

The Restoration of Paisley Abbey.

THE ancient Abbey of Paisley has witnessed seven centuries of Scottish life. It was once a magnificent and powerful monastic house. At the Reformation it was fortunate in escaping, to a great extent, the ruthless destruction which took place elsewhere. But the reformed clergy, with all their zeal for pure doctrine, were poor custodians of noble ecclesiastical architecture, and the Abbey Church, its revenues alienated, fell into obscurity and neglect.

In modern times a worthier spirit has grown throughout the country. Many fine old churches have been rescued from decay, and others in ruins have been restored. In the case of Paisley Abbey, this work, already partially attempted, is now almost completed, with a beauty and magnificence which recall the best days of pre-Reformation architecture in Scotland. The occasion seems a fitting one to relate the circumstances of the Restoration, and to call attention, however briefly, to those facts about the Abbey, historical and architectural, which give it a special and enduring interest.

I. PAISLEY AND IONA.

Through S. Mirin, the local patron saint, the traditions of Paisley Abbey are closely linked with S. Columba and the Celtic Church. Mirin, a pupil of Congal of Bangor, and eventually himself the Prior, was a contemporary and friend of Columba. He came from Ireland in 580, and founded a church in Paisley. When the Clugnaic monks arrived six centuries later, they found his memory still green and fragrant. In S. Mirin's Chapel, an extension of the south transept of the Abbey, erected in 1499

NOTE.

In photograph of Paisley Abbey, opposite page 56,
for “1897” read “1862.”



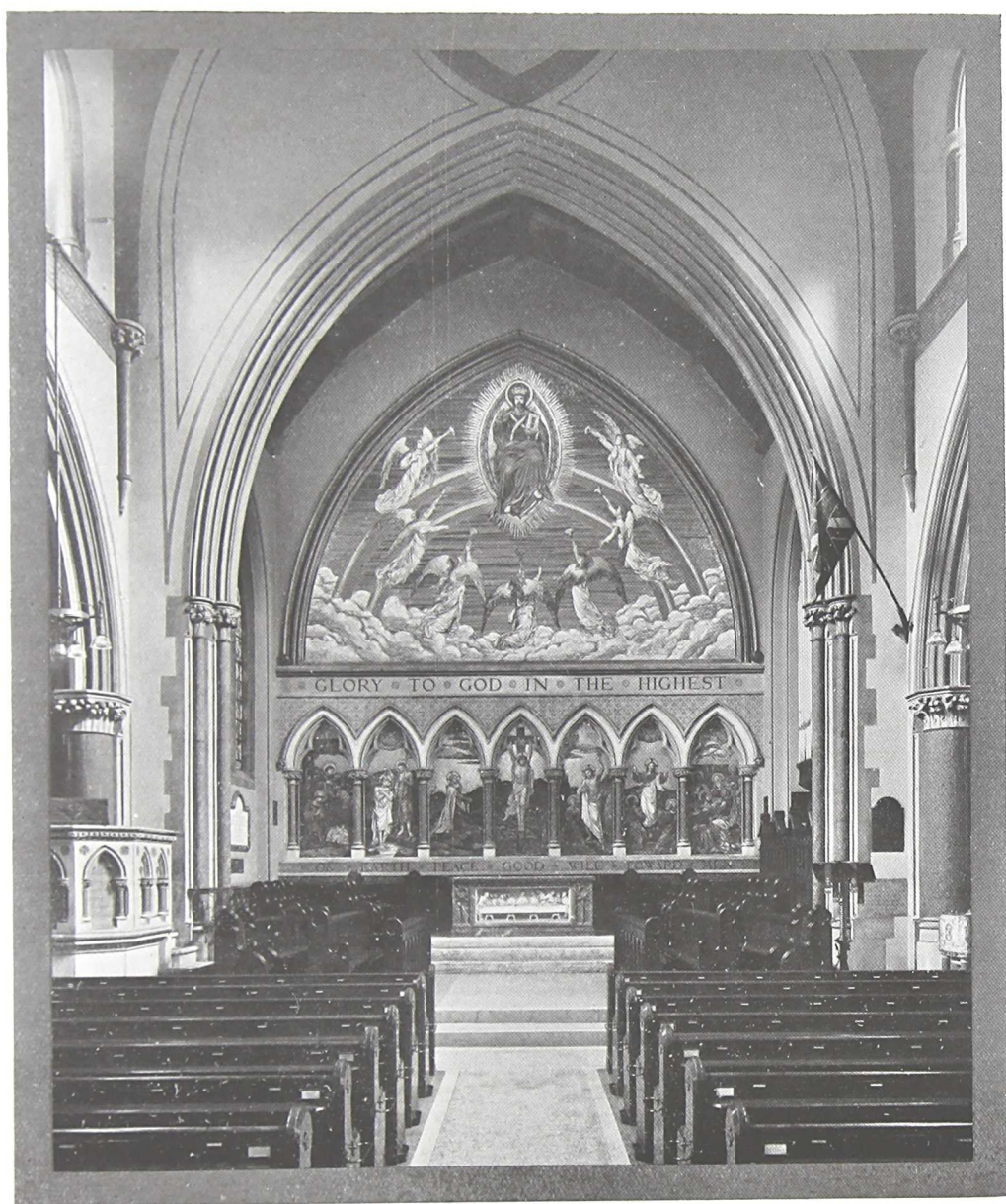
Paisley Abbey from the North.

