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On the Distinction between Anglo-Saxon & Norman Architecture.

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BEFORE I begin to read this paper, it is right that I should inform my audience that it contains but very little original matter from beginning to end; and also beg them to believe that I have not the least idea of teaching, as if I myself were any authority on the subject. But circumstances having drawn my attention to the subject for some time past, I think it not impossible that the few hints I have put together, may assist others, who perhaps have not thought much about it, in discovering Anglo-Saxon work in their churches; and, by so doing, in perhaps casting light upon a very difficult and much-disputed point in the history of the ancient architecture of this

country. I should also say, that from want of a good library, I have not been able to verify some of my quotations; but they are taken from good authority, and are, I believe, correct.

The antiquaries of the last century, as well as those of the early part of the present, appear to have had but very vague ideas upon the subject of architecture. Even the learned Milner, whose fondness for Gothic buildings sometimes exposed him to the ridicule of the *virtuosi* of his day, who could see no beauty in anything which was not classical, considered every building in which the arches were not pointed, as Saxon; and though well aware that Walklyn built the transepts of Winchester Cathedral very shortly after the Conquest, was so little acquainted with the masonry of that time, as to suppose that he was also the builder of the tower of that cathedral, and speaks of them all, together with St. Cross —built by Henry de Blois, in the reign of Stephen—as Saxon edifices. Indeed, so little was the distinction of styles understood, that the celebrated Thomas Wharton, in his description of Winchester, confidently pronounces the work of Bishop Godfrey de Lucy, on the east side of the choir, to be prior to the date of Walklyn's work, though it is a very pure and beautiful, though early, specimen of the style in use in the thirteenth century, to which the well-known Rickman has given the name of early English; and I believe the vergers still show the crypts as Saxon work, in spite of the rather contradictory fact, satisfactorily proved by documentary evidence by Professor Willis, that the Norman Cathedral built by Walklyn did not occupy the same site as that on which the original edifice stood.

When, however, the study of our ancient buildings became more popular, and was carried on in a spirit of closer

and more critical investigation, a great reaction took place, and when I first turned my attention to the subject, nearly thirty years ago, the received opinion among architectural antiquaries was, that no building remained, any part of which could with certainty be pronounced to be of Saxon workmanship; and that even those fragments which might be of earlier date than the Norman Conquest, were identical in style with those which were certainly known to be of later date than that event.

This view of the matter was, however, soon modified by the results of closer observation. I well remember when, about five and twenty years since, I was so fortunate as to become acquainted with that justly celebrated architectural antiquary, Mr. William Twopenny—that his opinion was, that there was no Saxon building in existence; and that about two years afterwards, when I again had the pleasure of meeting him, he told me that his opinion was changed, for that he believed he had discovered in the quoins of some buildings, which he had supposed to be early Norman, a peculiarity which he thought might prove to be a characteristic of Saxon masonry. That peculiarity was the system of bonding, now technically known as long-and-short work. And later researches have brought to light several other peculiarities, which are now generally supposed to be indicative of erections prior to the Norman Conquest, or, at all events, of a style differing materially from that known to be Norman, which prevailed in this country from the latter part of the eleventh to the close of the twelfth century.

A few of the most striking of these peculiarities I will now endeavour to describe. Before, however, entering upon the peculiarities of any style of architecture, it will

not be out of place to shew that it is at least probable that the style was really distinct from any other, more particularly as the ridicule which has been heaped upon the credulity of antiquaries, has rendered those of the present day a very sceptical race—much more so, indeed, than appears to me to be consonant with right reason; for it is in vain to search for evidence about things which took place nearly a thousand years ago, as conclusive as would be required to prove a fact of the present time. Now, we know from documentary evidence, that Edward the Confessor built at Thorney a church in a new style, and that this church was constructed by Norman architects, and was, no doubt, a Norman church. William of Malmsbury, describing the change among the clergy under the Normans, says : "Videas ubique in villis ecclesias, in vicis et urbibus monasteria novo edificandi genere consurgere." "You may see churches and monasteries rising in a new style of architecture." Now, if the Norman was a new style, the Saxon which preceded must have been different ; and Ordericus Vitalis, speaking of the state of England in 1070, says : "Fiebant et reparabantur basilicæ." "Churches were built and repaired;" and certainly it is probable that the churches which were repaired four years after the Conquest, were Saxon buildings. If, then, we find in early Norman churches details very different from those common in that style, we cannot, I think, be fairly accused of unreasonable credulity if we suppose them to be relics of that old style, which was different from that introduced by Edward the Confessor in his church at Thorney or Westminster ; nor is it really a valid objection that some of these peculiarities are found in churches, which are known to have been built after the Conquest ; for the question is not so much, whe-

