

HILLESDEN CHURCH.

Many of our readers will look back with much pleasure to the interesting visit paid by our Society to the beautiful and dilapidated Church of Hillesden. The interest then expressed has by no means subsided, although the present time has not been considered favourable on some accounts for commencing its restoration. We hope, however, ere long to record that a survey and estimate for this purpose has been made by our eminent Honorary Member, George Gilbert Scott, Esq., who has so handsomely offered his gratuitous services; and, further, that his Report has been favourably responded to by the authorities of Christ Church, and other persons most nearly interested in that Parish.

Since Mr. Scott's notice of Hillesden Church was printed in the account of the annual Meeting at Buckingham, the Rev. W. T. Eyre has published a letter upon the subject in the "Aylesbury News," and "Oxford Chronicle," from which we extract the following :—

"Thomas Courtenay, Earl of Devon, was attainted, 1161, (1st Edward IV.) when that King gave Hillesden Manor to Sir Walter Devereux, Knight. Sir Walter Devereux being slain in the battle of Bosworth, 1485, the Courtenays, being reinstated in blood, repossessed the Manor till their second attainder by Henry VIII, (1539,) on which it coming to the crown, Edward VI., by letter patent dated August 1547, in the first year of his reign granted it to Thomas Denton, Esq., and the estate did not again revert to the Courtenays. If the Church was rebuilt in 1493, and the Courtenays possessed the Manor from 1485 to 1539, it is clear that Hillesden Church was rebuilt *in their time*, but not so clear that it was rebuilt *by them*. Browne Willis says—The Church being ruinous, a complaint was exhibited at the Visitation,

against the Abbot and Convent of Nutley Abbey, [near Thame, Oxon.] 1493, 8th Henry VII., that Hillesden Chancel and other parts of the Church were very ruinous, and that the Churchyard lay open, and the whole was in great dilapidation, and that the Abbot of Nutley ought to amend it. Which had so good effect as occasioned it to be new built in the handsome manner it now is.'

"The conclusion that I come to is this, that the present Church was rebuilt by the Abbot and Convent of Nutley Abbey 46 years before the Reformation, when their revenues were plundered, and the society broken up and dispersed. At the same time, I think Mr. Scott was very accurate in stating in his lecture at the Church that the chapel adjoining the chancel on the north side was built by the Courtenays as a thankoffering."

In explanation of the statement that Christ Church had granted £2 a year for doing duty in the Church, Mr. Eyre cites Browne Willis's statement, that —

"The tithes of the Church, both rectorial and vicarial, were engrossed by the Monks of Nutley, who got it appropriated before the year 1200. On the dissolution of Nutley Abbey, 1539, when the tithe, glebe, &c., were transferred by King Henry VIII. to Christ Church, that College only paid about £4 to a curate, as the impropriators of Nutley had done."

He continues:—

"Here we find that Christ Church received the tithes, &c., subject to one usual charge, and in estimating that charge we ought to consider the difference of the times and of the value of money. The priest, before the Reformation, was no doubt wholly provided for by Nutley Abbey ; he had, too, what we should now call the run of the Manor House and £4 in his pocket. In 1680, after the Reformation, the Churchwardens of this parish certified at the Visitation that 'there is no Parsonage-house, or glebe, or endowment, saving £2, which Alexander Denton, Esq., *who provides a Minister*, pays to the Churchwardens,' [*Iquery for which purpose?*] Here, then, in 1539, the chantry priest was provided for. So in 1680 the officiating priest was the domestic chaplain of Alexander Denton, Esq., and had probably as little reason as his Roman Catholic predecessor to complain that he had fallen on evil times. Since that time, however, up to the year 1853, the officiating priest, or perpetual curate, was only entitled through the lessee to £30 a year, without the auxiliary resource of Nutley Abbey or the hospitable residence of Alexander Denton, Esq., or taking into consideration the difference of the value of money. In justice to Christ Church, let me observe that in the year 1815 they made a small augmentation to the Curate's salary, and a further augmentation in the year 1835, so as to make their stipend amount to £65 a-year, and this out of *other* funds than those of *Hillesden*. Their predecessors, who might plead precedent, had followed that injurious, (and I might add) iniquitous system of forestalling the income which was appropriated to religious purposes, and for God's honour and service, by taking in advance the presumed value of the property for the term of three lives, taking a large sum or fine prospectively, and divesting themselves of all responsibility and care for the spiritual interests of the parishioners.

"In the year 1853, the survivor of the three lives during whose existence the lease held good expired, and the valuable Church property of Hillesden at once reverted for re-disposal to the Dean and Chapter of

Christ Church. And what did they do? Instead of leasing their property away again for other three lives to the owner of the estate, they exchanged the mode of tenure from lives to 21 years. They covenanted with their lessee to increase the stipend of the Perpetual Curate to £130 a-year, gross sum, with a proviso that he should have a further increase at the end of each seven years, and they reserved out of the lease a plot of land, whereon, in due time, to erect a parsonage-house. I cannot but think then that this noble College comes into Court with clean hands, and may very safely be relied on that it will come forth to render important assistance in this interesting work of the restoration of the Church of Hillesden."

The whole of the inscriptions in the very interesting east window of the south transept of this Church, which were only partially deciphered at the time of our visit, have since been communicated to us. It will be remembered, that the window is, like the rest of the Church, of late third-pointed or perpendicular style, and consists of eight lights, each of which was stated by Mr. Scott to represent some incident in the legendary life of St. Nicholas. The miracle of restoring the freight of corn to its first amount, after taking sufficient to satisfy the famine of Bari, is the only act given in the more sober lives of this Saint. That may be the subject represented in the third light.

The inscriptions are as follows, commencing from the left hand in the upper lights :—

1. Cadit puerulus qucm mox salvat Nicholaus.
2. Tunc offert cyphum grates pro munere reddens.
3. Multiplicat frugem praesul qucm nave recepit.
4. Quae tulerat bona cogit reddere.
5. Auro furato baculo flagellat amicum.
6. Restituit rursus labor quod sustulit aurum.
7. Strangulat daemon puerum [fru]menta ferentem.
8. Mortuus ad vitam reddit precibus Nicholai.