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THIRTEENTH CENTURY WALL-PAINTING AT UPCHURCH.

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IN the course of some repairs to the church in 1839 a remarkable painting was discovered on the wall of the south aisle of the nave at Upchurch. The work was again plastered over, to be re-discovered when the church was under restoration in 1875. The design was then carefully copied, and plates from the drawing are given in *Archæologia Cantiana* (Vol. XI., page 42), accompanied by some illustrative notes by the late Canon Scott Robertson. These plates are now reproduced, together with an attempt to elucidate the subject of the painting. Canon Robertson describes the figures as follows: "High up, beneath the wall-plate of the south wall, there is a long series of figures, boldly sketched with broad black outlines, but very sparingly coloured. These figures form six distinct scenes, and extend along the whole wall, between the south door and the arch of the south chancel. The space thus occupied by the painting is about 17 feet long by 4 feet wide. The figures vary from 2 feet 9 inches to 3 feet in height."

The painting has been mutilated for the purpose of inserting a Decorated window,* which, as Canon Robertson pointed out, suggests the Early English date of the work, and that this series of painted figures adorned the south aisle of the fabric in the thirteenth century. The drawing was submitted to Mr. J. G. Waller, a good authority on wall-

* The date of this window is accurately fixed by another of like design, and evidently inserted at the same time, in the wall to the westward. Over the apex of this window a stone bears the date CCCC (1800), a rare example of an early dated window.

paintings, and he expressed his opinion that the subject was of unusual interest, and gave his description of the painting as it apparently read. Mr. Waller added that the Bishop, the important person in these scenes, ought to be nimbed, and that he had no doubt of being able to find out the subject, but that it would require some research. I am not aware whether Mr. Waller's attention was again called to the matter, but it does not appear that any further attempt at explanation was made.

An Upchurch will, proved in the Archdeacon's Court and preserved in the Registry of the Probate Office at Canterbury, gave a clue to the interpretation of the legend.

The will of Peter Danyell, made in 1478, mentions the light of *St. Sperablis* in this church. No saint answers to this name in the Calendar, but just as the painting itself had probably been covered over and hidden when the church was remodelled at the beginning of the fourteenth century, so the name of the saint commemorated seems to have fallen into like oblivion. I think a careful examination of the painting will prove that the Upchurch testator's unknown saint was none other than St. Spiridon (or Spiridion), bishop of Trimithus in Cyprus in the fourth century: a great Eastern saint, but not one whom we should have expected to find in this place.

The following short account is taken from Messrs. Smith and Wace's *Dictionary of Christian Biography**:—

“Spiridon (Spyridon, Spyridion, Spiridion), Bishop of Trimithus in Cyprus, one of the most popularly celebrated of the Bishops attending the Council of Nicæa, although his name is not found in the list of signatures. He was the centre of many legendary stories which Socrates tells us he heard from his fellow islanders, one or two of which he has preserved (*Socr. H. E.*, i. 12). Spiridon was a married man, with at least one daughter, named Irene. He was a sheep-farmer, and continued to exercise his calling after, for his many virtues, he had been called to the episcopate.

* Vol. iv., pp. 725, 726, ed. 1887.

"Spiridon is mentioned by Athanasius as among the orthodox Bishops at the Council of Sardica (Athanas., *Apol.* ii., p. 768). According to Dean Stanley his body, which had been buried in his native land, was removed to Constantinople, whence, on the taking of the city by the Turks, it was again transmitted to Corfu, where it is annually carried in procession round the capital as the patron saint of the Ionian Islands (Stanley, *Eastern Church*, p. 126).

"Spiridon is commemorated in the Latin church on December the 14th, and in the Greek on December the 12th."

