

On the Perpendicular Style, as exhibited  
in the Churches of Somerset.

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IN appearing before a local body, at the request of its own executive, to illustrate any portion of the antiquities of the district which forms the sphere of that body, while I am sensible that such a request, preferred to a stranger, is a compliment of a very refined nature, I cannot but feel an unusual diffidence in treating the subject in the presence of so many who must be so much better acquainted with many branches of it than myself. I feel, of course, no greater difficulty than elsewhere in describing and commenting on those individual buildings which I have myself examined; the danger is that of generalizing from insufficient premises, and passing by typical instances with which greater local experience might have made me familiar. And I therefore feel the more grateful to those members and officers of the society, who have so kindly acted as my guides to many of the most important churches in the county, with which I might otherwise have remained unacquainted. As it was at their invitation that I undertook

the subject in the first instance, it is by their means that I am enabled to treat it in a somewhat less imperfect manner. Even thus, I have of course examined only a very small proportion of the numerous churches of so large a district; but I have gone, as far as I was able, into different parts of the county, and I trust that I have been enabled to see some specimens of most of the leading types that it contains.

And, if it be not demanding too great a sacrifice of your patience to my own egotism, I cannot help venturing the remark that I have acceded to such a request as emanating from a Somersetshire Society, with a peculiar pleasure beyond what would have attached to it from any other quarter. Though I am in no way connected with this county by property or residence, and though I had not the honour to be born within its limits, it is one in which I venture to challenge a degree of interest, and whose boundaries I never pass without a feeling of satisfaction on many grounds. I may call myself all but a native of it, as my very first recollections appertain to the town in which we are now assembled, when the striking objects of its natural scenery, Worle Hill, Brean Down, the Channel, the Holms, and the distant mountains of Glamorganshire, made an impression upon my childish imagination, which is not likely ever to be effaced. And to come more directly to our immediate subject, I have always maintained, and that with a very intimate knowledge of the churches of Northamptonshire, and some little acquaintance with Lincolnshire itself, the claims of the churches of Somerset to take precedence of all specimens of parochial architecture in the kingdom. To my mind, contrary, as I am fully aware, to the general opinion, they exhibit the most perfect style of architecture in its most perfect form, and are particularly admirable for that feature, which it is well nigh the greatest

boast of our English builders to have brought to its perfection, their graceful and majestic towers. I have selected, out of the buildings of all ages and all nations, the west front of a Somersetshire parish church as the frontispiece of my most important published work ; in calling attention to a strange and almost forgotten cathedral, I have recognized the influence of Somersetshire models upon one of its most important features ;\* finally, in tracing out the infinitely varied forms of window tracery, I have found the most perfect of its later shapes well nigh the peculiar possession of the local style of this county.† In the district where I now reside, in those more distant regions of our island which have lately attracted most of my attention, I generally find that the highest compliment I can pay to a church is to say that it reminds me of a Somersetshire building. From the banks of the Severn to the rocks of Pembrokeshire, occasional imitations have from time to time reminded me of the structures of this favoured region ; while in every neighbouring county, Dorset, Wilts, Gloucester, I have been always pleased to recognize some faint forestalling of the more perfect splendours contained within the fortunate limit. Being thus connected with your county by a tie which to me is no slight one, and having always looked to it as the very Utopia of architectural beauty, I may be excused for dwelling at some length on the peculiar satisfaction which I have derived from the present invitation to become the more special illustrator of its merits.

Of course I do not profess on the present occasion to put before you a complete treatise on the churches of Somerset ; such a subject would require a far more general

\* Architecture of Llandaff Cathedral, p. 17.

† Essay on Window Tracery, p. 191.

knowledge than I can pretend to, and would also be far too extensive for the limits of a single paper. I prefer to adhere strictly to one branch of the subject; and indeed the churches which I have recently visited with an especial view to the composition of this paper, I have examined almost exclusively with reference to that branch, often passing by, with but little attention, portions which were interesting solely on other grounds. But I cannot help recommending to this society to undertake a full and systematic examination of all the churches in the county, a work to which I should be proud to contribute my humble assistance, with a view to the publication of descriptions something in the same form as those put forth by the Northamptonshire Society. At present my general remarks will be very brief, and I will pass as soon as possible to my immediate subject, the Perpendicular of the district.

The strength of Somersetshire, like that of Northamptonshire, lies in its parish churches. It is not indeed so entirely denuded of conventual remains as that county, but even monastic ruins, much less monastic churches retained for parochial purposes, do not seem to be a striking feature in its architectural wealth. The grand buildings which I am best acquainted with are all of the strictly parochial type, although they occasionally approach in size and splendour to the dignity of cathedral or conventual buildings, and moreover belong to a style in which the two types of the minster and the parish church run much more into one another than was usual at an earlier period. At the same time it is an honourable fact for the local architecture that it admitted of having churches of the cathedral type erected in it, a circumstance probably occurring nowhere else. The Cathedral of Wells was indeed built before a local style had been developed of sufficient merit to be employed in

such a structure, but the two churches next in importance which the county contains, belong essentially to the local Perpendicular. I mean Bath Abbey and St. Mary Redcliffe. The latter is perhaps the only parish church in England conceived throughout on the cathedral model, with the sole and unfortunate exception of the absence of a central tower ; and it is one which Somersetshire may claim as its own with the most perfect right. It is throughout an example of Somersetshire Perpendicular, a development on the cathedral type of the style of Wrington and Banwell. And I am by no means sure that we ought not to point to St. Mary Redcliffe as the cradle of the style. Its most important features are beginning to be developed in the transepts of that church, which are transitional from Decorated to Perpendicular. If we conceive them to have afforded the general model, we can readily account for the retention throughout the whole Perpendicular period of what I regard as the distinguishing and characteristic merit of Somersetshire work, namely the combination of unity and grandeur peculiar to the Perpendicular style with much of the delicacy and purity of detail more commonly distinctive of the earlier styles. Nowhere is this so conspicuous as in the transepts at Redcliffe. The general notion is intensely and magnificently Perpendicular, while the details are still to a great extent Decorated.

