Dunblane Cathedral and its Environs

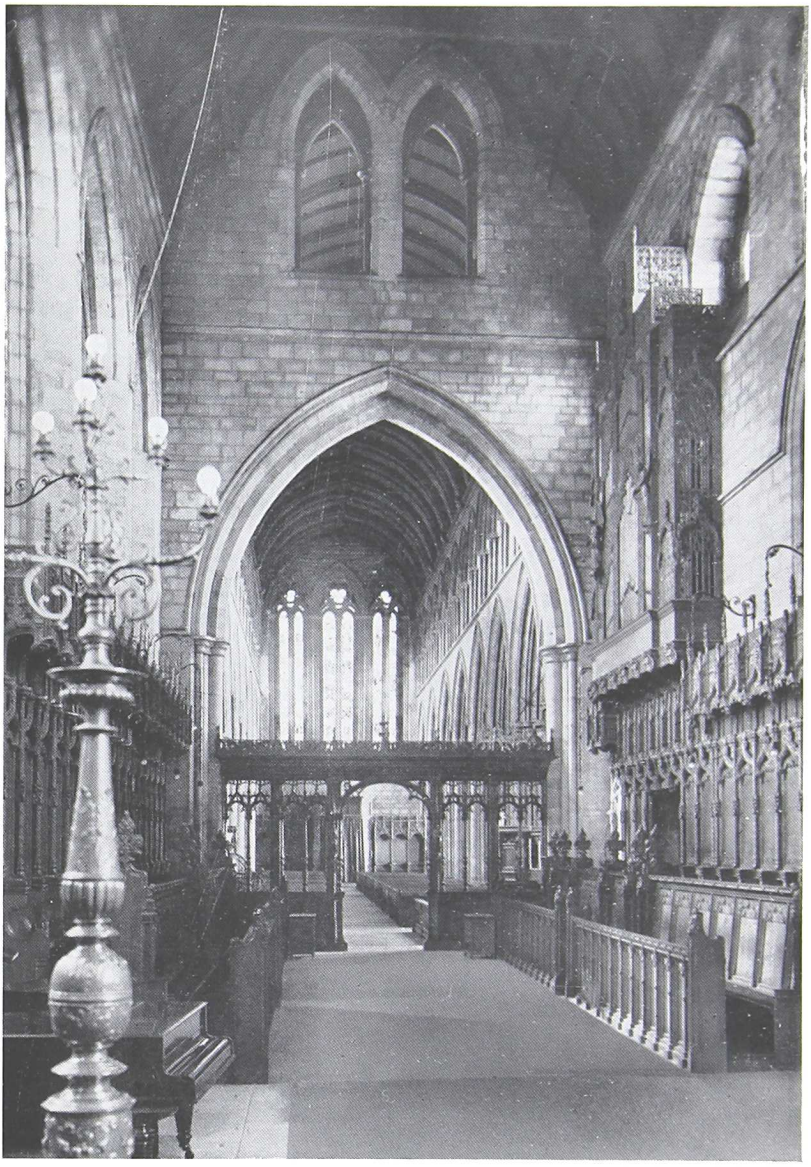
VISITORS to Scotland are often impressed by the great number of ancient ecclesiastical buildings scattered throughout the length and breadth of the land, Cathedrals, Abbeys, Priories and Chapels, many of them alas mere ruined shells, yet still conveying a stately magnificence, or in the case of the smaller buildings, an austere simplicity that once was theirs. One wishes that our national history had followed a less turbulent course, and that architectural masterpieces like the Cathedrals of Elgin and St Andrews, and the Abbeys of Melrose and Dryburgh, along with many others, had been preserved in their entirety. The fact that so few have escaped the ravages of time and the violence of men, should greatly enhance the value of those that have survived intact, leading us to cherish them among our most precious national assets.

Of these is Dunblane Cathedral which many consider to be an architectural gem of unsurpassing and unsurpassable beauty. The late A. B. Barty, author of *The History of Dunblane*, in an article on "Some Aspects of Dunblane Cathedral", puts the matter rather neatly in his concluding paragraph. "Beauty", he writes, "has been defined as unity in variety. Dunblane Cathedral discloses variety in measurement, in treatment, and in ornamentation, but without lack of unity. The outcome accordingly is beauty".

