

## OUR ENGLISH LETTER.

## A Visit to the Isle of Ely.

*(From an occasional correspondent.)*

I was very glad towards the end of a week in the latter part of May to get a note from the Organizing Secretary of the S. P. G., telling me that I had been appointed "a deputation" to preach on the following Sunday for the Society in three country parishes in Cambridgeshire. It was a part of the country in which I had not before been, and it gave me an opportunity which could hardly have been had so well in any other way of getting a glimpse at country Church work in England. A fast train took me rapidly through the fen country, giving a provoking glimpse of Cambridge, and stopping for a few minutes at Ely, whose Cathedral, situated on one of the very few eminences in that flat ground, had been visible for miles before we reached the city. My first stopping place was to be at a little village quite close to Ely, on a branch line; so when the fast train by which I had come so far rushed off, and I went from the bustling main line to a quiet siding, and saw there a small train, with a cattle box attached, and two or three leisurely porters chatting together, or entering into full explanations to any one of the half dozen passengers who had an enquiry to make, I felt quite at home. With no undue haste, we started not long after the proper time, and a very few minutes brought me to a station, where the Rector's pony chaise was waiting. I was driven through the village street up to the Rectory, where a most kind and courteous welcome was given me; indeed I may here say that at all three places I received a most hearty welcome, and everything was done to make me feel at home during my short stay. Stretham, Wilburton and Haddenham were the three parishes at which I preached, respectively, morning, afternoon and evening; the first a rectory, the other two vicarages. The three churches (I refer more to the buildings themselves) may very well be taken as three types of the Victorian era of Church restoration. All three are large stone churches, with massive towers at the west end, the Stretham Church having also a lofty spire. They date from the 14th century, some parts back to the 13th. Stretham has been *completely* restored; that is, nothing of the old church is left but the tower and spire. Haddenham keeps somewhat more of the old building, and Wilburton is much as it was in the 14th century and after Reformation defacements. On seeing these three, I could quite understand Ruskin's anger against much of the modern restorations. Of course it may have been impossible to do by them what was done at Stretham; but it seemed to me that could Wilburton have better chancel arrangement, and have necessary repairs made, it would be more interesting than those more completely restored. About £7,000 or £8,000 have been spent upon each of the two restored churches, and in all three Rectories or Vicarages and schools are in capital order and most convenient. And here I learned a fact which threw a light not altogether favourable upon the state of English country parishes. With us a well appointed church, good, well-kept rectory, commodious school house, would at once tell of a parish or congregation interested in Church work, and contributing liberally towards it. But I was told that here such a conclusion is, by no means, always a true one. A wealthy Rector who can call upon wealthy friends to assist, or the fact that a church is in some special way connected with the history of the country, or of some wealthy country families, will enable a church to be restored with scarcely any effort on the part of themselves or parishioners. Parishioners who can see with indifference a grand old parish church falling into ruin are bad enough, but worse, I think, is the state of those who can with equal indifference see their church restored for them, or else make a false boast of the beauty of that which has cost them nothing. With far more pleasure can one

look upon a simple, well-kept wooden country church and its homely parsonage in our own land, for one knows that they mean interest in the church, and self-sacrifice on the part of the people. But I am told that in this part of the country there has been much that now puts the Church at a disadvantage. Lying on the borders of Huntingdon, these villages warmly espoused the cause of the Parliament, and sent large contingents to Cromwell's army. After the restoration, the disbanded soldiers came back to their homes with all the bitterness of men whose cause was lost, and these feelings have been hereditary. Again, during the last century the clergy got the idea that the fen country was unhealthy, and valuing their own bodies more than their parishioners' souls, were generally non-resident. Of course all this is now changed; things are decidedly improving; and the Vicar of Haddenham, who has been there less than a year, tells me that his evening congregation has trebled, though it is still far from what he hopes to make it.

At two of the Churches, the Services were what are here called moderate Anglican—surpliced choirs, partly choral service, altar cross, lights and flowers. At the third, it was the more old fashioned type, chancel unfitted, except that a comfortable squire's pew, and very uncomfortable benches without backs, for the school girls, who formed the choir, and Service quite plain. I cannot say that the different kinds of Service seemed to have much effect one way or the other upon the congregation. In all three the attendance was fairly good, people fairly devout and reverent. Singing in one of the suppliced choir Churches, and in the one unsurpliced quite congregational. It looked to me—though I must remember that my view was a hasty and superficial one—as though the country people leave all matters about the Service to the parson, and providing that nothing outrageous is done, quietly accept what is given them. A state of mind which has its advantages and disadvantages too. I was very glad to see that the starved, ill-clothed, half-intelligent country labourer, of whom one reads, was very conspicuously absent. One or two very old men were there, but their infirmities were those of extreme old age everywhere. Plenty of the labouring class I did see, either in the Churches or in the village streets, but they were comfortable looking men; or nicely dressed, bright young fellows. Of course, there remains their great want—a future better than the present for themselves and their children. When one of the clergymen spoke to me with regret of the spirit of "discontent with their lot" that was growing among the labourers, I could not help asking him, whether they ought not to be discontented with their lot, and whether their being so, was not a cause of thankfulness. I went on, to tell of a country where each sober and industrious farmer could end his days in his own house on his own farm.

