

VII.—*The Green Book of St. Columb.*—By R. N. WORTH, Plymouth.

Read at the Autumn Meeting, November 30, 1868.

THE parochial records in many of our counties contain, as is well known, a large quantity of valuable inedited matter, which will yet yield a rich harvest to industrious antiquaries. This is certainly, I think, to a large extent, the case in Cornwall; and, in order to contribute somewhat towards the work of research, I desire briefly to call the attention of the members of this Institution to what is locally known as “The Green Book of St. Columb.” This “Green Book” is a large folio volume, bound in green leather, in which the accounts of the parish have been kept, with a few intermissions, from the year 1585, and are indeed still kept; the original supply of paper being, after the lapse of nearly three hundred years, far from exhausted. The book is in excellent condition, and the writing in the earlier entries is characteristic of the period, and uncommonly good. At present, the volume is merely used as a record of the parish accounts; but its former custodians occasionally jotted down memoranda of such general matters as they considered noteworthy, and consequently it contains many curious illustrations of bygone manners and customs. I purpose merely to lay before the meeting the results of a cursory examination of the volume, in the hope that some one far better qualified for the task than myself may enter upon a fuller investigation.

The book begins as follows:—“Liber Compti. The generall accompte of this p'isshe of St. Columb Major taken before the xij of the same p'isshe in the presence of the whole p'isshone^{rs} on the daye of the feaste of St. Andrewe the apostle, being the laste daye of November, in the yeere of our Lorde God 1585 and in the xxviii yeere of the rayne of our Sovraigne ladye Elizabeth, the Queenes Ma^{tie} that now is.”

Then follow the wardens' names. The “twelve” were of course

a kind of select vestry; and the form of parochial government which now obtains in St. Columb Major may be traced back, century after century. One very curious early record is a copy of the poor-rate assessment made immediately after the passing of the Act of Elizabeth. The parishioners in the days of "Good Queen Bess" used to keep stock and lend them out at so much a year. There are entries, for instance, of "sheepe" being lent at 7d. a head per year, the renter taking the increase and the wool. Cattle were lent out in a similar way; and the parish was not above advancing money, for a consideration. There was likewise a parish ladder, which was lent on hire; and a parish carriage, recorded in 1593 to have been built by Remfray Rowse and Harry Hawke, two of the oldest family names in the parish. St. Columb Church at that date boasted the possession of an organ, perhaps of more power than compass, since we find it stated "The organ do conteyine xv pipes." The Armada year affected this as well as the sea-board parishes, mention being made of a "stock of money for the trayned soldiers," "victualling for the trayned soldiers," &c. "Vermons" or "vermonts heades" formed a continual source of disbursement, the money in some cases being paid "in churche." Thus we have in 1671, "for vermonts heades and give to the poore and severall other disbursmts £1.0.4"; in 1704, "ffor a ffox head 1s."; in 1709, "to Richard Webber for one kitt and hedgehogs 1s."; and scores, if not hundreds, of others, the payments being made according to a fixed scale. The ratepayers, in turning back to the accounts of former years, must sigh for the good old days when the rates were but a "flea bite," and envy their predecessors in 1717 who could record "Goall and Marshalsea money and a bridge rate £3.2.0," even though they had in addition to pay the "expenses of two men going to Bodmin about the bridge rate."

In conclusion, I would quote a few other entries, of a more or less noticeable character, taken somewhat at random. Under the date 1671 we have: "P^d for curing Cissly Grosse's legge 10s."; "for mending the wayes 13s. 4d."; in 1678, "ffor ye burying peter the sonne of S^r John Seyntaubyn Barront 13s. 4d." This 13s. 4d. was not paid, and we find it afterwards carried on as an arrear. In 1698 there were paid "to three seamen 2s."; in 1703, "to poore seamen that had a pass 2s. 6d."; whilst elsewhere there

is entered "P^d Symon Treman for entertayning two soldiers 2s." In 1699, "to George Larkin for cutting a trench and draining of belowsy water (now Belovely) 6s., and then agreed with him to keep the same in repaire for one shilling a yeare during his life." People were buried at half price when not supplied with coffins, as the following entry proves, the ordinary charge for an adult being £1. 6s. 8d. : 1680, "John Lawry without a coffin 13s. 4d." About the beginning of the last century the neighbourhood was haunted by a notorious robber, called Vigers, and several traces of his existence and his depredations are to be found in the Green Book:—1708, "P^d Mr. Arnoll for lending and clenseing armes in searching for Vigars 7s." The search was ineffectual, for in 1710 we find: "P^d Thomas Gilbert in full endeavouring to tak Vigers 5s."

The only other quotations which I shall make are: 1706, "To Xtopher Reynolds for his goods being distrayned for ye high wayes 2s. 6d."; 1715, "P^d Mr. Robert Creeper in full for transcribing the King's letter £2 10,"—not bad pay; and in 1729, "Drink give the workmen throughout the whole yeare 2s. 6d.,"—an expenditure which, if not legal, was certainly economical. The interest of the book rapidly diminishes as the 18th century proceeds.