

NOTES ON THE GREAT NORTH WINDOW
OF CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL.

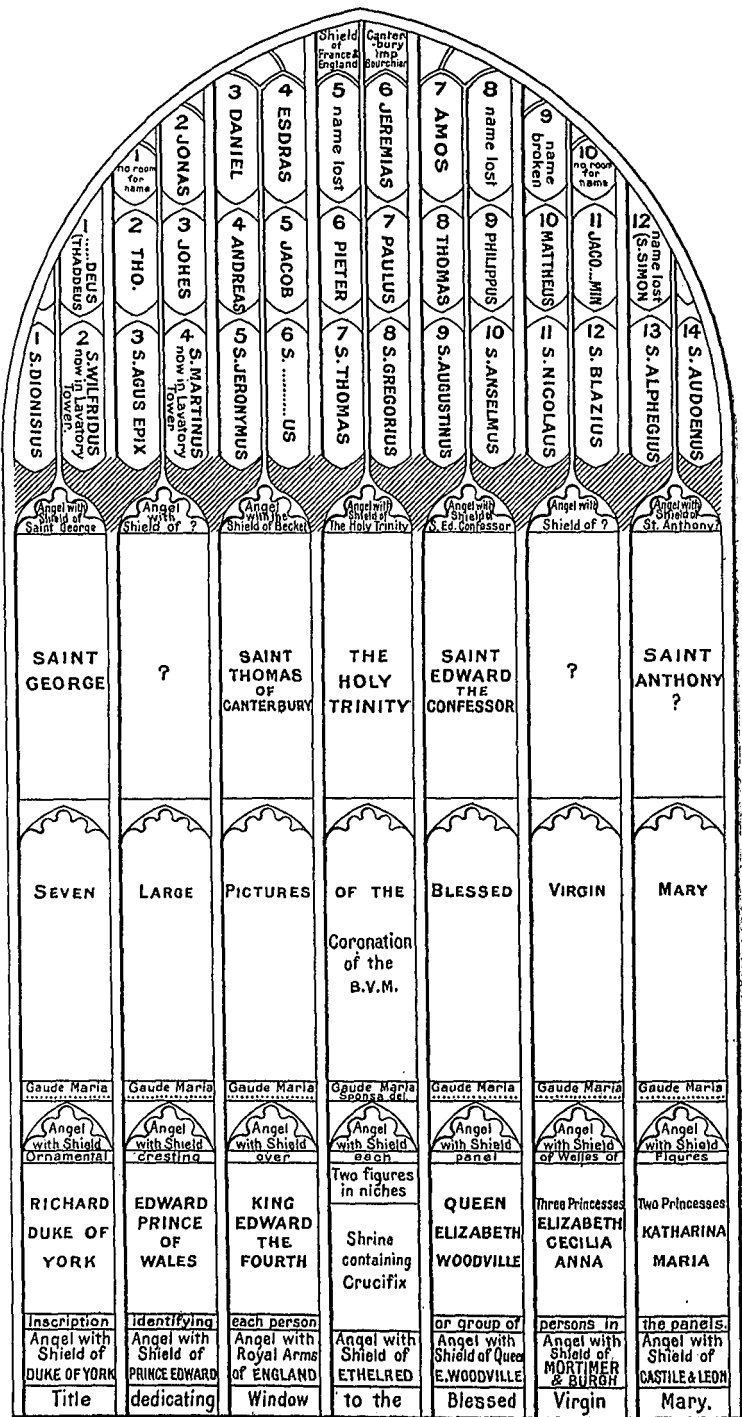
BY JOHN D. LE COUTEUR, ESQ.

It is evident to anyone who carefully studies the great north widow of Canterbury Cathedral that the remaining fragments of ancient stained glass are not in their original position, and everything tends to shew that, after the shameful handling of the glass by the iconoclast Richard Culmer in 1642, the pieces were replaced in such a manner as would best tend to fill the gaps caused by the destruction of the rest, without regard to their former position.

The window was given by King Edward IV. in memory of the marriage of his ancestor Edward I. and Marguerite of France, but, although the contract may have been placed with the glaziers in 1465 (in which year the King visited Canterbury), there is evidence to shew that the work was not completed until 1477 at the earliest.

Culmer boasts of his misdeeds in his pamphlet "Cathedral Newes from Canterbury," and from that source we can recover in some degree the original composition of the window. He says:—

"In that window was now the picture of God the Father, and of Christ, besides a large Crucifix, and the pictures of the Holy Ghost in the form of a Dove, and of the twelve Apostles. And in that window were seen seven large pictures of the Virgin Marie in seven several glorious appearances, as of the Angells lifting her into Heaven, and the Sun, Moon, and Stars under her feet, and every picture had an inscription under it beginning with 'Gaude Maria,' as 'Gaude Maria, Sponsa dei,' that is 'Rejoice Mary, Spouse of God.' There were in this window many other Popish Saints, as of



PLAN OF THE GREAT NORTH WINDOW IN THE N.W. TRANSEPT OF CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL.

