

The Parish Church of St. Michael of Linlithgow.

THE Parish Church of St. Michael of Linlithgow stands close to the historic Palace, the ancient residence of the Kings and Queens of Scotland. Billings refers to it as "assuredly the most important specimen of an ancient parochial Church in Scotland, both as to its dimensions and real architectural interest"; and another authority has pronounced it to be "a building worthy to rank with the ancient cathedrals of St Giles', St Mungo's, or Dunblane."

Historical.—It is possible that from the time of the evangelisation of Scotland by Celtic missionaries some place of worship stood at or near the present site. When the process of organising the dioceses and parishes of the country was begun, under Queen Margaret and her sons, the Church of St. Michael of Linlithgow had already acquired sufficient income, property and importance to be worthy of allocation to one of the new cathedrals. In 1138, David I. gifted it, "with its chapels and lands and all other rights pertaining thereto," to the Cathedral Church of St Andrews, and the terms of his conveyance seem to indicate that it was a royal foundation. In 1144 Bishop Robert, one of the earliest Bishops of St Andrews after the Celtic period of the Scottish Church had ended, conveyed it to the newly founded Augustinian Priory. Thence-forward it was contributory to the leading monastic foundation of Scotland, while its position beside the Royal Manor House, which developed into the Royal Palace, gave it associations with the Crown which endured, close and consistent, until the monarchy was transferred elsewhere.

On the 19th of May, 1242, St. Michael's was consecrated by David de Bernham, Bishop of St Andrews, probably after a restoration or reconstruction of the now inadequate building, or probably for the simple reason that he was putting into order the parts of his diocese that were, as yet, unused to regular episcopal supervision and visitation.

In his attempt to subdue Scotland, Edward I. of England made his abode in Linlithgow during the winter of 1301-02. He turned the King's Manor House into a fort or peel, enclosing the Church, which he used as a garrison storehouse. After the victory of the Scottish army at Bannockburn and the destruction of Edward's peel at Linlithgow, the Church, not unnaturally, stood in need of some restoration, and among the subscribers to this early restoration scheme was Robert II., whose subscription of twenty-six shillings and eight pence is recorded in the Royal accounts for the period.

In the year 1424 a fire occurred from which the Church "suffered great damage." It appears, however, that the "damage" did not render it unfit for use. The process of repairing the part that had been damaged, and enlarging the Church to its present proportions, was begun immediately after the conflagration, and extended over a century and a quarter. Skilled workmen were scarce and the country was poor. From time to time, however, contributions from Royalty and donations from pious citizens, together with an annual grant from the Priory of St Andrews, supplemented the efforts of the community. Encouragement was also received from the Pope, who in response to a petition of 1449, granted indulgences for stated periods to benefactors of the Church. Its completion was a great event in the life of the Burgh, and was celebrated by a Royal Charter,

permitting the Burgh to have a Provost, to be elected annually. The first Provost entered upon office on 23rd October, 1540.

The Church was thus little more than completed, when the *Lords of the Congregation* were preparing to "cleanse" it. On the 29th of June, 1559, on their march from Perth through Stirling to Edinburgh, they halted at Linlithgow and "freed the Church from its superstitious worship." They emptied all the niches which enrich the buttresses—twenty in all; they destroyed the numerous altars; they broke the holy water "stoup"; and in short, removed from the building everything which they deemed to be popish. The image of St. Michael, which crowns the buttress at the south-west angle of the nave, was the only one that escaped demolition.

After the Reformation, the chancel was fitted up with galleries and pews. The part of the Church not used for worship was, from time to time, put to various uses. In 1620 it was used as a storehouse for timber. In 1645-46, when the plague was raging in Edinburgh, the University classes were held in it. After the Battle of Dunbar, on 3rd September, 1650, Cromwell took possession of the Palace and Church, and fortified them in much the same way as Edward I. had done. Some of his soldiers slept in the triforium, the war-horses were stabled in the nave, and trenches were thrown up in the churchyard.

During the dissension within the Scottish Church between the Resolutioners and the Protesters in the time of the Commonwealth, General Monk gave orders that St. Michael's be divided by a "mid-wall." The order was given in March, 1656, and, on its being completed, the Protesters, who were the more numerous party in Linlithgow, were left in possession of the chancel, the furnished portion of the building, and the Resolutioners had to be content with the nave.