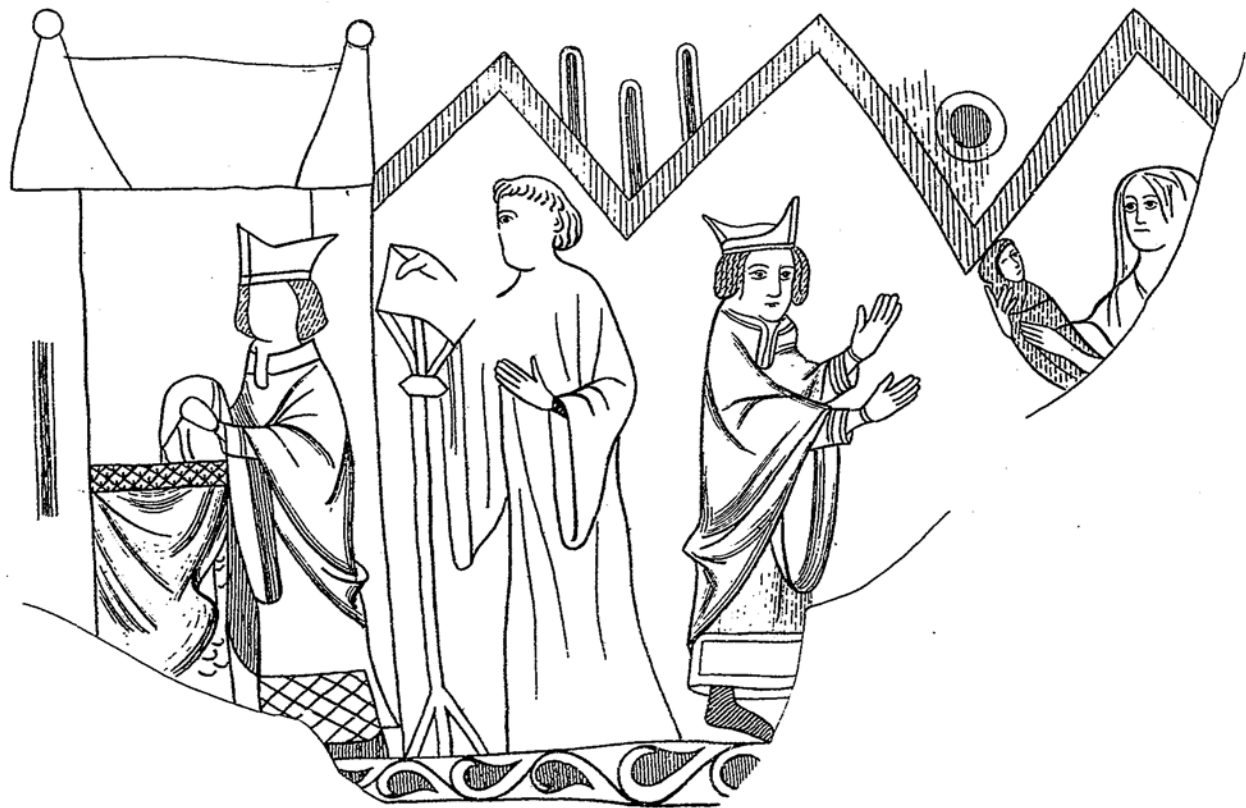
To this we may add that the Saint's miraculous powers gained him the name of "Thaumaturgus," and the devotion of his flock that of "Our Father," and that he is spoken of as a Confessor under the Emperor Maximian.

Legendary stories of St. Spiridon are related by Sozomen and Socrates in their continuations of the ecclesiastical history of Eusebius, but none of these are depicted in the wall-painting. Our Upchurch draughtsman apparently followed another stream of tradition. His inspiration is to be found in the compilation of Simeon Metaphrastes. This writer, born in the tenth century at Constantinople, was chief secretary of the Emperor Leo and master of the Palace. By order of the Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus he made a collection of lives of saints. Of these the principal lives have been inserted in Greek and Latin in the Acts of the Bollandists, and with Latin translations in the collections of Lippoman and Surius.

From the work of Surius, a Carthusian monk of Cologne, published at that place in 1581, and entitled *De Probatis Sanctorum Historiis*, I have translated those portions of the legend of St. Spiridon which the wall-paintings illustrate, passages to which the scenes more immediately refer being in italics. Surius, it should be added, expressly quotes the authority of Simeon Metaphrastes.*

Turning to the plates, we see what is intended for a rude representation of a church, with a Bishop (A) at the altar, and

* The heading runs thus: "Vita et certamina Sancti Patris Nostri Spiridonis, archiepiscopi Trimmythuntis, authore Simeone Metaphraste," etc.



