Christopher Whall, Artist-Craftsman

WHENEVER a fresh expression of beauty disturbs the drab routine of a commercialized art you may be sure that an ardent spirit is adventuring in the dusty pathways of the stupid; and if you know the perils of that mighty region, you'll be interested in the final outcome of the adventure.

The death of the venerable English master craftsman, Christopher Whall, late last year, marks the finish of just such a worthy course and recalls the victories that crown its many good fights. He was a gentle, friendly, great-hearted man, in spirit very like the knightly crusaders and wise friendly saints who feature his own windows in silver and jewels.

His education as an artist was sound and orthodox, for the influence of Sir Frederick Leighton and the heavy tradition of the period naturally left their mark upon him when he graduated from the Royal Academy Schools. Later, as he worked and studied in Italy, he came to feel the truth of Ruskin's contention that beauty and use are closely allied and that enlightened workmanship is a noble ally of the highest expressions in art. This may have been accepted by the "elect" then as it is now —but its effect upon the growing industrialism of the eighteen-seventies was not more pronounced than is its influence upon the powerful urge toward quantity production today. With a few exceptions, like the splendidly isolated work-shop of William Morris, stained glass shops were smooth-running factories, where skilled tradesmen made windows from designs and cartoons fashioned by artists whose interest in windows was not supposed to reach further than the door marked "no admittance" that closed in their faces.

It was in eighteen seventy-nine that the young painter, Whall, already known by pictures of pronounced decorative value, was asked to make some cartoons for church windows. "When I handed in my cartoons to the firm that had ordered them," he said, "I never heard anything more about the matter till the windows were fixed in their places. I went to see them, and the first thought that passed through my mind was 'I must learn my trade'; the word 'craft,' as yet, was never heard."

That decision, and the thorough-going fashion in which it was carried out, did more than any other modern influence to replace the word "trade" by the word "craft" as we know it now. Fortunately there is left for us a clear record of his mastery of the intricate details of the craft, as an artist's medium, in that delightful handbook—*Stained Glass Work*—written for the Artistic Crafts' Series. (Reprinted in 1920—London, Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons.)

This little book also reveals Whall as a born teacher and when he founded his own small workshop in eighteen eighty-four, his ambition for it was more nearly related to a school where things are learned and done by eager minds and hands, than to a factory, run by efficient specialists.

His friendly interest in students young or old and his generous sharing of all methods and expedients contrasted effectively with the narrow conservatism expressed by the "no admittance" sign and closed doors generally accepted as essential to the trade.

To him, as to all of us who love the craft, the ideal artist-craftsman was one who could design and make windows with his own hands from their inception to their final installation, and he reluctantly admitted the impracticability of such a conception in these fast-moving days of contracts and time-limits.

His rules for the guidance of himself and his group, as they appear in the handbook, are a worthy effort to serve that ideal to practical purpose under modern conditions.

(1) Not to direct what he cannot practice;
(2) To make masters of apprentices, or aim at making them;
(3) To keep his hand of mastery over the whole work personally at all stages;
and
(4) To be prepared sometimes to make sacrifices of profit for the sake of the Art, should the interests of the two clash.

His methods and successes moved the London County Council to appoint him teacher of Stained Glass in the Central School of Arts and Crafts, and later he taught at the Royal College of Art. He accepted these positions as opportunities to help release his craft from the timid banalities that had long repressed it and to put a flaming new color medium into the hands of the youngsters of his day.

