

The Transformation of a Country Church.

THE Chapel of the Blessed Virgin of the Garioch was founded before 1357 by Christian Bruce, who in 1326 was created Lady of the Garioch by her brother Robert Bruce, King of Scotland, on the occasion of her marriage to Sir Andrew Murray, Grand Pantelar of Scotland. Sir Andrew died in 1338, and thereafter his widow perpetuated his memory by the erection of the Chapel of Our Lady of the Garioch, the special duty of the chaplains being to say masses for the souls of herself, her husband, and her brother King Robert Bruce. Five other chaplaincies were added from time to time, one by Alexander Stewart, Earl of Mar, for the souls of his followers slain at Harlaw across the valley of the Urie, within sight of the ancient sanctuary, and another by the widow of Sir Andrew Leslie of Balquhain, for the souls of her six sons who fell on that same red field, and of her husband, killed in rebellion at Braco. The six chaplains served by pairs in turn, and there was probably a full Service by the whole Collegiate body in September 1562 when Queen Mary, then staying at the Castle of Balquhain, attended mass at the chapel which her ancestress had founded.

In 1599 this Chapel was replaced by the church of the united parishes of Logie-Durno and Fetternear, which took the name of the Parish of Chapel of Garioch from the old Chapel with which the district had been so long and so honourably associated. In 1812 this church was in turn replaced by the present church, which, when the writer first saw it in 1912, was a plain building of red granite, externally and internally typical of the country churches in the north-east of Scotland, but in no way worthy of the traditions of its site. The church was rectangular in form, with the narrow sides of the rectangle at the east and west, and a vestry and enclosed stair to the gallery at the north side. The eastern gable was crowned by the ball form of ornament common in such churches, and the western by a small belfry, from which a bell, apparently cracked at its mounting, had for many a year sent its unmelodious summons sounding across



The Parish Church.

Chapel of Garioch, Aberdeenshire.

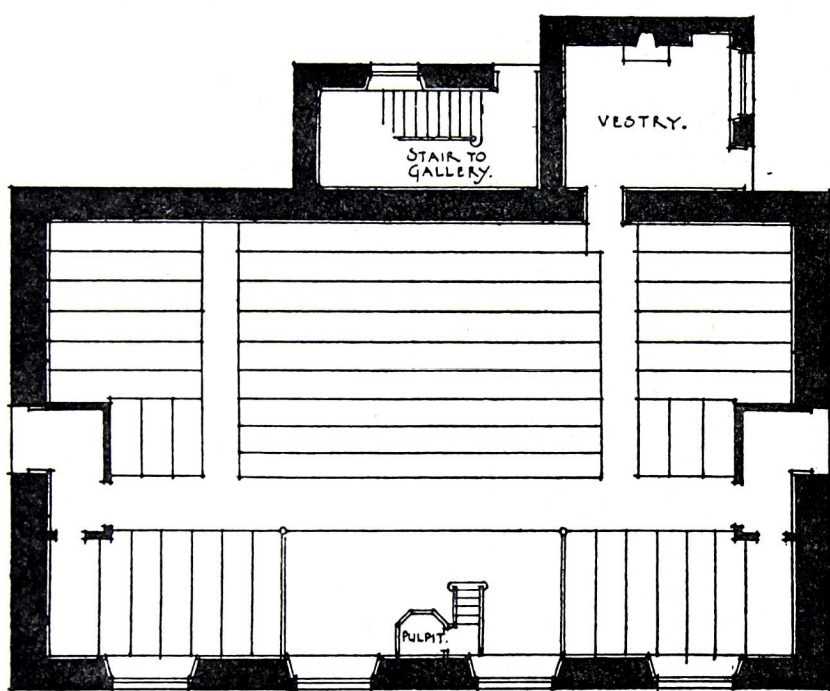
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Keystones of the Sanctuary Arch in Dalmeny Church.

