

Minehead Church.

After luncheon at the Feathers Hotel, the party proceeded to the Church, a steep, uphill walk of nearly half-a-mile. From the churchyard there is a magnificent view up the Channel, in a circle, southwards over Dunster, Grabbist Hill, and the foreground of Exmoor to Dunkerry Beacon towards the west.

In the Church Mr. E. BUCKLE, addressing them, said the first thing that struck any one was the plan of the building. The outer walls and the central arcade ran from the west to the east end without any break for the chancel. And a Church without any structural chancel was rare in Somerset, though common enough in Devon and Cornwall. The main fabric of the Church, including the outer walls and the arcade, appeared to have been built about the end of the 13th century. In the north wall the two windows were entirely new, and were put

in of different forms and at different levels. He accordingly thought it was safe to assume that Mr. St. Aubyn, the architect employed at the restoration, had grounds for putting in such windows, and that there were probably similar windows there before. These windows were of geometrical character, and one Decorated window remained also in the south wall. There seemed to have been a great deal of work done about the year 1500. The magnificent screen and rood-loft were certainly about that date. In the screen were reproduced almost identically the features of the screen in the Dunster Church. All the mouldings and the general arrangements were almost identical. The date of the Dunster screen was fixed at a period shortly after 1499. The staircase to the rood-loft was very remarkable. As a rule, the rood-loft staircase had small windows, and the doorway to the rood-loft was often very small,—so small that the priest must have had to crouch to enter,—but at Minehead there was a spacious entrance, and the turret was treated like a great bay window. The large window at the back of the pulpit was of the same date as the screen. In the chancel there was a very grand monument, which local tradition assigned as the monument of De Bracton; but it appeared to be absolutely out of the question that it was anything of the sort, as De Bracton lived in the 13th century, and that monument could not be very much before 1400, and might be later. The figure was represented as that of a priest with chasuble and carrying a chalice in his hands. He was told that De Bracton was a priest, but it was improbable that he would be so represented on his monument, as he was essentially a lawyer, and they would expect to find him represented as a judge. There was a very fine window at the end of the chancel aisle, and underneath that window it was probable that an altar formerly stood, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. On one of the label terminations of this window, outside, was the date, in Arabic numerals, 1529, together with the letter \mathfrak{A} ; and over the

window there was an inscription in black letter, of which he had taken a rubbing, and it was as follows:—

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This inscription seemed to point to the fact that the chapel belonged to a guild—of fishermen, perhaps. In the chapel beyond, which was now used as a vestry, there was a most beautiful oak chest. It had upon it a shield bearing *a dolphin naiant between three mullets*, for Fitzjames. Other panels bore—one the Tudor shield, another an eagle with a closed book in its claws, a third the initials **J.C.D.**, a fourth a cross with fleur-de-lys on the ends of the arms, and another a jug with a lily of five stalks, bearing, not natural flowers, but fleur-de-lys. Richard Fitzjames was Vicar, 1484; Bishop of Rochester, 1497.

The tower was about the year 1500, and had some rather remarkable sculpture. On the east side was St. Michael weighing souls with a pair of scales. The devil was holding on to one scale, vainly trying to draw it down, while the Virgin Mary was touching the other scale and pressing it well down against the devil; immediately below the Virgin Mary was a lily, growing. It seemed to him that it might not impossibly refer to the high altar being dedicated to St. Michael, and the side altar to the Virgin Mary. On the south side of the tower was a large panel, representing the Exhibition of the Host.

There were several chained books in the Church of 17th century printing, including a black letter Bible of 1639. The font was a very fine piece of work. There was a row of figures round the bowl, but their emblems had all been broken off. He could not make out who the saints were, but under one there was a figure of a priest praying, so he thought it might be assumed that a priest had given the font. And he thought it probable that the monument assigned to De Bracton

was really the monument of this priest, since, from the position in which he was buried and the grandeur of his monument, there was no doubt that the priest buried here had been a benefactor of the Church. Round the stem were eight other figures, including the four Evangelists, and four others in the robes of priest, bishop, cardinal, and pope. (A suggestion was subsequently made that these were intended for the four Latin Fathers; but is there any authority for the representation of S. Augustine?)

Mr. J. D. SEDDING also spoke, briefly, and said he was very glad that Mr. Buckle had entirely exploded the absurd theory that the monument in that Church had any connection with Judge de Bracton.

A most unusual feature in the south aisle is an arch of oak, with all the usual details of work in stone; an excellent illustration of the President's remark about the common use of wood in this district in place of stone.

With reference to the unusual size of the rood-loft stair and windows, it has been suggested that this projecting window was intended for lights to guide boats making for the harbour, and in support of this view it is said that the boatmen still talk of 'picking up' the Church lights.

