II.—ON WAYSIDE CHAPELS AND HERMITAGES, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CHAPEL ON THE OLD TYNE BRIDGE.

By F. R. Wilson.

[Read at the Alnwick Meeting on the 29th June, 1887.]

The name of Chapel before the Reformation indicated the sacred edifices devoted to prayer only, containing no baptismal font, and possessing no burying ground. These were sometimes isolated, sometimes annexed. King's and nobles sometimes possessed oratories incorporated with their residences, as well as isolated chapels in their court yards; and abbots, following their example, built for themselves private chapels within the confines of their abbeys. There were also chapels annexed to conventual and cathedral churches, such as lady-chapels and chantry chapels, contained in the precincts of churches, as well as chapels belonging to colleges. In early mediaeval times the oratories built over the graves of saints were called chapels, and the structure raised over the site of a miracle, was also known by the same title. Shrines or chapels were erected over springs of water, such as the highly enriched one over the very powerful well or spring at Holywell, in Flintshire. There were hollow isolated lofty columns of stone called "Lanternes des morts," which lost that distinctive character during the 14th century, and became replaced by small chapels which held perpetually a lighted lamp. Besides chapels in the neighbourhood of cemeteries, all the charnel houses placed in the middle of towns or near churches possessed an oratory.

A portion of the garment so generously divided by the young soldier, says Butler, citing St. Sulpicius, "la chape du bienheureux St. Martin," was held in great veneration as a relic in France, in the early days of Christianity. It gave the name of *capella* or *chapelle* to the oratory in which it was preserved; and when, like other relics, it was carried into the field of battle by its royal predecessors, it was guarded in a tent which was distinguished by the name of chapel (*chapelle* a *capa*, *capella*.) The clerics to whose charge the *cape* was

confided, received the designation of chaplains.[1] This led to the practice of placing a relic in every place consecrated to worship, and this practice is quoted as the origin of the term. Thus *capella* according to Johnson,[2] signifies a cabinet to contain holy relics, and in a larger sense a closet or chest for the repository of anything valuable; hence it came to signify a little church; for no church or chapel could be ordinarily consecrated without having the relics of some saint to be kept therein.

The particular motive or feeling that called into existence the great extension in the number of chapels was the ancient custom of making pilgrimages. Most persons made pilgrimage on the occasion of important events in their lives, such as recovery from an illness, or the loss of a near relative; but those of more pious tendencies made annual pilgrimages as a matter of conscience. Guilds made annual pilgrimages to chapels in the vicinity of their boroughs, and made offerings. Pregnant women frequently made pilgrimages. Persons about to undertake a voyage, generally visited a shrine to secure intercession of the saint for their safety; and on their return, they would go through the same ceremony to return thanks. A chapel on a bridge over a sea-going river, like old Tyne Bridge, would have special significance in this sense; as I hope to show you presently in reference to the hermitage and chantry there upon that bridge.

At last, servants and young people generally, inconveniently resorted to the prevailing practice to avoid the execution of their proper duties, and crowds of idle persons wandered about the country upon pretence that they were pilgrims. This ultimately led to the custom falling into disregard in England. This class of chapel which could not be brought within the description of superstitious foundation, was dissolved by the Act of 1 Ed. VI. for the suppression of chantries, but not before it had created a demand for numerous wayside chapels.

Hermitages were sometimes built by the roadside, frequented by pilgrims on their routes to particularly popular shrines; and in occasional instances they were the objects of pilgrimages themselves. There were men who looked back to the ascetic mode of life of the early solitaries with much reverence and desire; and who, one by one, turned their faces from the gradually accumulating splendours of the

[1] Guillaume Durand. [2] Eccles. Laws, MCLXXXVIII, i. Pr.

prosperous community with which they were associated, and established themselves in lonely cells. St. Cuthbert, it is well known, was one of these earnest men; he abandoned his responsible position at Lindisfarne Priory to retire to a hermitage on one of the desolate Farne Islands.

There were many other instances in which those high in the regard of their fellow men, bishops and abbots, as well as private individuals, retired from the world, its cares and occupations, to end their days as hermits.

Hermitages were sometimes chantries. That of Brianel was a chantry of two monks, and had demesne lands upon which corn was grown for their support. Another phase of eremitical life consisted in communities of hermits, in which each individual possessed his separate hermitage.

There was an enthusiasm about such men that begot enthusiasm. Their self-abnegation, vigorous devotion, prodigious charity and unwearying love, begot self-exaction as searching, compassion as generous, and passionate adoration as ecstatic. Nobles gave their lands under the influence of their example for religious and charitable purposes. Merchants gave all that they had to the poor—founded hospitals and alms houses. Nor has this influence altogether ceased. After every hermitage had been tenantless for two centuries, the great moralist, Dr. Johnson, paid this tribute to the memory of the recluses who once inhabited them; "I never read of a hermit," said he, "but in imagination I kiss his feet; never of a monastery, but I fall on my knees and kiss the pavement."

