

## BANBURY CROSS.

By W. LOVELL.

It may be safely affirmed that, thanks to the nursery rhyme, this celebrated cross will never be forgotten while the English language lasts. Looking back to early times we shall see what was said of the cross. It is mentioned in the reign of Edward VI as the "High Crosse." Leland writes, "The fayrest street of the town lyeth by West and East down to the River of Charwell. In the West part of this street is a large area invironed with meetly good buildings, havinge a goodly Crosse with many degrees (steps) about it. In this area is kept every Thursday a very celebrated market. There runneth through this area a purle (pool) of fresh water." The situation of the principal cross is thus identified as being in the part now called the Horse Fair. But Jonson tells us that the advent of Queen Elizabeth brought evil days to the Catholics. From the date of the execution of the Earl of Essex, which took place in 1601, the oppressed adherents of Rome waxed boldly in the expression of their opinion. Under the strict rule of the Puritans the Show and Pageants which were periodically used at Banbury, Coventry and other places were suppressed, and an attempt was made by the Catholics to revive them. The dresses were procured, the characters rehearsed, and a day fixed for the performance at Banbury. The procession of the performers had reached the High Cross, and the actors were engaged in the prologue of the play when a counter-demonstration issued from the High street, and a collision ensued between the excited partisans of the conflicting creeds. A regular *melée* is described as having taken place; but the supporters of the reformed doctrines having both numbers and the law upon their side seem eventually to have had the best of the fray. Having succeeded in driving their antagonists out of the town the rage of the populace took a new direction. Hammers and pickaxes were procured and the "goodly cross," the symbol of the faith of the Catholic World, was strewed in ruins through the Horse Fair. So thorough was the work of destruction that Richard Corbet, Bishop of Oxford, in his *Iter Boreale*, thus describes it—

"The Crosses also like old stumps of trees  
Or stoole for horsemen that have feeble knees,  
Carry no heads above ground. They which tell  
That Christ hath nere descended into hell  
But to the grave, his picture buried have,  
In a far deeper dungeon than a grave."

To the church the crowd repaired next, and worked their frantic will upon the stately temple. The magnificent windows of stained glass were shivered to atoms as savouring too strongly of idolatry, and the statuary and sculpture mutilated and defaced by the hands of those insensible to forms of beauty. Bishop Corbet charges the rioters with not having left the leg or arm of an apostle, and says that the names of the churchwardens were the only inscriptions to be seen upon the walls. Some legal proceedings appear to have been taken respecting this outrage at Banbury, as some "charges about the syte of the Cross" are mentioned in the Corporation Accounts in 1612. This work of mad destruction appears to have extended to every cross in Banbury, as appears by Corbet's lines before quoted. At an early date the names appear of the "Market Cross," "The Bread Cross" (repaired in 1563), and the "White Cross" without Sugarford Bar, West Bar, besides Weeping Cross beyond the boundary of the parish. There is an ancient gift of one Hall of Bodicot of 3s. yearly to be distributed in bread to the poor of Banbury. The Commissioners on Churches in 1824 state that it has been usual to distribute this bread in Oxford Bar Street on Good Friday; the vicinity of the cross thereto seems to give us the origin of the name of Bread Cross.

But to return to the "High Cross." The inhabitants have to thank the present Empress Frederick for its restoration, for it was not until her marriage that it was resolved to restore the Cross as the most graceful memorial of that event; for to think of Banbury without a cross is to set at defiance all the records of legendary lore. So subscription lists were opened, and the present elegant structure of hexagonal form was erected from a design by Mr. Gibbs of Oxford. It is fifty-two feet in height, of Bath stone, and is divided into three storeys or compartments. The panels of the centre compartment are richly ornamented with the foliage of the rose, ivy, acacia, chestnut, hollyhock and vine, and graced with the arms of Queens Mary and Victoria, Kings Charles I and George I, the Empress Frederick William of Prussia, the Earls of Banbury and Guildford, Viscount Saye and Sele, Sir William Cope, Sir William Compton, the Bishop of Lincoln, and the Rev. William Whately, who was Vicar of Banbury from 1610 to 1639. This William Whately was a Puritan, and is thus referred to by Bishop Corbet—

"If not for God's for Mr. Whateley's sake  
Level the walks; suppose these pitfalls make,  
Him sprain a lecture or displace a joint  
In his long prayer or in his fifteenth point."

The following are some allusions to Banbury in literature :—

Braithwaite in his "Drunken Barnaby's Four Journeys" refers to the town in the well-known strain—

"To Banbury came I, O profane one!  
There I saw a Puritane one  
Hanging of his cat on Monday  
For killing of a mouse on Sunday."

Ben Jonson in his comedy of "Bartholomew Fair" thus refers to Banbury—

*Winwife.* Alas, I am quite off that scent now.  
*Quarulous.* How so?

*Winwife.* Put off by a brother of Banbury, one that they say is come here and governs all already.

