

XXXVII. *The Old Tapestry in St. Mary's Hall at Coventry.*
By GEORGE SCHARF, *Jun. Esq. F.S.A.*

Read February 21, 1856.

I BEG to call attention to a very interesting monument still preserved at Coventry. It consists of a large piece of Tapestry, 30 feet long by 10 feet high, wrought at the close of the fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth century, and affording a singularly perfect example of the arts of design and weaving at that period. I am not aware that we possess many examples of tapestry before the sixteenth century; but specimens after the establishment of a manufactory at Mortlake, under Sir Francis Crane,^a seem to have become very numerous, chiefly, however, of Scripture-historical and allegorical compositions. The greater part of these are of the French school; although, in accordance with the wish of King Charles I., several sets of tapestries from Raphael's Cartoons, which are now at Hampton Court, were executed at that manufactory.

Before the seventeenth century, most of the tapestry used in England seems to have been Flemish, and much was wrought at *Arras*; hence the name with which we are so familiar in Shakspeare and most of the writers of the Elizabethan age, and the designation *Arazzi* in Italy. The devices of these tapestries were generally allegories combining love and chivalry; and of this class a very fine series is preserved at Hampton Court Palace, in the withdrawing room that leads out of Wolsey's Great Hall. The names of the personages are written in Latin above them; but the other legends, in white letters upon red, are in French. The costumes, however, are perfectly German. Many of the subjects are repetitions, so that they may possibly have all come from a manufactory in this country.

The celebrated tapestries of Nancy, now in Paris, were also allegorical, and are highly important for their art, costume, and historical associations.

The rarest class of subjects in this department of art is the strictly historical; and I am sure one instance of this kind connected with our own country, although not in England, will occur to the minds of all present—I mean that of the famous

^a The manufactory at Mortlake in Surrey was erected under James I. by Sir Francis Crane. Francis Cleyne of Rostock, a painter who had studied in Rome, was appointed by Charles I. to superintend the manufacture of hangings from Raphael's Cartoons, of which he had become possessed.—Passavant's *Life of Raphael*, vol. ii. pp. 252 and 275.

Bayeux Tapestry, wrought by Queen Matilda and her ladies to chronicle the Norman conquest of this country. It is still preserved at Bayeux, and was formerly employed to decorate the cathedral of that town on grand occasions. During the period of the French Revolution, it was carried about from town to town, and displayed as a means of exciting the people to the invasion of England. For a minute account of that valuable monument, and the historic information which it affords, I need only refer you to the memoir contributed by Dr. Bruce upon the Bayeux Tapestry, at a meeting of the Archæological Institute, and the beautiful volume which he has produced very recently.

The workmanship of the Bayeux Tapestry is particularly rude, and in that respect contrasts strikingly with the fabric of the tapestries at Hampton Court and in St. Mary's Hall at Coventry. Indeed, so rude is the production of Queen Matilda and her maidens, that it can only be compared to a little girl's sampler; and I believe few ladies would now award to it the unqualified designation of embroidery.

Still, it is one of our most important chronicles; and especially valuable from having the names of the individuals written against them; it is therefore historical. The subject of each compartment, also, is frequently inscribed on the border, in Latin.

The Tapestry at Coventry is an important specimen of art; and may be called historical, inasmuch as it represents a King and his court, every figure being undoubtedly a portrait, arranged in the same manner as Edward III. and his court in the old chapel of St. Stephen at Westminster. But, unfortunately, there is no writing to help identification, and therefore, in the absence of records, our explanation remains conjectural. For this reason I submit it to your notice, first, as a work of art—and so far of certain interest—and, secondly, as a problem, inviting your remarks and consideration upon the subject represented.

The ancient city of Coventry (the scene of Lady Godiva's celebrated exploit, and the story of Peeping Tom,) has always been distinguished for its textile productions. It was conspicuous during the Wars of the Roses for its steady adherence to the house of Lancaster, and seems to have been as much the favourite of Henry VI. as the venerable city of Shrewsbury appears to have afterwards become with Edward IV.

The guilds of Coventry were anciently much celebrated. They were four in number, not connected with particular trades, but partaking of the nature of the modern benefit societies. The names of the guilds were of the Holy Trinity, St. Mary, St. John, and St. Katharine.

They were afterwards united, and the more recent form of oath is preserved by Dugdale as follows :

“Ye shall be good and true to the Master of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, our Lady, St. John, and St. Katharine, and to all the brothers and sisters thereof.”

