

for obituary services, furnished with altars and shrines, and leaving room for the ministrations of a priest. They exhibit the growth of that ardent desire for propitiatory offices after death, which went on growing till the time of the Dissolution, and to which, undoubtedly, we owe a very large proportion of the benefactions of the mediæval centuries, and of many of the architectural adornments which still are the glory of our land. Walter de Merton was not by any means free from the idea of benefiting the departed soul, in its purgatorial state, by the purchased prayers of beneficiaries, for he left, by his first will, his whole residue, *in salutem animæ*, and provided chaplains to celebrate for his own and his parents' benefit; but he seems to have held this idea in a sober subordination to the higher motives (so plainly published in the preamble of his statutes) of glorifying God by his works of charity, and making a grateful return to the Giver of all good; and I cannot but regard his monument (for which, it may be remarked, he cared to leave no special provision) as in some measure an evidence of the truth of those words of his which are meant to declare his dominant motives in the disposition of his worldly wealth:—"De summi rerum et bonorum opificis bonitate confisus. . . . Ejusdem gratiæ, qui vota hominum pro sua voluntate disponit et dirigit, fidenter innisus. . . . Si quid sui nominis honori aliquid retribuam, sæpe sollicitus."—*Statutes*, 1274.

And these words and these motives I cannot do better than commend to the pious consideration and the loving imitation of all who bear his name, or profit by his benefactions.

THE ABBEYS OF YORKSHIRE ^a.

It may be with the partial eye of a native, yet I have always looked upon Yorkshire in point of interest to any one who searches for the beautiful, as the first of English counties. The physical configuration of the country marks it off rudely into three zones, running from south-east to north-west. Of these, the middle one comprises the rich level agricultural country between Doncaster on the south, and Darlington, just within the borders of Durham, on the north, and in which York itself is situated. Towards the sea-coast lies a second, comprising within it the wild moorlands between Whitby and Pickering, but without any considerable elevation of ground. While the third, lying to the west, commences northwardly, by Cumberland, with mountains nearly 3,000 feet high, and carries on these characteristics of the Lake District till it loses itself in the Peak of Derbyshire. In this third zone, the limestone, so remarkable for its numerous subterranean streams and caverns, and its no less beautifully varied waterfalls above-ground, forms the chief geological formation.

As indeed might be foreseen from the nature of the ground, Yorkshire

^a The substance of a Paper read before the Oxford Architectural Society, Dec. 1, 1858, by J. T. Jeffcock, Esq., F.S.A.

abounds in rivers; or, to speak more accurately, hemmed in by lofty mountains on the west, and with an elevated coast-line on the east, through which scarcely any brook can force its passage to the sea, the water which accumulates in the east and west zones flows inwards by various channels to the central plain, and issues by one noble outlet into the German Ocean. The many rivers which go to make up the Humber are, beginning from the north-west, the Swale, the Ure, the Skell, the Nid, the Wharfe, the Aire, together forming the Ouse river, and, lastly, the Don; while on the north-east rises the Derwent, with its tributary the Rie.

In so well-watered a country, interlaced with retreating valleys, which blend at one extremity with the great central vale, while towards their heads they gradually diffuse themselves into the moorland plateau, or terminate in the abrupt mountain side,—just where civilization begins to shade off into solitude,—where the face of the country in the vegetable life which covers it shews a struggle to be going on between art and nature,—just sufficiently removed from the bustle of the world, yet not altogether excluded from the possibility of participating at least by hearsay in its doings, stand the magnificent abbeys mentioned in this paper.

In a county which can boast of the minsters of Beverley and York, of the collegiate church of Howden, and a hundred masterpieces of parochial architecture, we look naturally for a like beauty and grandeur in its abbeys. Nor are we disappointed: Whitby, Byland, Rievaulx, Fountains, Kirkstall, and Bolton abbeys are not to be matched in any like space of ground.

In most instances the surrounding scenery adds wonderfully to the intrinsic beauties of the architecture. With that appreciation of natural sites which characterised the monastic orders, the abbeys of Yorkshire are most picturesquely situated. The dales in which the country abounds have each their monastic edifice. On the Yorkshire side of Teesdale, near Rokeby, is Egglestone Abbey; in Swaledale, near Richmond, is Easby; in the vale of the Ure is Jorvaulx; in Skelldale is Fountains; in Wharfedale is Bolton; in Airedale is Kirkstall; while situated where three tiny streams meet the branching Rie, is the sequestered Rievaulx. In strange contrast to these denizens of the vale stands out the stupendous form of Whitby Abbey. Erect, on a bold cliff, overlooking westward the gorge of the Esk, and presenting its northern side to the sea, it still totters on in spite of storm and tempest. As the sailor coasts along from the white cliffs of Flamborough and the castle-crowned crag of Scarborough, this abbey stands out as the next conspicuous landmark on the shore.

