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WEST & COLLIER
Ltd., Frieth, Henley-
on-Thames. *ℓ ℓ ℓ*

Complete .
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Furnishers

Booklet on Village Industry
by Rev. O. J. Jones. *ℓ ℓ*

FOURTH EDITION.

*COMPLETE CHURCH
FURNISHING*

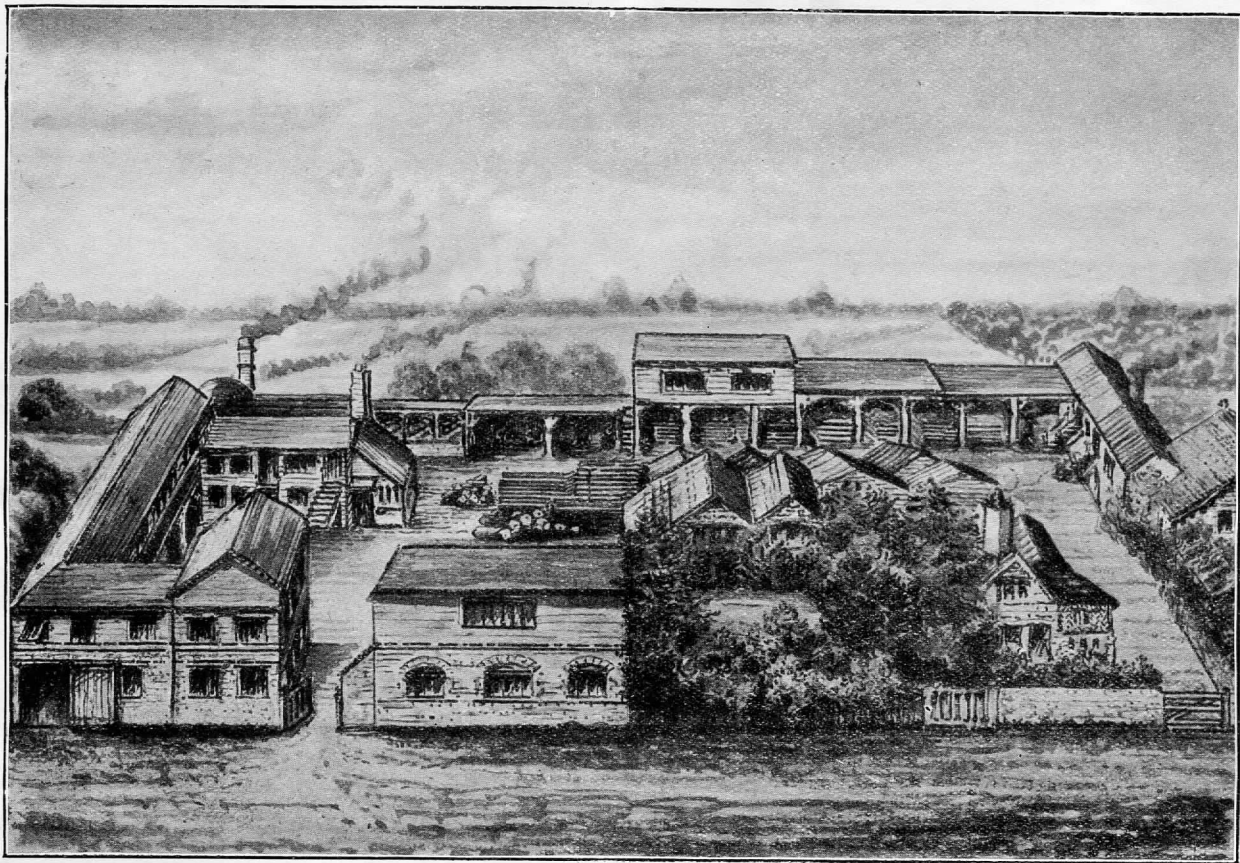
A VILLAGE
INDUSTRY

BY

REV. O. J. JONES

WEST & COLLIER, Ltd.
HAMBLEDEN, HENLEY-ON-THAMES

1911



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF WORKS.

