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One of the leading exponents of the nineteenth century's Gothic Revival, the architect Sir George Gilbert Scott (1811–78) most famously designed the Albert Memorial in Kensington Gardens and the Midland Grand Hotel at St Pancras. In the design and restoration of churches and cathedrals, his work was distinguished by its care, skill and sheer volume: most medieval cathedrals in England and Wales, including Westminster Abbey, benefited from Scott's expertise in some form. Written between 1864 and his death, then edited by his son and fellow architect George Gilbert Scott (1839–97), this 1879 autobiography was among the first of its kind, recording the background, career and opinions of a prolific professional architect. Moreover, the work includes a defence of Scott's principles against what he saw as the 'anti-restoration movement', led by John Ruskin and others. Altogether, these lucid memoirs confirm Scott's place at the centre of Victorian design.

# Personal and Professional Recollections

*With an Introduction by John William Burgon*

George Gilbert Scott
Edited by G. Gilbert Scott

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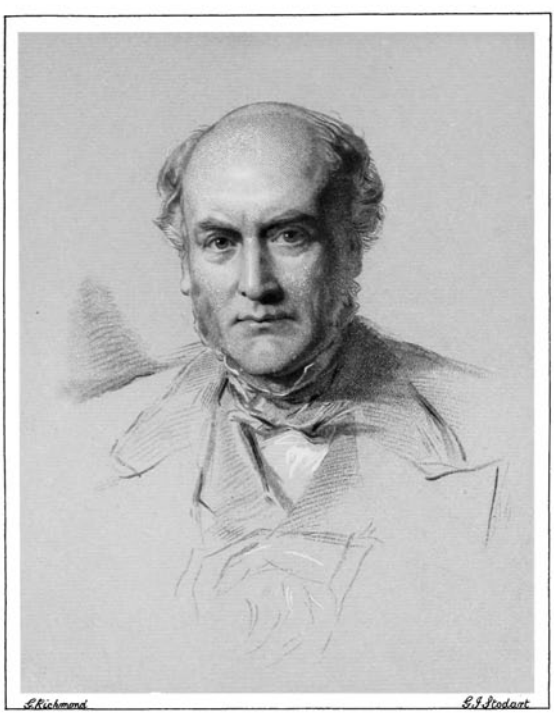

# PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL RECOLLECTIONS

BY THE LATE

## SIR GEORGE GILBERT SCOTT, R.A.

EDITED BY HIS SON,

G. GILBERT SCOTT, F.S.A.

*Sometime Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge.*

With an Introduction

BY THE

VERY REV. JOHN WILLIAM BURGON, B.D.

*Dean of Chichester.*

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1879.

JUSTORUM AUTEM ANIMAE
IN MANU DEI
SUNT

# PREFACE.

THE following "Personal and Professional Recollections" were commenced by my father many years ago. They were designed originally for the information of his family, but as the work progressed the scope of it became enlarged. In 1873 my father drew up directions for its publication in the event of his decease, and his instructions upon the subject are precise. "I feel it due," he writes, "to myself that the statement of my professional life should go before the public in a fair and unprejudiced form; and the more so as I have been one of the leading actors in the greatest architectural movement which has occurred since the Classic renaissance. I only seek to be placed before the public fairly and honourably, as I trust I deserve; and I commit this especially to those whose duty it is to do it, begging the blessing of Almighty God upon their exertions." The manuscript, naturally enough, contains much that is unsuited to publication, and which my father, had he lived to revise it for the press, would undoubtedly have modified or erased. With such matter I have endeavoured,

aided by the advice of others, to deal as it may be conceived that its author would have dealt, had opportunity served. There is also much relating to purely domestic concerns in which the public could not be expected to take interest. The greater part of this has been omitted. So much only is left as appeared necessary to the completeness of the story, and valuable as an indication of character. I trust it may not be thought that too little has here been expunged, and that something may be allowed to the partiality of a son.

My thanks are due to the Very Reverend the Dean of Chichester who, with equal willingness and kindness, undertook to contribute the Introduction, and who has further given valuable aid and advice in the revision, throughout, of the proofs. I have also to thank the Very Reverend the Dean of Westminster for the permission to reprint the sermon preached by him on the occasion of my father's interment; Mr. Edward M. Barry, R.A., for a similar permission in respect of a portion of a recent lecture delivered in the chair of Architecture at the Royal Academy, in reference to my father's career; to Mr. E. A. Freeman, who was at much pains to recover a passage in one of his early pamphlets to which my father in his manuscript had referred, but of which he has given no very accurate indication; and to Mr. George Richmond, R.A., for kind assistance in regard to the engraving from his drawing, which he has allowed me to place as a frontispiece to this work.

