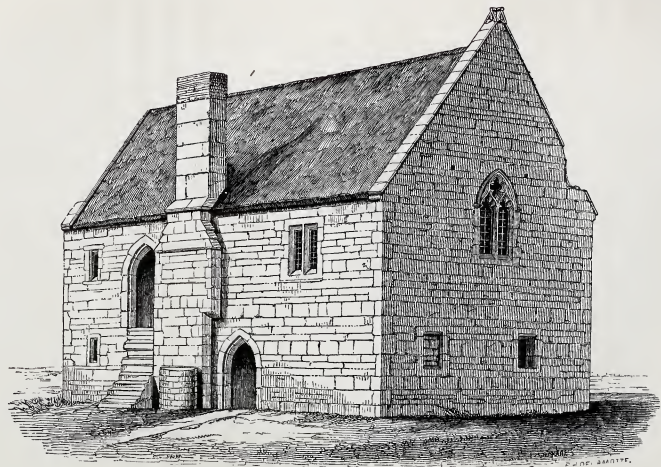


T H I R D D A Y .

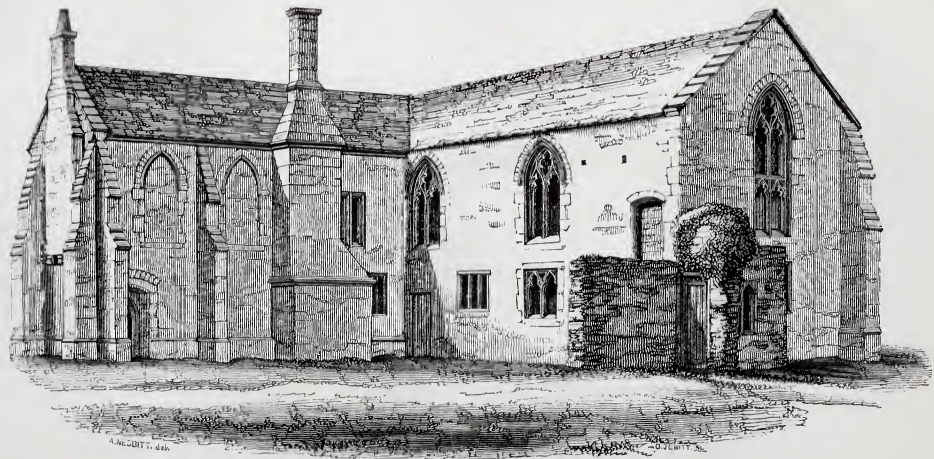
Excursion.

On Wednesday morning another excursion was taken, and opened under somewhat more favourable auspices. There were several showers during the day, but the rain was not so heavy, and gleams of sunshine were more frequent. The route included Meare, Wedmore, Cheddar, and Rodney Stoke.

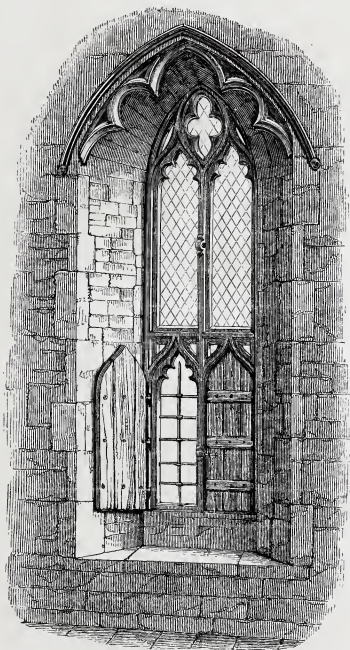
At MEARE the first object of interest was the "Porter's Lodge," supposed to have been so called from its proximity to the ancient country residence of the Abbots of Glastonbury. The "Fish House" was then visited. The party were here overtaken by rain ; but their spirits were by no means damped, as was shewn by the remark of the Rev.



