

## SOME OLD CHURCH CHESTS.

STOKE DABERNON  
SURREY



THE vestries of many of our country parish churches we may see the old oak chests in which the registers and other parochial documents have been kept from time immemorial. In some instances, these repositories are

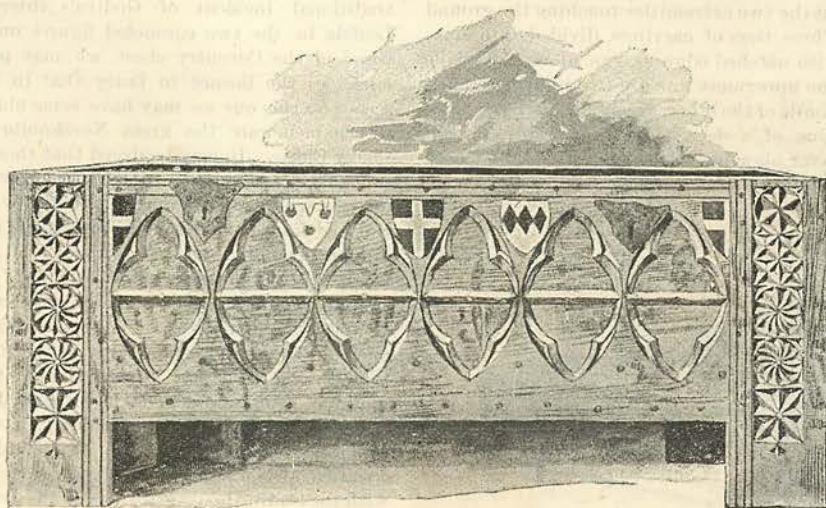
damp and decaying, dusty and cobwebby; and sometimes we find them turned out of the vestry into some lonely, shadowy corner of the aisles; but in many more instances they are well cared for, and their value and interest fully recognised. Some of our larger town churches, too, have preserved their chests; and in still rarer instances our cathedrals have not parted with some of the great chests in which the more costly robes of bishops and other clergy were formerly kept, but have found them a quiet resting-place either in their dim crypts, or in some equally safe solitude.

Some chests are raised from the ground on short legs formed by the framework at the four angles. Some touch the ground on three sides, but have their fronts cut away to be clear of it. The bases of others are flat and square. A further diversity is obtained in their treatment. Some are made wholly of oak, or some other hard wood, and elaborately carved. Others are left plain, plank by plank, but strengthened with hand-wrought ironwork of an ornamental character, on which the smith has lavished his utmost skill.

There is a fine "early" example of an ancient chest

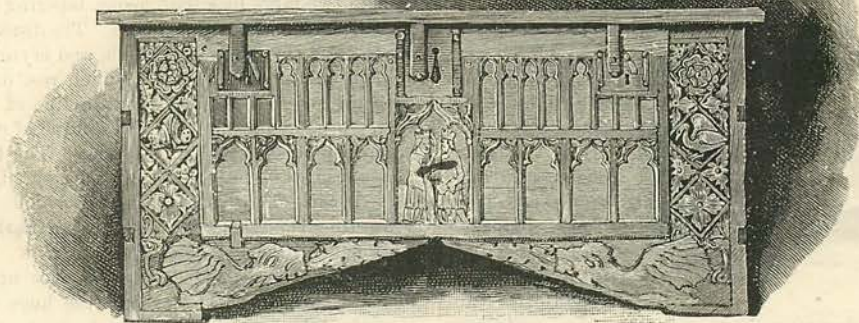
in St. John's Church, Glastonbury. It is lidless, though two large lock scutcheons, tapering to a point, are still in their original places. The front measures six feet and two inches in length, and is enriched with six equilateral cusped arches, which rest on six more that are inverted, and thus form a line of vesica-like carved ornamentation. Above this line of enrichment are five shields painted on the wood. The legs, which raise the chest eight inches from the ground, are richly carved with dog-tooth ornament, which leaves its Transitional (*i.e.*, between Norman and Early English) workmanship beyond question.