As one walks up the path leading to the south door of the Cathedral, the first thing that strikes one is the very obvious difference between the main part of the massive square tower and the Cathedral itself. The four lower stories are built of dark red sandstone, and are much older than the main building, being certainly not later than 1100 A.D., perhaps even earlier. The design is Norman. Judged from the fact that the door stands about three feet above ground level, the purpose that it served was probably defensive in the days when a Culdee settlement occupied part of the site of the present Cathedral. We can imagine the old monks retiring to this stout stronghold in the face of a threatened attack by marauders from the north, carrying with them their manuscripts and the sacred vessels. The two upper stories are built of different stone and are of a later date, while the parapet which was added by Bishop

DUNBLANE CATHEDRAL: FROM THE SOUTH EAST

DUNBLANE CATHEDRAL: INTERIOR, LOOKING EASTWARD



DUNBLANE CATHEDRAL: INTERIOR, LOOKING WEST

DUNBLANE CATHEDRAL: Choir Stalls and Organ

James Chisholm, belongs to about the beginning of the sixteenth century. The Cathedral itself consists of a Lady Chapel, Choir, and Nave, and was built by Bishop Clement sometime within the period 1237-1258.

Visitors often express amazement at the excellence of the workmanship of those early times, but it has to be remembered that it was an age of cathedral building. Salisbury was begun in 1220; extensive work was carried out at Wells and Lincoln in that same year, and at York in 1225. Labour would be plentiful and would constitute no problem. Everywhere there would be trained bands of mason monks or lay masons, dedicated men travelling about in bands from one scheme to another.

Bishop Clement was undoubtedly a man of great enterprise and drive who, far from being discouraged by difficulties, found in them a stimulus to his determination. John Ruskin wrote of him: "He was no common man who designed that Cathedral of Dunblane. I know not anything so perfect in its simplicity and so beautiful . . . . in all the Gothic with which I am acquainted". When he arrived in the diocese he found nothing but chaos and disintegration. There was indeed a church, but it was in an unfinished and ruinous condition without even a roof. His predecessors in office had not been able to complete the building for reasons unknown. We must presume that Clement had this earlier structure demolished.

Not only was there no adequate place of worship; the services were being conducted by a rural chaplain, while the Parish for nearly ten years had been without a pastor. Profiting by this state of affairs, unscrupulous laymen had seized and appropriated the temporal assets of the Church, with the result that there was barely sufficient money to maintain the new Bishop for six months.

Clement acted with speed and decision. Presuming upon the high esteem in which he was held by Pope Gregory IX, he made a journey to Rome and laid the situation before the Pope. Gregory appointed a commission consisting of the Bishops of Glasgow and Dunkeld to examine the case, and indicated to them possible lines of action. After six years' struggle for the rights of his diocese and his just dues, matters were put upon a better basis, and Clement was then free to concentrate upon what can only be described as the work of his life, the building of a worthy place of worship at Dunblane.

The first part to be built was the lovely Lady Chapel traditionally called the Chapter House, where presumably

services were held while the other parts of the Cathedral were in process of erection. The Chapel now serves as a place of assembly for the choir, and is the only place available to the clergy for a vestry.

The Society of Friends of Dunblane Cathedral have made the Lady Chapel their particular care, and have done much towards its further enhancement by panelling the walls with oak, and installing handsome wardrobes which hold the robes of clergy and choir. Here too are housed the memorials of the two world wars on which are inscribed the names of the fallen ; also two illuminated scrolls, the work of Miss Helen Lamb, containing the names of those who served in the armed forces. Enclosed within one of the panels and under lock and key is kept a very great historical treasure, the Dunblane copy of the National Covenant. The architect responsible for the work carried out on the Lady Chapel in recent years was the late Dr Reginald Fairlie.

Above the Lady Chapel Clement built a long room. This, it is to be presumed, contained his private chapel and altar, because near its east end there is a piscina. As one of his complaints to the Pope was that he had no place to lay his head, did he use this room as a dwelling until more fitting accommodation could either be built or found for him ?

