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## TYPICAL CHURCH TOWERS OF ENGLISH COUNTIES.

## PART VII.

## SUFFOLK.

In our last paper we described the characteristics of the Essex church towers and their somewhat humble and unpretentious architecture and dimensions. Now the moment we cross the boundaries of the adjoining county of Suffolk a most remarkable contrast is to be noticed in the churches: instead of small buildings with quaint wooden spires, or low towers, we find singularly noble edifices with elegant and stately towers. So marked is this that several of the grandest of the Suffolk examples are within four or five miles of the border, and even the two parishes which we first enter when crossing the latter possess remarkably fine churches—Clare and Cavendish—buildings totally distinct from anything to be seen in Essex. They are, however, far surpassed by the stately minsters of two adjoining parishes—Long-Melford and Lavenham. Unfortunately the former has lost its tower, which was rebuilt about a century back, and so it must yield the palm to Lavenham, though its nave and aisles, lady chapel and magnificent flint decoration, are perhaps even finer than those of the latter church.

The people of Lavenham are most justly proud of their church, and we recollect once hearing a very warm dispute between a local stonemason and an Ipswich plumber. The stonemason declared that Lavenham was the finest parish church in England.

"But," said the Ipswich man, "the men who built it were muddlers who did not know how to erect a square tower. I have just been measuring it for some new lead, and find none of the sides are equal; they differ as much as nine inches!"

The Lavenham man said, "Do you suppose that the builders of that tower could not have made it square if they had had a mind to do so?"

The Ipswich man appealed to us. "You see," said he, "the obstinacy of these Lavenham folks. Of course they have a fine church; but to attempt to defend the blunders of a builder simply because it is found in their church is too ridiculous!"

We pointed out the fallacy of this argument as follows: "You have yet to prove that it is a blunder. The men who built such an exquisite structure as Lavenham tower could not have been in the habit of making 'blunders.' And no doubt there was some reason for this irregularity which we are unable to discover just as there must be some reason why the sides of the Parthenon at Athens are not parallel and its angles not right angles."

The church at Lavenham is a large and stately building, and from its very favourable position looks even larger than it really is. It stands at the extreme limit of the village, or town, upon a gentle eminence, overlooking a pretty valley, and its lofty tower is thus seen for miles round. The length, including the tower, is close upon 200 feet, the width over nave and aisles 68 feet, and the tower is 141 feet high. The walls are adorned externally with stone panelling and inlaid flint work of a very elaborate description. The chancel is earlier than the rest of the building, and is excellent fourteenth-century "Decorated" work. The porch is extremely elaborate. The tower, though plainer than the rest of the building, is perhaps the noblest portion of the whole, and presents just that combination of massive solidity and grace of proportion which is so very pleasing and striking. Though far less elaborate than the Somerset examples, and devoid of that exquisite feature the spire, so common in Northampton, yet it has so much dignity and boldness that it is impossible to wish it otherwise than it really is. Few architectural works we have ever seen are so eminently satisfactory

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LAVENHAM CHURCH.