With the return of Charles II. in 1660, the mid-wall was demolished—the schism apparently by this time being healed—and, as the galleries within the chancel had become "delapidated," the Town Council took up the "reparation of the Kirk." The chancel and transepts were handed over to the heritors as a private burying ground, and the west end of the nave, including three of the bays, was fitted up with galleries and pews—the front seats of the "north loft" being allocated to the King, the Earl of Linlithgow, and the Magistrates.

In 1812 a return was made to the chancel. Unfortunately the "restorers" did not confine themselves to the chancel, but resolved to include in their scheme a portion of the nave. This resolution led to the destruction of a very notable feature of the Church—the arch between the chancel and the nave—in order that a few more of the people in the large end gallery should be able to see the minister. It also led to the destruction of the elaborately carved oak roof, and, to complete the vandalism, the whole of the interior was white-washed!

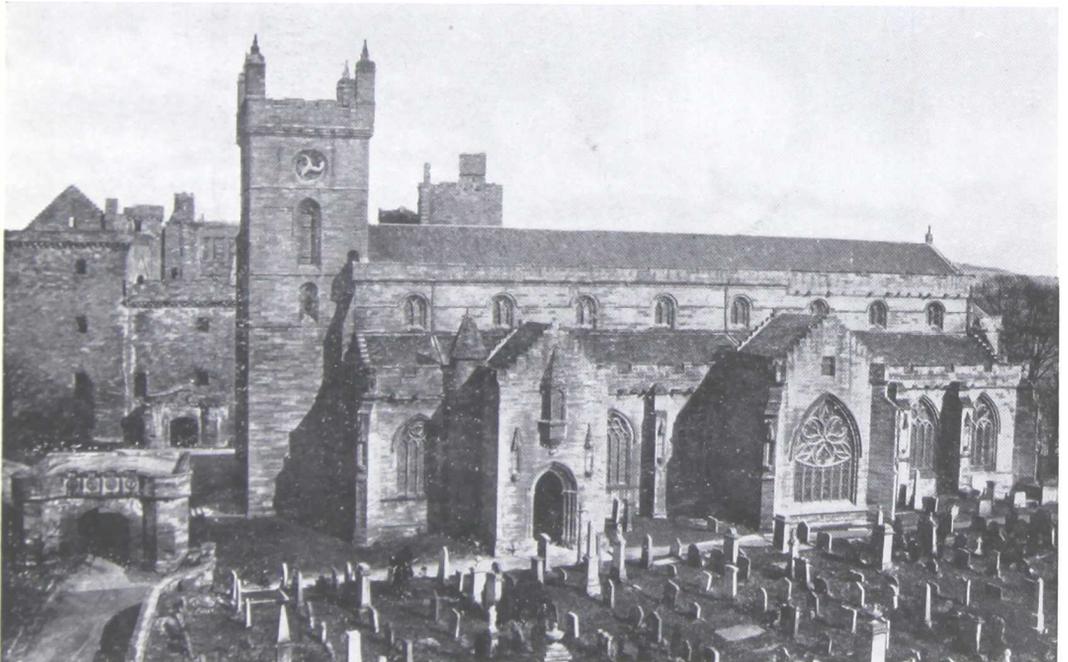
The restoration of the Church was contemplated by Dr Donald Macleod, Dr Scott, and Dr Niven. In the case of all three, however, their time in Linlithgow was short, and the tide which has given us St Giles', Dunblane, Paisley Abbey, the Town Church of St Andrews, &c., had not then begun to flow. But in 1894, under the leadership of Dr Ferguson, the matter was enthusiastically taken up, with Mr Honeyman of Glasgow as architectural adviser. The galleries were removed, and the Church opened from end to end. The floor of the nave, which had been raised a foot above the original level, was lowered; the removal of the white-wash from the walls, begun in 1876, was completed; a chancel arch, lacking, however, the dimensions of the original arch, was built; the nave was



THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. MICHAEL, OF LINLITHGOW.
INTERIOR, LOOKING EASTWARD.



THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. MICHAEL OF LINLITHGOW.
INTERIOR, LOOKING WESTWARD.



THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. MICHAEL OF LINLITHGOW.
THE EXTERIOR.

suitably furnished ; the chancel was provided with stalls ; and a vestry, in keeping with the architecture of the Church, was built on the foundations of the ancient sacristy. But there the work had to be suspended, as the money received by the Committee was insufficient to do more.