Coventry has a good example. Once upon a time Coventry was a walled city, and the huge wall stood screening the houses and their pleasant gardens like a great stone curtain three miles in circumference. And as the population increased, and the people were still desirous of benefiting by the protection the wall afforded, the pleasant gardens had rows of houses built in them, and became crowded lanes and courts. We may see somewhat of the picturesqueness of the old city to-day in its half-timbered houses with projecting upper storeys, the wooden effigy of Peeping Tom still apparently peeping at Lady Godiva out of an upper window, and its three grand parish churches, St. Michael's, Trinity, and Christchurch, with their three tall spires, and its fine old St. Mary's Hall; but not all that our predecessors saw in the days of old, for the wall has been taken down, and bright villas with gay gardens are spread beyond the old confines in every direction. However, in St. Michael's Church we shall find one of the old chests belonging to the old times. It is of the workmanship that is known as "Late Gothic." The front of it is carved with two rows of panels with cusped traceried headings, whereof the lower is twice as wide as the upper and has cusped spandrils. In the



CHURCH OF ST. JOHN, GLASTONBURY.

IN ST. MICHAEL'S,  
COVENTRY.



centre of this ornamentation, immediately below the large lock, is a larger oblong panel on which are carved two coroneted figures, and at the two ends of it are lozenged panels nine and a half inches wide, filled with Tudor roses and grotesque creatures. Doubtless various interpretations may be put upon these delineations, but bearing in mind the traditions of the city, how Leofric taxed the citizens, how Godiva importuned him to remit his charges, and how he consented to do so on the condition that she would ride through the streets, which she did, veiled only by her long and beautiful hair, we may allow ourselves the option of naming the two regal-looking figures Leofric and Godiva.

Alnwick has another of these old chests. It is not so old as the Coventry chest, nor as the Glastonbury chest; but it is large and massive and handsome. It is seven feet long good measure, two feet ten inches high, and two feet seven inches wide. The base of the centre of the front is cut away, which shaping leaves the framework at the two extremities touching the ground like legs. Three tiers of carvings, divided into compartments with notched edgings, run along the whole front. On the uppermost line are two hunting scenes, one the fac-simile of the other, except for one particular, both consisting of a deer, a dog, a man in a broad-brimmed beaver blowing a horn, and a tree, and both

facing the large iron lock in the centre. The difference consists in the deer being a hind on one side and a hart on the other. The other two rows are filled with representations of winged dragons, two on each tier, facing each other, and some intervening foliage. The ends are carved with dragons diversified with the heads of beasts and birds, and with leafed scrolls on the lowermost divisions. This chest is in the vestry of St. Michael's Church. On entering the church by the porch in the south aisle, on which are carved some ancient Percy heraldic insignia, one descends several steps, and then the eye is greeted with two noble arcades passing from the extreme west to the uttermost east, great traceried windows full of stained glass, oaken roofs, carved stalls, recumbent effigies, and mural monuments, in one first glance; and in front, opposite to the high and heavy entrance-door, is the vestry, and in it stands the chest that has been mentioned.

If we may see some old attempt to depict the traditional incident of Godiva's intercession with Leofric in the two coroneted figures on the central panel of the Coventry chest, we may perhaps allow ourselves the licence to fancy that in the hunting-scenes on this one we may have some old-world effort to commemorate the great Northumbrian romance, Chevy Chase. It may be urged that these chests were probably manufactured in large numbers in Flanders and elsewhere, and simply purchased when required. But we know that things often work together in a different fashion from this, and that local talent is more frequently employed than overlooked, and we may assume that it has been so before our own experience of the fact. This leaves us free to ask whether we may not have here some faint yet faithful allusion to the great "woeful" hunting incident that Northumbrian song and legend have handed down to us. Any Northumbrian, in any century, having acquired sufficiency of his art to carve this chest, would have acquired also a sufficiency of culture to be familiar with the leading historical facts of the district. And it seems not to be unreasonable to take this artistic effort,



Church Brampton Northhamptonshire

comparatively rude though it may be, to represent one more stone thrown upon the cairn to perpetuate the remembrance of local heroism.

Winchester and Ewerby have also handsome carved chests, with ornamental circles that speak of fourteenth-century carvers. In Empingham Church, near Stamford, there is a fine cedar chest with incised tracery and figures. And in Whitwell Church there is an example cut out of a solid tree of oak.

