

ST. ANSELM'S CHAPEL, CANTERBURY
CATHEDRAL.

(FORMERLY THE CHAPEL OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL.)

BY CANON SCOTT ROBERTSON.

THIS chapel, upon the south side of the choir's south aisle, stands above the crypt-chapel of St. Gabriel, the paintings in which were described by me, and fully illustrated, in *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. XIII., pp. 48-80.

Late in the year 1888, Canon Francis J. Holland generously undertook to restore St. Anselm's Chapel, and to fit it up for the use of such small congregations as would assemble, for instance, at early morning administrations of the Holy Communion.

In the course of the work necessary for carrying out his purpose, certain discoveries have been made which are of interest. Especially deserving of mention and of record, is the uncovering of a painting, in distemper, of St. Paul, shaking off the viper into the fire at Melita.

The work, which Canon Holland had undertaken, was found to require far greater labour and much longer time, than he or any one could possibly have anticipated. Before describing it in detail, it may be well to recall to the reader's memory what the chapel contains. It formed part of Ernulf's and Conrad's work at the commencement of the twelfth century.

On the north side of this chapel stands the elaborately carved tomb of Archbishop Simon Mepham, who died in 1333-4 on the 11th of February. The record of his inter-

ment states that he was buried in the Chapel of St. Peter which is situated on the south side of the High Altar.*

To admit of the insertion of Archbishop Mepham's tomb in 1334, the lower portion of the round shafts were cut away from the east and west piers of that arch by which the chapel opens into the south aisle of the choir.

Probably the beautiful "Decorated" window, in the south wall of this chapel, was inserted in some degree as a memorial of Archbishop Mepham. It was placed there in 1336, and part of its cost was defrayed by certain friends (who contributed £8 : 13 : 4); the remaining cost (£34 : 3 : 10) being defrayed by the Prior, Richard de Oxenden,† who was elected to be Prior while Simon Mepham was Archbishop.

Twelve years later, Archbishop Bradwardine "was buried (says Somner, p. 133) in St. Anselm's foresaid chapel, by the south wall." Thomas Bradwardine was never enthroned; he lived only five weeks and four days after his consecration, in 1349.

The chapel has an eastern apse, in which originally stood three windows. The roof of the whole is vaulted in stone, but various cracks, in the vaulted roof and in the walls, shewed that before the chapel was fitted up anew, for present use, its fabric should be overhauled and made strong.

When close examination was made, as Canon Holland tells me, it was found that in the north wall adjacent to the choir aisle, there had been weakness, and a settlement, at a very early period, in fact soon after its erection. Perhaps the thrust of the choir roof had caused the mischief, or the foundations were insecure; or, perhaps, from both causes combined, there had ensued crushing of the stone-work in the north wall, and even the columns of the mural arcading had

* "Quadam capellâ Sancti Petri nuncupatâ ex parte australi summi altaris," as quoted by Wm. Somner (A.D. 1640) in his *Antiquities of Canterbury*, p. 133, where he says Mepham was "laid in a tomb of black marble upon the north side of St. Anselm's Chapel; that so called at this day, for when he was buried there it had another name" [St. Peter's Chapel, in the margin].

† See Battely's *Appendix to the Supplement* (of Somner's *Antiquities*), p. 1, Ex archivis Eccles. Cant.: "Memorandum quod anno 1336, facta fuit una fenestra nova in Ecclesia Christi Cant.: viz.: in Capella SS. Petri et Pauli apostolorum, pro quo expensæ fuerunt ministratæ"... £42 : 17 : 2. "Summa £8 : 13 : 4, data fuit a quibusdam amicis ad dictam Fenestram. Reliqua pecunia ministrata fuit a Priore."

suffered from similar crushing. It became apparent that, to remedy the mischief, a later Norman arch was inserted within the original Norman arch, between the chapel and the apse. A strong wall faced with ashlar was also, then, built up against the northern part of the apse and of the chapel. This wall, Canon Holland says, started from the northern part of the eastern window of the apse, and was continued to the northern pier of the arch opening from the apse to the chapel. The space between this buttressing wall and the north wall of the apse, was solidly filled in with concrete, and pieces of broken masonry. On the surface of this later buttressing-wall were found evident traces of fire.

