

admirable clearness of Dr. Illingworth's style may tempt all but the most careful readers to fancy they have far too easily mastered all he has to teach them.

W. EDWARD CHADWICK.

SOME EARLY CHRISTIAN ORATORIES.

IN the sixth century a party of Christian missionaries from Ireland landed on the Cornish coast, either at Pendinas, where the town of St. Ives now stands, or on the banks of the Hayle Estuary. They began to preach in the neighbourhood, and their memory is perpetuated by the churches they founded and consecrated, churches whose direct successors remain to this day.

One of these early evangelists was Gwithian, who built near Godrevy Point, within sight of the waves breaking on the shore, a tiny place of worship, and bestowed his own name upon it. Probably he ministered within its walls to the simple people who gathered round him until a tragic end came to his career.

Tewdwr, the heathen chief who ruled over that part of Cornwall, put him and several of his companions to death, but speedily a dire vengeance befell the tyrant. As an old writer explains: "This is a parish much anoyde with the sea sande which flyeth at a low water with the winde out of the choaked hauen into the Lande, swallowinge vp much of the lande of the inhabitants to their great impoverishment." Tewdwr's low-lying territories, unprotected by cliffs, and his royal castle were overwhelmed, and have never been seen again.

At a later period Gwithian's church shared in the general desolation of the coast, when houses and pasture-lands were buried in the sand, but it was not forgotten; its site was well known, but it was confidently believed that there were no remains of buildings. As a fact, the buildings were in existence, but they were hidden by the towans. In 1834 the sand was dug out, and the little church again brought to light.

Let us recollect that the spot was a hallowed one; those drifts of golden sand had preserved it from desecration. It was the nucleus of the parish, for the church then in use was the successor to Gwithian's own little temple, only removed to another site for convenience and safety; yet the ancient stones claimed no reverence from their discoverer, and he degraded them to the purposes of a pig-sty. In the vestry

of the church at Gwithian two drawings are preserved, showing the appearance of the chapel at this period.

J. T. Blight, in his "Churches of West Cornwall," gives its dimensions—viz., length, 48 feet 11 inches; width of nave, 14 feet 4 inches; width of chancel, 12 feet 2 inches; and height of walls, 5 to 7 feet.

But the traveller who makes his way to the spot and expects to see walls and roof of ecclesiastical design will be disappointed. He might wander for a long time over the sandy tract—a kind of plateau among the towans—overgrown with yarrow and bird's-foot trefoil, or stroll along the bank of a tiny stream which makes a line of deeper verdure through the plain, and nourishes beds of blue brook-lime and yellow mustard, before he would discover and identify a low hillock, and on it a slightly depressed oblong space of sand, having at one end a tiny bit of wall 2 feet or so in height; for this is all that remains of St. Gwithian's Chapel, certainly one of the most ancient places of Christian worship in the land, if not the very oldest; the little buried oratory at Perranzabulo may or may not be earlier. Only two architectural details were noted when the building was laid bare: the chancel was narrower than the nave, and there were no carved stones of any sort. As St. Pieran's contained some slight mouldings, the absence of ornament at St. Gwithian's may point to its greater antiquity. Human bones have been found in the sand round about the church, and a few yards nearer the sea a towan, taller than its neighbours, rises against the sky, and is locally said to cover many houses overwhelmed in a sudden dust-storm. The shifting sands are now bound together by the *Arundo arenaria*, or sand-rush, which makes a foundation for other plants and grasses, so that in course of time the barren land is converted into pasture.

A few miles further down the coast, in the parish of Zennor, the Gurnard's Head thrusts a spur of dark rock into the Atlantic, and on the north side of the point, just where it juts out from the mainland, some fragments of an ancient oratory are to be seen. From its site the cliffs drop sheer down to the clear green water, and on the land side the moor, covered with heather and granite boulders, stretches far and high. The old woman in a cotton sun-bonnet who constituted herself our guide for half a mile along the footpath and over the "stone hedges" from the hamlet of Treryn to the headland, with the assurance that we could not discover the track alone, did not apparently find that many of the tourists whom she guided thither were interested in the "li'l chapel," for she said nothing about it until questioned on the subject, when she was able to point out the site. We saw a tiny parallelogram marked out by a mound 2 feet high,

covered with heather and closely-packed thrift. At the west end lay two loose irregularly-shaped lumps of granite, and at the east end a slab of the same material, traditionally said to be the original altar-stone, and also the burial-place of certain drowned sailors. The latter is by no means an unlikely tale, for until well on in the last century drowned persons of unknown name were buried in any convenient spot on beach or cliffs, and a place such as this, already provided with traditions of sanctity, might well appear especially suitable. A century ago the site was called Chapel Jane, and it was the custom to make a pilgrimage to it on the parish feast-day—the Sunday nearest to May-day—which seems like the survival of a very old practice.

