

WOOLPIT CHURCH.

COMPARATIVE anatomists, if you give them a few bones, can tell with admirable precision the size, shape, class, nature, and habits of the animal to which they belonged. Cuvier, I believe, had formed models of some of the antedeluvian reptiles, before their whole skeletons had been dug out of the bowels of the earth, and when he had nothing to guide him but a few disjointed bones and his own consummate skill.

By a process somewhat similar, or, at any rate as similar as the different nature of the materials will admit, architects can tell the various stages which our parish churches have passed through, from their earliest date to the present hour. By tracing a line here, and a moulding there—by the shape of a window or the form of an arch—by the cutting of a flower or the depth of a moulding, they can unravel a church's history, though the written memorials of it have perished. In fact its history is written in the living rock, and engraven on the imperishable stone; and there are who can trace its course, through the dark ages of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, back to the time when it was first set apart for the worship of Almighty God, according to the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Architecturally speaking, the last ages have been the dark ages, for in them neglect was suffered to eat into our parish churches as a canker: and when alterations were made, they were almost invariably for the worse. The hands that then touched our sanctuaries were, I will not say, unhallowed, but unenlightened by the least ray of taste or genius. In fact they sinned against the fundamental laws of taste, by adding Grecian ornaments to Gothic buildings. So common was this, that Sir Christopher Wren

perpetrated the barbarism of disfiguring Westminster Abbey—that noble specimen of Early English—with two quasi-Grecian towers.

Those ages, which some contemptuously call dark, were the ages in which most of our cathedrals and parish churches were either built, or enlarged, or beautified. And whatever advancement may have been made in other arts and sciences, and our advancement has been immense, in architecture we are still behind those, into whose labours we have entered, and to whose liberality we owe it, that every parish has its consecrated fold and endowed pastor. An impartial comparison of our most successful modern churches with those built in the 13th, 14th, and 15th centuries, forces us to say, “The old are better.”

When we think of our cathedrals, and minsters, and abbeys, and even of the parish churches which adorn our own county, such as St. Mary’s and St. James’s, Bury, Lavenham, and Long Melford, we must confess they were giants who built them, giants in intellect, giants in liberality, and I cannot but hope and believe, giants in piety and reverence. Unfortunately, I am not one of those who have such an acquaintance with architecture, as to be able to bring before you the varying phases of this church, from its infancy to its old age, I must refer you to your accomplished and indefatigable Secretary. He, probably, can tell you when a church was first built on this spot—when the older parts were removed to make way for better—who paid for the various portions, and who built the clerestory and the porch. All I can do is to produce a few disjointed notices and remarks. I must leave it to others to put them together, first fashioning the skeleton, and then clothing the dry bones with life and beauty.

When the bases of the late tower were taken down, Norman mouldings were found on the inside. They probably formed part of a Norman church, and were used again when the Norman building gave place to the Decorated, just as we have used in our new tower as much of the old stone as we could. You may see these bases in the churchyard.

On the old tower the marks of the high pitched roof were

visible. And the circular window which enlightened its deep recesses has been preserved, and is introduced into the new tower. What additional interest does it give to our churches, thus to connect them with the past. Probably, long before the Normans, there was a humble Christian church on this very spot. Here prayers were wont to be made by converted Danes, Saxons, Romans, and Britons. Here the fathers of the village have been buried for a thousand years or more, in hope of a glorious resurrection to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. So that they, who are lying at our feet awaiting the archangel's trump, and the consummation of all things, are more than the living around us. Without doubt a church and a churchyard are holy ground—sanctified by the most holy associations. It is not superstition, but piety which would guard them from profane uses, and enshrine them in our sympathies.

The columns of the nave, though similar in their outline, are not exactly alike: those on the south side are better than their brothers on the north. This has been observed elsewhere, and it is accounted for by supposing either that a retrograde movement was going on whilst the church was building, or that the funds were running low, and compelled the builder to sacrifice beauty at the shrine of economy.

