

THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF NEWFOUNDLAND.

[WE have much pleasure in publishing the following interesting letter, for which we are indebted to the Secretary of the Oxford Architectural Society —ED.]

To the Secretary of the Oxford Architectural Society.

Portugal Cove, near S. John's, Newfoundland,
Jan. 13th, 1853.

SIR,—It is now more than four years and a half ago that, on the occasion of my last visit to Oxford, I offered to resign my office of Corresponding Secretary of the Oxford Architectural Society (for Wiltshire), but my resignation was met with a request on the part of the then Committee that I would continue to hold the same office in the Colonies. I could not refuse the honour of being the first-appointed Colonial Secretary of a Society which I had always wished to serve to the best of my ability, and consequently acceded to the request. Yet I feel to my shame that my post has been too much of a sinecure (i. e., as regards the Society), and I must do and say something to retrieve my character,—although, as to *doing*, I will give myself so much credit as to say that I think that I have done something in trying to spread the knowledge of the principles of Gothic architecture, which is a working with that Society of which I am an unworthy member. But, to proceed with my report, I wish to say a few words upon the present state and future prospects of church-building in the Diocese of Newfoundland.

1. *As to its present state.*—Here you must first know that we are in some respects perhaps even two centuries or so behind the mother country,—in all respects, at least a quarter of a century. Fashions are palmed off on the credulous fashion-hunters here as new which really are stale enough in England. Church-building is in the same predicament; the revival, which began with you in 1839, can scarcely be said to have begun here, although there have certainly been more inquiries what Gothic architecture is within the last two years than ever there were before in Newfoundland. You wonder perhaps that, under these circumstances, Newfoundland can boast of our noblest colonial cathedral. But this is the doing of our noble-hearted Bishop alone. The building is quite unappreciated by the majority of persons here,—even by persons generally well-informed in other matters; they see no beauty in it, because it is not finished.

All buildings of any sort in this colony, with very few exceptions, have been of wood; until after the fire of 1846 the buildings in the lower part of S. John's, and all edifices for public purposes, were obliged by an act of the Colonial Legislation to be of stone. The wood employed for these wooden buildings is for the most part the produce of the country, which never grows to any great size. A house or

church is usually constructed in this way:—Sills are laid down consisting of chopped sticks, about eight inches at the small end, which, when chopped square, brings them about eight inches cube throughout; they are levelled, and kept there by shores driven well down in the ground. Afterwards, when the house or church is finished, if its builders wish it to look well, they build up a dry wall under these sills. The sills being laid down, they have mortice-holes cut in them, in which upright posts are set with tenons,—the posts being the required height of the walls, and having their outside face chopped fair (you must know that their hatchets are everything to Newfoundlanders); the posts are then lined on the top and sawn off straight, the wall-plate nailed on, the roof of chopped sticks put up, the different parts of it being merely nailed on to one another, and never morticed in, only each stick is let about an inch into the side of the other; then the walls, or rather the frames of the walls, are covered externally with clap-board, internally with inch lumber; sometimes the sticks are overlaid with the rough three-quarter or inch board sawn by the people here, and clap-board over that. The roof is then boarded over the rafters with the best board they can get, and then all the neighbours are called in to shingle it; sometimes sawn shingles are used, but more commonly cloven. In the case of a church, a cieling under the tie beams, or at least under the collar, is thought the proper thing, and the lining of the walls inside to be painted one daub of stone colour, which, being unbroken by anything like a string course, and often even by a cornice, is very painful to the eye. The windows are mostly of a genuine meeting-house type, and indeed all other furniture and details are not worthy of remark. High pews and galleries are seen in several of the older churches, though our good Bishop wages war against them. I ought to add, for his sake, that he has been instrumental in very many cases in replacing the old paltry church furniture with other of a more suitable character, of which the church here is a remarkable example. The details are for the most part incorrect, but still of good materials and well meant.

The sort of building I have described above is termed a "frame-house," which is considered the strongest sort of wooden house which can be built. There are also "stud-houses" and "plank-houses," neither of which I shall describe particularly, as they are reckoned unfit for churches. "Stud-wood" is used only for small and mean buildings, and is of a very primitive description: a number of studs (i. e., sticks from four to six inches thick) are set upright on a sill as close together as possible, and the interstices filled up with moss. Plank-houses are made of 3-inch plank, and, having no strong frame, are weaker than frame-houses, but the floors and partitions tie them together sufficiently.

As to stone buildings, it is only in S. John's that any number of them are to be seen, where, as I said above, people are obliged to turn their attention to the subject. I hear a good many complaints of the expensiveness of stone buildings; it seems that they want constant and costly repairs, owing to the ravages made on the cement by the intense frost, and the sudden changes to rapid thaw, which we have

more or less every winter. All sorts of remedies are proposed and tried,—some paint their brickwork, others point with Roman cement. I have an idea myself that roughcast would be effectual, but I do not think I have seen it tried. I should be glad of any hint on this subject, especially from any of our members who may have extended their vacation rambles to such countries as Norway, Sweden, or the north of Russia. Stone churches are built even in Iceland; what cement is used there?

