

town. All this and more you had read and heard of Chester. You had visited the Rows; purchased a picture post card of them because you knew you could not possibly describe their confusing arrangement to interested friends. God's Providence House, the castle, all these you had seen; and, as you looked back upon your visit there echoed in your mind, perhaps, the lines you had memorised when you chanced upon them in your casual reading:

Queer, quaint old Chester!
Grotesque and honest art thou sure,
And so behind this very changeful day,
So fond of antique fashions it would seem,
Thou must have slept an age or two away.

But the Cathedral: Somehow even her form had escaped your eye. You had seen her red turrets in the glare of an afternoon sun as you pressed on your way along the crowded east gate thoroughfare; or you had heard her clanging chimes and the concluding, swift-rung bell call scattered worshippers to evensong. But the structure itself; the history of its building; the story of the Diocese; its connection with secular history—you had attended to none of these, for you had never once paused to associate Chester Cathedral with any of your cherished idols of gothic art; and each time you visited Chester City you were in such haste to press on to one of these that you had no time for investigation there.

Let us see then, upon what grounds a lover of the beautiful in cathedral architecture might base his favoring judgment of Chester. Let us try her with currently-valid touchstones; and, first of all, the antiquity of the site in sacred history. If the town carries back its history into the Roman occupation of Britain, what do we know of the sacred site? Chester was of course, not always from its foundation a cathedral church. A little less than four hundred years ago occurred the dissolution of the first monasteries by order of Henry VIII., and in 1541 the Benedictine monastery of St. Werburgh at Chester, suffered along with the rest. The episcopal see of Chester was set up, in the Archbishopal province of York. The history of this monastic institution carries us back in imagination through other five centuries to its foundation in 1093 by the Second Earl of Chester, nephew of the Conqueror—Hugh Dupres and his Countess Ermentruda. This noble earl, though a reputed glutton and sensualist, was able, none the less, to devote no little of his time and possessions to ecclesiastical affairs. But we are not yet at the springs of our Cathedral's history. Back, back we must throw our minds, right away into the dim-lit Roman period, when, tradition tells us, there stood, on the very ground of the Cathedral edifice, a tiny church dedicated to St. Peter and St.