

REVIEWS.

THE ROOD-SCREEN IN ENGLAND.*

Expecting, as we may, a good deal from the author of "Gothic Architecture in England," there cannot possibly be any disappointment as these pages are studied. Those who are interested in our church architecture should possess both books.

The railing would seem to have been the earliest form of division and protection used in Christian churches, and to be as old as the fabrics themselves. This soon developed into the colonnade standing upon a solid plinth or podium, 4 or 5 feet high, as in the earlier church of St. Peter, Rome. This colonnade not only had a more imposing effect, but served for the hanging of lamps between the columns, the placing of candlesticks and reliquaries (as at Winchester) above its cornice, a cross, and later a crucifix, occupying the dominant position in the centre; also for the hanging of veils to shroud the altar at penitential seasons. The author has no doubt that we had in the earliest English churches screens of the colonnade type, and looks upon the triple chancel arches, of which examples remain (and several are here illustrated), though from the exigency of available materials the columns carried not a lintel, but arches, as being really a following of the Old St. Peter's type.

Summing up, the author concludes that "the origin of the mediæval quire screen is two-fold. Partly it is to be found in altar fences, whether railings or colonnades, partly in low parapets forming quire enclosures; both parapet and colonnade being ultimately combined in one, and placed at the entry to the chancel; of such an arrangement the triple chancel arch of the seventh century Anglo-Saxon churches may be regarded as a survival. Partly it

* "Screens and Galleries in English Churches," by Francis Bond, M.A., author of *Gothic Architecture in England*. 152 Illustrations, Svo., 6s. net. Hen. Frowde. Oxford University Press.

“is to be found in the necessity of providing supports for a rood-beam, which should carry a cross or crucifix, lamps, reliquaries, curtains, &c. The rood beam with its supports developed in Italy into a colonnade; in England into the quire screen of oak or masonry.”

Of the Rood, it is hardly true, as stated in the preface, that “no church was so humble but had its rood and rood-screen.” Indeed, later on (p. 107) this is to some extent contradicted: “It is hardly correct to assume that every church had a rood loft; some screens, *e.g.* such a screen as that of Great Bardfield (of the window variety) were so designed that it was difficult to superpose a rood loft on them.” Lofts are said to have been used in collegiate and monastic churches long before their use in parish churches, which the author attributes to the fourteenth century in the case of the larger parish churches, and a century later in the smaller. After the Reformation few lofts, of course, were erected; a fine example, however, illustrated here, exists at Rodney Stoke, which would seem to date from James I. In France the rood screen with loft is called the “Jubé;” from the first words uttered by the gospeller: “Jube, Domine, benedicere.” The reason why the gospel was read from on high is definitely given by Pope Innocent III.; it is that they who tell the good tidings of the gospel should go up on high, as said the prophet Isaiah (xl. 9):—“Super montem excelsum ascende tu, qui evangelizas Sion, exalta in fortitudine vocem tuam.”

The rood was generally carved in wood, painted and gilt. Occasionally cherubim were added in addition to the usual figures of St. Mary and St. John. Its position varied according to the varying conditions of the churches. In the case of a low chancel-arch it would have for background the plain or painted wall above the arch. In lofty churches it was placed upon a beam raised high above the loft, the beam sometimes serving also the utilitarian purpose of a roof tie. Sometimes it was suspended from such a beam, as at Cullompton and other places here and abroad. Although the west side of the loft, more rarely the

east, or on, or suspended from a beam above the loft was the normal position for it, the rood has also been found in other positions.

The architectural merits of rood and other screens are well compared and illustrated. They range from the 13th to the 18th century. The later Gothic screens of oak are the most abundant throughout the country. The design of those in the eastern counties is certainly better generally than those of Devon. Most of the latter were made quite late in the 15th century, oftener in the 16th. What has become of the earlier Devon screens has puzzled many. The screen-work of Wales, often elaborate and richly decorated, never arrived at refinement in design. The most sumptuous screen-work in this country is that of King's College, Cambridge, executed during Henry VIIIth's reign. Some examples of Jacobean design are also given; and later than all is the pretty, late Renaissance chancel-arch screen at St. Paul's, Warden. Stone screens in our parish churches, though common nowhere, are found more in the west country than the east. After the triple-arch screens of the 13th century came the striking 14th century window screens, still keeping to the triple division, of which the remarkable instances at Great Bardfield and Stebbing are illustrated. At Brimpton, Somerset, is an interesting small stone chancel-screen, dating probably from late in the 14th century, carrying a carved wood cornice into which, no doubt, the loft was framed. This screen has on the chancel side stone benches, which must have served, however uncomfortable, for returned stalls; and on the nave side narrower benches as kneelers, both stopping against stone ends—an arrangement I have not met with elsewhere. This is not illustrated here, but reference is made to a scale drawing contributed by the writer of this notice to the Spring Gardens Sketch Book.

“At Westminster there is known to have been an altar in the rood loft; it was called the altar of St. Paul and the Crucifix; to which, for kissing the feet of the rood, the people ascended the steps on the left on one side, and descended on the other.”*

* Lethaby's Westminster, 26.

After the Reformation the lofts, without their rood, were used as singing galleries, often being moved to other positions in the churches, and the last degradation of them was accomplished when "the richest or "most influential parishioner who could get possession "of it, used it as a pew, turning his back upon the "altar." Of this there was a prominent instance at High Wycombe, of which our member, Mr. Frederick Skull, gives us some particulars in this issue.

The destruction of roods and their lofts or "sollers" began in 1561. "In 1644 the Commonwealth ordered "that all roods, fonts, and organs should not only be "taken away, but should be defaced"—an order not universally obeyed. But what puritan fanaticism spared in the 17th century the modern Goth, unaware, possibly, of the illegality of the action without a special faculty, has frequently destroyed. When the desire for an uninterrupted "vista" did not spare even the solid masonry of the pulpitum of several of our cathedrals, no wonder that the same zeal made light of the more easily removed rood or chancel-screen. "Seventy-two are known to have been destroyed in "Devon alone in the 19th century by the clergy, their "guardians." Their active enemies in modern days have been of two kinds, the uncompromising man who would not have a screen at all, and the gothic-minded man, amongst whom were many architects, who would only tolerate them if they were in the Gothic style. Many a good Jacobean screen and other fittings in the same style were thus stupidly destroyed or made into "old oak" sideboards.

Reference is not made, so far as I have seen, to any screen or loft in this county, but the evidence of the buildings themselves shows that they were quite as much in use here as elsewhere. The churches visited by our Society this year nearly all retain the staircase, more or less well-preserved, which led to the rood-loft.
