

The Rev. PROFESSOR WILLIS then delivered an interesting lecture on

### The Cathedral,

which was illustrated by numerous elaborate drawings and diagrams.

Professor Willis stated that in the year 1851, when the Archæological Institute visited Wells, the Cathedral was assigned to him, as was very often, if not always, the case at the meetings of that Society, and he then gave such an account of the structure and its history as he was able to do. At that time he had free access to the records of the place, and by comparing them with the structure he elicited a number of dates and facts which before that time had escaped attention. The particulars he was now about to give them were substantially the same as those he produced in 1851. It had given him much pleasure to

revisit the Cathedral, for it was inferior to none in the illustrations it afforded of the method of erecting ancient buildings. The Cathedral was a very complex structure, and the different parts were tied together in a way which required considerable attention and experience to explain. Most of the designs and plans he had to direct their attention to were those he prepared for his address to the Institute. The buildings in connection with the Cathedral were the cloister, the vicar's close, the episcopal palace, the deanery, the archdeaconry, the canon's house, and the chapter-house. The Cathedral was cruciform in shape. The nave, transepts, and lower story of the central tower, above its great arches, were as nearly as possible in the same style of architecture, and belonged to the first half of the thirteenth century, the principal exception being that three arches of the tower were obstructed by certain subsequent arches introduced solely for the purpose of sustaining the tower when it had come to a state of approaching ruin. But parts beyond the eastern tower arch were of a subsequent style, and were built in the first quarter of the fourteenth century.

The eastern arm of the cross was in the original structure in the same style as the transepts and nave, had three pier arches only, and was square ended. Thus far the eastern arm resembled the transepts; but there was an aisle eastward of this original square end, and probably chapels attached to it in the usual manner. When the present eastern parts were erected, the three original pier arches on each side were retained, but the wall above them was altered to suit the new design of the work, which extended three arches farther eastward than the old. An entirely new vault covered the whole. It must be remarked that on each side, the most easterly one of the old

pier arches so retained, rests to the west upon its original pier, but eastward on a new pier similar to those of the continuation.

The reason for this was, that as the old pier stood at the junction of the eastern gable of the presbytery with its side walls, it must have been a large compound pier to sustain the angle, and consequently of a form unfit to remain when the range of pier arches were continued eastward. The side aisles of these older portions were also retained, and afford evidence of the original disposition of this part of the building.

The polygonal lady chapel and the vaulted work which connects it with the presbytery, is a most original and unique piece of architecture of pure and beautiful design.

The Professor supported his view as to where the original church ended by convincing details respecting the stonework and its peculiarities, which cannot well be given without diagrams. The chapter-house, he went on to say, was one of the most beautiful examples of its kind. Returning to the nave, down which he said he would conduct his audience, from east to west, he stated that the character of its architecture was unlike that of any ordinary Early English building, and deserved to be called the pure Somerset style. It was very beautiful, and did credit to the county, and was manifestly the work of local masons. In specimens of the ordinary Early English style, the same mouldings and methods of building were used in all parts of England varied only by some difference of material, but showing the work to be of the same school of masons. All of a sudden, however, when they got to the west end of this Cathedral, they found a change, as if an architect had been then called in, like Mr. Scott of the present day, who would have his own way and his own style, and that was

the common Early English, and not the Somerset style. The two styles were mixed together at their junction in the most complicated way they had ever seen. If they examined the spandrils, or open wall spaces between the sides of the arches down the nave, they would see that three remarkable changes had taken place in the work. The work in his opinion was commenced, continued, and carried on from east to west in order of time, inasmuch as the stonework in the spandrils improved as it went on, the stones of the spandrils nearest the tower being small and indifferently set as compared with those nearest the west end. The west front was of somewhat later date. He fortified this opinion by explaining how the Somersetshire work abutted against the Early English, and was joined and interlaced with it, and the example of this was the most curious he had ever beheld. In some cases the Early English overlapped the Somerset, and was actually superimposed upon previously-erected plinth walls of that style, clearly confirming his view. The west front contained the finest collection of mediæval sculpture to be found in this country. The Cathedral was originally built by Bishop Robert, who lived up to 1166, but no part of the existing edifice could belong to him. The next Prelate that came architecturally upon the scene was Bishop Joceline, from 1206 to 1242, and the credit of building the present Cathedral was assigned to him universally, but with various phrases and qualifications. Joceline records in one of his statutes, that he pulled down the old church, which was in ruins, began to build and increase it, and by God's help was enabled to complete it, so far as, having furnished it with all the separate vessels, altars, and reliques necessary for the splendour of the service, to solemnly dedicate it. As to this dedi-

