PECULIAR USES
OF THE
BEDFORDSHIRE BELLS.

THERE are very few directions in the Rubrics and Canons of the Church of England as to the use of the Church Bell.

The single one in the Rubrics is that in which the Curate is ordered to "cause a bell to be tolled" to daily service "a convenient time before he begin, that the people may come to hear God's word and to pray with him." The directions in the Canons are also very brief: the 15th, which directs "Litany to be read on Wednesdays and Fridays," orders that warning be "given to the people by tolling of a bell," and the 67th orders:—

And, when any is passing out of this life, a bell shall be tolled, and the Minister shall not then slack to do his last duty. And after the party's death, if it so fall out, there shall be rung no more than one short peal, and one other before the burial, and one other after the burial.

No further directions are given as to the use of church bells, and the only other references to them are in the 88th Canon against the superstitious use of bells upon "Holy days or Eves abrogated by the Book of Common
Prayer, nor at any other times without good cause, to be allowed by the minister of the place” and by the church-wardens, and in the 11th against hindering the minister or preacher “by untimely ringing of bells.”

It was, no doubt, the superstitious use, and the “untimely” ringing of the bells in mediæval times, which caused the Church at the Reformation, not only to put a check upon their excessive ringing, but to order only the most simple and necessary use of them. It will be observed that one bell is all that is really essential in carrying out the directions of the Church, so that the poorest parish can have no difficulty in obeying. But it by no means follows that what is sometimes, but not always correctly, spoken of as “Apostolical simplicity” is intended, either in this or in other matters connected with the services of the Church, to be inculcated when better things can be obtained; indeed, we know that it is generally only poverty, or some other difficulty, which hinders the erection in our modern churches of a number of bells with which to ring those peals in which almost all English Churchmen delight. And so it was in more ancient times: the larger parish churches sometimes had five bells, many four, more perhaps only three, but it was a very rare thing indeed to find any church with less than two and a sanctus bell.

In pre-Reformation times, as I have shown elsewhere, the bells were heard much more frequently than now. Where the Canonical Hours were kept they would be ringing very frequently and very regularly, by day and by night, so that they answered very much the purpose of a clock, and the different ways in which they were rung told the service then about being
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said. The bells were then frequently rung by the deacons. Such, we know, was the case in the fifteenth century at Holy Trinity, Coventry, and in the following century at Ludlow and at Exeter. Sculpture on the font at Belton, Lincolnshire, shows the campanarius attired in his camise, chiming two bells. In our smaller parish churches, too, those bells belonging to minor altars, to Guilds and Fraternities, or used for special Offices, would very frequently be sounding. Thus, at Ludlow—in addition to a ring of five bells—they possessed "Our Lady belle," "First-Mass-Bell," and "the gild belle."* On Sundays and on high-days all the bells appear to have been rung for Matins and Evensong—the two Services which all were expected to attend, and so the custom has continued to the present time. Hooper, in his Injunctions, dated 1551, whilst forbidding ringing at unseasonable times, adds "but before services, as well morning as at even, to warn people by as many peals or ringings as they think good."

The mode of ringing or of chiming for Divine Service varies somewhat in different parishes in Bedfordshire, as in the other counties of England.

At Ampthill, Harrold and Pavenham, all the bells are chimed, followed by a five minutes' sounding of the treble as the parson's bell.

At Cardington, Carlton, Chellington, Goldington, and Houghton-Conquest, all the bells are chimed, followed by a five minutes' tolling of the tenor.

At Apsley Guise and at Eversholt the tenor is rung for a few minutes, followed by a chiming of all the bells.

* See Ludlow Churchwardens' Accounts, published by Camden Society.
At Barton-le-Clay the treble is rung for fifteen minutes, then all the bells are chimed, followed by the tolling of the treble for five minutes.

At Dunstable they chime all the bells for twenty minutes, followed by the sanctus-bell for ten minutes as a sermon-bell.

At S. Peter’s, Bedford, the first four bells are chimed, followed by the tenor bell alone. The same custom is followed at Blunham and at Cranfield. At Melchbourne and at Hawnes the first three are chimed, followed in the same way by the 4th or tenor.

At S. Mary’s, Bedford, the bells are chimed for fifteen minutes, after which the tenor is tolled for ten minutes, followed by the priest’s bell for five minutes.

At Houghton-Regis the tenor is first rung up as a sermon-bell, and is "dropped in" with the other bells when chiming commences, and so is gradually "lowered," after which it is tolled till the commencement of service. A similar mode is followed at Marston Moretaine (where, however, about twenty strokes on the treble concludes), and also at Stanbridge; indeed, that is the favourite style of using the bells on Sunday in that part of the county. At Husborne-Crawley, too, the tenor is first raised, then "dropped in," whilst the other bells are chimed for twenty minutes, after which the tenor is lowered alone, followed by a chiming of all the bells until a few minutes before the commencement of Divine Service, when the priest’s bell concludes the warning.

At Meppershall all the bells are first chimed with the tenor rung in; the tenor is then lowered and chimed with the other bells.
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At Clifton ten of the bells are chimed by machinery until five minutes before the commencement of Service, when the 6th, 7th and 8th bells are chimed.

The chiming of the bells at Leighton Buzzard is divided into two peals, between which the tenor is raised and rung as a sermon bell.

At Northill the chiming commences an hour before Divine Service; after a pause it is resumed half-an-hour before the time, and is followed by five minutes' tolling of a single bell.

At Hockliffe any one bell is rung as a sermon-bell, followed by the chiming of the whole three; and at Pertenhall the sermon-bell is first rung, then the three bells are chimed, followed by the tolling—for a few minutes—of the tenor. At Old Warden (where there are four bells) they first chime all for twenty minutes, then toll one bell for five minutes, and conclude by the ringing of the third bell for five minutes.

The bells at Arlesey are usually rung, not chimed, for Services on Sunday.

At Woburn new church the single bell (the largest in the county) is rung up half-an-hour before the hour for Divine Service by three men; then a pause for ten minutes, after which there is ringing again for ten minutes, and the bell is lowered; the ringers receive three shillings per Sunday, paid by the Duke of Bedford.

On the Great Festivals the call to Divine Service is rung instead of chimed at Cople and at Tottenhoe.