*Quarlous.* What do you call him? I knew divers of those Banburians when I was in Oxford.

*Littlewit.* Rabbi Busy, sir; he is more than an Elder, he is a prophet, sir.

*Quarlous.* O, I know him! he is a baker, is he not?

*Littlewit.* He was a baker, sir, but he does dream now and see visions, he has given over the trade.

*Quarlous.* I remember that, too; out of a scruple he took that in spiced conscience those cakes he made were served to brides, may poles, morrisses, and such profane feasts and meetings. His Christian name is Zeal, of the Land Busy.

William Cartwright, in his comedy entitled "The Ordinary," which appeared in 1651, makes a gamester say—

"I'll send some forty thousand unto Paul's,  
Build a Cathedral next in Banbury,  
Give organs to each parish in the Kingdom,  
And so root out the unmusical elect."

John Cleveland, in a poem printed in 1656 in defence of the decent ornaments of Christchurch, Oxon, occasioned by a Banbury Brother, who called them Idolatries, asks—

"Shall we say  
Banbury is turn'd Rome because we may  
See the Holy Lamb and Christopher? Nay more,  
The Altar stone set at the tavern doore."

Sir Wm. Davenant, in his Comedy of "The Wits," in speaking of a lady, says—

She is more devout than a Weaver of Banbury that hopes to entice heaven by singing, to make him lord of twenty loams! "The Tattler" for Sept. 5, 1710, gives a jocular account of an Ecclesiastical Thermometer which had been invented for testing the degrees of zeal of particular places in behalf of the Church. The writer states that the town of Banbury, which had been singled out by Dr. Fuller a century before for its cakes and zeal, proved itself by "the glass," i.e. the above-mentioned thermometer to be still characterised in a marked manner by the latter peculiarity. In the days of Fuller the material things which the town was remarkable for were—veal, cheese and cakes; while it is not less certain that in the abstract article Zeal Banbury was also notable. Thereby hangs a jest. When Philemon Holland was printing his English Edition of Camden's "Britannia" he added to the author's statement of Banbury being famous for cheese, the words "cake and ale," and so it was passing through the press when Mr. Camden *coming in and seeing* the change, thinking "ale" a somewhat disrespectful reference, substituted for it the word zeal, very unluckily, as it proved, for the Puritans who abounded in the town were greatly offended by the allusion, and so more was lost than gained.

Mr. Philip Rushes, who was a resident of Banbury, and died in 1832, thus describes the church in 1789, the year before its destruction in his metrical description of the churches seen from Couch Hill—

"But see where o'er the rest will nobler blaze  
 Its right crowned turrets Banbury displays  
 Upon its hallow'd walls and wide around,  
 Thick rising structures occupy the ground.  
 Behold how Phœbus with his early lights  
 Shines on the battlements and builded heights."

The old church, a very handsome edifice, and one of the largest in the county, was taken down in 1790 under the authority of an Act of Parliament and the present ungainly structure erected on its site. (Add. MSS. Cole, 5832, page 173. Banbury Church, by Browne Willis).—

	yds.	ft.	in.
Length of the Body from West to East	-	31	1 9
Bredth of the Cross Isle from East to West	-	10	2 6
Length of the Chancel from West to East	-	21	1 9
Bredth of the Body from South to North	-	27	1 6
Length of the Cross Isle	-	34	0 0
Bredth of the Chancel	-	8	1 1

The whole length of the Church and Chancel from East to West 64 yards or 192 feet.

Bray, writing in 1777, says that Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, is supposed to have been buried in the chancel of Banbury Church, "under a tomb on which is a mutilated figure recumbent."

The effigy of an ecclesiastic of the fourteenth century, described in Plate XVII of Beesley's History of Banbury, is probably the figure referred to, but this writer says that it certainly was not erected over the remains of Bishop Alexander, as that Prelate was buried in Lincoln Cathedral. None of the ancient monuments have been re-erected in the present church, but a few fragments of some of them still remain in the room which is over the vestry.

Leland writes—"I saw but one notable tombe in the Church, and that is Blacke Marble wherein William Cope Coferer to K. Henry VII. is buried."

For those feeling an interest in this place the excellent History of Banbury, written by Alfred Beesley, and published in 1841, with copious illustrations, will afford a real treat. He received information and assistance from eminent antiquaries and literary men in almost all parts of England. There is also a very good Strangers' Guide by W. P. Johnson, and published by Mr. Walford of the *Advertiser*, Banbury, at the moderate price of sixpence.

To those interested in epitaphs the following are selected from several preserved in the British Musum. (Add. MSS. Cole, 5831, fo. 86 B):—

#### *Epitaphs in Banbury Church.*

Here lyeth the Bodies of John Knight 3 Times Baylee of this Borough & Jone his wife by whom he had three sons & 10 daughters whereof 9 were married. They saw springing from their own Loyns 84 children which like Olive Branches were an ornament to their Table. In their Life Time they cherished the Poor & having bequeathed certain Lands

for their perpetual Relief dyed full of days desired, loved, & bewailed of  
their Children, Friends & Neighbours.