I have spoken of St. Mary Redcliffe as a Somersetshire church ; I hope my Bristol friends will not consider their municipal independence invaded, if I place their whole city, for architectural purposes, within the limits of my favourite county. The architectural march, indeed, extends a good way into Gloucestershire ; but Bristol is an integral part of the mother county. Its churches certainly form, in some respects, a marked class by themselves, but they

only differ as the type of Wrington differs from that of Taunton, and must be considered as forming a portion of the same whole.

Previous to the Perpendicular period, the churches of Somersetshire appear to have been, for the most part, structures of no very great pretensions. They seem to have been usually without clerestories, and, I suspect, very frequently without aisles. This I infer from the arcades being almost always Perpendicular ; we can hardly suppose that earlier arcades would have been so generally destroyed had they ever existed. They were frequently cruciform, and they have transmitted the use of that shape to some complete churches of the Perpendicular period, at which time I need not say it was very seldom employed in original designs. In some parts an octagonal tower, sometimes central, sometimes at one side, appears to have been frequent. The square western tower, when it existed, seems to have been very small and plain, as at Wilton and Trull. St. Mary's, Bridgwater, is an example on a larger scale, but with no further allowance of ornament. Now unfortunately, it seems destined to have all its characteristic features obliterated by that subtle form of destruction, which arrogates to itself the name of restoration.

In a general survey of the county, all traces of these earlier fabrics should be carefully attended to, and the different types which they may present among themselves should be accurately marked, as well as referred, as far as possible, to their causes; how far, for instance, they may be attributable to the influence of different abbeys, how far to the different stone of different localities, or to the appropriate requirements of different kinds of scenery. All these are points of great interest and importance, and ought to be thoroughly well worked out, but I can at present give them only a very limited share of attention.



These smaller and more ancient fabrics were far from being without influence on their more magnificent successors. A Perpendicular church seems to have been very seldom entirely erected from the ground ; the chancel at least of the old building is generally retained, and too frequently, from its smaller size and inferior architecture, it forms a sad blot on some of the most stately fabrics of all. I may mention Wrington and Yatton, the latter especially. Here we have a cross church, of which the chancel, transepts, and central tower received only some modifications and additions during the Perpendicular repair, while a nave of the most magnificent character was erected to the west of them. The result is a ludicrous insignificance on the part of the chancel, and in the interior that ruinous circumstance to the effect of a cross church, lantern arches disproportionately low.

I suspect that in many cases, where the church was not cruciform, they first erected the tower to the west of the old nave, and afterwards attempted to bring the rest of the church into harmony with it by re-building the nave, (or, what is practically much the same, adding aisles to it,) and subjecting the chancel to greater or less modifications in detail. This would account for the very small Perpendicular naves which we sometimes find attached to the most magnificent towers, as at Bishops Lydiard. They were cramped for room by the old chancel at one end and by the new tower at the other.

I will allude briefly to a few instances where considerable portions of the early fabric remain, or where it has greatly influenced the subsequent Perpendicular structure. Whitchurch, near Bristol, is a good specimen of the original cross church without aisles ; viewed from the north, it appears to be entirely unaltered, but on the south side the transept

has been destroyed, and an aisle carried along nearly the whole length of the church, producing an outline very common in Jersey, but very rare anywhere else. This little church has many points well worthy attention, but chiefly on grounds quite alien to our present purpose. At Othery, a cross church without aisles, and at Kingston, if I may be allowed the bull, a cross church without transepts, the original ground-plan is untouched, but the central towers have been re-built in Perpendicular times. Stoke St. Gregory is perhaps a more instructive case than any. This was originally a small Early English cross church with a central octagon. Of this fabric, the chancel, transepts, and tower seem to remain, with only alterations in detail. But a large Perpendicular nave and aisles, altogether disproportioned to the size of the church, have been substituted for the original western limb. So great was the increase of height that the ridge of the new nave roof came very nearly to a level with the top of the original tower. Consequently the Perpendicular builders added another stage to the latter in a manner harmonizing better with the original than such alterations often do ; and, what ought to be accurately observed, the original belfry windows were blocked and converted into niches for images.

In these cruciform buildings the original fabrics have necessarily had more influence on their successors than in other instances. They supplied an important feature in the central towers, which it would have been wanton prodigality to have destroyed. But even in other cases, their influence has not been unimportant. The retention of the original chancels has prevented one common Perpendicular development from obtaining in Somersetshire. We do not meet with the quasi-basilican type of Perpendicular church, in which the aisles run uninterruptedly





to the east end or within a bay of it, the distinction of chancel and nave being made wholly by internal screen-work. It is indeed very usual for chapels to be added north and south of the chancel, but they almost always retain the character of chapels as distinguished from aisles, and the abrupt finish of their rich parapets often contrasts in a singular manner with the high-pitched dripping roof of the chancel. Wrington is a conspicuous instance.

