their riders, in a plate, given by Hefner,\* which is copied from a miniature on parchment, contained in Rudolph von Montfort's 'Universal Chronicle.' This was written between the years 1340 and 1350, and is preserved in the great Library at Munich. In the miniature, not only the saddles, but the other horse furniture; the steel head covering with spike in front, the armour on the mane, the band across the horse's chest, the saddle cloth and girth, are all similar to those on the Harty carving. Upon the whole, I am inclined to think that this carving was done in Germany, or the Low Countries, about the end of the fourteenth century.

The costume of the esquires, and sentinels, strengthens this impression. Their tunics are all very short, just covering the loins, and in this respect not very unlike the military tunics of this year of grace, 1875. Long tight hose envelope the legs, but over the hose one sentinel seems to wear a pair of high boots; he stands behind the victorious knight. The tunic of this sentinel, like that of the opposite foot-page, is fastened tightly, from waist to neck, by a long row of small buttons; his tunic however alone shews three straps or laces across the front of its short tail. His sleeves, those of the other sentinel, and those of the mounted esquire, seem to

\* J. H. von Hefner Alteneck, 'Trachten des Christlichen Mittelalters,' ii. 8.

be tight at the wrist and loose at the elbow, but those of the foot-page are wide and open at the wrists. Round hats, or bonnets, are worn by all four, but the sentinel behind the vanquished knight wears, beneath his hat, a hood over his head, with its cape across his chest and shoulders. The mounted esquire seems to have a similar hood across the chest; his saddle-cloth is scalloped at the edge, and his saddle has a high crupper and pommel.

The fence, by which the lists are enclosed, seems to be very rough and undulating in surface, and singularly uneven in height. Trees appear in the upper background, but its line is broken in the middle, by a blank rectangular space, which, from its moulded edge, was evidently so left by the carver for the insertion of a lock.

Harty Church, though small, consists of a nave with two aisles, and a chancel with north chapel and south transept. The chest stands in the north chapel. A small bell-cot supplies the place of a tower. The architecture belongs to various periods—Norman, Early English, and Perpendicular; and the fifteenth century rood-screen remains in situ. Upon the jamb of the north doorway an early sun-dial has been carved.

When this chest was brought to Harty it is impossible to say; but the position of the church, on a hill close to the river Swale, made it easy of access at all times from the German Ocean. The parish occupies the eastern extremity of the Isle of Sheppey, and was passed by every vessel which sailed from the continent to London, or to any port on the Thames or the Medway.

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