

Chancel Arch—Stuke sub Hambdon Church.

PROCEEDINGS
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PAPERS, ETC.

On the Architecture of the Neighbourhood
of Yeovil.

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I AM truly sorry that I am unable to attend this year, as I have had great pleasure in doing for two years past, at the Annual Meeting of the Somersetshire Archæological Society. I have indeed no doubt that my time will be as agreeably and as profitably spent at that of the Cambrian Association: I only regret that the arrangements of the two Societies should interfere with one another, or that I am not invested with the privilege of ubiquity, which would enable me to attend both. But though I believe the Brecknockshire Beacons are visible from some parts of the county of Somerset, yet the towns of Brecon and Yeovil are sufficiently distant from one another to render it impossible to read Papers at both on the same day, and

not altogether convenient to do so even within the same week. So then, as Brecon was an engagement on my part of older standing, I am reluctantly compelled to absent myself entirely from your proceedings of this year, and to leave my annual contribution to your volume to be laid before you by a very efficient deputy.

In my two former Papers I have said nearly all I have to say about the Perpendicular of Somerset, passing but cursorily over the remains of the earlier styles. But as Yeovil possesses in its neighbourhood some of the best specimens of the latter class, a Yeovil meeting seemed a good opportunity for attempting a somewhat more attentive consideration of them. But I do not mean to confine myself very pedantically to the immediate neighbourhood of the town, though I will promise not to require you to follow me all the way to Bath at one end or to Minehead at the other. I may here mention that the very best architectural day's work which I ever remember to have done, was one which had Yeovil for its starting point. Montacute, Stoke Hambdon, Martock, Kingsbury, Muchelney and Huish, form a perhaps unparalleled succession of attractive objects, both ecclesiastical and domestic. Nor was my next day's work of Langport, Long Sutton, Somerton, and Huish again, at all contemptible, although hardly to be compared with the former. Many of the results of those two days I have already laid before the Society; others I have reserved for the present occasion. With numerous examples I have made acquaintance during the present month, under the auspices of Mr. Dickinson and Mr. Fagan, as I did with others two years ago under those of Mr. Warre and Mr. Giles.

The first thing that strikes the observer in the earlier

churches of Somerset, is the universal absence of aisles; the second is the frequent presence of transepts; the third is the octagonal form not uncommonly given to the towers. I have alluded to all of these in my previous papers; but I will now comment on them a little more at length. I travelled from Burnham to Kingweston, and made two considerable excursions thence, both in the direction of Yeovil, without seeing a single church with regular aisles, but cross churches of every variety I found in abundance. In fact I think I may safely say that the occurrence of aisles in a Somersetshire church earlier than the Perpendicular period is something quite exceptional, unless in the case of quite large buildings, like St. Cuthbert's at Wells. But transepts occur extensively, even when the tower is not central. Sometimes we find an original central tower, or a later one which evidently replaces an original one; sometimes a side tower forming one transept; often a grand Perpendicular tower has been added; sometimes the church has remained without a tower to this day. But under all these modifications, the cross form still remains the typical ground-plan of the district and period. The use of the octagonal tower, as was first pointed out to me by Mr. Giles, stretches over a long narrow line of country from about Taunton nearly to the eastern boundary of the county. As far as I have seen, I regard it as the distinctive Somersetshire steeple of early times, just as the grand western tower is of later. It has often been raised in Perpendicular times, it may occasionally be of Perpendicular erection from its foundation, but in all such cases it is evidently a mere retention of an earlier practice; it never catches the true Perpendicular character; it may have Perpendicular belfry windows, but it always remains in its essential conception, a work of an earlier period. Also its proper

position is only less regularly, either central or lateral, than that of the fully developed Perpendicular tower is invariably western. Even the square western tower was rarely used ; the common alternatives seem to have been a central tower of either form, a lateral octagon, or no tower at all. We have seen how often the earlier type of Somersetshire influenced the later, but no two types can well be more opposite to one another, in the more fully developed specimens of each. And the earlier type of which I am speaking is not spread over the whole county. For instance, I do not call to mind an instance of it north of Mendip; that is, not of its most distinctive characters, for cross churches with central towers of course occasionally occur, as at Yatton and Whitchurch.