The typical Somersetshire Perpendicular church consists of a lofty and elaborate western tower, standing disengaged from the aisles; a nave and aisles, with or without a clerestory, according to circumstances, with very commonly a large southern porch as high as the aisles; a high roofed and comparatively insignificant chancel, containing traces, more or less extensive, of earlier work, but with Perpendicular chapels on each side. Transepts are not uncommon, but cannot be called typical. There is a tendency to polygonal turrets in various positions; west of the aisles, as at St. Cuthbert's, Wells; east of the nave, as at Banwell; flanking a west front without towers, as at Crewkerne and Bath Abbey; north or south of the nave and aisles, often forming an approach to the rood-loft, of which there is a remarkable instance at Burrington, crowned with an elegant little spire. Pierced and other enriched parapets are common. The roofs are of various kinds, but different forms of the coved roof are typical here, as in the rest of the West of England and South Wales. The interiors are rich in screens and other kinds of wood-work, but with these, as ecclesiastical rather than architectural, I have at present nothing to do.

We may generally remark, though the position must be taken with considerable exceptions, that the work in the northern part of the county is better than in the southern.

This, I am informed, is owing to a difference in the kind of stone employed. In the north we find a remarkable delicacy of workmanship, while, in the south, with the same general character, with nearly equal magnificence of general design, and with the same tendency to retain early detail, there is often much coarseness and clumsiness in the actual execution. This is particularly conspicuous in St. Mary Magdalen, Taunton, a church of most imposing general effect, but whose details will not bear examination. In the south we find ashlar masonry less commonly used in other parts than the towers, and a coarse battlement is in common use, while in the north we continually find straight parapets elegantly pierced, and more commonly broken by pinnacles. In the best churches in Bristol we find the same general excellence of work as in the neighbouring part of Somerset, but from the crumbling stone employed, the external enrichments have almost entirely vanished.

#### TOWERS.

I begin now with the towers. One would have thought that it could need no argument to prove that a grand Perpendicular tower ranked among the noblest triumphs of architectural skill, and that it was among the greatest boasts of England in general, and of Somersetshire in particular, to have brought so glorious a feature to perfection. Even the ecclesiological school, in their intense depreciation of our most truly national architecture, do not deny its positive beauty, but are content to place it after the form which finishes in a spire. This is a mere matter of taste, on which we may well be content to differ; it is in fact simply a question between the highest degree of grace and the highest degree of majesty. But there is another view of the subject which cannot be passed by so lightly,

or so gently. A writer whose works have recently made no small stir in the architectural world, has taken upon him to assert that all the world is wrong in this respect, also as well as in most others. The author of "the Stones of Venice,"\*—what, by the way, would the world have thought if Dr. Layard had given us "the Bricks of Nineveh?"—would probably think the stones of Wrington, or even of Glastonbury, altogether beneath his notice; but it is impossible for an admirer of those glorious structures to let them fall undefended before his attacks, even though it is only a stab in the dark which is aimed at them. The two great offences appear to be presence of pinnacles and of buttresses, which I, like I suppose most other people, have hitherto considered to be very ornamental and necessary appendages. Now any difference about pinnacles or buttresses with such men as Mr. Petit or Dr. Whewell, one would argue out calmly and dispassionately, and with the deference due to such distinguished names; but it is impossible to preserve common patience over the childish rant with which Mr. Ruskin goes about to prove pinnacles offenders against what he calls the "Lamp of Beauty." "I believe," he says, "that all that has been written and taught about proportion put together, is not to the architect worth the single rule, well enforced: 'Have one large thing and several smaller things, or one principal thing and several inferior things, and bind them well together.' Sometimes there may be a regular gradation, as between the heights of stories in good designs for houses; sometimes a monarch with a lowly train, as in the spire with its pinnacles. The varieties of arrangement are infinite, but the law is uni-

\*The Committee beg it to be understood, that while giving free scope to fair criticism, they do not commit either themselves or the Society to the adoption of the opinions expressed by contributors.

versal—have one thing above the rest, either by size, or office, or interest. Don't put the pinnacles without the spire. What a host of ugly church towers have we in England, with pinnacles at the corners, and none in the middle! How many buildings like King's College Chapel, at Cambridge, looking like tables upside down, with their four legs in the air! What! it will be said, have not beasts four legs? Yes, but legs of different shapes, and with a head between them. So they have a pair of ears, and perhaps a pair of horns—but not at both ends. Knock down a couple of pinnacles at either end in King's College Chapel, and you will have a kind of proportion instantly.”\*

I am really ashamed to read out talk of this kind before a rational audience; but the passage is a good sample of Mr. Ruskin's diction and logic. Here we have “a monarch with a lowly train;” here “a table upside down, with its four legs in the air.” Why should not the table stand erect, and the monarch be reversed, so as to realize at once the Herodotean tale of Hippocleides? But the real question is, what have either the monarch or the table, to say nothing of the horses, goats, camels, or hippopotami, which come after them, to do with St. Cuthbert's tower, and King's College Chapel? Herein lies the great force of Mr. Ruskin's style of logic. He puts two things together by an arbitrary juxtaposition, and then expects you, first of all, to accept the juxtaposition as an analogy, and finally to accept the analogy as an argument. What has a monarch and his lowly train to do with it? Why may I not, in the nineteenth century, erect, if I think good, a thoroughly republican steeple? Why may I not, if I choose, like some of my friends, to symbolize ecclesiastical

\* *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, p. 115.

facts, terminate my tower with the four Doctors of the church, or even with the Twelve Apostles? I cannot, suspect Mr. Ruskin, of all men, of wishing to violate the strictest equality among the latter. Fresh from "the Stones of Venice," I would fain, if any conceivable shape of tower would allow me, crown my edifice with a Council of Ten; will my master require greater pre-eminence to be anywhere assigned than that belonging to the little Doge who tries so modestly to bring himself into notice at the corners of Taunton and Weston Zoyland? What would Mr. Ruskin have done had he lived

"In lordly Lacedæmon,  
The City of two Kings?"

