Chalk, St Mary

CHALK [5]

CONSISTORY COURT OF ROCHESTER.

A Case of Mutilated Bells.

On Saturday afternoon the Chancellor of the diocese of Rochester, the Worshipful F. H. L. Errington, held a formal inquiry in the parish church of Chalk, near Gravesend, into the manner in which a faculty for rehanging the three ancient bells had been carried out. It was alleged that the bells had been injured and mutilated through the vicar neglecting to comply with the terms of the faculty, which made it a condition that the work should be done under the instructions of an architect. Evidence was given to show that of the three bells, one was cast by a founder who was probably Thomas de Weston, about 1348, and that the other two were by John Wilner of Borden, in 1634, that they were of great archæological value and interest, but that the canons had been cut off when they were rehung. It was shown that every effort had been made first by the Registrar and then by the architect to impress on the vicar the importance of not allowing the removal of the canons; but while the work was in progress the founder, Mr. Alfred Bowell, of Ipswich, claimed that it was necessary to remove the canons on account of the nature of the new headstocks he had prepared. The vicar neglected to call in the architect to inquire into the matter, with the result that the canons were removed. The founder claimed that the removal of the canons was a common practice, that it made the bells easier to ring, that it was sometimes necessary if the canons were broken, and that he had done it in numerous other churches in Kent. He admitted that it was not necessary to remove the canons to quarter-turn a bell, and that if he had been instructed at first not to do so, he would have prepared headstocks accordingly.

The learned Chancellor found that the provisions of the faculty had not been carried out, and that the vicar had not had the work done under the advice of the architect, but had allowed the bells to be mutilated in direct opposition to his advice. He impressed on the clergy and Parochial Church Councils not only the necessity of loyally carrying out the provisions of faculties, but also the importance of making full use of the system of Advisory Committees recently set up. The committees included men of expert knowledge, who gave their advice to parishes free of charge, and the clergy and all concerned should avail themselves of these advantages. He said that those who refused to be guided by the committees, and who ignored the conditions laid down in faculties, played into the hands of those who wished our churches to be taken over by the State. If the ecclesiastical courts were ignored it would be said that the Church was powerless to safeguard her own buildings and the treasures they contained. If the Diocesan Advisory Committee said the advice of a particular person should be sought, it should be sought; and if that advice were included in a faculty, it would have to be followed. What the vicar had done in this case amounted to contempt of Court, and might lead to the consideration of coercive measures. He trusted the clergy and Parochial Church Councils would loyally support the system as at present administered.

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