I would, in passing, call your attention to the bowing out of the nave: you will see it best from the west end. Some think this was by design, to represent a ship: some consider it an accident, arising from the comparatively little regard the ancient builders paid to exact line and measure. Others regard it merely as a settlement, though I am told, by those who ought to know, that a settlement would not take that shape.

The windows in the south aisle have been recommended as models, combining, as they do, elegance with simplicity, correctness of style with little cost. To do this well should be the aim of church architects, and success in it would be a great recommendation for employment. The form of the arches is simple and good, well adapted for a village church, as they have sufficient grandeur without any very great expense.

Avoiding the regions of conjecture, we come at once to recorded history.

The porch and clerestory were both building in the middle of the fifteenth century, for, in 1444, and the subsequent years, several persons left, what would now be considered small, sums for rebuilding the nave, by which, I imagine, is meant adding the clerestory, as that is in the style of that period, namely, the Perpendicular; and the pillars and arches are Decorated. In 1451, John Turner de Woolpit left 13s. 4d. to the making of the new porch.

The clerestory and roof and porch are very excellent specimens of Perpendicular work. The oak roof is probably the most striking feature in our church. It combines consummate skill of construction, and taste in execution. No one can look at it without being struck with the genius that designed it. The inspiration of Bezaleel was not extinct, whilst our parish churches were yet in building. What an adaptation of the native oak, for which our county was once so celebrated, to the noblest purposes! It has been said of the roof of King's College Chapel, that the architect has hung upon nothing whole quarries of stone, and given the solid rock the lightness of fleecy clouds. We may say of those who planned our wooden roofs, that they have suspended in the air whole forests, and given the solid timber the most light and beautiful and scenic appearance. You might think it was intended chiefly for ornament, but it supports an enormous weight of lead, and has covered successive generations of worshippers from the summer's heat and the winter's cold. But the man who designed it would not have considered it the highest compliment that you admired the beauty of the work, and his own consummate skill. He wished to elevate to heavenly things the minds of those whose eyes were cast upon his handy work. He hoped to remind them, by the upright figures under the canopies, of the cloud of holy men, prophets, martyrs, saints, who in their generation served God faithfully, and sealed their testimony with their blood: and by the small figures with expanded wings, of the hosts of heaven, who stand round God's throne, and are "sent by him to minister to those who shall be heirs of

salvation." The architect believed in the "communion of saints," and has embodied the doctrine in the way you see. If any one thinks, as some have thought, that the introduction of carved figures into places of worship is contrary to the spirit and letter of the second commandment, I would remind them, that God himself ordered two cherubims of gold, with expanded wings, to be placed over the mercy seat, both in the tabernacle and the temple, and that all the walls of the temple were carved with figures of cherubims, and palm trees, and open flowers, within and without.—1 Kings, vi. 29.

The porch is well worthy of your inspection, especially the open tracery, which is lighter and more elegant than the open parapet of King's College, and may be looked upon as one of the most successful specimens of Perpendicular. As the porch was begun in Henry the Sixth's reign, the effigies on the sides of the door are most probably that King and his Queen, Margaret of Anjou, more celebrated for her spirit than virtue. We regret the fickleness of this monarch, which entailed so many losses and sufferings on his subjects; but we cannot help feeling a sympathy for his misfortunes, when we remember that he was the son of the popular and victorious Henry the Fifth; that he was the founder of Eton and King's College, and that it is to his liberality we owe that most magnificent building, King's College Chapel. In these days, when success is the measure of merit, it may be considered more poetical than popular to say of one who lost his crown—

"Where grateful science still adores
Her Henry's holy shade."

The open seats have been much admired. Pugin copied them, so did Cottingham. What a contrast between the open seats and the pews! What an eyesore the latter are! And which is infinitely worse, what a heartsore too! I know not what scripture may not be explained away, if St. James on this subject is to be set aside.

I will now briefly draw your attention to the new tower and spire. We have kept to the old outline, improving the belfry windows, and adding the rich parapet, endeavour-

ing thereby to make it worthy of the rest of the church. The work, if my partiality does not mislead me, does credit to the taste which designed, the hands that executed, and the liberality that paid for it. The cost will be about 1800*l.* and some may think this too large a sum for such a purpose. My apology is,

1st. It would not have been seemly to have added a plain tower to a highly ornamented church. I cannot understand their feelings who shew good taste in everything but in things connected with the sanctuary.