Hermitages were not exclusively situated in secluded places like the rock-hewn one so well known at Warkworth, although they are so popularly associated with the idea of retirement, that the term hermitage has been applied to secluded places in which a hermit never resided. At Severington, near Wisbeach, one of these solitaries lived over the porch of the church. And one lived, I think, as I will show you to morrow, in the sturdy Edwardian tower of the church at Eglingham. Hermitages were common, too, at the *ends* of bridges, in church yards, and at the gates of towns. "Not far from hence," says the student in Don Quixote, "is a hermitage where lives an anchorite who is said to have been a soldier. Adjoining the her-

mitage, is a little house built by the labour of his own hands, which, though narrow, is large enough to receive travellers." "Can that same hermitage produce any poultry," said Sancho. "There are few hermitages destitute of that provision," answered the knight. Accordingly they called at the hermitage for some of the best wine, but were answered by the under hermit, his master not being at home, "that they had no wine, but were welcome to water." This passage is a picture of the manners and customs of the time, which this masterpiece of Cervantes is allowed to be, would lead us to conclude that in those days hermits were expected to exercise hospitality to wayfarers. Nevertheless, from the character of the remains of the hermitages which still exist, it would appear that secluded retreats were most frequently chosen by them for their habitation. The cell at Cratcliff near Winster, Derbyshire, is cut out of a rock. St. Robert's Chapel, Knaresboro', is also cut out of a rock, the altar in it is well preserved, and the small excavation for the chalice to stand in is very discernible. The niche for the crucifix and the recesses for the holy water are perfect. Godric of Finchale, a hermit of great celebrity, lived in a chamber excavated out of the ground, and covered with turf. To this was annexed a chapel with two altars—one dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and the other to the eremitical St. John the Baptist.

The theory of the division of time between work and prayer was sometimes often first fulfilled by hermits working at a trade. Bilfrid, an Anglo-Saxon anchoret, was an excellent goldsmith! one Christina, an anchoress, was a famous embroideress; but the description of labour they undertook was most frequently gardening. At Nottingham, there are remaining separate cells occupied by a community of hermits. There are some curious cells to be seen at Corby; and Norham once possessed a hermitage, the site of which is now forgotten. So late as the last century an old man built a hermitage in the village of Intakes, Derbyshire, and placed on it the following inscription, with the date "1723":—

> "Francis Brown in his old age,
> Did build him here a hermitage."

In early mediaeval times hermits were much resorted to for advice and comfort. They were favourite confessors too. They were sometimes compelled to enlarge their abodes in consequence of the numbers of

their visitors. Thus the Golden Legend tells us that Fiacre sought a place "to lede hys lyfe heremytiche and solitarily," and begged for that purpose "a lytill place within a wood, and ferre fro abydinge of ony folk, where he founded a chyrche, and beyond it a lytill way thens he bylded a lytill hous wherein he dwelled, and there herberwedde the poore that passed by."

Wayside chapels were frequently placed in the approaches to bridges, and less frequently built upon the piers themselves. There were chapels of this kind on the bridge at Elvet, "The chauntries of Saincte James and Saincte Andrewe upon the new bridge of Elvet," (Durham), and there were chapels at Exeter, on old London bridge, and as I think, I can show you, on the old Tyne bridge at Newcastle! There are still chapels on bridges at Barnard Castle, and that very beautiful one of which I show you illustrations, on the pier of the bridge over the Calder, at Wakefield, in Yorkshire.[3] Nash states that the high road passed through the midst of the chapel at Droitwich, the reading-desk and pulpit being on one side and the congregation on the other.[4]

Wayside chapels are much more frequent in continental countries than in our own. Indeed, in travelling abroad, the pretty wayside chapels and crosses with peasants kneeling, show more than most things that we are away from home. In Switzerland the shingled spires of road-side chapels built on the central piers of bridges cast their shadows into many a snow stream. In France and Italy they are equally numerous. They are of much diversity of form, some being square or oblong, whilst others are built upon triangular, hexagonal, and circular plans. There are numerous examples of chapels built of two stories in height, as the gorgeous Sainte-Chapelle at Paris. In these instances, the upper chapel, which was on a level with the principal floor of the palaces, contained the precious relics, and a gallery for the royal family to pay their devotions in! the lower was appropriated to public worship. When a chapel was built over a crypt, this disposition was reversed, the crypt contained the relics, and the chapel was devoted to worship. The most remarkable of the

[3] See *Journal Brit. Archl. Assoc.* XX. (1864), pp. 111-119, for account of chapel on Wakefield Bridge, Harnham, by Mr. Wilson.