See page 81.

the fertile slopes beneath the shadow of Benachie. Internally the church was not without some measure of quaintness and attractiveness. As will be seen from the plan, the pulpit was on the south side between the centre two of the four large windows which mainly lighted the church, two smaller windows being in the east and west gables above the entrance doors, and partly obscured by the gallery, which covered the remaining sides of the church. The pews were very narrow, upright, and uncomfortable, especially the long pews in the centre of the area, which had broad flat book-boards for use at the celebration of



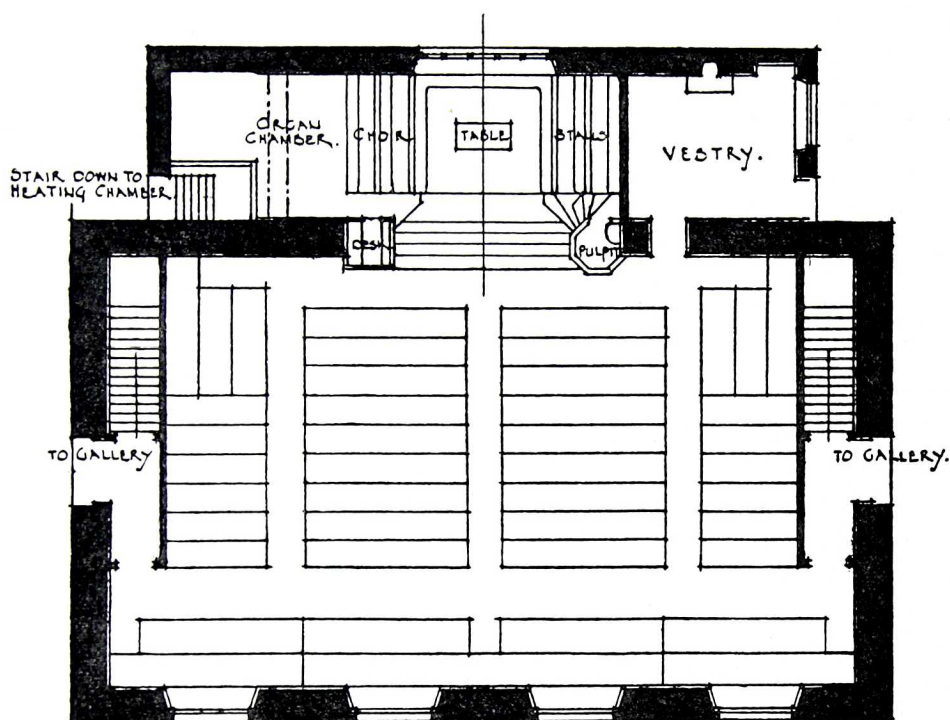
the Lord's Supper. The woodwork of the church was grained and varnished a light shade of oak, and, so far as the pews were concerned, badly worm-eaten. The walls were somewhat elaborately stencilled in various colours, and the flat ceiling was painted blue, bespangled with golden stars, and broken into panels by broad white bands. The lighting was by means of a central fitting with four large oil lamps, and a number of small glass lamps hung in brackets from the walls and pillars. There was a small "Positive" pipe organ with the console at the left-hand side of the pulpit, within a raised enclosure for the choir, who sat round a long rectangular varnished yellow pine Communion Table, which had a ledge round

it for the choir books. The flooring of the church was of wood, raised above the level of the passages, which were of stone; and the church was very inadequately heated by an old saddle boiler. Owing to the fact that the congregation sat facing south, the sun was exceedingly trying to the eyes of those who sat near the front, while those at the back, under the gallery, were in comparative darkness.

The church as it stood had its obvious disadvantages on the score of comfort, and lacked dignity and impressiveness as a place of worship. There was nothing in its atmosphere to beget or add to the sense of reverence in the worshipper, and, with the arrangements as they were, it was not possible to do much in the way of introducing a more ordered form of service. What could be done in the meantime, however, was done. The enclosure for the choir was enlarged, a new oak Communion Table suitably carved was provided, and dedicated and preserved for its sacred purpose. An Order of Service was drawn up and adhered to, incorporating Scripture sentences calling to prayer and the Lord's Prayer, which latter, at monthly Children's Services, was joined in by the congregation. The Services of the Christian year were observed, and the Apostles' Creed was said on these days, and at the half-yearly observance of the Lord's Supper. On the latter occasions also the Offerings were solemnly received and dedicated. By these means the devotional atmosphere was deepened, and the way prepared for a renovation which would add to the attractiveness and comfort of the church, and make it more truly a place of worship.