cation in 1239, it appeared from Matthew Paris and other sources, that it was one of the temples dedicated about the same time as a batch of others, just after the visit to this country of the legate Otho, who had been commissioned by the Pope to inquire into church abuses, and had reported one abuse to be the non-dedication of a great many churches for a long time after their completion. In the case of this Cathedral he (Professor Willis) believed the dedication was not a forced one, but took place at the same time as several forced dedications, because the building then happened to be ready. The difficulty with him was whether (as it was not always necessary that every portion of a church should be actually completed when it was dedicated) the west front was completed in 1239, when the dedication occurred. That date, however, was reconcilable with the phase of Early English which the architecture presented, but the sculpture might have been completed long after the tabernacles which received it. Amongst the records of the Chapter he found much information that had not before been observed. In 1851, he had been most liberally permitted to examine the records of the Cathedral, and had been fortunate enough to discover many particulars hitherto unknown in relation to the progress of the building in the fourteenth and subsequent centuries.\* In 1286, a chapter meeting was called to consider the urgent necessity of completing the "nova structura" of the church long since began, and also of

\* These records are contained in several volumes which are designated as follows in these extracts, by capital letters:—

R. *Liber Ruber.*

A. *Liber Albus.*

B. A book bound in white basil, entitled copies of various canon grants, statutes, and entries, &c., from 1270 to 1391.

X. *Registrum X.*

repairing the old fabric (B. 198. 6) ; and it was agreed that each canon should pay a tenth of his prebend yearly for five years. In 1299 (B. 220. 6), (R. 23), a similar tax was imposed for repairing the roof of the church. In 1318 (B. 143), receivers were appointed for the tenths, given in aid of the *new campanile*, and for the oblations to Saint William. This was Bishop William de Marchia, who died in 1302, and as the canon of Wells relates, "was buried against the south wall, between the cloister door and the altar of St. Martin, at whose tomb formerly many great miracles were worked." (His canonization is mentioned in Reg. x., pp. 171, 6, and 172 ; vide also p. 165). It appears therefore, that here, as elsewhere, when a church was undergoing great restoration and rebuildings, a saint was canonized in aid of the funds. In 1321 we find a grant from the clergy of the Deanery of Taunton, in aid of the roofing of the *new campanile*. In 1325 (B. 175. 6), the bishop gave half the proceeds of his visitation to the "*novum opus*" of the church at Wells, and an order was made that, because the stalls were ruinous and misshapen, every canon should pay for making his own new stall, and the dean sent to Midelton for boards to make the new stalls. In 1326 (X. 175), a grant of the land at the east end of the Cathedral, by the bishop to one of the canons, measures its length of fifty feet eastward from the wall of the *newly-constructed chapel* of the Blessed Mary.

We may now attempt to apply these dates to the existing buildings. Their architectural details enable us to conjecture that the works alluded to, belong to—(1), the chapter-house—(2), the lady chapel—(3), the aisles which connect it with the elongation of the presbytery, and lastly that elongation itself.

The chapter-house stands upon a vaulted substructure, by which its floor is considerably raised above the floor of the church. This substructure cannot well be called a crypt, for it is not sunk under ground, the springs of water in the soil forbidding such a building. It is entered from the side aisle of the choir by a doorway and passage. The floor of the chapter-house above is reached by a building attached to its western side, which contains a staircase, lighted by great windows of early geometrical tracery, and leading to the elaborate doorway of the chapter-house. The style of the chapter-house itself is so greatly in advance of the substructure and staircase as to shew that a considerable interval of time elapsed between the one and the other. The great windows of the staircase are in the earliest geometrical style, rather in advance of those of Salisbury and Westminster. Those of the chapter-house, although of geometrical tracery, have patterns of much greater intricacy, such as belong to the development of such tracery.

The "nova structura," said in 1286 to have been commenced long since, and then recommenced for completion, was consequently interpreted by the Professor to be the chapter-house, of which the lower story and staircase had been built about 1260, or 70, and the upper story now resumed, in 1286. Godwin, indeed, states that the chapter-house was built in the time of Bishop de Marchia, 1293 to 1302, by the contributions of well-disposed people. The *new campanile* which was in course of construction in 1318, and roofed in 1321, must be the central tower, the upper story of which corresponds to this period.