John Stewart.



Paisley Abbey.

View of the Nave and ruined Transept prior to 1897.



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S. Columba's Church, London.

and dedicated to S. Mirin and S. Columba, there are ten sculptured panels depicting incidents in the legendary life of S. Mirin. These carvings, when in their original position, probably formed part of the retable of an altar in the Abbey Church,¹ and, though they would appear to be of fifteenth century date, they testify to the Celtic antecedents of the monastery. During its history the monastery at Paisley received rich material benefit from the West Highlands. The fact was doubtless due to the memory of these earlier relations with the church of S. Mirin. It used to be thought that the monastery of Iona was an offshoot from Paisley. That has been found to be incorrect. But recent excavations at the Abbey brought to light a few of the capitals of the mediæval cloister columns, which are very similar to those at Iona. They have determined the design of this part of the restored buildings, and are incorporated in the new colonnade. These ancient stones have therefore fascinating suggestions for the imagination. They link us on to Iona and the Celtic Church. The shades of S. Mirin and S. Columba meet and walk in the cloisters at Paisley.

II. THE CRADLE OF THE STEWART KINGS.

The Abbey has a special claim on the reverence of the nation as the cradle and early spiritual home of the royal house of Stewart.² The founder was Walter Fitz-Alan, a Breton, the great-grandson of Alan, Dapifer or Steward of Dol in Brittany.³ The family had settled in England, and were patrons of the Clugnaic Priory of Wenlock. Walter came to Scotland with David I. In 1163, being back in England with King Malcolm at Fotheringay Castle, he signed an agreement founding a monastery at Paisley. The monks were to come from Wenlock, but were to be subject direct to the parent House of Clugny. It was surely a strange conjunction of events that staged this historic scene where, four centuries later, Mary, Queen of Scots, the lineal descendant of Walter, met her tragic fate. The Abbey contains a memorial of these events in the beautiful oak pulpit gifted in 1904 by Mrs James

¹ 'Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland,' Vol. lxii. (1927-8).
'Remains of Altar Retables of late mediæval date in Scotland,' by J. S. Richardson, F.S.A.Scot. Cf. 'Proceedings,' Vol. xxxv. (1900-1).

² The spelling, Stuart, for the Royal House, came into being in the time of Mary, Queen of Scots.

³ *Vide* 'The Scottish Historical Review,' Vol. xxiv., No. 96, July 1927.

