



1621

1621 from the Palace Meot.

WELLS CATHEDRAL.

A journey of a few minutes by rail leaves us at Maesbury Station. The line here winds round the shoulder of a headland of the Mendips, the top of which, once the site of a Roman camp, commands a view unmatched in interest or beauty throughout the country. As we step through the wicket of the Station the view before us is one not easily to be forgotten. On either hand the ridge of the Mendips stretches onwards to the west, shutting in a valley rich for the most part in bright green pasture land, with graceful profusion of foliage. The valley falls away before us irregularly at all times, but in the end so suddenly, that Wells, the object of our visit, is hidden from us. Beyond the furthestmost line of the valley stretches out a level tract of country, little inhabited; mapped out with dyke and willow-row, enclosing little else than fallow land, whose long marsh-grass changes from silvery grey to a dull deep green as the wind plays with its listless blade. Over this the eye ranges to where, like a light blue cloud, the Welsh mountains rise out of the glistening waters of the Channel. There is little to suggest to us that we are looking upon what was once the "great water" of the Arthurian epic. And yet the day is not long past, as the history of the world reads, since along the richly cultivated valley which follows the curve of the hill on our right, flowed the waters which surged up the narrow gorge of Cheddar; and we know much of the lives of those who passed over in boats the marshy pasture-land which leads southwards to the shrine of Glastonbury,—then the Holy Isle of Avaton.

The walk to Wells is pleasant, but we have made most of our distance before we get our first view. Gradually the slope on our right falls away, until at last, stepping to the side of the road, we see the town and cathedral before us. It is a view not to be described. We are near enough to make out most of the details,—towers and apse and chapter-house,—but the eye rests on none of these. It is the harmony of the whole that strikes us, for we compass the whole with one glance of the eye: all is in keeping, all is beautiful. In the midst rises the cathedral—"the kingly crowned head"—the source of the life and the beauty of the whole. The impression of our first glance has revealed to us the

true history of Wells. The cathedral has given and still gives life to the city; for none of the busy inventions of modern trade and industry have dared to claim a share in the direction of the functions of the quiet municipal existence of Wells.

In speaking of the material fabric of Wells we are cut off from a great and important portion of its early existence. A collegiate chapel, dedicated to St. Andrew, was established here by King Ina about the year 705. In King Edward the Elder's reign, in the year 909, the bishopric of Somersetshire, now for the first time divided from the vast bishopric which swayed over Dorsetshire, Wiltshire, Berkshire, and Somersetshire, fixed its See at Wells. The old English Church of St. Andrew's received the Bishop; and its college of Priests became his Canons. There is reason to think that the old building survived until the middle of the 12th century. We read of its lamentable condition before this time; but the bishopric had been removed to Bath, and St. Andrew's had fallen into neglect. Bishop Godfrey of Lorraine, who came to the See in 1135, restored the rights of the Chapter of Wells; only vesting the election jointly in the Chapters of both Bath and Wells. Besides this he undertook the restoration of the old Church. The repairs may have been extensive, as they were followed by a consecration in the presence of three Bishops. However, scarcely a single trace of his building remains for us to judge by at the present day.

An interesting period in the history of Wells is that in which Bishop Savaric, and after him Bishop Jocelin, strove to annex Glastonbury, and to make it a cathedral, if not the cathedral church of the diocese. Jocelin's name appears as Bishop of Bath and Glastonbury in the Magna Charter. By dint of great concessions the Monks freed themselves from the intrusion in the year 1218. We may be thankful that Jocelin withdrew his claim, for from that date, through the thirty remaining years of his life, he gave himself up to the rebuilding of Wells. From this event dates the commencement of the erection of the present cathedral. The church which Jocelin built comprised, of the present building, the nave, the transepts, and the three western arches of the choir, which are used as the choir at the present day. The three towers were built by him as far as the roof of the church, but no farther. In this portion, the completion of which occupied more than thirty years, there are two styles of architecture noticeable. The features of the west front differ from those of the nave and transepts. Both portions belong to the

Lancet or early English period, and, moreover, the west front is in the style of that period common in other parts of England; but the rest is marked by local peculiarities to be found only in Somersetshire and South Wales. It bears traces of the Romanesque period which preceded it. "Its mouldings and the clustering of its pillars are much less free; the abaci or tops of the capitals are square or octagonal instead of round; it makes no use of the detached shafts, often of marble, which are so abundantly found in the west front."¹ The oldest parts of the palace, which were built by Jocelin, are in the style of the west front. The employment of local workmen and of strangers alternately would be sufficient to account for this change, principally of detail; and when we think that the work extended over thirty years this supposition becomes probable. The vaulting of the nave was not completed six years after Jocelin's death: for, during its erection in 1248, an earthquake caused it to fall in, doing a great deal of damage. The repairs necessary may account for some slight variations between the details of the eastern and western bays of the nave.