The country here has many interesting historical associations. In the Isle of Ely, the Saxons made their last stand against the Conqueror, who was for three years baffled by the fens and morasses which then surrounded it. At last, at Aldreth Bridge, Hereward, the last of the Saxons, was defeated and slain by William, who at once proceeded to St. Ethelreda's shrine in the Cathedral, and having devoutly made his thanksgiving to the Saint, rose from his knees and set his men to plunder her shrine and pillage the priory she had founded. Aldreth is also noted for having given a well used word to the English language. Its annual fair was very celebrated. Remembering the slovenly way in which English people's names are pronounced, it is easy to see how wares purchased "at Awdreth" would become "wares tawdry." While the salesmen were honest "tawdry" was a word of praise; but as their honesty decreased, the word changed its meaning to its present one. And now, all that is left of Aldreth fair, is the contemptuous word "tawdry."

On Sunday, I met the Archdeacon of Ely, who most kindly invited me to spend Monday with him at Ely, on my way back to London, when he promised to give some of his valuable time to

showing some interesting parts of the Cathedral to Archdeacon Chiswell (late of Madagascar, also on S. P. G. work) and myself. I very gladly accepted his invitation, and remaining Sunday night with my kind host and hostess at Haddenham Vicarage, went to Ely by an early train. The Ely people proudly claim that while York and Denham may dispute with others as to which is the King of English Cathedrals, Ely is undisputedly the Queen. And, certainly, it is difficult to imagine anything to surpass the exquisite beauty and grace of its interior. A description I will not attempt, but will briefly point out some of its distinguishing characteristics. Its great length. There is dispute as to length between it and Winchester, but it is a matter of inches between them. Its octagonal lantern between nave and choir, put up about the 12th Century, to replace a Norman Tower which fell down, this feature is quite unique. It contains specimens of the architecture of all pencils. From one point of view, the Archdeacon pointed out a Norman arch, an Early English pointed one, a decorated and a perpendicular, all to be seen at once. That one view is a lesson in architecture. Its Lady Chapel, instead of being behind the high altar as usual, runs from the north transept, parallel to the choir, and is used as a Parish Church. Then it was the first of the old English Churches to be restored, and when the Dean and Chapter had decided on the work, they chose as architect one who was then said to be a talented young man, a Mr. Gilbert Scott. Scott always said that the restoration of Ely Cathedral was the foundation of his fame. Then there are its exquisitely light screen, and its gorgeously painted roof. I may just add as interesting in these days of centenary celebrations, that a few years ago, Ely Cathedral celebrated its *twelfth* centenary.

TRAVELLER.

## NATURE'S MODELS FOR INVENTORS.

BEFORE the first clumsy sail was hoisted by a savage hand, the little Portuguese man-of-war, that frailest and most graceful nautilus boat, had skimmed over the seas, with all its feathery sails set in the pleasant breeze; and before the British admiralty marked its anchors with the broad arrow, mussels and pinna had been accustomed to anchor themselves by flukes to the hull as effective as the iron one in the government dockyards. The duck used oars before we did, the rudders were known by every fish with a tail countless ages before human pilots handed tillers; the floats on the fisherman's nets were pre-figured in the bladders on seaweed, the glow-worm and the firefly held up light-houses before Pharos or beacon tower guided the wanderer among men; and long before Phipps brought over the diving-bell to this country spiders were making and using air-pumps to descend into the deep. Our bones were moved by tendons and muscles long before chains and cords were made to pull heavy weights from place to place. Nay, until quite lately—leaving these discoveries to themselves—we took no heed of the pattern set us in the backbone, with the arching ribs springing from it, to construct the large cylinder which we often see now attaching all the rest of set of works. This has been a very modern discovery, but nature had cast such a cylinder in every ribbed and vertebrate animal she had made. The cord of plated iron, too, now used to drag machinery up inclined planes; was typified in the backbones of eels and snakes; tubular bridges and columns have been in use since the first bird with hollow bones flew through the wood, or the first waved in the wind.

Our railway tunnels are wonderful works of science, but the mole tunneled with its food and the pholas with one end of its shell before our navvies handled pick or spade upon the heights of the iron roads. Worms were prior to gimlets, antlions were the first funnel-makers, a beaver showed men how to make the milldams, and then pendulous nests of certain birds swung gently in the air before the keen wit of even the most tender mother laid her nursling in a rocking cradle.