There are numerous abbeys, however, which cannot, like the former, be arranged according to the dales in which they are situated. Guisborough, some ten miles from Teesmouth; Mount Grace about the same distance from Northallerton; Byland, near Coxwold, the residence of Sterne; Bridlington Priory, near Flamborough Head; St. Mary's Abbey at York; Roche Abbey, near Doncaster; Monk Bretton, near Barnsley; and Selby Abbey church. All these, though perhaps inferior in general interest, are not far inferior to those above mentioned.

The first characteristic of Yorkshire abbeys is their picturesque sites. The very names of many of them betoken this: Jorvaulx and Rievaulx are the valleys of the Ure or Yore, and of the Rie; Fountains, *de fontibus*, points to the streams of Skelldale, *skell* signifying, according to Dr. Whitaker, "a fountain." Roche again, *de rupe*, takes its name from the limestone *rocks* which overhang its well-wooded valley. These, be it observed, are of the Cistercian Order, whose genius led them to search out

for uncultivated and wild localities; which characteristic was so general with them, that they obtained immunity from tithes on that account.

It is another curious fact that the greater part of the abbeys, and certainly the more noteworthy ones, were founded in the reigns of Henry I. and Stephen. In these reigns we have Nostel, Emmesay (afterwards removed to Bolton), Bridlington, Guisborough, Kirkham, Wartre, Drax, and Newborough, for Augustinian, or Black canons; Rievaulx, Fountains, Hode (removed afterwards to Byland), Sawley, Roche, Meaux, Bernoldswick (afterwards removed to Kirkstall), for Cistercian monks; besides several Benedictine and Præmonstratensian houses.

Burton, in his *Mon. Ebor.*, p. 57, remarks:—

“Within 150 years after the Conquest, or before 1 Hen. III., there were founded and refounded in England 476 abbeys and priories, besides 80 alien priories: of those, 14 abbeys, 44 priories, 7 alien priories, and 13 cells, 3 præceptories, and 3 commandries, were in this county; after that time there were many chantries, 28 houses of friers, many hospitals and colleges founded, but no houses of monks, nuns, or canons.”

It is strange there should have been such a mania for monastic institutions at this time, nor is it easy to realize in our days the principles which were at work in such cases. This period synchronizes with that of the Crusades; to these holy wars has been attributed the rise of monasteries. The Crusader left his lands either simply, or on condition they should be restored if he returned alive from Palestine. The Norman was naturally of a religious disposition even before these events, but now he kindled up into the most devoted zeal for God, and left manor after manor to endow or re-endow the monastery in which prayers were to be said for his soul. There is also another fact to be taken into account which I do not think has hitherto been made quite enough of. “Soon come, soon gone,” says the adage: the Norman conquerors had received their broad estates in England at so very cheap a bargain, that they seem almost to have felt nauseated with the glut of land. Consequently they made over a good slice of their possessions to the new monastery, which, by diligent and regular cultivation, soon turned it to better account than the warrior lord or the ill-fed serf had inclination to do. It is not improbable, too, that in some cases a twinge of compunction for the ousting of the Saxon may have prompted the dedication of some portion of the ill-gotten gains to the service of religion. But on the whole, it is clear that the main object was the safety of the souls of the founder, his ancestors and his heirs, as most of the foundation-charters declare; in fact, it was the ecclesiastical doctrine of salvation by works which caused these edifices to be raised.

But what must ever be of prime importance and interest in an architectural point of view, is, that the rage for building monasteries arose at the same time that the Norman and Early English styles were in vogue in England. To gaze on the massive Norman nave of Selby Abbey church certainly makes one feel thankful that the power and talent, no less than the will, were present to rear such a splendid edifice.

And why is it that our abbeys attract such deserved attention? Their sites are beautiful; there is the peaceful repose in which they lie, nestling by the copse in the secluded vale. The idea of age, too, which the time-worn and tottering fabric, with its festoons of ivy, its mosses and lichens, imparts, adds to the feeling of reverence. But surely it is not too much to say that that style of architecture where the stern Norman blends into the chaste Early English, or where the Early English stands out in all its beauty and purity complete, has more to do with the soul-elevating feelings

which a ruined abbey inspires; than either its venerable age or its fairy situation.