They assembled in a spacious hall to the south of St. Michael's church, called St. Mary's Hall, which is mentioned by name about the end of the reign of Edward III.

The present hall was commenced in 1394 and finished in 1414. In the year 1580 the inside was new painted and beautified.

It is remarkable that, though the constant designation of the united guilds was the *Trinity* guild, yet this hall has uniformly maintained its original appellation of St. Mary's Hall.

The hall, really an architectural study, has also a magnificent roof, with ten admirably carved figures of angels playing musical instruments. The inevitable darkness of the apartment is rendered still greater by a quantity of stained glass, of the deepest possible hues, displaying a very curious arrangement.

At Shrewsbury I had occasion to observe the filling-up of spaces of glass with paintings made to imitate a brick wall. At Coventry I found the prevailing pattern for filling up odd—and frequently very large—spaces to be a kind of patchwork of bright flat colours, not combined with the taste of old patchwork quilts, still seen in our country villages, but put together *anyhow*. Nor does this singular device possess the irregularity and variety of fragments of glass in a kaleidoscope : the Coventry pattern is made up, like the ancient polygonal walls, of odd-shaped pieces of plain, flat, stained glass.

Such gewgaws, it is but justice to the present corporation to say, were all perpetrated a long time back, when the side windows were filled with glass, under name of restoration, by Pemberton of Birmingham. At that time the fine old glass was taken out, on account of its ruined condition, and replaced with modern, wretchedly-executed, versions of the originals, partly copied from Dugdale, and inserted as substitutes. In refitting the windows the former arrangement of subjects does not seem to have been implicitly observed.

At the present time I believe a very earnest spirit of respect for the antiquities of the venerable city, and a desire to preserve in the best possible manner these vestiges of the olden time, prevail in the corporation of the city of Coventry, and that Mr. Alderman Eld is an especial promoter of these good feelings. Shrewsbury is a most venerable town, retaining many features of the sixteenth and

seventeenth century, but there is nothing so complete, so well kept, so unspoilt, as Ford's Almshouses and Bablake Schools at Coventry.

As a lover of the picturesque I regret to say that my sketchbooks, since 1850, contain records of many timber houses at Coventry that have since exchanged the gable front of wood and plaster for the rectangular brick and mortar face, brilliantly heightened with red and white. But these changes, although adding space to the inhabitants within, and externally indicative of manufacturing prosperity, cannot be observed without regret, and it is to be wondered at that the photographer has not hitherto set up the three legs and black veil in a city that would afford better subjects for his operations than any other within our shores.

St. Mary's Hall is a large square apartment, with a great window at the upper (north) end, towards the church. This window is, however, of a very remarkable proportion, being unusually short compared with the length and the curve of the arch of its upper part. By this means a large space of wall is left clear beneath it. On the outside it was ornamented by six niches and statues, and this space internally was filled exactly by the Tapestry I propose to describe to you. The architectural framework in the Tapestry so exactly corresponds with the mullions of the window above, that I fancy this to be an additional proof that it must have been wrought for the place. The local guilds, also, we shall see, are typified in the figures of certain Saints introduced, and it is the more to be regretted under these circumstances that documentary evidence should still be wanting of its origin.

The only entries in the guild accounts that can be referred to the Tapestry, are the two following; and for these I am indebted to Mr. Alderman Eld, of Coventry :—

1519. Item to two men, that take upon them to mend the cloth of aras, by advice of Mr. Mayor and his brethren . . . 16 shillings and 8 pence.

1605. Charge in the city accounts of 4*s.* 6*d.* for 6 ells of linen cloth to line the cloth of arras at St^e Mary's Hall.

I believe that these are all the notices that can be found relating to the history of the Tapestry, and beyond this we must depend upon internal evidence. The drawing that I have the honour of submitting to you is still in progress, and is the result of repeated visits to Coventry. It was begun with a desire to secure some careful record of so curious and frail a monument. The hall in which it hangs is freely open to the public, and is occasionally let out for the exhibition of various shows and performances. On my first visit to Coventry, six years ago, I

was horrified to see a phantasmagoria and fireworks on a small scale played off in front of this very hanging tapestry. A single spark would have destroyed the whole relic, for it is little better than tinder. I have, however, begged the present authorities to have it taken down and relined, and to have it in some way strained to prevent the lodgment of dust, and to ensure its better preservation. The central upper part was removed in Puritan times, and a figure of Justice, in a very different style, inserted instead; that portion in my drawing still remains uncoloured. The corners and some parts of the borders have also been pieced with other tapestry; and it is the more to be regretted, as I discovered, only on my last visit, that at each angle had been originally a small scroll with writing on it. The upper right-hand corner is the only one remaining perfect. The upper left-hand one is entirely wanting.

