

Sketches of the Church.

No. 2.

In Sussex and Essex we come across a few relics of Saxon Churches, notably the Churches at Sompting, and Greenstead, the latter being built partly of wood (Saxon), and the chancel of stone (Norman). Also at Bradford-on-Avon there is a well preserved specimen of a Saxon Church. In these islands we have, of course, nothing very ancient in the way of buildings, and such as do bear any marks of antiquity, we are doing our best to get rid of. It is therefore a matter for congratulation that in the proposed restoration and enlargement of the Church at Opotiki, the marks of the past will be conserved, and Mr Volkner's grave will be included in the new part of the Church, thus following the example of our forefathers, as countless Churches in all parts of the world testify. These Saxon Churches at Home are most interesting to us. Could their timbers and stones but speak, what stories of the past would at once delight and shock our ears! Delight, because we should hear of the patient endurance of saints and martyrs, of the triumphs of the Faith, of the course of glory won by countless heroes and heroines in the "well-fought fight," of the keeping alight the lamp of Christianity despite all vicissitudes, of the winning an Empire for Christ. Shock, because we should also hear of many ignoble struggles and petty quarrels among the faithful, of lukewarmness, of turpitude, of outward prosperity and inward corruption, of oppression by Kings, by usurpers, by people so great that anything less than God's Church would have succumbed. But the Church of Christ is still a witness in the earth for her master, still a power for good, still, "though oppressed by many a foe," gathering in the sheep and the lambs into the true sheep-fold.

The conversion of the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the religion of the empire. The faithful, now no longer compelled to worship the one true God in caves and catacombs, emerged into the light of day, and began to build temples, more or less beautiful; and the religion of Jesus Christ spread slowly but surely over all lands, and exercised an immediate and wonderful influence on the laws. The continual contrast between believers and non-believers (especially during the reigns of Commodus, Severus, and Gallienus), must

have gradually moulded the opinions of men, so that they were, at least partially, prepared to accept Christianity as the Religion of Law and Order, a Religion "altogether lovely" in its ideals; a religion of Love and Brotherhood, yet not subversive of authority; a religion which safeguarded the rights of all people—king, noble, freeman, and peasant; a Religion which taught that the State is a Divine institution, and thus, "even in degenerate Rome, gave birth to a system of law, destined to survive the Empire itself, and nursed both Law and Liberty as twins at its own breasts."

In the conversion of England (or rather of the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms), Christianity was in every case first embraced by the Kings and the higher classes of people, and the people generally followed their leadership, and multitudes were baptised in the rivers. It is not surprising therefore that many lapses occurred, or that old heathen superstitions retained for many many years, their hold upon a rude and ignorant people. Of the northern nations, the people of Norway clung the most fondly to their old faiths, and their old superstitions, and we read, how even in the year 1015 a great image of Thor was worshipped, and how when one Kolbein the Strong struck the image with his club and broke it in pieces, a number of mice ran out: the people seeing the helplessness of their god, became Christians, were baptised, and the heathen chief Gudbrand himself built a church in the valley.

It is of interest—it is good for us, in these days, to remember that (1) the kings and chiefs and people gave land to the missionaries for the building and endowment of the church; (2) that in every case the bishops simultaneously set up schools in connection with each church.

Sometimes, instead of a church, a large cross would be erected in some clearing, and these served as open-air stations for prayer and preaching the Word. Survivals of these may still be seen at Eyam, Ruthwell, etc., and history and tradition seem to show us that as people found these open-air stations very inconvenient during rainy weather, and for celebrations of Holy Communion, the rector usually built the chancel himself, as a covering and protection for the altar and ministrant, expecting the people to build the nave. All the Saxon kings and queens, and most of the nobles, gave lands to the Church, for the erection of churches, chapels, schools and monasteries, or houses for lodging

the priests and deacons, abbots and monks and nuns who were employed in the service of the Church, in visiting the sick, in teaching the children, and in good works generally, and the fashion of founding religious houses spread among the smaller land-holders. Some of these were conducted on very strict lines, but in many of them the life was only that of an ordinary household, thus opening the door to abuse, and bye-and-bye the life, the discipline in many of these religious houses became very lax.

At the end of the eighth century, churches and schools and monasteries were scattered from one end of the land to the other, and we are told that "the vales of Worcestershire and Gloucestershire were famous for the multitude and grandeur of their monastic institutions."

Many suffered terribly at the hands of the Danes in their various invasions and plunderings, some not being re-occupied, and a number of the smaller houses disappeared entirely, whilst many passed into the status of parish rectories, and became centres of education, as well as of worship for defined areas or "parishes." This brings us to the time of Archbishop Theodore (668—690).

(To be continued).

The Old Testament.

We are bound to regard the Old Testament as containing the voice of God speaking to man. The Old Testament writers were actuated primarily, and mainly, by a *religious* purpose. If once we lose sight of this fact, and think that we are to go to the Old Testament for exact historical information, or for accurate scientific knowledge, we are certain to go wrong, and to be disappointed. For it is in the sphere of *religious truth* that the inspiration of the Old Testament is found. The writing in which the truth is contained, whether it take the form of history or any other form, is merely the human framework, and, as such, subject to the limitations of human method.

—Rev. C. F. Burney.

"Consecration is not something done once for all, but is a maintained habit of the soul. A consecrated day is a framework ready prepared, in which God alone has to act in us, and through us."—*Adolph Monsu*.