For the sake of continuity I must now anticipate and briefly indicate the fortunes of the Cathedral to the time of its restoration. Though escaping the violence of man it fell a victim to his neglect, for during the sixteenth century, the roof of the nave collapsed through lack of proper care and maintenance. For roughly three hundred years this part of the building remained an empty shell, open to the sky. Considering the soft crumbly nature of the stone, it is surprising that so much of the ruin remained intact. Throughout this lengthy period religious services were held in the choir, which was blocked off and became the Parish Church.

October 28th, 1893, was one of the red letter days in the history of the Cathedral, for on that day public worship was once again held in the nave, which had been restored. It was a major operation which took four years, 1889-93, to complete, and was made possible by the generosity of the late Mrs Wallace of Glassingal, a small estate near Dunblane. Strangely enough there is no reference in the records of the Kirk Session to the opening ceremony, nor to the work

while it was in progress. The architect was Sir Rowand Anderson. In a memorial tribute to him, Sir John Stirling Maxwell, referring to his work for the Cathedral, said: "He approached his great task with knowledge and enthusiasm, a great reverence and complete confidence".

We may now conveniently resume our description of the two major parts of the structure, the Choir and the Nave. Opinions differ as to which of these came next after the completion of the Lady Chapel. The more authoritative view favours the Choir.

The Choir is the most ornate part of the Cathedral, thanks to the generosity of the late Mr J. G. Stewart of Aultwharrie, Dunblane, who in 1914 made possible a second restoration. The architect responsible for this very fine piece of work, Sir Robert Lorimer, was a pupil of Sir Rowand Anderson. Choir Stalls, the Organ Case, the wonderful Leighton Screen beneath the great east window depicting the Seven Works of Mercy, and regarded as among the finest pieces of wood carving in the country, were then installed.

On the floor in front of the Communion Table are three blue marble slabs commemorating the three daughters of Sir John Drummond of Cargil and Stobhall, first Lord Drummond. Their tragic fate is one of the great romances of Scottish history. Margaret, the eldest, to whom the Duke of Rothesay, afterwards James IV, was greatly attached and may have been betrothed, was poisoned at Drummond Castle in 1502, along with her sisters, Euphemia and Sybilla. They were buried in the Choir of the Cathedral, where their uncle, Walter Drummond, was Dean. Suspicion fell upon some of the nobles, who desired an English royal marriage with Princess Margaret, daughter of Henry VII.

A very extensive and interesting article could be written about the stained glass of the Cathedral, but one can only mention in passing the magnificent series of six windows in the south side of the choir, the theme of which is "The Benedicite". They were the gift of the late Lord Blanesburgh, and the artist was Mr Louis Davis.

In an account of this kind it would be a grave omission to say nothing of the organ, which is housed on the north side of the Choir. As in all cathedrals the music is an important feature of the services, and we are very fortunate both in our instrument and organist. We have travelled far from July, 1872, which saw the introduction of instru-

mental music in the form of a harmonium, to the very fine organ of today which two years ago was completely modernized at a cost of £5,000. Experts have described it as one of the finest in the country.

The Nave is twice as long as The Choir, one hundred and forty feet. There are no transepts. Seven pillars on either side support the arches, while triforium and clerestory form one course, with through passages from end to end reached by a stair in the west wall.

In medieval days, when the splendid ecclesiastical edifices were being erected, the decorative effect of heraldry was a leading feature, and so, when the Cathedral was being restored, this fact was not lost sight of by the architect, who consulted the Marquess of Bute on the subject. After careful consideration, it was resolved that a series of heraldic shields representative of the various holders of the title of Stratherne should be displayed on the north and south sides of the roof of the Nave, while down the centre should be fifteen bosses emblazoned with the arms of the Sovereigns of Scotland and Britain from James III to Queen Victoria.

The denominational history of the Cathedral is epitomized by a series of seven carved figures round the pulpit beginning with St Blaan representing the Celtic Church, and concluding with Principal Carstares, the representative of the Church of the Revolution Settlement. As might be expected, John Knox marks the Reformed Church. He, poor man, has had the misfortune to have had the fingers of his right hand snapped off by some unscrupulous souvenir hunter. The sixth figure is that of the Saintly Bishop Leighton. I mention him because in conducting visitors round I find they frequently express surprise when told there was a period in the seventeenth century when the Cathedral was under episcopacy. Robert Leighton, Bishop of Dunblane from 1662-71, was the outstanding figure. The screen at the east end of the Choir already mentioned, is known as the Leighton Screen, and is dedicated to his memory.

