

Mr. Oswald Fisher, Rector of Harlton.

I had heard of Mr. Fisher long before I met him. An old lady - Miss Durbin - who lived in our village was his friend. She told me that after his wife died she often drove over to Harlton, which is about three miles off, in order to give ^{him} a helping hand over his boys. Mr. Fisher was left - as far as I remember - with six sons to bring up and the youngest was not much more than a baby. Miss Durbin went over to see that not only were their clothes kept in good order but that the faces of the younger ones should at least sometimes be washed clean. She did not mention the nurse but she evidently did not think much of her. Mr. Fisher was much occupied for he worked at Science Studies in Cambridge as well as attending to his parish. The boys managed to scramble up for when Miss Durbin talked of them to me they were all out in the world. They were clergymen, lawyers, agents etc. I was not interested in them with one exception.

The exception was William Fisher. He was a lawyer and he often came to visit his father and call on Miss Durbin. He used to take back from the Rectory to his London office wonderful bunches of roses. A friend of mine met him near the Law Courts with such a bouquet that it created quite a

densation. I thought that William's law office must be an unusually cheerful one.

What fixed the talk in my mind was that I heard that the roses were taken from the Rectory garden from under umbrellas. My friend said: "All the rose trees in Mr. Fisher's garden have old umbrellas tied over them." I was just beginning to be a rose grower but I decided that I would rather not improve the blooms in that way for it would quite spoil the beauty of the garden.

I was studying the lives of artists in order to tell them as stories to my pupils when I became deeply interested in the life of John Constable. I heard that Mr. Fisher was a descendant of Archdeacon Fisher, the artist's friend. Owing to this connection I at once began to take a particular interest in the old Rector of Harlton.

One day I was working in my Studio in St. Andrew's Street. A note was brought to me from Mr. T.D. Atkinson, a well known architect of Cambridge. The note was to ask me if I would care to go with him to Jesus College that afternoon. I said yes, of course, and after work was over I was called for. We reached the cloisters and on one side there was a heap of rubbish and plaster. Some workmen near it were preparing to leave. They had evidently been making a big hole, not merely in the wall, but also in the ground. In that hole - its base below the level of the ground - I saw a lovely early English

doorway of three arches. It was completely uncovered and only slightly injured by time and by rough covering. The carving of the capitals of the pillars was delicate and flower-like and the little pillars themselves were so perfectly proportioned that I exclaimed with delight at their beauty. It added to my pleasure to hear from Mr. Atkinson that through that arch, long centuries ago, had passed to their Chapter House the nuns of St. ~~R~~hdegund's Convent. "Who guessed that such a treasure was hidden behind all this plaster work"? I asked. "Mr. Osmund Fisher, Rector of Harlton", answered Mr. Atkinson. So it was my rose umbrella clergyman! I asked to be told the story of the discovery. We went to a seat somewhere near and Mr. Atkinson told it to me. -

"Long ago - fifty years ago - Osmund Fisher was an undergraduate at Jesus College and, unlike many undergraduates, became very much interested in the history of his college and studied it carefully. As he sat in the chapel, which he knew had been the nuns' chapel and had been little altered structurally, he amused himself by thinking out how the nuns had entered it. He knew that once it had been connected with the Chapter House and other buildings long since destroyed. During one summer Osmund was up in College for the long vacation and one day, as he passed through the cloisters, he saw workmen who were on the point of finishing some repairs in the wall. He stopped to look at their work and he thought he saw a bit of

stone in a piece of the wall not yet covered with plaster. It struck him as unlike anything in the way of stone that he had seen in the rubble. He wanted to examine it but the work went on inexorably and the stone, or whatever it was, was soon hidden from view. The remembrance of this worried his mind and at last he went to his tutor and made a request that he might be allowed to examine the wall. Of course permission was refused. It would indeed have been an unheard of thing that an undergraduate should be allowed to knock about the walls of his College. The boy was much disappointed and gave up the idea - at all events for a time.

He worked hard and became known for his talent in mathematics. He took orders and was given the living at Harlton. He married. His wife died soon after the birth of his sixth son. He did his best for his boys but it was very difficult for him to bridge over the distance between his mind and theirs.

Fifty years passed away since he had seen the stone in the wall. His sons had left him and had homes of their own. He had fewer expenses and he was free to do what he liked, even if it cost money. He became again very curious as to what might lie behind the plaster of the cloister wall. He could not forget that piece of stone. He again addressed himself to the authorities and being now the pride of his College he was listened to graciously but with considerable surprise.

