

CHURCH BELLS

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The Church Bell — what a variety of associations does it kindle up — how closely is it connected with the most cherished interests of mankind! And not only have we ourselves an interest in it, but it must have been equally interesting to those who were before us, and will probably be so to those who are yet to come. It is the Churchman's constant companion — at its call he first enters the Church, then goes to the Daily Liturgy, to his Confirmation, and his first Communion. Is he married? — the Church bells have greeted him with a merry peal — has he passed to his rest? — the Church bells have tolled out their final note.

From a very early period there must have been some contrivance, whereby the people might know when to assemble themselves together, but some centuries must have passed before bells were invented for a religious purpose. Trumpets preceded bells. The great Day of Atonement amongst the Jews was ushered in with the sound of the trumpet; and Holy Writ has stamped a solemn and lasting character upon this instrument, when it informs us that "The Trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised." The Prophet Hosea was commanded to "blow the cornet in Gibeah and the trumpet in Ramah;" and Joel was ordered to "blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm." The cornet and trumpet seem to be identical, as in the Septuagint both places are expressed by *σαλπισατε σαλπγγι*. But the use of the trumpet as a call to holy worship is manifest from Numbers 10, "Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings." It was also employed as a war signal to gather together the people and for the journeying of the camps.

Reflection brings with it the conviction that in the first ages of the Church, neither trumpet nor bell could have been commonly used to summon the people to the united worship of their Divine Master. The Pre-Constantine



St. Mary's Ashendon Bucks. (for Records of Buckinghamshire.)

era Avas for the most part an era of persecution to the infant Church. The world and its prejudices riveted to heathen habits and heathen liberty, would naturally in its unenlightened state coerce, if possible, Christianity into oblivion. To have tolled the bell, or blown the trumpet in such a case would have only brought Decius or Diocletian to their door. It is not, therefore, improbable that when persecution was at its height, the Primitive Christians may have retreated to such secret places as the Catacombs suggest, that in quietness and confidence they might worship God in the beauty of holiness.

But we may not, I apprehend, jump to the conclusion that because the Church sometimes sought retirement for safety's sake, it had not Church buildings of its own. Of course, in vain should we look for the spacious nave, the well-proportioned aisle, the ornate chancel, and the "dim religious light" which it is now our happiness to see and enjoy, and our duty to re-produce. The circumstances of those days, whether we have regard to State-policy, or pecuniary resources, would not have admitted of all this; otherwise the Apostolate with the plain fact before them of an inferior religion possessing its "magnificent" temple, would not have scrupled to erect becoming edifices for the new religion which exceeded the old in glory.

King David strikes the right chord when having obtained rest, from his enemies, he would no longer himself dwell in an house of cedar while the Ark of God was within curtains;* and the Church so soon as she had rest by the conversion of Constantine the Great, follows up the pious suggestion of the King, and emerges from the "τό υπερώον" or the lower chamber of a Catacomb, and erects for herself † temples of a style and grandeur befitting the Holy Religion committed to her trust. S. Ignatius and Clement of Alexandria testify to the existence of Churches in the second, and Eusebius and S. Cyprian in the third century. Socrates says of Frumentius, that after he had converted the Indians, he immediately built Churches for them; and a Body of Bishops, and the martyrdom of St. Alban, are an indication that there were Churches in Britain before Ethelbert united with his pious Bertha in

* Chron. xxii, 5,

† See description of Ecclesia Constantiniana in Bingham, viii, cap. 2

the profession of Christianity. There was one at Canterbury, it is stated, dedicated to St. Mark, and at the Council of Aries in the year 314, London, York and Lincoln each sent its Bishop for consultation.

Although history is clear as to the existence of Churches in the Pre-Constantine era, no mention is made of their having had any bells annexed to them. Had there been any, most probably we should have heard of them; as it is, we may safely conclude that at least for the first three centuries they had none. In Egypt the Christians used trumpets after the manner of the Jews; every monk had to leave his cell as soon as he heard the sound of the trumpet calling him to Church.

Bells for a variety of purposes have been used for many centuries past; we read of the "golden bell" in the Book of Exodus, and we learn from ancient sources that they were used in the mysteries of the Corybantes; that the Romans tied them to the necks of horses, oxen, and sheep; that they summoned slaves to work, announced the opening of the baths, called the family to dinner and supper, and adorned the necks of criminals when led to execution. They were thus used to keep watch and ward the fortified cities of Greece. A guard being stationed in every tower, an appointed person walked to and fro on the portion of the wall between two towers. It was his duty to carry the bell which he received from the guard of one tower, to deliver it to the guard at the next tower, and then to return, so that the bell by passing from hand to hand made the circuit of the city, and showed if any guard was asleep or did not answer to his bell.*

The origin of bells for ecclesiastical purposes has been attributed to Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, who lived A.D. 400; hence they were called *Noloe* and *Campanaoe* — Nola being in Campania. But as the Bishop in an epistle to Severus gives an exact description of his Church, omitting all mention of bells, it has been supposed that we cannot give him the palm for an invention destined to become celebrated and perpetual.† The next claimant to the honour is Pope Sabinianus, A.D. 604, who, *De Sueur* assures us, ordered them to be rung at the canonical

* See Smith's Dictionary of Antiquities, Voc. *Tintinnabulum*, for illustrations.