Saint George, etc. But their prime Cathedral Saint, Archbishop Thomas Becket, was most rarely pictured in that window, in full proportion, with Cope, Rochet, Miter, Crosier, and all his Pontificalibus. And in the foot of that window was a title, intimating that window to be dedicated to the Virgin Mary: 'In laudem et honorem beatissimæ Virginus Maria Matris dei,' etc."

The tracery of the upper lights is interesting as containing most of the original glazing in a very fair state of preservation.

There were originally 36 figures, of which 34 still remain *in situ*, two ecclesiastics having been, for some reason, removed to the lavatory tower, where they may still be seen; their places being filled with modern, and very common, coloured glass.

Dr. Westlake says that this tracery-work dates c. 1440; but there can I think be no doubt that the figures in the tracery and in the main body of the window belong to the same period, namely, 1465—77.

Gostling, who made a careful examination of the window in the second half of the eighteenth century, has left a detailed account of the pictures as they appeared in his time; and, on comparing his notes with the window as it stands to-day, it is evident that but very few changes have taken place.

At the apex of the window are two coats of arms: the shield on the left bearing the arms of France and England quarterly, and that upon the right displaying those of the See of Canterbury impaling the arms of Archbishop Bourchier.

The figures are in three rows, the topmost containing ten prophets, the second the Twelve Apostles (mentioned by Culmer), and the third fourteen ecclesiastics.

Each figure is placed on a bracket with the name inserted on a scroll underneath, except in the cases of numbers 1 and 10 of the topmost row, where the openings are too small to allow of more than demi-figures to be inserted. The canopies vary considerably in each tier; in the top row

they are much broken. Several of the figures in the top-most are mutilated.

Gostling gives the names as follows: 1 no room for name, 2 Jonas, 3 Daniel, 4 Esdras, 5 name lost, 6 Jeremias, 7 Amos, 8 name lost, 9 name much broken, 10 no room for name.

The second row contains the Twelve Apostles arranged in a similar manner. According to Gostling the names are: 1 deus (probably Thaddeus), 2 Tho, 3 Johes, 4 Andreas, 5 Jacob, 6 Pieter, 7 Paulus, 8 Thomas, 9 Philippus, 10 Mattheus, 11 Jaco min, 12 name lost—but, as this figure holds a long saw, it is evidently intended to represent St. Simon.

Gostling adds the query “If this spelling is not German, and may shew that the artist was of that country.”

Dr. Westlake, it may be noted here, inclines to the belief that this is Westminster work, but adds that there are two figures (in the central light of the middle tier) in niches of German-looking work.

A possible solution of the question might be that the firm responsible for the work had one or more German workmen amongst their employés, and that these men executed the inscriptions and some of the other details, whilst the more important part of the work was entrusted to the Englishmen.

The third row containing fourteen ecclesiastics is the most interesting of the tracery glass. Twelve of the figures are more or less complete, but numbers 2 and 4 (counting from the left) are now, as has been stated, in the lavatory tower. Careful examination of the lights which they once occupied discloses the fact that in each case the white alb remains, as does the bracket and inscribed scroll.

Reckoning from left to right, the figures according to Gostling are as follows: 1 S. Dionisius, holding his head; 2 S. Wilfridus, 3 S. Agus. Epix., 4 S. Martinus, 5 S. Jeronymus, 6 S. us, 7 S. Thomas, 8 S. Gregorius, with papal tiara; 9 S. Augustinus, 10 S. Anselmus, 11 S. Nicolaus, 12 S. Blasius, 13 S. Alphegius, 14 S. Audoenus.

The two figures now in the lavatory tower may easily be distinguished from the rest of the work there. They are slightly larger, and in each case the white alb is wanting. St. Wilfrid is in the second light of the Western window, and St. Martin in the second light of the Eastern window, counting in each case from the left. The rest of the glass in the lavatory tower, interesting though it is, does not come within the scope of this article.

The body of the window is divided by stone transoms into three tiers of seven lights apiece. With the exception of five of the angels in the top lights, none of the glass now in the window appears to be in its original position.

The seven small angels, in the heads of the top tiers, hold shields which, in five cases, are charged with devices alluding to the large figures which once occupied this row. The other two, whose shields bear heraldic charges, do not seem to be in their original places.