In the centre, over the more recent figure of Justice, still remains a Hebrew inscription, of which I have provided a transcript on a larger scale.

The writing on the books before the King and Queen, I had hoped would have been sufficiently legible, but from the angularity of the letters, caused perhaps by the working of the loom on so small a scale, there seems little chance of decipherment. The manufacture, and the peculiar mode of reducing the various shades of the draperies by perfectly upright lines, is identical with the specimens already referred to at Hampton Court. My friend Dr. Waagen, when last in England, was not able to visit Coventry; but he studied my drawing very carefully, and pronounced the original to be of Flemish workmanship, and relating to a German Emperor. The crown on the *prie-dieu*, before the principal male figure, he considered to be the imperial crown; but he was not aware of some minute circumstances that I discovered afterwards. In the border above and below, at the four points where the upright divisions continue the line of the mullions of the great window, is a large red rose, heraldically designed; and, in that respect, utterly at variance with the rest of the flowers in the border. Here we have a Lancastrian sign; but the costume and style of art are so evidently of a period subsequent to the marriage of Henry VII. and union of the houses of York and Lancaster, that it is difficult to account for the singleness of colour in the rose, which in the time of Henry VII. would have been red and white, as we see at Windsor, Cambridge, and Henry the Seventh's Chapel at Westminster. That the rose so heraldically drawn is not intended to connect itself with the rest of the border, has further proof in the introduction of a small rose in one spandril only, and that immediately over the crown of the principal figure. It has been an entirely red rose, thus favouring the ancient tradition that, although executed in

later times, it commemorates the court of the city's especial benefactor, King Henry VI. Some persons have supposed from the costume that Henry VII. is the monarch so represented; and, indeed, the Queen and her costume closely resemble Elizabeth of York on the tomb in Westminster Abbey; but then the colour of the rose rises in contradiction. Others have suggested, from the fact that the King wears a bonnet and the crown lies by his side, that it represents Prince Arthur, the eldest son of Henry VIII. and his wife Katharine of Arragon. They were married in 1501; but the figure in question, although beardless, is far from that of a youth. King Henry VI. is always represented beardless; Edward IV. I believe also. Moreover, there are no signs of the Prince of Wales, nor occurrence of the pomegranate, which is so characteristic a symbol of Aragon. The tree beside her can scarcely be so interpreted. The beardless Cardinal, designated Cardinal Beaufort, has milder features than are seen in his effigy in Winchester cathedral; but his prominent place, immediately next to the King, as one of the family, and not in an ecclesiastic capacity, tends in no small degree to strengthen the identity. The figure standing between the King and Cardinal is named the Good Duke Humphrey, and the lady nearest to the Queen the Duchess of Buckingham; these personages, I need hardly say, have no other claim beyond tradition for the appellation.^a

^a Mr. Blaauw has kindly called my attention to an instance of portraiture in hangings in the Will of Sir David Owen, published in the Sussex Collections, where mention is made of five pieces of hanging with imagery of Henry V., Henry VI., and his brothers:—

EXTRACT from the WILL of SIR DAVID OWEN. (From Sussex Archæological Collections, vol. vii.)

"A counterpoynte of verder with a great lyone in the middes of golde and silke; a trussyng bedde of black velvet and russett satin imbrawdred with wolfes and swaloes, wyth O and N of golde, with diverse other flowers inbrowdred, with a tester and curtens to the same; an other tressyng bedde of blak damaske and russett satin with a tester, curtens, and valaunce to the same; *fyve peceys of arrays made with imagery of King Henry Vth, Henry VIth, the Duke of Clarence, the Duke of Bedford, the Duke of Gloucester, with diverse other great men*; a great tester of a bedde with a selar to the same of arrays; with haffe the stuffe of householde, that is to say, pottes, pannes, disshes, spetes, cawdeyernes, cofers, and of all other thynges; a dossene of kyne, tenne great oxene for her wayne; alle which parselles afforlymyted I geve and bequethe to my wiffe to be lovyng unto my children and hers, and upon that condicōn that she lyff soole without mariage, and if she doe marye all my forsaid goodes to her before bequethed to be and remayne to my children betwixt her and me begoten. Item, I geve to my sonne Jasper Owen and to theires males of his body lawfully begoten all my landes and tenementes in the cytie of Coventrie, and in Watford, Frethynngstone, and Shotlanger, in the countie of Northampton, to the said Jasper and to theires males of his body lawfully begotten; and for lake," &c. &c.