[4] There was a chapel *under* the southernmost arch of the bridge at Catterick.

ancient continental wayside chapels, however, is that dedicated to Santa Maria de l' Epina, built upon the approach to the Ponte Nuovo over the Arno at Pisa. It is built of the rich materials of the locality, and is elaborately ornamented with niches containing statues. Those who have seen it radiant with sunshine, as I saw it on the quay-side, will need no reminder of its many graces. It was erected *circa* A.D. 1230. Alterations and renovations, rendered necessary by its decay or destruction, have been made in successive centuries. A single thorn, said to be from the Holy Crown of Thorns was enshrined in it, and the wayside chapel of St. Mary of the Thorn became the object of prayer and pilgrimage. I show you an illustration of this exquisite marble built bridge chapel, which I brought with me from Pisa in 1856.

Having thus demonstrated to you that chapels, hermitages, or chantries were general upon bridges, at bridge ends, or at the approaches to bridges, I come now to tell you briefly why I think that there was a chapel on or at the end of old Tyne bridge.

The view of the Tyne bridge looking north towards the Castle and St. Nicholas's Church, which I now produce, by Sam.[1] and Nath.[1] Buck in 1745, shows the chapel "at the bridge end."[5] Dr. Bruce tells us that "the mediaeval bridge was, as is well known, destroyed by a flood on the 15th November, 1771." What remained then of the chapel would be involved in the general destruction. There is, however, further and confirmative documentary evidence, if still existing, in the conclusive record by Parson and White in 1827, that "there was a small place of worship called the Ladies chapel on the old Tyne bridge, which, by an ancient deed, appears to have been used as a tenement in 1616." In 1429 (Hen. 6), Roger de Thornton (the great benefactor and builder of the Maison Dieu, which he founded in 1412, and which stood on the site of the fish market at the east end of the Guildhall, and dedicated to St. Catherine; and of many other benefactions), in his will, appointed the hermit then residing on this bridge, to be one of the 30 priests whom he had ordered to sing for his soul, with a bequest of six marks annually.[6]

[5] See Plate C. facing p. 112 of *Arch. Ael.* IV. (N.S.)

[6] On this subject Mr. Welford thus writes in the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* (9 July, /87) :—

"All references to a 'recluse,' 'anchoret,' 'hermitage,' 'chapel,' etc., upon Tyne bridge are, I think, referable to the chapel of St. Thomas à Beckett, which is frequently described in ancient documents as standing 'upon' the bridge, though in reality forming the north end of it.

"1.—The Recluse or Anchoret.—Brand, in his *History of Newcastle*, i. 43, writes:—'In the year 1429 a recluse appears to have lived in a hermitage upon Tyne Bridge, and was appointed by Roger Thornton in his will one of the thirty priests he had ordered to sing for his soul, etc.' Brand does not state his authority for placing the recluse in 'a hermitage upon Tyne Bridge,' and *there is nothing at all about the abode of that solitary personage in Roger Thornton's will.* Dr. Rock, an eminent Roman Catholic authority on the subject, states that an anchoret was generally under a life vow never to go beyond the precincts of the church to which he was attached. It may well be that the Newcastle anchoret was attached to the chapel of St. Thomas à Beckett, and that is the nearest approach to the Bridge we can obtain for him.

"2.—Hermitage.—Brand also is the authority for the use of the word hermitage in connexion with Tyne Bridge. In a foot note to the page quoted above he states: 'That there was a hermitage on this bridge anciently appears from a deed remaining in the archives of the Corporation of Newcastle, dated November 20th, 1643,' which may mean that in that year, a century after the Reformation, the crypt of St. Thomas's was let for cellarage under the name of the hermitage. As it stands the quotation proves nothing.

"3.—Chapel.—The 'Chapel on Tyne Bridge,' it cannot be doubted, was the chantry of the Virgin at St. Thomas's. Frequent reference to it as the chapel of our Lady 'in the chapel of St. Thomas à Beckett,' occurs in local history.

"Without any pressing desire to advertise my own work, I may perhaps be permitted to add that in the first volume of my *History of Newcastle and Gateshead*, Roger Thornton's will is printed verbatim, and that in the second volume, between pages 142 and 239, are long descriptions of the churches and religious establishments existing in Newcastle at the time of the suppression—with lists of their incumbents, occupants, possessions, value, etc. Neither there nor anywhere else that I was able to discover, is any mention made of a separate religious abode (or another chapel) upon Tyne Bridge, beyond the chapel of St. Thomas à Beckett."