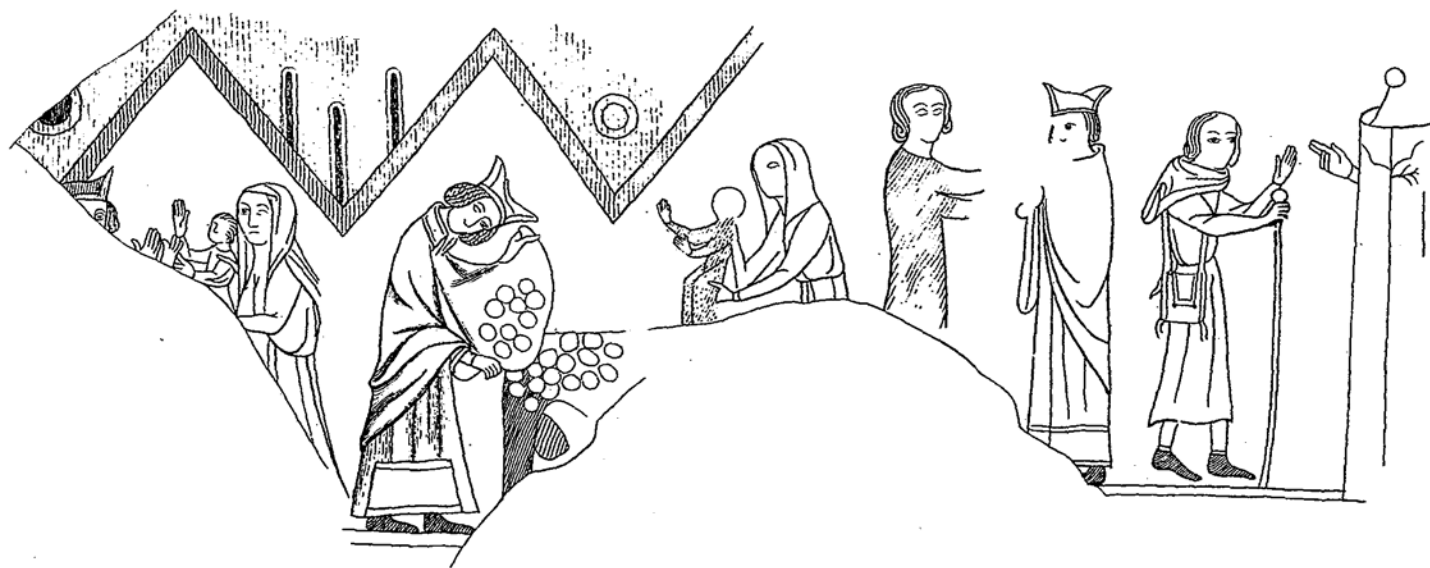
A

B.

C.

D.

EASTERN PORTION OF WALL PAINTING IN UPCHURCH CHURCH.



E.

F.

G.

H.

I.

K.

L.

M.

MIDDLE AND WESTERN PORTIONS OF WALL PAINTING IN THE SOUTH AISLE OF UPCHURCH CHURCH.

a Deacon (B) at the lectern. The legend offers the following elucidation of the scene:—

In the island there is a certain town called Erythra, not far from the chief city Constantia, for it does not exceed the distance of thirty stadia. The great Spiridon, having come thither for some purpose, enters the church to pray, and bids a certain Deacon, of the number of those at that place, to offer up a short supplication. For he was wearied by his journey, which was long, especially as it was summer-time, and the great heat fatigued him. But the Deacon was so slow, and of set purpose from self-conceit prolonged his prayers, to gain therefrom, as would seem, empty glory for himself. Regarding him sternly, he who was otherwise of most gentle disposition said in rebuke, "Be silent." *Straightway the Deacon, as though tongue-tied, and deprived of speech, became dumb, the course of the prayer which was being intoned by him being suddenly cut short.* But when the Saint had supplied what was wanting, the Deacon fell at his feet—miserable, who a little before had been lofty in his own eyes; dumb, who before overflowed with words, and took delight in ill-timed delay. Fear fell upon those inhabitants of the village who were present, and the report caused those who were absent to assemble, and numbers came in a continued stream, impelled not only by admiration of the Saint, but also by pity for the sufferer, especially his relations and friends, who also implored that generous spirit to pardon him who was condemned to dumbness and loosen his bond. See what that man of perfect and charming virtue does. Being constrained by their prayers that he should relent, although the Deacon still needed chastisement (for this, too, he saw by the Spirit), he wisely divides the penalty, permitting him indeed to use his tongue for all kinds of speech, yet not altogether freely, and not clear and resonant as before, but blunt and weak, stammering and stuttering, teaching him no more to take conceit in his tongue, and not to boast himself about words, when it is not becoming for a good man to boast even of deeds.

The Bishop is next seen with hands upraised (c), and a woman (n) is holding up to him a dead child. In the next scene* (E and F) the Bishop has restored the child to life.

* The painting at this place has been mutilated by the insertion of the Decorated window, but it is probable that the space between the figures D and E was originally occupied by an Early English lancet window, as it is unlikely that a third figure intervened between D and E.