How would he have designed a rival to the Giralda, in the reign of Ferdinand and Isabel? Again, he tells us, "what, it will be said, have not beasts four legs?" By whom will it be said? Could the idea enter into any man's head but his own, that the legs of beasts could prove anything, either way, as to the beauty of King's College Chapel? I am fully aware that beasts have four legs, just as other members of the animal kingdom have two, six, eight, or a hundred; but I am too blind to see how any architectural principle can be deduced from this most indisputable fact. And as for the beasts "with legs of different shapes, and with a head between them," I much doubt whether the deserts of Africa, or the sculptures of Nimroud, exhibit anything half so marvellous. I must appeal to the Natural History section of the Society to inform me whether any such are to be found in rerum natura.\*

\* I have since discovered that, if not in nature, they at least exist in art. In Mr. Wilson's *Archæology of Scotland*, p. 556, an animal is represented exactly realizing Mr. Ruskin's hippogryph or martichoras.



But there is another count against our towers ; besides the fault of pinnacles, they have to answer the farther accusation of buttresses ! Mr. Ruskin treats us to the following piece of declamation on this subject, which I should be exceedingly obliged to any philological friend to translate into some intelligible tongue of the Indo-Germanic family.

“ There must be no light-headedness in your noble tower ; impregnable foundations, wrathful crest, with the vizor down, and the dark vigilance seen through the clefts of it ; not the fligree crown or embroidered cap. No towers are so grand as the square-browed ones with massy cornices and rent battlements \* \* \* But in all of them this I believe to be a point of chief necessity,—that they shall seem to stand, and verily shall stand, in their own strength ; not by help of buttresses nor artful balancings on this side or on that. Your noble tower must need no help, must be sustained by no crutches, must give place to no suspicion of decrepitude. Its offices may be to withstand war, look forth for tidings, or to point to heaven ; but it must have in its own walls strength to do this ; it is to be in itself a bulwark, not to be sustained by other bulwarks ; to rise and look forth, ‘ the tower of Lebanon that looketh toward Damascus,’ like a stern sentinel, not like a child held up in its nurse’s arms. A tower may indeed have a kind of buttress, a projection, or subordinate tower, at each end of its angles ; but these are to its main body like the satellites to a shaft, joined with its strength and associated with its uprightness, part of the tower itself ; exactly in the proportion in which they lose their massive unity with its body, and assume the form of true buttress walls, set on at its angles, the tower loses its dignity.”\*

\* *Stones of Venice*, p. 200.

Now, in the name of common sense and common English, what does all this mean? If Mr. Ruskin thinks the tower of Magdalen College, or even the western tower of Wimborne Minster, better than Wrington, Titchmarsh, and North Petherton, let him; it is a fair question of taste, on which we may differ quite comfortably; but why all this rant and dogmatism? What is "light-headedness in a tower?" What is "wrathful crest?" could Sir Samuel Meyrick himself have derived any idea from a tower "with the vizor down, and the dark vigilance seen through the clefts of it?" The Glossary fails to inform me what is meant by "square-browed towers," and "rent battlements," unless indeed a tower cannot put in a claim to "nobility" till its parapet has been damaged by a thunder-storm. Finally, *why* is all this? Why cannot our buttressed towers do all these fine things? Why cannot Taunton tower "rise and look forth," &c. &c. though as I do not know the form of "the tower of Lebanon," which I believe the royal lover likens to the nose of his bride, I cannot profess to say which of our Somersetshire types departs furthest from that ideal. To come to the main issue, I can of course only dogmatize back again; if I say "there should be no top-heaviness in your noble tower," I feel quite sure of being right; if I say it should have its "vizor up," though I do not know what that means, I think probability is on my side, inasmuch as I am asserting the contrary to Mr. Ruskin; and I lastly solemnly affirm that what Mr. Ruskin says about "crutches" and "bulwarks supported by other bulwarks," is simply a specimen of his false analogies.

From Mr. Ruskin and his vagaries let us turn to one who does not indeed write about "Lamps," or "Sheepfolds," or "Stones of Venice," but who has an eye to discern, a

pencil to pourtray, a mind acute enough to understand for himself, and capacious enough to tolerate the opinions of others, and who, above all things, does not disdain the natural and appropriate use of his native language. I set up no man's *ipse dixit*, but I always have a peculiar pleasure in finding myself ranged by the side of Mr. Petit. The following is his judgment, as well argued as it is simply expressed.