Note.—Thomas Duke of Clarence, who was killed at Baugy in 1421; John Duke of Bedford, the Regent, who died in 1435; and Humphrey the good Duke of Gloucester, who died in 1446, were the second, third,

The shape of the crown should not escape observation ; it is arched, and ornamented with balls, crosses, and fleurs-de-lis. The four arches are decorated with architectural crockets, and support a ball and cross not larger than those upon the lower circlet. The arched crown is seen in our Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, and the seals of Edward the Confessor and our first Norman kings, but it does not appear on any of the Plantagenet monarchs until Henry VI., and then only, I believe, on painted glass. It does not appear, I think, on our coins till the reign of Henry VII. The arch of the crown in the Coventry Tapestry is, however, very peculiar ; it consists of a double curve like an ogee, and I only know one other example, which is to be found in the painted window of St. George's Chapel at Windsor, representing Edward IV. and V. although dating of the time of Henry VII.^a

The arches of the *imperial* crown were not, I believe, arranged, like ours, so as to intersect and form a cross ; nor do I remember that the fleur-de-lis was ever a part of its decoration.

The crown of Charlemagne, at Vienna, has merely a single arch across the circlet.

The crown of the Queen is in fact nothing more than a coronet decorated entirely with fleurs-de-lis, and smaller trefoils like the shamrock between them. A short veil hangs down at the back of her head, and, with the exception of the ermine lining to her sleeves, her dress differs little from that of her ladies.

The central compartment between the two groups already referred to pertains especially to the glorification of the Virgin Mary, to whom the hall itself was dedicated ; and the treatment of the subject is somewhat remarkable.

The Virgin, a full-length figure, stands with her hands joined in prayer. She wears a richly embroidered dress, like that of the Queen, displaying the well-known pine-apple pattern which became so prevalent in the early part of the sixteenth century. Over this extends a full blue mantle, fastened on the breast with a band and two clasps. Her hair is peculiarly long and dishevelled, such as would be more becoming to St. Mary Magdalene, and is never appropriated to the Virgin except by the older masters of Cologne, or Jan van Eyck and his

and fourth sons of Henry IV., and the arras may probably have been the property of the Queen, widow of Henry V. and so passed to her second husband, the testator's father. The curious arras now in the Guild Hall of Coventry, apparently of the later date of 1493, represents Henry VI. and the Duke of Gloucester. The bequests here remind us of Gremio's boast of his wealth in *Taming the Shrew*, II. 1.

" Thy hangings all of Tyrian tapestry,
In Cypress chests my arras counterpoint,
Valance of Venice gold in nedle-work."

^a See Carter.

scholars. It certainly never appears so in Italian art. The North Italian masters displayed it in full profusion, but not in the dishevelled condition adopted by the Germans.

The feet of the Virgin rest on the shoulders of an angel, who holds the crescent moon. Four angels in the air are also in the act of supporting the figure of the Virgin, and on either side six of the Apostles kneel, with hands placed in various attitudes of prayer. The drapery of these saints is remarkably well arranged, and, by the largeness of the folds, evinces an already advanced period of art.

One of the Apostles in brown mantle is singularly like a figure in Masaccio's fresco of the Tribute Money, at Florence. The flowers beneath the Virgin are not lilies, but small red flowers with long stalks. The angels have no nimbus, and are clothed in the long loose dress that first appeared in the fifteenth century. Their hair is long and divided in the centre, and not cut square as in Edward the Fourth's time. The figure of the Virgin is encircled with clouds which are bluish green; the space inclosed by them is red.

The larger compartments above, to the right and left, are occupied with groups of patron saints, the male on one side, and female on the other. The latter may be named in the following order, beginning from the centre over the Queen: St. Katharine, with the sword and wheel; St. Barbara, holding the book and palm-branch (the tower appears between them); St. Dorothy, with a basket of roses; St. Mary Magdalene, the only saint without a nimbus, holding the ointment vase; St. Margaret with the dragon; St. Agnes, with the lamb and palm-branch; St. Gertrude of Nivelles, in monastic habit, with a crozier and three white mice^{*}; St. Anne, with book and staff; and, finally, St. Apollonia, with a book, holding a tooth in a pair of pincers.

The figure of St. Gertrude had by some been named St. Modwena, who was an Irish saint, but became especially venerated in the midland counties, as the king built for her the monastery of Polesworth, in Warwickshire, where she became the instructress of his daughter Edith.

