

DESECRATED CHURCHES OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

(Continued from Vol. I., p. 292.)

23. **FILGRAVE.**—The village of Filgrave lies about three miles from Newport Pagnell. Though it is now united, both parochially and ecclesiastically to Tyringham, it was formerly a distinct parish, and possessed a Church of its own, which has long since been destroyed and swept away.

When this Church was first founded is not known, but it must have been at a very early period, for in the reign of Henry II., about A. D. 1160, the advowson of it was given by Hamon, son of Memfelin, Lord of the honor of Wolverton, to the nunnery of St. Mary de la Pre, near Northampton. As this notice speaks of the Church as then existing, without any reference to its foundation, it is probable that it was founded soon after the conquest; for it was the practice of the Norman Lords, when they received grants of land from the King, to build and endow Churches near their own residences, and in every village situated on, or connected with, their several manors. The Rectory in 1291 was assessed for Pope Nicholas's Tax, at £4 13s. 4d., which is equivalent to £200 at the present time.

The advowson of Filgrave continued in the possession of the Abbey of St. Mary de la Pre till the dissolution of that convent in the reign of Henry VIII. It was then granted in A. D. 1544 to Thomas Lowe. Subsequently Edward VI. granted it to Sir Nicholas Throckmorton, knt., his heirs and assigns for ever. From the Throckmorton family it appears to have passed by sale to the family of Tyringham, of Tyringham; and thus the two livings of Filgrave and Tyringham, coming into the same patronage, they were probably soon after consolidated into one benefice, but there does not appear to be any record of such

consolidation in the Diocesan Registers : for Browne Willis, in his M.S. account of Newport Hundred, observes, —“ I don't find in the Lincoln Registers any regular union or annexation of this Church (Filgrave) to Tyringham. It is said,” continues Willis, “ that in Queen Elizabeth's time the roof of this Church falling in, occasioned the parishioners to desert it, and resort to Tyringham. Thomas Bradshaw was presented to the rectory of Tyringham in 1585, and in 1598 he also stiled himself Rector of Filgrave, and not before, as it seems to me.”

Browne Willis then proceeds, in his usual way, to repeat almost verbatim what he had before said, thus—“ Filgrave Church being much decayed and at length the roof falling in, and the parish being but small, it was united to Tyringham in Queen Elizabeth's reign, and joined in the presentation with that Church, and so they became one consolidated rectory, and are now, A.D. 1730, held together, as well as the manors, by the family of Backwell of Tyringham, heirs to the family of Tyringham. I was informed,” continues Willis, “ by old persons, that the family of Tyringham never prospered after desecrating Filgrave Church ; and that there were three bells, two of which were carried to Tyringham and one to Sherington. One Downing is reported to have been the last person baptized at Filgrave: his grandson died at Sherington A.D. 1720, as I was told.”*

Filgrave Church was dedicated to St. Mary, and consisted of a chancel, a nave, and an embattled tower fifty feet high, in which, according to Willis, there were three bells. When he visited it, in 1730, the tower and part of the side walls were standing ; and they would, probably, have been still standing had they not been purposely demolished.

Cole informs us that, in 1758, Mrs. Backwell, then of Tyringham House, gave orders “ for the utter pulling down of the Tower and what remained of the side walls of Filgrave Church in order to repair a mill.” This desecration was postponed a short time through the intervention of Mr. Wright, of Gothurst, who, however, does not appear to have been influenced by any veneration for the sacred edifice.

* A list of the Rectors of Filgrave from 1272 to 1661 is given in Lipscomb.

