

The PRESIDENT then called upon Mr. E. A. Freeman, who delivered an

Introductory Discourse on the General Antiquities of Wells.

He began by congratulating the Society on the presence of so many eminent antiquaries from different parts of the country, more probably than had ever been present at any local meeting. First and foremost, there was Professor Willis; he had often had the benefit of hearing the Professor's expositions of cathedrals and other great churches; but those had commonly been at the Meetings of the National Society, the Archæological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland; he was not aware that he had ever before done a purely local society the honour of coming to lecture at its meetings. [Here Professor Willis came on the platform, amidst loud cheers.] But, though Professor Willis was first, he was not the only one.

They saw again their old friends, Mr. Green and Mr. Dawkins, whose acquaintance they had so profitably made last year. And, among older men and greater strangers to the county, they had the pleasure of seeing among them Mr. George Williams, so well versed in the ecclesiastical antiquities of the East, and Mr. Stubbs, who knew every action of every bishop who had ever lived. Mr. Dimock, the learned biographer of St. Hugh, had also fully intended to be present, but had been unavoidably hindered at the last moment. Mr. Parker, having in a manner fixed himself among them, could no longer be looked on as a stranger. It was among these eminent antiquaries that the main and detailed work of the meeting was to be divided; the several antiquities of the city, of the cathedral, the palace, the vicars' close, &c., were parted out among them; what he himself had to do was simply to give a short introduction to the whole subject, sketching out the objects which were to be seen and their relations to each other, while he left the minute details and dates of each object to those who had specially taken that object in hand. He would give a sketch of the antiquities of Wells something like the view of the city itself from Tor-hill,—not the Glastonbury Tor, but the Wells Tor-Hill on the Shepton Mallet road,—the point whence the general aspect of the buildings, and their connection with each other, can be better seen than from any other point, though it is too far off to study any particular building in detail. From that point may be seen, all grouping together round the cathedral as the great centre, the palace, the cloister, the chapter-house, the vicars' close, the detached houses of the canons, the more distant tower of the parish church. Now that view, as far as his experience went, either in England or abroad, was perfectly unrivalled;

most of the buildings, taken separately, might be easily equalled or surpassed, but he knew not anywhere else of such group of buildings, forming such a perfect whole. The history of those buildings was the history of Wells, and, as they were wholly ecclesiastical buildings, it followed that the history of Wells was wholly or mainly an ecclesiastical history. Wells, in short, was a strictly ecclesiastical city; its whole importance was derived from its ecclesiastical foundations. The city had, as their friend Mr. Serel could easily shew them, a municipal history, but that municipal history was in fact part of the ecclesiastical history; the earliest Charters of the city consisted of grants of franchises by the Bishops. Wells had never had any military importance; it had no castle or town-walls to show; it had never been the seat of any great Earldom or provincial government; it had never had any commercial importance, like its neighbour Bristol; it was not the scene of any great event in English history; the name of Wells was, indeed, mentioned in the wars of the seventeenth century, and one of the members for Wells played a distinguished part in those wars; but the city itself was in no way prominent in that or in any other period of English history; it was not connected with any such associations as those which attach to the name of Lewes in one age and to that of Naseby in another. Wells was simply a city which had grown round a great ecclesiastical foundation, and whose whole importance centred in that foundation. Such, too, was Peterborough, such was Glastonbury, but those were towns which had risen round a monastery, while Wells had risen round a secular church. The ecclesiastical foundations of Wells had always been, from their beginning to the present day, in the hands of the secular clergy. It might not be too much to say that there never was a

monk in the place; there is no record of any monastic foundation, for, though there had been a building called the Priory, it had never been a religious, but only a charitable establishment. Wells was, in short, the best example which he knew of the arrangements of a great secular college. He knew of no other where so many of the ancient buildings remained, and where they were still so largely applied to their original purposes. Now, here came in one of the main differences between a secular and a monastic foundation. The monks in a monastery lived together, and had certain buildings in common, church, chapter-house, refectory, dormitory, &c., all arranged round the cloister as the centre of all and the connecting link between the several parts of the whole. The Abbot or Prior alone had his house distinct from the common buildings of the brethren. But in a cathedral or collegiate church served by secular canons most of these common buildings were not wanted; the church and the chapter-house alone were necessary, the cloister was a convenience, but it easily might be, and often was, dispensed with. The canons did not occupy a common refectory and dormitory, but lived, as they do now, each man in his own house. The position of a canon of Wells four or five hundred years back differed in nothing from the position of a canon of Wells, now, except that now he might marry while then he could not. It follows at once from this difference that it is much easier to preserve and use at the present day the buildings of a secular foundation than those of a monastery. When Henry VIII. turned an abbey into a cathedral, as at Peterborough, or put secular canons into a cathedral formerly served by monks, as at Ely, he found a number of buildings which were not needed in the new state of things,

