



NOTES ON THE NEW WEST WINDOW OF THE CHURCH OF S. JOHN BAPTIST, CHESTER.

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(Read 15th December, 1890.)

IN the short time allowed me this evening, I shall not attempt to enter upon a description of each of the subjects depicted in the new window at S. John's, (especially as a guide book has been published which gives this information), but endeavour rather to give you a general idea of the work, how originated, the selection of the subjects, the connection which they bear one to another, and the purpose which led to such a selection.

It was in the month of June, 1887, that the Duke of Westminster, being in the church of S. John's, announced his intention of giving a painted window for the West end of the church. Without delay, the work was entrusted to Mr. Edward Frampton, of Buckingham Palace Road. The window was, I believe, intended to be a memorial of the jubilee year of Queen Victoria's reign. I ventured for this and other reasons, to suggest that the window should contain Historical rather than Scriptural subjects. His Grace

was pleased to accept this suggestion, and I set about seeking for suitable subjects. A number were submitted to the judgment of the then Bishop of Chester, Bishop Stubbs; some of these he approved, some he rejected, and some of those finally adopted, he suggested. We may be satisfied, therefore, that the subjects now embodied in the window, are there by the best authority. There is a feeling in some minds that historical representations in a church are out of place, and that nothing but sacred subjects should be admitted into church windows. I do not share that feeling, for it is one which tends to break up our national life, and to place religion on one pedestal, and the secular affairs of the nation on another, as though they had no connection. I think that everything should be done to encourage the feeling, happily not yet extinct, that the public affairs of the state should be guided with some reference to the King of Kings, and that those to whose hands they are entrusted, should be men of honour and truthfulness. In this country the church is not, as is the case in some countries, at variance with the state, and not only all churchmen, but all religious men must hope that "state control," as it is called, may never be so pressed as to lead to a severance between those whom God has joined together. It was with a desire, then, to provide what might remain as a lesson to future generations as well as to our own, that the subjects in S. John's window were chosen; they are designed to remind us that religion, associated publicly with all matters of state, has been the means of making England what she is; and that although the church has not at all times been favoured by the state, yet the state has at all times been nourished and assisted by the church.

The window, as you know, consists of three large lancet lights. It is a modern window, inserted in the

year 1863; it is not displeasing in its proportions, the central light is thirty feet high and five feet broad, the two side lights are a few inches less in height, and are each four feet wide. The subjects are twelve in number, four in each light. In order of date they begin at the top left-hand corner, and run across the window; they are divided by scroll work, of a very fine character, into which are incorporated various coats of arms, some thirty-nine in number; these are chiefly the arms of those Mayors of Chester who have been inhabitants of S. John's parish since the year 1529, and are taken from the old mace board of the church. Among these we may notice those of Charles Walley, mayor when the city of Chester surrendered to the Parliamentary army, 1646; the Earl of Derby, who was mayor in 1702, he lived in the Groves, died in the year of his office, and was buried in the Stanley Chapel in Ormskirk Church; Earl Grosvenor, 1807, who lived during his year of office in the Priory, purchased the advowson of S. John's in 1810, and built the old Grosvenor Schools. The events represented in the window cover a period of one thousand years.

I will divide the subjects into three periods. The first of these represents events affecting Chester and the church of S. John's before the Norman Conquest. The second represents events extending from the Norman Conquest to the Reformation; and the third represents events from the Reformation to the Restoration, since which time the church has sustained no great shock or change.

Taking these periods, then, we begin with the massacre of the monks of Bangor at the battle of Chester, when Ethelfrith drove the Britons from Chester. Seeing these holy men praying for his defeat, he deemed them more powerful in their prayers, than others in their arms, and ordered that they should first be slain. We are deeply

interested in the British Church at S. John's, for there is some reason to think that the crosses preserved in the Chapter House have a British origin; that on some return of the exiles to Chester, these crosses were erected by them, for Professor Browne points out that they have no resemblance to any other, except to a celebrated Welsh cross, which he says is almost certainly the work of the same hands, and which he thinks was set up by the Britons when they fled from Chester westward. The Saxon church founded by King Ethelred soon after this defeat, and the visit of Edgar with his kings to the church, are scenes which have authority from the *Holy Lyfe of S. Werburgh*, written by the monk Bradshaw, who appears to have been a native of Chester, and to have employed his time in the Benedictine Monastery of S. Werburgh there, in writing the life of the glorious Virgin S. Werburgh, and also in describing the many miracles that God had showed for her. He died in 1513.