- No. 1.—The arms of the Dean and Chapter; but, as both Gostling and Willement agree in stating that in their time this charge was *Argent, a cross gules*, it seems highly probable that the figure of St. George once filled the space below.
- No. 2.—The arms of Guldeford and Halden; but Gostling states that a shield charged *Vert, three crowns or*, was originally here.
- No. 3.—The arms of Becket impaling the See of Canterbury: so, without doubt, his effigy "in full pontificals" once stood here, as described by Culmer.
- No. 4.—The Shield of the Holy Trinity. It seems highly probable, judging by Culmer's description, that the Holy Trinity was represented by two figures, with the Holy Ghost in the form of a Dove hovering over them, and that the large crucifix spoken of belonged to the third tier.
- No. 5.—The arms of Edward the Confessor. Probably the figure of that saint once stood here, as he would be the name-saint both of King Edward and of the Prince of Wales.

- No. 6.—The framework of a well, being the arms of Cecilia, daughter of Edward IV., who married Viscount Wells.
- No. 7.—The arms of an Archbishop, which, says Miss Williams,* were made by Mr. Caldwell. Gostling states that in his time this shield had a broken Saint Anthony's Cross, so perhaps St. Anthony occupied this last light.

Careful examination of the angels shews that the backgrounds of numbers 2 and 6 differ considerably in hue from the rest; therefore, in all probability, this was not their original place. Possibly they may have formed part of a similar series of angels, bearing shields with the coats of arms of the different families connected by marriage with the House of York. This series probably filled the heads of the third tier of lights.

The large figures of saints do not appear to have been placed under canopies, but they may have stood upon brackets across which ran scrolls inscribed with their names.

Another point of interest arises here. Among the broken pieces of coloured glass that compose the borders of the lights, several white roses on flaming yellow suns will be noticed in the middle light of the topmost tier. These suns are chiefly set in blue glass, diapered in like manner to the blue half-curtain behind Prince Edward. Judging by this, it would seem that some of the figures in the top row were set against backgrounds powdered with Edward IV.'s badge.

The seven large angels in the top tier are the next to be considered. If we take it for granted that the figures of saints were represented as standing upon brackets, and that they were, as we know that of Becket was, at least full length, then it is clear that there could not have been much room for these angels. It is far more probable that they were originally situated at the base of the third tier of lights, and

* *Notes on the Painted Glass in Canterbury Cathedral.* (Aberdeen University Press, 1897.)

they may, therefore, be left until we come to deal with the third row.

We have now to consider the middle tier of lights, which at present contain the superb row of Royal portraits and also some coats of arms. The latter may be dismissed with the remark that they do not belong to this window at all.

The "seven large pictures of the Virgin Marie in seven several glorious appearances" undoubtedly once filled this entire tier. Such an important subject would never have been relegated to the bottom tier of the window. Culmer distinctly tells us that one picture represented the Virgin as being lifted into Heaven by angels, the sun, moon, and stars being depicted under her feet, with the inscription: "Gaude Maria, Sponsa Dei." Clearly, then, this particular scene represented the "Coronation of the Virgin," and was doubtless placed directly under the light containing the Holy Trinity.

Now, if the long band of Royal portraits had been in this middle tier, and the figures of the Virgin in the lowest row, as has frequently been suggested, the picture presented would be meaningless, not to say ridiculous; but if, as was undoubtedly the case, the Holy Trinity overshadowed the figures of the Virgin, and, on either side, and above again in the tracery, were nothing but saints, there would be both sense and reverence in the window.

In passing, it would be interesting to know what Culmer meant by "glorious appearances." It is hardly likely that he intended to convey the idea that the figures were beautiful, although they were, no doubt, like the rest of the work in the window, exquisite specimens of the glass-painter's art. It seems far more probable that he wished his readers to understand that each figure was set within a circle of rays, such as is found in a picture of God the Father in one of the old stained-glass windows at Nettlestead, and illustrated in Volume XXVIII. of *Archæologia Cantiana*.

We come now to the third tier of lights which, at present, contains seven coats of arms and two small angels holding shields. It is certain that none of this glass occupies its

proper position, and, in fact, does not seem to be in accordance with the rest of the design.

The original arrangement of this third tier is quite unknown to me, as the only detail that Culmer gives concerns the title dedicating the window to the Virgin Mary, which, as he tells us, once ran across the foot of the lights. Any attempt, therefore, at reconstruction must of necessity be conjectural.

It has already been suggested that the heads of the lights, in this bottom tier, contained angels holding shields charged with the arms of those families connected by marriage with the House of York, and that No. 6 of the topmost row of angels was originally situated here. There is in fact no other place in the window that this figure could have come from.