Cole's account of the matter is curious. "When Mr. Wright," says he, "heard of Mrs. Backwell's design, the Tower making a very good object from one of his parlour windows, as it does also at Weston Underwood and many parts of this neighbourhood, he applied to Mrs. Backwell, as Guardian of her Son, to prevent the taking it down, offering, as I was told by Mr. Throckmorton, to give from his estates an equal quantity of tones for the Repairs of the mill; but by the suggestion of the Steward, that old stones which had stood the weather were more probable to be of longer duration, and better for their purpose, it was not listened to, and the Tower was taken down for the aforesaid use." Cole, a few years later, has recorded, in his own peculiar style, some further particulars respecting this curious transaction. In his diary he writes—"June 25th, 1766. Dining with Mr. Smith (the rector of Filgrave) at Mr. Barton's, of Sherington, he told me, that he was at Mr. Wright's when the answer came from Mrs. Backwell (who is since dead, and buried in Tyringham Church, her son was a minor of about thirteen years of age at Eton Schole), who (*i. e.* Mrs. Backwell) had the unpoliteness to demand of Mr. Wright, instead of pulling down the tower, which they much desired might stand, a writing under his hand that his family would always engage to let the Mill be repaired from the Gothurst Stone Quarries. This I mention not only to show the unreasonableness of the demand, but how thrifty a steward she was for her son. Mr. Chubb, Valet de Chambre to Mr. Thomas Uthwat, of Great Linford, and who inherited his master's loose principles, as well as his old clothes, being Steward to Mrs. Backwell, was thought to advise the pulling down the Tower. Mr. Smith said that he dug up the Foundations last year to make reparations at the parsonage, as also that no one had any right to take away the materials off from his freehold, had he been disposed to make any words about it, which he did not choose to do, as they gave him the living. Mr. Chubb is an old bachelor, came out of the north, lives at Sherington, and is worth 3,000 Pounds."

It is necessary to state that Mrs. Backwell might be a very estimable lady notwithstanding the remark of Cole, who was too much given to detraction, and unscrupulous in his remarks on persons who had in any way displeased him. She probably took no active part in the transaction,

but left it in the hands of her agent. Cole himself, in another part of his manuscript, gives a favourable testimony of the rector who dug up the foundations of the Church. "Mr. Smith," says he, "the present rector of Filgrave and Tyringham, has fitted up the parsonage house here in a very handsome manner; he was of Oxford, son to Mr. Smith, rector of Emberton, and married a daughter of Mr. Shann, of Chicheley, and is reputed to be a very worthy man." This notice is dated February 16th, 1760.

Thus in 1766 no portion of Filgrave Church was left standing;—the very foundations had been dug up, and part of them, at least had been carried away. Of that sacred edifice, which had been solemnly dedicated to the service of God and where prayer for centuries was wont to be made, not one stone was left upon another that had not been thrown down. With regard to the destruction of a consecrated edifice, no longer needed for the service of God, there always has been, and probably always will be, diversity of opinion. The destruction, or removal of ancient parish Churches is now carried to a great extent in the metropolis, and has received the sanction of many whose veneration for sacred objects cannot be questioned. But then the removal of a Church from one site to another is a very different thing to the appropriating a Church or the materials of one, to merely secular purposes. The changes which from time to time occur in the population of the country may, perhaps, justify the removal of a Church. One district for which a Church was built may become altogether destitute of inhabitants, while a large population may arise in another locality where no Church exists. In such cases it may sometimes, under special circumstances, be desirable to remove a Church from one spot to another; for the Christian's House-of-Prayer, like the Tabernacle of the wandering Israelites, may be pitched where most convenient for the worshippers connected with it to assemble. But no such plea can be applied to the destruction of Filgrave Church. It was not for the convenience of the population that the services of Filgrave Church were merged in those of Tyringham; for the amount of population at Filgrave has always far exceeded that of Tyringham. The present population of Filgrave is about 150—that of Tyringham not more than 30; and

the Rectory-house, which is still at Filgrave, is about two miles distant from Tyingham Church, but not more than about two hundred yards from the site of the destroyed Church at Filgrave. The sole cause then for the desecration and destruction of this Church appears to have originated in the parsimony or apathy of the inhabitants of the parish in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The Church was suffered to become more and more dilapidated till at length the roof fell in;—then, of course, it could no longer be used for the services of the sanctuary; so those of the inhabitants of Filgrave who loved these services, and were able to walk so far, “resorted to Tyingham Church.”

But what became of the aged, the sickly and the infirm? Many of these, though they could not walk so far, yet loved the services of the sanctuary, and could have partaken of them in their own House-of-Prayer.

THE CHURCHYARD.—From a notice in Cole’s manuscript we learn that in 1616 “several persons willed to be buried in the Churchyard of Filgrave,” which shows that, after the Church had ceased to be used for divine service, the Churchyard still continued to be used as a consecrated burial ground. Even after the last relics of the Church were removed the Churchyard preserved its sacred character, and continued to be inclosed by a surrounding fence within the memory of persons still living. At length the wall, which separated it from the adjoining glebe, was removed.