These examples show the diversity of usage at present in different parishes, but, no doubt, ancient customs have, in many cases, departed.
Early Sunday Peals.—With the introduction of the "new service" (as the Book of Common Prayer was called) in the time of Edward VI., the singing of the Canonical Hours—with the exception of Matins and Evensong—was dropped. The only traces of them we now have in the use of our church bells, excepting the ringing or chiming for Morning and Evening Prayer, are the ringing of the "first and second peals" on Sunday mornings at seven and eight, or at eight and nine o’clock, in many parishes. In pre-Reformation times matins was said in all parish churches before breakfast as a preparation for mass. The "first peal" was the call to matins, the "second peal" to tierce and mass. It is a curious proof how tenacious custom is in having continued the ringing of these bells for over three hundred years after the purposes they served were abrogated, and when few even think of, or inquire as to, the meaning of their sound.

For these "peals"—which are rung in many Bedfordshire parishes—the smaller bells are generally used. The mode of ringing varies:

At Houghton Conquest the treble bell is rung at 7 a.m., the 1st and 2nd at 9 a.m.

At Marston Moretaine the 1st is rung at 8 o’clock, and is called "8 o’clock bell," or "first peal," and the 1st and 2nd at 9 a.m.

At Pertenhall they ring the 1st at 7 a.m., and the 1st and 2nd at 8 a.m.

At Stanbridge the 1st is rung at 7.30 a.m., and again at 9.30 (the latter now for Sunday-school).

The two early-peals have, in many parishes, merged into
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one; thus one bell (generally the treble) is rung at 8 o’clock at Ampthill, Bedford (S. Cuthbert), Biddenham, Dunstable (2nd bell), Flitwick, Harlington (for “sermon bell,” commonly called “8 o’clock bell”), Kempstone (where they formerly rang 1st at 7 a.m., and 1st and 2nd at 8 a.m.), Lidlington, Millbrooke, Northill, Potten, Shelton, Stotfold, Tilbrook, Wilden, and Wilhampstead. Two bells are rung at the same hour—8 a.m.—at Bedford (S. Peter’s), Blunham (1st and 2nd), Cardington (3rd and 4th, called “sermon bells”), Eversholt (1st and 2nd, called “8 o’clock bells”), Leighton Buzzard (3rd and 4th, called “the 8 o’clock peal”), Odell, and at Sandy (1st and 2nd). At Cranfield they chime the 1st, 2nd and 3rd bells at 8 a.m. In some parishes a large bell is rung at 8 a.m.; thus at Cardington they ring the 5th, and call it the sermon-bell; at Southill the 3rd is rung, and at Toddington the 6th bell is rung alternately at 8 and at 8.30 a.m. At Houghton Regis the treble is rung at 7 a.m., and is still called the “first peal;” the treble is rung at the same hour at Milton Bryant and at Turvey, and at Tingrith the 2nd is then rung, and is called the sermon-bell. At Fandish and at Hawnes a bell is rung at 9 a.m.

Many years ago it was the custom at Aspley Guise to ring a bell at 8 a.m. and again at 9 a.m., called respectively “the first and second peals;” so, too, until recently, one bell was rung at 7 a.m. and two at 8 a.m. at S. Paul’s, Bedford. The ringing of a bell at Tilsworth at 7 a.m., and of one at Willington at 8 a.m., are remembered. They have both been discontinued for some years.

The Sermon Bell was heard in Pre-Reformation times, as
is evident from the *Rites of Durham*, and the Royal Injunctions of 1547 ordered a bell in convenient time to be rung or knolled before the sermon. The ringing of this bell, which is usually the tenor, though not universal, is heard in many parishes in this county, and that frequently after the chiming. The tenor bell is so used at Bedford (S. Peter’s and S. Mary’s), Carlton, Chellington, Egginton, and Milton Ernest; it is rung before chiming at Houghton Regis, Husborne Crawley, Marston Moretaine, Pertenhall, Stanbridge and at Hockliffe, where any bell, not necessarily the tenor, is rung.

At Leighton Buzzard the tenor is rung as a sermon bell between two peals of chiming. At Dunstable the ringing of the sanctus bell for ten minutes after the chiming of all the bells is called the sermon bell. At Harlington the ringing of the treble at 8 a.m., at Caddington the ringing of the 5th bell, and at Cardington the ringing of the 3rd and 4th at the same hour, are called sermon bells. At Tingrith the 2nd bell, rung at 7 a.m., is called the sermon bell; and many years ago it was customary after this bell was raised to strike the day of the month. At Tilsworth the ringing of the sermon bell was discontinued about the year 1870, and at Stevington it was rung until recently at 8 a.m.; it was discontinued in consequence of the clerk being a shepherd, and his services being supposed necessary in the fields at that hour.

**Sunday Mid-day Peals.**—It is customary in some parishes to ring at the close of the Morning Service in a similar manner to that described under Early Peals. Thus the 1st and 2nd bells are so rung at Pertenhall; at S. Peter’s, Bedford, the treble is rung for five minutes, followed by the ringing of the
3rd and 4th bells for five minutes, called "the dinner-bell;" at Blunham and at Cardington a bell (at the latter place the 3rd) is then rung for a few minutes.

As the early peals are frequently considered signals for the Morning Service, so these mid-day ringings are sometimes now used as warnings that Evensong will be said; such is the case at Wilden, where a bell is rung at 12 o'clock when Morning Prayer has not been said, which, however, very rarely happens.

The bell so rung at the close of Morning Service is, in some places, called

**The Pudding, or Dinner Bell**, being supposed to be rung in order to give the cook warning that Service is over, and so dinner may be prepared. Such is the case at Leighton Buzzard, where the 3rd bell is rung at 1 o'clock, and (as we have seen) at S. Peter's, Bedford. At Tingrith a bell is rung immediately after Morning Service, and is popularly known as

**The Potato Bell**, "because on hearing this bell the people at home put their potatoes in the pot for boiling." At Wilhampstead the ringing of this bell has been recently discontinued.