Of stone churches built before the fire of 1846, I know but two,—that of Harbour Grace, and the large Romish chapel (so-called cathedral) in S. John's. The former I have not seen, but I am told that its state is bad enough. The latter I know is far from being in a safe condition. The Cathedral (not the Romish) has taken a good deal of pointing since its erection, but I think it promises pretty well; it is entirely pointed with Roman cement. I heard a great deal on my arrival about the frost splitting the stones in the wall, which I could not quite believe, and, on examining the walls, I found that the fractures in question were nothing more or less than settlements, caused by using too large stones and too fine joints. There are no other stone churches in the diocese besides what I have mentioned.

With this report I hope to send a few sketches to show you what some of our existing churches are. Very little need be said about them,—a sketch will tell you best, and "ex uno disce omnes." The only exception which occurs to me is Pouch Cove church, which is a great attempt at something correct, and in many respects is very pleasing; the great fault, perhaps, is that the walls are much too high. In this case, however, "too many cooks spoiled the broth," and what made it worse was, that none of the cooks knew exactly how the broth was to be mixed; several persons gave their advice about it, but none had a clear notion what Gothic architecture was.

2. To go on, then, with the *future* prospects of church-building here. The Cathedral I hope our eyes will see finished, but if that be not the case, I should think that the next generation would take care that the rest of the building should be only a carrying out of the original design of Mr. G. G. Scott, the architect. But as to other churches which may have to be built hereafter, we must look in the main to the Clergy to be the architects. I see no prospect at present of any really good church architect coming out here; and we want a person *on the spot* to design our wooden churches,—one who is thoroughly acquainted with the wants and resources of the country; it is little use to send home for designs to persons who do not know our manner of building, or the climate of Newfoundland. The churches of Norway were recommended to us some time ago as models; they do indeed give good hints, but it seems to me that such churches could not be put up here out of the material of the country; we have no such timber as that of Norway. In this place we have to go four or five miles to find sticks 11 feet long by six inches at the small end. Again, there is a good deal of wood-work in many parts of England—wooden pillars and arches, towers, porches, and even walls, in Cheshire, Hampshire, Sussex, and Essex; but there thick and crooked oak timber is used, and our sticks are thin

and straight: so that altogether we want a *local* architect. But it seems as though S. John's would scarcely find employment for a really good one; there are builders and carpenters,—those who call themselves architects, and who are competent enough to do the principal work,—to run up square brick houses and design shop-fronts. One of these turned out an Independent meeting-house lately,—a sort of parody of Gothic, with bits cribbed from the Cathedral stuck in here and there, and a good honest square chimney crowning the eastern gable. I fear that I am partly to blame for this, for on the Archdeacon demanding of the “architect” his authority, he produced the elevations of Littlemore, published by our Society some years ago, which, I think, I gave away to somebody in S. John's. All the faults of Littlemore had been diligently copied, and its merits struck out. Here, then, the Clergy *must* be architects, and I see the necessity of their being so more and more every year. I found the necessity in England, but much more in the Colonies.

Let me add my voice to those of many others who have spoken before me, and strongly advise the junior members of our University to qualify themselves for Holy Orders by a practical knowledge of architecture. It is no disgrace to follow such men as William of Wykeham.

I must beg the Society not to accuse me too hastily of egotism, if I say a few words about their humble servant and his works. I have had the office of Diocesan Architect forced upon me, and in that capacity have given designs for eight entire churches, and for additions to two existing churches. However, one of the eight above mentioned (it is in Cape Breton Island, in the Diocese of Nova Scotia) was entirely remodelled, and a new chancel added according to my designs. Two others were in Labrador. When holding the office of Principal of Queen's College at S. John's, I used to give Architectural Lectures to the students twice a-week, as also a course of lectures on the same subject to the Clergy assembled at the Bishop's last visitation. I hope that the attention of the Clergy was called to the subject; it was perhaps only my vanity which made me suppose that the fact of a greatly increased demand for architectural works afterwards was caused by the effect of these same lectures of mine. I hope with this to send a few sketches of some of the churches which have been erected under my superintendence, and leave the Society to form their own opinion about them, asking them to remember that the sudden changes from frost to thaw, the high winds with furious snow-drifts, together with the poor materials, render a very simple outline quite necessary. A Newfoundland architect cannot produce all the varieties which battlements, parapets, pinnacles, gabled aisles, flat roofs, &c., &c., give to your English churches, without making his building either ludicrous, or dangerous, or both together.

I must speak no more of agents, but go on to the head of matter, and say a few words about our materials; how we may hope to handle them.