A. MacKean. It is an exact copy of an old pulpit in Fotheringay Church.

The family of the Stewards succeeded each other in hereditary succession, and were loyal and generous benefactors of the monastery. In 1245 it was raised to the status of an Abbey.¹ A later Walter, Steward under Robert the Bruce, fought gallantly at Bannockburn. He had his reward when the Bruce gave him his daughter Marjory in marriage. The young bride was accidentally killed within the year by a fall from her horse, but, in dying, she left a son, the future Robert II. The mother of the Stewart kings is buried in the Abbey. And there is no sufficient reason for doubting that the effigy on the canopied tomb-chest which, after many vicissitudes, found a sanctuary in S. Mirin's Chapel, is that of the Bruce's daughter. Robert II.'s two wives, Elizabeth More and Queen Euphemia, rest within the Abbey. Robert III., after his unhappy reign, was interred under the high altar. Robert II. was buried at Scone, strangely so, for all his forebears, back to Walter Fitz-Alan himself, are buried at Paisley.

Under royal patronage the Abbey prospered. The Stewart kings were frequent guests of the Abbot. James IV., remorseful for his share in his father's murder, received absolution from his friend, the Abbot of Paisley. There is no evidence that the hapless Mary, Queen of Scots, ever visited the Abbey, but she had close interests in it, and there is the romantic tradition that she was wooed and won by Darnley at Crookston Castle, near by. The last Abbot, Archbishop Hamilton, was her trusted friend and adviser. His nephew, Claud Hamilton, after the Reformation became vested as Commendator in the Abbey temporalities, and lived at the Place of Paisley, previously the conventual buildings, but transformed by him into a mansion-house. Claud fought for the Queen at Langside, and was deeply involved in her later adventures. A room in the Place which still retains its original ornate plaster ceiling in rich relief has sometimes been called "Queen Mary's room." It belongs to the reconstructed house of later date, and she can never have occupied it. Her son, however, James VI., twice visited Paisley, on the first occasion, in 1597, bringing with him his Queen, Anne of Denmark. We have a quaint

¹ Lees, 'The Abbey of Paisley,' p. 58. The Pope's bull was in 1219; but the Abbot of Clugny's permission was not received till 1245.

record of the second visit in 1617, during which James, now also King of England, was entertained in the great hall of the Place. When eventually the curtain fell on the fortunes of the Stewarts, the old sanctuary of their earlier and brighter days was forgotten. For two centuries it was unvisited by royalty. But Queen Victoria on her visit to Paisley in 1888 was deeply interested in the historic shrine of her ancestors, and caused a monument to be erected to the memory of Robert III., the last of his race buried within the Abbey. To this day, however, the eldest son of the British Sovereign is Lord High Steward of Scotland and Baron of Renfrew.

III. GREAT MEMORIES.

The old church has known other scenes and events of great historic interest. The birthplace and early home of Scotland's noblest patriot, Sir William Wallace, are near at hand. The beautiful transition Norman doorway in the cloisters dates from his time. The future deliverer of his country must often have passed through this doorway into the nave to worship with his parents, and he would probably receive part of his early education from the monks. In 1308 Robert the Bruce came to Paisley Abbey to be absolved for the murder of the Red Comyn. An interesting feature in the church is connected with the memory of the great King Robert. Sir Alan Cathcart, who had accompanied the good Douglas when the latter set out for the Holy Land with the Bruce's heart, and who was with him in Spain when he fell, brought the heart back for burial at Melrose. The arms of the Cathcart family, prominent on one of the pillars on the south side of the nave, commemorate this safe return. The last Lord of the Isles, John, Earl of Ross, after his stormy career, passed the closing years of his life as a monk at Paisley. His body lies buried near the high altar, by the side of his friend and patron, Robert III.