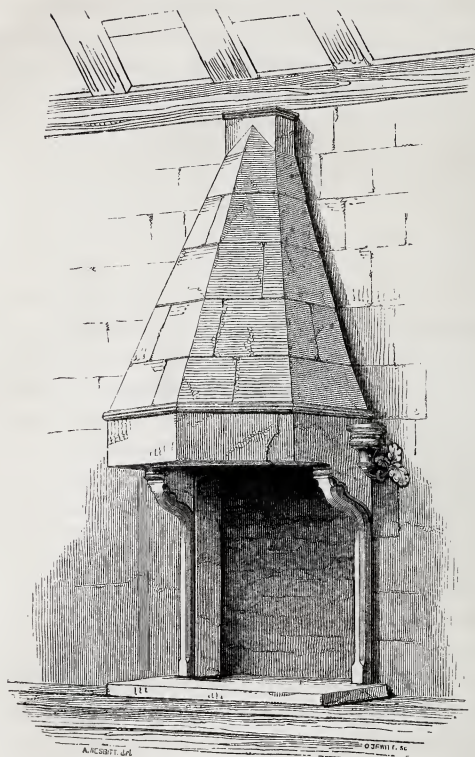
The Fish House, Meare.



Abbot's House, Meare, North-east View.



Window in the Hall, Meare.



Fire-place in the Hall, Meare.

F. Warre—that water was highly appropriate to the fish-house, although they were not quite fish enough to appreciate it. The Rev. F. W. White read an extract from Mr. Parker's work, on *The Domestic Architecture of the Middle Ages*, describing the building, from which it appeared that it was the residence of the head fisherman of the Abbots. This account was supplemented by some further remarks from Mr. Parker himself, who assigned the date to the reign of Edward III. Mr. Dickinson said that Mr. Gabriel Poole had furnished him with maps which gave the boundary and size of the Abbot's pool or "meare." It appeared to have occupied a space of about 500 acres. The Rev. Mr. White observed that it was five miles round, and that there were also three small pools in which fish were placed to be preserved for the use of the Abbot. Mr. Parker drew attention to the square-headed windows in the building, which, he said, were clearly those of the fourteenth century. It was generally supposed that all square-headed windows were late, but it was quite a mistake. The "Abbot's House," which was formerly their country residence, was then examined. It is now occupied as a farm-house by Mr. N. Look, and the company had the opportunity both of admiring the many beauties of ancient architecture it contains, and witnessing the modern process of manufacturing the celebrated cheese of the locality. The banqueting hall, now used as a store-room for cheese, is very spacious. Mr. Parker said that the position of the room, in one wing of the building, was unusual. There was an external doorway which formed the lord's entrance, the servants' entrance being on the other end, from towards the centre of the building. Where the ruins of a house were remaining, it was well to remember that the principal rooms were often on the first floor,

and the apartments beneath were commonly used merely as cellars or store-rooms. It was usual with our ancestors to build their houses, so to speak, upon vaults. These were now called ambulatories, cloisters, and other names; but the fact was they were used for whatever purpose they were required. This was a remarkably fine hall, if it might be called a hall; from the peculiarity of its position it was usually termed the banqueting room instead. It was, however, one of the finest rooms of the kind he knew.

By the courtesy of Messrs. Parker the committee are enabled to enrich the present volume with the following illustrations of Meare, from *Domestic Architecture of the 14th Century*, viz. :—Abbot's House, N.E. view; Window in the Hall; Fire-place in the Hall; the Fish House.