The nimbus round the heads of the female saints it may be remarked is composed of a single ring, whilst that of the male saints on the opposite side is a double ring.

The names of the saints on the left hand compartment, beginning from the centre over the King, are, St. John the Baptist, in red mantle, covering the hair-

^{*} For the identification of this saint I am indebted to the friendly aid of Mrs. Jameson, who has also told me of an instance where the saint is represented in a MS. illumination with the three mice running playfully up her crozier.

shirt, holding a book with the kneeling lamb with cross and banner on it; St. Matthias (or St. Jude, or St. Thomas) holding a lance; St. Paul with a sword; St. Adrian, in armour and cloak, standing on a lion, and holding a sword and anvil; St. Peter with a key; St. George holding a banner with red cross on it; St. Andrew resting on his transverse cross; St. Bartholomew with a short knife, or dagger; St. Simon with his saw; St. Thaddeus with a halbert.^a This saint is the only one in the whole series with a nimbus in the form of a solid circular plate seen in perspective. The heads of two other saints appear behind, without any distinctive attribute or especial character of countenance. One female head also appears behind the group on the other side.

What remains of the central upper compartment uncovered by the figure of Justice is a group of eight angels; four of them holding the instruments of the passion, namely, the crown of thorns, the spear and sponge and pincers, the pillar and whips, the cross and three nails. The remaining four above in the clouds are in attitudes of adoration. Behind the figure of Justice, judging from what now remains of a handsome throne and part of a richly embroidered mantle, may have been a seated figure of Christ in full robes, a subject often painted at this period.

Many suggest that it was a personification of the Holy Trinity; whatever it may have been, it certainly was something sufficiently offensive in representation to the zealots to induce them to take the trouble to substitute another subject with so much care. Had it been a representation of the Trinity, with the first person holding a crucifix, I do not think we should have had the Angels, with the instruments of the passion, but rather the four emblems of the Evangelists, as on the canopy of the tomb of the Black Prince at Canterbury, and various MS. illuminations.

The principal guilds of the city were represented, as we have seen, in the prominent figures of St. John, St. Katharine, and the Virgin Mary.

The architectural framework that divides the whole into six compartments is peculiar; it has very much of the character that we at present designate German. The pattern of the diaper behind the figures is remarkably elegant and well distributed. The armour, as seen on the figures of St. George and St. Adrian, marks a late period in the reign of Henry VII., if not actually belonging to that of his son and successor. The broad toes in these instances formed a violent contrast to the sharp points of Richard II.'s period. The drawing of the extremities is in many instances very faulty; St. John the Baptist has only four toes to each foot.

^a See Mrs. Jameson's *Sacred and Legendary Art*, p. 105.

Some of the heads, however, are remarkably fine, with much individuality of character, especially in the lower series. They were doubtless all portraits, and seem to have originally been very well coloured. At present the complexion of two or three only is well preserved, but in several instances the light of the eyeballs has turned white, which gives the face a very peculiar appearance, inasmuch as the ball now looks lighter than what we call the white of the eye.

It may be interesting to note that the fabric of the tapestry is loom, and not needlework. The pattern appears on both sides.* The loops or stitches are arranged horizontally, but the tints and shading off of the drapery are disposed in vertical lines, the darker shades widening downwards.

This tapestry, owing to long neglect, has become sadly distorted and coated with dust, but fortunately it is neither moth-eaten nor injured by damp; for the latter advantage it is indebted to the fine high and dry situation of the hall itself.

The room, however, is unfortunately so dark that it is generally impossible to discern even the mere subject of the tapestry. The best time I have found to be in the morning, whilst the sun is in the south-east, when all the details and colours can be made out most completely. I hope that by calling your attention to this interesting monument I may induce a few of my hearers to visit Coventry, and to examine the relic for themselves. At present, however, my earnest wish is to obtain remarks and information that shall tend to place the identification of the portraits upon a somewhat more certain and satisfactory foundation.

I have only of late become aware that Mr. John Carter made a careful drawing of this tapestry, which is in the possession of Mr. Nichols, of Parliament Street; but I have never seen it. Had I been aware that the hand of so distinguished an artist and antiquary as Mr. Carter had been exercised in its behalf I should not have devoted so much time and anxiety to the subject. My sole motive has been to rescue from oblivion and afford some record of this truly national monument.

I have since received the favour of a communication from Mr. John Gough Nichols, F.S.A., relating to the subject of my investigations, which, from its importance, I desire to transcribe verbatim.