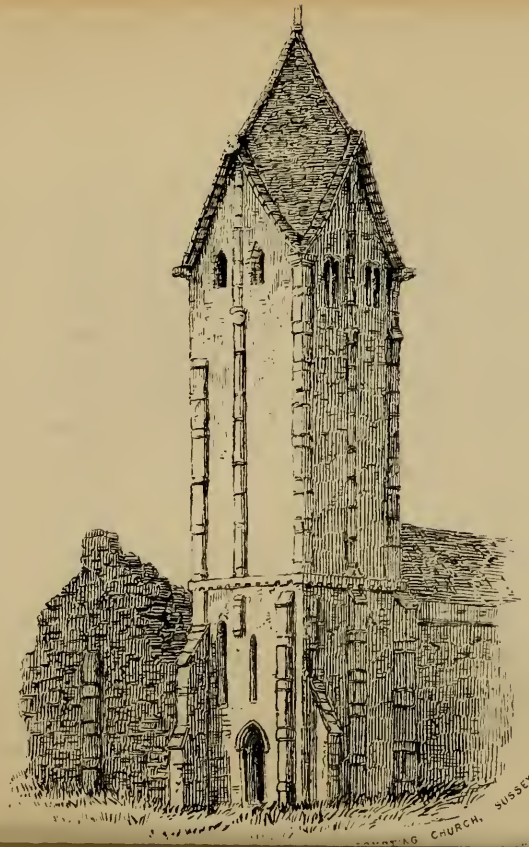
ther a Saxon or a Norman monarch held the throne, at the time a church was built, as whether the building is of the Saxon or Norman style ; and, though it is manifestly impossible that the details of a style, first used in the eleventh century, can be found in buildings of an earlier date, it is neither impossible nor improbable that details common in the latter part of the tenth, and the beginning of the eleventh, should occasionally be met with, particularly in obscure and remote districts, after the time of the Norman Conquest;. and it is certain that besides those buildings which are clearly transitional, there are many instances in which the different styles overlap each other, if I may so say, in a very abrupt and striking manner.

In order to render my description of these peculiarities more distinct, I will divide them into those of the masonry, arches, doors, windows, and towers, of Anglo-Saxon date. And first, with regard to the masonry—this will almost invariably be found to consist of very rough and irregular rubble, or rag-work, the joints wide and the cement coarse, in one case,—the church at Britworth, near Salisbury,—containing pounded brick, which is supposed to be a Roman custom. It has been also observed that stones of a much larger size than those used by the Normans, are to be found among the smaller rubble ; but the most characteristic point of the masonry is, that it is often divided by narrow vertical strips of stone, which at first sight appear to be merely superficial, but on closer investigation will generally, I believe always, be found to extend quite through the thickness of the wall, forming a sort of frame work for the rubble, in the same manner as wooden uprights are used in forming what we in these days call a brick nogging, and are probably nothing more than stone substitutes for the timber, which had been used in earlier

times for that purpose. The quoins, too, are usually constructed of what is called long-and-short work, which consists of long upright stones, alternating with much shorter ones, which are usually of greater breadth, and act as bond stones on both sides, though at Sompting, the long and short stones appear to be of the same breadth. This system of bonding, I believe, has not been observed in Normandy, though it is found to exist in Sicily, in buildings supposed to have been erected by the followers of Guiscard de Hauteville.