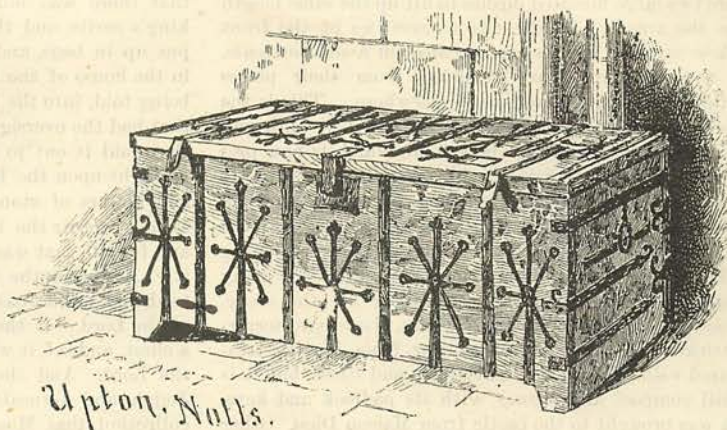
There is another example in Upton Church, in Nottinghamshire, of a different description. On the roughly hewn surfaces of front, lid, and ends are laid

straps of wrought iron at irregular distances, which divide it into compartments. In the centre of each of the spaces thus left is an additional band wrought out into the rough outlines of a star with floriated points. At each end are four iron bands and an iron chain for a handle. It is six feet three inches long, two feet six inches high, and two feet wide.

In West Horsley Church there is another oaken chest strengthened with iron straps, but smaller and of much greater simplicity than the Upton example. It has two massive locks and a central hasp for a padlock. It has also an iron bar perforated with holes, by means of which the lid can be held up when required. The ends of the iron straps are beaten out into a rude fleur-de-lys.

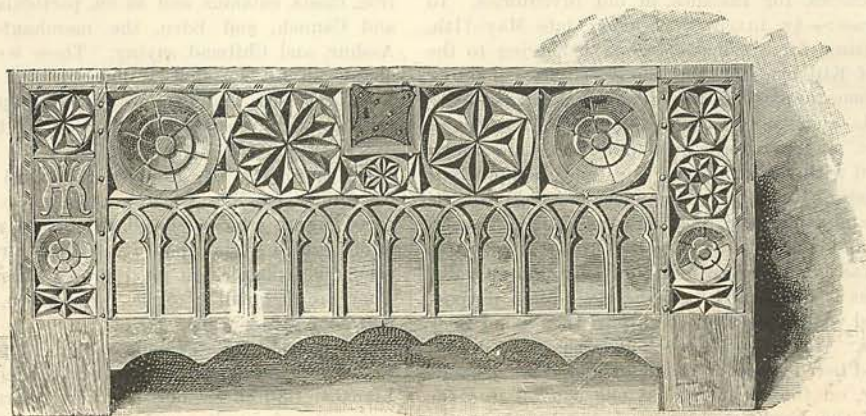
At Church Brampton, in Northamptonshire, there is an ancient chest enriched with floriated and scrolled ironwork on the front. The edges are strengthened with iron corner-straps beaten out into fleurs-de-lys at the ends, and the hinges are also treated ornamentally.

There is a grand chest in the vestry of St. Mary's Church, Mortlake. This is made of walnut, inlaid with ebony and boxwood. The chief ornamentation



of the front consists of its elaborate lock, with its four squares of tracery at the angles of it, and large and long hasps, and the fine lozenge-shaped scutcheons for fine ring-handles. There are also very richly wrought handles at the side. The lid considerably overhangs the chest, and has two lions' heads carved at the corners of it. The chief beauty of this example is on the underside of this lid, where there is some very elaborate tracery in tinned ironwork sunk level with the woodwork, and we may see, by traces of it, that red velvet or cloth has once set it off. There is a central, large circular ornament, which is a continuation of the hasp, and there are two squares of similar work, one on either side of it, which are extensions of the hinges, and disposed all round is a border which breaks up at regular intervals into a design formed of rectangular lines.

