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TYPICAL CHURCH TOWERS OF ENGLISH COUNTIES.

PART V.

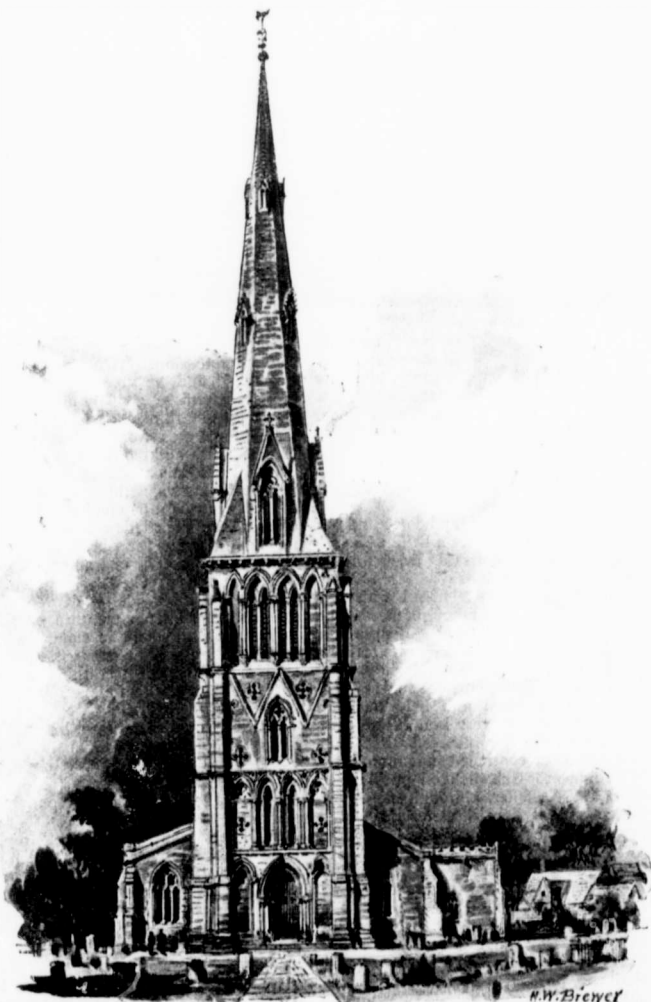
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.

It is perhaps not too much to say that Northamptonshire presents the most remarkable architectural puzzle in the world. Here, in a purely agricultural county, apparently not remarkable for wealth, with no cathedral, for Peterborough was only converted into a cathedral in the reign of Henry VIII., with few monastic churches of importance, the towns small and unimportant, we find a series of village churches which, for refinement of style, delicacy of detail, graceful carving, rich mouldings, elegant window tracery, and a general air of what we call exquisite taste in ornamentation, are not surpassed, if equalled, in the grandest cathedrals.

These Northamptonshire village churches are not grand, stately structures like the Yorkshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Lincolnshire churches, or such elaborate buildings as those of Somersetshire. There is scarcely a large church in the county, with the exception of Peterborough Cathedral, and few of the churches measure one hundred and fifty feet in length, whereas the majority are of still more modest dimensions. There is little boldness of construction, and the scale of their various component parts is almost diminutive, yet, owing to their artistic arrangement, carefully contrasted features and delicate detail, they are the most perfect series of ecclesiastical buildings in this country.

Noting the various excellences of these buildings, our modern architects at the time of the "revival of ecclesiastical architecture" largely copied them, but unfortunately their churches were generally erected in modern towns, and the result of these imitations was failure complete and inevitable, because a Northamptonshire village church, though exquisite in a country village, is thoroughly out of place in a town. We saw an example of this a few days back. A pretty little church of the Northamptonshire type had been built in a busy eastern suburb of London, and would have looked well upon a village green with low-built cottages about it, a pretty churchyard around it, backed up by trees with a clear stream flowing past, and a picturesque manor house with pleasant gardens near at hand, perhaps a windmill, and a cherry-cheeked country lass driving home a pack of geese in the foreground. But place such a building in a filthy street between two huge factories as tall as its spire, with vast chimneys belching forth black clouds of smoke, without a scrap of ground about it except a narrow paved space forming a receptacle for torn paper, rags and filth, and how then will it look?

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RAUNDS, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.