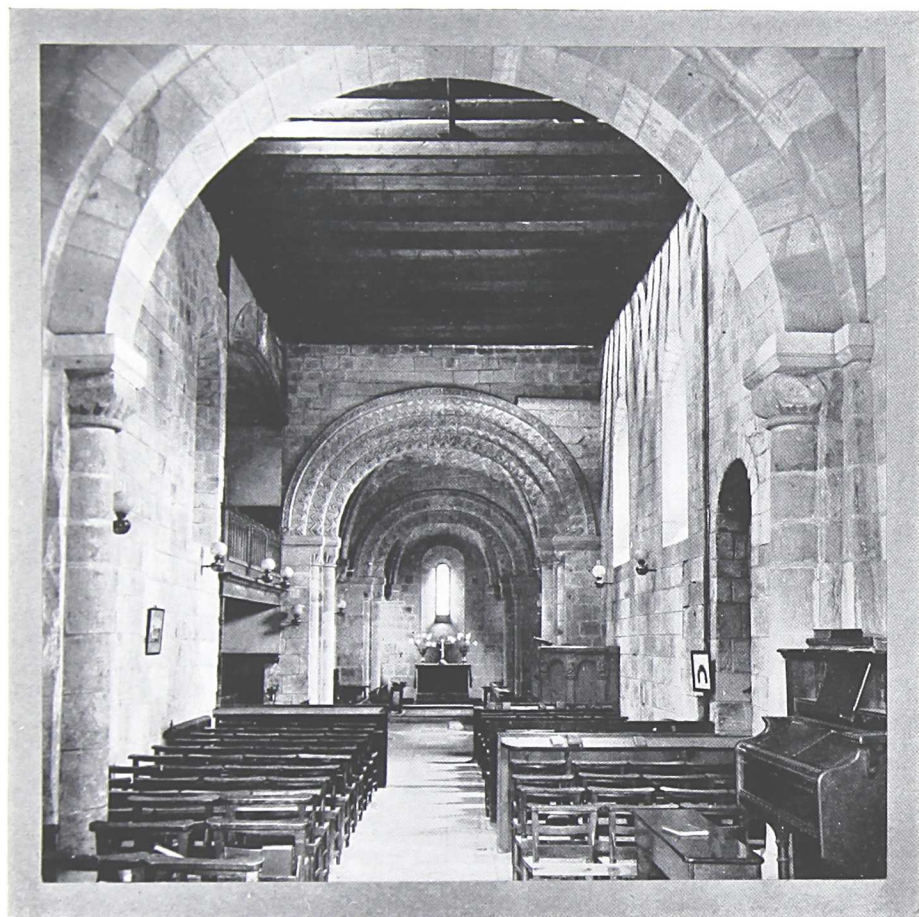




DALMENY CHURCH—INTERIOR.

The Restoration of Dalmeny Church.

"THE ANNUAL," of May, 1929, contained an article describing the progress of this restoration, and I am now asked to continue the story and bring the information up-to-date. But there is so much to tell! and each of the incidents seems jealously to demand inclusion! We shall see.

At the time of the last article the interior of the Chancel had been brought back to its original grace. Walls, windows, the Sanctuary arch and the vaulting of the choir and sanctuary had gone through their process of repair, and were both sound and fair. The nave, in contrast, was still sheathed in lath and plaster, with the huge west gallery and the mock plaster vaulting obscuring any likeness to anything that had any right to be in the earth beneath—especially if attached to the most perfect Norman Chancel that can be found in this island of perfidious Angles and honest Scots.

When things were at this stage we received a lot of good-intentioned advice about leaving well alone, about the size of the next part of the undertaking, and the impossibility of financing it. However, things did not seem to be so well that they could be left alone, and we hoped the other matters would solve themselves if we carried on as steadily and economically as we could. So we set to work, stripped the chancel arch of its plaster, and regarded a little ruefully its sagging lines and broken stones. These showed more clearly than any records the threat of collapse which had necessitated relieving the arch (in 1734) of the weight of the gable wall above.