Nothing now remained to define the extent of the ancient cemetery, or to attest the sacred character of the spot. The next step in its desecration was easy. The adjoining glebe had to be ploughed up, and, as there was no longer any boundary fence, the thrifty ploughman, naturally perhaps, encroached a few paces on the sacred soil, and the mouldering dust of our fellow-creatures was gradually becoming converted into a common corn-field.* Such desecration is revolting to the feelings,—and not only so,—it is a breach of trust,—a violation of an invested right. A Churchyard, which has been consecrated as a place of sepulture, has been legally and formally conveyed for the purpose to God and His Church. Before the ground is consecrated the previous proprietor of it is required by a

* This encroachment appears to have occurred in the interval between the death of the last Rector and the Institution of the present.

deed of conveyance to relinquish all future claim upon it, so that whether it be sold or freely given for the purpose, it thenceforth becomes, so to speak, the property of the Dead ; subject only to certain claims on it by the Church, which, as trustee, is bound as far as practicable to protect from all indignities the bodies of those there interred. Less than this can scarcely have been intended by these solemn words in the Consecration service—

“ O God, who hast taught us in thy Holy word, that there is a difference between the spirit of a beast that goeth downward to the earth, and the spirit of a man which ascendeth up to God who gave it ; and likewise by the example of thy holy servants, in all ages, hast taught us to assign peculiar places where the bodies of thy saints may rest in peace, and BE PRESERVED FROM ALL INDIGNITIES, whilst their souls are safely kept in the hands of their faithful Redeemer : Accept, we beseech thee, this charitable work of ours, in separating this portion of land to that good purpose.”

On a former occasion I have treated this point more fully, but enough has now been said to show that a Churchyard, which has been consecrated as a burial ground, has been legally and solemnly set apart for the purpose, and cannot be diverted from it without the violation of an invested right. Trusting to the fidelity of this contract, Christians have buried their dead in consecrated ground under the impression that, so long as the rights of property and the feelings of humanity were respected, they would be allowed to rest there in peace, and be secure from those indignities to which they might be subject if buried in common ground. Was it not under such impression that those persons “ willed in 1616 to be buried in Filgrave Churchyard ?” Though the Church was then in a dilapidated condition, would they have left such request in their wills had they expected the Churchyard would be converted into a corn-field ? Undoubtedly they would not. And happily before the work of desecration had proceeded so far it was arrested. The present rector has had the ancient Churchyard properly enclosed. It has been again fenced off from the adjoining glebe ; that portion has been again turfed over which had been torn up with the plough ; and the whole enclosure is now used only for purposes consistent with its hallowed character.

This is as it should be ; and if ancient Churchyards which are no longer needed for sepulture were thus respected, instead of being thrown open for the common purposes of agriculture, there would not be much cause to complain. It might however be an additional means of perpetuating their sacred character, and of inspiring more veneration towards them, if a stone cross, or some such monument, were erected within such enclosures.

W. HASTINGS KELKE.

* * A Report of the foregoing paper having appeared in the "Newport Weekly Standard," it elicited the following letter, which shows that the suggestion of erecting a cross in a disused Churchyard had been anticipated, though unknown to the writer :—

*Lavendon, near Olney,
12th August, 1860.*

To Mr. Croydon.

SIR,—In your paper of the 11th instant is a report of a paper on "Filgrave Church," read at the Meeting of the Bucks Architectural and Archaeological Society at Newport Pagnell, which, after mentioning the desecration of Churchyards, adds, "In the case of such disused Churchyards, it would be well if, to perpetuate their sacred character, a stone cross were erected within them." Now this method has been adopted at Waresly, in Huntingdonshire, where a new Church on a different site was erected by Colonel the Honourable Octavius Duncombe, a cross being erected on the old site, on which is the following inscription, viz. : "The Church of St. James the Great, which was destroyed by a tempest A.D. 1724, and rebuilt A.D. 1728, was replaced by a new Church erected in the centre of the village A.D. 1856. This cross marks its former site." Probably there may be similar instances, but this at Waresly is a *fait accompli* within my knowledge ; and should the Rev. author of the said paper on Filgrave Church not be aware of the circumstance, it may be satisfactory to him to be acquainted with it, and you are at liberty to make what use of this paper you please.

Yours obediently.

ISAAC LENNY,

Land Surveyor.