while a number of buildings were wanted which were not there. The Bishop or the Dean might often be conveniently lodged in the quarters of the Abbot or Prior, but houses for the other canons could only be found by making them out of the common buildings of the monastery. This, of course, involved what were, in an architectural point of view, the most barbarous changes in those buildings, such as we see at Peterborough, Ely, Canterbury, and elsewhere. A refectory or an infirmary could not be made into a private house without utterly spoiling it. But Wells and its buildings never went through any such violent revolution. The bishopric and chapter retained, with some mere changes in detail, the same constitution which was fixed for them in the twelfth century. So, too, the buildings remained essentially what they were in the middle ages. Each officer of the cathedral, from the bishop to the organist, had his own house; those houses, for the most part, still existed, and are still most commonly occupied by their proper inhabitants. While at Ely or Peterborough, some very destructive changes were involved in the nature of the case, at Wells, as at Lichfield, Salisbury, and other secular churches, no change had ever been needed except that gradual change which effected everything. Thus, though a few needless acts of barbarism had been committed at various times, the buildings at Wells still remained in better condition than those of any other city that he knew. The bishop still lived in the palace, the dean still lived in the deanery, the canons' houses were still largely lived in by canons, the only great loss was the alienation of the archdeaconry, which still existed and retained some very fine portions, but which had long passed into private hands. This was the effect of the changes of the sixteenth century, which at Wells were merely a pas-

sing storm. Both bishop and chapter were grievously plundered under Edward VI.; the palace itself was for a while alienated, but while most of the other property was recovered under Queen Mary, the archdeaconry had never come back to its old owner. Wells thus presented in greater perfection than any other city, an unaltered picture of the arrangements of a great secular church in old times. There were the two essential buildings, the cathedral and the chapter-house; there was also a cloister, but it was an evident after-thought and was widely different from a real monastic cloister. The palace stood to the south, the deanery and archdeaconry to the north; the canons' houses were scattered about without any certain order, but most of them so as to enter into the general grouping.

It should not be forgotten, Mr. Freeman continued, that at Wells the chapter was, in a certain sense, an older institution than the bishopric. The chapter did not assume its present form till the twelfth century, but there had been a college of priests, in some shape or other, ever since King Ine in the eighth century, while the bishopric was not founded till the time of King Edward the Elder in the tenth. What King Edward did was really much the same as what had been done within our own memory in the churches of Ripon and Manchester; he planted a bishop in a church which already existed and possessed a collegiate foundation. The college of priests founded by King Ine thus became the chapter of the bishop. They were never at any time displaced to make room for monks, as happened in so many other cathedral churches, but a step was taken by Bishop Giso in the eleventh century which certainly looked like an attempt in a monastic direction. Giso, in the words of Bishop Godwin

“thought good to augment the number of his canons, and for their better entertainment built them a cloyster, a hall, and a dorter or place for their lodging. Lastly, he appointed one Isaac by the name of a provost to be their governor.” Now, these were not necessarily monastic arrangements, they might be only an attempt to enforce a stricter collegiate life; in themselves they did not amount to turning canons into monks; still they had a tendency that way, and, considering what had been, and still was, going on elsewhere, there was a great temptation to believe that this change of Giso’s was putting in the small end of the wedge, and that the next step might very likely have been to enforce monastic vows and so to turn the college into a monastery. If such designs were entertained by Giso, they came to nothing. Of the next bishop, John de Villulâ, we read that “the cloyster and other buildings erected by Giso for his canons, be pulled down, and in the place where they stode built a pallace for himsele and his successors, forcing them to seeke dwellings abroad in the towne.” This seemed to shew that either the cathedral or the palace had changed its site since John de Villulâ’s time, as they might be sure that Giso built his cloister and other buildings close to the church. In the time of Bishop Robert (1136—74) the chapter assumed the form which, with some mutilations in the sixteenth and some in the nineteenth century, it has retained ever since. In Bishop Godwin’s words:—

“He thought good to divide the landes of the church into two parts, whereof the one he assigned unto the chapter in common; out of the rest he allotted to every cannon a portion, by the name of a Prebend. He also it was that first constituted a Deane to be the President of the chapter, and a Subdeane to supply his place in absence; a Chaunter to governe the quier, and a Subchaunter under him; a Chancelour to instruct the younger sort of Cannons; and, lastly, a

Treasurer to looke to the ornaments of the church. The Subchauntership, together with the Provostship an. 1547, were taken away and suppressed by act of Parliament, to patch up a Deanery, the lands and revenewes of the Deanery being devoured by sacrilegious cormorants."