These Somersetshire octagons have a very peculiar character, and it may be worth while to compare them with those which occur in another region, where the octagonal form is also frequent, namely, Northamptonshire. Two marked differences strike at once ; the Somersetshire octagon is a sign of early work ; that of Northamptonshire is generally late ; the Somersetshire octagon is the tower itself assuming the octagonal form ; the Northamptonshire is an addition made to a square tower, which might exist without it, or at most an altered shape given to its upper portion. Stanwick is the only case which occurs to me of a tower at once of early date and octagonal from the base. The Somersetshire octagon again is, when most distinctive, central or lateral, while the Northamptonshire octagon is invariably western, and often supports a spire.

It may be worth while, as the examples in the two districts are not positively very numerous, to compare them a little in detail. I have said that in the Somersetshire

octagons, it is the tower itself which assumes the octagonal form, while in Northamptonshire the octagon is only part of the tower, or even distinctly an addition to it. This is true, although there is only one Somersetshire octagon which I have seen, that at Barton St. David's, which is octagonal from the ground, and that of course only on the side away from the church. The central octagons of North Curry and Stoke St. Gregory have indeed no square base appearing above the roof, and so may come under the same head; that at South Petherton I have not yet had the good luck to see. But the lateral octagons of Somerton and Bishop's Hull, and the western ones of Ilchester, and Puddimore Milton, all rise from a square base rising to about the height of the church, or nearly so. Yet every one would call these octagonal towers: even at Somerton, where the square base rises to a greater height than in the others, it is the octagonal form which determines the character of the tower. In short, *in Somersetshire the square is a mere base to the octagon, while in Northamptonshire the octagon is a mere finish to the square.* Thus at Irthlingborough, at Luffwick, and at Fotheringhay, the octagon is added to a square tower of considerable height, and rises from within the distinct parapet and pinnacles of such square tower. The square tower of Luffwick, rising two good stages above the roof, would be an amply sufficient steeple without the octagon; in the other two cases the square tower alone would be rather low, but still it is distinctly finished. At Fotheringhay this is still more marked than in the other cases, as it has not those enormous pinnacles, which at Luffwick receive the flying-buttresses of the octagon. At Wilby, where the octagon supports a spire, the former is indeed taken out of the height of the tower, of which it forms the

belfry-stage; but still the square portion rises a whole stage above the roof of the church, and has its own parapet, pinnacles, and flying-buttresses. At Nassington the belfry-stage itself suddenly becomes octagonal at about half its height. At Barnack, the octagon, an Early Gothic one, is added to the old Saxon tower, or possibly has supplanted its belfry-stage. Still the latter rises a stage above the church, and the octagon, as at Nassington, is merely a base for the spire. At Milton Malsor the spire and its octagonal base are such mere additions to the predominant square tower, that I had almost forgotten to include this example in my list. At Helpstone alone have I found a Northamptonshire tower on the Somersetshire model; here the square base is of the height of the church, where it turns into an octagon of two stages, very like Ilchester or Puddimore, save that it again supports within its parapet a dwarf octagon and spire. But even here, where the octagon is decidedly itself the tower, and not a mere finish to the square, I suspect that before the existing clerestory was added, the original roof abutted wholly against the square portion, whereas at Puddimore, and still more at Ilchester, it comes up against the octagon.

Of distinctive detail I have not observed much in these earlier churches, except an elegant practice, not indeed altogether distinctive of Somersetshire, though certainly far more common there than elsewhere, that of foliating the rear-arches of windows. I was glad to find that my friends who are rearing the graceful new church at Kingweston have introduced this beautiful local feature: I could wish they had also preferred the local coved ceiling to a form which, though good in itself, belongs to Sussex and not to Somerset.

I will now mention those churches of the district and

period on which I am engaged which struck me as most worthy of notice, adding some brief account of those domestic buildings in which this region is so singularly rich. I shall ask my hearers to accompany me on a somewhat long circuit,—an imaginary journey, in fact, which I have patched up out of four or five real ones. I will suppose you then to have diligently studied Yeovil church, with the criticisms which I offered on it last year in your hands, as they may be found in the Society's last published volume. I thence ask you to accompany me first to *Brimpton*. I do not quite know how to take you from Yeovil, as I myself reached the place from quite another direction; but I will suppose you somehow conveyed (with the Rector's leave, if it would involve a trespass) to the spot just in front of the parsonage. From that point, one of the most striking architectural groups I know will be seen lying in the hollow beneath. A large and stately mansion, a house of humbler pretensions, and the parish church, all lie close together, and all are worthy of attentive study. The church is small, and was originally a Decorated cross church, without aisles or tower. The south transept, with a beautiful Geometrical window to the south, and a foliated arch connecting it with the nave; the foliated south door, and a piscina in what was the north transept, are all pleasing examples of that style, and enable us to form a good notion of a Somersetshire church of the earlier period. But some benefactor of Perpendicular times, some inhabitant doubtless of the adjoining mansion, whose name and exact date some local antiquary will, I doubt not, be able to supply,* founded a chantry for three priests. He