Beneath the angels was placed the splendid series of Royal portraits in the same order in which they still remain, but with no breakages to mar their beauty. Clad in rich purple crimson robes, and, in the case of the King, Queen, and the two little Princes, wearing white satin tunics profusely embroidered with golden patterns, they present a glorious array. Each figure, or group of figures, kneels before a desk, upon which rests an open book. The background of each panel consists of a curtain, half of which in four cases is striped with the emblem of the person represented, the other half being richly diapered. The two panels containing the Princesses have, however, only backgrounds of curtains, half crimson and half deep blue, in each case richly diapered with an elaborate pattern.

The figures from left to right are :—

1. Richard, Duke of York.
2. Edward, Prince of Wales, afterwards Edward V.
3. King Edward IV.
4. Central panel (to be described presently).
5. Queen Elizabeth Woodville.
6. Three Princesses : Elizabeth, Cecilia, Anna.
7. Two Princesses : Katherine, Maria.

Each panel has an inscription beneath it, identifying the

person or persons placed therein, but the wording relating to the two Princes is somewhat difficult to read.

It is much to be regretted that the original heads of the two princes have been destroyed, for the present work, excellent though it is, is of no value as regards portraiture. Also, had the original heads survived, not only should we have possessed authentic portraits of the two boys, but we could have formed some opinion as to the actual date of the completion of the glass. As it is, judging by the stature of Richard, Duke of York, as compared with that of his father, the whole work was probably finished about 1478, when he was a child of six.

The central panel of this tier is, however, of different design, and contains two distinct subjects. The lower one represents the arms of King Henry VII., and, therefore, does not belong to the window at all.

The two small figures above it are of much more importance. They are placed in small niches of what Dr. Westlake describes as German-looking work, perhaps designed by the same artist who was employed upon the inscriptions in the tracery, as already described. The figures themselves represent: on the left a king in armour with a sword, "Mauritius" underneath; and, on the right, a female figure with long hair, helmet, and sword. There is an inscription underneath this niche also, but it is too indistinct to be read. Over this panel runs the same golden cresting that surmounts the pictures of the Royal Family. Thus it would appear that this interesting piece of work once formed part of the shrine containing the large crucifix, to which the Royal Family knelt in prayer. It is certainly difficult to see from what other part of the window it could have been removed.

Mention has been made of the seven large angels in the top row, whose shields are charged with various blazonings alluding to the Royal Donors, and it was stated that in all probability they came from the base of the third tier.

This, though of course mere theory, has several reasons to support it. One reason is that these coats of arms would

naturally be as near as possible to the persons who were entitled to them—more especially as the figures are not depicted wearing heraldic surcoats, as was usual in portraiture of this kind. A second reason is that the shields are not now in their proper order, which fact leads us to suppose that they were removed by careless or ignorant workmen, who, without troubling themselves as to whether the shields were in their proper order, placed them in the positions that they now occupy. A third reason for believing them to have originally been placed at the base of the window, *beneath* the Royal portraits, is that, if they were so situated, they would constitute a fine band of colour running across the window, between the two inscriptions, the first being that alluding to the King and his family, and the second, now utterly destroyed, dedicating the window to the Virgin Mary.

The present order in which the shields are placed is as follows:—

1. Royal arms, with argent label, for Edward, Prince of Wales.
2. Royal arms, Edward IV.
3. Royal arms, a label of three points argent, the dexter point charged with a canton gules, Duke of York.
4. Gules, three crowns in pale or, Ethelred.
5. Castile and Leon.
6. Royal arms, impaling those of Elizabeth Woodville.
7. Mortimer and Burgh.

Their proper order perhaps should be:—

- 1 (now 3). Royal arms, a label of three points argent, the dexter point charged with a canton gules, for Richard, Duke of York.
- 2 (now 1). Royal arms, with argent label, for Edward, Prince of Wales.
- 3 (now 2). Royal arms, for Edward IV.
- 4 (now 4). Gules, three crowns in pale or, Ethelred.
- 5 (now 6). Royal arms, impaling those of Elizabeth Woodville.
- 6 (now 7). Mortimer and Burgh.
- 7 (now 5). Castile and Leon.

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Beneath the angels ran the inscription alluded to by Culmer, dedicating the window to the Virgin Mary. Of its precise details we only know that it commenced with the words "In laudem et honorem beatissime Virginis Marie, Matris Dei." It certainly may have continued with the statement that the glass was given by King Edward IV., finally ending with the request that prayers should be said for the prosperity of the Royal Family while on earth, and for the eternal repose of their souls after death.