A VILLAGE INDUSTRY.



HAVE often desired Messrs. West and Collier to give me leave, as an impartial observer, to attempt some description of their village works—in chair-making, church joinery, and carving—as a picturesque little story of interest to my brother clergy and other educated people, and as an instance of successful striving with our modern problem of industry and social life.

“Back to the land,” says the earnest statesman or philanthropist, but is answered by doleful assertions that country life is doomed, that farm-industry is dead or dying, that village life is deadly dull and hopeless, and that the migration of labour to overcrowded towns, to swell the ranks of unemployed or sweated workers in factories, is the sad necessity of modern industrial development.

Some of us who live on the spot, however, believe the exact contrary to this, and also believe that if some of our thoughtful classes—our clergy and architects, our capitalists and labour-directors, and people of taste generally—knew more of the surviving villages where old art and handicrafts are still pursued under healthful and happy conditions, they would be glad to encourage such communities for our country’s sake, as well as to learn how to obtain honest and thoughtfully-designed handwork, for use or ornament, in preference to the machine productions, which form almost the sole stock of dreary town showrooms.

It has been my privilege for three years past, living here as Curate-in-Charge, to find in our village of Frieth one of these interesting self-supporting thrifty communities. Frieth Village is the hilltop of Hambleton Parish, in the Thames Valley, and consists of about one hundred cottages, clustered picturesquely about a tiny Church, School, Parsonage, and Village Institute, in the midst of a glorious sweep of scenery—woodland and moor, and rich farm country.

The wealthy woodland of beech, ash, and oak explains the chief Bucks industry—chair-making and church furniture work—carried on in the quaint group of country buildings of our firm, which, with their own and their workpeople's dwellings, have developed bit by bit throughout thirty-six years. It is a picturesque range of English homesteads and workshops (including bits of fourteenth-century walls), not unlike that of William Morris's famous Merton Abbey Works.

The story of West and Collier's growth is delightfully simple and interesting. Beginning in 1869, in a small workshop about 20 ft. square, with only two hands beside themselves, they have steadily developed, building their own required workshops and storage rooms, etc., until they now cover an area of two acres, employing most of the people in the village, of whom eighteen men average twenty-five years of service with them.

The relations of the principals towards their workpeople are as simple as they are agreeable. The village lads who leave school to enter their employ pay no premium, nor are bound by any formal indentures, but simply by an agreement that they remain a certain time in their service, to compensate for the trouble of their first days of training.

Besides the employment in the workshops, the variety of crafts included in the works provides skilled handiwork for women and young people in almost every one of our village homes, in rush and cane seating of chairs, and the making of various kinds of church hassocks and kneelers. One of the prettiest daily pictures of our village life is the group of children, of the most sturdy, graceful type I know in English villages, crossing the fields from their homes, bringing their little daily burden of their mothers' work to the firm, and taking back fresh sheaves of rushes, or rolls of russet canvas or carpet for new kneelers, etc. The chair rushes are of a special kind, grown in Holland, and imported direct from the Dutch growers.

Chair-making itself includes about a dozen successive branches of work. The selected trees are cut down in the neighbouring woods and trimmed. . . . The Children's "Wooding" Party find their pleasure in gathering the trimmed branches to take home for firewood. The tree is then sawn into suitable lengths, which are



conveyed to the various workshops. The seats are made of elm, cut into the proper thickness and width, and stacked in sheds for about a year before use. The seats are shaped very skilfully—the exact hollow of a chair is worked by a few dexterous strokes of the adze, after which it is smoothed and polished ready for the frame. The chair-back is first shaped by fine sawing, and the bars and legs are cut to size and turned in any variety of pattern required; the whole is then put together by the framer.

The great interest of all these operations is that every one of them is absolutely hand-labour alone. Not a single machine-appliance exists on the works. Even the turning lathes are of the quaint old "pole-and-treadle" style, known to the antiquarian as of prehistoric origin.

