

The Choir stalls story

Preface

These few notes are intended to serve as a guide to the subjects illustrated by the figures in the Choir Stalls of this Church.

The writer gratefully acknowledges help most heartily rendered by the Rev. Canon Edmonds and Miss Duckworth.

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The Story of PRAISE and PRAYER in the CHURCH OF GOD.

We have tried to write this in English Oak in the Choir Stalls of this Church. The large figures on the Bench-ends represent the great minstrels of the Church of God. On the one side the Blessed Virgin speaks to us of the Magnificat, and on the other Simeon sings to us his "Nunc Dimittis." Here are also Miriam and Hannah, and we remember how from the latter and the lesser the authoress of the greater "Magnificat," drew something of her inspiration. Here are Moses and David, as writers of the Psalms which have always formed a part of the worship of God's Church, and there on the other side are Isaiah and S. John with their angel songs, from which Christian liturgies have taken their words of praise, "Holy, Holy, Holy,"

(the Ter Sanctus). Further on we have figures of S. Ambrose and S. Augustine, the traditional authors of the "Te Deum." It is said that the verses of this great creed hymn were composed under inspiration, and recited alternately by S.S. Ambrose and Augustine immediately after the Baptism of the latter in 387. Some doubt. We commemorate the tradition.

On the South Side in the niches we read the story of

PRAISE.

EPHRAIM OF EDESSA born A.D. 307, claims a place as representing the hymn writers of the Ancient Church of Syria. The language of their hymns was probably the very language spoken by the common people of Palestine in the time of our lord. These hymns are metrical sermons, designed to teach the story of our Lord's life.

GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS represents the Greek hymn writers. The last years of his life were employed in sacred Poetry. The following are very free translations of old Greek hymns —

"Come ye faithful raise the strain."
"Art thou weary."
"O happy band of pilgrims,"

AMBROSE. Bishop of Milan, 374 A.D., the earnest and brilliant defender of the Catholic Faith against the Arians of the West, as Athanasius against the Arians of the East. We are concerned with him as "The father of Church song." He introduced from the East the practice of Antiphonal Chanting. He has a right to a place here, as representing writers of Latin hymns and as the real founder of hymn singing in the West. In our own hymn book the following are translations of Ambrosian hymns —

"O come redeemer of mankind appear."
"O Jesu, Lord of life and grace."
"Three in One and One in Three "

In the Boys' Stalls on the South Side are four kneeling figures of writers from among English Bishops.

KEN. In earlier life rector of Brightstone, Isle of Wight. He boldly rebuked vice, first in the Prince of Orange and afterwards in King Charles II. He was appointed Bishop of Bath and Wells in 1685, but was deprived of his bishopric because he firmly refused to take an oath which he believed to be unlawful. He finds his place here as the author of the morning and evening hymns —

"Awake my soul and with the sun."
"Glory to Thee, my God this night."

HEBER. Bishop of Calcutta, 1823, has a right to a high place among hymn writers. Heber was remarkable for having pressed into sacred service the freer rhythms of the poetry of his time, and while his hymns were more florid than our best early hymns they were never less reverent —

“Brightest and best of the sons of the morning”

is a good example of this freer rhythm. As Bishop he ordained in India the first Christian native—Christian David. was author of —

"From Greenland's icy mountains."

" The Son of God goes forth to war."

and best of all " Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty."

WALSHAM HOW . Bishop of Wakefield, 1888, was the author of several sacred songs which have attained a place in the front rank. The following hymns are among these —

" O Jesu, Thou art standing."

" For all the saints who from their labours rest."

" We give Thee but Thine own."

BICKERSTETH. Bishop of Exeter, 1885. His reputation as a hymn writer has extended far and wide. The best known and most popular of his hymns are —

"Peace, perfect peace," *and* "'Till He come."

BISHOP BICKERSTETH consecrated this Church, 1900, A .D.

In the Stalls on the North Side, we read the story of
LITURGICAL PRAYER.

The names of LEO, GELASIUS and GREGORY, Bishops of Rome in 440, 492, and 540 respectively, are popularly believed to have been authors of three important Sacramentaries. The Sacramentary was a book used in the Western Church which contained not only the prayers for the Holy Eucharist, but prayers to be used at the performance of every Sacramental Rite, Baptism, Confirmation, Dedication of Churches, etc. The Roman Sacramentaries are divided into three classes, the Leonian, Gelasian, and Gregorian. The Leonian enable us to carry back the origin of many of our finest Collects, to a date earlier than the 6th Century. From the Gelasian we learn what were the contents of the Altar Book in the 7th Century. Gregory revised the work of Gelasius "removing many things, changing a few and adding some." In the 8th Century, Egbert, Archbishop of York, spoke of "Gregory's Missal," and he meant without doubt the Sacramentary which at that time passed in England as the work of Gregory. The figures of Leo, Gelatius, and Gregory cry for a place here as of men who have left their mark in the history of Liturgical Prayer. Probably the use of Gregory's Missal was encouraged by S. Augustine, and probably a Liturgy closely akin to this was the Service which in consequence of its revision by Osmund, Bishop of Sarum, or Salisbury, in 1085, became known as the "Use of Sarum" and was introduced into Exeter during the 13th Century.