The Church at Meare next formed the subject of attention. It contains a fine stone pulpit, which has recently been scraped. The roof of the nave has been restored, and is highly beautiful. Mr. White stated it to be an exact imitation of the former roof. There is also an old oaken roof in the chancel. The roof of the south aisle has been replaced by a plain one. Mr. White explained that the parish, having raised £700 or £800, had been unable to put up a good roof to that part; but he hoped to be able eventually to effect an entire restoration of the church. A very curious old alms-box was noticed, resting on a handsomely carved pedestal. There is a painting representing the Descent from the Cross. Mr. White said that it was probably 200 years old; but about 30 years ago it was daubed over by some artist, and spoiled. Mr. Parker then gave a description of the church. The chancel and porch appeared, he said, to be about the same date, and he should suppose them to be of the fourteenth century. He was informed by the vicar that they were

probably about the year 1300 ; but he should not have thought them so early. The chancel roof was remarkably nice, and the beauty of the part over the altar was in accordance with the custom of decorating that part more richly than the rest. The nave and aisles, and the chancel-arch, which appeared to belong to the nave, seemed to have been rebuilt late in the fifteenth century, probably in the time of Henry VII. The pulpit also was of the same work. The roof of the nave, he thought, had been very creditably restored. The iron-work of the door was very remarkable, and was of the fourteenth century. The pedestal of the poor-box, which was very beautifully carved, probably formed a portion of the screen, and was made use of for its present purpose after the Reformation. The tower arch was hidden by the gallery, and he could not say much about it. Mr. Freeman said that he would supplement Mr. Parker's facts by a little criticism. There were bad architects in the fourteenth century as well as now. If the chancel was examined minutely, it would be seen that it was a freak, and had many faults in it. If a modern architect were to bring him such a chancel, he should call him all sorts of names. The tracery of the east window was a corrupt imitation of one of the very prettiest forms we had, and which was found in perfection in St. Mary Redcliffe and one or two other churches—it was that which we should term the spheric square. The architect appeared to have got hold of some form of the sort, but he evidently did not appreciate the beauty. He made a spheric square (if that was the correct mathematical term) but made it much too flat, as if some one had sat upon it, and then he threw up a perpendicular mullion into it, producing a most peculiar form. One window was of exceedingly beautiful design, but it was almost spoiled by being

made too large. The south windows of the chancel were also freaks. It was not a good design, to put a little bit of Perpendicular tracery upon the top of a Decorated quatrefoil as had been done, but it was perhaps a sign that the first rudiments of the Perpendicular style were coming in. In the hall they had just seen there was an example of good architecture, and in that chancel of bad architecture of about the same date. The nave was decidedly of a local character, but poor, and there was a great weakness about the whole. The angel corbels were very beautiful in some churches, but the architect had contrived in this to make them very ugly. The west window was much superior, and those of the belfry were curious. They were Decorated, and had a triangle in the head instead of a circle. The roof of the chancel was a very nice one, but still rather a freak, and more like that of a hall than of a church. Mr. Dickinson pointed attention to several marks on the chancel arch, as if bars had rested there, and enquired if they probably had any connection with the rood-loft? Mr. Parker explained that it was a common practice at the time of the Reformation, to fill up the chancel-arch with lath and plaster; and the marks appeared to indicate that this had been done in the present case. The arch itself was very late, and he could not suppose that a rood-loft had been attached to it after it was built. He once met with one of these timber partition-screens, separating the nave from the chancel, with the two tables (or oak slabs) of the Commandments in ornamental letters carved in the wood, of the time of Queen Elizabeth. The fact of their having been so used clearly shewed that the Reformers, when they mentioned the east end of the church, meant the east end of the nave, and not of the chancel. The custom in their time was to place the communion-table in that

part, but it was subsequently removed to the chancel, which was its proper place. In examining the sacred building, the Rev. F. Warre observed a chest containing some ancient armour. The Vicar explained that anciently, Meare sent fifteen armed men to assist the Abbots of Glastonbury, and the chest contained pieces of their armour.

At this part of the proceedings, Mr. Parker was obliged to leave, and Mr. Dickinson, in the name of the Society, thanked him for his attendance, and the valuable information he had rendered.

At WEDMORE, the Rev. F. Warre conducted the excursionists to a farm, in the occupation of Mrs. Hawkins, where there are two remarkable effigies, used as gate-posts. Mr. Warre observed that there was a difficulty in assigning their date. The work appeared to be that of the fourteenth century, but the armour was similar to that of the early part of the fifteenth, about the commencement of the wars of the Roses. The Rev. T. Hugo thought they were not at all later than the fourteenth century. The local tradition was stated to be that the figures represented Adam and Eve, but unfortunately for this idea, the supposed figure of Eve appeared to have been arrayed in coat armour.

