

St. Mary's Church, Bridgwater.

After luncheon, the company paid a visit to St. Mary's Church, an interesting description of which was given by Mr. EDMUND BUCKLE. He said it was quite impossible to look at the church with any attention at all without feeling what an important place Bridgwater was in olden times. The church was really larger than it gave one the impression of being, and he believed that it seated something like 1,300 people. It was not surprising that Bridgwater should require a church of that size now, but it was really suprising that as far back as they could go there appeared to have been as large a church as the present one. There was nothing of Norman work left ; but the foundations of the Early English building extended all the way round the north aisle, and along the end of the north transept. That appeared to make it plain that

in the thirteenth century there was a cruciform church, with aisles and nave of the same width as the existing ones. Mr. BUCKLE then pointed out the great width of the building across the nave and aisles, and remarked that in the thirteenth century it would have been unusual to find so wide a church. In the time of King John there was founded a hospital of Augustinian Canons in Bridgwater, and the church was appropriated to these canons, who served it partly themselves and partly by a secular chaplain. The only serious additions to the size of the church made since the thirteenth century, appeared to be the filling out of the space between the transepts and the north and south porches, and additions at the east end. The two side chapels were probably added later, and the chancel carried at least one bay further east than it was at the time of that Early English church. Mr. BUCKLE pointed out the early niches for monuments in the north aisle wall and also the piece of thirteenth century work in the north door, which, however, was not *in situ*. The tracery between the lintel and the arch marked the date at which this doorway was rebuilt in its present position in the outer wall of the north porch. Very little alteration had taken place in the general appearance of the church, except as regarded the removal of the cross arches from the centre of the church and the raising of the nave. The windows were of all sorts of dates. There were Geometrical windows, Decorated windows, and windows with reticulated tracery. In the north aisle they found the internal arch of the old windows remaining, whilst the windows themselves had Perpendicular tracery inserted all through. The arches of the Perpendicular arcade varied a great deal in width, and the capital of one pair of pillars dropped down quite a foot below the others. Another remarkable fact was that the clerestory windows were not over the arches but over the pillars. The old rood screen was now utilised as side-choir screens, and a remarkable thing was that in olden time there was in front of the rood screen another screen some six or

eight feet forward. This was a Jacobean screen, which now formed the front of the Corporation pew, and the mayor and corporation seemed to have been provided with stalls, placed between the two screens. Altogether the church must have been wonderfully rich in carved work, because the whole of the front of the stall work in the chancel was filled out with panels of ancient carved work. The pulpit was a pretty one, of Perpendicular date, and formerly stood against one of the pillars down the nave. Mr. BUCKLE spoke of the arrangement of the squint from the north porch. The view of the high altar from this porch was obtained by a four-light window opening from the porch into the church, a squint through the west wall of the transept (which wall has, in 1849, been replaced by an arcade), and another squint through the pier of the chancel arch. The purpose of these squints was generally supposed to be to provide for lepers. With regard to the furniture the most conspicuous thing was the picture presented to the church by Mr. Anne Poulet, who was christened Anne after Queen Anne, and was at that time member for Bridgwater. Beyond that fact no history of the picture was known, but it was generally ascribed to an Italian artist, Annibale Caracci, of Bologna. There were at one time at least seven altars in the church, as had been discovered by Mr. Weaver.* These were the High altar, Trinity altar, Our Lady's altar, St. George's altar, the Rood altar, St. Katharine's altar, and St. Soday's altar, and there appeared also to have been an altar to St. Erasmus. There was ample room for seven altars, and there might very well have been more. There were three chantries—of St. George, Our Lady, and the Holy Trinity, and there were seven guilds in connection with the church. All these things pointed to the great richness and importance of the town. The small arch leading into the tower showed that at the time it was built there was no clerestory. The tower was a massive building, consisting almost solely of rubble

* See "Downside Review," December, 1896.

stone work, without any free-stone where it could be avoided. Towers of this character prevail in West Somerset and part of Devon. The tower in contrast to the church showed poverty, but it had really a remarkable spire, being a great deal taller than the tower on which it stood, and it gave an individual character to the appearance of the building.

Lieut.-Col. BRAMBLE spoke of the resemblance between St. Mary's tower and the tower of old Bedminster church, now pulled down. As to the roof it was of a style peculiar to Somerset, which had got to be known as Somerset waggon roof. There they had a Somerset waggon roof as a nucleus and a great deal besides.

The Rev. J. E. ODGERS spoke of the ceremonies which formerly took place in the church between Good Friday and Easter day. A sepulchre was set up in the church, and watchers were appointed until the Sunday, when a curtain was drawn back revealing the figure of the rising Saviour.