The permission that had been refused to an undergraduate of twenty, was accorded at once to the learned man of seventy. There was not however much faith among the members of the College that anything would be found but still it was an interesting experiment to make. Apparently a limit was put to the time that he might have for uncovering the piece of wall. Mr. Fisher got together some workmen and a foreman. Bit by bit they stripped off the plaster and rubble from part of the side of the cloisters. Whether he had forgotten the place where he had seen the stone, or whether it had not been a stone of any importance, is not certain but anyhow the time limit had been exhausted and nothing had been discovered. Mr. Fisher left the works that evening feeling that he had failed in one of his dearest hopes. He returned to Harlton discouraged.

When he had gone and the workmen had given up work, the foreman remained. He had been infected by the enthusiasm of Mr. Fisher. He began hammering on another part of the wall that Mr. Fisher had regarded as giving no chance of success. Soon the sound of the hammerstroke made him pause. His practised ear detected a change of surface. He chipped away the plaster and uncovered a piece of a carved capital. Then he telegraphed to Mr. Fisher at the Rectory. Immediately a horse and trap were ordered and soon master and man were chipping away by the light of a lantern. A far more beautiful piece of work than Mr. Fisher had ever dreamed of was growing under

their heads. It was the usual doorway to their Chapter House. Mr. Atkinson finished his story by remarking - "Was it or not mistaken, it will be my part to find the foundations of the Chapter House!"

I was delighted to hear the story of an idea living through fifty years and coming to fulfillment at last. I felt so that I was fortunate in having seen the beautiful arch - before the tiresome but necessary iron railing should be put round it. It had only been completely uncovered a day before I saw it.

Not so very long after this I was asked if I would accept a commission to finish a portrait of Mr. Fisher begun by an artist who had been unable to carry it through. The head was finished but the hands, clothes and chair were hardly indicated. I was glad to undertake the commission and I and my sifter made friends over it and over roses and tales about Constable. He told me that he had the portfolio of original etchings and drawings by Claude that Constable and Archdeacon Fisher had bought between them. He lent it to me and I also, as well as the great landscape painter, pored over the drawings. They influenced me strongly. Mr. Fisher and I found much to talk about in the way of his pictures and other artists.

One afternoon I went to have tea with him at the Rectory to see his roses. He took me, for some reason, into a disused room in the house where, in a corner, was a collection of things to be thrown away. I saw, in an old and battered frame

with a smashed glass, a little etching. I took it up and examined it and felt sure that it was an original Dutch etching and a good one. I asked if I might borrow it. Mr. Fisher was surprised but of course agreed and I carried the etching off with me. I felt to sure that it was good that I ventured to take it to the British Museum. They named it. It was by an old Master, as far as I remember, by Albrecht Altdorfer. The meseum possessed a specimen - a better one perhaps than Mr. Fisher's - but his was a good one. This discovery added to our friendship.

After a time Mr. Fisher resigned his living, left Harlton and went to live with one of his sons. When I sometimes visited the Geological Museum in Downing Street I looked through the glass window of an inside office to see his portrait. I cannot do it now as it no longer hangs there. It has gone back, I believe to his family.

I am sorry that it has gone. I liked to see the features of my old friend and it made me remember our pleasant talks together. Until a week or two ago I had never troubled to think wht his portrait had hung there. I was writing to Mr. Atkinson - Mr. Fisher's friend, now living at Winchester - and I asked him. He answered back rather rebukingly :- "Why ! did you not know that Osmund Fisher was a great geologist ?" I began to talk about him to anyone who I thought might remember him and one person remarked that he was a great Mathematician.

I went also to Mrs. Raverat who is the daughter of Sir George Darwin. She lives in the old Rectory at Haddon. She remembered her father speaking of him and saying - "Mr. Fisher is not a great mathematician but he is a very good one". I heard from another person that he was an Astronomer, so I wrote to Mr. Newall of the Observatory. He told me that long ago he had listened with interest to an address by Mr. Fisher explaining his theories of the condition of the interior of the earth and the effect of earthquakes on its crust. He looked up dates and found that Mr. Fisher had become a member of the Astronomical Society very early in his life. He must have been musical too. He resisted angrily his bishop's recommendation that he should train a choir. "My congregation is my choir", he said. He had indeed trained it carefully as far as congregations can be called "trained".

I asked Mrs. Raverat to find out from the people of her village if they remembered their old Rector. They could remember, nothing worth recording. Only one thing remained strongly in their minds and that was that he grew his roses under old umbrellas.

The account of the opening of the old archway can not doubt be found in the College records. It will be told baldly and the story, in any case, will be almost buried there. People will look at the archway and admire it. Some may even ask by whom it was found and as time goes on no answer to the question could be given without research. Mr. Oswald Fisher

will soon be forgotten in the rush and anxiety of modern events so I write of what I know of him. There are not many country clergymen with attainments such as his.