long before the 12th century. In part, however, the story may be true ; certainly an impetus was given to the weaving industry of Palermo in the 12th century, and for about two centuries Sicily became the chief seat in Europe for the production of the finest woven stuffs. A large number of examples of these beautiful fabrics still exist, showing an immense variety of designs, all of which are imagined with the highest decorative skill,—perfect master­pieces of textile art, combining freedom of invention and grace of drawing with that slight amount of mechanical stiffness which is specially suited to the requirements of the loom. One of the earliest existing specimens, which shows the existence of the fabrique before the time of Roger I., is a piece of silk stuff in which the body of St Cuthbert at Durham was wrapped when his relics were translated in 1104; this was found at the opening of his grave in 1827, and is now preserved in Durham cathedral library. The figures woven on it show an interesting com­bination of Western and Oriental art. Birds and conven­tional ornaments of purely Eastern style are mingled with designs taken from late Roman mosaics,—the whole being blended with great skill into a highly decorative pattern.@@1 The Sicilian silks of the 12th to the 14th cen­tury were mostly used for ecclesiastical vestments, altar frontals, and the like ; and the fact that examples have survived in almost all countries of Europe shows how im­portant and far-reaching a trade in them must once have been carried on. The favourite designs were the sun breaking through a cloud from whence rays of light are issuing, or conventionally treated ships, fountains, islands, castles, and an immense variety of birds and beasts, such as swans, mallards, eagles, lions, cheetahs, hounds, giraffes, antelopes, and others. Some specimens have siren-like female forms, with floating hair, casting nets, leaning down from palm trees, or issuing from shells. Others, rather later in style, have winged angel-like figures. In many cases the Assyrian sacred tree and its guardian beasts oc­cur, and very fre­quently borders with sham Arabic letters are intro­duced,—a survival of the time when real sentences were woven into the fab­rics of Persia and Egypt, probably in­tended as a visible sign that the stuff was the genuine product of Sara­cenic looms. All these are perfect masterpieces of tex­tile art, and have never since been rivalled either in beauty of design or in skilful use of gold and colours. Fig. 5 shows a character­istic example ; another copied from a painting is given under Mural Decoration, vol. xvii. p. 46, fig. 15.

In the 14th century the chief centre of fine silk weaving was transferred from Palermo to Lucca, Florence, Milan, Venice, and other towns in northern Italy, and a different class of design, less rich in fancy, but scarcely less beautiful in effect, came into vogue. The designs of these 14th and

15th century textiles were chiefly conventional adaptations of natural foliage and flowers, arranged with great beautv of line and wealth of de­corative effect; among the most beautiful is scroll-work of vines with graceful curving lines of leaf and ten­dril. An extremely rich design, largely employed throughout the 15th century, was made from the arti­choke plant,@@2 and was especially used for the rich “ cut ” velvets of Genoa, Florence, and Venice, in which the pattern is formed in relief by pile raised above pile, mixed with gold@@3 (see fig. 6 and vol. xvii. p. 46, fig.

14). At this time Venice contained a large number of Ori­ental craftsmen in all the industrial arts, and very beautiful stuffs were woven there with designs of mingled Oriental and Italian style,—probably the work of Mohammedan weavers (see fig. 7).

In all these Oriental, Sicilian, and early Italian stuffs gold thread is used in a very lavish and effective way. It was made very skilfully, the richest effect being produced with little metal by thickly gilding fine vellum skins with gold leaf ; the vellum was then cut into very thin strips

@@@1 See Raine, *Saint Cuthbert,* Durham, 1828, plate iv. ; in his text the author is wholly wrong as to the *provenance* of these stuffs.

@@@2 This is usually called the pine-apple pattern ; but it was invented long before the discovery of America had introduced the pine-apple into Europe.

@@@3 Italian and Flemish pictures of the 14th to the 16th century often give most valuable representations of rich textiles ; see Vacher, *Fifteenth Century Italian Ornament,* London, 1886, a series of coloured plates of textiles taken from Italian pictures.