Descriptive.—The building is in the form of a cross. The extreme length is 182 feet, and the measurement across the transepts is 102 feet. It may give a better idea of the stately dimensions of St. Michael's, when it is mentioned that the centre of the nave is rather wider than that of Glasgow Cathedral, and of the Cathedrals of Lichfield and Norwich, while the aisles are about 2 feet wider than those of St Giles'. A broad stone bench or seat is carried round the nave. The old saying that the weakest go to the wall is said to have arisen from the custom in early mediaeval times of providing seats or benches only against the walls of the nave of a church. In the nave there are triforium openings in each bay and clerestory windows above them. The chancel is distinguished from the nave by having no triforium openings, but the clerestory windows are similar in both. The aisles and transepts are vaulted throughout. The groining is simple, and the ribs are tied at the intersections with sculptured bosses on which such symbols as the "Five Wounds," the Cross and Crown of Thorns, the Fleur-de-lis, are still discernible, with the bright colours, which had adorned them, still in some cases adhering to them. Each of the transepts contains an apartment over the vault. The room over the south transept is provided with a large fireplace, which would in all likelihood be the background of a mediaeval caretaker. The room over the north transept is empty and bare. In the wall of the north aisle of the nave, but now built up, there stood the Royal Entrance. Inside, the doorway is quite plain ; outside, it is moulded with ornamental hood and carvings. A paved way led across the Palace yard to a door in the opposite wall of the Palace.

At the west end of the Church there are features worthy of attention. On each side of the vestibule there is a shallow recess, containing a stone bench eight feet in length. Overhead is a canopy formed of soffit foliations. Some have suggested that these benches may have been beggars' seats ; according to others, they were intended to receive monuments or sculpture. Recessed into the west wall there are two aumbries, and there is a third in the south transept. Under the west window of the south aisle of the nave there is an oblong aperture in the wall, but the use of the opening (now built up) is not clear. Some think it may have been a leper's window, and others hold that pensioners here received their dole.

It is impossible now to ascertain the position of the numerous altars which occupied the aisles. That of the Blessed Virgin may have been in the apse, behind the High Altar. The south transept, popularly known as "St Catherine's Aisle," was doubtless the site of the altar of St Catherine. It was in St Catherine's aisle James IV. received the mysterious warning not to go to war with England, which is recorded by Lindesay of Pitscottie in quaint phraseology, and which forms the subject of Sir David Lindesay's tale in *Marmion*.

Some writers assert that James V. erected in St. Michael's a throne for himself and a stall for each of the Knights of the Thistle. Others ascribe this to James IV. Among the latter is Sir Walter Scott, who, in his picture of the King at his devotions within "Katherine's aisle," surrounds him with his Knights of the Thistle, and even places the banners of the Knights over their respective stalls. In reproducing Sir David Lindesay's tale, Sir Walter also represents the window as being filled with stained glass.

The exterior of the Church, while massive and stately in aspect, shows a greater amount of ornamental detail than the interior. The Porch, which shelters the south doorway, is a very beautiful feature of the building. In it there are benches, for in mediaeval times the church porch had many and important functions, partly of an ecclesiastical, partly of a secular character. It has two storeys, and the upper storey is an apartment, in the walls of which are several deeply recessed presses, one having had double doors. It may, therefore, have been used for the protection of legal and other precious documents, and it may also have contained the church library.

The Western Tower once formed an important feature of the Church. It was terminated with an elegant crown, which bore as finial and vane the favourite device of James III.—a hen and chickens, and the motto, “*Non dormit qui custodit*” (“he sleeps not who guards”). From an apprehension that it might otherwise fall, it was decided in 1840 to remove it, and so, in spite of a report by an engineer that “the stone work could be secured by the use of iron binders and copper bolts,” the crown disappeared before August, 1841. Parishioners and visitors alike frequently give expression to the hope that it may one day be restored.

As noted, however, by architects, a “more serious” defect is the existence of the present plaster imitation vault, which “by its being too low, entirely alters the otherwise perfect proportions of the Church as originally designed.”

The restoration can never be said to be complete, therefore, till the whole of the main roof has been renewed, the present unsuitable plaster ceiling removed, and a return made to the loftier and more suitable open timber type of roof, which existed prior to the alterations executed in 1812. Then, and then only, will St. Michael's have been restored to its pristine dignity and beauty.

ROBERT COUPAR.