The *novum opus* in 1325, is explained by the allusion in 1326, to the newly constructed lady chapel (1). The styles of the elongation of the eastern part of the church,

shew that the lady chapel was built first, and the work carried on westward from that building to join the old presbytery. After this new portion was finished, the inner surfaces of the walls above the pier arches of the old work next the tower, were cased with an architectural lining in the style of the new. The *novum opus* of the Cathedral at Wells, is also the subject of an indulgence, dated 1325, 2 kal. Feb. (Harl. MS., 6964), and the phrase at this period must be held to apply to the whole work of the eastern elongation, from the lady chapel at the east to the junction with the choir, and the new fittings of the stalls, &c. We have no other allusion to this work until 1337.\*

In 1337, a convocation was summoned to consider, amongst other matters, the raising of money by the non-residents for paying a debt of 200li. incurred for the restoration of the greatest part of the fabric. (B. 200.)

In 1338, another convocation was summoned because the church of Wells is so enormously fractured and deformed†, that its structure can only be repaired, and with sufficient promptitude by the common counsel and assistance of its members. (B. 201.)

To understand this, we have only to examine the central space of the Cathedral. It is evident that the weight of the upper story of the tower completed in 1321, had produced fearful settlements, the effects of which may still be seen in the triforium arches of the nave, and transepts

\* Bishop Will. Bytton was buried in 1264, in novâ Capella B. M. Virginis. (Ang. Sac. 566.) But as his chantry was "in the Capella B. Virginis infra claustrum" (Liber B., p. 62,) the above passage does not apply to any lady chapel at the east of the Cathedral, but to the building of the other lady chapel which was in the east walk of the cloister in the position usually given to a chapter-house.

† "Enormiter contracta" . . . . . "totaliter contracte & enormiter deformate."

next to the tower, which are dragged downwards and deformed, partly rebuilt, filled up, and otherwise exhibiting the signs so often seen under central towers of a thorough repair. The great piers of the tower are cased and connected by a stone framework, which is placed under the north, south, and west tower-arches, but not under the east. This framework consists of a low pointed arch, upon which rests an inverted arch of the same form, so as to produce a figure somewhat resembling a St. Andrew's cross, to use the happy phrase applied by Leland (*Itinerary*, v. 3. f. 85) to a similar contrivance introduced for a similar reason into the central tower arches of Glastonbury, by Abbot Bere, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, doubtless in imitation of the mother church at Wells, which being dedicated to St. Andrew, perhaps suggested the application of the name to the stone framing.

The Professor explained that the central tower above had been strengthened in a manner which was clearly shewn by drawings. The original high narrow windows had been fortified with later insertions, by way of bonding and stiffening the structure endangered by the sinking of its piers below, and producing on the outside a singular mosaic of styles in which late canopy and pannel work is inserted in the earlier openings.

These works probably occupied many years, and were added from time to time as fresh symptoms of failure exhibited themselves, although the first alarm is indicated by the convocation in 1338.

Professor Willis was frequently applauded during his lecture, and heartily at its close. The above sketch of his learned statement is necessarily much condensed.

The LORD BISHOP moved a vote of thanks to the Professor for his kindness in coming there that day, and

for the lucid and able lecture he had given them, as well as for the further information that he was to give them in the Cathedral itself. His remarks must have taught them that they must enter into the *minutiæ* of what they wished to thoroughly comprehend. The Professor himself seemed to have followed and examined nearly every stone of the building, and had given them a remarkably clear and perfect explanation of the manner in which the Cathedral was built.

The motion was carried by acclamation.

Professor Willis said he had made one great omission. He desired particularly to direct their attention to the fact that the building in question was entirely raised and sustained by a tax voluntarily placed upon themselves by the canons. He never found that system so completely developed as he had in searching through the history of this Cathedral.

A large number of the members of the Association were present at the afternoon service in the Cathedral, and after its termination Professor Willis directed the attention of a numerous audience to the points of interest he had noticed in his lecture. His descriptions, illustrated by the objects themselves, were listened to with much gratification, and occupied an hour and a-half. Both the inside and outside of the building were inspected, and we may mention that eminent archæologists, who had been before opposed to the Professor's theory concerning the erection of the structure, were converted to his way of thinking by his painstaking and thoughtful explanations. The lady chapel was pronounced by him one of the most beautiful and precious specimens of its kind. The chapter-house he conjectured to have been built in the time of William de Marchia, and said it was in the finest period of Early English decorated