2nd. It will not do for us who spend so much upon our private houses, furniture, equipages and plate; who encourage with no niggard hand the fine arts, adorning our rooms with paintings and sculpture; and have sanctioned the expenditure of nearly 2,000,000*l.* on our Houses of Parliament; I say, it will not do for us to turn round and object to money being spent in making God's House as magnificent as we can.

3rd. The whole of the money spent in building our tower and spire, with the exception of the small sums paid for the stone before it was hewn from the quarry, for the brick earth before it was dug, and for the lime ere it was taken from the pit—all the rest (with this exception, which went to the landlords) has been employed in encouraging skill and paying for labour.

This expenditure has enabled several industrious mechanics and labourers to support themselves and families. I maintain that money so spent is not wasted even on any sound principle of political economy; it does more good than if it had been given to the poor. In short, money so spent is piety towards God and charity towards men. We do not rob the poor when we thus honour God with our substance: on the contrary we feed and clothe them. It was the traitor who complained that the ointment was wasted, which faith and love poured on the Saviour's head; and it required a traitor's cunning to clothe his ingratitude and selfishness under the popular pretence of caring for the poor.

And as the labouring classes are benefited by the outlay, the subscribers are not the poorer. God can, and frequently

does, return the gift by blessing their basket and store : they prosper they scarcely know how or why. "The widow's barrel of meal wasted not, neither did her cruse of oil fail," whilst they maintained a prophet in addition to her own family.

There is one more remark I wish to make, because it is closely connected with our subject: How are our parish churches to be maintained in future? I would recommend that all property at present liable to church-rates, should commute their liability into a small fixed annual payment of, 2*d.* or even 1*d.* in the pound. This would be sufficient to maintain the fabrics with such voluntary offerings as piety would ever be willing to cast into the Lord's treasury ; it would do away with church-rate contests, which are so painful and unseemly ; and the owners of the property would not, with any shew of reason or justice, object to pay this small rate, as they have all bought or inherited their property subject to this impost.

I should mention that the west window was painted by our kind friends and neighbours, Mr. and Mrs. Marriott. It gives great richness to the view, and their success in the art should encourage others to adorn God's House of prayer. I cannot conclude without expressing my hope that the members of your society will exert their influence to have our parishes churches restored in a correct and becoming manner.

I ought to apologise for having detained you so long, and especially that my remarks have not kept closer to the subjects most interesting to your society. L. F. PAGE.

Woolpit church is one of the most interesting churches in the county of Suffolk. It has a chancel, nave, aisles, south porch, and west tower. The chancel is Decorated, with a good east window of five lights ; and a double piscina trefoiled. The doorway to the sacristy is Perpendicular, but the vestry is modern, built on the old site. The rood screen is fine Perpendicular. The nave piers and arches are Decorated ; the roof very fine Perpendicular, with double-hammer beams ; those next the wall having angels

with expanded wings. The helves are wrought into niches, filled with figures of saints, supported by angels with expanded wings. There are good open seats, with poppy heads. One of the choir seats in the chancel has an elegant figure of the Virgin with the pot of lilies by her side. The clerestory and north aisle windows are Perpendicular; the south aisle Decorated. The aisle roofs are of the same date and equal to those of the nave: there are sedilia and piscina at the east end of the south aisle. The south porch, which is very fine Perpendicular, has a groined roof and room over it, with an elegant open parapet.* The tower and lofty spire is modern: the old tower was Decorated, and finished by a low spire. This spire was built in 1708, to replace one that had been blown down in 1703, as appears by the following memoranda in the Parish Register:—

On the 26th day of novemb., 1703, a very handsome pinnacle, of about 66 foot in height, was blown off this steeple, by a strong south-west wind, which did considerable damage to the north part of the church.

