

Something about Bell-founders and their Bells.

By M. ADELINÉ COOKE.

HOW interesting it would be to know somewhat of the names and doings of those old-world bell-founders—perhaps the title is rather pretentious—who cast the crotals found in ancient barrows and the hand-bells which did service until, with increasing wealth and knowledge, a more opulent and sonorous sound was desired. Certainly Mr. Raven, in his book on bells, puts forward a fascinating theory of metal journeying in Phœnician vessels to be cast into shape and returning to England in the form of crotals; and subsequently he draws a delightful picture of hawkers' carts tracing the British trackways, and later supplies being stored at stations along the great Roman roads. Yet bells were made in Britain at a comparatively early period. Did not St. Boniface—born in the year 680—send a present of a hand-bell to the Pope? and it may safely be presumed that even so prominent a divine would have scrupled to offer what might not be relied on both for use and beauty. The renowned St. Teilo was presented with a bell by his people. Would that history recorded how it was cast, or whether its wonderful properties were simply the result of close association with its richly-endowed owner. This bell not only “condemned the perjured and healed the sick,” but also sounded every hour of its own accórd! Bells were evidently in general use in England about the seventh century, from the manner in which the Venerable Bede alludes to the bell rung at the death of the Abbess Hilda of Whitby. But religious establishments would naturally take the lead in such a matter, and very probably the monks themselves were the founders. And in that portion of the Bayeux tapestry which portrays the funeral of King Edward the Confessor, two wonderful urchins are armed with two hand-bells each. There is scant evidence, if any, to show who cast the celebrated peal of bells which was the pride of Crowland

Abbey, though we may reasonably conclude that it was founded by the monks. This peal led the way in the practice of naming bells after important personages. The great bell was called Guthlac, after the hermit who first sought out the lonely spot among the treacherous bogs and waged spiritual warfare with demons. Tradition affirms that its sound was most efficacious in curing those suffering from headache! The other six, which were added in the time of Abbot Egelric, received the titles of Turketyl, his predecessor in the office, Betelin, Tatwin, Pega and Bega, and last, but not least, St. Bartholomew, whose thumb was one of the prized relics of the monastery, and who, of course, would confer additional virtue against peril by thunder and lightning. Unfortunately, however, this did not prevent destruction by fire. A century later a fire broke out, and belfry and bells were no more. But, in 1113, Fergus of Boston, *brasiarius* as he is termed, and practically the first bell-founder whose name is known, presented two skillets to the despoiled abbey. As the craft of bell-founding gradually became the work of others beside the monks, Alwoldus of London comes to sight. He appears to have been thought very highly of and quite at the top of the tree regarding his trade, for he is designated *campanarius*, whereas his fellow-craftsmen are merely termed *ollarius* or potter. They seem to have lived principally in the neighbourhood of St. Botolph's-without-Aldgate. These "potters" were often men of substance and evidently held what we should nowadays consider a good position. They bought and sold lands, frequently acted as mayors, made wills directing the bestowal of their property, and sepulchral brasses and monuments were raised to their memory. Often they took their surname from their craft, like William le Belyetere, a provincial founder, though one man there was who evidently held himself in such high repute that he placed on his bells the name of his county after his own. One is thus inscribed :

"Stepne Norton of Kent,
He made in God intent."

The *campanarius* or Belleyettere by no means disdained to make lavers, pots and pans beside founding bells; thus he was frequently termed potter. Brasyer was another cognomen, and there was a Robert Brasyer who also served as bailiff, sheriff and mayor. But bell-founders frequently followed a second trade, whether by way of having two strings to their bow, who can determine? So this Robert's son also followed two occupations according to the entry of his name when admitted to the freedom of the city. "Rics Brasyer Goldsmyth, fil Robti Brayser Belzet."

The notable Henry Jordan or Jurden displays a number of signs upon his bells which would apparently indicate that he also pursued the calling of a fishmonger, which, to our mind, does not seem to assort at all well with that of a founder. But did not three generations of De Ropefords who lived at Paignton during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries actually do business as founders, clock-makers, and organ-builders! Truly a diversity of talents! Early bells were long and pear-shaped, and entirely devoid of any mark or ornament. Not until the reign of King Edward I. were attempts begun at inscribing them. The oldest bell in England which is dated is found at Claughton Church, and the date of the year is 1296. So that this casts grave suspicion upon a bell at the Norman church of Studland which is generally supposed to be of great antiquity. It bears the date 1065—more than a century before the foundation of the church—an inscription, "Drawe Neare to God," and what may be considered the trade-mark of the founder, the initials C. P., and between them the figure of a bull. It would indeed be interesting to know the true history of this remarkable bell.

An Evesham monk, Walter of Odyngton, wrote down—of course in Latin—the first known instructions on the art and craft of bell-founding. He lived in the reign of Henry III., but although monastic foundries existed for a considerable period, they were gradually ousted by the trade foundries, which very probably were enabled to do business on a larger scale and were therefore largely patronized. The last ecclesiastical founder of

whom we hear mention was Thomas Hickman, Sacrist of St. Augustine's, who cast a bell in 1358 for Canterbury Cathedral. Belonging to the trade was the famous Richard Tunnoc, city bailiff of York in the year 1327. The remarkable bell-founder's window in York Cathedral which perpetuates his memory gives quite a lesson in the diverse and wonderful methods of casting bells. Evidently he was a very great man.