Descending from the Church, the large party found breaks and carriages awaiting them, and at once drove off by a beautiful route through narrow lanes to

Bratton Court.

Here the Rev. F. HANCOCK took his stand on the upping-stock by the side of the fine old gateway, with massive doors and posts of most unusual size, and read a short paper. He said that they had heard the theory of the supposed monument of De Bracton sufficiently destroyed that day, and he supposed the specialists would tell them that that old building, instead of being—as was locally supposed—the house of Judge Bracton, belonged to a later date. There was local evidence

that the great judge originated from this part of the country. The family held property in Luccombe, Selworthy, and other parishes in that district, for many generations. The property passed by marriage from the Bracton family to the well known Devonshire family of Fry, the latter being connected with the district by inter-marriage with the owner of the adjoining estate of Holnicote—the Steyning family. From the Fry family the estates passed, again by marriage, to another Devonshire family, that of King, and in the hands of the representative of that family—the present Lord Lovelace—the Bratton Court estate still remained. The Secretary informed him that De Bracton held a prebendal stall in Wells Cathedral. But it was as a lawyer, and not as a clergyman, that De Bracton was famous. Henry III seemed to have stood his constant friend, and in 1244 he was appointed one of the Justices Itinerant for several counties. Lord Ellesmere and some other authorities spoke of him as Chief Justice in the reign of Henry III, but there appeared to be no proof of his reaching that elevation. Bracton declared that his book was designed not only for the instruction of practitioners, but for the protection of suitors from the ignorance and arbitrary will of foolish, unlearned persons, who, he said, “ascend the judgment seat before they have learnt the laws.” Bracton had but little respect for the legal knowledge of his contemporaries. It was useless, he said, to attempt to enlighten the ignorance of an older generation; he had undertaken for the instruction at least of the rising generation to examine the ancient judgments of righteous men, and by summarising them to commend them to perpetual memory by the aid of writing. His treatise was evidently designed after the model of the treatise of the Roman civil law of the famous Italian lawyer Azo. It appears that no inconsiderable part of the Roman civil law must have been practically applied in England in De Bracton’s day, and it is probable that the immediate object which Bracton had in view in composing his work was to

draw up a manual of the Common Law of England for the use and instruction of the Justiciaries in Eyre, probably as a supplement to the great work of Glanville. The year 1267 is probably the date of Bracton's death."

The only portions of the buildings at Bratton Court of early date are, the gateway, a chamber over with a fine timbered roof, commonly called Judge Bracton's study, and a portion of the side of the quadrangle immediately contiguous to it. Here again wood is found instead of stone, imitating stone work so closely that it is difficult at a short distance to say of which material the cusping of the windows is made.

Mr. W. GEORGE has supplied the following supplementary particulars relating to De Bracton:—Very little has hitherto been known of the personal history of Henry de Bracton, beyond the fact that he was an ecclesiastic, and that he was collated on January 21st, 1263-4, to the Archdeaconry of Barnstaple, which he resigned in the following May. But Sir Travers Twiss, since the publication of the first volume of De Bracton's works (in the Rolls series), has discovered the particulars of his different preferments in the archives of the diocesan registry at Exeter. Before 1237 he was admitted to a prebendal stall in Exeter Cathedral. He was also a Prebendary of the collegiate Church of Bosham, in Sussex. On May 18th, 1264, he was appointed Chancellor of Exeter Cathedral, when he resigned the Archdeaconry of Barnstaple. The prebends and the chancellorship he had until his death, in July or August, 1268. It has recently been established by Sir Travers Twist that De Bracton was buried in the nave of Exeter Cathedral, before an altar dedicated to the Virgin, a little to the south of the entrance to the choir, at which a daily mass was regularly said for the benefit of his soul for the space of three centuries after his decease—that is, until the reign of Henry VIII, and it seems to have been always known as De Bracton's chantry. Although doubt exists as to the place of his birth, there can be no question as to the place of his burial.

The life of this eminent jurist, in which is embodied the new information supplied by the registries at Exeter, is contained in the fourth volume of the new *Dictionary of National Biography*. The three places that have been conjecturally assigned as his birthplaces are Bratton Flemyng, Bratton Clovelly (Devon), and Bratton Court, near Minehead.

From Bratton Court the upper road was followed to

Selworthy Church,

for the sake of the magnificent view across the Holnicote and Luccombe valley, to Cloutsham and the slopes of Dunkerry.