This custom is probably the survival of the

**Knolling of the Aves**, mentioned in the Injunctions of 1538 as being sounded after the Service, and at certain other times, and as having been brought in and begun by the presence of the Bishop of Rome's pardon, and it was ordered that they be thenceforth left and omitted. Shaxton, Bishop of Sarum in that year, said "that the bell called the Pardon, or Ave Bell, which of longe tyme hathe been used to be tolled three tymes after and before Divine Service, be not hereafter, in any part of my diocese, any more tolyd."
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In some places the Aves' bell was tolled thrice every day. That was the case at Cropedy, Oxfordshire, as we know from a benefaction to the bells made by Master Roger Lupton, vicar of that parish, by indenture dated 26 August, 1512. He gave certain money to the churchwardens upon condition that they should, amongst other things, "toll dayly the Avees bell at sex of the clok in the mornynge, at xij of the clok at noone, and at foure of the clok at afternoone."

The saying of the Aves was between the tolling. Among the Articles of Enquiry in 1547 was one whether the knolling at the Aves be used.

The ringing or tolling of a bell or bells before the chiming commences for Divine Service at Aspley Guise, Barton-le-Clay, and in other parishes, may be, and probably is—as well as the ringing at the close of the Service—a continuance of the custom of knolling the Aves.

The Passing-Bell.—Besides the use of bells for calling to Divine Service, the Canons enjoin the tolling of the "Passing-bell." The custom of notifying, by this means, the passing of a soul out of this life, is almost, if not quite, as ancient in this country as the use of bells by the Church. Bede records its use as early as the year 680.† Durand, writing about the close of the twelfth century, thus describes the object, as well as the mode, of ringing:—

When any one is dying, bells must be tolled, that the people may put up their prayers, twice for a woman and thrice for a man: if for a clergyman, as many times as he had orders.‡

* Historical Notices of Cropedy, by Rev. D. Royce, p. 43.
† Bede, Book iv. c. xxiii.
‡ Brand's Pop. Antiq. ii. 129.
The Passing-bell was, of course, then rung at all hours of the night, as well as by day. After the Reformation the custom of ringing the Passing-bell in the ancient way was continued. Bishop Hooper, in his Injunctions (1551) allowed it, the Royal Injunctions of 1559 enjoined it, and the Advertisements of 1564 show it was then usual to ring or toll the Passing-bell whilst the person was believed to be dying, but not yet dead. In after-years the Bishops inquired in their Articles whether the Passing-bell was so tolled; indeed, the custom was continued until recent times. An aged friend recently told the writer that when his mother was in extremis she desired her maid to order the Passing-bell to be tolled, and other similar instances are on record.* Persons have even been known to recover their health after their Passing-bell had been tolled.† The ancient custom of so ringing the Passing-bell had gradually fallen almost into disuse about a century ago. Wheatley speaks of it as being generally disused in 1755.‡

The bell now used for the Passing-bell (or more properly, the Death-knell, as it is not now rung until after death) is usually the tenor, but this is sometimes changed, as we shall see, in the case of children, for a smaller bell. At the close, or the commencement, or at both, of the Passing-bell, it has long been the custom to indicate the sex of the person departing, or departed, by certain strokes or tolls of the bell. These have generally been three for a male (in honour of the Holy Trinity), and two for a female (in honour of our Saviour,
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born of a woman) on the tenor bell, as at Ampthill—where all the bells are previously sounded in succession for half-an-hour—S. Cuthbert's, Bedford, and Biggleswade.

At Goldington these tolls are given both before and after the knell.

At S. Paul's and S. Mary's, Bedford, Kempston, Potton Sandy, and Steppingley, the same distinctive tolls—three for a male, two for a female—are given on the tenor for adults, on a smaller bell for children.

The same number of tolls are given on each bell after the knell at Clapham, Oakley and Milton Ernest (where the knell is rung for five minutes only), and before the knell at Carlton, Chellington, Harrold, Langton (where they begin with the treble for children), Northill, Odell, Pavenham, Stanbridge, Stevington, Stotfold, Tilsworth and Toddington; the same custom is followed at Blunham, Houghton Conquest and Tin-grith, where, however, the knell is tolled on the treble bell for infants.

At Marston Moretaine they give three tolls for a male and two for a female on all the bells, beginning with the treble, both before and after the knell, which is rung on the tenor for adults, on the 4th or 3rd for young people in their teens and under.

At Flitwick three strokes are given on all the bells for a male, two for a female, commencing on the tenor for adults, on the treble for children under twelve years of age.

At Great Barford each bell is sounded three times for a man, twice for a woman, and once for a baby before the knell, which is rung on the tenor for males, on the treble for females.
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At Clophill they give the same tolls on each bell for a man, and two on each bell for a woman or child.

At Old Warden three strokes are given on each bell for a man, two for a woman, and one for a child, after which the tenor is rung up and sounded once a minute.

Another usual form of notifying the sex in this county, as elsewhere, is thrice three tolls for a male, and thrice two for a female. Such is the custom after the knell at Caddington, Dunton, Lidlington and Salford; and both before and after the knell at Aspley Guise, Chalgrave, Cranfield, Dunstable, Eversholt, Houghton Regis (where the 3rd bell is used for young people), Hulcote, Leighton Buzzard, Milton Bryant, Pertenhall, Pottesgrove, Tottenhoe, Wootton and Woburn; at Tottenhoe and Wootton the treble is used for children.

At Battlesden and Wilhampstead the custom is to give, after the knell, thrice three tolls for a man, thrice two for a woman, and three single tolls for infants: the same custom is followed, both before and after the knell, at Egginton and at Hockliffe; also at Millbrooke, where the tolls are given on both the bells.

At Harlington the thrice three tolls for a male and thrice two for a female are given on all the bells in succession before the knell: the same custom is followed at Meppershall, where the tenor is used for adults, the treble for children, and where, after the knell is rung and the bell lowered, the age of the deceased is tolled.

At Shillington the same number of tolls are given on the tenor bell for adults, on the 4th bell for young people, and on the treble for children.

At Southill they give the same number of tolls (3 x 3 and
3 x 2) on the tenor for people above twenty years of age, on the 5th for those under twenty, on the 4th if under sixteen, on the 3rd if under twelve, on the 2nd if under eight, and on the treble if under four years of age. These are given before and after the knell on the tenor bell, which is rung with a stroke at intervals of a few seconds.