“This style (the Perpendicular) appears to the greatest advantage in the finish of towers. We know how the Germans avoided the horizontal line in that part of the structure. The sides of a tower or octagon often terminated in gables, and the whole was surmounted by a dome or spire, which was of wood, if the substructure was not capable of bearing one of stone. In the Perpendicular English, on the contrary, the tower was boldly finished with the horizontal line ; broken, it is true, with the embattled parapet, and varied with pinnacles, but still without disguise or concealment ; for it was felt to form an excellent contrast with the vertical lines of the edifice. The square tower, with its capping of battlements and pinnacles, (I cannot name a better example than that of Magdalen College, Oxford,) is one of the noblest features of Gothic architecture, and is peculiarly our own ; nor is it confined to one class of building ; the town, the village, the episcopal city, all alike boast it as their chief ornament.”\*

#### DIFFERENT TYPES OF TOWERS.

The more elaborate of the Perpendicular towers of Somerset, although forming one great class, may yet easily be grouped under several minor subdivisions. Three

\* Church Architecture. i. 208.



Engraved by T. J. Sturt

TOWER OF ST. MARY'S CHURCH, LYDEARD

great classes very readily present themselves, which I will now endeavour to trace out.\*

*First Class, Taunton.* I will first describe that which is the most usual, and which is employed in several churches of very great beauty, though I must, in my own mind, give it a place below either of the other two. At the same time I will promise in no way, by word or deed, to assault or maltreat any person who may hold a contrary opinion. This type I will call that of Taunton, as being employed in the two stately steeples of that town, of which, as we all know, that of St. Mary Magdalen must, for height and magnificence, claim nearly, if not quite, the first rank in the county. The characteristic of this type, which seems principally to be found in the south, is that the height above the church is divided into numerous stages, and that a staircase turret at one corner, most usually the north-east, is combined with double buttresses at all the four corners, while all the pinnacles are of equal height. Of this type St. James at Taunton, Bishop's Lydiard, Isle Abbots, and Huish Episcopi are noble examples. The two latter I only know from drawings; but I can answer for the admirable beauty of the two first; anywhere else they would probably rank first among the towers of the district. It shows the wonderful wealth of Somersetshire that we have to place such beautiful structures in the lowest class of merit; the lowest, of course I mean, among those which make any pretensions to architectural magnificence. St. Mary Magdalen, at Taunton, is of this type, but it sins against the first law of tower-building, which I conceive to be that there should be a gradual increase of lightness and decoration towards the top. The lower parts

\* I am here working out more at length what I have already sketched in my *History of Architecture*, p. 386.



should be plain and massive ; the necessity of a large western window and doorway renders this character only the more necessary on the north and south sides. The stage or stages between the west window and the belfry-stage should hardly have more than single windows ; in the belfry they are larger, and double or treble, and the open parapet and pinnacles crown all. The Taunton tower, on the other hand, has double windows, nearly as large as those in the belfry-stage, in the two stories beneath, so that this progressive diminution of massiveness is quite lost. At Bishop's Lydiard, on the other hand, it is beautifully preserved ; we have first a stage with a single window, then one with a single window flanked by a niche on each side, finally, the belfry-stage with double windows. This is observed in one face only of St. James's tower at Taunton, a steeple exceedingly like Bishop's Lydiard, and which struck me as surpassing it in dignity, while Lydiard has a sort of grace peculiar to itself. Chewton Mendip I have only seen from the top of a coach, but I should imagine it to be an example of the same class, of greater magnificence than either.

The fault of these towers I conceive to be, that having a distinct staircase-turret carried up the whole height, they do not give it any prominence, but allow it to conceal itself among the buttresses and pinnacles at the corner, and instead of its natural finish of one large pinnacle, assign it only a small battlement, perhaps fringed with diminutive pinnacles of its own. The uniformity of the structure is destroyed, without any proportionate gain in picturesque effect. I therefore venture to assign to this first class the lowest place in the scale.

*Second Class, Bristol.* The second class is distinguished from the first, by the manner in which it avoids this last



fault; that is, by bringing the staircase turret into prominence, and crowning it with a single large pinnacle, rising above all the rest, so as, I imagine, to exempt this class from the extreme severity of Mr. Ruskin's censure. The same division into stages is preserved as in the former type.

Towers of this class differ much more widely among themselves than those of the former, among which we may observe a similarity approaching, in many instances, almost to identity. This is the prevailing tower in the city of Bristol, and in a smaller and plainer form, it seems common also in the adjoining part of Gloucestershire. Its grandest specimen is of course the magnificent tower of St. Stephen's, which however must quite stand by itself. This tower is remarkable for having æsthetically dispensed with buttresses, those which it has having so slight a projection as hardly at all to influence the general effect. It has indeed almost the appearance of a Gothic version of the old Italian campanile. However this may be, its idea, which is one quite peculiar to itself, though it may not altogether approve itself to our preconceived notions, must be allowed to be, in point of fact, magnificently worked out. I may remark however that one commendation which I have always bestowed upon this steeple is, I find, undeserved, at least by its original condition. At present it is remarkable for the absence of top-heaviness, when we consider that it is entirely square, without any receding of any kind. But I find that the present parapet is not a true reproduction of its predecessor; the old one had domical turrets, more like Thornbury, and also small projecting pinnacles, with flying-buttresses at the angles. This last feature is found in some very splendid towers, but I can never bring myself to admire it, as it certainly gives an appearance of inse-

curity to the top of the tower. Of the same general type is St. Werburgh's, and several smaller steeples in Bristol. A famous example of this class is the celebrated tower of Dundry, which I have myself only seen at so great a distance, that for its details I must trust to engravings. It has the same sort of parapet, with open turrets and projecting pinnacles, as Taunton and St. Stephen's; but it is by no means so artistically treated as the latter. The buttresses, being more prominent, require a greater connection with the parapet than they possess—a fault less conspicuous in the square outline of St. Stephen's—and the manner in which the square open turret is set upon the octagonal one which it crowns, seems extremely awkward, though it is, as we shall hereafter see, by no means unparalleled.