I am not at all certain (notwithstanding what I have said above, and what others have said,) that the walls of our churches may not be built

very well of stone, either entirely or in part. (a) Entirely, by using (i.) either Cyclopean masonry, which might be done along the south coast of the island where granite is the prevailing rock. In this case no cement would be used outside, only the stones must be pretty well squared, and the walls being plaistered inside, the air could not penetrate through the wall: (ii.) Or by giving the walls a good coat of rough-cast, always remembering to use small stones with wide joints, (like Roman masonry,) which will give a better hold to the rough-cast, as well as tend to make the settlements of the wall less ruinous in their consequences than where large stones and fine joints are used. (β) Or our walls might be built partly of stone, partly of wood; thus in the case of towers the lower part might be of stone, and the upper stage of wood, as is the case of many churches in Sussex and Hants, e.g. West-hampnet near Chichester. Or in the case of lower walls, they might be built in "black and white," as the Cheshire phrase is—a sort of work often seen even in large houses in that county, and very generally between Gloucester and Bristol, which consists of a wooden frame filled in with brick or stone; the stone or brick whitewashed, and the wooden frame painted black, or, what looks better, red. This sort of work, I think, might be employed in some districts hereabouts. On Bell Isle, in my parish, is found a sort of schist rock, which breaks to a smooth face, and often as square as a brick. The stones would lie together so close in a wall as scarcely to require any pointing or cement:—I have seen houses built in this fashion in Cornwall (in the neighbourhood of Liskeard I particularly remember them,) which had no sort of cement or mortar outside. And the window and door jambs being of timber, as also the quoins and other dressings, no dressed stones would be needed in such buildings, and the services of the stone-cutter dispensed with. I cannot help thinking that we shall be obliged to make more use of stone for churches and houses than is now done, as proper sticks for building are getting very scarce in the neighbourhood of S. John's, and round Conception Bay, owing partly to fires among the woods in summer, which fires extend often for five or six miles in length, and partly to the wasteful way the people hereabouts have of cutting and destroying the trees; barking many while still standing for the sake of the rind, and felling the trees in winter two feet or so above the root, they being buried in snow so deep or deeper, while they hack about the smaller trees to get boughs for the covering of their fish flakes.

As to buildings entirely of wood, we may make them much more ornamental than they generally are now. At present the ultima Thule of elegance in a wooden house, is to have the clap board nicely planed and painted white, and the frames of the doors and windows painted umber. But if the clap board be nailed on, some horizontally, some obliquely, with the frame-work painted with red and the clap board with yellow ochre, the building will have a much more pleasing appearance, with a very small extra expense—I ought rather to say less expense. The Parsonage here has been clap-boarded thus. It occurs to me that many Members of the Society do not understand what "clap board" means; I did not before I came out here. A straight stick is sawn down in such a way that each board shows a wedge-like

section. This board when planed, is nailed across the uprights of the frame in courses about four inches—the nail which secures the lower, i.e. the thick edge, goes through the thin edge of the board below.

The *roofs* of our churches here deserve a good deal of thought and attention, for there are few places where a real good American timber roof can be erected; the native “sticks” must furnish all building materials in several out-harbours. But even with these we may have good ecclesiastical-looking roofs—e.g. such as those figured in plates 171, 175, of the 2nd Vol. of the “Glossary of Architecture,” (5th edition) which are such as can be constructed with our small, straight timber. If any Members of our Society have fallen in with such a roof with its original decorative painting, I should be glad for any hints on this head.

Glazing is another matter on which I have thought a good deal. There are no workmen at all in Newfoundland who can make lead sashes worth anything. Zinc sashes have been used in several churches and houses, but few persons understand the way to use it, and I have found that the casements cannot be made weather-tight. You must remember that snow and rain with us always comes with a heavy gale: it does not fall quietly as with you at home. I think that in many cases we must use wooden sashes; this is the sort of work which people here understand, and is quite weather-tight. Indeed it is rather expensive when the quarrels are as small as you have in churches at home; but although I would never recommend large square panes such as are used commonly in dwelling-houses; I think we might have something between the two panes about 6 or 7 inches across, and arranged diamond-wise.

On the subject of *heating* churches I should be glad of any suggestions. I think myself that the mode of heating hot-houses would be the best in this climate. The hot air from a furnace below the level of the floor is carried by a pipe of drain tiles along the church, and discharges itself by a pipe or flue up a corner of the tower.

I am almost ashamed to trouble you with this long story, but perhaps as a report from Newfoundland is a novelty to the Society, I shall be excused. I shall be truly thankful for hints and suggestions on the subjects I have mentioned. Permit me also to draw the attention of Members to a statement which I hope to send by the same mail which takes this, concerning the new church which I am endeavouring to erect here. I presume that as the Society did not grant money to new churches when I was resident at Oxford, so it does not at present; but that the Committee will kindly recommend my case to the Members. I have only space to add that I am

Your obedient servant,

WILLIAM GREY.

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Sketches of Newfoundland
and Labrador in [1858]?

(these are sketches by
William Grey)