The continuance of the provost founded by Bishop Giso alongside of Bishop Robert's dean, was, Mr. Freeman said, an anomaly. The title of provost was found in some English and many German churches—whence, perhaps, the Lotharingian Giso might have imported it into England—but as far as he knew, where there was a Provost, he was the head of the chapter and took the place of the dean elsewhere. In some places indeed the offices of provost and dean co-existed, but in a reverse order of precedence. Thus he had lately visited the cathedral of Chur in Switzerland, and carried with him a letter of introduction to the dean. He had naturally expected to find his friend the head of the chapter, and was a little amazed to find him only the second in command, the highest place being held by a provost. It was hard to see what the duties of the provost could be after the foundation of the deanery and subdeanery. These two, with all the other offices instituted by Robert, except those suppressed under Edward VI., still existed. The architectural history of the cathedral he left to Professor Willis, and that of the palace to Mr. Parker. The next event which concerned him, was the foundation of the college of vicars in the fourteenth century. These were a body of clergy and laymen subordinate to the chapter in an ecclesiastical point of view, but forming in temporal matters an independent corporation. This position of the vicars, to be found in most of the old cathedrals, was a good instance of that love of local and corporate independence so characteristic of both civil and ecclesiastical bodies in the middle ages.

A town or a district thought it a privilege to be exempted from the ordinary authorities, either in church or state, and to set up some exceptional jurisdiction of its own. So the chapter, the bishop's council, made itself as independent as it could of the bishop; so the vicars, the assistants of the chapter, became as independent as they could of the chapter; so even each canon became, for some purposes, a separate corporation sole, independent of his brethren, with his own property, his own patronage, and often his own jurisdiction, under the form of a prebend. The vicars' close and the bridge, which was afterwards added to connect it with the cathedral, were among the most remarkable ornaments of the city, but he would leave their detailed description and history to those members who had specially undertaken them. Another addition to the ecclesiastical foundations of Wells was made by Bishop Erghum (1388—1401) who incorporated the chantry priests of the cathedral, fourteen in number, into a separate college. There were thus three distinct corporations attached to the cathedral, namely, the chapter, the college of vicars, and the college of chantry priests. Of these the chapter and the vicars still remained, but the college of chantry priests was suppressed, with other institutions of the like sort, under Edward VI., and its buildings no longer existed. Besides these there was the hospital, founded by Bishop Bubwith (1408—24) and enlarged by later benefactors. This also still existed, an example of that type of hospital in which the domestic portion opened into a chapel at the east end. The other hospital, known as the Priory, no longer existed. These were the different ecclesiastical and charitable foundations of the city. Beside them was the noble parish church of St. Cuthbert, which it would fall to his own lot to describe in detail at a later

stage of the meeting. As usual, the parish church was quite distinct from the cathedral. He was not aware of any strictly English example either of a cathedral church being, in the full sense of the words, a parish church, or of such a church being divided between the chapter and the parish in the way so common in monastic and collegiate churches.* On the other hand, of the four Welsh cathedrals, three are parish churches as well. The constitution of St. Cuthbert's church had some peculiarities which it was rather Mr. Serel's province to expound. Though the rectory and advowson belonged to the dean and chapter, the connexion of the church with the corporation of the city was singularly close, and they exercised a degree of authority over it for which it would be hard to find a parallel elsewhere, especially in the appointment of a churchwarden, contrary to the usual rights both of the vicar and parishioners. The only strictly municipal antiquity in the city was the old town-hall attached to Bishop Bubwith's hospital. Nor was there very much of domestic antiquities unconnected with the cathedral. A few fragments were scattered up and down, and a noble square had been begun by Bishop Beckington. But most of the houses had quite lost their ancient character, though enough remained through fragments peeping out, here and there a buttress or a shield of arms, to show what the design was.

The speaker wound up by expressing his earnest hope [to which the feeling of his hearers evidently responded] that this unrivalled collection of buildings would be preserved with the care and reverence which they deserved.

* This assertion was disputed by a friend after the meeting. But I do not think that the cases cited, Ely, Chester, and Norwich, are real exceptions. Surely the parts used for parish services in those churches have been so applied in modern times. Certainly there is no English cathedral *divided* in the same way as Dunster or Waltham.— E. A. F.

He was sorry to say that one ancient house had been wantonly destroyed the year before, and that another, that of the organist, was still threatened. He trusted that no such acts of barbarism would happen again. He deprecated all schemes for "opening" the cathedral, for "isolating" it, and so forth, schemes grounded on the merest ignorance of what our great ecclesiastical buildings were meant to be. A minster, like that of Wells, was never meant to be isolated; it was merely part, though the chief part, of a group of buildings, the perfection of which was marred by the destruction or mutilation even of the humblest. To mar such a collection of buildings as surrounded the cathedral of Wells was to destroy a portion of the history of our country. He had thus discharged his own duty of giving a general sketch of the antiquities of the place, introductory to the more minute descriptions which were to follow. "I will now," he ended, "make way for my master."

The Rev. PROFESSOR WILLIS then delivered an interesting lecture on