In later days many strange scenes were witnessed within the old walls. Here Cromwell's soldiers roughly dispersed the local ministers of the Covenant at a meeting of Presbytery. Here in 1670 the saintly Archbishop Leighton pled—alas! in vain—for understanding and peace between the two opposing parties in the Church. Here Claverhouse, the terror of the Covenanters, was found in softer mood when, in 1684, he married the beau-

tiful Jean Cochrane, grand-daughter of Lord Dundonald, then in possession of the Place of Paisley. It is recorded that, within an hour of his wedding, a messenger came riding in hot haste with a summons to him to speed at once to Slamannan to disperse a conventicle. "There was never a more saddle-sore and weary bridegroom than Claverhouse when he dismounted, three days later, on his return to Paisley to claim his bride. . . . Before the day closed, they went quietly into the great Abbey Church and entered S. Mirin's Aisle, where for a few moments they knelt down together and sought a blessing from the God of their fathers." ¹

This was under the Episcopal régime, but almost a century earlier, during the stern anti-Papist ministry of Andrew Knox, daily services, with prayers read from the 'Book of Common Order,' were held in S. Mirin's Chapel. In 1636, the Presbytery of Paisley, while protesting to the Council against the new liturgy of that date, was loyal to its own Scots Prayer-Book—"seeing we have had a liturgie established by authority, where-with we have been bred and educated ever since the Reformation, and the same not abolished. . . ." ²

IV. FROM SPLENDOUR TO DECAY.

There is a peculiar interest to-day in the remarkable contrast between the Abbey as it must have appeared in its great days and as it became later, after long and shameful neglect. We have a record of the magnificence of its adornments under Abbot Tervas (1445-1459), "its statlie stalls" for twenty-six monks, chandeliers of silver, a lectern of brass, "mony other gude jowellies," and at the high altar "the stateliest tabernacle that ever was in all Scotland and the maist costlie." ³ A massive wall, built by Abbot George Shaw and adorned with statues, extended for a mile round the Abbey policies. A great gate house with tower, erected by Abbot Tervas, gave entrance to the grounds. The conventual buildings of Abbot George Shaw's time were complete and uninjured, and close by and across the river lay the Abbey gardens and orchards. The Cart ran sweetly then, with sparkling

¹ An imaginative but delightful comment on the incident in Mrs Parker's 'My Ladie Dundie,' p. 134.

² Lees, p. 286 ff., the incidents relating to Mr John Crichton, minister of the Abbey at this period, and his railed altar, being specially interesting in the history of church worship in Scotland.

³ 'Chronicle of Auchinleck,' p. 19.

water in which the salmon leapt, its green banks softly shaded with trees. "The beauty of the buildings of this temple," says the contemporary Bishop Leslie, "the splendour of the church furniture, and the beauty of the gardens, may rival many churches which are to-day considered more magnificent among foreign nations."¹

There is a sad contrast between this fair scene and what it became later. From old prints one sees what the exterior was like. Only the nave and S. Mirin's Chapel stood intact, the rest of the fabric being in ruins. The top of the north porch, which contained a parvise, had been disfigured by an ugly erection used as a session house. The entire church was shut in on all sides by sordid buildings. The churchyard was a dreary wilderness, the ground swelling up on the walls of the church. The west door was obstructed by a dunghill. The interior (as it was in 1859), we are told, "was like a vault in a graveyard. Water ran down the walls, and an unwholesome smell pervaded every part of the church. Heavy galleries round the place cut the pillars in two. The clerestory windows were blocked up, and whitewash was freely used. The whole of the moulding at the base of the pillars was hidden out of sight in the soil. . . . The pulpit was placed against the centre pillar of the north aisle, and round the floor of the church was a wide circular passage with huge iron stoves placed in it at intervals. This passage formed a favourite promenade for stragglers during the time of service, who perambulated from one stove to another, occasionally lighting their pipes at them before going out."

V. RESTORATION.

The era of restoration in modern times² began in 1788, when Dr Boog, minister of the first charge, made some excellent repairs. The present plaster roof dates from this restoration, and though now quite unworthy of the Abbey, was a notable improvement on a "roof full of holes, through which the birds obtained free access."³ In 1862 the Rev. Andrew Wilson—"dear Andrew," as Dr

¹ Quoted Lees, p. 238.