Suppose for a moment the periods of architectural styles had remained as now, but the era for building monasteries had happened not when it really did, but, say, a century before the Reformation; instead of the beautiful pointed arch, the most graceful of Christian forms, we should have had the obtuse Tudor arch with its Perpendicular tracery, and our abbeys would have been no grander than most of our parish churches. A ruined Perpendicular building rarely looks well, even if we grant it to look so when entire. The fact is, the styles seem admirably adapted to the offices which they had respectively to fulfil. The simple, almost ideal symmetry of the Early English, accords entirely with the simple devotedness of the Crusader, who forsook his home to fight for the Holy Sepulchre, who seems a character severed from modern sympathy, without the ordinary desires and employments of men such as now are. The Perpendicular seems a more domesticated, a more matter-of-fact style; certainly for use, perhaps for ornament. It accords well with the days of parish churches to be hereafter filled with a sermon-loving population; it is quite in its place in the country mansion, or the larger society of the college.

To this former style belong, of the Yorkshire abbeys, Roche, Rievaulx, and Fountains, Bolton, Whitby, and Kirkstall. It certainly strikes one with surprise that so many glorious edifices could within a few short years have risen within so short a distance of each other. But having accounted for the original endowments, we may easily picture to ourselves a vigorous abbot, aided by earnest coadjutors, employing those bands of masons who probably may have completed in succession, or at least have assisted in raising, each of these splendid edifices. Curiously enough, these laborious and skilful workmen have left traces of themselves,—yet who shall read their writing? I have myself seen on very many of the stones of Roche Abbey, (begun 1145,) and of Mount Grace Priory, the “masons’ marks,” by which each man’s work might be recognised, when he delivered up the tale of his labours to his overlooker.

It would be impossible on this occasion to go through any detailed account of the several monastic ruins: I can only confine myself to general observations. One thing which has struck me in examining these ruins, is the zeal and zest with which the architect entered into his own conceptions of architectural style, and his utter lack of entering into those of his predecessors.

It will be observed that in many cases a later age found it necessary to add to the buildings of an earlier one. Nothing would seem to us more reasonable than that the architect should have made his additions and alterations in the same style as that in which the original edifice was designed. But if we look at the tower of Fountains Abbey, or at that of Bolton, which was in course of erection when the mandate for the dissolution of the abbeys came down from Henry VIII., or, what is still more glaringly incongruous, the Perpendicular work surmounting the truncated transition tower at Kirkstall, and the conical caps of the buttresses transformed into florid pinnacles at the same place,—it will be at once evident that the idea of a former age could not be realized or carried out by the architect of a later one. Similar, and perhaps the example will be more familiar to many, is the case of Iffley Church. Originally a Norman building, it has received alterations from many subsequent hands: there are remains of Early English in it, and, until lately, a neat little Perpendicular

window was inserted in the circular window of the west end. For myself, I think it a pity that the later window should have been removed, for it illustrated the principle to which I have called attention, and might, I think, have been urged in extenuation of the deeds of churchwardens *circa* A.D. 1750, for it testified to the fact that in reality the churchwardens of that epoch were no worse than their predecessors, since they only altered according to their light, and added stairs, and gangways, and galleries, in accordance with the fashion of the times.

A consideration, however, of the addition of this Perpendicular work to that of earlier styles, would seem to indicate that in art, creation and criticism are rarely found together. Ask Homer on what principles he wrote the *Iliad*, and surely he could not have answered. Ask Longinus to create a like poem, and the prince of critics would have been dumb. Similarly it would seem that the mighty souls of our Early English architects, who might be able to create a Rievaulx, could not, certainly did not, sufficiently enter into the genius of the preceding Norman to make their additions in the like style, nor the school of Wykeham in like manner appreciate the elegant lines and graceful curves of the Early English styles, so as to make their restorations or alterations harmonize congruously with the elder architecture.

This is a point on which I dwell the readier, as it so nearly concerns the hopes of architecture at the present time. The present age is decidedly critical; we are confessedly a restoring age; our imitations are wonderful, they are models to the life. But it is asked, "Can we create the living form, or is it but the lifeless statue after all?" Before the Reformation there was creation, but no criticism; last-century-Gothic had neither creation nor criticism in it; we certainly have the latter,—have we the former? Our fathers had neither,—have we both? In the parish church of Doncaster, the finest church in Yorkshire,—shall I say in England? which the present century has produced, I think we may discover the spirit of creation still inspiring our architects, and realizing itself in the chaste forms of curve and arch, as it did six centuries ago.

In addition to their architectural merits, the abbeys of Yorkshire have enjoyed a general celebrity through the poets who have sung of them. "Egglestone's grey ruins" and "high Whitby's cloistered pile" obtain a niche in Sir Walter Scott's poems; Fountains has become the type name for an English abbey, from its wonderful beauty and extent; Wordsworth has celebrated the Priory of Bolton both in his "White Doe of Rylstone" and a separate poem, "The Founding of Bolton Priory."

