

SOME REMARKS ON THE STANLEY EFFIGY AT LICHFIELD.

By the VERY REV. CANON ROCK, D.D.

THE knightly figure of a Stanley yet existing in Lichfield Cathedral, being bareheaded and stripped of all clothing down to the waist, is not only an example of monumental sculpture of very rare occurrence, but appears to require some particular notice.

From the beginning the Church has everywhere followed the example of St. Paul,¹ and publicly shut out from her body all open and heinous breakers of her laws; and the words which, in most cases, she speaks while doing so, are borrowed from Holy Writ, in Deuteronomy, ch. xxviii. But like St. Paul, who threw open the door again to the young Corinthian,² after he had heartily sorrowed for, and broken off his incestuous intercourse with his father's wife, so the Church brings back to her fold the erring but sorrow-stricken sinner. To anyone who happened to die under the censure of unremitted excommunication, burial in hallowed ground and all Christian rites were forbidden. The case of Walter Earl of Essex exemplifies this discipline. That nobleman had plundered the church of Ramsey of its sacred vessels and vestments, and in consequence fell under the greater excommunication, the words of which may be found in Maskell's *Monumenta Ritualia*.³ The narrative of the sequel is given thus by Dugdale:—"Post hujusmodi tandem excessibus aliisque multis his similibus, publicam anathematis non immerito incurrit sententiam Poenitens itaque valde et Deo cum magna cordis contritione pro peccatis suis supplicans, quantum taliter moriens poterat Deo et hominibus satisfecit, licet a præsentibus absolvi non potuisset. Illo autem in discrimine mortis ultimum trahente spiritum, quidam supervenere Templarii qui religionis suæ habitum cruce rubea signatum ei imposuerunt, ac deinde jam mortuum

¹ 1 Corinth., c. v. vv. 3, 4, 5.

² 2 Corinth., c. ii. v. 10.

³ Maskell, *Monum. Rit. Eccl. Anglicanæ*, t. ii. p. 286.

secum tollentes et in pomerio suo, veteris scilicet Templi apud London, canali inclusum plumbeo in arbore torva suspenderunt. Post aliquot vero tempus . . . à Papa Alexandro more taliter decedentium meruit absolvi, inter Christianos recipi, et pro eo divina celebrari.”⁴

Our English rubric for taking off this excommunication was the same as that which then existed and still exists all over Christendom ; it is thus given in Maskell’s Monumenta, above quoted, t. ii. p. 303 :—“Deinde consuetum est ut fiat absolutio (a majori excommunicatione) hoc modo. Excommunicatus, vestibis suis spoliatus, ponat se ante januas ecclesiæ prostratum, vel flexis genibus coram illo qui debet eum absolvere ; qui absolvens, alba vel superpelliceo cum stola indutus, teneat virgam in manu sua, dicendo totum et integrum psalmum, *Miserere mei Deus secundum magnam misericordiam tuam*, cum *Gloria Patri*, et *Sicut erat*. Interim verberando poenitentem cum virga, videlicet percutiendo eum semel in quolibet versu vel magis vel minus, levius vel acrius secundum quantitatem delicti,” &c., ib. p. 303.

In the rubric which occurs in a continental form, the following may be found :—“Post hoc secundum modum culpæ poenitentiam ei injungat, et litteras per parrochiam dirigat ut omnes noverint eum in societate Christiana receptum.”⁵

No one, high or low, is exempt by the canons from the sentence of excommunication. Many who have visited Milan may have called to mind while there, how, at its old cathedral door, St. Ambrose, with hand uplifted in mild sternness, excommunicated the Emperor Theodosius for the blood which, in his fury, he had shed at Thessalonica ; and though in imperial state, with a crowd of courtiers about him, that prelate forbade him to cross the threshold.

In this country Henry II., at the end of his penitential pilgrimage to Canterbury, underwent a scourging upon his naked shoulders by the hands of the monks of Christchurch :—“Nudus pedes . . . ad ecclesiam majorem pervenit (rex), absolutionem petiit, carnemque suam nudam disciplinæ virgarum supponens a singulis viris religiosiis, quorum multitudo magna convenerat, ictus ternos vel quinos excepit.”⁶

⁴ Mon. Anglic., t. iv. p. 142, ed. Calev.

⁵ De Antiquis Eccl. Ritibus, Lib. iii. cap. iv. t. ii. p. 325, ed. Martene.

⁶ Wendover, Flores historiarum, ed. Coxe, t. ii. p. 378.

This scene is figured in stained glass now in the great east window at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. For a small theft of a sacrilegious kind, men were sometimes whipped before the high altar in a church. That delightful book written by the monk of Durham, Reginald, affords us this example of a priest's servant being so punished by his master:—"Sacerdos . . . ipsum (dapiferum suum) manu comprehendens in ecclesiam Beati Cuthberti introduxit, et temerarium scelus et peccati facinus confitentem, quantum potuit, absolvit. . . . Quem flagris coram altari pro poenitentia multavit."⁷

The shedding of blood in a church, while it desecrated the building, and stopped the celebration of service in it till the ceremony of reconciling had been gone through, brought down the greater excommunication on the delinquent:—"Sanguinis effusio a cunctis horribiliter deploratur. . . . Factum permiserabile episcopo denunciatur, et in crastino reconciliata ecclesia reus absolvitur."⁸ The bleeding from the nose, through a wrathful blow struck on a sudden, would cause this, as we find by some curious documents given in the Depositions and Ecclesiastical Proceedings published by the Surtees Society, pp. 10, &c.

With all these evidences before me, to my thinking, this Stanley, of knightly rank, had drawn down upon himself the greater excommunication through the spilling of blood in Lichfield Cathedral on some occasion, from a blow on the face with his hand, or possibly by a slight stab with his anelace, on the person of one with whom he had quarreled. He lies bare-headed and naked as far down as the girdle. His upraised hands, according to the representation given by Pennant and copied in Shaw's History of Staffordshire, held a scroll, which must have been the document noticed above, signifying, under the bishop's hand, that, having undergone the canonical penance, the offender was again admitted to all Christian privileges.

The rite of scourging is still followed, and, while I was a student at Rome, I saw it performed upon the bare shoulders of two policemen; they had wounded a criminal who, while being led to prison, made his escape, and ran into a church.

⁷ Reginaldi Dunelmi Libellus de Admirandis Beati Cuthberti, p. 148.

⁸ Ib. p. 120.