† Bingham,

hours and mass;* and this much we may safely believe, that if he did not invent them, his age was not ignorant of them. History informs us that in the year 610 the Bishop of Orleans being at Sens, then in a state of siege, scared away the besieging army by ringing the bells of St. Stephen's Church; so that Church bells must have been in existence, and, at the same time, an alarming novelty.

With respect to their introduction into Britain, we have a more definite announcement from Venerable Bede, who mentions them in the year 680. About this period too, as Bede relates, the nuns of St. Hilda were called together by the sound of the bell. It is reasonable to suppose that we are indebted to the Church peal for the spacious and elevated tower, of which some beautiful illustrations are supplied us in Whittingham, Northumberland; Barton-on-the-Humber, Lincolnshire; Earl's Barton, Northamptonshire; Clapham, Bedfordshire; St. Michael's, Oxford; Sompting, Sussex; Stanton Lacy, Shropshire; Dunham Magna, Norfolk; and St. Mary Bishophill Jun., York.† Before that period the British Christians used wooden rattles to call the faithful together; and amongst Mahometans something of the same contrivance is still in vogue — bells being forbidden.

A correspondent of the *Daily News*, dating Bucharest, October 14, describing a visit which he made to a Wallachian monastery, writes — "The perfect wildness of the scenery, — the absence of roads, — of villages, — in short of all the usual marks of civilization at the present day, — the abundance of wild fowl which soared around and dabbled in the lake unscared by our presence; — the primitive aspect of our farm buildings, the corn lying on the threshing-floor after having been trodden out by bullocks, — in short the presence of almost all the attributes and incidents inseparably connected, in my mind, with an English monastery of the middle ages, as it would appear in the glowing pictures of Scott, rendered the whole scene to me one of the greatest interest. After an hour's saunter along the shore in the midst of a silence broken only by the sound of our voices, we returned once more to our quarters, and found our dinners served up on the table in the hall. We had hardly finished when we were roused by a loud noise

* Gatty. † See Appendix to Hickman's Gothic Architecture.

of hammering in the court, and on going out we found a nun pacing up and down in front of the Church-door, beating with a large mallet a short piece of wood, somewhat resembling the board used by a tailor to flatten out the seams upon, and pierced with two or three round holes. The effect was a loud and sonorous sound; the strokes were delivered at regular intervals, but about every five minutes became heavier and more rapid, and each of these paroxysms, if I may use the word, ended in one tremendous bang which wakened up echoes from every corner of the convent. The performer accompanied herself by repeating her prayers in a long dismal nasal drawl. This lasted about ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, and no sooner ended, than the very same sounds issued from the old brick tower, under the archway of which we were standing. I mounted, and found the board with the holes in it suspended by ropes from the roof, and a nun beating it with a mallet precisely in the same manner. On inquiry I learnt that this was the old Greek manner in the primitive time, before bells were in vogue, of calling the faithful to prayer. In this instance, as soon as the nun had laid aside the mallet, she commenced to toll the bell in slow and measured time."

Ingulphus, Abbot of Croyland, who died A.D. 1109, distinctly assures us of the existence of bells before his time, he says that "the first Abbot of Croyland gave six bells to that monastery, that is to say, two great ones, which he named Bartholomew and Beladine: two of a middling size called Turketullum and Beterine: two small ones denominated Pega and Bega; he also caused the great bell to be made called Gudla, which was tuned to the other bells, and produced an admirable harmony not to be equalled in England." During the Heptarchy, Croyland was the retreat of St. Guthlac, who built himself a hermitage, near which Ethelbald, in 716, founded a Benedictine monastery and dedicated it to SS. Mary, Bartholomew, and Guthlac. It was destroyed by the Danes in 870, and rebuilt in 948; and on the acquirement of the Crown of England by William, in 1066, Ingulphus, who had previously been his secretary, was created Abbot of Croyland; and by the favour of the King and Archbishop Lanfranc, obtained for it many privileges.*

* Maunder.

Thus, the monastery having been founded in the eighth century, and enriched by the first abbot with six bells, renders it a matter of certainty that at this period bells in Britain were becoming generally known. Turkeytel's successor* is supposed, also, to have caused the first tuneable set to be put up at Croyland Abbey A.D. 960, in which case it would be subsequent to the destruction of the abbey by the Danes, and prior to the accession of Ingulphus on the elevation of William to the Throne of England.