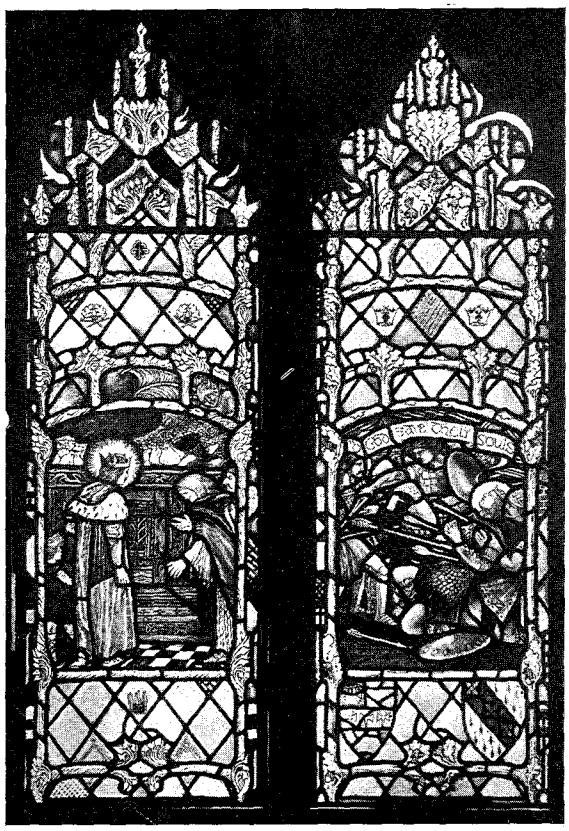
His influence as a teacher is not to be casually estimated, for it is still growing and spreading throughout England and America. The students who worked with him in his shop, and the larger group from his schools, have long been a vivid and powerful influence in modern stained glass. For years Whall's most sympathetic and promising pupil was his own daughter, who later shared his problems to such purpose that several of them were given to her outright. Among her successful windows is the Saint Catherine group represented by a cartoon near his own exhibit in the permanent collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Therefore his friends and the lovers of his glowing traditions are gratified to know that Miss Veronica Whall plans to continue the Ravenscourt Workshop with the help of her brother and the Whall staff of craftsmen.

The "Whall tradition," although young, is powerful and significant. He may almost be credited with the discovery of white glass, for when he began to design windows, the rule was to use pale tints of green and blue for white and further to subdue their contrast with tame gray colors by the use of paint in matts. He believed in paint in coarse stipples that would let light through everywhere, rather than in the flat matts of the orthodox. In this way he succeeded in subduing "raw" light sufficiently while retaining the jewelled brilliance of pure color and whites.

The sparkling silver of the clear whites and the powerful pure colors in Whall's windows brought a vigorous protest from conventional church goers and architects, while an equally loud denunciation came from the trade

St. Vincent
Detail from the Lady Chapel Windows,
Gloucester Cathedral
Christopher Whall

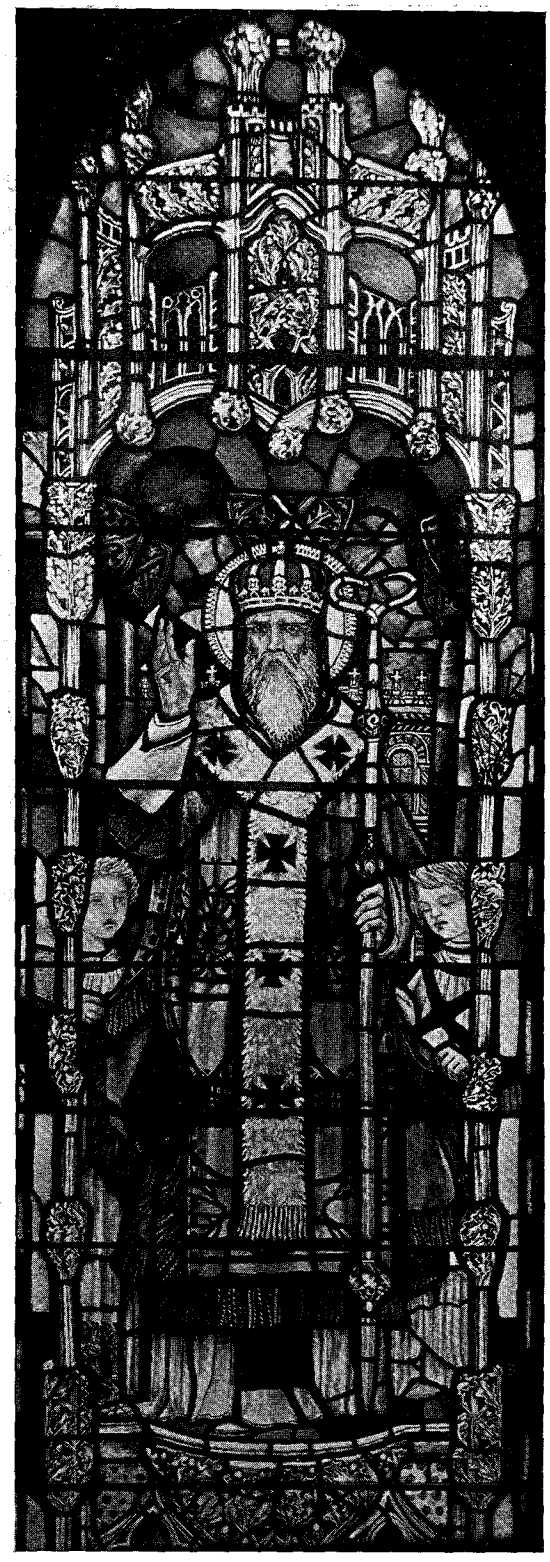
St. Chad
Detail from the Lady Chapel Windows,
Gloucester Cathedral
Christopher Whall