Different customs are observed in other parishes. Thus at Cardington they give three tolls for a male on the bells in succession, commencing with the 8th (tenor) bell, and going to the 3rd, when the tenor is rung for the knell; the same number of strokes are given on the same bells for a female, but commencing with the 3rd and going on to the 8th.

At Dean and at Melchbourne three tolls are given for males on the tenor, and the same number on the treble for females, both before and after the knell on the tenor, which is tolled forty minutes for adults and fifteen minutes for children.

At Tilbrook three strokes are given on all the bells "for all alike."

At Husborne Crawley thrice three tolls for a male and thrice two for a female are given on the 3rd, 4th and 5th bells before and after the knell, which is rung on the tenor for adults, on the 5th bell for children.

At Keysoe the custom is to give three tolls twice on all the bells both before and after the knell, which is rung for an hour, for males and females alike, commencing with the tenor for the former, with the treble for the latter.

At Turvey they give, at the close of the knell on the tenor bell, thrice three tolls on all the bells, commencing with the treble, for a male above twelve years of age; for a female of
the same age the same number of tolls are given in succession on the first five bells; for children under twelve the 5th bell is used for the knell, closing with three tolls on the first five bells for a boy, on the first four for a girl.

In some parishes they give no distinctive tolls, but use a different bell for the knell, according to the age of the deceased. Thus at Clifton the tenor is used for adults, one of the middle bells for a young person, and the 3rd for infants. So, too, at Edworth the 3rd is used for adults, the 2nd for young persons, and the treble for infants; and at Wilden—where the knell is rung for an hour—the tenor is used for adults and the treble for children.

There is no distinction of any kind at Gravenhurst, Hawnes and Willington.

In this county, as elsewhere, the Passing-bell is not rung in cases where an inquest is held, until the jury have given a verdict other than *felo-de-se*.

**Death-Knell.**—In addition to the Passing-bell, the Canon enjoins that "after the party's death, if it so fall out, there shall be rung no more than one short peal." That custom is mentioned by Durand (who wrote about the end of the twelfth century), in the *Book of Ceremonies* (1539), and in the Articles of Inquiry issued by the Bishops after the Reformation, who used such words as "or to ring a knell presently after the departure, that notice may be taken by all to give God thanks for that party's deliverance out of this vale of misery." Even the Puritans in 1562 were willing to allow it, only stipulating that "no peal after death of any person be above the space of one hour." Wheatley wrote of "the short
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peal" after death as being generally rung in 1755, but the custom has now entirely fallen into disuse, or rather, perhaps, it would be more correct to say, has been superseded by the ringing of the still so-called Passing-bell after instead of before death, or whilst the soul was "passing." A trace of it may perhaps be found in some parishes, where the tenor bell is first tolled for a short space and then rung.

Burial Peals.—The Canon enjoins, "and one other (peal) before the burial, and one after the burial."

This sounding of bells at funerals is an ancient custom, and had been carried to great excess; indeed, so early as 1339 Bishop Grandisson, of Exeter, found it desirable to check the long ringings on such occasions, on the grounds that "they do no good to the departed, are an annoyance to the living, and injurious to the fabrick and the bells."* The Puritans, in 1562, desired to limit the peals at funerals to half-an-hour. Notices of this custom are constantly found in Churchwardens' Accounts and in other Parish Records, and provision was frequently made for its performance by Will. It is, however, now becoming obsolete, though it still lingers in a few parishes in this as in other counties. At Cople they chime the five bells for funerals; at Hulcote and at Salford the bells are chimed for about twenty-five minutes before a funeral, followed by a tolling of the tenor for five minutes; at Harrold the practice, though not now followed, is remembered as customary.

Simple tolling of the tenor bell, until the procession reaches the church, is now the general custom.

The "one peal after" the funeral is now of rare occurrence,

* Ellacombe's Bells of Exeter Cathedral, p. 7.
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excepting in the case of ringers and other church officials. The only trace of it I have found still surviving in this county is at Flitwick, where about five strokes are given on the tenor at the close of the Service. Until about the year 1872, the tenor bell was always tolled at Woburn at the end of the Office as the mourners left the grave.

In pre-Reformation times the church bells were frequently ringing on Obit-days, that is, on the anniversaries of the deaths of persons, when masses—for which provision had been made by the deceased, or by their friends—were said for their benefit. Although such have long ceased in the English Church,

Commemorative Services, when the bells are chimed, are not unknown. Oliver Peach, of Harrowden, a hamlet of Cardington, in this County, who died on the 19th of June, 1715, aged 60 years, left a yearly rent-charge of one pound on his estate, afterwards purchased by Mr. Whitbread, for an annual sermon on the 21st of June—the day of his burial.

The Sanctus or Saunce Bell is generally mentioned in the Inventories of Church Goods taken in the reign of Edward VI. It was sometimes hung in a little belfry at the gable of the chancel roof between that portion of the church and the nave, but more usually in a convenient position in the belfry—not unfrequently in a window—so that the rope came down into the church with easy access to the server at the altar. When the priest said the Sanctus in the Office of the Mass, three strokes were given on this bell (hence its name), so that all within reach of its sound—whether within or without the church—could join in the sacred song of adoration.
A few successors of the Sanctus-bell are in the Bedfordshire churches in the "Priest's-bell," or "ting-tang," usually rung immediately before the service begins. These are in many cases modern, being, probably, recasts of the ancient Sanctus-bells. There are, however, two of those ancient bells still remaining in this county—the one at Lidlington and the other at Dunstable.