In the Church of St. George at South Acre, in Norfolk, there is an ancient carved oak chest of a familiar type, on which there is a row of twelve cusped arches. Over this line of ornament, on the centre of the front, is the lock, a little tilted out of the square made for its reception, and on either side

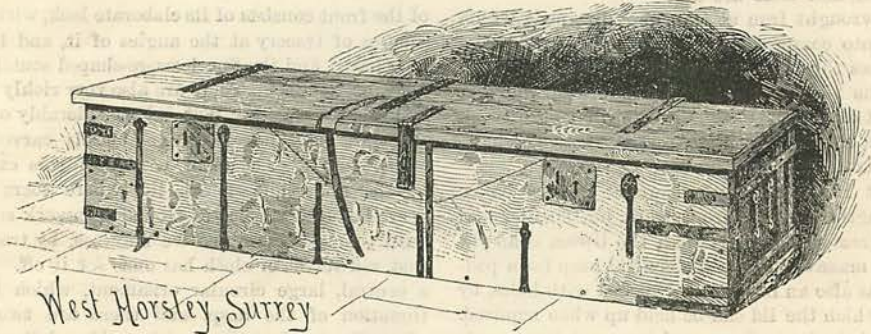


CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE, SOUTH ACRE, NORFOLK.

are two large floriated circles to fill up the same length as the arcade. At the two extremities of the front these circular figures are repeated on a smaller scale.

Some examples are removed from their places altogether, and taken care of elsewhere. This is the case of a chest four feet long by two feet high and two feet wide, that has a coped lid, which is now preserved in the old castle in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It has seen many stormy days: Scots bearing down upon Newcastle time upon time, the town besieged, the steeple of St. Nicholas' Church full of prisoners, Charles the First a detained resident there for many months, Oliver Cromwell appearing on the scene, Jacobite risings; and many times, doubtless, terror-stricken folk have rushed to it or from it with treasured valuables under great strain and stress, but it is still compact and strong, with its padlock and keys. It was brought to the castle from Maison Dieu. Other

that there was much money in the chest, that the king's scribe and the high priest came up, and they put up in bags, and told the money that was found in the house of the Lord. And they gave the money, being told, into the hands of them that did the work, that had the oversight of the house of the Lord: and they laid it out to the carpenters and builders, that wrought upon the house of the Lord, and to masons, and hewers of stone, and to buy timber and hewed stone to repair the breaches of the house of the Lord, and for all that was laid out for the house to repair it." Again, in the Second Book of the Chronicles we read that when Joash was minded to repair the house of the Lord, "at the king's commandment they made a chest, and set it without at the gate of the house of the Lord. And they made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem to bring in to the Lord the collection that Moses the servant of God laid upon



removed examples, though very rich and handsome, are, on the contrary, sometimes put to very incongruous uses. A superbly carved chest of fourteenth-century workmanship, covered with interlacing arches and floriated ornament, was recently found in a farmhouse near Brinkburn Priory, used as a bacon-chest. But these instances are rare. We read of many more that have been quite lost. There is frequent mention of church chests, for instance, in old inventories. To give a case:—An inventory bearing date May 11th, 1536, setting forth the possessions belonging to the Priory of Kilburn, mentions many articles belonging to the domestic parts of the convent, such as bedsteads of boards, and "a standinge bedd wt four postes of weynscot," and "a trundle bedd under the same," and a "cubbord with two aumbreys," etc., and then proceeds to enumerate items belonging more especially to the church, and among the hangings and altar-cloths and chalices and copes, we come to two "chestes wt div'se bookes p'teinynge to the church, bookes of no val'."

A chest is mentioned as being used for a purpose connected with a place of worship in the Second Book of Kings. We read—"But Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of the Lord: and the priests that kept the door put therein all the money that was brought into the house of the Lord. And it was so, when they saw

Israel in the wilderness. And all the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end." The prophet Ezekiel, too, when indicating the riches of Tyrus and the number of its far-sought merchants, and mentioning those who traded in the fairs with emeralds, purple, broidered work, fine linen, coral, agate, wheat, wine, white wool, precious clothes for chariots, bright iron, cassia, calamus, and so on, particularises Haran, and Canneh, and Eden, the merchants of Sheba, Asshur, and Chilmad, saying, "These were thy merchants in all sorts of things, in blue clothes, and broidered work, and in chests of rich apparel, bound with cords, and made of cedar, among thy merchandise."

In the choir of Amiens Cathedral there is a bas-relief showing a chest used as a table by a robed figure who is seated at it and writing on a tablet which rests upon it. There are also some very fine examples in good preservation in France. They are frequently to be noticed, too, in the vignettes of ancient manuscripts.