Then the laborious process of repair began. The foundations came first. After that, the bases and responds of the piers, which had been cut away in earlier alterations, were replaced. Then bit by bit the arch itself was braced up and consolidated. In the end, only two of the carved stones had to be entirely renewed, the other mutilated ones being repaired with carefully fitted indents.

While this was being undertaken by skilled masons, the "Gang" were preparing the way in the nave. Gradually

they dug down the whole floor area to a depth of four feet, underpinning the walls and laying a solid raft of concrete under the whole building at a level convenient for the paving which would follow.

The masons were now ready to commence work on the Nave walls. The plaster had to come off ; this could not be done without the removal of the ceiling ; and this removal occupied one of the great field days of the work. It was a Monday evening, with a full muster of the "Gang" armed with all manner of tools—crowbars, pinches, miner's picks, spades, ropes, and tackle of sorts. (During the day the Church had been cleared of every piece of moveable furniture.) They went aloft, there was a sound of battering within, and soon from every door and window and up through the roof clouds of white dust poured out as if the church were on fire. Improvised gas masks were put on to make breathing possible in the atmosphere charged with dust of falling lime, and the battering went on. Every man went at his bit of ceiling or wall as if he had a personal enmity against it. In about four hours the job was completed. It looked like a bombardment ; there was a litter of debris two feet thick covering the whole floor of the Nave. The villagers were invited to come and collect kindling wood for their fires and lime for their gardens, and by dint of a week's barrowing and spraying, washing and dusting, the Kirk was in use again on the Sunday. Next week the West Gallery, which had served as a convenient scaffolding for these operations, came down. The characteristic square proportions of a Norman Nave came back to Dalmeny Church, and the tall narrow opening of the south door, which the gallery had blocked, was once again revealed.

Came next the treatment of the walls and roof, the rebuilding of the widened windows to their original dimensions, the probing of the west wall and finding embedded there the original piers of the tower arch, unseen since about 1480 when the tower collapsed. By the time this was completed and the Church made decently and comfortably habitable again, we had not yet arrived at a satisfactory solution of two of the main problems which confronted us : (1) the original design of the south door which had been widened in 1736, especially the details of the inner ring of the arch which had been removed ; and (2) the character of the old Western Tower.

It was determined to delay both these matters until every possibility of direct evidence had been exhausted.

The next work undertaken, therefore, was the pointing of the whole of the exterior walls of the Church, except, of course, the west gable, which would have to come down when the Tower came to be built.

Here again Providence rewarded patience. Just to the left of the south doorway was a piece of wall which had been many times altered in the centuries of changing fashions. In rebuilding the inner face of this wall, traces had been found of a door followed by a square-headed window. This latter was finally blocked up at the time the South doorway was widened and the tympanum filled with glass. When the time came to prepare this portion for pointing, the wall quietly subsided, and among the rubble which fell out on to the pathway were portions of three carved stones—unmistakably from the inner arch of the doorway! Previously a portion of a similar stone had been found under the floor and set aside.

Plans for the doorway could now be gone on with. They were, and when the pointing was finished, an immediate start was made with it. Again—just to make assurance doubly sure—when the jambs of the doorway were being excavated, three more of these stones were discovered, one of them absolutely intact, the opened strands of a rope on the outer face, a *taurus* moulding on the soffit, and a plain back for the door to butt against. After that we could say “Let there be a doorway as of old.”

That really ends the first chapter of the work, during which we employed one, two, or three skilled masons, and carried on bit by bit on what was fundamentally repair work, guided by the evidence of the existing stonework. The next chapter is a very short one, in which readers will not be harrassed with technical details. It is the story of the rebuilding of the gable wall (on steel girders) above the Chancel Arch, and the lowering of the roof of the choir to rest, as of course it originally did, upon the corbel table. The effect of this was a return to the right external levels of the building, and a wonderful addition in grace and proportion to the whole structure, which now rose step by step from apse to choir and choir to nave, each division being represented by an interior arch and an increase in the width of the building. This portion of the work was entrusted to Messrs Robertson & Carrick, under the direction of Mr Alfred Greig, to whom every lover of Dalmeny Church is lastingly indebted.