As regards the much admired west front, many will wonder to hear that there is a heavy censure to be laid upon it. It will be sufficient to state this, and to leave all further judgment to the reader's own sense of morality in aesthetics. The charge brought against it is, that it is unreal. It is not the natural ending to the nave and aisles, but a blank wall built up against them with a principal view to effect. Windows and doors are sacrificed to lines of sculpture.

Bishop Jocelin built a portion of the cloister now standing. The vaulting and upper story of this are of later date. The chapter house, with the staircase leading to it, and its undercroft (falsely called a crypt), were built towards the close of the same century.

The completion of the rest of the church was separated more by difference of style from the work of Jocelin than by number of years. From the beginning of the fourteenth century the task of completion was in hand. Three bays were added to the choir, distinguished by minuteness and gracefulness of detail.

Then, detached from the choir, was built the octagonal Lady Chapel, with an additional transept. The beauty of this feature is that it gives an apsidal form to the east end of the church; while the shafts, which complete the octagon where it joins the

¹ See E. A. Freeman's "History of the Cathedral Church of Wells," p. 75. From this book most of the facts of this notice are taken.

choir, frame the apse in a graceful intersection of arch and moulding, which discloses new beauties at every point from which we view it. The period of roofing the three new bays of the choir seems to have suggested an adaptation of the three older bays to the new ones. This was attempted by substituting for the old a clerestory and triforium in the same style as those of the new bays. These changes were finished in the course of the first half of the fourteenth century. The name of Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury is principally connected with this work.

The raising of the central tower belongs also to this period. The question of central towers, lately become of personal interest to us, receives a practical illustration in Wells. The church was designed for a central tower, but for one of little weight. This intention allowed them to build up the graceful and comparatively lofty arches in the point of intersection of nave and transepts. The tower was built recklessly to a vast height; the piers and arches proved too weak, and began to give way. Hence the necessity for the extraordinary support which is so prominent a feature in the cathedral. One cannot but lament that it should have been necessary. Still familiarity not only reconciles us to it as a remedy, but even reveals beauties in its simple and bold arches. The external flying buttresses were added at this time to strengthen the bays near the tower.

The last addition to the church was that of the upper portion of the western towers. The southern one was built first, by John Harewell, Bishop from 1366 to 1386. It belongs, therefore, to the earliest days of the perpendicular style. The other was built mainly at the expense of Bishop Bubwith, whose episcopate lasted from 1408 to 1424. It would be hard to detect the difference in date of the two towers from their appearance.

All further change in the building has been one of mere detail. The perpendicular tracery inserted in the windows of the nave and transept dates from the end of the fourteenth or beginning of the fifteenth century. The addition of rooms over the cloister took place soon after this; and later still the insertion of a fan-tracery vault in the central tower, hiding the original arcading. A Lady chapel was afterwards built on the east side of the cloister in the second half of the fifteenth century, but was destroyed by Sir John Gates.

The view accompanying this sketch is taken from the moat of the Bishop's palace, south of the cathedral. There, as we pass under the fragrant shade of the lime-trees, we see appear above

the massy walls and battlements of the palace and the clear waters of the moat—flowing ever fresh from St. Andrew's Well—now the western towers and roof of the nave, as in the picture; now the graceful central tower; and finally, nestling against the stronger and bolder mass of the choir—the delicate beauty of the Lady Chapel. Little attempt has been made to describe the charm of Wells, for it is one that lives not only in beauty of detail but in variety; and we should tire the reader were we to attempt to follow the form of beauty through aisle and transept, in moulding and tracery, within and without. Suffice it to say that many visits will not exhaust the charm.

REVIEWS.

EXTINCT BRITISH ANIMALS.¹

IT is a question which possesses most interest for naturalists—a study of the present or of the past? There is an undescribable charm in the exploration of pathless woods and lonely fens, of rugged mountain sides and smooth sandy shores, and in the contemplation of the varied forms of animal life to be met with in all these situations. On the other hand, there is a strange fascination in examining the relics of a bygone age, whether in the shape of exhumed remains of extinct animals, or ancient documents which tell of the former aspect and condition of the country; of the wild creatures which once inhabited it; and of the men who spent their lives in hunting them.

Certain it is, that by a study of the past, we are helped to an understanding of the present, and that study ought no more to be neglected in Zoology than in the kindred sciences of Geology and Botany.

In the book before us we see an attempt to bridge over the gulf between the past and present, and to supply a missing chapter in the study of British animals.

Five and thirty years ago, Professor Owen, in his "History of British Fossil Mammals and Birds," made us acquainted with some strange forms of animal life whose existence in British soil in pre-historic times is incontestably proved by the discovery of their

¹ *British Animals extinct within Historic Times: with some account of British Wild White Cattle.* By James Edmund Harting, F.L.S. With Illustrations by Joseph Wolf and others. London: Trübner & Co. 1880.