The writer thus records this miracle :—

But our discourse must retain the memory of other miracles, adorned with the joyous flower of graces, and breathing forth great profit with truth. The Saint, leaving his palace, is hospitably entertained by a certain lover of Christ. A foreign woman, unskilled in the Greek tongue, draws near, *bearing her dead son in her hands*, and lays him at the Saint's feet; moreover, she fell on her face weeping piteously, and, addressing to the bystanders words unintelligible by reason of her strange tongue, spake with her tears alone, shewing how she wept for her son, and besought the Bishop to raise him up. The compassionate heart of the Saint is distracted at this sight, and is divided between forbearance and pity for the woman. For when he considered her grief and the warmth of her love, he was induced to attempt a miracle, and pray to God that the child should be restored to life. But regarding on the other hand the boldness of his prayer, being a modest and diffident man, of pious and cautious heart, he shrank back and hesitated, thinking the attempt an impudent one. *Wherefore he determined to take counsel of one of those with him, by name Artemidorus*, a Deacon at that time, a man diligent in the exercise of all things pertaining to virtue. The Saint then asked him what he should do. He answered, what was entirely fitting for the one to say and the other to hear, "Why, O father, hast thou asked the question? What else can be done, especially by you, than to call upon Christ, the giver of life, who has already in many cases evidently heard your prayers? Lest otherwise, the Emperor having been made whole at your hands, the poor and lowly shall be judged to be despised." The Bishop obeys that most excellent advice, and with heart inflamed with pity, eyes full of tears, knees bent to earth and watering it with his weeping, cries full eagerly and piteously, beseeching the good Christ of his mercy to give the child back alive to the wretched woman, and in accordance with Holy Scripture to make a mother glad for her son. He, then, who by the hands of Elisha and Elijah breathed spirit into the son of the woman of Sarepta and the Shuamite's son, and bestowed life upon them, in like manner heard the prayer of Spiridon, *and the boy who lay dead was seen crying before the eyes of his mother*. Tears of joy flowed from my own eyes. And no less what remains to be told affected my mind when called to memory. Do ye, too, give ear. When the mother saw her dearest child alive (hidden are Thy judgments, O Christ!), unable to endure the excess

of joy, she fell to the ground and expired. For lo! not only may mortal grief be excessive, but we know that joy, too, overleaps the bounds. Ye too, I well know, are affected, being turned from joy to grief. For men are by nature pitiful. But the great Spiridon is near who shall change your sorrow into joy. *Again he takes counsel of Artemidorus*, and the modest man is prevailed upon to give the mother to the son. Looking up to heaven, with mind intently fixed upon the Lord who dwells therein, and praying to Him who breathes life into the dead, and transforms and changes all things by His will alone, he says to her who lay on the ground: "*Arise and stand upon thy feet.*" *But she on a sudden, as one whom sleep rather than death had overcome, arose, and standing before him received her child into her arms. The child, as we have said, was alive and leaped in his mother's arms.* The great Saint was unwilling, on account, as I said, of his extraordinary modesty, that these things should be declared abroad. Of a surety he imposed silence on Artemidorus and on the woman by him. But Artemidorus, after the Saint's death, thinking it a shameful thing that pious men should be defrauded of so beautiful a story, not to say so great a miracle, discloses it to the ears of the faithful.

Omitting the figure at α , which illustrates an independent legend, and which we shall deal with presently, it will be seen that the figures π , ι , and κ also belong to the above story. It was a puzzle to account for the apparent repetition of the mother and child (π), but this of course represents the mother's restoration to life. The figures ι and κ would seem to be the Saint taking counsel of Artemidorus, though it must be confessed that the figure ι , if correctly delineated, hardly appears to represent a deacon.

The next scene (α) shews us the Bishop emptying certain circular objects out of his chasuble, of which we shall find the interpretation in the following account:—

[After relating a story of a rich man, who in a time of scarcity had refused to give corn to a sufferer, and whom the Saint punished by causing a violent tempest and rain to flood his barns and scatter his store, the legend continues:—]