In the year 1708, a pinnacle was built again, of about 42 foot in height, by Stephen Bacon and Ambrose Taylor, churchwardens, encouraged by the generous contributions of the persons underwritten:

	£.	s.	d.
Imp.: Sir Robt. Davers gave 3 guineas.....	3	4	6
Collonel Cropley gave a tree, of threescore feet, for the middle piece	3	10	0
Mr. Cook gave 32 foot of timber.....			
Mr. Goodday gave 41 foot of timber	2	1	0
Mr. Ffisk gave 39 foot of timber	1	19	0
Mr. Cocksedge min., gave 40 foot of timber, and twenty shillings by carting, in all	3	0	0
Zech. Seagar, of this parish, grocer, gave	5	0	0
Sum. tot. given.....	20	4	6

The porch was in course of erection in 1439, and was not finished in 1451. In the former year John Turnor de Wulpit, bequeathed to the making of "the new porch" 13s. 4d., and to the mending of the doors of the church 6s. 8d. In 1451, John Stevynesson also left 13s. 4d. to the making of the porch, at which he directed his legacies to

* Ecc. and Architectural Topog. of England, part vii.—Brandon's Churches, &c.

be paid ; a very frequent practice at that period, and not entirely discontinued for more than a century later.

The nave of the church was also in course of restoration. John Walsom, in 1444, left 20*d.* to the body of the church : in 1462, John Shepperd, senior, bequeathed 13*s.* 4*d.* to the repairs of the north part ; and in 1471, John Denys, left by will “ a place clepyt Bekatys with all the londe y^r longyth thereto,” “ to y^e a mendyng and rep’a’on of the sayd church.” In 1473, one Aubry directed his tenement called “ Wadys ” to be sold, and half the money to be devoted to Woolpit church.

Our Lady of Woolpit appears to have been an image of repute in the county, much frequented by pilgrims*. It was situated in the chapel of our Lady, at the end of the south aisle, and stood under a rich tabernacle or canopy, which appears from the will of John Stevynnesson before mentioned, to have been newly made in 1451. In 1469, Geoffrey Coley, bequeathed one wax candle of a pound and a half weight to the image, to burn during divine service ; and in the time of Henry the Eighth, Margaret Jervys, left two pounds of wax to the chapel, and one pound to the rood loft. In 1515, Robert Ketyll, bequeathed to the chapel of our Lady 20 pence “ to goe to the use of steynyd clothe in the seyde chapell.” These cloths were probably painted with representations of incidents in the life of the Virgin. In connexion with our Lady of Woolpit, it may be mentioned that in a meadow near the church is a far-famed well, called Lady’s well, the continued resort of the pilgrims in former ages. A chapel is said to have formerly existed near this spring, but no vestiges of it remain.

There was also an image of our Lady of Pity in this church, but where situate is unknown. Our Lady of Pity was usually represented as weeping over the body of the Crucified Saviour, which she holds in her lap, while the tomb is being prepared for its reception. In some old representations, an angel appears on each side of the Virgin,

* In the will of Robert Agas, of Thurston, 1469, “ our lady of Woolpit ” is enumerated as one of seven local pilgrimages which he directed his son to

“ go or do gon.” In 1507 John Calabour, also of Thurston bequeathed “ to oure lady of Wolpitte a golde ryng.”

bearing the emblems of the Crucifixion; the one with the crown of thorns, the other with the reed and sponge. In 1477, Amy Fen, bequeathed to the painting of "our Lady of Pyte" in this church 20s. and 20 pence, and two bushels of malt.

This church was visited in 1643 by the deputy of William Dowsing, the Parliamentary Commissioner appointed for demolishing the superstitious pictures and ornaments of churches within the county of Suffolk. The result is thus recorded in his well-known diary:—"1643-4. Woolpit, Feb. the 29. My deputy: eighty superstitious pictures; some he brake down, and the rest he gave order to take down; and three crosses to be taken down in twenty days,—6s. 8d."

