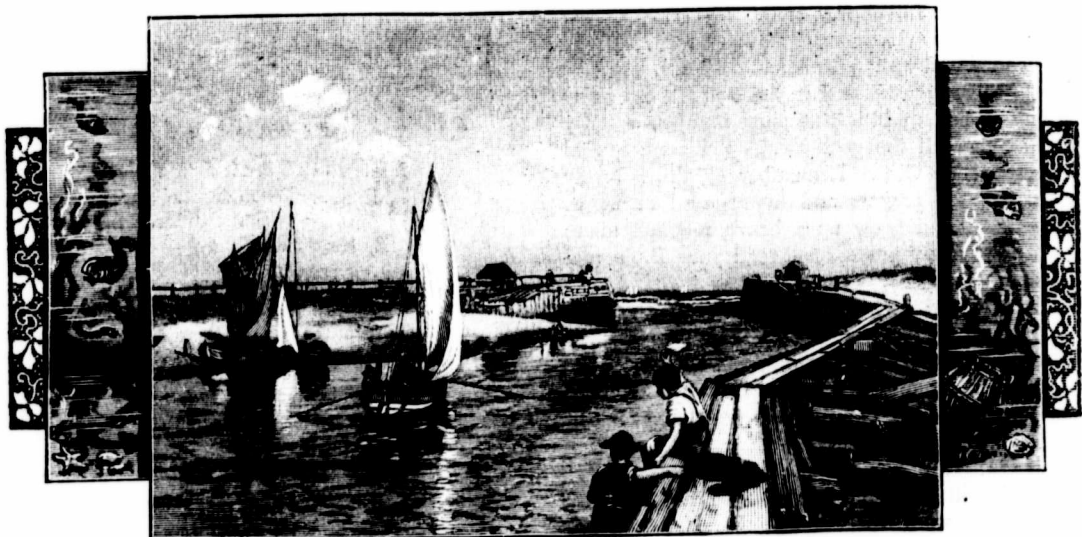




"WATCHING A PASSING SAIL."

From the original painting by G. HILLYARD SWINSTEAD, R.B.A.

OUR PARISH CHURCHES.

VIII.—WESTHAM, SUSSEX.

WESTHAM, under the shadow of Pevensey Castle, four miles from Eastbourne, and a mile from the sea, is a kind of landmark on the English Riviera. Westham, as its name indicates, is of Saxon origin—the west home or hamlet of Pevensey. In the old days the town of Pevensey stood within the great walls which now remain of the Roman city of Anderida; but a time came when its Saxon community, waxing impatient of its surroundings, leaked out through the great Roman gates which open to the west, and settled itself down on the outside of the walls. A village was formed towards the sun-setting, and that was Westham. By-and-by the Conqueror landed at Pevensey, and then, of course, the whole district was, as the French would say, demoralized, upset, and the aspect of everything changed. William or his half-brother began constructing a castle within the old Roman walls, but at the same time they gave their attention to building a Church in Westham.

The Normans were great Church builders; all over England they went to work, pulling down Saxon masonry—for which they seem to have had a kind of contempt—and building up Churches after their own style.

Whether there was ever a Saxon Church at Westham no one can tell, but if there was the Normans made short work of it. The Church they built here was cruciform in shape, and more substantial than any Saxon Church could have been. There was

apparently an apse to each transept, and an apsidal chancel after the Romanesque fashion. I say apparently because what seems portions of these apses are still visible. Of this early Norman Church the south wall and part of the south transept, now a private chapel, remain. Three of the original windows are still in the wall, and the tracery of an absent fourth is seen from outside. The doom of the fourth apparently came about in this way: At the Reformation time they wanted more light for the pulpit, so they knocked out this small window and substituted the present big window of perpendicular elaboration. For it must be conceded that the early Norman windows were very small and deep-splayed; in fact, one way of determining their early date, so the archaeologists tell you, is by the depth of the splay and by the casements being worked out flush with the outer wall. So at Westham. Thus the Norman Church must have been very dark, and strong enough also to have stood a siege, which perhaps it did.

However, in 1300 or thereabouts, an extensive enlargement was carried out in the Church: the north wall and transept were pulled down, and an arcade of early English style substituted, to which a north aisle was added on. At the same time the noble west tower was built—an embodiment of massive dignity and stateliness that, so far as towers go, can hardly be surpassed. For six hundred years it has been a sight of beauty and strength, gladdening the soul of the wayfarer; and even now it is impossible for a man to look at