Mr. CHARLES MAJOR and Dr. WINTERBOTHAM also spoke. The latter dissented from the view of Mr. Buckle that the altar piece belonged to the Italian school. He considered it was a specimen of the Flemish school. It was said to have been taken from a privateer, and it had been inspected and valued by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

It was mentioned that the Corporation annually insured the picture for £10,000.

The Rev. H. BIRCHAM, vicar, said that the registers were very interesting indeed, and Mr. Lockyer, the Parish Clerk, would have great pleasure in showing them the Communion plate as well. The chancel, he added, did not belong to the Corporation, they were only lay rectors. With regard to the picture he did not believe that that belonged to them either. It had been there many years, and he doubted their having the slightest power over it, although he did not want to reopen the question.

The Rev. F. W. WEAVER said the churchwardens' accounts,

which belonged to the Corporation, went back to 1368, and were some of the most interesting in the West of England.

Admiral Blake's House.

The party next wended their way to Blake Street, to inspect what is acknowledged to have been the birth-place of the famous Admiral Blake. For some years past it has been the residence of Miss Parker, niece of the late Mr. George Parker, author of a brief history of Bridgwater, and other works, who purchased the property in question. Mr. Parker, the present owner (a nephew of the deceased gentleman), received the party on their arrival and escorted them through some rooms, and into a garden at the rear, adjacent to what is locally known as "mill tail," and referred to as such in Domesday book. It was admitted that the premises had undergone very extensive alterations, but there were traces of ancient remains, and in particular Mr. Parker pointed out those of an old window and fireplace which undoubtedly constituted a portion of the original building.

The Castle.

The party next directed their steps to the Western Quay, and here they were shown the only remaining traces of Bridgwater Castle, consisting of a massive stone archway, formerly a portion of an old water gate, this being situate at the entrance of some bonded cellars in the vicinity of the Custom House. This was viewed with a good deal of interest, and although no public observations were offered thereon, several members indulged in a retrospect of recorded events connected with the siege of Bridgwater and its heroic defence, and expressed surprise that the castle had been so completely dismantled that all other traces of it had disappeared.

Afternoon Meeting.

At 4.30 the members again assembled in the Town Hall, at a meeting at which papers on local subjects were read and discussions took place. Mr. E. J. STANLEY, M.P., again presided.

The PRESIDENT first called upon the Rev. F. W. Weaver, M.A., to make a statement with regard to the index to Collinson's History of Somerset.

The Rev. F. W. WEAVER said the Society was bringing out in a form uniform with Collinson's History an elaborate index to the whole of the three volumes. The index had now reached the letter M, and as Editor, he had received valuable help from the Rev. E. H. Bates. Those who used the index would find it valuable when they wished to see what Collinson really said. He hoped that those who had not subscribed would give their names to Mr. Bidgood. The price of the work was fifteen shillings, and he hoped it would soon be ready.

Mr. HOBHOUSE said they were indebted to the two gentlemen who had undertaken the work, and appreciation of their efforts should be shown by purchasing the work.

Mr. C. H. BOTHAMLEY read a paper on a Photographic Survey of the County of Somerset (*see* Part II).

Mr. HOBHOUSE thought it was a very proper object for the Society to take up, but the proper mode of procedure would be to refer it to the Executive Committee, to see if they would take it up in conjunction with certain other bodies, and whether it would be desirable for them to make a small grant to cover initial expenses. It was clear that no large grant could be made at present, but Mr. Bothamley had suggested voluntary subscribers if sufficient could be found to set the ball rolling. He would like to know the extent of Mr. Bothamley's proposition before referring it to the Committee to consider.

Mr. WINTERBOTHAM said if the Society did not see its

way to granting any large sum of money, it could give an expression of opinion that the suggestions thrown out by Mr. Bothamley were worthy of consideration. They had not the funds to make themselves a society for the purpose of protecting national monuments, great and small, in Somerset, but the idea that they could keep a faithful representation of what they had before the time of destruction came was one within their grasp and means, and although the Society might not feel themselves able to contribute largely, their protection thrown over the idea would enable it to advance, and many of them would be glad to form a subsidiary society which would aid such matters.

The Rev. F. W. WEAVER said there was a valuable collection of photographs of old churches taken by Mr. Gillo, formerly of Bridgwater, in existence, but they were in possession of a certain firm, which, possibly, would part with them to the Society for a reasonable sum.

The Rev. J. WORTHINGTON said it was entirely a question of finance, but if common action were undertaken he felt sure the Committee and members would support the matter right heartily.

Mr. BOTHAMLEY did not anticipate that the expenses would be very large. Mr. Hobhouse wished to know the extent of his proposition. His suggestion was to first obtain photographs of domestic objects which were liable to disappear, and afterwards of those subjects which were less liable to alteration.

The Rev. J. E. ODGERS then read a paper on "The Bridgwater Academy, 1688-1748."

The Evening Meeting.

