

ART. VI.—CHURCHES THAT SOMETIME WERE.

THE farewell to St. Philip's Church, Regent Street, pathetically spoken by Dean Pigou a few weeks ago, and the still more recent sale of the fittings of St. George's Chapel, call to mind recollections of other churches that have had "their day and ceased to be," although notable for beauty, historic memories, and association with the great and good. "Hungry time hath made a glutton's meal of this catalogue of gentry," wrote Thomas Fuller as he compiled his list of "Worthies," and "hungry time" has swept away many a fair church, once built and adorned by skilful hands, endowed from generous purses, and consecrated to the service and glory of God for ever.

Here the long street roars where the quiet village church and God's Acre have taken "the sunshine and the rains" for generations, there the plough turns up sacred symbols from some long-forgotten place of worship, and all round the coast tower and spire lie low beneath the smiling waves. Where are the churches of Lyonesse, of the Lowland Hundred, of Dunwich and Crantock; of Reach, that tiny village in the fens, once a city well provided with "places where prayer was wont to be made"?

"As for parish churches in Exeter," says Fuller again, "at my return thither this year I found them fewer than I left them at my departure thence fifteen years ago. But the demolishers of them can give the clearest account how the plucking down of churches conduceth to the setting up of religion. Beside, I understand that thirteen churches were exposed to sale by the public crier and bought by well-affected persons, who preserved them from destruction."

In 1546 the City Fathers of Lincoln ordained that the Church of St. Stephen in Newland, "now decayed, with the gutter of lead, the tile, timber, and stone should be granted to the sheriffs in place of ten pounds given to them for the expenses of their office," and a little later some of the stones of St. Katherine's Church were ordered to be kept for use, the rest to be sold at one penny the cartload. Nor are we better than our fathers. Lake Vyrnwy, Liverpool's great reservoir, covers the site of a village church, and the stones of St. Mildred's in the Poultry, taken down only thirty years ago, narrowly escaped being ground up for Portland cement. They were finally sold to a private purchaser, who intended to build a domestic chapel attached to his own residence.

A curious irony invests the history of the now destroyed Church of St. Bartholomew's by the Exchange. The tower escaped destruction in the Great Fire, but was taken down in

1840 to make room for the Sun Fire Insurance Office. At the time great interest was felt in the possible discovery of the remains of Miles Coverdale, who was buried there in 1568. Exeter, St. Paul's Cathedral, and St. Magnus, London Bridge, were eager to receive his ashes. When they were actually exhumed, their reinterment took place in the old part of the last-mentioned church, of which he had been rector.

St. Christopher le Stocks, Threadneedle Street, gave place to an enlargement of the Bank; St. Benet Fink disappeared to make room for the Royal Exchange; All Hallows, Bread Street, where Milton was baptized, "was struck by lightning, and though but little damnified was taken down for sparing the charges of reparation."

Within the angle formed by the junction of Mark Lane and Fenchurch Street, and approached from these busy thoroughfares by Star Alley, stands the tower of the destroyed church of All Hallows, Staining, dating very possibly from the thirteenth century. A plot of ground planted with trees and shrubs, and provided with one or two benches, surrounds it, and supplies the few visitors who wander in, young and old, with playground or resting-place according to their respective needs. Tall offices rising higher than the tower, which is of quite humble dimensions, encircle the plot, and through their big plate-glass windows clerks may be seen poring industriously over their ledgers, or at occasional idle moments biting their pens and gazing vaguely at the ancient tower. It is probable that the original church was built in the reign of Henry III., for Stow mentions a monument to a certain "John Costin, girdler, a great benefactor," who died in 1244, and sarcastically adds that "his name remaineth painted in the church roof; if it had been set in brass it would have been fetched down."

One of the six bells which formerly hung in the tower was dated 1458. Tradition has it that these same bells rang a merry peal to celebrate the release of the Princess Elizabeth from imprisonment in the Tower in 1554, and the joyful sound attracted her to the church, where she knelt to return thanks to God for her deliverance. Later in the day she dined at the King's Head tavern on pork and peas, which dish was for long afterwards served at the inn on her Highness birthday.