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# INTRODUCTION

BY

## THE DEAN OF CHICHESTER.

INVITED to contribute an Introductory Chapter to Sir Gilbert Scott's "Recollections," I willingly undertake the task; yet have I little to offer beyond the expression of my personal regard for the man, my hearty admiration of the great work which he lived long enough to accomplish.

(1.) It is impossible to survey the revival which has taken place in the knowledge of Gothic architecture within the last forty years without astonishment. Not that our actual achievements as yet are calculated to produce excessive self-congratulation: but when it is considered out of what a state of childish ignorance we have so lately emerged, it is surely in a high degree encouraging to review our present position. And to Sir Gilbert Scott, more than to any other individual, we are indebted for what has been effected. He ingenuously acknowledges his obligations to others: tells us at what altar he first kindled his torch: arrogates to himself no claim to have been *facile princeps* in his art. On the contrary, he frankly recalls his own failures; and recounts the steps,

slow and painful, by which he himself struggled out of the universal darkness, with a truthfulness which is even perplexing. Yet has he been unquestionably the great teacher of his generation; and by the conservative character of his genius he has proved a prime benefactor to his country also. To *his* influence and example we are chiefly indebted for the preservation of not a few of our national monuments—our cathedral and parochial churches. And (it must in faithfulness to his memory be added) a vast deal more would have been spared of what has now hopelessly perished had his counsels always prevailed—above all, had his method been more generally adopted.

(2.) In the "Recollections" which follow (would that they were less fragmentary!) Sir Gilbert has chiefly—all but exclusively, in fact—dwelt upon the great *Cathedral* restorations which were conducted under his auspices. His remarks will be read with profound interest, and will become local memorials of the most precious class, as the authentic private jottings (for they do not pretend to be more) of the great architect himself. But one desiderates besides an enumeration of the many dilapidated parochial Churches on which he was employed; and one would have been glad at the same time to be reminded by himself of the eloquent plea which was ever on his lips for dealing in a far more conservative spirit with those precious relics of antiquity. Let me be allowed in this place to say a few plain words on a subject very near to my heart—as I know it was very near to his: a subject concerning which those who have a

right to be heard, and who ought to have spoken long ago, have either practised reticence or else spoken ineffectually until, I fear, it is too late for any one to speak with the possibility of much good resulting from what he says. I allude to the ruthless work of destruction which for the last thirty years has been going on in almost every parish in England under the immediate direction of our architects, and with the sanction of our parochial clergy. Verily, it is not too much to declare that with the best intentions and at an immense outlay, more havoc has been made, more irreparable mischief wrought throughout the land within those thirty years, than any invasion of a barbarous horde could have effected. We have severed ourselves, on every side, from antiquity,—have effectually broken the thousand links which used to connect us with the historic Past.

(3.) At the beginning of the period referred to, to seek out and to study the village churches of England was almost part of the education of an English gentleman. In the case of one of cultivated taste, whatever was remarkable in their structure or in their decorations,—from the primitive window or singular font or rude bas-relief above the doorway, down to the fragments of stained glass, specimens of wrought iron, or vestiges of fresco on the walls,—nothing came amiss. The ancient altar-stone degraded to the pavement; the curiously-carved finials; the dilapidated stand for the preacher's hour-glass; all found in him an appreciating patron. That the edifice itself was as a rule in a most discreditable

plight, is undeniable. The green walls, low plastered ceiling, chimney thrust through the window,—the ponderous gallery above and the tall pews beneath,—all were sordid and unworthy. But for all *that*, the great fact remained that our village churches were objects of surprising interest; full of beauty, full of instruction. There is no telling what a privilege it was to pass a day with one's pencil among the many relics which they invariably contained; and from every part of the edifice to learn *something*. Externally, enough remained at all events to tell the story of the structure: within, comfortable it was to reflect that nothing after all was so much needed as the removal of pews, galleries, whitewash: the re-opening of windows: the careful repair of what, through tract of time, had vanished: the restoration of what had been barbarously mutilated. Nothing in short was required but what a refined taste and strong conservative instinct might reasonably hope to see some day effected.

