

Round about Old Christchurch.

By HINE RAWEI, WAIKOUAITI.

THE river Avon, famous in all history and to-day for its fine salmon fishing, gyrates southwards with almost the regularity of a corkscrew from the ancient city and County town of Salisbury, till it is intercepted just before reaching the sea by the vagabond Stour, which has wandered across the County of Dorset. And just at the point of junction, like a nest in the hollow of a branch nestles old Christchurch, its well preserved Cathedral looking calmly on the meeting of two rivers, the Avon and Stour, as they placidly glide on their way to the ocean, like fond lovers who have waited long for marriage, but now walk side by side

intentions, and completely upset all arrangements. It is said that stones for the building were imported from quarries in the Isle of Wight and Isle of Purbeck, but as fast as these were placed in position on St. Catherine's Hill, unseen hands removed them each night to the site of the present Church. It is not related how long the Dean resisted this ghostly interference with the work, but ultimately he decided to abandon his plan for the erection of the Church on St. Catherine's Hill, and he caused the foundations of the Church to be laid on their present site. And now a second wonder is recorded. Amongst the builders employed was a mysterious craftsman of marvellous skill, and during the hours of toil this individual laboured unceasingly, but was

part of the original design and execution of Dean Flambard, is 118 feet long by 58 feet wide, and consists of seven bays, and these noble proportions may be sought for in vain in other English Cathedrals. A curious feature is that the groining begins some feet below the path of the Clerestory, a feature which is only found, I am told, in one other Norman Church in England, and that is the Cathedral at Durham, also designed by Flambard, when preferred from the Deanery of Christchurch to the See of Durham. Curiously, Flambard did not live to see either Clerestory completed, so that his successors appear to have had sufficient respect for his memory to complete his peculiar plan. The roof of Christchurch was originally very lofty, but it has undergone much alteration, and the present timbers of the roof were probably placed in position about the date of the Battle of Crecy, and may claim contemporary life with that oak whose pride of race has been rendered vocal by the poet in the lines:—

that the monks who occupied them might rest but not fall asleep during the chanting of the Psalms. So long as the chorister sat bolt upright, the seat afforded some slight support, but should his drowsy head fall forward, the seat would reverse and awaken him by throwing him forward upon the desk. Among the carvings of these stalls there is a striking likeness of the hunchbacked Tudor King Richard III. Another quaint carving, which suggests that the designer must have been of a sarcastic turn of mind, represents a fox preaching to a large flock of geese. The *veredos* (see illustration) dates back to 1380, and is peculiarly interesting. It represents the Stem of Jesse, who is carved recumbent and life size, over the altar, and from whom the Stem branches through figures of King David and King Solomon to our Saviour, through figures representing the 28 generations mentioned in the genealogy in the first chapter of the New Testament. Close by is a small but elaborately carved chapel, executed by



OLD CHRISTCHURCH CATHEDRAL, ON THE AVON, ENGLAND.

with eyes fixed on the desired end. A couple of miles further on these streams unite in the little harbour, flowing thence into Christchurch Bay and the turbulent English Channel.

The old Saxons originally christened the place 'Twyaham,' or the town between the two rivers, and how it came to be called Christchurch is a story which should interest New Zealanders, as it illustrates the tenacity of old English legend and superstition. The priory was founded by Edward the Confessor, but Bishop Flambard, the Chancellor of William Rufus, and a builder of some repute, had no more liking for Saxon architecture than for Saxon manners, and while Dean of Christchurch he raised the Saxon structure and began a new Priory and Cathedral. The story runs that he chose as his site an adjoining eminence, and decided that the sacred edifice should be known as the Church of St. Catherine, a name which still adheres to the hill on which he proposed to erect it. But according to local tradition a miracle frustrated the good man's

never seen during meal times, and never claimed wages. On one occasion a large and heavy oak beam that was to be fitted into the roof was found to have been cut much too short, and the Dean was exceedingly angry in consequence; but before the work began next morning the strange carpenter had actually stretched the beam to the required length and placed it in position. If my readers do not believe the story they may go to old Christchurch and view the identical piece of timber, which is now on exhibition in the Clerestory of the Lady Chapel. This miraculous interposition is said to have caused the Dean to alter the name of the Church, and Christchurch it has remained to this day. The Church has given its name to the town, although every Hampshire man knows that the original name of the place was Twynham.

Of the Church itself, and the Augustinian Priory at Heron Court more could be said than I have time to recount, or New Zealand readers would care to know. The nave, which is

In my great grandsire's trunk did Druids dwell;

My grandsire with the Roman eagle fell;
Myself a sapling when my father bore
The hero Edward to the Gallic shore.

The nave of the church was for the congregation. A richly carved stone screen seven feet thick separates the priory stalls and the high altar from the gaze of the laymen. Mass was performed in the nave, where a piscina still remains to mark the position of the altar. The screen is considered a magnificent piece of 14th Century carving, and it must have been a beautiful lesson in stone before Henry VIII's emissaries carried away and broke up the images which filled the now vacant niches. The great thickness of this remarkable screen affords room for a flight of stairs by which the priest ascended to read the gospels and epistles from the top during High Mass. If we open the small doorway in the centre of the screen we may pass through to the Prior's stalls, quaintly carved in solid oak; these were added about the end of the fifteenth century. Here are the 'nodding seats,' contrived so

Terregiano for a Countess of Salisbury, lady of the Manor of Christchurch, who was beheaded for treason by Henry VIII. The pavement in front of the altar shows the hollow places from which, to the disgrace of the custodians of the church, he it said, the brass memorial tablets have been stolen. There are now living in Hampshire to-day several persons who can recollect seeing these brasses in the pavement; but though they escaped even the fury of the vandals of the Reformation (the church was not injured by Cromwellians), they have been stolen in the nineteenth century by some collector whose zeal for acquisition outweighed his reverence for the subjects of his collection.

Behind the grand altar is the Lady Chapel, the Holy Table being formed of one magnificent slab of Purbeck marble. Very beautiful and interesting are the consecration crosses, which are doubled, showing that the table was twice consecrated. There are five of these double crosses, one in the centre and one at each corner. In the Lady Chapel are the