These two classes naturally run very much into one another, the only difference being in the degree of prominence given to a feature which exists in both cases. I should consider those only to be pure examples of this second, in which buttresses are entirely absent from the corner occupied by the staircase-turret, so as to give the latter its full importance. It is no wonder then that we meet with an intermediate class, in which the turret stands out much more boldly than in the first class, but still has not entirely dispensed with the buttresses at that angle. Such I conceive to have been the famous leaning tower of Temple church in Bristol, one whose appearance is now ragged and unpleasing, but which, when its parapet was in existence, and before its other ornaments had crumbled away, must have ranked as quite the second steeple in the city. Here I can only conceive that the turret would have been crowned with a single large pinnacle; but still its lower portions are very much cloaked by buttresses. At



WRINGTON CHURCH

Banwell and Cheddar are noble towers of this kind, where the turret stands out very prominently, and its pinnacle soars above all the rest ; but still a buttress and pinnacle, like those at the other angles, creeps up by the side of it. In fact, the only difference between these and some of the first class consists in the finish of the corner turret. Thus the very stately tower of Weston Zoyland has lost its pinnacles ; if in any work of restoration, one large pinnacle should be clapped on the turret (which, however, does not seem to have been its original finish) it would at once be classed with Banwell and Cheddar. The tower at Bleadon, to judge from the engraving in Rutter's Somersetshire, seems to bear some resemblance to Banwell, but must be very inferior. It has diagonal buttresses, and the stage below the belfry is blank. The engraving does not show whether there are any buttresses at the turret angle or not, but I should think there hardly could be.

I am obliged to place this second class higher than the first in the scale of architectural merit, as it certainly marks a higher style of art, to bring forward into æsthetical prominence any feature which really exists, and to treat it accordingly. But I must confess that the actual examples of the first please me much more. St. Stephen's is, after all, rather wonderful than pleasing ; none, in fact, of the Bristol towers have any thing of the exquisite grace and delicacy of Bishop's Lydiard. Banwell is indeed a most beautiful tower, but the general character of its composition approximates much more nearly to Lydiard than to St. Stephen's.

*Third Class, Wrington.* I now come to the third class, which, to my mind is immeasurably superior to either of the others, whether in ideal merit or in actual magnificence of effect. It is a small class, and differs widely from the other two, which may indeed be ranked together in oppo-

sition to it. In both the former classes, the portion between the roof of the church and belfry stage is generally divided into horizontal stages, which have no necessary connexion with each other, and any of which we could conceive being removed with no other prejudice to the tower than simply making it lower. This may be seen very remarkably in the tower at Middlezoy; this is one of the Taunton and Weston Zoyland group, and has quite the same general effect; but, as it stands on higher ground than its neighbours, it was not thought necessary to give the tower itself the same height; consequently there is only one stage between the west window and the belfry, without any other change in the general composition of the steeple.

We may also observe in most specimens of the two first classes a certain weakness in the pinnacles, which seem hardly of sufficient consequence to form the crown of the magnificent structures on which they are placed; while in the few exceptions they are often topheavy, as at St. Mary Magdalen, Taunton. There is also in many cases hardly any connexion between them and the pinnacles, so that the whole parapet seems something altogether extraneous, merely put on, without in any way growing out of or being fused into one whole, with the stages beneath. This third class avoids all these deficiencies, and works up the whole tower into the most perfect unity that can be imagined.

Its ideal form may be thus described. The staircase-turret, as any important æsthetical feature, is entirely dispensed with, being only carried up a little way above the roof of the church, and then finished off under the belfry-stage. The whole portion of the tower above the church is thrown into one vast stage, panelled with two

enormously lofty windows, transomed at proper distances, and with such portions as are necessary pierced for light and sound. This stage is recessed between two flat square turrets or large pilasters, against which the buttresses are finished with their pinnacles just below the parapet. The pilasters are carried up and crowned with spires, forming four magnificent pinnacles to the whole tower, and rising as the natural finish of the pinnacles below. This glorious idea, which I have no hesitation in ranking among the very highest achievements of architectural genius, I have as yet seen completely realized in two cases only, Wrington and St. Cuthbert's at Wells. Of these two I think Wrington may fairly claim the first place, and is therefore probably entitled to the designation of the finest square western tower, not designed for a spire or lantern, in all England, and therefore possibly in the whole world. In comparing it with St. Cuthbert's, we may not only remark a greater degree of a certain indescribable grace, but may point out some definite features in which I think it cannot fail to have the superiority assigned to it. St. Cuthbert's, equal, as I should imagine, in positive height, is more massive in its proportions, and its corner pinnacles are, to my mind, a trifle too large—a fault, however, quite on the right side. I cannot but think that, if a small portion of their elevation had been taken into the general mass of the tower, it would have been a decided improvement. Again, the parapet at Wrington, flat and beautifully pierced, is, in my opinion, decidedly preferable to the battlement at Wells, and is further enriched by the small pinnacles running up between the windows. Had these been absent, the battlement would have been preferable, as the horizontal line must be broken somehow; but these pinnacles, while effecting this, allow the actually more graceful form of



parapet to be employed. Again, the belfry windows at Wrington gain much, from their threefold division by a second transom, while at Wells there is only one. On these grounds, therefore, I give Wrington the first place ; but St. Cuthbert's need not be ashamed at being placed second after such a rival.