The Church of Wedmore was thrown open by the Rev. Mr. Kempthorne. It is a large building, and in some respects was admired by the archæologists, though Mr. Freeman gave a verdict the reverse of approval. It contains a splendid piece of old roofing, illuminated with figures of angels. Mr. Freeman, in giving a description of the exterior, said that it was a cross church, with a central tower; but there were two or three additions to the ground-plan, which made it somewhat complicated. The porch grew into a sort of tower, as was seen on a still

greater scale at Bruton, and at the east of it there was added a large chapel, which threw the transept into insignificance. The church was in the Perpendicular style ; but it was not a good specimen, and there was only one of those elegant windows which were found in so many churches in the county. There was also an awkwardness in putting together the several parts. Those who knew Yatton Church would remember what a splendid composition the front was, but here there was nothing of the sort ; the tower was rather lofty and slender, but poorly finished, and instead of a beautiful open parapet at the top, there was one not pierced but merely panelled. Mr. Freeman gave also a description of the interior of the church, but not before many of the company had expressed an opinion, notwithstanding the severity of his strictures, that the effect externally was good. He said that originally there appeared to have been a cross church, of the period of the transition from Norman to Early English. That was a much smaller building than the present, as was shewn by the four lantern arches, which were not in the least adapted to the proportions of the present church. The doorway (which was highly ornamented) might be later, but he did not know that it was necessarily so, as it was by no means an uncommon practice, where a church was very plain, to concentrate all the ornament on one feature, which was very often the south doorway. There was a very good reason for selecting this part, because it was one that could be contemplated by itself, whereas, if one or two pillars or arches were decorated more than the others, the whole building would appear inharmonious. Then, the greater part of the church was reconstructed in Perpendicular times. There must also have been something done intermediately, as there was one singularly

beautiful window of the Early Decorated period, which shewed that an aisle or chapel must have been introduced towards the end of the thirteenth century. The Perpendicular reconstruction could hardly be all of one time, as there were considerable differences of detail. The work was, on the whole, very poor. The lofty pillars and arches, with no clerestory, looked poor in comparison with those at Wrington, Martock, and other grand examples in the county. Still it was essentially Somerset work. There was the characteristic round capital, with foliage, it being a peculiarity of the Somersetshire Perpendicular that it retained many of the beauties of the earlier style, with its own peculiar magnificence. The chapel on the south side had, instead of pillars, two small pieces of wall moulded on each side, which was by no means an elegant form. There were some good pieces of wooden roofing in the chancel of the church. Mr. Dickinson said that unless there were very strong reasons, he should doubt whether the original church was a small one. The peculiar lowness of the arches which supported the tower might have been designed in consequence of their having to bear its weight. Mr. Freeman said he thought the church must have been originally both lower and shorter than at present. He then drew attention to the very beautiful piece of wooden roof, with figures of angels, and verses of the *Te Deum*, to which we have already alluded, and to some fan-tracery over the lantern. He also explained, in support of the opinion he had advanced in reference to the church having been heightened, that one great object with the architects previous to the Reformation, was to enable the congregation to see the high altar, with which, in the present state of the church, the low arches would interfere. This elicited an interesting discussion, and it appeared that in collegiate

churches there was sometimes one altar for the monks and another for the congregation ; there were also altars at the ends of the aisles. Mr. Freeman related a curious circumstance in connection with the church at Dunster. The monks and the people quarrelled, and the monks refused to allow the parishioners to use their high altar in the chancel. The church was therefore divided, the inhabitants had a chancel and choir formed out of a part of the nave, and an altar erected, and two separate services were conducted.