The Sanctus-bell may have been used upon other occasions than the one just mentioned. Dr. Rock was of opinion that in many parishes some kind of instruction was given every Sunday in the afternoon—we know that was the case at Durham. To warn the parish of the sermon time, a large bell, or bells, would be rung for a time, followed, perhaps, by the ringing of the smaller or Sanctus-bell,* hence, probably, the origin of the modern use of

The Priest's-bell or Ting-Tang. At Ware, in Hertfordshire, they possessed in 1552, "one lyttle belle to calle for ye priest, clarke or sexton when they are absent."† This bell was occasionally called the 'Tantony-bell, or Saint Anthony bell, a small bell being the emblem of that Saint;‡ and at Oldham it was described as "The Anthem-bell."§

As just indicated, the Priest's-bell is usually sounded for a few minutes before Divine Service to call the clergy, but the one at Dunstable is rung as a Sermon-bell, and the one at Toddington is not only rung at the usual time, but also as an alarm-bell in case of fire. At Luton the Priest's-bell—which

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* See Notes and Queries, vol. xi., p. 150
† Cussans' Church Goods in Herts, p. 123.
‡ See North's Church Bells of Northants (1855).
§ Cheetham Soc., cvii. p. 43.
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has not been used for twenty years—is unhung, and is in an outhouse at the Rectory. It is said to have been formerly known as the Curfew-bell, and afterwards as the Fire-bell. It may be worth noting that the one at Wootton hangs in a turret, and is always rung from the chancel—the ancient mode of ringing the Sanctus-bell—when the parson enters the church for service.

The Sacring-bell is mentioned in the Inventories of Church Goods belonging to Eversholt and Westoning in 1552. It was a small hand-bell used formerly in every church in the Office of the Mass, to warn the people that the elevation was about to take place; it generally hung in the chancel; sometimes a number of small bells affixed to a wheel, which was pulled by a cord, were used to give the warning.* At Hemswell, Lincolnshire, this bell was called the "Agnus-bell," from its being rung at the elevation of the chalice at the close of the Canon, followed immediately by the singing of the Agnus. The ringing of the Sacring-bell was forbidden in the Injunctions issued in 1549-50; indeed, the necessity for it passed away when the Order of Holy Communion was commanded to be used in English.

Hand-bells are also mentioned as existing in parish churches when the Inventories were taken in the reign of Edward VI. They were then found at Battlesden, Cranfield, Husborne Crawley, Salford, and Westoning, and were, doubtless, at the other churches in this county, whose Inventories have not yet been discovered. They were used in a variety of ways

* See Church Bells of Northants, p. 139.
in pre-Reformation times: in processions on Rogation-days, in the procession when the Eucharist was borne to the house of the sick or dying, to give warning of its approach, that all might pay reverence to it; hence it was sometimes called—as at Great Gonerby, Lincolnshire—“the Houselling-bell;” it was also rung to clear the way, and to call for a prayer for the deceased at the burial of the dead, and so was frequently called “the Corse-bell” or “Lych-bell;” indeed, the hand-bell was used in a variety of ways in the mediæval Church.

The Curfew.—I am not aware that the curfew is now rung in any parish in Bedfordshire. It was formerly (till about the year 1835) rung at S. Paul’s, Bedford, at 8 p.m. in the winter, at 9 p.m. in the summer; but it was discontinued when the Corporation declined to pay the ringer’s fee. So, too, it was rung at Leighton Buzzard until about the same date. At Luton the Priest’s-bell is said to have been formerly known as the Curfew-bell, and at Woburn there is a tradition that the Curfew was regularly heard there many years ago.

The Early Morning-bell.—As the Curfew, when it ceased to be legally enforced as a notice for the extinction of fire and candle, probably became the evening Angelus—a warning to all to say an Ave to the Blessed Virgin before retiring to rest;* so the ringing of the early morning-bell arose from an extension of that practice. In 1399 Archbishop Arundel issued a mandate commanding that at early dawn one “Our Father,” and five “Hail Marys,” should be said.† As a reminder to all of this duty, the Angelus—which was frequently

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* See Rock’s Church of our Fathers, iii., p. 337.
† Walcott’s Sac. Arch.
called "Gabriel," from being dedicated to the Angel of the Annunciation—was rung very frequently as early as four o'clock in the morning. The bells bearing the inscription Ave Maria—of which there are several remaining in this county—were probably used for the same purpose. The early morning-bell—the tenor—was rung at Toddington in this county at four o'clock until the year 1877, when it ceased. At Hockliffe, too, until recently, a bell was rung daily at 7 a.m., and again at 9 a.m. A morning-bell was formerly rung at 4 a.m. at Woburn "as a school-bell in connection with the free-school there." It was afterwards rung at 6 a.m., but has been entirely discontinued for about forty years. At Eversholt the 1st or 2nd bell is still rung daily, excepting Sunday, at 8 a.m.

Other Daily Bells.—A mid-day Angelus was rung in France in the fifteenth century. Although that custom does not appear to have been followed generally in this country,* a Mid-day-bell was rung in some parishes, and is still heard in a few; but whether it be in all cases a survival of the mid-day Angelus is very doubtful. At Turvey the treble bell is tolled—and has been from time immemorial—at noon (12 o'clock), and is now considered as a signal for dinner. At Eversholt a bell is rung daily at one o'clock, and at Cranfield the 1st and 2nd bells are rung daily—Sundays excepted—at one and two o'clock, and are called dinner-bells. The Mid-day-bell (3rd) is remembered as being formerly rung daily at mid-day at Oakley, and the 2nd bell at one o'clock at Pottesgrove.

* The "Ave-bell" was rung at noon at Cropredy, Oxfordshire. See Historical Notices of Cropredy, by Rev. D. Royce, p. 43.
In the absence of all evidence to the contrary, the use of these mid-day bells may be generally attributed to a secular origin—the giving warning to agricultural labourers and others of the time—rather than to a religious one.

The Pancake-bell was originally the Shrive-bell, which was rung on Shrove, or Shrive Tuesday, as a warning to all to come to church, where the parish priest sat in an open chair, or stall, to hear the confessions of his people, and to award them such penance as he thought good for them, or to give them absolution. Again, in times when Lent was more strictly observed than now as a time of abstinence from flesh-meat, the housewives, we are told, in order to use up all the grease, lard and dripping, made pancakes, and the apprentices and others about the house were summoned to the meal by the ringing of a bell, which was, naturally, called "The Pancake-bell."*

The ringing on Shrove Tuesday of the Shrive-bell, now called the Pancake-bell, is still continued in a few parishes in this county, and is remembered in many more.

At S. Paul's, Bedford, the 5th bell is rung at eleven o'clock, at Cranfield the 3rd bell is rung, at Toddington the 6th; at Turvey the 1st and 2nd are chimed together at noon, making a most unmelodious noise, which is supposed to indicate the approaching commencement of the gloomy season of Lent.