* It appears, from Mr. Batten's account, that the architectural changes were all made about the same time, in the reign of Henry VII., by a benefactor of the name of Sydenham; but that the original foundation of the chantry was due to an earlier family, named D'Evercy, temp. Edward I.

built for their dwelling-place the house which still remains on the north side of the churchyard, and modified the church to adapt it to his purpose. He made an eastern addition to the north transept, and altered the direction of its gable, so as to give it the external appearance of an aisle, while internally it makes two chapels, the south transept being doubtless the third. A stone roodscreen, that uncommon feature in a parish church, must date from the same period; so also must the western bell-cot of a very distinctive character, a wiser addition, I think, than either a meagre tower, which would have been of no beauty in itself, or a magnificent one, which would have destroyed the beauty of the rest of the church. I cannot speak with equal praise of the addition of a flat panelled ceiling, which, though very good in itself, cuts off the head of the beautiful south window. The chantry house is an oblong Perpendicular building of two stages, chiefly remarkable for the octagonal turret which gives access to the upper one, which is so large as to have quite the air of an oriel. A good open roof and some fine plaster ceilings of later date, will be found above. The great house, to which the chantry house now forms a horticultural appendage, presents a west front of great splendour, which is throughout essentially of good Perpendicular architecture, though extensive portions have been altered in later styles. The north-west portion is untouched, and presents a magnificent display of oriels, turrets, chimneys, and open battlements. The central part, containing the hall, has been altered in Elizabethan times, but it retains its original basement, and a curious kind of oriel, which, now at least, acts also as a porch.* The south part has been still more

* Mr. Batten says this oriel was added in 1722. I should like to look at it again; but, speaking without book, I should have thought this was rather the date when the door, which looks like an interpolation, was cut through.



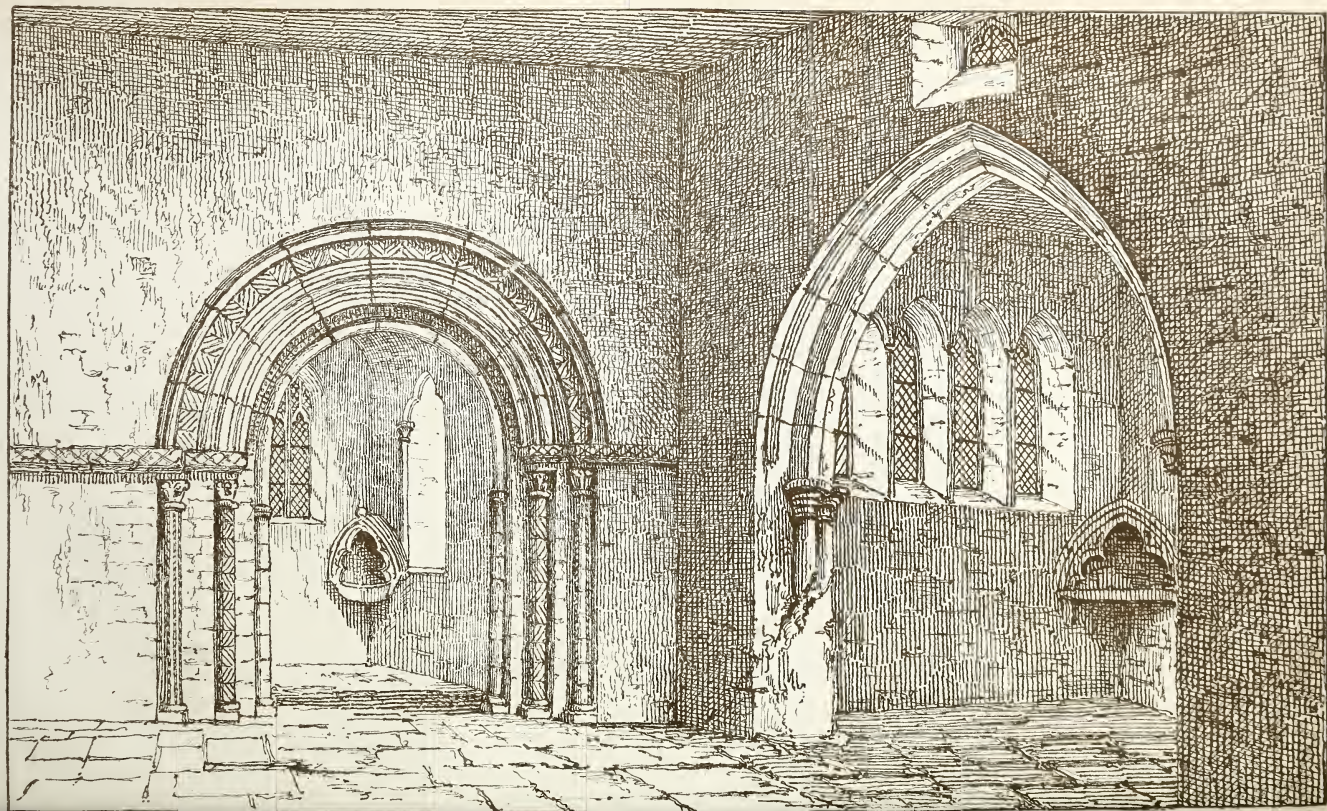
Stuke and Bamdoun Church.