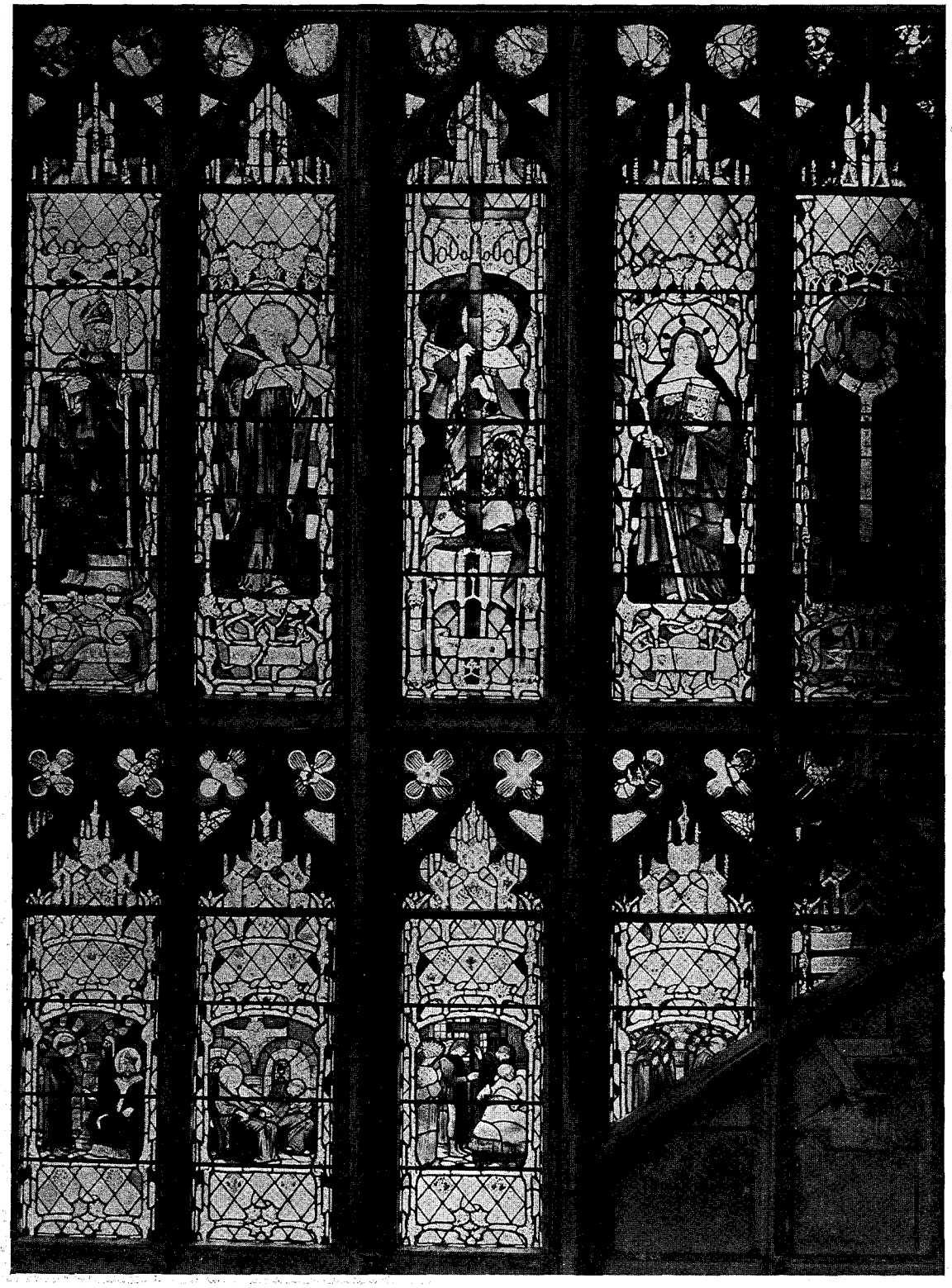
DETAILS FROM THE LADY CHAPEL, GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL
Christopher Whall

for his strange canopies, designed in natural forms, his use of large lead lines and bar lines, and, most of all, for his clumsy, "loose" painting.