Within living memory the Pancake-bell was rung at Cardington (6th bell from eleven till twelve o'clock), Eversholt, Harrold, Hulcote, Marston Moretaine, Oakley, Salford,

* See Notes and Queries, 3rd S. vi. 404.
Wootton, and Woburn; and at Wilden it is traditionally remembered.

The quaint old clerk who serves both Carlton and Chellington, and who is (1881) 84 years of age, says the Pancake-bell used to be rung at Carlton "by a chap" whom he describes as "a Roman," but that since his death, about twenty-five years ago, the bells have not been kept up to the same pitch of ringing; and the Pancake-bell has been discontinued.

Advent Ringing.—Although there is no special peal rung on Advent Sunday in this county, as in some parishes elsewhere, it is customary in Bedfordshire, as in other counties, for the ringers to practise ringing during the weeks in Advent, and to ring much during the Christmas season; such is the case at Arlesey, Aspley Guise, Barton-le-Clay, Cople, Dunstable, Hartington, Hockliffe, Hulcote, Meppershall, and Salford.

Christmas Peals are rung in many parishes on the Eve of the Festival. Such is the case at Aspley Guise, Biggleswade, Cardington, Dean, Egginton, Eversholt, Flitwick, Hockliffe, Houghton Conquest, Husborne Crawley, Leighton Buzzard, Marston Moretaine, Melchbourne, Meppershall, Pertenhall, Sandy, and Tingrith.

The ringing at midnight is an old custom which is followed at Great Barford, Blunham, Cople, Hartington, Houghton Regis, Keysoe, Stanbridge, Turvey, and Woburn.

Merry peals are rung early on Christmas morning at Arlesey (at 6 a.m.), Great Barford, Barton-le-Clay, Cranfield, Flitwich (at 8 o'clock), Goldington, Houghton Regis, Keysoe
Easter-day is ushered in by peals on the bells at Arlesey, Eversholt, Leighton Buzzard, Meppershall, Tilsworth, and Toddington. At Turvey the bells are rung at the close of afternoon service, and at Houghton Regis the are bells sometimes rung instead of chimed for Service on this great Festival.

So, too, on other Festivals the bells are sometimes rung:—

The Epiphany: Peals are rung at Tilsworth.

Ascension-day: Peals are rung at the same place.

Whitsunday Peals are rung at Eversholt, Leighton Buzzard, Tilsworth, Toddington, Turvey, and sometimes at Cranfield.

Lady-day: the bells at Tilsworth are rung on the Feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary.

Trinity Sunday: the bells at Eversholt are rung.

Lenten Ringing: the bells of the church should be silent in Lent excepting for Divine Service. No other ringing is allowed at Eversholt, Husborne Crawley, Leighton Buzzard, Tilsworth (excepting one half hour a week for practice: none for any wedding), Turvey, and Woburn.

Good Friday Use: at Eversholt the "early peal" at 8 a.m. is rung on Ash Wednesday and on Good Friday as on Sundays. At Keysoe the tenor bell is tolled for Service on Good Friday.

New Year's-eve: the bells are rung on New Year's-eve at—amongst other places—Aspley Guise, Biggleswade, Cranfield, Dean, Melchbourne, Hockliffe, Husborne Crawley,
Marston Moretaine, Sandy, Shillington, Tingrith, Toddington, and Tottenhoe.

**New Year's-eve and New Year's-day:** the old year is rung out and the new rung in, at Arlesey, Blunham, Cardington, Cople, Eversholt, Flitwick, Hartington, Houghton Regis, Leighton Buzzard, Shelton, Southill, Stanbridge, Wilden, and Woburn. At Meppershall a muffled peal is rung on New Year's-eve for half-an-hour before midnight, ceasing a few minutes before twelve, to allow of the mufflers being removed. At midnight the number twelve is struck on the tenor, and then another peal is rung for half-an-hour. A peal is also rung at day-break on New Year's-day. Early peals are also rung on that day at Barton-le-Clay, Marston Moretaine, Shillington, and Hartington.

**S. Hugh's-day:** in the Churchwardens' Accounts of Shillington are charges in many years between 1574 and 1594 for ringing on S. Hugh's-day. It may be well to note that this ringing was not in honour of the great Bishop of Lincoln, but in celebration of the accession of Queen Elizabeth, which took place upon S. Hugh's-day, and which Saint's day, in accordance with ancient custom, was frequently quoted as a date instead of the day and the month—17th November. The day was also known as "Queen's-day."

**Dedication Peals** are rung at Tilsworth on All Saint's-day; at Turvey on the Monday following the first Sunday after All Saints'-day, and at Milton Ernest on "the Feast-day," which is said to be the 2nd Sunday in July, although the church is supposed to be dedicated to all Saints.

Until quite recently a peal was always rung at Husborne
Crawley at 8 a.m. on S. James'-day, the titular Saint of the Church. This ringing, which was voluntary on the part of the ringers, was, it is said, discontinued in consequence of an objection being made to the time, possibly by the farmers, most of the ringers being labourers.

Banns Peal—that is, a peal after Divine Service on Sunday morning, when the banns of an intended marriage are first "put up"—is sometimes rung at Biddenham, Hulcote, and Langford; at the last mentioned place the ringing depends entirely on the "tips" given to the sexton, which, he says, vary "from five bob to only a pint or two."

Wedding Peals are, of course, usual in almost every parish in the county; at Pertenhall, however, they are only very occasionally rung for a wedding by license; at Pottesgrove they are heard "now and then;" at Tottenhoe they are "few and far between;" at Tilsworth no wedding peal is allowed to be rung during Lent; at Marston Moretaine peals are rung during the day if the parties can pay—if they are poor the ringers give a peal in the evening; and at Husborne Crawley merry peals are voluntarily given in the evening of the day on every marriage at the church, without respect of persons, if the ringers can muster, which is generally the case.

The Bride's Peal is occasionally rung in some parishes on the morning after the wedding, called "Ringing them up." The only approach to it in Bedfordshire is at Steppingley, where, sometimes, a peal is rung on the day after the wedding.

Fair Peals are rung at Toddington on the 25th April, being the day of the fair.