* This I made an especial point of verifying since the reading of my paper, when Mr. Ashpitel laid much importance on this question of the fabric. I had before only judged by the appearance of the border at the edges. A hole worn in the stuff nearer the centre, has since enabled me more to determine the question.

Read March 13, 1856.

25, Parliament Street, February 29, 1856.

MY DEAR SIR,

Being aware that many interesting extracts from the Municipal Records of Coventry, and other collections relative to the history of that city, had been left in manuscript by the late Mr. William Reader, I have requested his son to search them, with the view of discovering any particulars that might throw light upon the history of the Tapestry which has recently engaged so much of your attention. I beg to communicate the result, chiefly consisting of facts in the history of the city, which lend a certain amount of historical illustration to the subject, and, though they do not supply direct information regarding the Tapestry, will assist in forming the most probable conjectures respecting it.

And first with regard to the guilds in which the citizens were associated. The prior and monks of Coventry received licence from King Henry III. to establish a merchants' guild in the year 1267. But in the middle of the fourteenth century this guild expanded into several branches or distinct companies. The guild under the patronage of the Virgin was founded in 1340, that of St. John the Baptist in 1342, that of St. Katharine in 1343, that of Corpus Christi in 1348, and that of the Holy Trinity in 1364. During the same period the city at large received a new constitution, and the first mayor was appointed in 1345. At the close of the same century four of the five guilds coalesced into one; and during the fifteenth century there were but two, that of the Holy Trinity, the Blessed Mary, St. John, and St. Katharine, and that of Corpus Christi. These two were united in 1534. When the four guilds coalesced they resolved to build a new hall on the site of that occupied by the guild of St. Mary. This, therefore, was pulled down, excepting its porch and exterior kitchens, and the present magnificent structure was completed in 1414. An intimate association was always maintained between the general corporation of the city and the guilds, and the mayor of the city and the master of the guilds were accustomed on state occasions to sit together in a large and magnificently carved double chair. Of the existing half of this chair engravings have been published in John Carter's *Architecture and Painting*, and in Mr. Henry Shaw's *Ancient Furniture*. Its right-hand side is richly carved, but the left side is plain and rough, the corresponding half having doubtless been carved on the left side. In the same chair it is traditionally related that King Henry VI. and his Queen were seated when they were admitted brother and sister of the guild in the year 1450.

Henry VI. is recorded to have been a frequent visitor of Coventry. He was there in 1436, when he kept Christmas at Kenilworth Castle. In the year 1450 he was lodged in the priory at Coventry, and on St. Michael's day came thence to attend high mass in St. Michael's church, the Bishop of Winchester officiating. On this occasion he gave the church a gown of gold tissue, and in that gown he has been supposed to be represented in the Tapestry. Again, on Whitsunday, 1456, King Henry and Queen Margaret, wearing their crowns, walked in procession from Coventry priory into St. Michael's churchyard, round by the steeple, and thence to the cathedral gate which opened into Trinity churchyard. The Bishop of Hereford performed high mass in the cathedral. The prior and convent of Coventry, with the dean and members of the King's Chapel, were present. The Duke of Buckingham followed next the King on his right hand. The Lord Beaumont bore the King's train, the Earl of Stafford his cap of state, Sir John Tunstall his sword. The Queen's train was borne by the Duchess of Buckingham. She was also attended by the Lady Rivers, by the Lady Shrewsbury the elder, and the Lady Shrewsbury the younger.

So particular an account having been preserved of this visit of Henry VI. and of the names of the nobility who formed his retinue, it is not surprising to find that the two groupes on the Tapestry, representing royal personages and their attendants, have been supposed to commemorate it. Accordingly, I find in Mr. Reader's manuscript the principal male figures in the Tapestry are assigned to King Henry VI., the Duke of Gloucester, Cardinal Beaufort, and the Viscount Beaumont; and those on the ladies' side to Queen Margaret, the Duchess of Buckingham, &c.

But it appears that King Henry VII. and his Queen were also admitted as brother and sister of Trinity Guild, in the year 1499, and this date certainly agrees better with the fashion of the costume in the Tapestry. This opinion I find is adopted in the recently published Number of the *Archæological Journal*.^a

In this case, supposing the crowned figures are Henry VII. and Elizabeth of York, the Cardinal may have been intended for Cardinal Morton.