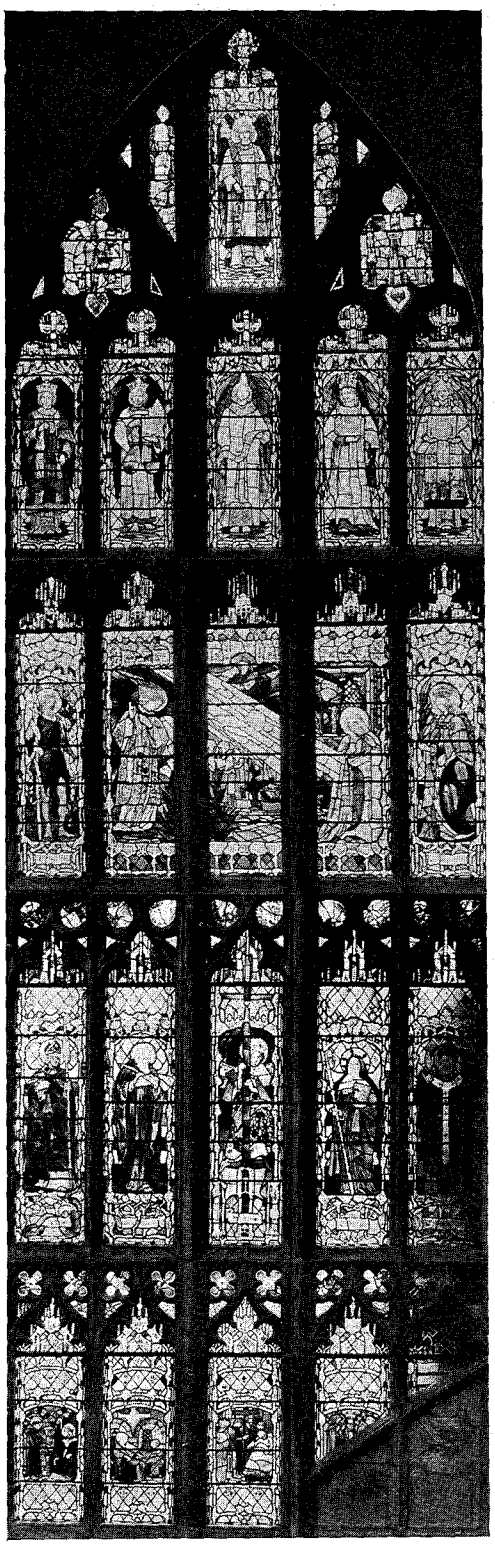
The same criticisms followed his work to America, when, through Mr. Cram's influence, a series of windows was designed and made for the clerestory of the Church of the Advent, Boston. Scornful laughter greeted these "crudely painted" windows when they were unpacked in the shop of the Boston firm commissioned to set them in place. But the smug, critical attitude of one young designer in that group was swallowed up in wonder and admiration when he saw those windows in place, vibrant with sunlight. He recognized in them rare examples of English work made with a real understanding of our brilliant light, and their original color schemes, radiant whites combining in a charming symbolism, made him a staunch partisan from that time forth. Whall seemed always to glory in the beauty and power of the benign, stout-hearted early Christians, and the Boston group, representing the advancement of nations through saintly lives, is characteristic of his loving thought of them and of their symbolism. His quaint and formal arrangement in line and color of "Saint Ignatius," "Saint John Chrysostom," "Saint Ambrose," "Saint Columba" and "Saint Athanasius" are like lyrical verses about those goodly men. The daring use of great lions in the Saint Ignatius lancet is like him, as is also the choir boy who stands before hearty Saint Ambrose.



ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM
NAVE CLERESTORY, CHURCH OF THE ADVENT, BOSTON
Christopher Whall



A Section (Lower Half), Lady Chapel, Gloucester Cathedral
Christopher Whall
(The entire section is reproduced upon the opposite page.)



A Section, Lady Chapel, Gloucester Cathedral

Christopher Whall

(The lower half of this section is reproduced upon the opposite page.)