West and Collier are proud of their system of exclusive hand-labour, as employing so much larger a number of workers, and holding its own against any form of machine work. It would be a disaster indeed if the rage for supposed cheaper products of machinery should ever reduce the demand of our clergy and architects for such solid work of the village craftsman. I am glad to believe that this is not likely, as one learns that West and Collier have seated most of our English—and many foreign—cathedrals with their chairs, over 100,000 of one special pattern having been thus supplied for church use.

The most interesting of the workshops to art lovers is the Carving and Joinery Department, where all kinds of church and domestic furniture are produced—the most delicate Queen Anne or Chippendale design for a country mansion or city hall, or the most sumptuous architectural design for a great church or cathedral. On my last visit to the carving-room they were busy on a very fine oak rood screen, with figures, for a London church.

And the Firm is going on. Happy in a succession of several sons, able designers and craftsmen, the requirements of any Church Committee or architect are confidently and ably handled by our village artists.

Best of all, the prosperous and peaceful life of a hardy and vigorous peasant community is kept wholesome, and free from the squalid influences which deteriorate human life in our congested towns, by this business enterprise of happy, intelligent interest to all the

workers, thoughtfully and cordially managed by a spirit of old-fashioned comradeship and mutual interest, which renders our whole village life that of a true family-community.

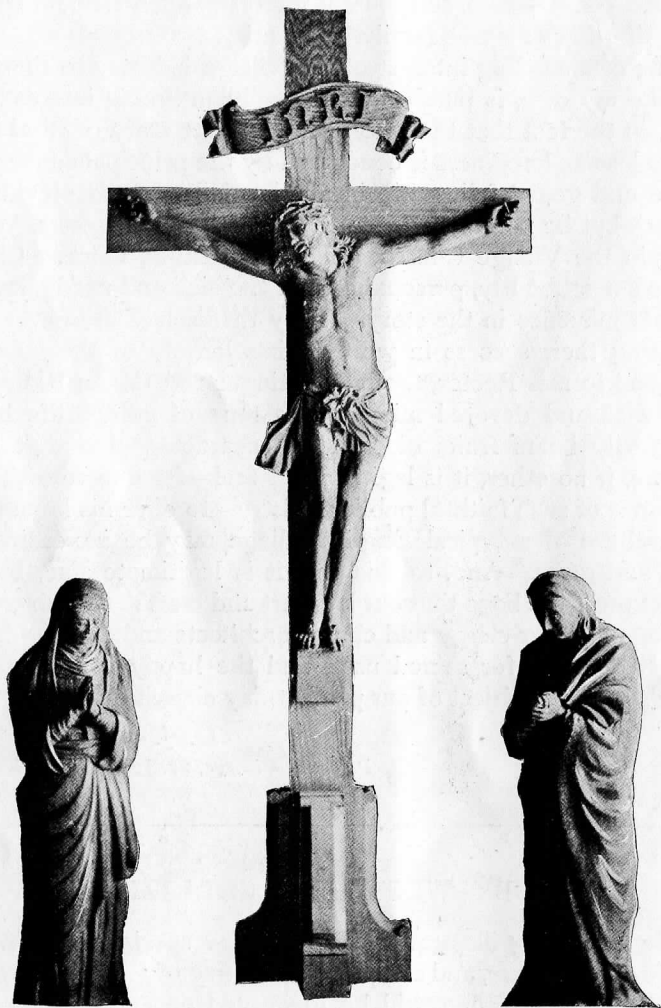
The commanding interest of this village industry to those whose task, like my own, is purely that of a philanthropic interest, lies, of course, in the fact that the whole of this quiet story of rural industry and wholesome happiness is conducted by the principals under a spirit of wise and genial fellowship in all the daily details of village life. It cannot but be noted that the lifelong activity of Messrs. West and Collier in the Village Church, Schools, Institute, Cricket Club, etc., and their neighbourly, personal care of the sick and needy, have been the great influence in the story. They themselves are never tired of attributing their success in worthy aims largely to the influence of their good former Rector, the late distinguished Canon Ridley, under whose wise and devoted ministry the tone of village life here still undoubtedly bears fruits of healthful character. On that account, therefore, if no other, it is legitimate, I feel—for one who shares the inheritance of such faithful public ministry—to offer his hope that this daily welfare of a typical English village may be increasingly preserved and grow. And, to this end, it is legitimate also, I feel, for one to express the hope that our local art and craft may be increasingly encouraged by our clergy and church architects and others who desire the best of work for sacred uses, and the happy conditions of the worker's lot as an object of our present-day church interest.