The Oven-bell: the mill and oven of the Lord of the
Manor formerly existed in many parishes; to them the tenants of the Manor were expected to resort to grind their corn and to bake their bread. In some places a bell was rung, called the "oven-bell," to give warning that the Manor oven was heated and ready for use. There is only one trace of this custom in Bedfordshire—at Shillington there are faint reminiscences of the Oven-bell being rung, but the custom has been long discontinued.

The Market-bell, which was formerly heard in many market towns, where it was rung to announce when buying and selling should commence, and so prevent forestalling, etc., has no representative now in this county. The only trace of it I have found—and that not in connection with a church bell—is at Woburn, where a small bell, used as a Market-bell, formerly hung at the Town Hall. It was stolen from the Park Farm—where it had been placed for safety during the building of a new Town Hall—about the year 1829.

The Restoration of Charles the Second is well commemorated in this county. At Cranfield ringing commences as early as three o'clock in the morning, and is continued at intervals throughout the day; a large bough of oak is affixed to the top of the church tower, and the day is observed, more or less, as a holiday in the village. At Toddington the bells are rung from three till five o'clock in the morning. At Blunham they ring two or three peals, commencing at four o'clock in the morning; and the bells are still rung on this day at Dunstable, Houghton Conquest, Houghton Regis (morning and evening), Kempstone, Marston Moretaine, Potton, and at Shillington (with an oak bough on the tower),
where we find a very early instance of it recorded in the Churchwardens' Accounts:

1661. Given to ye Ringers ye 29th of May......... o 2 6

Until recently the bells were rung on this day at Cardington, Carlton, Chellington, Harrold, Oakley, Sharnbrook, Willington, and Wilden.

The Gleaning-bell is rung in many parishes during harvest in the morning and evening, that all—old and feeble, as well as young and active—may have a fair start. Such a bell is rung at 7 a.m. and at 6 p.m. at Great Barford, Blunham, Carlton, Chellington, Keysoe, Langford, and at Muggerhanger; at 7 a.m. and at 7 p.m. at Houghton Regis, Milton Ernest, Pavenham, and Willington; at Sandy the 1st bell is rung at 6 a.m. and at 6 p.m.; at Bolnhurst a bell is rung at 6 a.m., and again in the evening; at Clifton and at Harrold the bell is rung in the morning at 7 a.m. The school-bell (not one of the church bells) is rung as the Gleaning-bell at Meppershall.

The Gleaning-bell is remembered as being rung, though now discontinued, at Dunton, Marston Moretaine, Pertenhall, Sharnbrook, Turvey, and Wilden. At Turvey the gleaners used to pay a fee of a halfpenny each to the ringer.

The Execution-bell: the 5th bell at S. Paul's, Bedford, was formerly tolled as the criminal passed on his way to be hanged, calling on the people to pray for one passing from this life.

The Fire-bell: a special bell is sometimes rung as an alarm in case of fire. The Priest's-bell is so rung at Todding-
Peculiar Uses of the Bedfordshire Bells.

ton, the 5th at Houghton Regis, and the tenor at Husborne Crawley.

Gunpowder Plot.—The discovery of this plot is still commemorated by the ringing of merry peals at Cranfield, Dunstable, Goldington, Houghton Conquest, Kempstone, Leighton Buzzard, Marston Moretaine, Odell, Pertenhall, Potton, Sandy, Wootton, and, occasionally, at Stanbridge.

At Houghton Regis the bells are raised and clashed or fired (i.e. all together) at intervals—called in Lincolnshire “shooting old Guy”—breaking into rounds after about half-a-dozen “fires.” At Toddington, too, the bells are similarly rung.

Ringing on this day is remembered, though not now practised, at S. Peter’s, Bedford, Cardington, Carlton, Chel-lington, Harrold, Hawnes, Oakley, Sharnbrook, Wilden, and Willington. The Churchwardens’ Accounts of Shillington have an early entry about it:

1619. Bestowed upon the ringers the 5th of November ...... xijd.

and in 1665 there is a charge for ringing on “Gunpowder Tresson day.”

The Mote or Common Bell which was ordered by Edward the Confessor to be sounded, in case of danger, to convene the people, and which was so commonly used, at least, in all large towns in mediæval and later times, as at Stafford, “to geather to all things pertening to the towne,” has a representative in many parishes in

The Vestry Bell, which is rung as a summons to a town or parish meeting. The 1st bell is rung as a call to vestry meetings at Barton-le-Clay, Battlesden, Blunham, Harlington,
Peculiar Uses of the Bedfordshire Bells.

Stanbridge, Tilsworth, Turvey and Wilden; the 2nd bell is rung at Langford; the 3rd at Ampthill and at Husborne Crawley; the 4th at Pavenham; the 5th at Houghton Regis; the 6th at Toddington; the 7th at Dunstable; the tenor at Goldington and at Hockliffe; one of the bells is also rung as a summons to vestries at Chalgrave, Clapham, Cople, Cranfield, Dunton, Egginton, Gravenhurst, Hatley Cockayne, Houghton Conquest, Hulcote, Keysoe, Lidlington, Milton Bryant, Milton Ernest, Pertenhall, Shillington, Tilbrook, Tingrith, and Old Warden.

At S. Paul’s and at S. Peter’s, Bedford, the summons is by about ninety strokes given on the tenor bell three times, with a short interval between each tolling.

Until recently the vestry-bell was heard at S. Mary’s, Bedford, Carlton, Chellington, Kempstone, Pottesgrove, Sandy, Wootton, and Woburn.

Induction-Bell: the old custom of the new parish priest ringing one of the church bells upon being inducted into his living is referred to in an entry in the Parish Register of Houghton Conquest thus:—

Mr. Beverly took poset’on of the church of Houghton Conquest and Ronge his Bells the 7th day of Jun being wisson Sunday.

Mayor’s Peals are rung at S. Mary’s, Bedford, when the new mayor is chosen.