² Lees, p. 338, *vide* also the late Dr Maclean's very valuable record 'Paisley Abbey Restoration, 1913,' from which the ground plan by the late Dr Macgregor Chalmers is reproduced by kind permission of the publishers.

³ R. A. Smith, of Scots' Psalmody fame, composer of the tunes "Invocation," "S. Lawrence," "Hamilton," &c., was precentor of "the Abbey Band" for a time during Dr Boog's ministry.

Lees, his junior colleague, spoke of him—carried through a large scheme of restoration. “The unsightly galleries were taken down, the floor cleared of the accumulated rubbish of centuries, the body of the church reseated, the clerestory windows opened up, the transept walls and windows restored, and the turrets rebuilt.”

In 1897 the Rev. Dr Thomas Gentles, the indomitable pioneer of a complete restoration scheme, raised the sum of £20,880 for this purpose. Dr Rowand Anderson was appointed architect. Unfortunately, the larger part of the money had to be spent in strengthening the foundations. Other splendid and important work, however, was accomplished. The pre-Reformation east wall of the nave was taken down; the four piers of the crossing were rebuilt; the transepts and S. Mirin’s Chapel were again made part of the church; and the tower was rebuilt considerably above the roof.

The final stages in the scheme were initiated in 1911, the Rev. A. M. Maclean being its active promoter till his lamented death in 1925. The restoration of the choir was made possible by the munificent bequest of £30,000 (later raised to £40,000) by the late Sir John (then Mr) Stewart Clark and his sisters, Mrs Bryce Allan, Miss Robina Clark, Mrs James Clark, and Lady Dixon, in memory of their parents. The war intervened, and the work had to stop. In 1923, operations were resumed, but costs had so risen that the sum originally subscribed was found to be quite insufficient. With unstinted liberality it has again been largely augmented by the Clark family. Mr A. F. Craig gifted £2000 for the restoration of part of the cloisters, this work being completed before the war. The late Mr Robert Allison gave £8000 to complete the building of the tower, afterwards generously supplementing this by £6000. The work was committed to the capable hands of the late Dr Macgregor Chalmers, who has left so big and enduring a mark on the church architecture of Scotland. Unfortunately, he did not live to see the completion of what he rightly regarded as his greatest achievement. But the walls of the new choir had been erected, and the vaulted roof, with its elaborately carved bosses, has been completed according to his plans. Dr Macgregor Chalmers was succeeded by Sir Robert Lorimer, who has been responsible for the final stages. Sir John Stirling Maxwell succeeded the late Sir Charles Bine Renshaw as chairman of the Restoration Committee.