Anglo-Saxon arches, when large, are usually semicircular, composed of coarse, irregular masonry, rising from a rude abacus or impost, frequently showing an attempt at imitation of Roman mouldings. When small they are often flat-sided, the capitals of the piers are sometimes coarsely carved in a manner very different from Norman work, and, as well as the bases, seem to be of a debased Roman character. The doors are generally semicircular, shewing traces of long-and-short work in their jambs; though at Dunham Magna, in Norfolk, at the west end, there is a triangular canopy over a square-headed door-way, consisting of a fillet with the edges cut into a sort of square billet ornament, with shafts of a similar character. The windows, which are small, have also generally semicircular heads, though they are not unfrequently flat-sided—their chief peculiarity being that the splay, which in Norman windows is perhaps invariably internal, is, in Saxon work, nearly, if not quite, equal; so that the narrowest part of the opening is at the centre of the wall. Small circular windows, splayed in this manner, are not uncommon in churches of this style.

We now come to the towers of this style, of which, as being probably the most costly, as well as the strongest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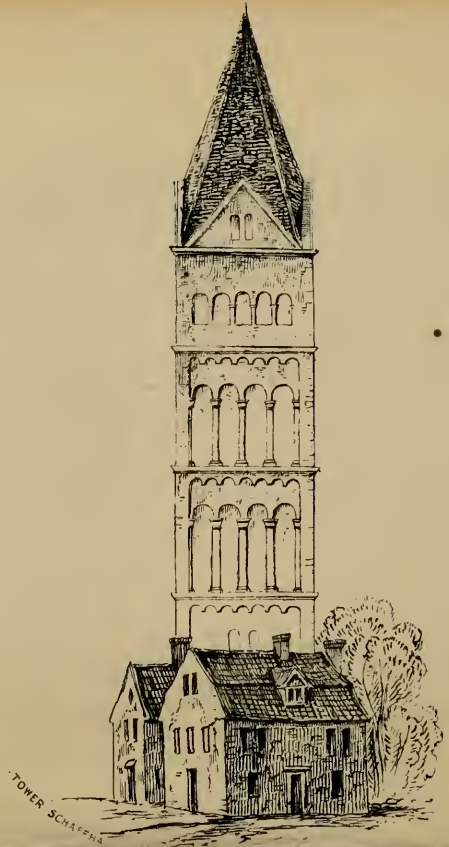
TOWER SCHAESHS

parts of the church, a much greater number have come down to us nearly in their original state, than of any other part of the building. These towers, though the walls are of great thickness, do not usually present the striking massiveness of proportion which is found in those of the Norman period. Sompting, with its steep gables and spire-like roof, is a strong instance of this difference of proportion. They are frequently of three stages; each stage being smaller than that below. They are destitute of buttresses and internal staircases, and generally bonded at the quoins with long-and-short work. The pilaster-like strips of stone before described, are generally to be observed where the masonry is not hidden by plaster—in some to a great extent—and at Earls Barton in such profusion as almost to have the appearance of trellis work. They have frequently small triangular windows, and in the belfry stage, commonly a small double window, the division of which is formed, not as in Norman work, by a shaft, but by a baluster placed in the centre of the wall, and supporting an impost, which extends through its whole thickness.

These are the most striking peculiarities of which I am aware. They are, perhaps, seldom all to be met with in the same building; but their effect is such, that they can hardly be mistaken when once pointed out, for the more common details of Norman buildings. Good examples of them all will be found in the illustrations of the Archæological Journal, and in the new edition of Rickman's work on Gothic architecture. It is a curious corroboration of the theory, that these peculiarities are indicative of Anglo-Saxon work, that similar architectural details are represented in illuminations of the ninth and tenth centuries, though I believe not in any of later date.