OSMUND, the first of the kneeling figures in the Boys' stalls came to England with William the Conqueror, whose nephew he was, and fought at the Battle of Hastings. When more peaceable times came he took Holy Orders and became an eminent Churchman. It is said that a riot at Glastonbury was the cause of Osmund taking in hand this adaptation of an earlier Liturgy. A Musical Abbot introduced there a Norman Method of Psalm-singing. There were Psalm riots, as in later days there were Surplice riots. Osmund brought peace by giving some

Norman colouring to an earlier Liturgy. This was the Sarum Missal which in time became popular and was destined to be the parent of the Liturgy which was one day to be used by the whole Church of England, the first Prayer Book of Edward VI.

ARCHBISHOP CRANMER was the head of the revising Committee by whom the First Prayer Book of Edward VI was issued in 1549. This, the first complete version in English of the Service Books of the Church, gives clear evidence of the Catholic Spirit by which the Primate was prompted. He firmly repudiated the Supremacy of the Bishop of Rome, but he had no desire to yield to the influence of the Protestant Party by sweeping away the beliefs and practices which came down to the Anglican Church from primitive times.

COSIN, Bishop of Durham, 1660, deserves well the place which he finds here. Driven into exile by the Puritans in 1644, he returns in 1660. The enemy alike of Puritanism and Popery he was devoted to ancient ritual and order, and was above all men of his time familiar with the Sarum Missal and other office books of the Old Church of England. A lasting service to the Church, a service which is here commemorated, was his invaluable contribution to the work of the final revision of the Prayer Book in 1661. Cosin composed the Collects for 3rd Sunday in Advent, 6th Sunday after Epiphany, and for Easter Eve.

ANDREWS was Chaplain to Queen Elizabeth, and Bishop of Winchester during the reigns of James I and Charles I. He was eminent for his learning and piety, and this place is accorded to him here as one who by his "Manual of Devotion," showed that there still lived in the Church that Spirit of Prayer, which in otherdays was found so remarkable in those who composed our Prayer Book Collects. As a teacher and leader of souls in the highest paths of private devotion, training them to follow the thoughts and so to feel at home with the words of the Ancient Church, Andrews stands still alone.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE VARIOUS SOURCES OF ENGLISH CHRISTIANITY.

There are four large figures in the panels of the front bench-ends.. The two on the South Side - S. GREGORY and S. AUGUSTINE represent the Roman source of English Christianity. On the North side, S. COLUMBA represents the Scotie (Irish) source, to which English Christians owe so much. The fourth figure stands for S. DAVID, the patron Saint of our Church, who was Bishop of Menevia, (Wales), and died in 601. The dedication connects us with that Ancient British Church which was driven into the hills of the West by the invasion of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, and which is still represented by the four Welsh Dioceses.

In front of the Choir Stalls, on the North and South sides, the conversion of the Heptarchy is illustrated by six Kings and the Bishops to whom they and their peoples owed the introduction of Christianity.

ETHELBERT, 560-616. AUGUSTINE, d. 604. Ethelbert was King of the Jutes, in Kent. He married Bertha, a Christian Princess from Gaul. He and his people were converted by St. Augustine, who was sent from Rome by Gregory the Great. Augustine planted the Church at Canterbury in 597.

EDWIN, 617-633. PAULINUS. Edwin was King of Northumbria, a district which corresponded, nearly, with Northumberland, Durham, York, and Scotland to the Forth. Edwin married Ethelburga, daughter of Ethelbert and Bertha, and she was accompanied by Paulinus,

a companion of Augustine, who planted the Church at York in 627. But the conversion of Northumbria was checked by the defeat and death of Edwin at the battle of Heathfield, 633. Paulinus fled with Ethelburga to Kent, where Paulinus died Bishop of Rochester.

OSWALD, 635-642. AIDAN, d. 651. S. Oswald, King of Northumbria, married the daughter of Kynegils, King of Wessex. Oswald had learnt Christianity from the Scotie (Irish) Monks established by S. Columba, on the island of Iona. Thence came S. Aidan, the Evangelist of the North. S. Aidan's Diocese of Lindisfarne became the ancestor of the See of Durham.

OSWY, 642-670. CHAD. Oswy, King of Northumbria, married Eanfreda, daughter of Edwin. S. Chad completed the conversion of Northumbria, and that of the Midlands, where he died fifth Bishop of Lichfield, a See which had been established in the reign of Peada, first Christian King of Mercia.