St. Ambrose

Nave Clerestory, Church of the Advent, Boston

Christopher Whall

Whall's acknowledged masterpiece is the group of six great windows in the Lady Chapel of Gloucester Cathedral, and his gracious control of this large interior, in terms of light and color, suggests the power of an amiable composer-conductor over a vast orchestra.

The central idea of the group relates to the dignity to which human nature has been raised by the incarnation of Christ through the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the upper parts are Archangels and Choirs of Angels, Virtues, Principalities, and Thrones, while in the lower parts are single figures of saints and incidents from their lives in medallion-like designs. Many of these saintly characters belong to English history. Those of the North are treated on the north side, and of the South, in the southern group.

A consistent, thoughtful arrangement may be found to link these jewelled splendors together, but the prevailing impression is one of a joyful faring forth of a child-like spirit into regions of beauty and goodness.

Any glass man would realize such achievements were fraught with tremendous difficulties, and it is now well known that the payment for them was inadequate. They furnish an excellent illustration of Whall's repeated remark to his students that money must never interfere with an artist's expression, one way or another. When it was found, during their execution, that they could not possibly be finished for the price allowed, Whall called his staff about him, explained the situation, and all agreed to a reduction of wages to meet the emergency.

He was of those "Dreamers whose dreams came true" and though we sadly recall his recent death we are happy in the richness and fulness of his life.

CHARLES JAY CONNICK.

From Foreign Shores

Trade-Winds

WHEN I was young and was studying physical geography I knew something about the operation of the Trade-Winds; at least I knew what the books told me. There was something fascinating and poetical to young America in the idea of encountering the Trades and in being wafted gently and softly toward foreign ports when embarked in imagination upon the boundless Pacific and the far western seas and in being just as softly and gently wafted homeward when our sails were spread in fancy upon the broad Atlantic. For us, with our own land bordered by the eastern and western oceans, wherever we might be in this wide world of waters, sooner or later in due course, the friendly "Trades" would bring us home.

In some such conceit as this I set down the caption above. Articles on American architecture, pictures of American architecture, and comments on American architectural practice, have been flowing in on me from many and widely separated foreign sources during the two months past and in such quantity and of such nature as to demand recognition on my part. I do not seek in the pages of the foreign architectural press examples of the work of my compatriots and I care for their presence there only that I may study the reaction on the foreigners themselves. 'Fore God, they find, though I can not, ourselves to be a marvelous proper lot! (That's almost word for word Shakespearean.) Anyway "they" seem to find a lot to emulate and a lot to which to give a mead of critical praise.

I shall not reproduce any of the illustrations herewith even though I may mention an example or two, for our own work is so well known to us—or should be—that the space might be (though it may not be) better filled than with illustrations thereof. I am going to take one or two of our foreign critics and reporters to task—though again the space might be better filled—in a manner wholesome, I hope, and not too censorious. Mr. F. E. Bennett, A.R.I.B.A., of London, I think, who has been in this country for some little time enjoying the fruits of a scholarship, has helped *The Architects' Journal* of London (29 April, 1925) in the preparation of an extensively illustrated review of Modern American Architecture. Mr. Bennett is careless in some of his reportorial work and not as humorous as he wanted to be in other of it. There was no excuse for ascribing so well and widely known a building as the Shelton Hotel by Mr. Arthur Loomis Harmon to another and I believe non-existent architect both in the text and accompanying the illustration. The only proper way to rectify a slip of this sort is not to introduce somewhere in the background of the journal a "beg your pardon" notice but to republish a cut of the building together with the proper ascription of authorship. The reasons for this are obvious and need not be enlarged upon.

Another mild criticism, not this time touching journalism but spoken advice and admonition, is leveled at a distinguished guest from Holland to the recent Town Planning Conference who, failing to note the new spirit entering into American architecture as he might have sensed it in the architecture of New York, even, drubbed us for copying so closely European forms and conventions and not venturing out into new paths of our own creating. I heard this speech by our Dutch friend in New York (or maybe it was in Washington, where it would not be so inappropriate), and I heard it repeated in Chicago in a building in which, if the speaker had used his powers or any powers of observation, he would not have discovered a single borrowed form. Our guests and critics should be *observers* as well as mentors and admonishers.

The American Manner

It seems so difficult for us to please all our critics. In one moment one critic, our Dutch friend, finds that we do not express ourselves in an American manner, and in the same moment our English friend, Mr. Bennett, finds it quite noteworthy that we do. The architects he meets in New York speak with an "American accent." Now this seems to me to be altogether natural and proper. I