

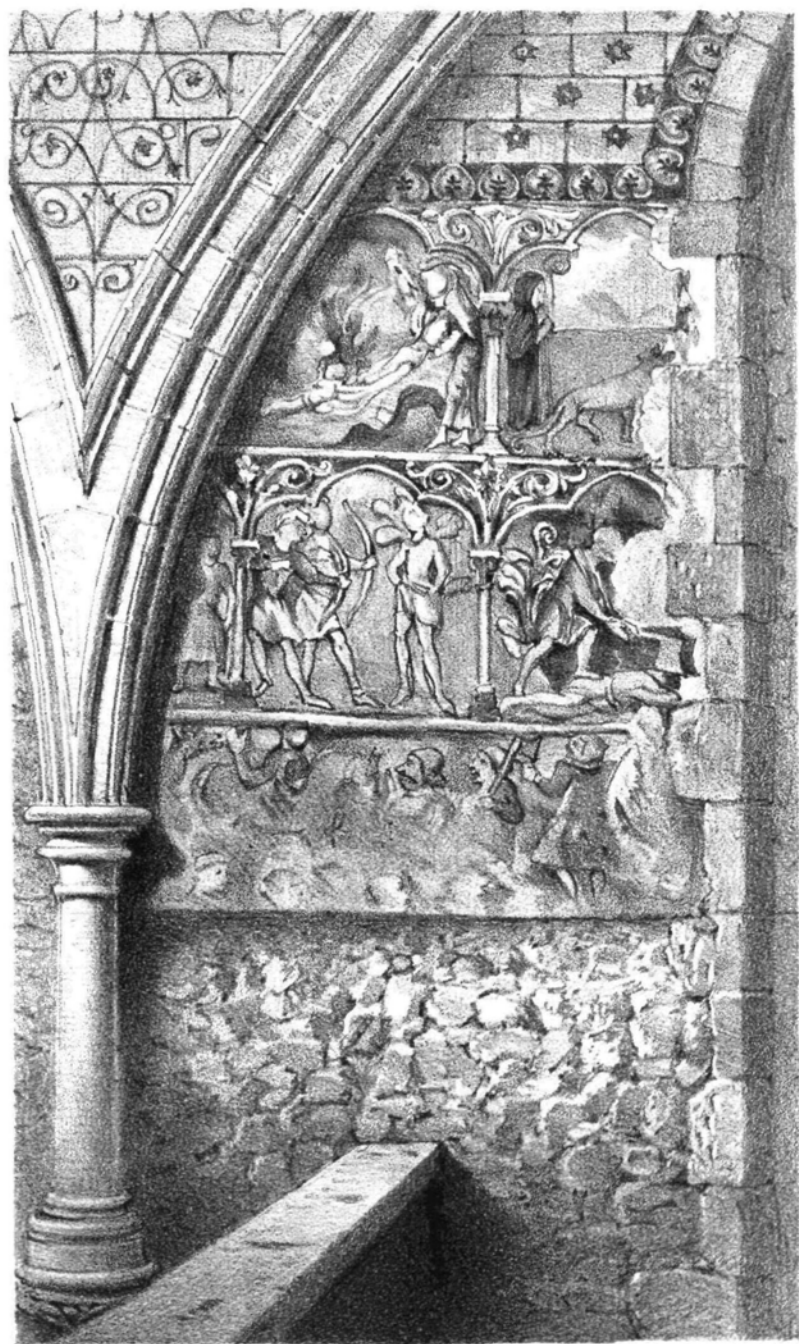
ON A MURAL PAINTING IN ST. HELEN'S  
CHURCH, CLIFFE AT HOO.

BY THE REV E. H. LEE.

DURING the restoration of the north transept, in 1864, this painting was discovered. The whole of the transept shews traces of colour on the walls, but except on the east side, the colours simply represent blocks of stone, marked out upon the plaster. On the east and west sides immediately under the wall plate, and on the south side over the arch leading into the nave, there runs a band, two feet wide, containing a scroll pattern of very elegant design; the trefoiled ends are of various colours, but they have nearly disappeared. The story of Saint Edmund's martyrdom is depicted upon the east wall, which is enriched by a couple of sunk arches supported on three slender columns. The middle column terminates midway in a moulded base, under which is a piscina.

The centre of each bay is pierced with a lancet. The painting occupies the upper part of the wall, between the arch and the southernmost lancet window. The subject is divided into three courses, or bands, by horizontal lines; the upper line ranging with the spring of the lancet window, to which it forms an enrichment. A band containing a bold heart-shaped ornament, of the form of a cockleshell, on a deep moreen ground, runs along the top of the painting, and is continued over the lancet window, the space above being marked out into blocks, with a cinquefoiled flower in the centre of each. The painting is below this, running horizontally in three courses or bands, two of which have each two compartments. In these four compartments are depicted four scenes, each under a separate arcade of pure Early English date. The third or lower course, which shews but one scene, has no such arcade.

In the lowest scene a figure on horseback is addressing three ill-favoured men, variously armed with sword, bow, and



*The Hill, Leighton Buzzard,  
and King of the Forest, Leighton.*  
MURAL PAINTING IN THE NORTH TRANSEPT OF ST HELENS CHURCH  
CLIFFE AT HOO.

hatchet. The figure on the horse holds up one hand in the form of entreaty, the other being laid on his breast. The men evidently mean mischief, and their countenances depict every evil passion. The legend tells us that on an occasion of an irruption of the Danes, A.D. 870, into East Anglia, the young King Edmund, after the undecisive battle fought at Thetford, rode out to meet the fierce invaders with the view of making terms for his people. The Danes finding him in their power, dragged him from his horse, stripped and tied him to a tree, and shot him to death. In the middle course, the compartment on our left represents two Danes in the act of shooting, their bows are bent; and the King stands opposite to them tied to a tree. After he had been thus killed, he was beheaded, and thrown into a wood. The adjacent compartment on the right shews a man in the act of cutting off the head. When the Danes leave the neighbourhood the King's friends search for his body, this they find, but can nowhere discover the head; the story runs that a wolf brings it to them in his mouth (some such animal appears in the upper course, in the compartment on the right side), and the head when brought into contact with the body at once adhered to it, proving by the miracle that they really belonged to each other. Thus assured, the friends pay the last rites to the martyred King by burying his body (which is shewn in the upper compartment on the left). The figures are well drawn and sketched with a bold hand.

When the north transept was under restoration in 1864, while removing the soil preparatory to laying down concrete for the pavement, we uncovered the foundations of an earlier wall. It ran parallel with, and close beside, the base of the existing east wall of the transept. It was four feet thick, and was met, at a point fifteen feet and three quarters north of the chancel wall, by a cross wall, or pier four feet square, at right angles to it. Beyond this cross wall a similar pier, four feet square, terminated this ancient wall. In the arch by which we enter this transept from the north aisle I believe that we have remains of the older (Norman) Church. Its northern pier and the northern half of its arch seem to me to have belonged to the earlier building.