There was a large gathering at eight o'clock, in the Town Hall, to listen to a paper by Professor MONTAGU BURROWS, R.N. (Chichele Professor of Modern History in the University of Oxford, and Fellow of All Souls' College), entitled "The Life and Times of Robert Blake" (*see Part II*).

The PRESIDENT proposed a vote of thanks to Professor Burrows for his paper.

Mr. W. L. WINTERBOTHAM followed with a paper on "Blake's Charities." He said the few notes he had been able to make did not mean a history of "Blake's Charity," but he rather wanted to point out (while Professor Burrows had given them in his own eloquent language what the Empire owed to Blake), by just giving them a few items from Blake's will, what he had done for Bridgwater and its neighbourhood. He did not regard this subject as important as that which Prof. Burrows had laid before them, for after all it was a small thing what a man did for his successors, but it was a great thing what a man did for the nation. He wished to be an advocate for a memorial of Blake, whether his likeness was that of a saint or of a sinner. A memorial that would bring to their minds the fact that Blake was born, and lived in this place. Although in obtaining a statue they would wish to go as near the truth as possible, the ideal did not lie altogether in the value of the truth, but in what the man did and what he was to those who were living at the present day. What he had to say of the past and the connection of Blake with them was to show how humbly he was one of them; how his people lived there because in this world their neighbour was much more their friend than those who lived at a distance. They had a close connection with those in their own parish, their own county, their own country, and although they did not go to the extent that if a man was not born in the parish they would have nothing to do with him, they felt more kindly to those connected with them. Mr. Winterbotham alluded to the will of Robert Blake (grandfather of the great Admiral), who left in 1592 lands at Tuxwell, in Radlett, to William, and to his son Humphrey lands at Puriton and Crandon. Humphrey Blake (father) left to the Cathedral church at Wells 5s.; to Bridgwater church, 40s.; to Pawlett church, 20s.; and to the poor of Bridgwater, £5. The manor of Puriton and Crandon

was left to the son Robert, and silver salts, silver bowls, and a dozen of silver spoons with lions' heads. His chattel lease of lands in Puriton and Huntspill were left to the son William, towards his education and charges at Oxford; reversion and interest on lands in the manor of Hamp to his son Benjamin; the dwelling-house and garden, which the Society had visited that day in Blake Street, to his sons Robert and Humphrey. Extracts from the wills of William Blake (Bridgwater) and Margaret Blake (grandmother), dated respectively 1667 and 1599, showed that the former left £100 to the poor of Bridgwater, whilst the latter left £10 yearly for the poor, also 20s. at her burial for the same cause. Various gifts of goods were made to the almshouses of Bridgwater, and to the almshouses of Stogursey 5s., to the poor of Spaxton, 10s., the will also stating, "My late husband, Robert Blake, at his death left £240 in the hands of Richard Hodges and one Leonard Crosse, in trust, to pay £20 yearly for my maintenance, and also appointed that the said £240 should be paid to the Mayor, Aldermen, etc., of Bridgwater, to be employed by them to make a yearly gain of £20, to be distributed after my decease as follows: £16 yearly to the poor, and the other £4 for the repairs of the highways near Bridgwater, my son Humphrey (to whom the same is now assured) to see that this is performed."

By the will of Admiral Robert Blake, dated 1655, he left to the town of Bridgwater £100 to be distributed amongst the poor thereof at the discretion of Humphrey Blake, his brother, and of the Mayor for the time being. To the town of Taunton he also left £100; to his brother Humphrey the manor of Taunton and Crandon; to his brother Benjamin his dwelling-house in St. Mary Street, and the other house adjoining and eleven acres of land in the village of Hamp; and to the widow Owen, of Bridgwater, the relict of Mr. Owen, minister, he gave £10. Mr. Winterbotham also read an interesting letter which he had discovered written for the trustees of Blake's

charity to a descendant on February 2nd, 1736, stating that they observed by the writings there was left £100 to be laid out in land for the use of the poor, and that they could not find above £82 10s. laid out, so they desired the gentleman written to to be pleased to let them know to which of the trustees the remaining part of the hundred pounds was paid. It would be interesting to know where the difference between the £82 and £100 went. It seemed from all these wills that Admiral Blake and his family were persons who, by some means, acquired considerable wealth, and that when they died they did not forget their native town. Mr. Winterbotham concluded a highly interesting paper by again expressing a hope that in a town like that they might soon have a memorial of the great admiral. It was not every town that could boast of having a townsman like Admiral Blake, and he thought they would not only be commemorating the life and death of a great man, but would be adding to the welfare of their citizens in the future by putting up in the town an Admiral Blake statue.

The PRESIDENT also, on behalf of the audience, thanked Mr. Winterbotham for his interesting paper.

The Rev. E. H. BATES next read a paper of considerable interest on "An Inventory of Church Plate in South-East Somerset" (*see Part II*).