

THE MISERERES OF HAMPSHIRE.

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Among the many objects of Archæological interest to be found in our Churches are *Misereres*, but these, from their obscure position are often overlooked. This is to be regretted, for the carvings on them are often beautiful and generally quaint, and a study of them throws much light on the customs, manners and feelings of our ancestors, for artists until the time of the Stuarts always depicted their subjects in the dress of the period in which they were carved, painted or sculptured, and generally surrounded them with objects of the same date. This is particularly the case with the carvings on *Misereres* of the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries. These small bracket seats were intended to supply a slight resting place for the Monks during the daily church services, and especially during the long Penitential Psalms, when all were expected to stand ; they must have been very uncomfortable, and were liable to collapse at the least movement of the user. The very narrow shelf-like seat was supported underneath, something after the fashion of the folding seats in a modern theatre. It had wing-like projections on each side, and it is these and the central support that are generally carved.

In 1896 Miss Emma Phipson published a very beautiful book on "Choir Stalls and their Carvings," and she gives a most interesting account of a large number of *Misereres*, and figures of very many of them. The earliest she mentions is at Exeter, and is of the date 1244, and the latest at Durham Cathedral about 1660 ; but the greatest number of them are of the 14th and 15th centuries. Winchester Cathedral has some of the 13th century, Winchester College of the 14th, and Christ Church Priory of the 16th, as well as at least one example of the 13th century.

In the 14th and 15th centuries, as we learn from the writings of Chaucer, Langland and others, there was in England a growing feeling of dislike and distrust for the rapacity and greedy extortions of the clergy, and evidence of this is to be found in the carvings on Misereres, where Priests and Monks are often caricatured as foxes preaching to a number of geese, or as animals preying upon smaller beasts ; sometimes the tables are turned, and the fox is shown as being hanged by the geese !

Until the time of Chaucer, we have but little knowledge about the domestic and every-day life of the English people, but he, in his Prologue to the "Canterbury Tales," gives us most valuable information about the religion, dress, manners and habits of his time, and the carvings on the Misereres of the 14th and 15th centuries often represent most vividly, and amusingly, domestic scenes of the period.

Hampshire possesses many Misereres. They are generally of a somewhat late type, although some are of early date. Miss Phipson gives us a list of about 68 Misereres in Winchester Cathedral, some of which she figures. There are to be found on them many caricatures of the clergy. One shows a Bishop in a fool's cap, with long ears, he holds a pastoral staff. Another has a fox running away with a goose, but most of them are valuable for the glimpse they give us of the dress and customs of our ancestors. The 14th and 15th centuries were times of such great extravagances in the dress of both men and women, that laws were made putting many restrictions on the wearing of costly furs and jewellery. Many examples of the fantastic modes of fashion of these times are shown in the carvings on Misereres. The typical head-dresses are very well depicted, also the long pointed shoes. The occupations of the people can be learned from the carvings. Women are spinning, playing on musical instruments of various kinds such as pipes, horns, harps and fiddles, while the men are hunting or indulging in acrobatic performances, of which they seem to have been very fond, or they are fighting with men or wild beasts. Cats and dogs as domestic pets occur in many of the carvings, while references to the superstitions of the time

may be found in the figures of demons, human-headed beasts and birds, mermen and mermaids.

Miss Phipson gives a list of 18 Miséreres in Winchester College Chapel. These are mostly 14th century, and are illustrative of the dress of that period. One curious carving shows a crippled man kneeling on one knee, he wears clogs instead of shoes and one of these is fastened to the knee on which he rests. Another very interesting group represents the parable of The Good Shepherd.

Mr. Robert Comont, of the Castle Tea House, Christchurch, Hants, has issued a very valuable series of local post cards, and he most kindly allows me to reproduce sixteen of them to illustrate this paper. They show Misereres and Choir Stalls from Christ Church Priory principally of the 15th and 16th centuries.

A great difference will be noticed in these, in their choice of subjects and fashions of dress, from those in Winchester Cathedral; although No. 1 shows a favourite object of all periods, that of a Fool or Zany. Nos. 2 and 3 depict the Devil, he is shown with hideous long nailed claws, and in No. 3 is reclining against a wool sack. As in all mediæval representations of the Evil Spirit he is of grotesque form, it was not till the middle of the 16th century that the idea occurred of showing him as a grand, majestic, but fallen angel, as represented by Marlowe in his Mephistopheles in "The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus," and later on, by Milton in his "Paradise Lost." In early times he is represented in carvings, morality plays, etc., as a silly, but on the whole somewhat jolly personage, who sets traps to catch souls, but is easily duped and cheated by those whom he seeks to destroy.

No. 4 shows an acrobat holding one of his feet in each hand, he is smiling in true professional style. No. 5 shows an enormous dog biting a man's foot. No. 6, a bat with grinning mouth and outspread wings, and No. 7 a goose bringing a round object to a burly looking man. Nos. 8 and 9 are interesting as showing workmen busy with their tools. No. 8 is a sturdy, bare-headed and bare-footed man with hammer and chisel, he probably repre-

sents the carver of the Miserere ; No. 9 is a man in flat cap and thick high boots with a hatchet in his hand with which he is evidently cutting down the wood for the carver. Similar representations of workmen engaged in carving the ornamentations of the object on which they occur may be found on Fonts, but most of these, I think, are of earlier date than the Christ Church Misereres. No. 10 shows a different fashion of male dress, it is probably of a somewhat late date. No. 11 reverts to the favourite subject of 14th century carvings, and shows a fox in clerical garb preaching from a pulpit. No. 12 is somewhat puzzling ; there is a two-handled vase between two disagreeable looking and very powerful male faces, one of these heads wears a Biretta, the features are wonderfully well marked, they are probably portraits and the carving may possibly refer to some controversy on sacramental teachings. No. 13 is a pretty bit of foliage carving. No. 14 is a most realistic portrait of Richard III. No. 15 represents a carving on the Choir Stalls of three faces under one hat, and on each side of them well defined heads, evidently portraits. No. 16 is of a panel also in the Choir Stalls, showing Catherine of Arragon with Cardinals Wolsey and Campeggio on each side of her.

A very amusing modern instance of the influence which "the topics of the day" have on decorated carvings occurs at Bakewell, Derbyshire. I am indebted for the notice of it to the Rev. C. T. Thornehill, formerly vicar there, he writes to me : "Some time during the eighties, during the incumbency of Archdeacon Balston, a partial restoration took place in Bakewell Church, and amongst other things several Miserere Stalls were placed in the central portion under the tower. It was just at the period when Mr. Jesse Collins' proposal of 'Three acres and a cow' for every labourer was before the country ; and one of the men employed on the carving of the new Stalls wishing to commemorate the fact, decorated a Miserere with a shield representing a cow in its lower portion, and three large double teeth as 'achers' in the upper ! An achievement which fortunately escaped the Archdeacon's notice, and resulted in the Miserere remaining in the Church to the present day !"



Addendum :

Referring to the coffin lid with the inscription in leonine verse, it may be interesting to note a brass plate with the following inscription formerly at Thatcham Church, Berkshire :—

“ Quisquis ades, bustumque vides, sta, perlege plora.
Judicii memor esto mei, tua nam venit hora,
Sum quod eris, fueramque quod es, tua posteriora
Commemorans miseris, memorans, pro me, precor, ora.”

Ashmole, in his “Antiquities of Berkshire,” gives the following free translation :—

“Whoer thou art stay, read, and drop a tear.
Think on my Judgment, and thy Hour as near ;
I was as you, like me so you shall be,
Then with a pious Wish O pray for me.”