As to the saint who ministered here and his disciples, history is silent. Perhaps the latter came from the hamlet above, where a farmhouse, a hotel, and a few cottages cluster together as if for protection from the furious gales that sometimes sweep over the highlands of Zennor.

Our guide told us that twenty years ago no one came to the Gurnard's Head; now there is seldom a day without visitors, who drive over from Penzance and St. Ives. Even in winter many come to enjoy a fine sea; but the little chapel, lying just off the beaten track to the headland, is unvisited, save by the bees and butterflies, which drink honey from the heather-bells. There it has stood for unknown ages; there its remains will probably linger, clinging so closely to the side of the cliff as to be almost one with the living rock, protectively clothed with the same vegetation, drenched by ocean spray and mountain mists, until some landslip or mighty convulsion of Nature rolls chapel and cliff together into the sea below.

Still further westwards on the isthmus connecting Cape Cornwall with the mainland, and on the right of the road leading to the headland, stands a small stone building with gable ends and apparently in a good state of repair.

If the casual tourist should take any notice at all of this tiny edifice he would probably suppose it to be a cattle-shed, but this is where tradition has placed St. Helen's Oratory.

It is such a spot as the primitive saints loved, for they thoroughly appreciated the beauties and loneliness of wild Nature. The Land's End, the reef of rocks called the Longships, where the lighthouse of the same name now stands, the two detached Brisons, gray in the sunshine, black in shadow against the shimmering azure, were in full view; the sound of breaking waves was never absent. But the "horrid forms in which the rocks appeared," to use the words of an eighteenth-century historian, did not disturb the lonely dweller at St. Helen's. The seaward end of Cape Cornwall—"that tremendous precipice which common mortals scarcely visit without

a degree of dismay"—rose higher than the isthmus, and was a shelter from the greatest fury of gales off the sea; landwards there was the moor, covered with a thick mat of gorse and purple heather. In the neighbourhood the miners, delving from time immemorial for copper and tin, gave scope for missionary effort, as they do still, for even now in the depressed state of their industry the water in little Porthleden Cove, close at hand, is stained red from the tin works, and by hill and vale are chapels of denominations enough to suit every phase of even a Cornishman's religious nature. County histories and guide-books for the last hundred years quote the name of *Parc-au-Chapel* as applied to the field in which the shanty stands, but a lad whom the writer questioned on the spot denied all knowledge of such a name. The dimensions of the oratory were 45 feet by 12, so that it closely approached *St. Gwithian's* in size. Sheep graze in the field once the chapel yard, and from the modern, well-preserved look of the little building it is impossible to doubt that it has been used for farm or domestic purposes within the memory of man, though no such use is made of it at the present time.

To live where there is neither a road nor a tree, "but only my Maker and me," was the desire of the recluse, call him what you will—saint, hermit, missionary—who in a far back age mortified his flesh and nourished his soul in the tiny dwelling wedged into a cleft of the *Pembrokeshire* cliffs, and now called *St. Govan's Chapel*.

Doubtless the holy man saw visions and dreamed dreams as, with the sounds of many waters for ever in his ears, he watched the Atlantic—in sunshine stretching away blue and smiling to a far-off horizon, and in storm churning itself into foam along the rock-bound coast, where headland and bay, headland and bay, succeeded each other until all were lost in distance, while above the gray cliff towered high in solemn loneliness and echoed the scream of the sea-birds.

Of course, disciples visited him, walking for the purpose long miles over the grassy waste on the cliff top. Women came oppressed with the cares of life, but as eager to minister to the lonely man of their substance as to gain benefit from his exhortations or taste the healing waters of his sacred well. Children were brought to receive his blessing, and men, emotional and fervent, came to sit at his feet and learn how to bear on the torch of Christianity to later generations, and in time add their names to the long roll of Celtic holy men.

Since those primitive times the chapel has been rebuilt, but it is not known exactly when this was done. Up to the year 1840 patients were visiting the well close by, and leaving behind them the sticks and crutches which they no longer required.