I think so far as this we may be assured, that the intention was to represent certain courtly personages who had condescended to enter the fraternity of the guild at Coventry, but how far individual portraiture was attempted it is not easy to determine. Possibly the design was rather to personify the whole series of distinguished members that had been enrolled in the guild than those which were living at any one time, after the plan which was pursued in the prints of

^a December, 1855, p. 417.

the Oxford Almanacs at the beginning of the last century. In that case, however, the artist might have introduced more than one king, for the guild of Coventry had enrolled among its members all the Lancastrian monarchs—Henry IV., Henry V. when still Prince of Wales, Henry VI., and Henry VII., as well as Prince Edward, afterwards King Edward V. who was admitted at the age of seven, in the year 1478. Among the other royal and noble members were John of Ghent, King of Castile and Leon, and his wife Constance; John Duke of Bedford; Henry Earl of Warwick, and his wife Cecily; Sir John Beauchamp, &c. &c. but no perfect list appears to be preserved.

At the neighbouring town of Stratford-upon-Avon there also was a guild, which was honoured in like manner by the association of many persons of high rank, as will be found in Fisher's *Antiquities of Stratford-upon-Avon*. In 1477 the King's brother George Duke of Clarence and his wife Isabella, together with Edward Earl of Warwick their son, and Margaret their daughter, were received into the fraternity of the guild of the Holy Cross at Stratford-upon-Avon, and thereupon paid for their fine five marks.

Mr. Reader's manuscripts do not contain any other extracts from the city records at Coventry relative to the tapestry than the two which have already been supplied to you. The first in 1519:

"Item, to ij men that take upon them to mende the cloth of arras, by advice of Mr. Meir and his bredren, xxvj s. viij d."

The second in 1605:

"Item, for vj ells of linen clothe, to line the cloth of arras at St. Mary hall, iiij s. vj d."

With regard to the first of these entries it has been remarked that the year 1519 was an early date for the arras to require repair, supposing it to have been made after Henry VII. became a member of the guild in 1499. Still, we cannot tell to what amount of wear and rough usage it had then been subjected during a period of eighteen years or more, at a time when the hall was frequently thronged by busy multitudes; and the circumstance of no earlier entry of the kind having been found is perhaps in favour of our assigning its manufacture to a date as near the commencement of the sixteenth century as may be, in the absence of positive historical evidence.

It would have given me pleasure had the result of my inquiries elicited more direct and satisfactory information than the foregoing in illustration of the subject of your very beautiful drawing; but some of the particulars I have stated appear

to me to be deserving of attention, and, if you agree in that view, you will do me the favour to communicate them to the Society of Antiquaries.

I am, dear Sir, yours very sincerely,

JOHN GOUGH NICHOLS.

To George Scharf, Esq. F.S.A.

These notes on the guilds are especially interesting, and I learn with pleasure the existence of one guild, the Corpus Christi, that I did not know of before, and one which strongly favours my interpretation of the upper central compartment of the Tapestry in its original condition.

The Corpus Christi guild would naturally be personified by a seated figure of Christ, as in the central compartment of the chapter-house at Westminster, holding up the pierced hands. A scarlet robe, embroidered with gold borders, fastened by a gilt fibula on the centre of the breast. The wounds, also, in the side and feet clearly visible. The subject at Westminster was surrounded by angels holding the instruments of the Passion.

The most perfect development, it may be observed, of this representation occurs in the works of Raphael, especially the central figure of his celebrated fresco called the "Disputa," or Theology, in the Stanze of the Vatican; in the first fresco Raphael ever painted, still preserved in San Severo, at Perugia; and also in the principal figure of the design engraved by Marc Antonio, generally known as the "Five Saints."

The Corpus Christi guild was founded in Coventry a quarter of a century (twenty-six years) after the canonization of the great promoter of the festival, St. Thomas Aquinas. The guild of the Holy Trinity was not founded till twenty-one years later. That of St. Mary had been established before all. The founders of Corpus College at Cambridge were brethren of the guilds of Corpus Christi and of the Virgin Mary, and these two guilds were probably often united. With respect to the circumstance of payment for mending the Tapestry at so early a date after its manufacture, no importance can be attached to such a notice as an argument that it had long existed, as accidental injury might very easily occur to such frail materials.

The Tapestry appears singularly wanting in inscriptions or lettering, when compared with other known examples of the period; and it is remarkable that no armorial bearings, crests, or devices, are introduced. No shields are to be seen, and even the *prie-dieu* is left without heraldic blazonry.

I call to mind the celebrated altar-piece by King René of Anjou, at Aix,

where he is represented kneeling in like manner at a *prie-dieu*.^a He also wears a close cap on his head, whilst the crown is deposited beside the book before him. His queen, Isabella, the mother of Margaret of Anjou, as in the representation of her daughter at Coventry, wears the coronet on her head.