The same general idea is to be found in St. John's at Glastonbury, a steeple whose size gives it a still greater magnificence of general effect than either Wells or Wrington, but which, on minute critical examination, must be content with the third place. Its height is so great that the whole space above the roof could not be converted into one panelled mass ; there are therefore two distinct ranges of panelling, which takes away something from the intense effect of unity which distinguishes the other two ; at the same time, this being so, it would have been better if the lower range had assumed more of the character of a quite distinct pair of windows than it has. It is, in fact, a confusion between the notions of one and of two stages. Again, the slope of the buttresses may be considered too great, and they certainly finish too low down, so that the connexion between them and the great pinnacles is much less close than in the other two. These pinnacles again are somewhat squat, and the small spires rise out of projecting battlements—an arrangement far less elegant than the beautiful canopy work at Wrington. Finally, the small projecting pinnacles and flying buttresses produce the same general effect of top-heaviness which I have already mentioned in St. Stephen's.

These three are the only pure examples of this class with which I am acquainted, and I hesitate not to call them by far the grandest square western towers that I have ever seen or heard of. Next to these may come the noble

tower of North Petherton, which is indeed honourable among its fellows, but which attaineth not unto the first three. This steeple will not come exactly under any of our heads, but certainly has most affinity with this third and noblest class. In like manner with them its staircase-turret finishes below the belfry-stage, but the portion above the roof does not form one panelled mass, but is divided into two very large stages. The belfry windows are large and double, with some remarkable pierced paneling in a square frame over them. There are unfortunately no flat turrets, so that the parapet has little connexion with what is below, and altogether there is a great air of squareness and sharpness about the belfry-stage. There are eight pinnacles, as at Wrington and Glastonbury; perhaps it would have been better had there been a greater difference in size between the principal and the subordinate ones.

I will conclude this part of my subject by noticing the tower of Portishead, which remarkably combines the characteristics of the second and third class. In this case we may remark, by the way, that the solitary aisle is prolonged nearly to the west face of the tower, quite contrary to the usual Somersetshire practice. It is a much plainer tower than any that I have yet mentioned, having only single windows in all the three stages above the roof, and these diminishing in length towards the top. We may therefore pronounce, without hesitation, that the otherwise very beautiful west window of five lights is too large for its position. The parapet resembles Wrington, and the great pinnacles, which have something of the same character, but are less elegant, are closely connected with the buttresses, but in a different manner. A staircase-turret, crowned with a somewhat larger pinnacle, occupies the north-east angle. This turret is square at the base, and becomes octagonal at

about the height of the church, much as at Dundry—a tower with which Portishead has a good deal of affinity, except in the parapet. It strikes me that, when such a turret is introduced, its predominance over the other pinnacles should be greater than it is in this case. But my own view, in direct opposition to Mr. Ruskin's, is very decidedly that this form is only adapted to an inferior class of towers, those of the merely *picturesque* kind; and that in structures of the real architectural magnificence of Wrington and Glastonbury, their designers judged right in making all their pinnacles on a level. I have no recondite argument about the legs, horns, or tail of any creature wherewith to support this view; I can only put it forth as my own view, for which I claim no greater respect, even from those least acquainted with the subject, than the sort of confidence which I am myself always disposed to give to the tact and experience of those who have given attention to any subject of which I am myself ignorant. The tower of Backwell church, which I know only as forming the frontispiece to Barr's *Anglican Church Architecture*,\* may also perhaps be considered as presenting a feeble approximation to the third class, inasmuch as the pinnacles are connected with the buttresses in something like the way described. But the strange and awkward shape of the belfry windows, a broad ogee arch, with its apex piercing through the parapet, deprive it of all real resemblance to Wrington and St. Cuthbert's.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TOWERS.

Though we have thus found considerable diversities among the Somersetshire towers, yet no observer can

\* I have since passed by it, but without having been near enough for any examination.

fail to remark a very strong family likeness among them. There is a sort of character by which it is not hard to recognize them; there is a great similarity in proportion, and there are also several points of detail which most of them have in common. Thus there is in all a great tendency to panelling in the form of windows, those portions which are requisite being pierced for light and sound; so common is this that, in speaking of windows in a Somersetshire tower, one must generally be understood to mean panelled designs of this kind, partly blank, partly pierced. Panelling not thus grouped into window-patterns, such as we see at Cirencester, Wolverhampton, or St. Margaret's, Leicester, —all noble towers, but not resembling any Somersetshire model—is by no means common. There is however a great deal of surface ornament in the way of decorative canopies and pinnacles, a mode of enrichment used lavishly at least as early as the tower at Redcliffe; and it has often struck me that, in the method of its treatment, the skill of the Somersetshire architects is admirably displayed. No one who has admired at a distance the magnificent outline of the great tower of Gloucester Cathedral can have failed to be disappointed on a nearer examination at the frippery appearance produced by the excess of ornament of this nature; the decorations look as if they were nailed against a plain wall, and had nothing further to do with it. Now somehow or other the Somersetshire architects have contrived to avoid this fault in the use of the very same kind of decoration; perhaps partly by always keeping it in subordination to panelled spaces; whereas at Gloucester there are no such spaces except the windows themselves, which, being of small size and deeply recessed from the surface, look like insignificant apertures in the canopy-work. Another peculiarity is the frequent use of

patterns of stone-work between the mullions, instead of the ordinary louvre-boards. This we find as early as the Decorated octagon at North Curry. The buttresses in the best towers are also almost invariably double, and placed at a little distance from the angles; the diagonal buttress is chiefly confined to towers of smaller pretensions and, strange to say, to central towers, where it seems least of all in place. Pinnacles are not uncommon on the set-off of buttresses at various heights. When we come to consider the influence of Somersetshire upon the neighbouring districts, we shall find that some of these features are common to the Somersetshire towers and those which seem to be imitated from them, while others seem distinctive, or nearly so, of the model region itself.