The Nave contains many objects of interest and great historic value, but space permits of my referring only to one or two. In the north west corner is a large upright stone about six feet high, which has on one of its sides a clearly defined Celtic Cross, while on the other there can be traced the figure of a man on horseback, with what may be a dog following close behind. It has been estimated that this stone is as early as 700 A.D., and the assumption is that it stood outside a small Celtic Church somewhere on the site of

the present Cathedral. It was discovered beneath the Lady Chapel in the middle of last century.

In 1954 the Society of Friends of Dunblane Cathedral celebrated its semi-jubilee. It was decided to mark the occasion by inserting into the north wall of the Nave at the west end a plaque on which would be recorded the names of the bishops and clergy who had served the cause of Christ in Dunblane. Starting with St. Blaan, A.D. 602, are the names and dates of all the incumbents incised on three stone panels, the whole being surrounded with a border of Ravelston stone. Space has been provided so that the list can be continued for many years to come. An inscription at the top reads : " These are the Bishops and Ministers who throughout the centuries served God in this place ". The design was by Professor Robert Matthew and the sculptor was Mr Maxwell Allen, both of Edinburgh.

On either side of the exit leading to the west door and facing down the Nave are six Bishops' Stalls, the earliest examples of their kind in Scotland, erected by Bishop Chisholm, who was consecrated in 1486.

Our much too rapid survey of the Cathedral itself having been completed, we now take an even more hasty and partial glance at one or two of the adjoining buildings. Across the road from the churchyard is a very picturesque seventeenth century structure known as the Dean's House, which some years ago was gifted to the Society of Friends. It is said to have been the town residence of Dean Pearson, appointed Minister of Dunblane by Adam, Bishop of Dunblane, and Dean by James VI on 3rd March, 1624.

Part of this quite extensive building now houses the Cathedral Museum, a very interesting place containing among other valuable relics the largest collection of Communion tokens in the country. Throughout the last two years a great amount of reconstruction work has been carried out on the Museum, thanks to a most generous grant from the Carnegie Trustees, which has allowed a considerable extension to be made. The rest of the property not incorporated in the Museum has even more recently been converted into two small modern dwellings, again thanks to most substantial assistance, this time from the Historic Buildings Council. So far as the external features are concerned great care has been taken by the architect, Mr Ian Lindsay, to preserve the seventeenth century characteristics.

Mention has already been made of the Leighton Screen, but another concrete reminder of this noble churchman

exists, namely a small building situated within a stone's throw of the Cathedral, the Leighton Library. When Bishop Leighton died on 25th June, 1684, in London, his will revealed one special bequest. "My Books I leave and bequeath to the Cathedral of Dunblane in Scotland to remain there for the use of the Clergy of that Diocese". No time was lost in carrying out the testator's desire, and a small building erected at the expense of the Bishop's nephew, Mr Edward Lightmaker, to house the books, was completed in 1687-1688. An endowment of £300 for the maintenance of the Library was also given by Mr Lightmaker.

Although many volumes have disappeared from the shelves throughout the centuries, yet the number and variety of its present contents are a matter of amazement. In the course of the years additions have been made, but naturally the most interesting books are those that belonged to the Bishop himself. Additional value is given to about two hundred of these because of the notes and marks Leighton has made in them. For the most part these are comments and thoughts which he had met with in his reading, and are in different languages, Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, and Italian. They are recorded on the fly-leaves of the books, and except that they are chiefly ethical and religious, they have no connection with the subjects of the volumes in which they are recorded.

Throughout its existence the Library has always been severely hampered through lack of funds, and a few years ago a critical stage was reached when it was discovered that the roof was in a very bad condition. The Trustees decided on a bold and venturesome policy, which involved not only restoring the roof, but modernizing the heating and lighting, redecorating, rebinding some of the more tattered volumes, and preparing a catalogue. A very ambitious programme indeed for a body of men, four in all, with next to no resources behind them. Once again, however, fortune has favoured the brave. The Pilgrim Trust came to the rescue with a most generous grant, and a substantial sum was raised privately. Most of our objectives have been realized, and by the end of this year it is hoped to have the catalogue printed along with a brief description of the contents. Copies will be sent to subscribers, and to Universities in this country and overseas. The compilation of a new catalogue has meant a complete reorganization and reclassification.