VI. THE ABBEY TO-DAY.

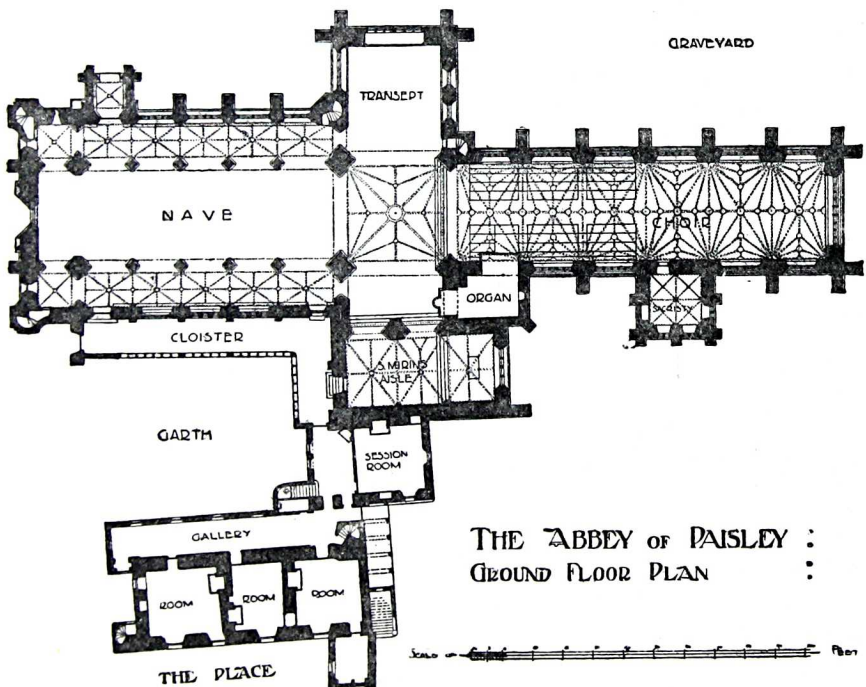
Through the public-spirited generosity of a few citizens of Paisley, an "Abbey Surroundings Committee," appointed in 1897, was enabled to buy up old and dilapidated properties and other buildings which obstructed the view of the Abbey and spoilt its amenity. This enlightened policy had been begun as far back as 1872 by Mr Thomas Coats, and many buildings have been removed. The Committee has now finally fulfilled its purpose. Extensive acquirements of property are being handed over to the Town Council of Paisley who, in the most sympathetic and progressive spirit, have agreed to carry out a large and comprehensive scheme of improvement. Within a few years wide clearances round the Abbey will have been made, and the beautiful restored building will have a spacious and worthier setting.

The new aisleless choir is built in the decorated Gothic style. The windows are large, with flowing lines which recall the tracery in Melrose Abbey, whose architect was probably the same as that of the church of the same period at Paisley.¹ It was originally intended to have statues of the Scottish kings and other historic figures connected with the church in the niches round the walls, but circumstances have not yet permitted their erection. The abundant sculpture on the building is conceived in the characteristic playful spirit of the mediæval artist. The frieze running along the top of each wall is specially to be noted for the rich variety of its subject-matter and the exquisite delicacy and grace of the carving. The exterior of the sacristy on the south wall has a theme to itself—viz., Psalm cxlviii. It is a distinct gain to the intelligent appreciation of the work that, being on a lower level, the carving here can be seen to greater advantage. The large gargoyles, which project at the parapet of the choir walls, have appropriate grotesqueness; one of them has the unmistakeable likeness of a monarch opposed to us in the Great War, who, immortalised as a gargoyle, may now be thought of with Christian tolerance! At the east end of the church, high up, are small but interesting sculptures of the heads of King George; the late Dr A. M. Maclean with the Abbot's mitre; the Prince of Wales,

¹ John Morrow, Lees, p. 222.

Baron of Renfrew ; and the late Sir Charles Bine Renshaw, the first chairman of the Restoration Committee, representing the four estates of the realm—the King, the Church, the Lords, and the Commons. The battlements of the tower on the four sides bear shields with the arms of Abbot George Shaw, the Stewarts, the Burgh of Paisley, and the County of Renfrew. The tower is a central one, and has great dignity. It is square and massive, with crocketed turret and pinnacles, and two large windows on each gable. The restored portion of the cloister makes a picturesque corner on the south-west. The Place of Paisley adjoins the cloister, and includes the south walk as part of the post-Reformation reconstruction. It is much to be desired that this fine old building, with its rich historical associations, will now also find a restorer. A beautiful war memorial, the Cross of Sacrifice, stands in the cloister garth.

The interior of the church has now to a great extent the aspect it had in the fifteenth century. The measurements inside are: nave, including the aisles, 96 ft. $\times$ 59 ft. 7 in.; choir, 123 ft. 9 in. $\times$ 32 ft.; crossing, 40 ft.; transepts, 90 ft. 9 in. $\times$ 32 ft.; total length, 259 ft. 9 in.