Public Rejoicings would be incomplete without merry peals from the church bells; so thought the Corporation of Bedford when, as recorded in their Black Book, they received
their new Charter from Charles the Second, in the year 1684. The entries are:

   July 23. Ordered that the Chamberlains do pay Henry Lower £32. 17. 6. for Dinners and Wine the 19th Inst. July being the Day of the Reception of the new Charter and Treatment of the Earl of Aylesbury and other Gent. there present. And £1. 5. 0. to be paid to the Ringers.*

Loyal Peals: upon all occasions calling for an expression of loyalty, such as the anniversaries of the Queen's birthday, accession and coronation, the bells are rung in many parishes, and so it was in times past. The accounts of the churchwardens of Shillington have entries such as:

1628. Item given to the Ringers on the Coronation day ...... ijs.
1629. Item given for ringing upon the King's holyday.......... ijs.

That would be S. James' Day, when, as we know from similar records in other parishes, the bells were then frequently rung.

We have already seen (p. 22) that change-ringing was practised in this county at an early date; we have noticed its gradual decline, and have referred to the efforts now being made to revive the art by the establishment of a Bedfordshire Association of Change-ringers.

It may be well to remark that this Association is not only intended to encourage the cultivation of scientific change-ringing, but to promote belfry reform.

* For making these extracts I am indebted to D. G. Cary-Elwes, Esq., F.S.A.
An important step towards that reform is to make the ringers' chamber not only clean, but comfortable; it should be furnished with proper light, with pegs for coats and hats, and have the windows glazed. Another important step forward is made when the parson, rope in hand, can take his place among the ringers, and by his presence improve their moral standard and the general tone of the belfry.

The bells, too, should be well looked after. Mr. Haweis says: "The Belfry should look like a fire-engine room in a first-rate factory. It should be a pleasure as well as an instructive lesson to go into it. When all was in motion, everything should be so neatly fitted and thoroughly oiled, that we should hear no sound save only the melodious booming of the bells themselves."*

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*Music and Morals, p. 460.
LATIN INSCRIPTIONS

ON

CHURCH BELLS IN BEDFORDSHIRE.

[With Translations.*]

AVE MARIA.
[ Hail Mary.]

CUM CANO BUSTA MORI CUM PULPITA VIVERE DISCE,
DISCE MORI NOSTRO VIVERE DISCE SONO.
[When I sing of Tombs, learn to die; when of Pulpits, learn to live; learn by
our sound to die (and) learn to live.]

CUM VOCO VENITE.
[Come when I call.]

DOMINE MEMENTO MEI.
[Remember me, O Lord.]

EGO SUM VOX CLAMANTIS.
[I am the voice of one crying.]

EX ANNA NATA SALVET NOS VIRGO BEATA.
[May the Blessed Virgin, born of Anna, save us.]

* For these I am indebted to the kindness of a friend.
Latin Inscriptions on Church Bells.

FYDELIS MÉSURIS NOMEN CAMPANA MYKAELYS.
[The Rev. I. T. Fowler suggests that as it stands it may be Michael's bell is (my) name (I am) true in (my) measures (dimensions or tone); but that something seems to be missing, and "Fydelis" clearly ought to rhyme with "Mykaelis."]

GLORIA DEO SOLI
[Glory to God alone.]

GLORIA DEO IN EXCELSIS.
[Glory to God in the highest.]

GLORIA PATRI FILIO ET SPIRITUI SANCTO.
[Glory to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.]

GRATA SIT ARGUTA RESONANS CAMPANULA VOCE.
[May the little bell be pleasant, sounding with clear tone.]

GURGITE ET AUDITE VOCEM MEAM.
[And hear my voice in the depth.]

HOC SIGNUM PETRI PULSATUR NOMINE CHRISTI FUSUM.
A.D. MDCCCXXV.
[This bell of Peter is rung in the name of Christ. Cast A.D. 1825.]

HONORABILI VIRO DOMINO HENRIC. GRAYE MARIQUE UXORI
EJUS BENE PRECATUR ARTIFEX 1580.
[The founder prays well for the Hon. Lord Henry Graye and for Mary his wife, 1580.]

IH'S NAZARENUM REX JUDEORUM FILI DEI MISERERE MEI.
[Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, O Son of God, have mercy on me.]

IN MULTIS ANNIS RESONET CAMPANA IOHANNIS.
[For many years may John's bell resound.]

MUSA RAFAELIS SONAT AURIBUS EMANUELIS.
[The song of Raphael sounds in Emmanuel's ears.]

NOMEN MAGDALENE CAMPANA GERET MELODIE.
[This bell shall bear melodiously the name of Magdalene.]
Latin Inscriptions on Church Bells.

NON CLAMOR SED AMOR CANTAT IN AURE DEI.
[Love's voice, not noise, sings in the ear of God.]

NON VERBO SED VOCE RESONABO DOMINI LAUDES.
[Resound the praises of the Lord not in word, but with voice.]

O MARTIR XPÔFORE PRO NOBIS SEMPER ORATE.
[O Martyr Christopher, ever pray for us.]

OMNIA FIANT AD GLORIAM DEI.
[Let all be done to the glory of God.]

PATER IN MANUS TUAS COMMENDO SPIRITUM MEUM.
[Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.]

SANCTE PAULE ORA PRO NOBIS.
[Holy Paul, pray for us.]

SIT NOMEN DOMINI BENEDICTUM.
[Blessed be the Name of the Lord.]

STATUTUM EST OMNIBUS SEMEL MORI.
[It is appointed unto all men once to die.]

SUM ROSA PULSATA MUNDI MARIA VOCATA.
[I, being rung, am called Mary the Rose of the World.]

SUM CAMPANA MARIE MATRIS MESSIE PIE.
[I am the bell of Mary, the pious mother of Messiah.]

TE DEUM LAUDAMUS.
[We praise Thee as God.]

TU INTONAS DE COELIS VOX CAMPANÆ MICHAELIS ITERUM FUSA.
[Thou soundest from the heavens, O voice of bell Michael cast again.]

VOX AUGUSTINI SONET IN AURE DEI.
[Let the voice of Augustine sound in the ear of God.]

XPÈ AUDI NOS.
[O Christ, hear us.]
Average Weight of Bells.

List of the Average Weights and Sizes of Bells cast by Messrs. Mears & Stainbank, Whitechapel; Messrs. Taylor & Co., Loughborough; and Messrs. Warner & Sons, Cripplegate, London. The diameter being known, a reference to this list will give the approximate weight of any bell.

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<th>Inches</th>
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