(4.) And now, what has been the actual result of thirty years of church "Restoration"? Briefly this,—that in by far the greater number of our lesser country churches there scarcely survives a *single point of interest*. In the case of our more considerable structures—with a few bright exceptions—the merest wreck remains of what did once so much delight and interest the beholder. The door of entrance has been "restored," but not on the old lines: three other doors—in order to obtain additional sittings, to exclude draughts, and to save expense—have been so

blocked up as to make it impossible to discover what they were. The curious Norman chancel-arch has been "enlarged:" the ancient font and pulpit have been supplanted: the screen has either been painted over or else removed entirely. The windows (furnished with stained glass of the kind which it gives the beholder a sharp pain across the chest to be forced to contemplate) are wholly new, and do not assort with the edifice: a huge east window in particular (bad luck to the author of it!) has effectually obliterated the record of what stood there before it. The venerable tomb of the founder (on the ground, under a mural arch) has been built over with seats. Another mutilated recumbent figure of an ancient lord of the soil has been buried,—inscription and all. Sedilia, piscina, aumbry, niche,—ruthless hands have rendered every one of them uninteresting and unintelligible. Some exquisite tracery has been chiselled away within and without the building. A specimen of the ancient oak seats has disappeared, and a forest of rush-bottomed chairs covers the floor. There were once traces of curious fresco painting on the walls; but they also have been obliterated. After repeated inquiry I find that the sepulchral slabs, of which there used to be several, are at the present hour either (*a*) buried, or (*b*) lying in the churchyard, or (*c*) ingeniously plastered into the wall of the tower where they cannot be seen and where they cease to be of the least interest, or else (*a*) destroyed. A prime object seems to have been to assimilate the tint of the walls to that of a cup of coffee: also to procure a surface of unbroken

colour. Another leading principle has evidently been to introduce a quantity of varnished deal furniture. A third, to overlay the floor in every direction with "Minton's tiles"—except where the perforations for the "heating apparatus" have established a stronger claim. The result is that there is no longer discoverable a single inscribed stone—certainly not *in situ*—from one end of the church to the other. *When* will architects and country parsons learn that the most unmeaning, most commonplace, most *vulgar* thing with which the floor of an ancient church can be covered is an assortment of black and red tiles? Is it not perceived at a glance that they must needs be uninteresting, disappointing, and when they have procured the ejectment of ancient sepulchral stones, downright offensive? Has the parish then no history? It *had* one—a history which thirty years ago was to be seen written on the walls and on the floor of the parish church. Is it tolerable that on the plea of "restoration" these local records should all have been obliterated? How about the men who ministered to the many generations who once worshipped within these walls? Behold, they have (all but one) departed. And have they then, like a long line of shadows, left *no* material trace of their occupancy behind them? The answer is obvious. Certain of them sleep in dust, side by side, in front of the altar which they served in their lifetime; and a row of sepulchral slabs until yesterday acquainted the beholder at least with their names, dates, ages. Am I to be told that yonder assortment of parti-coloured tiles (which are to be bought by the yard by anybody, any day,

anywhere) are so much more interesting than those memorials of the past, that it is reasonable they should cause their unceremonious ejectment? . . . . I have said nothing about the architectural Vandalism of these last days, being without professional knowledge; but I have the best reason for knowing that the author of the ensuing "Recollections" would have endorsed every word which has gone before. O, that what has been written might avail, if it were but in *one* quarter, to arrest the work of ruin which is still steadily going forward throughout the length and breadth of the land!

(5.) I recall with interest an opportunity I once enjoyed (1869-70) of acquainting myself with Sir Gilbert's skill and conscientiousness in superintending a work of no great magnitude. The beautiful church of Houghton Conquest, in Bedfordshire, had fallen into a state of exceeding decadence; and the rector (the late Archdeacon Rose) having been encouraged to invoke the assistance of Sir Gilbert Scott, the architect paid us a visit. (I say *us*, because Houghton Rectory was the happy home of all my long vacations.) Sir Gilbert fully shared our concern at the entire destruction of the large east window, which had been half blocked up, half replaced by a wooden frame containing three vile mullions of wood. After conducting him round, the Archdeacon and I took our seats by his side on the leads of the nave, while he took a leisurely survey of the roof of the structure. "What is *that?*" he inquired, directing his glass to the summit of the eastern

gable. I volunteered the statement that it was a ruined fragment of the former cross, for such it seemed. "*That* was never part of a cross," he at last said thoughtfully; "it is part of the tracery of a window. I can see the cavity for the insertion of the glass." To be brief, it proved to be, as he at once suspected, the one necessary clue to the restoration of the east window. On the window-sill, which was honeycombed with decay, his practised eye had already distinguished traces of *four* mullions. I need not go on. A few more fragments were found built into the wall, and the entire window for the architect's purpose was recovered. He preserved everything for us, from the dilapidated screen to the old hour-glass stand. Several specimens of fresco were revealed on the walls; a curious coat-of-arms in stained glass was detected in the tower; two windows which had been closed were opened; the grave-stones were left in their places; the very reckoning of the parson with certain members of the Conquest family, scratched with the point of a knife (I suppose in the time of Queen Elizabeth) inside the arch of the vestry door, was ordered to be religiously preserved. On the other hand, a portentous Georgian pulpit, furnished with a formidable sounding-board above, and a species of pen for the accommodation of the clerk beneath, were banished. The sordid porch and plastered ceiling of the chancel were supplanted by objects exquisite in their respective ways.