The books belonging to Leighton have been gathered together into one section, while the remainder have been

arranged under subjects ; a long task covering five years but one that has been both satisfying and rewarding. Though many additions have been made to the original bequest, the main value of the Collection lies in its association with Leighton.

The Rev. Dr Wm. Blair, in an article on " The Bibliography of Archbishop Leighton ", contributed to the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, July 1883, wrote : " His library was his field where at eventide he meditated : for his books goodly and choice like the old guard of Napoleon, had been the companions of his fortunes and his supports in all his conflicts, and as he communed with them and wrote down or read over his waymarks on their fly leaves, his life was retouched again ".

From the earliest times it would appear that Dunblane has been a religious centre, though I do not think it could be maintained that that has been so continuously adown the centuries. Like everywhere else there must have been dead and barren periods, but a very interesting experiment is soon to be tried, which, if successful, will continue this tradition and make this place once again the centre of a religious community. The scheme is sponsored by the Scottish Churches' Ecumenical Committee.

A row of five small houses facing the east end of the Cathedral has been gifted to the Ecumenical Committee by the Society of Friends of the Cathedral. A generous gift from the Russell Trust and a grant through the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland will make (as at the time of writing the work has not started I use the future tense) it possible to transform the houses into a single building of considerable charm. Residential accommodation will be available for meetings of up to thirty persons, in addition to a house for a Director. A small enclosed garden, dating from medieval times, will rise behind the houses.

The building is being constructed for the use of all the Churches in Scotland, seven of which are represented on the Ecumenical Committee. It will therefore be named the Scottish Churches' House, and will be available for a wide variety of groups and purposes. The general object of the scheme may be described as the renewal of the Church for its mission in the world. Attention will be paid to the needs and interests both of the ordained ministry and of laymen and women. This will involve many lines of action such as : (*a*) Discerning the nature and function of the Church in the world today ; (*b*) Deepening the understanding of

worship, developing the practice of private and corporate prayer, and opening up new ways of Bible study in the context of modern life; (*c*) Inviting men and women from a wide range of occupations and responsibilities to bring their problems and discover forms of personal commitment and service; (*d*) Facing urgent issues which arise in the life of the Church or nation; (*e*) Seeking through every activity to advance the cause of Christian unity.

The Committee intend to draw upon the experience of many similar "houses" in Europe. They feel that the time is particularly opportune to provide a place belonging to all the Churches, where deeper and more permanent foundations can be built for their most urgent responsibility. (1)

In this very brief and all too inadequate description of the Cathedral and some of its environs, one is more conscious of the many interesting facts and objects which have had to be omitted than the few that have been mentioned. Readers whose interest lies chiefly in the ecclesiastical history of the place, are referred to the two volumes by the Very Rev. J. Hutchison Cockburn, D.D.: *The Celtic Church in Dunblane* and *The Medieval Bishops of Dunblane and their Church.* While to those whose interest lies more in the direction of form and content one can only say: "Come and see".

Here then stands this truly noble building, where throughout the centuries men have worshipped God. Symbol of the eternal amidst the temporal, it dominates the little township in the midst of which it is set.

Many have been the tributes passed on Dunblane Cathedral, but let the following paragraph from Dr Hutchison Cockburn's second volume serve as an epilogue to this brief account. "The building is small when compared with many Cathedrals especially in England and the Continent, no larger than many a parish church; but such are its beauty and dignity of proportion that it impresses the eye as larger than it is. I remember vividly the catch in the breath when first I visited it; forty years of intimate concern and nearly thirty years of almost daily contact have not staled its appeal. Its various glories never fail to move the discerning worshipper nor to inspire the interest of the visitor. Many have been inspired to princely gifts for its adornment: this fact in itself is a tribute to its builder who out of meagre resources planned and built a noble structure to the glory of God".

J. CHALMERS GRANT

(1) The writer is indebted to Dr Nevile Davidson, Minister of Glasgow Cathedral, for the foregoing account of the aims and objects of this interesting experiment.