O. J. JONES,

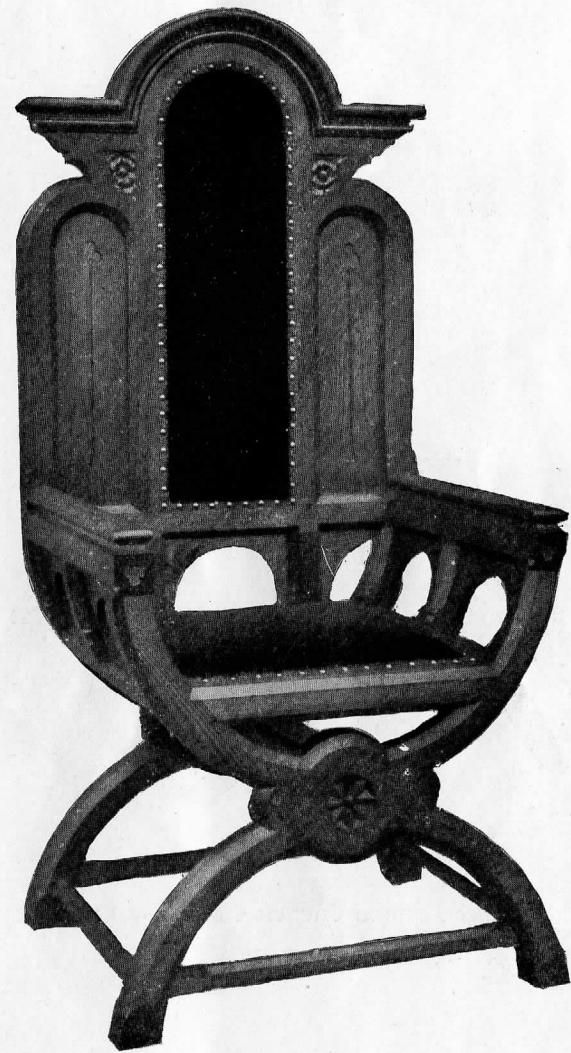
Priest-in-Charge, St. John Evangelist, Frieth.

NOTE BY WEST AND COLLIER, LTD.

The following illustrations show a few specimens of West and Collier's manufacture, and complete Catalogue of Church Furniture, in Brass, Wood, and Stone, will be forwarded on application. Church Chairs from 20s. per dozen, and Kneeling Pads from 6s. 6d. per dozen. Special attention is called to our Patent Folding Church Chairs for export. Prices on application.