Another parallel will be found in the curious pictures at Hampton Court Palace,^b which were the wings of an altar-piece containing portraits of James IV. and Margaret of Scotland. In this, as in the René picture, armorial bearings are conspicuous.

In all, not omitting the royal portraits on the east wall of St. Stephen's Chapel, the King and attendants occupy the north or left-hand side, the Queen and females the south.

The names of the personages given in the procession of 1456 might be very serviceable towards naming the various characters. I cannot think that Henry VII. is the monarch represented. Being wrought at the conclusion of his reign, some of his family would at least be introduced, as in the east-wall paintings of St. Stephen's family. Three figures only of the royal party are in attitudes of prayer; none but the King, Queen, and Cardinal kneel. The rest stand round at respectful distance.

Before concluding, I beg to add two or three words upon the merits of this tapestry, in comparison with other known examples. I have gone through the magnificent works of Jubinal^c and Du Sommerard with the express object of finding either parallels or some peculiarities of style which might throw further light on the monument at Coventry.

To judge from these publications, there is a great similarity between the style, drawing, and treatment of the Coventry Tapestry and two pieces of Flemish Tapestry, of the close of the 15th century, now in the Louvre. They are given in full colours by Du Sommerard (Album, 3^{me} série, plates xxiv. and xxv. chap. 19). The shadows on the draperies are produced by the same vertical lines of colour as at Coventry—the head-dresses are in many cases perfectly identical; many

^a D'Agincourt, Peinture, pl. 166. Œuvres du Roi René, avec une biographie, par le Comte de Quatrebarbes, &c. Paris, 4to. 1849.

^b Formerly in Kensington Palace. J. D. Passavant, Kunstreise durch England. Frankfurt, 1833, p. 49, where the picture is attributed to Hugo van der Goes. Waagen, Treasures of Art, Lond. 1854, vol. ii. p. 366, assigns it to Mabuse. The wings have been engraved in Shaw's Dresses and Decorations, and in John Pinkerton's Iconographia Scotica. 8vo. 1797. Compare also Mrs. Jameson's Public Galleries, vol. ii. p. 411; and Kugler's Handbook of German Painting, English edition, 1846, p. 80, note.

^c Jubinal, Anciennes Tapisseries, oblong folio. Paris, 1838. A superb coloured copy is in the Library of the British Museum.

of the countenances and mode of drawing the heads are precisely the same. The architectural framework also affords considerable resemblance. In the Louvre Tapestry the figures are more crowded and heaped one above the other, and a greater number are kneeling. The subjects are said to be Saul and David, and David and Abigail.

The "Tapisseries de Nancy," alluded to at the commencement of this paper (Du Sommerard, série 3^me, plate xxxv. ; and Jubinal, plate i.), are of an earlier period ; the men's head-dresses generally partake more of the turban with the hanging end, but some are very similar. The draperies are more formal, and wanting in pliant folds.

The "Tapisseries de Dijon" display all the peculiarities in costume of the reign of Henry VIII.

The most striking resemblance in all respects to the Coventry Tapestry appears to be in the "Tapisserie du Château d'Haroué," published in full colours by Jubinal. The subject is a hawking party, with a numerous company of ladies and gentlemen. It is considered by Jubinal as of the commencement of the sixteenth century, nearly coeval with that of Dijon and the Tournament Tapestry of Valenciennes, A.D. 1500. The Château d'Haroué in the département de la Meurthe, some leagues from Nancy, belonged to the Princes de Beauveau.

The little labels in the corners of the Coventry Tapestry, which I have already had occasion to notice, are very similar to the curved labels with the motto **PAR** that are strewn over the ground of one of the Tapestries of Beauvais (plate iv. of Jubinal). The architecture contained in the preceding plate of the same series displays a considerable amount of German characteristics, united with the flowing curved forms, denominated, I believe, flamboyant.

The contrasts of colour, yellow lights shaded with blue, and red shaded with a deeper tint of the same colour, are strikingly seen in the Hampton Court Tapestry mentioned at the beginning of this paper ; but the Coventry specimen has suffered most in its colours from dirt and in the drawing of the features by ill-treatment and unequal straining. Some of the countenances have, by this means, become sadly distorted. I trust that these attempts to make a rare specimen of art better known may have the effect of contributing towards some means for securing its future preservation, and that it may be more generally recognised as one of our most curious national monuments of the middle ages.

GEORGE SCHARF, JUN.