It is highly probable that, when these buttressing additions were made to the north side of St. Anselm's Chapel, further support to its foundations was obtained beneath its floor, by completely walling-up the arches of entrance to the apse of the crypt chapel of St. Gabriel.

Before touching the later work inserted during the Norman period, to counteract the mischief caused by roof-thrust or bad foundations, Canon Holland caused an outside buttress to be rebuilt, the arches to be reset, and two massive iron girders (filled in above and below with solid masonry) to be inserted in the main wall of the Choir aisle, adjacent to the chapel.

Then the upper part, of the later-Norman buttressing wall, was very carefully removed, and behind it was discovered the painting representing St. Paul at Melita. This painting must have been hidden from sight for more than seven centuries. It had been executed upon the original wall of the apse, soon after the chapel had been erected. Canon Holland states that the colours when first uncovered looked marvellously fresh, and, it was evident that the whole of the original wall had been highly adorned with colour; red, blue, and rich chocolate being the prevailing tints.

When the roof plaster in the apse was knocked away, the original Norman vaulting was found above it, but in such a shaky and dangerous condition that it became necessary to take off the outer roofing of the apse, and to pour in "grout" before dealing with the Norman vault itself. No less than

sixty pails of grout were thus poured in, to fill up cracks and to solidify the masonry of the vaulting.

Two skilled workmen, under the able superintendence of Mr. Gaymer of North Walsham, were occupied during fifteen weeks in "restoring" this vaulting. They removed all the faulty mortar, they reset the Voussoirs, or vaulting slabs, of Kentish ragstone, and thus, by slow degrees, they completely restored the vault. The vaulting of the apse is now singularly beautiful and almost unique.

It is Canon Holland's intention to fill the windows of the chapel with stained glass (to be made by Clayton and Bell), and to insert a reredos or altarpiece, for which Mr. Pearson has furnished the design. A new pavement of Hopton Wood stone has already been laid down, and the chapel will soon be an example of most perfect "restoration."

The most interesting portion is certainly the mural painting which Canon Holland's work has brought to light, after it had been hidden for more than 700 years.

The painting is thus described by that good authority, Mr. J. G. Waller, F.S.A., in a letter with which he has favoured me:—

"The tempora painting, of St. Paul at Melita, has a special interest, inasmuch as that, so far as I know, the subject is unique in the mediæval art of this country. Still more interest perhaps attaches to it, from its merit, as a work of art which must probably be attributed to the middle of the twelfth century.

"It is equal to anything I have seen abroad of that period, and it reminds me of some of the best mosaics in Italy. The date of its execution can scarcely be far from that of the paintings in St. Gabriel's Chapel, in the Crypt. Yet the art is so much better, that it bespeaks a more intelligent and advanced hand.

"The drawing of the extremities, especially of the foot, is a long way in advance of any example of that period, known to me in England; and this is always a test of an artist's power. The drapery is well cast, and gracefully treated. The colouring is generally good, and delicate throughout. The blue background, which was much affected



The Phototype Co., 308, Strand, London.

ST. PAUL AND THE VIPER.

(MURAL PAINTING, OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY, IN CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL.)

during the twelfth century, and in the early part of the thirteenth, is here rather too powerful, arising perhaps from the fact of its being a pure colour, and unbroken. Time, however, may have modified the shades that go with it, and thus make it too prominent.

“The tinting upon the adjoining capital is so excellent, that it reminds one of an illuminated letter in one of the best manuscripts.”

Mr. Waller has not drawn attention to the artist's treatment of the hair, and head, of St. Paul. How great an advance, in art, his treatment thereof betokens, in comparison with that displayed in the crypt-paintings, immediately beneath St. Anselm's Chapel, may be seen by referring to the plates given in *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. XIII., from the paintings in St. Gabriel's Chapel in the crypt. They will be found, in that Volume, opposite pages 65, 67, 73, 75, 77, 79, and 81.

In 1774, St. Anselm's Chapel was in use as two vestries; one for the Minor Canons, and one for the lay-clerks.

It may be observed that, in spelling Archbishop Mepham's name, I do not use the “o,” which in modern times has been inserted before the “p,” therein. That letter “o” was never used in his name during the fourteenth century. His name was spelt as Mepeham and as Mepham. The latter form is adopted by Archbishop Parker, Lambard, Somner, Ducarel, Gostling, and Hasted. The Saxon name of the Kentish village was sometimes spelt “Meapaham.”