(6.) I have said nothing hitherto about Sir Gilbert's personal characteristics, disposition,

habits of mind. It will be found that these emerge with tolerable distinctness from the autobiography which follows. His indomitable energy and unflagging zeal, as well as the enlightened spirit in which he pursued his lofty calling: his enthusiasm for the great cause to which he devoted himself to the very close of his earthly life: these lie on the surface of his narrative. And here it is impossible not to admire the entire absence of any expression of professional jealousy from first to last; and indeed the absence of depreciatory language concerning others,—although the man who worked after Wyatt in the last century, after Blore in the present, might have been excused if he had testified both surprise and annoyance at what he was daily constrained to encounter.—A stranger, I suspect, would have been chiefly impressed by the exceeding modesty and unassumingness of his manner,—"his beautiful modesty," as one who knew him most intimately has well phrased it; adding a tribute to "his perfect breeding and courtesy,—not so much finish of manner as genuine inbred politeness." Such "graces of character," writes another friend of his, "will not soon be forgotten by those who knew him, however slightly." Obvious as it always was that he entertained a decided opinion on the point under discussion, he yet bore with the crude remarks of persons who really knew nothing at all about the matter in hand to an extent which used to astonish me. Even when conversing with those who were submissive and really only wished to learn, there was no appearance of dictation or dogmatism. His affability was extraordinary. While on this

head let me not fail to acknowledge his wondrous patience and kindness in matters of detail.

I must needs also again advert to the conservative character of his genius. When I became Vicar of St. Mary-the-Virgin's, Oxford (1863), I found to my distress that Laud's porch was doomed. The parishioners willingly listened to my recommendation, and it was spared. I confessed what I had done to Scott, and asked for his forgiveness if I had counselled amiss: but he commended me highly. A few feet in advance of the porch however, are two plain piers, erected in the last century,—either of them surmounted by a strange kind of dilapidated urn. Were *they* also to stand? I presumed that the architect who had already removed the high wall which used to enclose the north side of the churchyard, and substituted for it the present elegant erection, would have been for their removal: and certainly I was not prepared to offer any resistance had I discovered that such was actually his view. But no. After a careful survey, he recommended that they should be retained, and gave me his reasons for retaining them. It was truly edifying and interesting to hear his remarks on such occasions. The thing was "historical;"—or at least it was "good of its kind;"—or it "had a certain character about it;"—or "I don't altogether dislike it." In short—for whatever reason—the end of the matter commonly was that "I think we had better let it alone."

(7.) Notwithstanding all that has gone before,

were I called upon to state my private estimate of the man, I should avow that in my account, second to no other personal characteristic was the ardour of his domestic affections: first, his love for his parents, brothers, sisters; then his entire devotion to his wife and his children. There is many a passage in the ensuing autobiography which bears me out in this estimate. I well remember the exceeding distress which the death of his son in 1865 at Exeter College occasioned him; an event on which he had freely dilated with his pen, but which it is thought was of too private a nature to find here so extended a record. I should also think it right to declare that in my account a deep undercurrent of Religion, as it was the secret of his strength and of his life, so was it also the secret of his heart's affections: the fountain-head too, by the way, of a certain playful joyousness of disposition which came to the surface continually, and never forsook him to the last. His general manner, however, was grave and thoughtful; and his piety of that quiet and even reserved kind which only occasionally comes to the surface, and easily escapes observation altogether. No one about him, in fact, not even his sons, knew the strength and ardour of those religious convictions which were with him an inheritance; for (as the reader will be presently reminded) the Rev. Thomas Scott, of Aston Sandford, the commentator, was his grandfather. To his faithful valet, who had repeatedly asked him to tell him (but had been invariably put off with some evasive reply) how it happened that the lower side of his arms looked galled and sore, had in fact a *leprous* appearance, he

one day avowed as follows: "When I am praying, especially for my sons, I feel I cannot do enough. I feel kneeling to be but little, and I prostrate myself on the floor. I suppose that my arms from this may have become a little galled."—He never syllabled his wife's name in conversation with his sons without a silent prayer for her repose; and when out of doors, he would always raise his hat (the token of how he was mentally engaged) at the mention of her cherished name.—I trust it is not wrong to reveal such matters. One must either practise reticence, and so conceal the character which one professes to exhibit faithfully: or else risk offending the very persons probably whose good opinion one would chiefly be glad to conciliate.

JOHN W. BURGON.

THE DEANERY, CHICHESTER,
*May 17th*, 1879.