I will now hazard a conjecture as to the style of the

buildings of which these curious relics of antiquity are fragments; for I cannot bring myself to believe that no greater difference existed between it and the Norman, than that of ruder workmanship and less skilful building. The classical architecture of Rome in its debasement seems to have diverged into three, or perhaps four different channels—the Byzantine, Lombardic, Norman, and that style of Romanesque which appears to have prevailed in some parts of Europe, particularly in Germany, as late as the fifteenth century. Of the Byzantine, the most celebrated specimen is the Mosque of St. Sophia, at Constantinople. Of the Lombardic, a splendid, and I believe correct, specimen may be seen in the church recently erected at Wilton, by the Honourable Sidney Herbert. Germany is full of the fourth variety, and our own country affords us numberless examples of the Norman, from the magnificent cathedral down to the humble parish church. All these styles the beautiful works of Mr. Galley Knight, the masterly drawings of Mr. Pettit, and the valuable work on German churches by the master of Trinity College, Cambridge, have made familiar to every admirer of ecclesiastical architecture. Now if we include them all under the generic name of Romanesque, the specific difference of the Norman appears to be, that it has a gothicizing tendency, or in other words, is a transitional style, which runs as easily into the early English as that into the decorated; which is not the case with the others, which are fixed and complete styles. A scientific architect would no doubt be able to explain this clearly; but unfortunately my scientific attainments on this, and I am afraid on all other points, may fairly be described as a negative quantity; and though I think that from habit I can tell a Norman building when I see it, from the other varieties of

Romanesque, I am not presumptuous enough to attempt to explain to others what I very much doubt whether I understand myself.

Now, we know that the Anglo-Saxon church, from the time of Augustine to that of Edward the Confessor, was peculiarly devoted to the Roman Pontiff—that the communication between England and Rome was frequent and intimate—that some of the Saxon kings, amongst others the youthful Alfred, visited the eternal city; and, in short, I am afraid that if ever a thoroughly priest-ridden people existed, our Saxon ancestors were that people. It was therefore much more likely that they should have derived their ecclesiastical architecture from the fountain head, than from any other source. Benedict Biscop is said to have built churches "more Romano," and Wilfred, Archbishop of York, whom we know to have founded churches after his return from Rome, at the end of the seventh or the beginning of the eighth century, no doubt built them "more Romano" also.

Wolstan, in his metrical description of Winchester Cathedral, as re-edified by the Bishops Athelwold and Alphage, about the year 980, says: "He repaired the courts of this old temple with lofty walls and new roofs, and strengthened it on the north and south sides with solid aisles and various arches; he added also many chapels, with sacred altars, which distract attention from the threshold of the church, so that a stranger walking in the courts, is at a loss where to turn, seeing on all sides doors open to him without any certain path. He stands with wondering eyes, fascinated with the fine roofs of the intricate structure, until some experienced guide conducts him to the portals of the farthest vestibule. Here, marvelling, he crosses himself, and knows not how to quit, so dazzling is the construction, and so

brilliant the variety of the fabric that sustains this ancient church ;"—a description it must be allowed, little suggestive of the simple, stern majesty of an early Norman cathedral. Nor is his description of the tower, in which may be recognised some similarity to that of Sompting, at all more like one of Norman date. "Moreover," says he, "you have added a lofty temple, in which continual day remains—a sparkling tower, that reflects from Heaven the first rays of the rising sun. It has five compartments, pierced by open windows, and on all four sides as many ways are open. The lofty peaks of the tower are capped with pointed roofs, and are adorned with various and sinuous vaults, curved with well-skilled contrivance. Above these stands a rod with golden balls, and at the top a mighty golden cock, which boldly turns its face to every wind that blows." The description of the monastery, built by Alfred at Athelney, as given by Camden, on the authority of William of Malmsbury, is as follows : "He founded there a little monastery, the whole frame whereof hanged upon four main posts, pitched fast in the ground, with four round isles of spheric-work contrived and brought round the same." Now, however little applicable these descriptions may be to Norman buildings, they are by no means unlike Lombardic or Byzantine edifices, particularly the last, which, if we suppose it to have been a square building, with round towers at the corners, having a dome and pinnacles, such as we know from illuminations to have been in use among the Saxons, was a building of decidedly Byzantine character. That domes were used by the Saxons is rendered probable by an illumination of early date, which contains an object which seems to be intended to represent one.

The conclusion from what has been said, which after all is little more than a guess, is this, that the style of

architecture which prevailed among the Anglo-Saxons, was a variety of Romanesque, probably a rude imitation of Lombardic, with some intermixture of Byzantine details, bearing no greater resemblance to the Norman, than was necessarily the consequence of their common origin from the classical Roman.

