

transcript of what went on every day in the cottages and the streets, the fields and the woods; we see country folk ploughing, sowing, weeding, mowing, reaping, carting, threshing; fattening and killing the family pig, sheep-shearing, milking; we see them enjoying their sports and pastimes; we hear the alehouse jests, the wise saws and modern instances, hoary witticisms, proverbs and nursery rhymes. The limitations of their Bible knowledge and of their acquaintance with the legends of the Saints throw a curious light on the religious atmosphere of bourgeois life. Their opinions on music and art and dancing, on the high observances of chivalry, on the preaching and mendicant friars, on the mediæval doctor and dentist, find forcible expression. They are the censors of vice; no form of immorality escapes their lash. The carvings present to us a picture—realistic and true—of that history which does not find its way into books.

Nor is the work of the carvers to be neglected in a comprehensive history of English art. The art of the easel picture is a great art, but it is not all. There is another art; humbler it may be, but, unlike the former, indigenous, and that savours of the soil. Beginning with lovely illuminations of psalters and missals, it passes into the carvings of stalls and bench ends, and into popular chapbooks and almanacks. Many a figure scene on the misericords is well worth study, while from the carving of leaf and bloom modern designers might well take lessons.

The book is the first attempt, here or abroad, to deal comprehensively with the whole subject of the carvings of misericords. Being a first attempt, it is naturally imperfect. From limits of space, the treatment of the animals described in the *Physiologus* is very summary; an adequate account of any one of them would occupy more pages than it has been found possible to give lines. But all the more important sets of misericords have been studied *in situ*; and of these and of many hundreds of other examples, the writer has been supplied with photographs and drawings. Nevertheless it may well be that important examples have not come before his notice. Moreover, the interpretations given of the subjects here illustrated are anything but immune from criticism; the meaning of the representation is only too often obscure, and may be contested. There are also many examples not mentioned in the book which need elucidation. But at any rate something will have been done to help others in the way. For the benefit of those who may come across other examples not here classified and dated a special chapter has been inserted, in which are given the criteria from which as a rule the chronology of the carvings may be ascertained.