The question of renovation was deferred indefinitely by the outbreak of the War, but by the autumn of 1922 sufficient funds had been raised to make the undertaking of the work practicable, and the advice of Dr Marshall Mackenzie of Aberdeen was sought as to how best to go about the task. In making the alteration, various factors had to be borne in mind. There was, of course, the matter of cost, the congregation numbering some 380 members, and its resources not being unlimited. There was the question of the legal requirements in the matter of seating. Owing to the building of a *quoad sacra* church in the parish, the capacity of 722 sittings was no longer needed, but yet the modern requisite of 530 sittings could not be attained without either an expensive addition or the retention of a considerable part of the gallery. There

was also the question of retaining, if possible, something of the character of the old church. All these considerations were very happily met by the plans submitted by Dr Marshall Mackenzie. The centre of the gallery was cut out, and the two ends left and completed with the rather finely panelled woodwork of the portion removed. Stairs leading to these galleries were made from each entrance porch. A fine chancel was built on the north side on the line of the existing vestry, largely constructed of the stonework of the covered gallery staircase which was demolished. The massive granite steps of this stair-



case were used for the steps of the new chancel and the bases of the pulpit and prayer-desk, the remainder of the chancel floor being laid in concrete. The furnishings of the chancel, including pulpit, prayer-desk, choir stalls, and reredos were in oak, carrying out the design of the front of the galleries, and a fine two-manual pipe-organ, gifted along with the pulpit and prayer-desk in memory of the late Captain Smith of Pittodrie, filled the organ chamber on the west side of the chancel. The area and part of the gallery of the church were refloored, the whole re-seated in Columbian pine, with a centre aisle, and a new heating system installed, making use, as far as pos-

sible, of the old piping. All plaster work was made good. The roof attracted the eye no longer in its coating of plain white. The walls lost their gaudy hues, and looked clean and sunny in buff Duresco. The woodwork was stained a dark brown, and all inside doors covered with purple baize. The outside doors were faced with stout oak boards, with oval straps over the joints, and their surface oiled. The church was lighted with graceful brass lamps hanging from chains in wrought-iron fittings. A richly jewelled brass alms dish and two brass flower-vases standing on the ledge on the reredos behind the Communion Table added, with the brass pulpit lectern, a note of richness and brightness to the chancel. Finally, the church bell was recast and rehung. Apart from the pulpit, prayer-desk, organ, and brasses, the work cost roughly £1400, which, with the exception of £100 generously gifted by the Baird Trust towards the reseating, was raised wholly by the congregation and friends. An impression of the church will be got from the drawing facing page 81.

The renovation has been entirely satisfactory. It has given the congregation a dignified and beautiful place of worship. It has kept something of the character of the old church, and so blended the old and the new that one would think the church as altered was the original building. It has provided a comfortable church as regards seating, lighting, and heating, and one in which the whole congregation is kept in close touch with the minister. It has created a suitable atmosphere in which to conduct a seemly and ordered Service, and, from the day when the church was reopened, such a Service has been conducted. That the Service is acceptable to the people is evident from the fact that, three years after the writer has ceased to be minister of the parish, the Service continues unchanged under his successor. That it has not been without its effect in the deepening of the spirit of reverence has been evident from many signs. A few weeks after the church was reopened, a young woman bore in her own way her testimony to this. "Do you know, mother," she said, "I never go to church now but it makes me think of the Communion." If it does that, has not the renovation achieved its end?

WILLIAM MACNICOL.

We are indebted to Dr A. Marshall Mackenzie & Son, Architects, Aberdeen, for the plans and drawing illustrating this article.