In Sir H. Ellis's Letters, (3rd series, vol. iii. p. 33), is given a letter attributed to Cuthbert Shirebrook, a dignified ecclesiastic, relating partly to the suppression of the abbey of Roche. He says:—

"There is an abbey, hard by me, called the Roche Abbey, a house of White Monks; a very fair builded house, all of freestone; and every house vaulted with freestone, and covered with lead, (as the abbeys was in England, as well as the churches be). At the breaking up whereof an uncle of mine was present, being well acquainted with certain of the monks there; and when they were put forth of the house, one of the monks, his friend, told him that every one of the convent had given to him his cell, wherein he lied; wherein was not anything of price, but his bed and apparel, which was but simple and of small price; which monk willed my uncle to buy something of him; who said, I see nothing that is worth money to my use. No, said he; give me ij^d. for my cell door, which was never made with v^s. No, said my uncle, I know not what to do with it. (For he was a young man, unmarried, and then neither stood need of houses nor doors.) But such persons as afterwards bought their corn and hay, or such like, found all the

doors either open, or the locks and shackles plucked away, or the door itself taken away, went in and took what they found, filched it away.

"Some took the Service Books that lied in the church, and laid them upon their waine coppes to peice the same; some took windows of the Hayleith, and hid them in their hay: and likewise they did of many other things; for some pulled forth the iron hooks out of the walls that bought none, when the yeomen and gentlemen of the country had bought the timber of the church. For the church was the first thing that was put to the spoil; and then the abbot's lodging, dortor, and frater, with the cloister and all the buildings thereabout, within the abbey walls; for nothing was spared but the ox-houses and swinecoates, and such other houses of office that stood without the walls, which had more favour showed them than the very church itself; which was done by the advice of Cromwell, as Fox reporteth in his Book of Acts and Monuments. It would have pitied any heart to see what tearing up of the lead there was, and plucking ap of boards, and throwing down of the sparrs; and when the lead was torn off and cast down into the church, and the tombs in the church all broken (for in most abbeys were divers noble men and women, yea, and in some abbeys kings, whose tombs were regarded no more than the tombs of all other inferior persons; for to what end should they stand, when the church over them was not spared for their cause), and all things of price either spoiled, carped away, or defaced to the uttermost.

"The persons that cast the lead into foddors, plucked up all the seats in the choir, wherein the monks sat when they said service, which were like to the seats in minsters, and burned them, and melted the lead therewithall; although there was wood plenty within a flight shot of them, for the abbey stood among the woods and the rocks of stone; in which rocks was pewter vessels found that was conveyed away and there hid: so that it seemeth that every person lent himself to filch and spoil what he could; yea, even such person were content to spoil them that seemed not two days before to allow their religion, and do great worship and reverence to their mattins, masses, and other service, and all other their doings; which is a strange thing to say, that they could this day think it to be the House of God, and the next day the House of the Devil; or else they would not have been so ready to have spoiled it.

"For the better proof of this my saying, I demanded of my father, thirty years after the suppression, which had bought part of the timber of the church, and all the timber in the steeple, with the bell-frame, with others his partners therein, (in the which steeple hung viij., yea, ix. bells whereof the least but one could not be bought at this day for xx^s., which bells I did see hang there myself more than a year after the suppression,) whether he thought well of the Religious persons and of the Religion then used? And he told me, Yea; for, said he, I did see no cause to the contrary. Well, said I, then how came it to pass you was so ready to destroy and spoil the thing that you thought well of? What should I do? said he. Might I not as well as others have some profit of the spoil of the abbey? for I did see all would away; and therefore I did as others did.

"Thus you may see that as well they that thought well of the religion then used, as they which thought otherwise, could agree well enough, and too well, to spoil them. Such a devil is covetousness and mammon! and such is the providence of God to punish sinners, in making themselves instruments to punish themselves, and all their posterity from generation to generation! For no doubt there hath been millions of millions that have repented the thing since; but all too late. And thus much upon my own knowledge touching the fall of the said Roche Abbey."

Such was the suppression of an abbey: and though

" . . . the gentle work begun
By nature, softening and concealing,
And busy with a hand of healing ^b,"

has now brought the ruin to its present state of loveliness, we can well conceive the exasperation which worked up the galled feelings of a county, suddenly robbed of so many, such beautiful, and such hospitable monasteries, into that rising known in history as "The Pilgrimage of Grace."

^b Wordsworth, White Doe of Rylstone, canto i.