And now the Tower! Excavations had been made which definitely established its original ground plan. Other factors, such as the height of the lower storey and the placing of the windows, were determined by the height of the Tower Arch and the proportional rise of the carved course in which the sills of windows are formed. Mr Greig had drafted out and then modelled the main outlines, leaving details to be decided from the evidence we expected to find during the demolition of the gable wall. But here we remembered the wise words of Scripture—"Which of you intending to build a tower sitteth not down and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?" The more we sat down and considered the cost the more we realised the bleak truth that we had not sufficient to begin it! An Appeal Committee was formed to put the case before a wider public. At the first meeting that Committee took an adventure in faith. The Dalmeny Quarry from which the Church was built is no longer workable, but thousands of tons of its stone were taken in to Edinburgh last century for building purposes, and some of this became available by the demolition of the Calton Jail. Providence again favoured us in this, because apart from our Tower there did not seem at the time any urgent reason for clearing the Calton Hill! The Committee, being heedful of such indications of favour, although as yet impecunious as a Committee of church mice, boldly ordered all the suitably sized Dalmeny stone available.

So the village green was covered with some hundreds of tons of splendid stone. Lorries brought from Edinburgh about twenty tons a day, and the "Gang" turned out those winter nights with frozen fingers and an assortment of storm lanterns, and graded and stacked the stone.

In April, 1931, the Committee issued the appeal booklet and sent it forth in hope. The financial crisis held the purse strings of the nation and the harvest was slow to be gathered.

In July of that year, King George and Queen Mary, with the Duke and Duchess of York, came to visit our wee Kirk and gave us all the encouragement of their good wishes—and most understanding good wishes they were. From that day the stream of generosity did not stop until with task accomplished we joined in the great service of Praise and Dedication.

This year, during the time of the nation's mourning, all the Press pictures of His Majesty's visit were framed in

black and hung in the Church, while the visitors' book lay open on the Communion Table at the page where the King had signed.

In addition to private contributions and a redoubled effort on the part of our own congregation, grants were promised from the Baird Trust, the Pilgrim Trust, and the Home Mission Committee, while the First Presbyterian Church in New York, to whose building fund Dalmeny had subscribed twenty-three pounds Scots in 1723, sent back the £23 with £100 added for goodwill !

The special grants were set aside for the final effort, but other moneys were spent as they came, keeping hewers in employment those two difficult years, dressing stones which would be used when the time for building came.

Then was a great day. Easter Monday, 1934.

The "Gang" had already made preparations for it. They had dug down the entire area of the Tower to the solid rock, and carried this up in reinforced concrete to the building level. They had put up a wooden partition at the west end of the Nave, so that the Church might go on in uninterrupted use while the Tower was a-building. They had constructed a light railway to run the rubbish out of the Churchyard, and that Monday they began to take down the gable wall. It meant removing about 250 tons of solidly built masonry, and letting each stone down carefully to be examined. About twenty men were working every night, and it took exactly a month, as it was planned to do. Then the evidence of the old stones was read. They gave us four old corbels to carry the baulks of oak which form the ceiling in the Church. They gave us the carvings of the old Tower windows—if we had thought it well to copy exactly, or rather too exactly, the designs of eight hundred years ago. They gave us stones of each of the three orders of the original tower arch, by which Mr Greig was able to check his earlier forecast. His details were identical with the authentic stones, except that he had allowed an extra half-inch in length of the stones of the inner ring. On went the work—and on would go this article, but a photograph of the completed structure is more profitable than many words.

The total cost of the Restoration, apart from all work, services, and gifts, is a little over £7000.

An entire absence of mention of any furnishings in the Church does not mean that there is no interest in these, nor that such as are intended to be permanent are not

beautiful in workmanship and appropriateness. It only means that there must be moderation in all things, and that this "Annual" must minister to other interests than Dalmeny Kirk.

W. NEIL SUTHERLAND.