



SLAB IN MELMERBY CHURCH.

ART. VII—*An attempt to elucidate the meaning of Shears, combined with Clerical Emblems, on certain incised Grave-slabs, at Dearham and Melmerby.* By THOS. LEES, M.A.

*Read at Melmerby, July 11th, 1884.*

SHEARS in various forms, alone and in various combinations, are common on incised grave-slabs, and various examples, with theories as to their respective meanings, will be found in Boutell's *Christian Monuments* (pp. 81 to 97; edition of 1854), and other Antiquarian works. But hitherto one combination, that of the shears with the peculiarly clerical emblems of book, or book and chalice, has puzzled all enquirers.

In the county of Cumberland, we have three examples of this strange conjunction, viz :—

1st. A slab formerly found at Dearham church, and now preserved carefully at Dovenby Hall, and ascribed by Mr. Cutts to the 14th century.

2nd. Another still at Dearham church. Till the recent restoration it did duty as a coping stone on the porch. This also is of 14th century work, but rather plainer in design and ruder in workmanship than the former.

Both these slabs have the shears on the dexter side of the cross, and the "book" on the sinister.

3rd. Our third example is still *in situ*, on the floor of Melmerby church; it seems to me of the 13th century date. The shears are on the dexter, and book and chalice on the sinister of the cross. In R. Singleton's very quaint account of Melmerby, written in 1677, this slab is de-

\* Pictures of both these slabs are in the fifth volume of these Transactions, p. 153. The first is engraved in Lyson's *History of Cumberland*, pl. 2, p. cxcv. Cutt's *Sepulchral Slabs*, pl. lxiii. Boutell's *Church Monuments*, p. 93. The two last authors have copied the engraving given in Lysons, without finding out that it is inaccurate in many details.

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scribed as a "through stone, on which ther is cut out the like crosse, with somewhat like a paire of wool shears on the south side thereof, and a chalice, under which a masse book on the north side thereof."

Both Boutell and Cutts give another example (13th century) at Bakewell Church, in Derbyshire. Shears on dexter, and book on sinister, as in the two Dearham stones, and in speaking of this, and No. 1, Mr. Boutell says: "the only explanation of this singular combination of symbols, which I can offer, is, that each of these stones was intended to commemorate two persons," (Christian Monuments, p. 94); and Mr. Cutts is equally at fault. "Shears and book" says he, "difficult of explantion. May not the book be in fact a comb with the teeth omitted or obliterated?" There can be no doubt, that on the Dearham stones, the square object is nothing but a book, and if there were any doubt, there is still the Melmerby case of shears, undoubted book, and chalice to dispose of.

All antiquarians are, I believe, agreed, that the "book" represents the "Textus," or Book of the Gospels, which was given to a deacon at his ordination by the bishop; and the chalice is regarded as the emblem of a priest. How then do we account for the presence of such purely secular implements as shears in combination with these?

I may here notice that the shears in this combination are all of the sharp-pointed style, not the broad-pointed found on cloth dressers' or wool dealers' graves. In a beautiful 12th century MS. Life of S. Guthlac, the hermit, now in the British Museum, (Harley Roll Y 6) one medalion represents the important rite of tonsure being conferred on Guthlac at the monastery of Repton, by Bishop Hedda, of Winchester. The bishop vested, and attended by a surpliced deacon holding the service book, holds his pastoral staff in his left hand, and grasps in his right hand a pair of sharp-pointed scissors, like those on these slabs, with which he is clipping the abundant locks off the saint.

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You will observe that on all these stones the shears are on the dexter side of the central cross. From this fact, my conclusion is, that they indicate *a distinction in the ecclesiastical ranks—some honourable office held by the individual cleric commemorated.* What was that office?

All students of Ecclesiastical History know the great importance attached by the Christian Church to the question of the Tonsure. During the natural convulsions, consequent on the breaking up of the Roman empire, this clerical distinction had assumed three different forms in the three different branches of the Church Catholic. The Eastern clerics had the whole of the head denuded of hair; the Romans removed the hair from the apex of the head, and left around the space a fringe of hair, called "the Crown," from its being intended to represent the Crown of Thorns; the Keltic church clipped all the hair in front of a line drawn from ear to ear, over the top of the head, and allowed the back hair to grow long. After the conversion of the English by the Roman missions, they took the Roman (or Petrine, as it was called) fashion, while the British Christians, owing their Christianity to Ireland, adhered to the Keltic form. Next to the time of observance of Easter, the form of the Tonsure was one of the great subjects of difference discussed between the representatives of the British and English Christians, at the Council of Whitby (A.D. 664); there it was decided that the Roman fashion should be adopted by all clerics. Notwithstanding this, the Celts in great numbers, clung to the old fashion, and when on the death of Deusdedit, Pope Gregory appointed Theodore of Tarsus, to the see of Canterbury, the latter had to tarry at Rome four months till his hair (which had been entirely removed, after the eastern mode) had grown sufficiently long for him to be tonsured in the Roman manner, lest he should seem to countenance the Britons in their errors. After the entire Western Church had adopted the Roman, or Petrine form, the Tonsure was still

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a matter of importance, not as formerly, on account of its distinguishing members of one branch of the Catholic Church from members of another, but as being the main distinction between clerics of whatever order and lay-folk. Then, as now-a-days, the clergy were apt to adopt lay ways and costumes; but though a priest might disguise himself in layman's clothes, he could not also adopt his long locks, or make his own close-clipped poll grow hirsute at will. Bishops and Councils fulminated threats and punishments against such worldly-minded ecclesiastics. To support the canons of the Church, the deans rural were to set a good example of walking decently attired "*in habitu clericali, et cappis clausis utentur,*" being in their own persons "*honeste tonsi et coronati.*" The Provincial Council of Oxford, (A.D. 1222) under Archbishop Langton, in its 28th canon enacts this, with this penal consequence; that all violators of the law were liable to the correction of their superiors; but a previous Provincial Council at York, under Hubert Walter (A.D. 1195) having enjoined both Crown and Tonsure on the clergy generally, adds, "that if any *unbeneficed* priests contemptuously refused the distinction, (for the beneficed were brought to submission by deprivation) they were to be *clipped* against their wills, by archdeacon or deans." If the dean himself departed from the true canonical vesture, crown and tonsure, he was, in case of contumacy, *ipso facto* suspended from office and emolument, by the 5th Legatine Constitution of Cardinal Deacon Othobon, (A.D.) 1268). "Again, by the constitution of William de Bleys, Bishop of Worcester, (A.D. 1219) if a *clericus*, duly *shaven and shorn* were made prisoner by the civil power, the *dean rural* was to intercede for his absolute and immediate liberation," or at least for his surrender to the custody of the church. But when thus liberated, by virtue of his clerical privileges, and the power intrusted to the *dean* by the bishop, for that purpose, if the said *clericus* was found to be insufficiently

" *tonsoratus*

“*tonsoratus vel coronatus*,” he was to suffer condign punishment at the hands of the bishop, “*pro incompetenti tonsoracione vel coronacione.*”

Seeing then, as we do in these passages (which I quote almost verbatim, from Dansey's “*Horæ Decanicæ Rurales*, vol. ii., pp. 267-270),” the importance attached in mediæval times to the preservation of the clerical Tonsure, and that the charge of this preservation was intrusted to rural deans and archdeacons, I *think* when we find the shears by which the Tonsure was effected and preserved, in conjunction with clerical symbols on memorial stones, we may safely conclude that the ecclesiastic thus commemorated, has either held office as a rural dean, or “discharged archidiaconal functions.”