The interest attaching to this point, I think, will at once be admitted by every antiquary who remembers that from the time that Benedict Biscop began to build churches "more Romano" in the seventh to the close of the twelfth century—a period considerably longer than that occupied by the three pointed styles. Romanesque, in some shape or other, was the style of ecclesiastical architecture which prevailed in this island; and that the Norman does not occupy above 150 years of that period; that during a considerable part of that time the Anglo-Saxons were neither an uncivilized nor an unlearned people, but one which gave birth to such men as Benedict Biscop, Wilfred, the Venerable Bede, Ethelward, Aldhelm, and the immortal Alfred—which entered into treaties with Charlemagne, and held no obscure position in the political system of Europe; nor is the field by any means a narrow one. There is probably far more Saxon work in existence than is generally supposed, particularly in the eastern and northern counties. In Somerset the West Saxon Kings had more than one residence; and I doubt not the traces of their work may be found in many places, if carefully searched for. It has been supposed that it is useless to look for Saxon work in any church that is not mentioned in Doomsday-book. But this is not necessarily the case, for, though a wonderful production, Doomsday-book is by no means a perfect survey; and not being undertaken for ecclesiastical purposes, does not mention more

than about 1,700 churches, though we know that many more, and some (as Dorchester, in Oxfordshire,) of great importance, existed in places where no church is mentioned.

A very few years ago we knew but little more of Norman work than we do now of Saxon, and in those few years we have learned to discriminate between early and late Norman, and to decide with tolerable accuracy the date of each building. Nor are differences wanting in Saxon work which may probably be discovered to be good criteria of date. For instance, may we not conclude from the decidedly Roman character of Brixworth, and the Roman composition of the cement at Britworth, that they are of very early date—either relics of Roman civilization, or instances of the skill directly imported from Italy. Again, if we find, as we very probably may, that in some cases the pilaster-like strips of stone are really superficial, instead of extending through the thickness of the wall and forming a frame-work for the rubble,—may we not, taking the analogy of Grecian architecture for our guide, conclude that those buildings in which only the appearance exists, are of later date than those in which the strips are actually the frame of the building; an idea which appears to me to gain strength from the fact of the long and short stones in the quoins of Sompting tower, (which, from its similarity to that described by Wolstan, is probably not earlier than the middle of the tenth century,) being of equal breadth, and consequently not really useful as bonding; and when we find plans or details of marked Byzantine character, may we not suppose that they were introduced either by the Northmen, (whose intimate connection with Constantinople is proved by the fact of Harold Hardrada commanding the Varangian Guard about the year 1030, as well as by the coins of Greek

emperors and ornaments of Oriental character constantly found in Norway,) or by Theodore, a native of Tarsus, in Cilicia, who was appointed primate of England by Pope Vitalian about the end of the seventh or the beginning of the eighth century.

But it may perhaps be said all this may be very true, but what practical good can arise from the study of such a rude style of architecture. I will mention a fact which I am sure will be sufficient to satisfy any archæologist that great practical good might arise from a more particular study of the Romanesque styles. Some time since I had occasion to apply to a very learned ecclesiologist for information as to the date of the earliest known specimen of a lychnoscope or low side-window, and the answer I received was that he had seen one in a Romanesque building. Now my object was to find, if possible, some ritual observance, the introduction of which about the time of the earliest known lychnoscope, might perhaps have thrown light upon the intention of those mysterious apertures; but for this purpose his answer, taking in as it did a period of full 500 years, was manifestly useless.

I fear I have handled a subject, to master which requires learning, in a very unlearned manner. I have felt all along that I was in danger of getting beyond my depth. Whether I have escaped that danger or not I am by no means certain; but should I have been the means of drawing the attention of any one to Saxon remains, and by so doing should elicit a few communications on the subject, my object will in great measure be obtained; for archæological induction can only be satisfactorily drawn from the knowledge of many facts, which can hardly be obtained by the unaided exertions of a few individuals, however zealous they may be in their antiquarian researches.