recently altered in an Italianizing style, in which also a grand southern porch has been added, but the walls are original, as the chimney and some of the windows testify. These are the main features of the exterior ; its internal arrangements I must leave to some more favoured visitor than myself to describe.

From Brimpton I must conduct my party up a hill to *Odcombe*, a church which forms a very prominent object in the landscape. It is a church with the tower placed as at Iffley, and the outline is very good. Its most important portions have been remodelled in Perpendicular, but a careful examination will soon show that it is a mere recasting of an Early English building. We now descend, and in a little time find ourselves in the village of *Montacute*, where a rich store of antiquities is gathered under the shadow of the hills. To the church I have already had occasion to allude, on account of the excellent Perpendicular tower which has been added to its west end. But the church itself is essentially one of the earlier type ; indeed it contains earlier work than any we have seen, having a good, though plain, Norman chancel arch of three orders. The greater part of the church seems to belong to the turning point between Early English and Decorated ; the south transept arch belongs rather to the former style, the north to the latter ; the windows in both and also in the chancel are Geometrical. Probably all are parts of one renovation, between the accomplishment of whose several portions a good deal of time was allowed to elapse. Few villages, few towns even, are richer than Montacute in domestic architecture. Besides the well-known Elizabethan mansion, some excellent remains of the Priory exist near the church. These consist of a gateway and some adjoining domestic buildings. The very fine Perpendicular gateway,

with its oriel and bold staircase-turret, has rather a collegiate than a monastic look. Its general character and its position with regard to the other buildings reminded me much more of several gateways in Oxford than of any other conventual gateway I recollect. There are also scattered about the village streets several other houses, with oriels and the like, which seem to date from tolerable Perpendicular times.

We next come to the church of *Stoke Hambdon*, that temple of strange destinies, which, as local tradition asserts, "was built *for* the Roman Catholics, but was never occupied *by* them." The points of ecclesiastical history involved in this curious statement, I shall leave others to decide; I shall content myself with attempting to fix the age of the erection of its several parts, without striving to discover how far the authors of each of them held that the Bishop of Rome had or had not any jurisdiction in this realm of England. The original church was Norman, and probably consisted of a nave and chancel only; of this fabric we find remains of the north and south doorways, and also the extremely fine chancel arch. This last is profusely enriched, and there is a peculiarity in its soffit, to which is attached a heavy roll, running continuously round, with only a small band ranging with the neckmoulding of the shafts. The Early English period rebuilt or remodelled the chancel and added transepts. The northern one, as I mentioned in my last year's paper, forms the tower. It is a plain, bold, massive structure, with a belfry stage of exquisite masonry, with two lancets in each face. Within it exhibits a fine specimen of vaulting, rising from shafts with floriated capitals and octagonal abaci. The south transept is later, approaching the Decorated style; it has a noble range of trefoil lancets on each side, and similar ones occur