On high festivals the church was lighted by a number of candles of large size, which were placed on the high altar, on the rood loft, in the various chapels, and before and around the different images of Saints. Several legacies for this purpose have been noticed. On the high altar, the candlesticks were generally of metal, commonly of latén, a hard mixed metal much resembling brass, the precise composition of which it is believed is unknown. Those on the rood, being larger than the rest, were of wood painted. In 1475, Margery Cobbold, left by her will the sum of 26s. 8d. to the painting of a table, or altar piece, and the candlesticks of this church. A

Pulpits were rarely to be found in parish churches in the 15th century: but there appears to have been one in this church, for Katherine Almy, directed a sangred or saugred to be said in Woopit church, for the space of a whole year "pro solacionem Jo'his Ryche and Jo'hne Ryche vxor eius." The particular service denominated a sangred is not known, but it appears from the will of John Baret, one of the pious benefactors to the church of St. Mary, at Bury,* to have consisted of prayers for the soul, said in the pulpit on Sundays. There still remains an elegant brass lectern, in form of an eagle with expanded wings, which tradition reports to have been the gift of Queen Elizabeth on her visiting the church. It formerly

* Tymms's Bury Wills, p. 30.

had a copy of Bishop Jewell's Apology chained to it, the mutilated remains of which were removed between forty and fifty years since, but are still preserved.

There are no ancient monumental inscriptions in the church.

There were two guilds in Woolpit; one in the honor of the Nativity of the Blessed Mary; and another in honor of the Trinity; both of them existing in the 15th century. To the guild of the Holy Trinity, Margery Cobbold, in 1475, bequeathed 13s. 4d., to buy pewter vessels for the use of the fraternity, probably at their feasts; and in 1473, Aubry gave by his will "a cove to be put forth to cres of the same gylde."

The lordship and advowson of Woolpit became vested in the Abbot of St. Edmund's, at Bury, by the gift of Earl Ulfketel; and King Henry II. obtained from Hugh, Abbot of that Monastery, in free alms, this parish church, for his clerk, Walter de Constance*, and in consideration thereof, by charter, dated at Westminster, granted that after the decease of Walter, or his resignation, the church should be appropriated to the use of the sick monks.

It is related in the Chronicles of Jocelin of Bracklond that in 1183,

"It was informed the abbot (Sampson, abbot of Bury) that the church of Woolpit was vacant, Walter of Constance being chosen to the bishopric of Lincoln. He presently convened the prior and great part of the convent, and taking up his story, thus began: 'Ye well know what trouble I had in respect of the church of Woolpit; and in order that it should be obtained for your exclusive use, I journeyed to Rome at your instance, in the time of the schism between Pope Alexander and Octavian (A. D. 1159—1162) and I passed through Italy at the time when all clerks bearing letters of our lord the Pope Alexander were taken, and some were incarcerated, and some were hanged, and some with noses and lips cut off, were sent back to the Pope, to his shame and confusion. I however, pretended to be a Scotchman; and putting on the garb of a Scotchman, and the appearance of a Scotchman, I often shook my staff in the manner they use that weapon they call a *gaveloc* (*i. e.* a javelin or pike) at those who mocked me, uttering threatening language, after the manner of the Scotch. To those who met and questioned me as to

* Walter de Constances was consecrated Bishop of Lincoln in 1183. In the next year this prelate (surnamed

"the Magnificent") was translated to the Archbishopric of Rouen.

