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## THE TILE FLOORS IN ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL, DETROIT

MARIAN V. LOUD

**T**HE Episcopal Cathedral of St. Paul's, Detroit, of which Messrs. Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson are the architects, is intensely interesting, not only as a beautiful example of modern Gothic architecture, but also, to the craftsman especially, on account of several striking features of its interior. The reredos, choir-stalls, pulpit, in fact all the furniture of the chancel, is of carved wood, done in the style of the finest Gothic traditions; a very notable piece of work. This reredos will be familiar to all Boston readers of HANDICRAFT as it was on exhibition there at the Museum of Fine Arts before being sent to Detroit. The large east window, made by Heaton, Butler & Bayne of London, is a beautiful piece of glass mosaic, decorative rather than pictorial; filling the whole end of the church with a wonderful glow of color, of which the predominant tone is a rich turquoise blue. And finally, the tile floor, the subject of this article.

It is interesting to know that the Pewabic Pottery won the contract for supplying this floor tile in open competition with the best potteries in the country; and while the window comes from England and the

wood-carving from Boston, the tile is entirely a product of Detroit.

It speaks well for the genius of the architect and the catholicity of the Gothic style, that all these different elements blend into a whole whose essential unity is enhanced, rather than impaired, by them.

EDITORIAL NOTE.]

ONE of its most notable art achievements has been given to America by Mary Chase Perry and Horace J. Caulkins, in the floors of St. Paul's Cathedral, Detroit, Michigan.

Although departing from long established conventions in paving, they have maintained, consistently, the spirit of the Gothic period, in which style the church is built.

In the three main porches, the square six-inch unglazed tile in soft buffs and ambers, set with the wide grouting characteristic of Pewabic work, give the impression of breadth and stability suitable to the entrance of such a structure.

Unity of design is not sacrificed by the variation in the paving of the Hancock Avenue porch. Four inch natural clay tile are set with modelled inserts. The border, together with those of the other porches are essentially Gothic, consisting of simple arrangements of squares and triangles, in varying tones of brown, soft green and the quiet blue which gives the key-note to the whole design.

Standing within the doors of the nave, one is impressed, at once, with what sympathy the designer has worked with the architect. Deeper in tone and

smaller in size than the tiles of the main porch from which one has entered, they seem to increase the breadth of the aisles and the loftiness of the ceiling. One is led forward by the narrow border and the instinctive spotting of blue throughout the field until he stands at the steps of the choir.

From this point the design is taken up in glazed tile. The delightful irregularities of the handpressed tile add to the beauty of the ivory and brown tones of the field, bordered by large Gothic triangles in mellow green and blue. Three panels, set diamond-wise occupy the middle line of the aisle. In the center of each lies a twelve inch tile bearing in low relief an angel form, while the borders are made up of tiles modelled in ecclesiastical designs. The blue note which we have been following is nearly submerged in the clouding of the brown and green of these angel panels, but is sufficiently present to keep us expectant.

Stone steps lead to the Outer Sanctuary, where an ivory and brown field, set diagonally, with modelled inserts, and a staccato border of vivid blue oblongs alternating with square three-toned modelled tile, prepare us for the glory of the Inner Sanctuary.

A magnificent border of iridescent tiles, bearing various types of crosses, lies between the Outer Sanctuary and the Holy of Holies, significant of the human sacrifices requisite to spiritual attainments.

On a field of blue—as blue as those starry ceilings of old Egypt—lies the cross, glowing with the marvelous hues of Pewabic lustre. A halo of tiny tiles in antique gold lies upon the arms of the cross, while

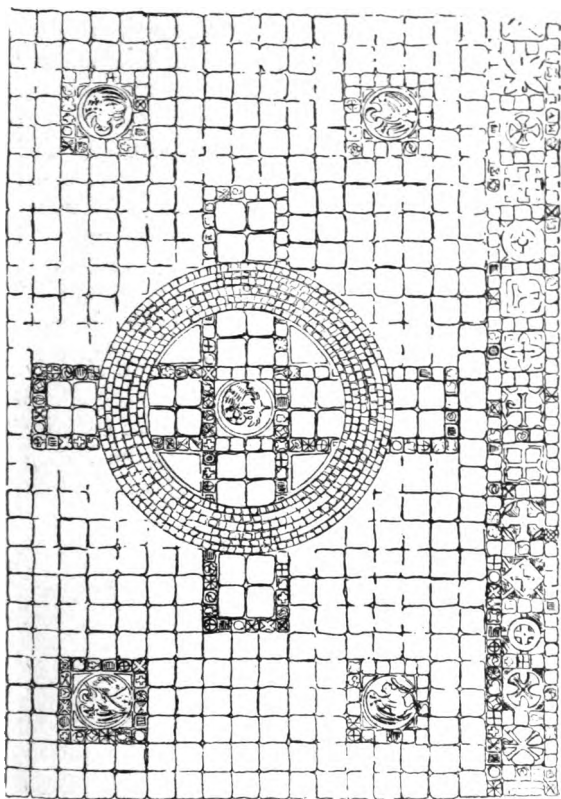
the very heart from which the whole design radiates is an iridescent disc bearing the form of a pelican feeding her young with drops of her own blood, symbolic of the mother church sustaining the young churches. Panels bearing the symbols of the four Evangelists lie to left and right, while other panels in iridescent tiles complete a design leaving nothing to be desired in form, color or religious feeling.