in the chancel. We must also remark the cinquefoiled piscinas, which are placed in an unusual, though not quite unique, way across the angle both of the chancel and transept. Of complete Decorated work we have the large vaulted porch, with an unusually large window in its parvise, and whose vault cuts through the original Norman doorway. There are some other insertions of windows of this date, two of which on the south side, including the south window of the transept, are designed in evident adaptation to the Early English ones in their immediate neighbourhood. In the porch, as was just mentioned, and at the west end, the architect did not consider himself thus bound by precedent, and employed the large traceried window, in this case of the Reticulated variety, more usual in his time. The Perpendicular age did little beyond lowering the roofs of the nave and south transept, and embattling the walls of the former. A few windows were inserted, including a large one in the south wall of the nave, which involved the destruction of the original entrance on that side, in lieu of which apparently a doorway was now inserted in the west front. I know of few churches, great or small, more interesting than this of Stoke Hambdon. In this one little building we find specimens of all the principal æras of our national architecture, of which the two earlier dates supply thoroughly good and typical examples. The Norman chancel arch, the tower, the ranges of lancets, are equal to anything of their respective classes with which I am acquainted, and the Decorated and Perpendicular insertions though not of equal merit, are by no means contemptible. Nor are the architectural attractions of the place confined to the church; there are the remains of a considerable mansion, to which however, I shall make but a sorry guide, as I have by me, nothing better than a general picturesque view of its exterior.

If my company are wiser or more fortunate than I was, they will now diverge to *South Petherton*, a place to which I can only act as a finger-post, and shall be happy to receive their report of the central octagon when they rejoin me at *Martock*. Here however I shall have no great occasion to linger; we have only to mark the beautiful eastern quintuplet, and to express a wish that this, as well as the east windows at Yeovil and Burnham, may all experience a speedy unblocking. We must however also cast a glance on the Decorated house, recently illustrated in Mr. Parker's beautiful volume on Domestic Architecture. At *Muchelney* we shall find the ruins of the Abbey, which I should very much like to inspect again more at leisure than I was able to do the only time I saw them. But I remember a beautiful Perpendicular cloister, and that the domestic buildings seemed to be built up against the west end of the church in an unusual manner.

Huish Episcopi I must put to a strange use. I feel half inclined, as I contemplate that glorious tower even in no better representation than my own drawing, to renew my old fight with Mr. Ruskin, to point to those gradually ascending buttresses—I beg pardon, crutches—those bands of foliation, those magnificent windows with their delicate screens of open work, and that imperial diadem of battlements and pinnacles, and ask of the reviler of England's noblest glories, whether this too is an "ugly church tower," a specimen of "savage Gothic" or "detestable Perpendicular." I am even tempted to break a lance with my respected friend Mr. Warre as to the "principle of spire-growth," only that I am somewhat mollified by finding that he agrees with myself in placing even glorious Huish after still more glorious Wrington. But my present business is not with this magnificent tower, but with the poor little church to which it forms so wonderful an excrescence. The



church has been much altered by Perpendicular architects, but it is evident that it was previously one of the small cruciform churches of the district. A Norman doorway to the south marks the original foundation of the church ; a Decorated window to the north, the probable addition of the transepts. But of these, the northern one alone retains its natural shape ; its southern fellow has been enlarged into a sort of imperfect aisle, not only externally, as at Brimpton, but within also ; so that this church now contains a *pillar*, a feature not generally found in churches of this type, and here due only to later alterations.

An exception to this last remark will be found in the next stage of our journey, namely, at *Somerton*. The church of this little town exhibits the type of which we have been treating developed to an unusual scale ; besides the transepts, of which the southern one forms a tower, we find a nave with arcades and aisles of the Decorated period. We must confess that the grand attraction of *Somerton*, its magnificent tie-beam roof, is the addition of a later age, and that the Decorated arcades, with their plain octagonal pillars, are of little value or beauty ; but the tower is an excellent study of the octagon of the district, slightly modified by the addition of a stair-turret to its whole height, and there are some good Decorated windows, especially a very elegant two-light Arch and Foil one in the north transept, At *Charlton Mackrell* is a cross church of very pleasing outline, with a central tower. The actual building is mostly Perpendicular, but the Decorated north transept, with its extremely fine north window of five lights, a Geometrical skeleton filled up with Flowing patterns, proves the existence of a cruciform church in earlier times. The trefoil doorway on the north side of the chancel should also be noticed.