KYNEGILS, 611-643. BIRINUS, d. 650. The kingdom of the West Saxons was founded about 519 by Cerdic, the ancestor of the Queen. Her pedigree runs through Egbert, the first King who united the Heptarchy into one kingdom, and Alfred the Great. At the time of the introduction of Christianity, Wessex probably comprised the counties of Hampshire, Wilts, Dorset, Oxfordshire, and parts of Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire. King Kynegils and his people owed their conversion to Birinus, a Missionary Bishop who came from Italy in 634. His efforts were seconded by S. Oswald, who stood sponsor to Kynegils at his baptism, and who married his daughter. The two Kings united in constituting the first Wessex Diocese, that of Dorchester in Oxfordshire. It was afterwards transferred to Winchester.

REDWALD, 599-624. FELIX, d. 647. Redwald was the first Christian King of East Anglia (Norfolk and Suffolk). He embraced Christianity on a visit to Ethelbert of Kent, but the conversion of his people was only carried out in 631, when Felix, a Burgundian, became first Bishop of Dunwich, a See afterwards, transferred to Norwich.

The four kneeling figures in front of the Priests' Stalls represent four men whose names are closely associated with the careful

ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH IN THIS COUNTRY.

On the South Side WILFRITH, whom, shortly after his Ordination as Priest, we hear of as taking part in the great synod or conference at Whitby. That synod finally determined the line the English Church should take on the points of difference between the British Churches on the one side and the Church Universal on the other. Wilfrith saw that the English race had far too much of the future in them to rest satisfied with an isolated position. They were to be a world wide force and must throw themselves into the general swim of the Christian world. Wilfrith, trained though he was among British Christians, successfully expounded these Catholic views to the conference. It is interesting to notice that Wilfrith did not rest his arguments on the practice of the Roman Church in such a matter as the proper time for keeping the Easter festival, but he appeals to the general practice of Gaul, Africa, Asia, Egypt, and Greece. The authority of Rome was to him only one among many, first, perhaps, but first among equals. Wilfrith, appointed bishop of the Northumbrians in 664, went to Gaul for his Consecration. He returns to find S. Chad made bishop in his place, and himself retires to his monastery at Ripon. There he worked until five years later S. Chad retired and then Wilfrith entered upon nine years of Episcopal work and hard Churchbuilding. After this Wilfrith seems to have complained bitterly of a part of his diocese being taken from him, he

appeals to Rome and was for eight years exiled from his diocese. In 686 he was restored again but having quarrelled with his King was again exiled for fourteen years. In 705 he was given the bishopric of Hexham, a part of his old diocese, and died there in 709, but his service to the Church at the Synod of Whitby lived on in the life of the Church. It was a true service when he fought hard to prevent the isolation of the English Church.

THEODORE was consecrated Seventh Archbishop of Canterbury, A.D. 668. He set his heart on forming separate parishes, where the priest should be resident among his people, and the preaching of the word and the administration of the Sacraments could be carried on without interruption. Theodore was the author of a scheme for the extension of the Episcopate, and within a few years he constituted seventeen bishoprics where there had formerly been only nine. One among several changes was that Wessex was divided into two dioceses, Winchester and Sherborne. He rendered this great service to the Church that he raised the English Church from the position of a mere Missionary Station into a completely organized and thoroughly consolidated National Church. It is by this service that he earned his place in these Choir Stalls. Bede thus describes the days of his Archiepiscopate " Happier times than these never were since the English came into Britain, for their Kings were brave men and good Christians, and while by the terror of their arms the barbarians were kept in check, the minds of men were bent on the joys of the heavenly kingdom which had just been revealed to them; and every one who desired instruction in the sacred Scriptures had masters at hand to instruct him."

ALDHELM is found here as representing a force which made for the union of the Church. Brightwold had succeeded Theodore as Archbishop of Canterbury. A tendency to union with Saxon Christians was soon shown by a number of British Bishops, who expressed their readiness to yield on the great question which divided British from Saxon and all Roman Christians, viz: the time for keeping the Easter Festival. In Cornwall the Bishops would not for a time fall into line. The pen of Aldhelm was employed to effect a reconciliation. He wrote a letter addressed to

KING GERUNTIUS (or Geraint), who is also represented here, and whose realm was Devonshire and Cornwall, in which Aldhelm pleaded for unity by united obedience to the tradition of the Roman Church. Aldhelm became Bishop of Sherborne in 705. In 1075 the See of Sherborne was removed to Old Sarum and so Aldhelm became the first in the long line of the Bishops of Salisbury, and will be remembered for asserting the 'principle that schismatics are to be convinced not by force but by reason. Devonshire was the field in a large part where Aldhelm tried to conquer by reasoning.