



BISHOP DURNFORD.

*Specially drawn and engraved for THE CHURCH MONTHLY  
by R. TAYLOR & Co.*

## OUR PARISH CHURCHES.

### I. ST. LEONARD, MIDDLETON.

**T**HE Parish Church of Middleton is one of the most ancient structures in the county of Lancashire, and second to none for its historical interest. The western arch is Norman work of about the year 1120, the pillars probably being still in the same condition as they were left by the axes of the masons. The arch, once a semicircle, has been rebuilt in a pointed style to suit architecture of a later date, and the Norman mouldings were put in almost at haphazard. Other remains of similar work are to be seen in the arch over the pulpit, and stones carved with diaper pattern are built into the north wall of the nave. The earliest mention of any rector yet found, is that of "Peter, parson of Middleton" in the year 1250. In an arched recess of the north wall is a sepulchral slab, bearing a great incised cross, but having no inscription. Some antiquaries have supposed that it may have been used as an "Easter sepulchre," for the consecrated elements from Good Friday to the dawn of the Day of Resurrection. The Bishop of Stepney thinks it may be of about the year 1300, but adds "the only thing which seems to me like an earlier date is the base of the Cross being curved instead of with steps. This seems archaic." Bishop Durnford

considered it to be the tomb of some ancient founder. There can be no doubt that it belongs to the de Middletons, the Saxon family who seem to have been left undisturbed at the Conquest, and it is quite possible that it commemorates the builder of the Norman Church. Over the centre of the tomb is a corbel which probably bore the image of a saint previous to the Reformation. Just above the recess, but on one side of it, is the matrix of a brass which evidently represented a lady with hands raised in prayer. Probably this would be the monument of Maud de Middleton, the heiress of Roger, the last male of his line, who died about the year 1322. She married John de Barton, of Rydale, in Yorkshire.

A stone coffin found beneath the north aisle during the restoration of the Church under Bishop Durnford, no doubt belonged to a member of this family. Nothing further is known of the little Norman Church of which these are the relics, or of any earlier building that may have preceded it.

But we possess a most interesting record of the erection of a new Church by Thomas Langley, Prince Bishop of Durham from 1406 to 1437, who was made a Cardinal by Pope John XXIII., and was Lord Chancellor of England in the reign of Henry IV. Many evidences remain of his goodness and greatness. His tomb stands before the Altar of the Blessed Virgin and St. Cuthbert, in the lovely Galilee Chapel at the west end of Durham Cathedral, hard by the dust of the Venerable Bede. Two of the four pillars in each group supporting the roof of the chapel, and work in other parts of the Cathedral are also his memorials. He was a Middleton boy, and in his exalted position he did not forget his native village. On August 22nd, 1412, the Cardinal Prince Bishop consecrated the Church to St. Leonard, and dedicated two altars in the nave, the one founded by himself, to the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Cuthbert, and the other by the Bartons, to St. Chad, our first Bishop, and St. Margaret. The licence issued by John Bourghill, Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry, tells us that Langley bore the whole cost of rebuilding the Church, and describes the beautiful and well finished stonework which adorned it. He endowed his chantry for the instruction of the youth of Middleton, and here in all likelihood the famous Dean Novell, to whom we owe so large a proportion of our Catechism, received his early education.

Only portions of the Church erected by Langley now remain. The tower, the exquisite porch, whose rare beauty is fast crumbling away, and some parts of the walls and arcading, are all that we can attribute to him. The clerestory and roof, and the greater part of the walls, are of the date 1524, when the Church was considerably enlarged as a thankoffering for the victory of Flodden, in which "the lovely lads of Lancashire" played so great a part. Upon the south parapet there is a stone bearing the inscription "Ric