

OLD-WORLD ARCHITECTURE.

VII.

Our illustrations to-day are concerned with two characteristic specimens of the minor architectural monuments of old time. In these days of water powers and drainage schemes, wells are thought to be signs of a civic state of affairs but little removed from the ignorance of primitive barbarism. There was a time, however, in the history of the world when they played an important part in the affairs of mankind. The well was the source of water, and in fortified towns could not, like the water supply brought by aqueducts from afar, be cut off at will by an enemy intent on siege operations. Before that, in the more primitive state of society, the well, as the permanent source of water, was held to be sacred, and the cult of benevolent rural deities had, in many countries, grown up around them; indeed, the great necessary element—water—with its many valuable properties, was sacred in most eyes; a feeling to which many rivers of the world, notably the Ganges, to this day owe the retention of the belief in the holy character of their waters. The sentiment was acknowledged all over mediæval Europe, and nowhere more so than in "Merrie England," in several counties of which the custom of "well dressings"—the offering of floral tributes—remained in force to a late period.

These were specially famous in Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Westmoreland and Lancashire. "Christianity," remarks a recent chronicler, "substituted a saint's name for that of the local deity of heathenism, but the water worship continued as undiluted as the crystal fountain which had first claimed the gratitude of men." In the course of time, springs in certain parts were found to possess healing

properties, and about many of these legends grew up, more circumstantial than truthful, but commanding the belief of all and sundry. Of these some are famous still, and even at this date enjoy the patronage of many believers. For example, in St. Bede's well, at Jarrow, weakly children are dipped and crooked pins are offered in propitiation; at St. Helen's, in Lancashire, cloth is offered. Several wells in Scotland are famous for the alleged cure of skin diseases; the well of St.

shire, which used to be sought, not so long ago, on the first Sunday of June every year, and the well of St. Anthony, at Maybloe, to which ailing children always used to be brought on the first Sunday of May. Other wells, again, were of miraculous origin, like the well of Holywell, which is said to have sprung up in St. Beuno's church at the place where the head of the martyr St. Winifred rolled when struck off by Caradoc, the persecutor of Christians.



WELL AT CHARNAI, ALSACE. [Original Photo. by Mr. C. Dillworth Fox.]

Dwynen, in the Isle of Anglesey, is said to be good against love sickness; at Sefton, in Lancashire, there is a well into which maids threw pins in order to find out the date of their marriages and to test the faith of their lovers, and there are wells of special interest now for husbands and wives. Others are in vogue only on particular days of the year, such as the well of Trinity Gask, in Perth-

shire, which used to be sought, not so long ago, on the first Sunday of June every year, and the well of St. Anthony, at Maybloe, to which ailing children always used to be brought on the first Sunday of May. Other wells, again, were of miraculous origin, like the well of Holywell, which is said to have sprung up in St. Beuno's church at the place where the head of the martyr St. Winifred rolled when struck off by Caradoc, the persecutor of Christians.

As it was in England, so was it also on the continent of Europe. All over Germany there are wells and fountains, as there are over France, Italy, and the Low Countries. In Alsace they are particularly numerous. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that the architects and sculptors of the middle ages lavished their art upon the adornment of the wells of their time.

The first of our illustrations represents the well of the old Alsatian town of Charnai, not far from Thann. We noted, in a recent issue, the fine church of St. Theobald, of the latter town. It will be seen that at the back of the Charnai well is a church similar in character, very suggestive of the vast influence exercised on the taste of these regions by the fine cathedral of Strasbourg, of which this is the third considerable imitation we have come across in views of this not large region contributed by our Mr. Dillworth Fox to these pages. The design takes us back to the days of the Roman occupation indubitably, with its massive canopy and deeply-cut

entablatures, and its combination of relieving Ionic columns. The figures were probably added in later times. Evidently this was a well of the ordinary sort, without any pretensions to the odour of sanctity, and not owing anything to the healing art—just the place where the women assembled at regular hours through the day to draw the domestic water supply and engage in social gossip.