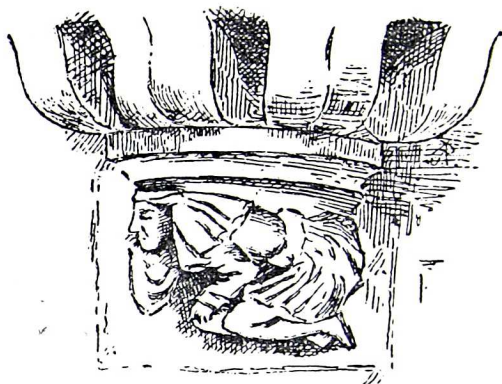


The thirteenth century church was burnt by the English in 1307; a few portions of it yet remain in the earlier styles, and take us back to the days of Walter Fitz-Alan, and of Wallace and Bruce. The late Dr Macgregor Chalmers held that the Abbey was again destroyed by fire in 1498.¹ The view hitherto accepted has been that the work of destruction, mainly of the choir, was brought about, some time before the Reformation, by the fall of the tower built by Abbot Hamilton.² The nave is of fifteenth century construction, and the walls have come to us intact. A unique feature above the triforium is not universally admired, but is undoubtedly of commanding effect—a succession of great corbels which carry the clerestory

walk at these points. Otherwise, and according to the usual custom, the passage would pierce and so, to some extent, weaken the upper walls which support the roof. The round arches of the triforium are similar to, but larger than, those at Dunkeld.

The clerestory is of early English style and is said to be a copy of that of Glasgow Cathedral. The nave is unfortunately disfigured by the west gallery of the restoration of 1862; the gallery should, of course, be removed; and the substitution of chairs for the present pews would restore the fine proportions of the pillars and arches. There is urgent necessity, also, for a new oak roof to replace the present one of plaster.

The vaulted stone roof of the new choir is now the chief glory of the church. The stones within the intersecting and richly embossed ribs are softly streaked with natural colour. This gives them great beauty. The subjects of the sculpture are symbolic, illustrative of Old and New Testament history. Along the walls on either side, symbols of the twelve Apostles are carved on shields



Corbel in Nave.

¹ 'Transactions of the Scottish Ecclesiological Society,' Vol. 'ii., Part 3, 1908-9, p. 402.

² Lees, p. 189.

held by angel figures. The sacristy has interesting sculpture representing "The service of God," and introducing local allusion. The ancient sedilia and the piscina on the south wall survived the last destruction of the choir. The sedilia are remarkable in being four in number; they are partly in ruin, but in the restoration they have been left untouched as relics of the old order.

The Holy Table is of sculptured stone. The choir stalls and a reredos in finely carved oak are outstanding examples of Sir Robert Lorimer's skill in design. For the guidance of donors, a consecutive scheme of subjects has been drawn up for the entire series of windows. Mrs James Clark has further added to her benefaction the gift of the great east window in memory of her husband, Col. Clark, a well-known and honoured elder of the Church, who was killed in France in the Great War. The work has been entrusted to Dr Douglas Strachan. A new and larger organ with 4 manuals, in a casing of carved oak, has been built in, and will make possible a musical service appropriate to the size and beauty of the church. It was desirable for structural reasons to erect the organ now; but the Kirk Session hope that a donor will come forward and associate his name with this necessary adjunct to the restored Abbey.

The upkeep of this noble building and of its Services, which henceforward will devolve upon the congregation, will severely tax its resources. It should not, alone and unhelped, have so heavy a burden imposed on it, in the case of a great national monument. The whole Community, however, is proud of the Abbey to which the town of Paisley owes its origin. The large Restoration Committee, which will soon have completed its labours, is representative of different Churches. The fine spirit in which all have worked together is a happy indication of what may be looked for, in generous sympathy and support, in the years to come.

The restoration is a noble memorial, and it is the most outstanding monument of modern church architecture in Scotland. Every sentiment of high patriotism and romance is stirred by it; art, piety, and devotion have all yielded their fitting service to the work; and the Abbey, when ready for reopening, will begin a new era in its long and chequered history, rededicated to the glory of God, and to the use and advantage, as we trust, of many succeeding generations.

A. R. HOWELL.