On the party having assembled in the Church,

The Rev. F. HANCOCK said the earliest part of the Church was the tower, except the east wall of the chancel which probably belonged to an earlier period and smaller Church. The porch was probably originally battlemented, like Crowcombe and Lydeard St. Lawrence. The north aisle was assigned to a date about the beginning of the 15th century. Originally, a fine screen ran across the Church, of which a few portions still remained. This screen was probably destroyed by a detachment of dragoons, part of Sir Hardresse Waller's brigade, who were quartered some time in the parish during the great rebellion. They, or some ignorant rabble incited by them, must have wrecked the Church and destroyed all the painted windows, throwing down the stone altars, and breaking up the screen. The very capitals of the pillars did not escape their stupid maliciousness. The discovery of one or two canon balls embedded in the earth, near the Church, seemed to point to some engagement having taken place near it during the civil wars. The roof of the north aisle was one of the most beautiful in Somersetshire. It had moulded ribs forming panels and very richly-carved wall-plate cornices. The roof was originally an open one. The walls of the whole Church were at one time stencilled or painted, and during the recent restoration of the Church a group of the Virgin and

Child was found painted on the wall beneath the east window of the south aisle, in such a position as to have been above an altar.

Mr. BARNINGHAM pointed out that the curious large square bosses on the roof of the central aisle, bearing painted figures and symbols, are from an earlier roof. They were cut out bodily from the solid timbers, and affixed as bosses to the new roof.

The Font excited much interest. It seems at first sight to have a stone base and shaft, with an octagonal wooden bason, with panels of the linen pattern. This wooden top however is easily lifted off, and underneath there is a stone bason of bulbous, tulip shape, which may very probably be Saxon work. The wooden casing was found, some years ago, buried some feet in a mass of dirt and rubbish in the tower, and was repaired and restored to the place for which it must have been made.

Outside the Church there is a good specimen of a churchyard cross, and also what seems to be an altar tomb of good 15th century work. It has the peculiarity, exactly like another example in Porlock churchyard, of bearing good carving upon the front and ends, while the back is left quite rough, as though it had stood against a wall. But this can hardly have been the case, for the plinth returns round the back, and the slab projects as much over the back as over the front. It was suggested that these are examples of the dole-stones which are common in Devonshire, but very rare in Somerset.

Leaving Selworthy Church, with its unequalled view, the party walked through the beautiful woods, under the guidance of Mr. C. T. D. ACLAND, M.P., to Holnicote, where refreshments were kindly provided, and from hence, after a visit to the stables to see the fine collection of stags' heads, drove back to Minehead in time for the dinner at the Beach Hotel, the President in the Chair.

The Evening Meeting

was held in the Town Hall, at eight o'clock, and was largely attended.

Domesday Estates.

Bishop HOBHOUSE presented to the Society a coloured map of the estates in Somerset at Domesday. The green colour, he said, represented the vast estates of the Abbey of Glastonbury. Yellow represented estates of the Crown, distributed throughout the county. The next large division was the lands of the Bishop of Wells, represented in purple. They would see that they were very much intermixed. His object was to urge others to make the map more complete, by adding to it, on a larger scale and with local knowledge, each helper taking his own locality. Professor Earle had told him he once attempted to do a similar work for his own neighbourhood, in the eastern part of the county, near Bath. The Somerset Domesday Survey was not so interesting as that of counties where estates remained more permanent. We have remarkably few families who have gone on from Domesday downwards. He believed their honourable friend in the Chair was the only person who represents a Domesday estate in Somerset in unbroken descent. By 1150 there were some fifteen or eighteen large estates which had been broken up. Besides the diminution in the size of the estates when regranted, there were other causes tending constantly to the same end. The King required an account to be taken of so many Knights' Fees; so all these large estates were assessed, and bound to produce, at the Sovereign's call, a number of men in armour. The large estates were growing more valuable in other ways, but were diminishing in size. This imperfect sketch should remain in possession of the Society, and he left it there in the hope that others may take up the subject. He would be very

glad if someone would take up the subject of the tenure of land in the county.

Professor EARLE said we were very much indebted to Bishop Hobhouse, and he thought, if his object could be attained, it would be very useful for historical purposes. It was an ideal object, but in some instances it might be obtained. If limited to Domesday, it exhibited a sort of pattern on which the historian can work; but it would perhaps be impossible (as Bishop Hobhouse had indicated) for any large area to go beyond 1300 in tracing the succession of owners. William's distribution of land was arbitrary. There were estates that had belonged to Bath Abbey centuries before he became "The Conqueror." Many hundreds—he might, without much strain, even say thousands—of documents existed relating to territorial possessions before the Conquest. Then came a uniform military arrangement on that system of land tenure which is known as the feudal system. The previous land system was one which had grown up step by step, and was valuable as being the expression of the mind of the nation as to how land should be distributed. He sincerely joined in the hope that the example now set might be followed by others.

Mr. SEDDING read a very elaborate paper on "The Ancient Monuments of the British Isles," illustrated by a large number of drawings, which is printed in the Second Part.