The only approach to the cell has always been by a flight of steps cut in the face of the cliff; they remain to this day, somewhat broken and worn, but no one uses them except occasional tourists who drive over from Pembroke and climb down to inspect the chapel. It is 20 feet long and 12 feet wide. A tiny cell opens from it. According to tradition the hermit was on one occasion pursued by a demon; he fled for refuge to this fissure in the cliff, when the rock opened to receive him, and held him enclosed until his pursuer had departed, when it opened again to let him out, but has ever since retained the impression of his body.

There is no St. Govan among the Welsh saints, and so conjecture has run riot in the endeavour to find a named and dated inhabitant for the chapel. The wildest of all the traditions connects it with Sir Gawain, King Arthur's nephew, "the reckless and irreverent knight, who, too blind to have desire to see, wearied of the quest of the Holy Grail, but found a silk pavilion in a tent and merry maidens in it, and so his twelvemonth and a day were pleasant."

Surely it can only have been in a repentant old age that Gawain sought the retirement of this wild spot.

"On the island or peninsula north of St. Ives standeth the ruins of an old chapel, wherein God was duly worshipped by our ancestors, the Britons, before the church of St. Ives was erected or endowed." Thus far the somewhat imaginative historian of the eighteenth century. Nothing certain is known of the foundation of this chapel, but as St. Nicholas, to whom it was dedicated, was the patron of sailors, it was probably intended for the use of sea-faring men. A great part of the old town stands on the narrow neck of the long headland, called from time immemorial the "Island"; the chapel is at the seaward end, perched among the granite crags at the highest point. Below it grassy cliffs slope steeply to the tumbled rocks, where the league-long rollers of the Atlantic roar and thunder. Perhaps that quaint old writer William Lambarde's description of the remains of a chapel near Hythe may fitly be applied to St. Ives, for he says: "Although it may now seeme but a base Barn in your eie, yet was it sometime an Imperiale seate of great estate and maiestie. For it was Saint Nicholas chappell, and he in Papisme held the same empire that Neptune had in Paganisme, and could (with his onely becke) both appease the rage and wallowing waves of the Sea and also preserve from wrecke and drowning so many as called upon his name." And therefore this was one of the places (as the poet said)

"Where such as had escaped the sea
Were wont to leave their gifts."

The little chapel was used as a place of worship up to the

eighteenth century, when, probably about the year 1738, it was rebuilt as a look-out for coastguard men and pilots, and so continued until recently, when it was taken down, and the site is now marked by an untidy heap of bricks and mortar and by two short sections of stone wall built between the granite boulders, and forming with them a stout rampart on the seaward side; but still the spot is invariably called St. Nicholas' Chapel.

It is seldom, indeed, that there is not a bronzed and weather-beaten fisherman squatting on the top of the wall and sweeping with keen gaze that blue expanse of ocean from far-off Trevoise Head to the nearer Carthew Rocks.

In 1649, when the chapel was in its prime, Godrevy Point, the opposite horn of the bay, was the scene of a historic wreck, when the ship containing Charles I.'s treasure was lost on its way to France, and almost every winter adds to the long, long tale of loss of life and property on the submerged reefs and rocky headlands that fringe the coast.

At present the Admiralty are the owners of the chapel, but they are proposing to hand it over to the Borough of St. Ives free of charge; and as the stones taken from the ancient structure have been preserved, it is not improbable that they may be replaced as far as possible in their old positions, and that there may again be a chapel of St. Nicholas on the island.

L. E. BEEDHAM.

THE MONTH.

NOT the least important and significant event of the past month has been the reduction in price of the *Record* from threepence to a penny. We congratulate our contemporary on its enterprise and true statesmanship in taking this very welcome step. For the first time the great body of Evangelical Churchmen have a weekly penny paper of their own, and in these days of cheap publications this fact will count for a great deal. Such a paper has long been needed—one that at the popular price of one penny would do for a wider circle of Evangelical and Moderate Churchmen what the *Record* has done at a higher price for the necessarily smaller constituency that could afford a more expensive paper. The first numbers of the new issue promise well in interest, variety, and helpfulness, and we wish the venture a large and increasing circulation. It is sometimes said that Evangelical Churchmen do not realize the value of the Press to the extent that others do, both inside and outside the Church of England. We hope that whatever truth there may be in this allegation will at least in part be removed by a hearty