He dyed ) 22 Nov. 1587.

She dyed j 26 Dec<sup>r</sup> 1590.

Graves are Lodgings to the Blest  
Not of Honour but of Rest :  
Cabinets that safely keep  
Mortals' Reliques while they sleep.  
When the Trump shall all awake  
Every soul her Flesh shall take,  
And from that which putrifys  
Shall immortal Bodies rise.  
In this Faith they liv'd & dyd :  
In this Hope they here reside.

(Baker's MSS. vol. xxxviii, p. 464).

On the same wall the proportion of an old man in the middle between  
two pillars of blacke marble with a booke in one hand and a handker-  
chiefe in ye other. Under him, on a table of blacke marble this—

To the pious memory of Will: Knight Gent, sometime Justice of  
Peace and Quorn in this Borough, who having had his education both in  
the Univ. and Inns of Court continued in the love and practice of good  
study, gave good example of morality and piety finished his course in  
the true faith and was here layd up in the Hope of a glorious resurrec-  
tion, 20th Sept., 1631—

His life, His Breath, His Facultys are gone:  
Yet Virtue keeps him from oblivion  
Those Arts and Parts that beautifyd his mind,  
Like precious oyntment leave his name behind.  
His Lamp is out ; yet still his Light doth shine  
His Faith and works survive as things divine,  
To God he lives, to us tho' dead he be:  
The buried seeds do spring : and so shall He.

Died 1631, *Ætatis* 73.

(Baker's MSS.)

To the memory of James White, son of Mr. Ric. White, of London,  
who dyed Dec. the 4th, 1669, having almost finished the 22nd year of  
his age—

Brother you've outstript me, I first born  
You first unto the Womb of Earth return,  
But I shall follow you 'ere long, and then  
One Womb shall us enclose yet once again,  
Which Womb shall open that like twins we may  
Be born on one the Resurrection Day.

Sic litavit Frater ejus natu maximus. R.W.

*In Banbury Churchyard.*

To the memory of Ric. Richards, who by a Gangreen first lost a Toe,  
afterwards a leg, and lastly his life, on the 7th day of April, 1656—

Ah ! cruel Death to make 3 meals of one !  
 To taste and eat and eat till all was gone  
 But know thou Tyrant ! when the Trump shall call  
 Hell find his feet and stand where thou shalt fall.

Petition of a great Number of the town of Banbury in favour of their Parson Thomas Brasbridge, likely to be deprived for disliking ceremonies 1590, with a letter to his Lordship from the said Brasbridge. (Lansdown MS., Burgley Papers, 64, fo. 13)—

"Right Honorable—Whereas Thomas Brasbridge many years a preacher of ye worde of god allowed by the university of Oxford was by the presentation of her majestye placed amongst us for our pastor of whose godlye conversation we are all witnesses : where also he hathe paynfully labored in his vocation teaching us our duties towards God, her majesty and of one towards another : So it is (Right Honorable) that ye said Mr. Bracebridge is either altogether or very lyke to be depryved of ye small livinge he hath amongst us, some matters of ceremonies being prosecuted against him by suche his adversaries of whose violence and wronge towards him ye whole countrye haith heard. In tender consideration whereof and for that the mayntenance in this place is so small that no learned man will undertake the same wherebye we are lyke to be ledd by an unfit guyde. May it please yr. honor yf upon his relation of ye matter it shall seeme reasonable to vouchsafe us the inhabitants of Banbury ye honorable favour to be a meanes that he may continue amongst us his paynful function and we all shall make prayers for so honourable a personage by whom we have received so great a blessinge as is the ordinarye winninge of our soules unto God.

"Your honors most humbly to command,

"The Bayliff, Justice & other the inhabitants of the borough of Banbury."

Then follow the signatures of ninety-five of the inhabitants,

Endorsed 16 Jan. 1590. "To the Right Hon. & our very good Lord the Lord Treasurer of England one of Her Majesty's most honourable privy Council."

Letter, 23 Jan. 1590, from Mr. Brasbridge to his Lordship, endorsed as follows :—"That if the commendacion given anent him by the inhabitants of Banbury and the request of Mr. Treasurer of the Household to whom he is well known may not kepe him from deprivation.

"Yett considering the towne in respect of his former prayers are content to give hym mayntenance preache he or preache he not he prayess that by ye good meanes he may be permitted to preache."

MSS. 14, 15 Jan. 1590, contains Arguments of Sir Francis Knolles, Treasurer of the Household, against the Cross in Baptism and the Surplice.

NOTE.—He ceased to be Vicar in 1590 and died in 1593 at the age of 56 years, and was buried 11 Nov. He was the author of "The Poor Man's Jewel, or a Treatise of the Pestilence.