Besides the Metropolitan bell foundries there were foundries at many important provincial towns such as Norwich, Bury St. Edmunds, Nottingham, Colchester, Gloucester, Bristol and Lynn. At Salisbury, too, in the fourteenth century there was a foundry for bells and pots. A few foundries also existed in quite country places. There was one on a small scale at Burford, Oxfordshire. Neale was the name of this local worthy, and he was honoured with burial in the north transept, which is usually called Bellfounder's Aisle, of the stately church. Four at any rate of the eight bells famous for their tone were his work, for they bear the inscription :

" Thomas Silvester, John Hunt, R. Taylar,
T. Tynckes.

C. G. H.

W. A 1635.

Henry Neale made mee."

The Church of Fontmell Magna in Dorset is fortunate in possessing what must surely be two pre-Reformation bells. They are inscribed respectively : " Intercede Pia pro nobis Virgo Maria," and " Ave Maria." I cannot give the precise date, and this conjecture may doubtless be proved incorrect, yet it is not usual to find invocations to the Blessed Virgin Mary after the Reformation.

But beside these stationary works there were a number of itinerant bell-founders who journeyed from place to place just where their services were most likely to be needed. There is something very picturesque about the lives of these wanderers, whose bells are often found at tremendous distances from each other all over England, pretty positive proof of the journeys they

must have made. The itinerant one did not disdain to make "pannys, potys and other like," and no doubt was welcomed with pleasure and his opinion asked concerning the church bells if there happened to be anything amiss. These he would recast upon the spot, in the churchyard most probably, all materials being supplied. The existence of such a furnace was discovered at Scalford, together with a quantity of bell-metal. This metal was often got together in all kinds of different ways. Parishioners gave and collected money to buy necessary material, but much was also given in kind—basins, platters, lavers, kettles, pots—so as to help forward the work. There is a certain story of a bell-founder who discovered just at the critical moment that, despite all efforts, he was considerably short of material. Imitating the celebrated Benvenuto Cellini when casting the Perseus, he seized all the pewter pots and culinary utensils on which he could lay hands and cast them into the furnace. Perhaps it was another of these itinerant seekers of trade and fortune who figures so amusingly as the "prowd potter" in Ritson's "Robin Hood Ballads."

When church bells needed recasting and no itinerant founder came that way, there was much ado to send them to the nearest foundry. The churchwardens of the time conveyed the bell or bells with the utmost care and received them back with pride. It was also the duty of these indefatigable ones to post to and fro to arrange with the founder, and all these excursions swelled the cost and made it an expensive affair for the parish in question. Sometimes, too, they were not satisfied with the work, and much litigation ensued. Indeed, the craft of bell-founding was by no means easy nor the bell-founder's life free from care. What with difficulties with unsatisfied churchwardens, trouble about the payment of money promised and fluctuations of trade, there was much to harass him. Are we not, indeed, told of one who actually committed suicide because he could not get his bells in tune! As a rule, however, they appear to have achieved fair fortunes, been men of prominence, and left long wills disposing of their wealth and bequeathing their foundries to those who

were to carry on the trade. One of the quaintest of these wills is quoted in "Church Bells of Cambridgeshire" and "Church Bells of Suffolk." It concerns a founder named Chirche, who evidently had given largely during his lifetime and desired that all should be in order for the future. "I will that Thomas Chirche my sone do make clene the grete lectorn that I gave to Seynt Mary chirche quart'ly as long as he levyth."

Very beautiful and interesting are many of the founders' marks or stamps and the dedications and inscriptions placed on bells. Longobardic lettering gave way to black-letter, roughly speaking, about the fifteenth century. Bells often bear dedications to the saints, apostles and martyrs, the name of St. Katherine appearing very frequently. Of course there are dedicatory hexameters to the Virgin Mary. St. Peter and St. Andrew were also popular, and the assistance of St. Barbara was often invoked, no doubt because of the special power ascribed to her in quelling storms. The ringing of bells was generally considered to drive away demons and dispel thunder and lightning. Norwich foundries were particularly famous for the beauty of their capital letters. Three bells, the lowest of which is surmounted by a crown, seems to us a specially apposite foundry shield. William Culverden, who lived during the reign of Bluff King Hal, is known by a beautiful rebus. Emblems of the Four Evangelists sometimes appear. Edward I. is also the first Sovereign whose head figures on bells. Stephen Tonni, who worked at Bury St. Edmunds, which had been active in bell-founding during the Plantagenet period, used a striking floriated cross; two other Tudor worthies were William Land and Thomas Draper. One of the Purdues is met with at Sherborne, where, in 1670, he recast the great bell given by Cardinal Wolsey. It bears the half-rhyming formula usual in such cases. "This bell was new cast by me, Thomas Purday, October 20, 1670," but it is also inscribed :

"By Wolsey's gift I measure time for all,
To mirth, to griefe, to church, I serve to call."

This worthy died at the ripe old age of ninety, and if he composed his own epitaph, as may have been the case, years had certainly not destroyed his confidence and conceit :

“ Here lies
The bell-founder,
Honest and true,
Till ye resurrection
Nam'd Purdue.”

Miles Graye, the famous Colchester founder, could not, at any rate, complain of lack of business. In Suffolk alone there are no fewer than ninety of his bells. A Norwich founder, William Brend, placed on his bells a monogram which included the initial of his wife's name of Alice. I cannot resist concluding these scant details concerning bell-founders and their bells with a quotation about the history of the treble bell at Brixton or Brightstone in the Isle of Wight, which was recast by Thomas Mears, and bears this exceedingly quaint inscription :

“ In the year 1740 John Lord zealous for the promotion of Campanologia's art caused me to be fabricated in Portsmouth and placed in this tower. 60 years I led the peal when I was unfortunately broken in the year 1800. I was cast in the furnace, refounded in London and returned to my former station. Reader thou also shalt know a Resurrection. May it be unto eternal life.”

