

ART. XIV.—*Keld Chantry*. By the REV. J. WHITESIDE, M.A., Vicar of Shap.

*Communicated at that place, July 15, 1897.*

THE hamlet of Keld is 1 mile west of the church of Shap. I suppose there is no doubt this is a Chantry Chapel. The photograph gives the east window and north side, where two windows are built up. The architecture of the windows, which fortunately survive in an almost perfect state of preservation, belongs to the later years of the 15th century. The east window is contemporary with the east window in the Abbey belfry and with one in the nave of the parish church. The mason's mark is different from any at the Abbey. There are five windows, but it is doubtful whether one at least is in its original position, and whether there was not another in the south wall of the supposed priest's cell. I have not been able to make much inquiry, but I regard it as indisputable that when the Abbey was founded, pious laymen and benefactors would come from time to time to live beneath its shadow and shelter. Keld, which is rather over half a mile from the Abbey, and connected with it by a mill stream and a road constructed by the monks, which passes by the mill, was then a place of some distinction. On the decease of one of its principal residents the chapel was built that masses might be said or sung for the repose of his soul. Hence the word chantry. If I may quote one of Offley Wakeman's gems:

The chantry owed its existence to a vein of conviction and feeling which ran very deep in the religious life of the middle ages. It is not to be ascribed to the selfish desire to avoid a materialized purgatory. Rather its root is to be found in that great sense of unity in the Church, which is the central figure of mediæval religion, a unity of interest



KELD CHANTRY.

interest and love, which by intercessory mass and commemorative prayer overleaped the artificial barriers of the grave. But *corruptio optimi pessima*. It was devilish work indeed to mar so true an expression of tender far-reaching love, to turn astray humility so noble and so hopeful, but it was done. The commemorative mass sank into a mechanical function. The chantry priest became the scandal of his order. In his vulgar and itching hands the doctrine of the future state was degraded until to the simple and ignorant it was pictured as a mere arithmetical arrangement of so many masses said and paid for, and so many years of punishment remitted.

I have sometimes been assured that the priest dwelt in the little chamber at the west end. This is not unlikely, but the partition wall, though thick, has a modern look, as if built for a fireplace, and the door was certainly at the west end, which has been almost entirely rebuilt. The stones of the doorway by which you enter on the north have been removed thence. It appears that after the suppression the roof was stripped, the fabric fell into decay and became, like the Abbey, a local quarry. That the chapel was not wiped out of existence is surprising. I have had an opportunity of inspecting title deeds going back exactly 200 years; throughout it is described as "the chapel, consisting of dwelling-house, &c." I take it that from the Whartons who received a grant of the Abbey possessions, including Keld, the chapel passed by a gift or purchase to some tenant. It was occupied more or less continuously for a century, but within the memory of older inhabitants the roof had fallen in. At the time of the construction of the railway it was repaired and re-roofed, and persons live in Keld who had the distinction of being born within its once sacred walls. There is a favourite legend in the neighbourhood of a subterranean passage to the Abbey. Such a tunnel through half a mile of solid rock, even if necessary, would be a tremendous undertaking, even to the laborious monks. The navvies engaged in making the railway, however, spent a night in antiquarian research, exploring and exploding the theory.

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At the west end is a well, now covered in, which may have been dug for the use of the chantry priest. You will observe that the floor is probably the original, and the chancel step is still *in situ*. Notice also a curious projecting stone on the right of the east window. May it have been a credence? Also notice a small recess in the partition wall. Much more may be advanced when the plaster and woodwork are removed. But we cannot be too thankful that the building is before us to-day, after 350 years of desecration and defilement. It will rejoice all antiquaries and Churchmen that I have secured it recently as a mission-room for Keld, to be restored to something of its ancient purpose according to the pure teaching of the Holy Catholic Church.

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