I cannot help contrasting with the towers of Somerset, one of the noblest that I know in a region where they cannot be supposed to have exerted any influence, and a view of which may perhaps help to show how closely, with all their differences, they hang together as members of one great class. I allude to the tower of Titchmarsh Church, Northamptonshire, remarkable as the only tower, of any consequence, in that county, standing by itself and not supporting a spire or lantern. It at once strikes the eye as something altogether different from any of the Somersetshire classes. The treatment of the buttresses, flat turrets, and pinnacles, may indeed, to a certain extent, recall the type of Wrington and Wells, but the resemblance is exceedingly slight, as the distinctive mark of the small pinnacles carried up in a larger one is absent. The arrangement as used at Titchmarsh is very common in Northamptonshire. In other respects there is no resemblance to any Somersetshire type. The proportions are far more massive, and far greater distinctness is given to the

stages; Taunton or Lydiard appears by the side of it hardly a less complete unity than Wrington itself. This distinctness is partly effected by bands of panelling, for which there is Somersetshire precedent at Huish Episcopi, but much more by the general character of the design. There are no surfaces panelled in window patterns; only the windows themselves, with all their tracery pierced, and no stone work between the mullions. There is no pinnacle or canopy work at all. We may remark that in Somerset the decoration is more equably disposed over the whole design, while in this of Titchmarsh it, so to speak, lies thick in patches, leaving a large portion of the surface quite plain.

#### SMALLER TOWERS.

In arranging the towers in their several classes, I have of course chiefly had an eye to those remarkable for their size or magnificence. But a visitor to Somersetshire will be grievously disappointed if he expects to find every parish supplying a rival to North Petherton or Weston Zoyland. I have already alluded to the octagonal type of different dates, and to the very plain towers of earlier date, or at least nowise affected by the general Perpendicular style of the county. But besides these there are a good many small and comparatively plain Perpendicular towers which evidently pretend to some imitation of their more stately neighbours. Thus Churchill and Locking towers are respectable structures, chiefly of the Banwell type; Kewstoke is a still smaller specimen of the more distinct Bristol class. So at Crowcombe and Lydiard St. Lawrence are small towers which evidently stand in the same, or perhaps a rather more distant, relation to Taunton and Bishop's Lydiard. At Burrington and Portbury are still plainer Perpendicular towers; the former indeed without pinnacles



or any one Somersetshire peculiarity. All these, it may be observed, have diagonal buttresses. The tower on the Tor Hill at Glastonbury has buttresses more like the usual kind, but has a mere plain battlement, and is otherwise very anomalous.

#### SPIRES.

Of perfect spires, I imagine the number to be exceedingly small; I have myself only seen Congresbury and Bridgwater,\* thereby shewing how much less keen my vision must be than that of Mr. Macaulay's† ideal stranger in the days of "King Monmouth" who when he "climbed the graceful tower of St. Mary Magdalen, owned that he saw beneath him the most fertile of English valleys. It was a country rich with orchards and green pastures, among which were scattered, in gay abundance, manor-houses, cottages, and *village spires*." And the remark I am next going to make will, I think, tend to show that their loss is not to be laid to the charge of Kirke's Lambs or the Bloody Assizes. There is to be seen in Somersetshire and Gloucestershire, a remarkable class of *imperfect* spires. I only actually know of five, St. Mary Redcliffe, Yatton, Minchinhampton, one in Gloucester, and if my memory does not greatly deceive me, Shepton Mallett; but these five, in a region where spires are comparatively uncommon,

\* I have since seen another, Worle. I am obliged to the Editor for a list of eight others, Frome, Whatley, Doultling, Croscombe, Chiselborough, East Brent, Stokecoursey, and Pitminster, the last of which, it seems, is a graceful and conspicuous object in the view from St. Mary Magdalen. If his wider observation can supply only this small number, even supposing the list is far from exhausting the whole county, the number still remains exceedingly small, as compared not only with the counties of Northampton, Leicester, or Lincoln, but even with Gloucester and Oxford, where the spire is far less general.

† History of England, i. 581.

certainly point to a localism of some kind, when they are set against the fact that among the countless spires which I have seen in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire I have only met with one similar instance. This is at Naseby, and the local tradition is that it was mutilated at the time of the battle. In the other cases it would require local information in each case to discover whether the spire was left unfinished, or has been subsequently destroyed. I believe St. Mary Redcliffe is generally attributed to the former cause, and Yatton to the latter. In any case it is remarkable, especially when compared with Northamptonshire, where, as far as I have gone, an unfinished spire is unknown; and, in the numerous cases where a spire has been destroyed, the work, with the single exception above mentioned, seems to have been done much more effectually. In the case of Redcliffe, I cannot help thinking that, if the builders intentionally left it unfinished, they knew very well when to leave off. In all designs and models for its completion, the spire looks awfully too high for the tower on which it stands, while in its present mutilated state it presents a slight approximation to the noblest finish of all, the glorious crown of Fotheringhay and St. Ouen's.

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