The Church at CHEDDAR was the next sacred edifice visited, and some portions of it were greatly admired. The Rev. R. Beadon, the Vicar, received the excursionists. The edifice is large and handsome, and the tower noble and well proportioned. There is a splendid stone pulpit, painted in polychrome. A southern chapel bore evidence of having been exceedingly rich, the windows in it being remarkably fine. The initials, J. S., observed here, and which also appeared at Meare, were supposed to be those of John Selwood, Abbot of Glastonbury. It was ascertained by the Rev. T. Hugo that the walls of this chapel were originally painted. A curious piece of stonework, supposed to have formed part of a tomb, and a boss, apparently of great antiquity, were noticed. Mr. Freeman explained the peculiarities of the church, prefacing his description by saying that as he had not seen it for thirteen years before, there was some difficulty in the task, but he would endeavour to avoid mistakes. The work was of several dates. There was some Early English, as shewn by a piscina, of great beauty. There was also some Decorated work. His chief difficulty was in deciding whether the clerestory windows were contemporary with the pillars and arches. They were a sort of transition between the Decorated and Perpendicular styles. There

were several things in the architecture very well worth study. Some one had mentioned that it was once a cross church, but he saw no evidence of that. Like many other churches in the county, the chancel was not worthy of the rest of the building. The Perpendicular work, though the style was not fully developed, was singularly good, and the parapets and windows were some of the best work in the county. There had been a chapel added at the east of the porch, which had one or two singularities. That such a chapel should be rich was not at all uncommon; but its richness was well worth studying. The windows were curious: there were two graceful windows set under a square head, which was pierced, so as to constitute one square-headed window. The oak roof of the nave was similar to that usually found where there was a clerestory; and the part over the rood-loft as was very frequently the case, was more highly ornamented than the rest. The roof of the chancel was coved. The church was very rich in its fittings—in its open carved seats, and stone pulpit; the latter appeared to have been found too small, and was enlarged by the addition of some wood-work. The tower was an example of what he called the Taunton type, and had a turret near its corner. It was very well proportioned. The Rev. T. Hugo remarked that the chapel evidently had formerly a fan-tracery roof, and one of the bosses was there on the floor.

Leaving the sacred building, the party proceeded to see the Cliffs, so celebrated for their grandeur. They occur, as our readers are aware, in a chasm of the Mendip range. The rocks, which are of mountain limestone, reach, in some instances, from 350 to 370 feet in perpendicular height, and are as remarkable for a romantic variety of form as for their stupendous character. The cliffs contain also speci-

mens of rare plants, and are therefore well calculated to interest the botanist. The following were found by Mr. Babington, and the Rev. T. Hugo : *Polypodium calcareum*, *Cystopteris fragilis*, *Thalutrum minus*, and *Dianthus cœsius*.

At Cheddar a cold collation was furnished by Mr. Cox, at the close of which Mr. Dickinson, the President, expressed his gratification at the success which had attended the meeting, and conveyed the thanks of the Society to Mr. Freeman, who had very much contributed to the interest of the proceedings, and whom he hoped to see again next year.

The Rev. F. Warre, as the senior officer of the Society, thanked Mr. Dickinson for his kindness in presiding. He had been Secretary nearly nine years, and without a word of disparagement to any other gentleman, he could safely say that never had the Society had a better President.

Mr. Dickinson acknowledged the compliment, and said that the success of the meeting was greatly attributable to the Secretaries (Rev. F. Warre and Rev. W. A. Jones), to whom he felt personally obliged for their exertions.

The proceedings of the Annual Meeting were then formally closed.

After the dinner, however, several of the company went into Mr. Cox's cavern, the stalactites of which are remarkably curious and beautiful.

And in returning, the Church at RODNEY STOKE was examined, the Rev. G. H. Fagan attending and receiving the visitors. It contains a mural chapel of the Rodney family, with monuments of the date of James I. and Charles I. There is also a rood screen (post-Reformation), which was characterised as unique, and a pulpit to match. The architecture is Late Perpendicular.

In consequence of the lateness of the hour, it was found impossible to visit Wookey Hole, and its celebrated cavern.