The second excerpt of Egbert A.D. 829, commands every priest, at the proper hours, to sound the bells of his church; and in 900 Pope John IX. ordered them to be rung as a defence against thunder and lightning." Paul de Caen, the first Abbot of St. Alban's after the Conquest, supplied the town with bells. Litholf, who resided in a woodland part of the neighbourhood, sold his sheep and goats and bought a bell, of which, as he heard the new sound when suspended in the tower, jocosely said, "Hark! how sweetly my goats and my sheep bleat." His wife added another, and the two together produced a most sweet harmony.† Bishop Hythe placed four bells in Rochester Cathedral, which he named Dunstan, Paulinus, Ithamar, and Lanfranc. Richard I., as we are informed by Matthew Paris, was welcomed at Arec with a peal of bells as he landed in 1190. Edward III. furnished St. Stephen's Church in the Sanctuary with three bells; so that, as is quite evident, a set of bells had now become the ordinary appendage to a parish Church.

In 1684 Abraham Rudall, of Gloucester, had brought the art of bell founding to great perfection, and in less than one hundred years his establishment had cast no less than 3,594 bells.

A valuable MS. is extant on Church bells, with notes in Bucks (between the years 1780 and 1766), the compilation of Cole and Browne Willis, and to be found in the British Museum; for the loan of a copy I am indebted to the Ven. Archdeacon Bickersteth. In the Deanery of Buckingham the following Churches had six bells:—Buckingham and Hillesden; and in that of Burnham, Amersham, Beaconsfield, Farnham, and Iver; and in that of Mursley, Soulbury, Whaddon, Whitchurch, Wing,

* Stowc.

†Buckler,

and Wingrave; and of Newport Pagnel, Brickhill Magna, Chicheley, Linford, Olney, and Weston Underwood; and in that of Whaddon, no Churches are named as possessing six bells; and in the Deanery of Wendover, Aylesbury, Bierton; and in that of Wycombe, Hambledon, to which a note is appended, "In another MS. given me by Dr. Forester, Hambledon is said to have only three bells;" Haverington (in another MS. list only five) — Marlow Magna and Woburn Episcopi. With the exception of Denham, Bletchley, Newport Pagnel, and Wycombe Magna, each of which places then enjoyed a complete peal of eight bells, the remaining churches of Bucks had less than six bells. The biggest bells in the county are assigned to Eton, which had a large separate single bell weighing 37 cwt. or better; Crendon 35 cwt.; Wing 33 cwt.; Missenden Magna 32 cwt.; Olney 28 cwt.; Ivinghoe 29 cwt.; Edgeborough 28 cwt.; Buckingham 27 cwt.; Wycombe 26 cwt.; Aylesbury 25 cwt.; Denham 24 cwt.; Hanslop 23 cwt.; Shenley 22 cwt.; Newport 22 cwt.; Quainton 21 cwt.; Amersham 20 cwt.; Winslow 20 cwt.; Waddesden 18 cwt.; Chesham 18 cwt.; Newton 18 cwt.; Bletchley 17 cwt. The following Churches had five bells each, viz — Midsmorten, Mersden Gibwen, Steple Claydon, Stow Langport, Tingwick, and Twyford in the Deanery of Buckingham; Burnham, Chalfont (St. Giles), Chalfont (St. Peter), Chesham, Chesham Boys, Datchet, Horton, Penn (now 6) Wyrardsbury, and Langley Capella, in the Deanery of Burnham; Chedington, Edgborough, Hardwick, Hardwood Magna, Ivinghoe, Marsworth, Mursley, Mentmore, Slapton, Stewkeley, and Swanborne in the Deanery of Mursley; Calverton, Stony Stratford, Clifton Reynes, North Crawley, Hanslop, Lavenden, Newton Longueville, Shenley, Sherrington, Stoke Geddington, Tyingham, and Wavendon in the Deanery of Newport Pagnel; Brill, Crendon, East Claydon, Ludgershall, North Merton, Quainton, Shabbington, and Waddesden in the Deanery of Waddesden; Aston Clinton, Stoke Mandeville, Bledlow, Dynton, Hadenham, Cudenton Capella, Missenden Magna, Princes Risborough, Stone, Wendover, and Weston Turvill in the Deanery of Wendover; in the Deanery of Wycombe no church is stated to have only five bells. The remaining churches of the county have either

one, two, three, or four bells — the result being that four have 8 bells, twenty-two 6 bells, fifty-seven 5 bells, twenty-one 4 bells, fifty 3 bells, sixteen 2 bells, seventeen 1 bell, and Borstal and Quarendon none; so that at the time the aforesaid notes were taken the county of Buckingham was possessed of seven hundred and thirty church bells. It would be an interesting inquiry, could we ascertain what increase the population of our church towers has made within the last hundred years; the difference, no doubt, would be found mainly to exist in cases where the peal numbers less than six bells — instances of retrogression would be very rare. The majority of our modern district churches are charged with only one or two bells. The old parish church with its spacious square tower, and its musical peal of six or eight is now seldom reproduced — partly through lack of zeal and partly on the score of economy.

(To be continued.)