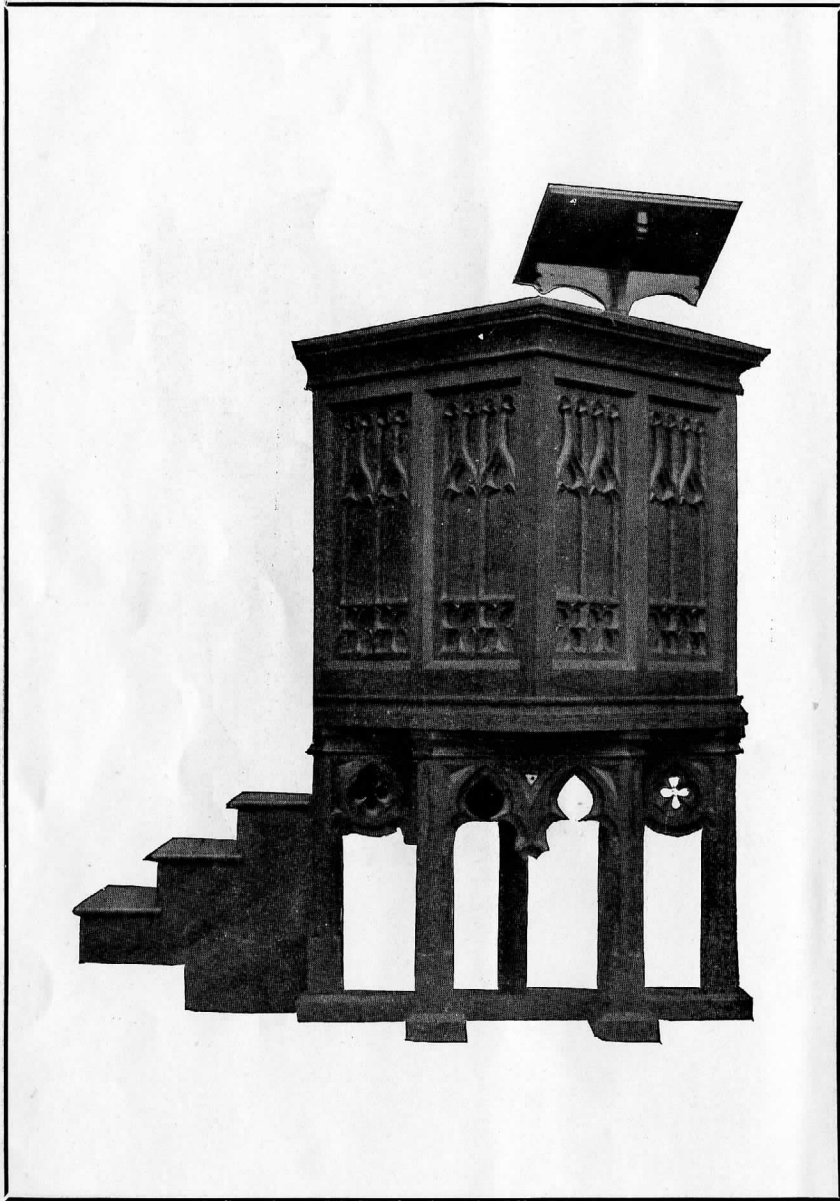
FIGURES ON ROOD SCREEN ERECTED IN
S. NICHOLAS' CHURCH, Tooting.

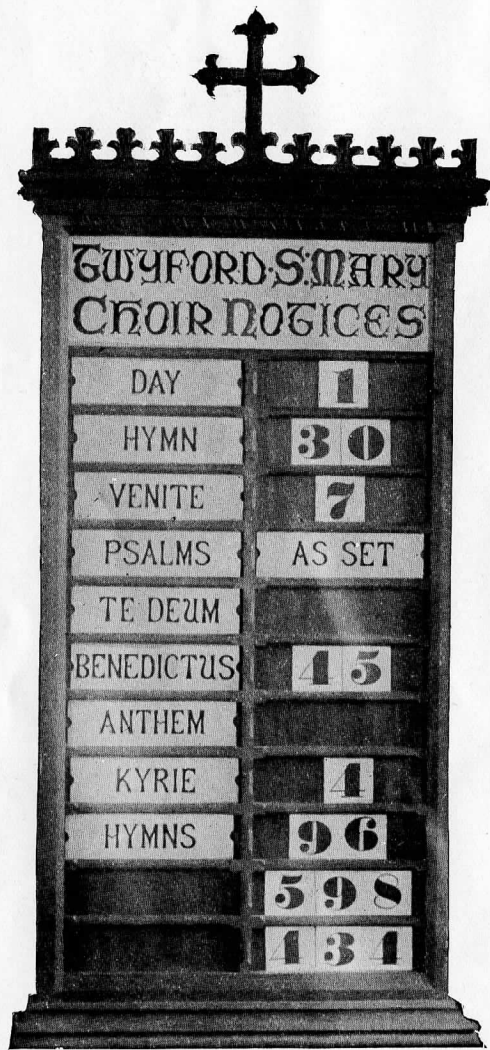




PATENT FOLDING CHURCH CHAIR FOR EXPORT.









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