Nowhere in the world, we believe, does there exist a floor bearing the slightest resemblance to this of St. Paul's. Perhaps its closest relationship, and this in feeling only, lies with the exquisite mosaics in the ceiling of the Tomb of Galla Placidia, Ravenna. In the one, stately forms move across the vault of Heaven's blue; in the other the cross with its golden halo glows in the blue of infinite space, symbolic of human life and its divine aspirations.

#### NOTES ON THE TILE

The tile in general are characterized by freedom in the fashioning, having an undulating plane on the surface, with softened edges and corners. All the irregular shapes were cut in the clay, being made from templets during the progress of the laying, when necessary, so that there was no chipping or cutting of the finished, burned tile.

In the unglazed portions aside from the clay colored by nature, those of deep tones like blue or green were composed of solidly colored body, no-slip glazes being employed. Frequently the harder or lighter burning gave great play of tone to these surfaces, often running from a light, greenish-blue to a deep,



Design for Floor of Sanctuary, St. Paul's Cathedral, Detroit.



“Pelican” Tile.

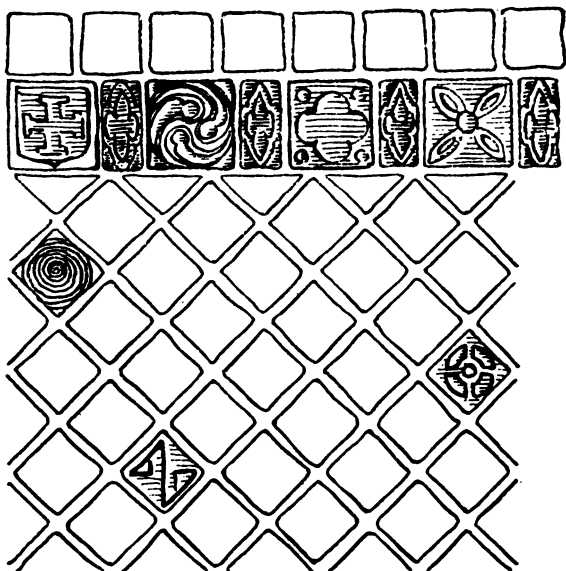


“Forbidden Fruit” Tile.

dull blue in the same tile. When laid, the slightly uneven surface, besides giving texture to the whole mass in appearance, also gives a feeling of security or “tooth” beneath the feet; which, as the bishop of the diocese expressed it, makes him feel “that he is not about to slip or slide.”

In the glazed tile, the color effects are gained mainly by the management of the glazes, chiefly in the use of combinations, sometimes by using two tones of one color, or by superimposing a thin glaze of one color over another, allowing the under glaze to show through, quite in the order of using oil paint on a canvas. Frequently three glazes are used in this way by firing each time between the application of the glaze. In the aisle of the choir especially, the border and center panels are full of color, yet always in subordination to the dominant ivory and brown of the entire field.

The process followed for the production of the tile with designs in relief, was the most simple one, that



Tile in Outer Sanctuary.

Plain tile, ivory and brown. Decorated tile, ivory, brown and green.  
 Small decorated tile in border, deep blue.

of direct modelling where only one or two were to be used, or, where many duplicates were required, a plaster mold was made, and the tile were pressed. In the case of the Pelican in the Sanctuary center, a great number were made, one after another, before the one which seemed right in color, brilliance and iridescence was secured.

In laying the tile, the test was always followed of



noting whether a given group of tile tied together well, or whether any one refused to stay in its place; in which case it was immediately discarded, or removed to another position where it would relate itself more harmoniously with its neighbors. This meant a constant oversight of the tile layers, who, thanks be to them, fortunately worked in sympathy with the spirit of the undertaking, even though oft times with most untraditional methods of tile setting. It has been asked how the scheme for the general design was worked out, and the infinite number of shapes and patterns developed. It would almost seem that the idea worked itself out, or "grew" of itself. After letting the general plan of the floor shapes and areas of the different portions simmer in mind for several weeks, together with much reading and sketching of the various emblems and symbols of Christian art, resolutely letting alone entirely all modern efforts, and closing one's mind and eyes to currently acceptable traditions with their purely decorative intent, the conceptions of the best period of ecclesiastical decoration soaked in, and fairly imbued one with their spirit. Then the general treatment of the whole floor, together with the detail, and the various designs, rearrangements, and conventionalizations of world-old subjects, suggested themselves freely and quickly, so that after all, the entire outline and cartoons were hastily sketched in, in half a day. Thereafter there was no sense of worry or difficulty in the execution of the main idea in mind, nor were any changes made during the progress of manufacturing and installing. In other words,

it was a notable example of the actual work having been finished by the time the design was clearly and theoretically defined in mind. From that point on, the carrying out of the idea was perhaps merely skilled labor, or artizanship if you will.