But another husbandman, a friend of the Saint, being sore pressed by hunger, also had recourse to that penurious rich man, who still possessed many other barns full of corn, thinking that his

former misfortune had taught him a salutary lesson. But it seemed, although he had lost his corn, he had in no wise got rid of his miserly habits or cruelty, and was no whit better than before. Now, although the husbandman promised to return what he should receive with increase in summer, the rich man had only made his former promises in order to feed fools with hope. "Without money," he said, "you shall not have one grain, no, not the shadow of a grain." The poor man in despair follows the example of his predecessor, and betakes himself to Spiridon as to a common treasure-house, tells him what he has suffered, and what answer the rich man had given him. But the Saint, having administered sufficient consolation, sends him home. Nor did his pity extend to words alone. Next day the great Prelate himself came to the poor man, *carrying with him certain gold coins of no light weight*. What that gold was and how it had been found by the Saint the story will forthwith disclose. The great Spiridon placed the gold in the poor man's hands, saying: "Take this, and having deposited so acceptable a pledge with the rich man, receive from him what you require." Joyfully he took the gold and made all speed to his wealthy neighbour. The latter seeing what he bore in his hands, just now so harsh and implacable, with ears deaf to prayers, all of a sudden is transformed to the sight and becomes complaisant and kind. Having received the money, he bestows such a quantity of corn that the other not only filled his own house, but had enough left to sow his fields. What he sowed produced such abundant increase that he paid his debt to the lender, received from him the gold which had been given in pledge, and gratefully restored the same to the Saint. Thus the poor man paid his debt. Our story has now its own debt to discharge, shewing, as was promised, what that gold was at first and whence it had been taken. When the Saint had received what he had given, "Come, my brother," he says, "and let us together make restoration to Him who has so kindly lent." So saying, and taking the gold, he leads the way to a certain garden which used to supply the great Saint's hunger with some scanty pot-herbs. Standing on the summit of the bank, and touching the hedge, he lifted his eyes to heaven. "My Lord Jesus Christ," he said, in the presence and hearing of the other, "who by Thy will alone dost create and transform all things, who of old didst turn Moses's rod into a serpent before the eyes of the king of Egypt, as formerly Thou hast changed this gold from a living being into this form, grant now that it be restored to that shape in which it was at

first, that this man, too, may know that Thou carest for Thine own, and may learn from experience what is in Holy Scripture, that whatever God wills He has performed all." Having thus prayed (who, O Lord, shall declare the greatness of Thy wonders?) the gold became a serpent, breathing and crawling, and moved and twined about the fence from which it had been first taken by the Saint's hands and so marvellously changed into that gold. When the husbandman beheld this portent, beyond all human thought, seized with trembling he fell upon his face, scattering dust upon his head, tears flowing from his eyes, as one unworthy not only of so great a gift and grace, but unworthy of the sight alone, or even of the hearing. But the Saint raises him from the ground and gives strength both to his mind and body. The serpent in the meantime passing through the hedge entered the hole from which he came at first—a miracle altogether beyond the necessity of amplification by discourse, for it sufficiently shews of itself what it is, and Nature having her own superiority has no need whatever of Art.

The last scene represents a traveller (L), with wallet and staff, receiving the benediction of the Bishop (M) from the door of a church. The building is very rudely indicated, but that a church is intended is shewn by comparison with the first picture in the series (A), which is clearly meant for a church.*

Finally, the legend relates how, after the Saint's death, one who had an ardent devotion for St. Spiridon, and was accustomed to make a pilgrimage to his shrine on his feast day, was once accorded a manifestation of the Saint's visible presence, who accompanied him on his homeward journey, warding off an impending storm until he had reached his own roof, and then proceeds as follows:—

The feast day of the great Spiridon was being celebrated, but this man was prevented from coming to the place—a grave misfortune as it seemed to him—and he asked that he should not be deprived of his accustomed visit and grace. What was the result? His prayers were not yet ended, when he seemed in a vision to go

* Canon Robertson, following Mr. Waller, supposed this scene to represent an anchorite giving the benediction from his cell, and he founds an inference on this supposition as to the high level of the window of the recluse's cell (*Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. XI., p. 39).

to the church, and at the same time perceived the presence of the Saint, and shared as before in the bright light and rapture. The Saint appeared to him to enter the church, and having prayed, to have remained with him through the whole of his ecstasy. *And when the Saint had given his benediction to all present he at length retired.*

With regard to the absence of the nimbus from the head of St. Spiridon, we may remark that it is not invariably found in thirteenth-century representations of saints. In the church of All Saints, Frindsbury, by Rochester, the figure of St. Edmund of Abingdon, Archbishop of Canterbury, identified by his name S. EADMU[ND] painted above, has no nimbus. Mr. St. John Hope dates this figure from 1256.

It would not be easy to account for the commemoration of the wonder-working Eastern Saint in so unexpected a quarter, but we may conjecture that, directly or indirectly, the Crusades brought his fame and cult to our shores. Possibly an Upchurch shipmaster in peril in the Levant may have attributed his delivery to the intercession of St. Spiridon, and caused his legend to be depicted on the wall of the Kentish church.