who I was, I answered nothing, but *Ride, ride Rome, turne Cantivereberi.* (I am riding to Rome and then I return to Canterbury; in other words, I am a poor pilgrim, first going to Rome, and then to St. Thomas a Becket's shrine, so I can have nothing to do with either Pope.) This did I to conceal myself and my errand, and that I should get to Rome safer under the guise of a Scotchman. Having obtained letters from the Pope, even as I wished, on my return I passed by a certain castle, as I was taking my way from the city, and behold the officers thereof came about me, laying hold upon me, and saying, 'This vagabond, who makes himself out to be a Scotchman, is either a spy, or bears letters from the false Pope Alexander,' And while they examined my ragged clothes, and my leggings, and my breeches, and even the old shoes which I carried over my shoulders, after the fashion of the Scotch, I thrust my hand into the little wallet which I carried, wherein was contained the writing of our lord the Pope, close by a little jug, I had for drinking: and the Lord God and St. Edmund so permitting, I drew out that writing, together with the jug, so that extending my arm aloft, I held the writ underneath the jug. They could see the jug plain enough, but they did not find the writ; and so I got clean out of their hands, in the name of the Lord. Whatever money I had about me, they took away: therefore it behoved me to beg from door to door, being at no charge, until I arrived in England. But hearing that this church had been given to Geoffry Ridell, my soul was heavy for that I had laboured in vain. Coming, therefore, home, I slunk under the shrine of St. Edmund, fearing lest the abbot should seize and imprison me, although I deserved no punishment; nor was there a monk who durst to speak to me, or a layman who durst bring me food, except by stealth. At last, upon consideration, the abbot sent me to Acre (in Norfolk) in exile, and there I stayed a long time. These and innumerable other things have I endured on account of this church of Woolpit; but blessed be God, who rules all for the best, behold! this very church, for which I have borne so many sufferings is given into my hand, and I have the power of presenting the same to whomsoever I will, because it is vacant. And now I render to the convent, and to its exclusive use I resign, the ancient custom or pension of ten marks, which ye have lost for upwards of sixty years. I had much rather have given it to you entire, could I have done so: but I know that the Bishop of Norwich might gainsay this: or even if he did grant it, he would by occasion thereof claim to himself such subjection and obedience from you, which it is not advisable or expedient you should acknowledge. Therefore let us do that which by law we may do; and that is, to put in a clerk, as vicar, who shall account to the bishop for the spiritualities, and to yourselves for ten marks. And I propose, if you all agree, that this vicarage be given to some kinsman of Roger de Hengham, a monk, and one of your brethren, who was joined with me in that expedition to Rome, and was exposed to the same perils as myself, and in respect of the very same matter.

“ Having said these things, we all arose and gave thanks; and Hugh,

a clerk, brother of the aforesaid Roger, was nominated to the aforesaid church, saving to us our pension of ten marks."

The Abbots continued to hold the manor and advowson until the suppression of that house; when it passed to the Crown, but was soon afterwards in the hands of Sir Richard Southwell. Sir Richard was one of the Privy Councillors who, on the 21st of June, 1553, signed the will of Edward the VIth, for the limitation of the crown, on which the claim of Lady Jane Grey to the throne was rested. He afterwards took part with Queen Mary, and received from her on the 4th of December in the same year a grant of a pension of 100*l.* He was with the Queen at the gatehouse when Whitehall was attacked by a party of the rebel forces under Sir Thos. Wyatt.

The following list of the Rectors since the Reformation, has been obtained from the Register of Inductions in the Archdeacon's Court, at Bury St. Edmund's:—

1554. Edmund Fletewood, per resig. Robertus Darcy; ad præ.
Ricardus Southwell, milites.
1556. Robert Walronde, ad præ. Episc. Norwicen.
1573. Thomas Cage, ad præ. ejusd.
- [1606. William Cook.—*Parish Register.*]
1612. John Watson, M.A., ad præ. ejusd.
- [1646. Thomas Fyson.—*Par. Reg.*]
1678. Francis Cocksedge, M.A., per mortem Thomæ Fison, ad præ.
ejusd.
1715. Simon Boldero, per mortem Cocksedge, ad præ. Caroli
Wood, arm.
1723. John Boldero, per mortem Simonis Boldero, ad præ. ejusd.
1752. Isaac Collman, LL.B., by the death of John Boldero, on the
presentation of Samuel Hunt, Gen.
1757. Charles Mandevile, M.A., by resig. Collman, on the presentation
of Geo. Mandevile, Esq., of Dean's-yard, Westminster.
1781. Thomas Cobbold, M.A., by the death of Charles Mandevile,
D.D., on his own petition.
1831. John Spencer Cobbold, A.M., by the death of Thos. Cobbold,
on his own petition.
1837. Luke Flood Page, M.A., by the death of J. S. Cobbold, on the
presentation of Benjamin William Page, Esq., and John
Chevallier Cobbold, Esq., of Ipswich.

SAMUEL TYMMS.