I am not quite certain whither I ought now to direct your steps. You must not omit the grand Perpendicular house at *Lytes Carey*, with its Decorated chapel, retained from an earlier mansion, its noble hall, with its poor windows and fine open roof, its porch, its oriels, its state rooms with their rich ceilings and panelling of later date, and a small feature which attracted my attention in no slight degree, a door-screen enriched with linen pattern and a crest of Tudor flower. Compare the eastern and southern fronts of *Lytes Carey*; one a mass of gables and projections, the other a perfect flat, broken only by the central oriels; the chapel attached at one end; something so wholly distinct as in no wise to invade its uniformity. Here is a clear lesson that the picturesque effect of a Gothic building is not to be sought by a conscious striving after irregularity, by accumulating a gable here, a turret here, a chimney there, but by making each portion of the building serve its own purpose, and tell its own tale. A hall, a chapel, a porch,—a journey to Glastonbury might perhaps teach us to add, a kitchen,—must stand forth as distinct portions with distinct roofs; but mere ranges of ordinary rooms need not be gabled and gabled from a mere abstract love of gabling. If we are to pick holes, it might be deemed a fault at *Lytes Carey* that the hall does not tell its tale till we get within the quadrangle, and that in the south front, the magnificent parapet of the oriel seems to make something of the kind felt as lacking along the whole extent of the wall.

Lytes Carey must, undoubtedly, be seen, and yet I want to convey my party, though it is a long way from Yeovil and trenching on the jurisdiction of Glastonbury, to the newly restored church of *Butleigh*. This was a church of the same plan as *Odcombe*; transepts have recently been

added, which seems to me to be the most natural mode of enlargement, if enlargement were necessary. Now, as I want you to be on the whole pleased with this restoration, I must ask you not to look at the monuments in these same transepts, much less to read the very blank verse which is written upon one of them. Come into the chancel, and see a Somersetshire roof restored as it ought to be, the good old coved ceiling boarded, and its eastern bay richly painted; here we have the best of all substitutes for a vault, indeed it is a barrel vault in wood. Turn round then, and judge how far superior the genuine local ecclesiastical roof is to the hall roofs which have been allowed to intrude into the other parts of the church.

We may now turn our face slightly Yeovil-wards, and take in succession three octagonal towers, *Barton St. David's*, *Puddimore*, and *Ilchester*. I have alluded to all of them before; Barton has its tower lateral and octagonal from the ground, the others are western, and set on square bases. Barton has also some good examples of the foliated rear arch, and is altogether a picturesque and pleasing little church. I would however suggest that the individual playing on a harp, depicted on the western gallery, seems to betoken a slight confusion between the Archbishop of Menevia, who, as I conceive, is the David from whom Barton takes its name, and the homonymous King of Israel. Get rid of the gallery, and the false hagiology will go with it. To return to architecture, the octagons at Ilchester and Puddimore do well to compare together, especially in the different ways in which they are connected with the square base. There is something ingenious about the Puddimore device, but the simpler arrangements at Ilchester better please the eye. I also prefer the more massive proportions of its untouched Early English tower,

to the superadded Perpendicular stage at Puddimore. I cannot say much for the two churches ; neither have any original aisles or transepts ; Ilchester, however, has a late chapel added to the north, which tries to be very fine, but hardly succeeds. The incipient Geometrical east window of Ilchester is the best thing in either of them. *Chilthorne Dormer* is a little church which took my fancy greatly, with its quaint bell-cot, like that at Brimpton somewhat enlarged. It has an east window, like Ilchester, and some other pretty details. *Thorn Coffin* is hardly worth stopping for, except because it has a bell-gable. These three are the only instances I have yet seen in Somerset, though there may doubtless be others. Numerous as are the cases in which the original church was towerless, in every other instance which has come within my knowledge, some subsequent benefactor has been found to supply the deficiency.

My long circuit is now accomplished, but I cannot help stepping beyond its limits to mention again a few churches to which I have already alluded, and a few that I have not mentioned. *Trent* has a noble example of a lateral tower and spire ; it is balanced to the north by what I might call a transept, were it not gabled to the east. The cruciform church of *Ditcheat* retains in its chancel, modified as it is, a fine series of Decorated windows with the foliated rear-arch. *North Curry* and *Stoke St. Gregory* I cannot allude to too often as most instructive examples of the central octagon. At *Woolavington* may be seen the comparatively rare feature of lateral triplets in the chancel. This church had a western chapel, now destroyed, beyond its western tower. *Bawdrip* is a good specimen of a simple cross church with a central tower ; *Othery* gives the old arrangement modi-

fied only by its Perpendicular tower; while *Middlezoy* retains as beautiful a series of Geometrical windows as is easily found in Somerset or elsewhere. My journey homewards, my revisitings of Glastonbury and Wells and Wrington and Yatton, my introduction to Chewton and Blagdon towers, to Harptree spire, and the Norman interior of Compton Martin, I must keep for another occasion, or at least not trouble you with at present.
