

ALL HALLOWS', LOMBARD STREET.

S.P.A.B. AND DEMOLITION OF FAMOUS LONDON CHURCH.

The 60th annual report of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings again forms an interesting record of the work carried out by the society in many directions during the year. Numerous church restorations have been executed with the collaboration of the society, but the matter, reported on at some length, which will interest ringers most, is that relating to the demolition of All Hallows' Church, London.

All Hallows' has a ring of ten bells, and London ringing organisations have directed the attention of the authorities to preserving the peal intact and erecting it in some other church where there is a tower which will enable the bells to be rung.

The S.P.A.B. report, as will be seen below, touches upon important matters relating to Diocesan Advisory Boards, who, given the additional powers proposed, may exercise still greater restraint in matters relating to bell restorations, although their jurisdiction, of course, touches practically everything connected with the fabric and the furnishing of the church.

The report on All Hallows' Church says:—

The decision to remove this church is a great disappointment to the society and to all those who have worked for its retention. That such a decision could be taken without reference to the London Diocesan Advisory Committee or to the Central Council for the Preservation of Churches, reveals an extraordinary state of affairs.

When the late Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Davidson, secured the exemption of churches from the Ancient Monuments Act in 1913 he certainly gave no pledge that every single church, early or late in date, should be preserved. No building-owning authority could do that, not even the Office of Works. But he did promise that the Church would set up efficient machinery to deal with questions of this kind. What has happened is not that the particular machinery has broken down in this case, but that All Hallows' has managed to escape it.

It is an amazing thing, but it is actually the fact, that, while it is and has for long been practically impossible to pull down a piece of an ancient church to add a vestry or an organ chamber in the Victorian manner, or even to carry out an old-fashioned 'restoration,' it really is possible to destroy a whole church! Such apparently is the state of the law.

NO CONTROL BEFORE CONSECRATION.

We understand that there is a strangely parallel situation in regard to new churches. It is not possible to place fittings or monuments in existing churches without the closest scrutiny, but prior to consecration there is no control over what may be placed in a new church. There is urgent need for some alteration in the law.

But there is no doubt that very real difficulties are arising in consequence of the shifting of the population and the traffic problems of urban areas. Certain recent schemes show that the municipalities are likely at any time to wish to destroy valuable buildings in central areas. How far State Control could protect some of them nowadays is a difficult problem. A Government department would certainly have to balance various interests against one another, and it might well be that without great expenditure of money and elaborate protective town planning, some loss would be inevitable in overcrowded areas. The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings may congratulate itself that in the case of All Hallows' it has done all that could be done, and that the agitation has shown the public that buildings of a certain degree of importance cannot be touched without an outcry.

It is also satisfactory to note the change of opinion that has come over the country in regard to renaissance art. Notwithstanding the destruction of All Hallows', the balance of opinion in favour of the importance of preserving renaissance work is more with the Church authorities than with the State. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments in their reports ignore everything from a few years after the date of All Hallows'. One may search most of their reports in vain for notice of anything of the later years of Wren or the work of his followers, while most of the Diocesan Advisory Committees are slow to tolerate interference with any eighteenth-century work of real distinction. The irony of the situation is that while a church like All Hallows' is to be pulled down, the London diocesan authorities have been encouraging the expenditure of vast sums of money in repairing the other city churches, and on the lines approved by this society.

What seems to be required is some new legislation by the Church Assembly to secure that cases like that of All Hallows' should come before the Advisory Committee at the very beginning of any scheme. The serious thing is that there may be other cases in the future. We must admit that according to the most reliable information, none of the other city churches in London are in any danger. New uses are being found for some of them: most are now well used on week-days. The scheme for pulling down nineteen is certainly a thing of the past. It is rather in some of the provincial towns that the danger lies, e.g., Sheffield, York, Norwich and Worcester. In none of these cases, as far as we know, has the Advisory Committee been consulted, though the destruction of valuable churches is contemplated as a consequence of urban depopulation.

There is another matter which requires ventilation. In London, notwithstanding the All Hallows' scandal, the Advisory Committee is a

(Continued in next column.)

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CULPABLE NEGLECT ALLEGED.

(Continued from previous column.)

very weighty body, doing excellent work. But in some parts of the country it does seem possible to say that there has been culpable neglect in fulfilling the pledge that the Archbishop gave the nation in 1913. For the Advisory Committee system is either not working at all or else working very badly. Take the diocese of Hereford for example, or that of Derby, or of Durham. We do not know who their secretaries are, or what they are doing. And it still seems possible for an ignorant incumbent or parochial church council to hold up their work by sheer defiance. In the city of London the Church of St. Olave, Hart Street, has the unenviable distinction of possessing the dirtiest monuments. In the same church the advice of the eminent architects responsible for recent repairs was ignored by the parish on points of great importance. We could quote other similar cases. Though less spectacular, these are matters of grave concern, because, unlike All Hallows', they are within the sphere of responsibility of the new protective system.

It is only fair to say that legislation is now pending before the Church Assembly in which it is intended to stiffen up procedure before the Consistory Courts, and to strengthen the hands of the Advisory Committees and the Central Faculties Council. But the unhappy experience of All Hallows', Lombard Street, shows that that is not everything, as it is difficult to see how it will affect those unwanted churches in depopulated urban areas.

The All Hallows' case has shown the value that is attached to the city churches and to the work of the English renaissance. It is poor compensation for the loss of the church, but it is something to be able to recall the fact that, whereas in Victorian cases of destruction of city churches little care was taken of their contents, in this case the greatest care will be exercised even to reproducing in the new suburban church which will succeed All Hallows' the conditions of the east and west ends, so as to contain the woodwork in surroundings such as it was intended to fill.

It is clear that there are elements in the Church which still do not take their responsibilities seriously enough where artistic and architectural considerations are concerned. Unless new legislation is carried through and made to apply more widely, and unless local disloyalty to their own system can be stopped, the Church authorities are quite likely to encounter a renewal of the agitation for the taking over of buildings by the State. The Advisory Committee system has certainly made far-reaching changes in the last twenty years, not least by its insistence on the value of renaissance work, but events are showing that it has not gone far enough, and that its net must be made closer and stronger.