The second period represented in the window, extends from the Norman Conquest to the Reformation. S. John's during this period occupied a very important position. Bishop Peter, in accordance with an order from the Council, held in London, removed his seat from Lichfield, "a sordid and desert place, to Chester, a city of renown." Here he laid out his design for a magnificent Norman cathedral, on the cliff over the Dee; but he died before he could complete his plan, and the wave of episcopal favour rolled back to Lichfield and Coventry. Bishop Peter lies buried in the choir of S. John's.

Anselm's visit to Hugh Lupus, Earl of Chester, in 1093, had for its object the consolation of the Earl in a time of sickness. Anselm used the opportunity to urge the claims of the religious foundation of S. Werburgh upon the sympathy of the Earl. The cathedral character of S. John's

seems to have continued, for in 1175 Robert II., the elected Abbot of S. Werburgh, received his benediction in the church of S. John's.

At this point, I hoped to have a subject which is mentioned in the Cowper MSS., and copied in Ormerod's *Cheshire*—the installation at S. John's, in 1398, of John Burghill, Bishop of Lichfield, on which occasion King Richard II. is said to have been present, and to have entertained a large number of the nobility. Some doubt, however, as to the accuracy of this statement was expressed by Bishop Stubbs, and on having the Lichfield Chapter Act books searched, a note was found showing that he was installed at Lichfield. We accordingly substituted the Benediction of the Abbot of S. Werburgh. This, and the visit of Anselm to Hugh Lupus, Earl of Chester, as well as the visit of Prince Edward, first Royal Earl of Chester, in 1256, are subjects suggested by the Chronicles of S. Werburgh. The ninth subject is one about which many papers might be written—the Dissolution of the College of S. John's. The foundation, never very rich, was now completely ruined; the church was stripped of its plate, vestments, bells, clergy, endowments; the choir was pulled down, and sold for building material; the lead was carried away, and sold for the king's use. The nave was left, because the parishioners had rights of worship there, and there were twelve hundred houslying people in the parish when this spoliation took place. The dean and canons of S. John's were not idle monks, as some chose to call them, but busy parish clergy. S. John's has been depressed and impoverished since that time. Its history since is one long struggle for existence; and its motto might be "I must decrease."

The last period is a short one in time, but not in events. The parishioners began to exert themselves in earnest,

and in 1581 they obtained a grant of the ruined church, and built it up very much as we now have it.

In the eleventh subject the artist has taken his picture from the old bridge with S. John's in the distance. When the Parliamentary troops took the outworks, they occupied S. John's church, and from the churchyard and streets adjoining they battered the walls of the city between the river and the East gate; from the south side of the churchyard in the distance might have been seen the old bridge, over which the defeated king with a body of his followers passed on their escape into Wales. The church suffered severely in this siege.

The last subject, the Restoration of Episcopacy and the entry of Bishop Brian Walton into Chester, marks an event of the greatest interest to the church and country.

The last bishop, Bishop Bridgeman, had been a very active earnest man, a friend of Archbishop Laud's, and a great advocate for discipline and order; he had not been popular with the Cestrians, but they were punished for their discontent and fault-finding, and had to do without a bishop for many years. During the disturbances in the time of the Commonwealth, Bishop Bridgeman fled to his son's house in Shropshire, where he remained until his death, the see was vacant for some years, and the Cestrians found that "Presbyter was but Priest—writ large;" they longed for a bishop again, for there is nothing like losing our mercies to bring us to our senses. Never was such rejoicing as when Bishop Brian Walton was appointed, and the Puritan reign was at an end. It was not a body of a few subservient clergy, anxious to propitiate their bishop, that met him at the bars in Foregate Street, but the mayor and corporation "in their formalities," and the train-bands of the city and the gentry from all the country round, who greeted the bishop with acclamations, and

attended him to his cathedral church, where he and they returned humble thanks to God for the preservation of His Church.

Two centuries of comparative peace have passed since that exciting scene took place. They have tended perhaps to make churchmen a little easy, and perhaps to undervalue that which has been interwoven with all our history, our public and private, our national and our social life; but the day of adversity may come, and may come in a way which we look not for, and I hope that if this be so, we shall not be found backward to cherish and defend, (I do not say the property of the church) but "the faith once delivered to the saints."

