

The Scene of the Church Congress.

By M. ADELINÉ COOKE.

THIS year's Church Congress has been fixed to take place in what is, in many respects, a remarkable town. That it differs widely in appearance and surroundings from most populous centres is apparent directly the visitor arrives at the principal railway station, for instead of being, as are so many stations, in the dirtiest and most undesirable portion of the town, at Southampton the wide flood of water lies alongside, sweeps indeed to the very boundary of the busy rail in the most delightful manner, and emerging from the station we are confronted with gleaming tides bearing stately ships and white-sailed boats, and the line of a curving coast whereby stand the ancient walls which in olden days defended Southampton—and sometimes none too successfully—against the dreaded onslaughts of Frenchmen and Spaniards.

The story of Southampton, even from its earliest beginnings in Roman and Saxon times, is more military than ecclesiastical, and perhaps in some ways that is only to be expected when the character of the town as the port for passage and transit from Normandy to England is duly considered. Monarchs frequently visited it, but their minds were usually too occupied in marshalling and embarking armies to fight on the fair lands of France to concern themselves greatly about religious foundations.

Another reason is no doubt to be found in the constant raids by the watchful foe, and the tales of fire and sword which mark much of the town's history. Southampton, indeed, formed far too tempting a bait for the denizens of the land just across the water for the inhabitants to care overmuch to increase the temptation to burn and plunder by building stately abbeys and enriching churches. Speed, indeed, narrates that the Church of St. Mary was "demolished in the sixteenth century because its spire was too good a landmark for the French."

Southampton folk would seem to have been, as they probably still are, of a somewhat utilitarian spirit, for the Court Leet Book of 1550 contains an order "to cart away so much of the rubbish of St. Mary's Church as would be required to make the highway from Bargate and all East Street down to the turning to the chantry." It is also declared that a certain chantry chapel of St. Michael's Church was let as a dwelling-house and became in time a barber's shop. This old church, the most ancient in Southampton, saw terrible doings in the fourteenth century, when a fleet of marauding galleys got access to the town on Sunday morning when folk were at Mass, and were rudely disturbed by the foreigners falling upon them, and fire and sword painted that quiet Sabbath in flame and blood. St. Michael's is a church which must greatly attract visitors to the Congress who care for the history of centuries told in stone. It shows many different styles, and the beautiful font, at least, would be worth going to see, for it is one of the five celebrated black fonts in Hampshire, wonderfully carved and full of detail. The church stands open all day long, and contains, besides a fifteenth-century brass eagle lectern, a sixteenth-century canopied monument to Lord Chief Justice Lyster, which now stands in the nave, and the piscinas which show the presence of vanished chapels. The shell of the church with its Saxon tower is very old indeed, and all is carefully and reverently ordered. About its position there is something most quaint and even foreign in appearance. It stands in the centre of a little square quite remote from the busy traffic of the town, although within a stone's throw of it; and nearly opposite rises the splendidly timbered, gabled, and carved Tudor House built by Henry Huttoft, a mayor of Southampton, and, so local tradition asserts, visited by King Henry VIII. and Anne Boleyn. Just by its side, beneath its shadow, lies Blue Anchor Lane, running steeply down to the Norman walls, the quaint building known as King John's Palace, and the sparkling blue water. It is one of the quaintest bits of old Southampton, a picture of the original town which must needs interest and charm, and the timbered house itself, built on stonework of the fifteenth

century, is well worth a visit if only to see the fine hall with the carved minstrels' gallery, panelled rooms, picturesque stair, and quaint casements. St. Mary's Church will most probably be the scene of Congress services. It is the principal church of Southampton, and was rebuilt by Street in 1878 as a memorial to Bishop Wilberforce. Much of the internal decoration is very beautiful, and the baptistery is a striking feature. The name of St. Denys, now practically a suburb of the town, recalls the Priory which has vanished long since ; but in the church of Holy-Rood, with its splendid fourteenth-century tower standing in Southampton's principal street, may be seen some fine old black stalls which appear to have come from the monastery, together with a brass lectern which represents an eagle, more like a dragon, trampling on a serpent. To this Priory Edward III. gave the Hospital, or lazaret-house, of St. Mary Magdalene, but so frequent and so bitter were the contentions over the nomination of the wardens and other matters that by the fifteenth century it ceased to exist. The town, however, contains much of the Maison Dieu, or Hospital of St. Julian, which is mostly known as God's House. Gervase le Riche and burgesses of the town founded it in the twelfth century in connection, so it is supposed, with the Canterbury pilgrimages. The chapel, which has been extensively restored, is often called the French Church, and was granted by Queen Elizabeth as a place of worship for Huguenot refugees residing in the town ; and it is worthy of note that this Queen also left fields at Oxford wherewith to build almshouses for four women and four men. It is a very peaceful scene nowadays, yet even St. Julian's was damaged by French raiders, and the ivied tower which practically adjoins the buildings may have been built as an additional defence.

And those who delight in traditional history must know that the shore was the scene of King Canute's rebuke to the flattering courtiers who would fain have persuaded the monarch that he was more than mortal. There is, indeed, a fragment of an old building in Porter's Lane which legend, at least, declares to have been his palace.

There are other churches in Southampton, naturally. The names come speedily to the mind, though space forbids more detail; yet it is interesting to note that the great painter Millais was baptized at All Saints' Church, while if we cross the river by the floating bridge we can visit the Jesus Chapel on Pear Tree Green, and remember that it was the first to be consecrated after the Reformation. Nor must we forget that Isaac Watts was born in the town, and that his grand hymn, "O God, our help in ages past," was originally sung in a Southampton meeting-house.

It is impossible to walk through the streets of Southampton without feeling that we are greeted by much history of the English race, and at least some few events which have marked the story of our country.

From the quay first set sail the *Mayflower*, laden with those greatly daring ancestors of ours, the Pilgrim Fathers, seeking a new home in a strange land. Underneath the old West Gate and Tower, standing so quaintly near the original place of embarkation, the West Quay, England's archers marched to cross the sea and fight the battles of Crècy and Agincourt. The old woolhouse, although converted to quite different purposes, speaks forcibly of Southampton's position in the commerce of a day that is dead; the fourteenth-century arcading of the town walls is deemed unique; King John's palace tells of the monarch who brought much shame on England, and contains a treasure-chest of Philip II. The principal street is spanned by the Bargate which confronts the twentieth century with medieval architecture; the huge docks and wharves where leviathans of the ocean lie at anchor, liners call, and all the busy commerce of an important seaport proceeds, must have a place in our time and our thoughts, or we should scarcely be true Imperialists at one with the achievements and glories of our country, and quietly ready to shoulder her responsibilities as well as take part in her triumphs.