There are many ancient oaken alms-chests still to be seen in many of our ancient churches. In Llanaber Church—a massive, heavy structure about two miles from Barmouth, on the sea-bound road to Harlech—there is an old alms-chest cut out of a single block of wood. They are generally, however,

ornamented with carvings and floriated ironwork. One at Dayton, in Berkshire, is a plain oblong box, bound about with straight iron straps, with three hinged hasps to it, and standing on a solid wooden pedestal. At St. Peter's-in-the-East, Oxford, there is an example, ornamented with floriated scroll-work in iron, which is fastened by a padlock to a hook in the wall, which hook is placed in the midst of much handsomer scroll-work, climbing up the wall plant-fashion. In Meare Church, Somerset, there is a specimen of a different kind again, for the chest is square and plain, but raised on a richly panelled and columniated pedestal. In several instances, as at Irchester and Mears Ashby in Northamptonshire, and Hartland in Devonshire, the alms-chest is placed on the capping of the pews. The regulation

requiring the provision of alms-chests, only stipulated they should be set and fastened in the most convenient place, to the intent the parishioners should be able to put their alms into them for their poorer neighbours. Three keys were ordered, that the churchwardens and clergyman should have one apiece. And the order continues:—"And the Parson, Vicar, or Curate shall diligently, from time to time—and especially when men make their testaments—call upon, exhort, and move their neighbours to confer and give, as they may well spare, to the said chest." The keepers of the keys were required yearly, quarterly, or oftener, to open the chest and divide the alms amongst the poor and needy, in the presence of most of the parish, or of six of the principal parishioners. S. W.

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## A SERMON FOR THE DEAF.

BY THE REV. MICHAEL EASTWOOD.

"The deaf shall hear the words of the book."—ISAIAH XXIX. 18.



OR some time past you have wondered at the indistinctness of speech (as you deemed it) amongst your friends and acquaintances. Sometimes you have been irritated by it—just a little. But you have at last acknowledged with your usual honesty that you

are very deaf. Will you accept a word of sympathy—not a word of pity, but of hope? It is by no means impossible that your hearing may be restored: perhaps by some shock to your system, perhaps yet by the staid finger of science—or, as you and I would reverently regard it, the healing touch of Christ, still in the world, no longer local but universal. But rest assured that if the Master leaves you as you are, it is for some good purpose; and what you lose in one faculty shall be given you in another.

And now, after this word of sympathy and hope, you will accept a word of remonstrance; and you will find it sympathy still, under another aspect. It is reported that you contemplate retirement from God's house on the ground that you cannot hear the sermon. But I want to remind you that—

(1) Although you cannot hear, yet YOU CAN SEE. God has spared your sight. Let it be your duty and your pleasure to use it in His house as well as your own. There is much to see in God's house. The very walls have become sacred, and yield forth pictures of the past. If chaste and beautiful, enriched by the gifts of those who feel they cannot live in beautiful homes without making God's house beautiful too, those walls have a ministry which all worshippers have learnt to love. But if those walls are bare and unadorned, they are now transfigured after standing

guard over God's poor for generations, by listening, as it were, to the prayers of humble worshippers; yes, and they are illuminated by God's smile of approval, like rocky hills at sunset. Ah! yes, to your wistful gaze, intensified by the loss of another faculty, those bare rugged walls will yield many a sacred picture.

And you can see the minister. Though you cannot hear him, it is something to see him if he be a true servant of God. You can mark the movement of his finger. You can see the gladness lighting up his face one moment, and the pain overshadowing it the next. By his gesture, by his expression, and by your own quick sympathy, you will sometimes know what he is saying, as in one breath he invites the sinner to Christ, and in the next seeks to urge the saint to fuller consecration.

And you can see the congregation: the old man whose hair has grown white in the service of God; that little child "with grave fresh lip," turning round to look at you with large soft eyes; the mother laying down the burden and the care; the strong man finding inspiration for the battle of life; the widow mourning a soldier's grave far away; the maiden who, as you can see, has brought to God's house the dream of her love, with all its tender helpfulness, and all its prophecy of pain; yes, and that graceless youth over there who is behaving so badly. So he is; but look again, and you may perceive the making of a good man (by God's grace) even in him. And as it happens that you have some influence over him, will you use it? That boy may be destined to become a gifted minister of Christ, and some day he will reprove others, not by harsh words, but by reminding them how he regrets having once behaved so badly in God's house himself. Will it not be a joy to you, whether in this world or a better, that you