In spite of the possession of a "high altar of carved tabernacle work with drapery of red Bruges satin, and statues of silver adorned with precious stones," the gifts of pious benefactors, neither parishioners nor patrons paid any attention to such a prosaic detail as the repair of their old church, with the result that a few years after escaping the Great Fire

the main body of the building fell down through age and neglect. It was rebuilt in 1675 in a very tasteless style, and was described in a contemporary record as "a plain building with Gothic windows and a freestone front of the Tuscan order, the interior totally destitute of ornament, having neither pillar, gallery, nor organ." To this plain little edifice the "brave rough English Admiral," Sir Cloudesley Shovel, came to be married to Lady Narborough.

The rebuilt church served the parish until 1870, when, with the consent of the Grocers' Company, who were patrons of the living, it was taken down under Act of Parliament, and the greater part of the site was sold.

The proceeds were sufficient to build three churches in needy districts—Bromley, Stepney, and Homerton. The patrons divided the handsome endowment of All Hallows, £1,600 a year, between the three new parishes, but with a commendably prudent recollection of the fate of the old mother church, they set aside £100 a year as a repairs fund. In 1901 the population of the three daughter districts exceeded 22,000, while the parish of All Hallows contained only 121 people. Such facts as these must compensate for any merely sentimental regrets over the destruction of an old building.

In the heart of Cambridge there is a little oasis of silence and consecration, carpeted with turf and gravestones, and jealously railed off from the street. University buildings and old houses surround it on every side; Master's Court shields it from the glare of noon; the evening sun casts upon it the long shadow of Trinity College Chapel; Selwyn Divinity School is a shelter from the north. Here, close by the streets and courts where the feet of teachers and students pass up and down all day, is the last resting-place of Henry Kirke White and of many other persons of less note who were interred in the church, which, for at least 800 years, stood upon this plot. It was called All Saints or All Hallows by the Hospital or in the Jewry, and was in existence in the eleventh century. One Sturmi of Cambridge gave the advowson to the nuns of St. Rhadegund's Priory, whose successors, the Fellows of Jesus College, are patrons of the living to this day. The church passed through many vicissitudes of restoration and rebuilding, and was finally deserted by its parishioners, who spread themselves out more and more in the direction of the open country, where they were far from any place of worship. It was, therefore, decided to build a new All Saints in a more convenient situation and to close the old church. In 1865 it was taken down. The fine roof of the nave found a home at All Saints, Wendy, a village about ten miles away, and the font went to the new parish church. A slender stone pillar

now stands in the middle of the old site to commemorate those who were buried here, and their names are inscribed upon it.

Henry Kirke White spent his short student life, through the liberality of Wilberforce, on the opposite side of the street at St. John's College. His abilities would probably have raised him to a high position if he had lived long enough to fulfil their early promise. One bit of his work lives yet in the hymn beginning, "Oft in sorrow, oft in woe." He scribbled the first ten lines in their original form on the back of a mathematical paper, and twenty years after his death Miss Fanny Fuller Maitland completed it, and it has been in print ever since.

The curious habit which prevailed in the Eastern Counties of building two churches in one churchyard, each with its own parish, vicar, wardens, etc., has almost invariably resulted in the union of the parishes under one church, while the other has sunk into decay.

"In all your music our pathetic minor your ears shall cross," we can imagine the poor derelict to murmur as the wind whistles drearily through its ruined walls while the organ peals high in the sister church.

South Walsham, Antingham, Trimley, Swaffham Prior, and Fulbourne in East Anglia, and Evesham in Warwickshire each had two churches apiece, while Reepham in Norfolk has, or had, three.

One of the most extraordinary examples of a degraded church is St. Helen's, Norwich, now an asylum for the aged poor. The nave is divided into wards for the accommodation of men, the chancel for women, while a small portion of the middle and side aisles remain as the parish church.

The effect from the outside is very peculiar; the long windows and buttresses are quite ecclesiastical in appearance, but the windows light both the upper and lower stories, and are boarded across the middle where the floor divides them, and utensils for homely domestic purposes are visible through the unstained glass. Two hundred destitute persons are housed in the cubicles built round the wards, and all the ancient rules and regulations are kept up, such as the presentation of a penny to each inmate on old Plough Monday, the first Saturday in August, and on Michaelmas Day. And in the grassy court without a notice-board warns all whom it may concern: "No person allowed to walk in this square with pattens." Over the entrance gateway the following lines are displayed:

"King Henry the Eight of Noble Fame,
Bequeathed this City this commodious place,
With Lands and Rents he did endow the same,
To help decreped Age in woful case."

And so for 350 years a work of practical charity has been carried on in the church, though it has not witnessed precisely those acts of prayer and adoration for which it was originally intended.

In the same city, and not very far away, are St. Andrew's and Blackfriars' Halls, the original nave and choir of the great church of the Dominicans, built early in the fifteenth century. The seven bays of the nave with their lofty pillars and pointed arches and the fourteen clerestory windows on each side remain, the latter being beautiful examples of Perpendicular work; but both buildings are now public halls, where meetings of all kinds, civic, political, and religious, are held. Once a year a great chrysanthemum show takes place within the once consecrated walls, and few probably among the hundreds of people who gather round the tables crowded with brilliant blooms and listen to the Royal Hungarian Ladies Orchestra playing "Stars and Stripes," or some such stirring melody, call up to their mental vision a picture of the friars preaching to the good citizens of Norwich in the nave, or kneeling in prayer in the choir, which was their private chapel. After the dissolution of the monastery, the timber from the church was cut up into market-stalls.

In later times both buildings were again used for spiritual purposes for the benefit of the many foreign refugees who were settled in the city. The Dutch held services in the nave, and first the Walloons and then the Dutch used the choir as a place of worship. A sermon in the latter language is still preached once a year in the Blackfriars' Hall.

What different fates have overtaken the great conventual churches of the Middle Ages! While some have entirely disappeared, and others are desecrated and their sacred origin almost forgotten, others again have become world-renowned cathedrals.

Away in the Cambridgeshire fens in the twelfth century there was a friendly rivalry between the builders and benefactors of two great churches, one high on the hill, the other only just raised above the ague-haunted swamp, and no one in 1160 could foresee how great would be the increase of the one and the decrease of the other. Benedictine monks, Knights Templars, and Franciscan minoresses have chanted their Offices in the Norman church of Denny Abbey, and its lofty tower must have been a landmark visible for many miles over the level fenland between Cambridge and Ely. Twice at least its reverend walls witnessed the forcible expulsion of the worshippers in shame and disgrace, when first the Templars and then the nuns fell under the royal displeasure. The Abbacy of Ely had already been converted into a bishopric,

and the cathedral was slowly rising in massive grandeur under the hands of the Norman masons, when Brother Robert and Aubrey Picot began to build their church at Denny. It was a noble edifice, with nave, chancel, transepts, and central tower, and was dedicated to St. James and St. Lawrence.

However, the Benedictines were not long in possession, for only a century later Knights Templars were established at Denny. When their Order was dissolved Edward III. gave the property to Mary, Countess of Pembroke, widow of Aymer de Valence, and she brought a community of Franciscan minoresses to occupy the old rooms and offices of the monks and Templars. She greatly enlarged the church and made other improvements, enjoining the Fellows of Pembroke College—also her foundation—to visit the nuns at Denny and “give them ghostly counsel on just occasions.” A gleam of romance flickers across the old church in 1465, when a marriage was solemnized there between William Ketterick, junior, and Marion Hall, domestic servants in the monastery.

Was it by the wish of the nuns, who were interested in the love affair of their young maid-servant, that the marriage took place, not, as might have been expected, in the parish church, where the banns were put up, but in the convent chapel, so that they, chaste votaries of a single life, might be present at the ceremony? Surely it must have been so. No doubt the poor sisters dressed and kissed and wept over the bride, but let us not add that they envied her.

The nuns were dispersed in the reign of Henry VIII., and a hundred years later the property was in the hands of Thomas Hobson, the noted carrier commemorated by Milton.

At the present time all that remains of the nave is built into the dwelling-house attached to a dairy farm. One bay, showing a massive round arch and fluted capitals, is in the entrance hall, and the line of the chancel arch can be traced in an outer wall. The site of the chancel is an open grassy space at the back of the house.

The glory is departed, the old order changed. Grandeur of aisle and vault, grace of sculptured capital and moulded arch, have vanished for ever from Denny, yet eastwards over the fen “the sun strikes through the furthest mist, the city’s spire to golden.”

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