



Drawn & Etched by H.Ninham.

FOUND UNDER THE CHANCEL FLOOR

BUCKENHAM ST NICHOLAS, NORFOLK.

LETTER FROM DAWSON TURNER, ESQ., V.P.

TO

HENRY HARROD, ESQ., SECRETARY,

TRANSMITTING

A CRUCIFIX AND ALABASTER TABLET,

TOGETHER WITH A PRINT OF THE LATTER;

PRESENTED

BY THE REV THOMAS BEAUCHAMP,

RECTOR OF BUCKENHAM FERRY.

MY DEAR SIR,

It is with great pleasure, that, in execution of the commission kindly given me by Mr. Beauchamp, I beg the favour of you to lay before our Committee the accompanying Crucifix and Tablet, together with a sufficient number of impressions from a lithographic drawing of the latter, to illustrate a description of it in our volume. The whole of these he offers as a present to the Society; and I am sure that you, and every one composing it, will feel with me that we are under great obligations to him on the occasion. Neither are these obligations to be limited to the value of the gift. Curious and most interesting though it be, we owe him scarcely less, in that he thus enables us to prove that we are accomplishing one of the leading objects in our establishment, by giving permanence and general notoriety to what is left us of the works of days of old.

The Crucifix, once evidently enriched and sanctified with gems and relics, and the Alabaster Tablet, hardly less curious for its representation of the singularly cruel martyrdom of a saint, were found by Mr. Beauchamp in the year 1840, wrapped up in sedge, about two feet below the surface of the

pavement of the chancel of his church. Little doubt can be entertained that they had been deposited there by some pious parishioner, in his anxiety to secure them against that profanation, to which they could not fail to have been subjected at the time of the spoliatory visitation already recorded in our pages.* What may appear extraordinary, is, that the same feeling did not prompt him to bring them again to light and use in the following reign. But here we are necessarily in the dark: he may possibly have done so, and may have re-consigned them to their hiding-place, when

“ She, whom, fools of Norfolk, we
Made Queen in Fifteen, fifty-three,
Had left to Elizabeth her state
In Fifteen Hundred, fifty-eight ; ”

and that during the apparent hopelessness of the revival of the ancient religion, all knowledge of the spot of their concealment had passed away with him who had so interred them.

The sculpture upon the Tablet, to which I shall now confine myself,—the plate of that alone being before us,—is, from the costume of the figures, referred by our learned member, Mr. Hart, to the period of Richard II. It may be allowable here to mention, for the sake of those who may have no opportunity of seeing the original, that its size is about quadruple *that* of the drawing; its thickness nearly an inch; its figures in high relief, and, though considerably injured, still in better preservation than, from their age, could have been expected. They even here and there retain traces of the gilding and colours with which they originally shone. Our ancestors delighted in such; and gorgeous must have been the appearance of many of their parochial churches, when, in addition to the richly-attired Virgins and all the host of heaven, the knightly sepulchres, now covered and the beauty of their workmanship hidden by coat upon coat

* Vide supra, p. 73.

of matted whitewash, glittered with the brightest hues of purple and scarlet and gold. Of such, the untired perseverance of my late excellent friend, Mr. Charles Stothard, in many cases detected the existence; and could you have seen him, as I have done, poring, day after day,—I had almost said week after week,—over a single effigied tomb, you would not wonder that no one was found after his melancholy end, competent to bring to a suitable conclusion the monument he has bequeathed us of his labour and accuracy and skill and knowledge.

Such of our members as are conversant with the earlier volumes of that extraordinary storehouse of varied and amusing and instructive information, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, will probably recollect that the twenty-ninth, *that* for 1759, contains, at page 268, an engraving, entitled the “Representation of a Bishop in the act of Martyrdom,” and that the resemblance between what is there depicted and what has been given us by Mr. Beauchamp is exact in subject, close in point of treatment, and not trifling in the figures. But in its date the former is evidently a century later. The following are the words in which the correspondent of our old friend, Silvanus Urban, describes it.

The plate “represents a group of seven figures in alto-relievo, cut upon a solid piece of oak 23 inches by 16, and about 3 in thickness, painted in proper colours. The person who suffers lies extended, and bound hand and foot to an engine, consisting of four posts, braced with two other horizontal pieces, in form of a double wicket, on which rests a handspit. Under his head, upon the ground, is placed a mitre, denoting him prelatical. Over the martyr stands an executioner, with a knife in the right hand: his left is broken off; and from an incision in the belly proceeded an intestine, now likewise in part broken away, which, when perfect, joined the spiral turns yet visible on the spit. Another executioner, whose force in the action is well expressed,

both in the attitude and countenance, is winding out the entrail, while a third, with his right hand in his bosom, leans with his left on the end of the spit, in order to keep it close to the rack. Behind the executioner stands the chief officer or magistrate, in a listening posture; and behind him are two other officers or attendants: the one, resting his right hand on his superior's shoulder, bends forward to see the execution; the other holds in his hand a scroll, on which are inscribed some characters, I confess to me illegible."

I have thought it right to give this long extract, to enable any one who may not have the Magazine at hand to compare the plate there, by means of the description, with ours. The writer, who signs himself Cantuanus, proceeds to state, that he believes what he has figured to have previously belonged to the family of the Bouchiers, Earls of Eu in Normandy, and of Essex and Northampton in England, their arms being cut on the reverse, quartering those of the Bohuns, Earls of Hereford, Woodville, Earl Rivers, &c. He had seen, he adds, the same subject depicted on the east window of the church of Lullingstone in Kent; but his attention had been more particularly called to it by an article in the number of the Magazine for December, 1756, p. 559, in which mention is made of the finding of twenty-five different pieces of sculpture in the roof of a chapel at Wakefield in Yorkshire. One of these, representing St. William, Archbishop of York, is there engraved; and this, with the account of the discovery, so excited his attention, that he was led to make the journey, and detected among the reliquiæ a carving of the same martyrdom, as also of the same form and materials, as that from Buckenham. The sufferer he names, but hesitatingly, St. Amphibolus, a saint of whom I know no more than that Giraldus Cambrensis mentions him as a native of Caerleon and the instructor of St. Alban in the true faith, and that Sir Richard Hoare subjoins, but without stating his authority, that, being found at Verulam, he was imprisoned and

sentence was passed on him, from which he escaped, by converting his executioner, and fled; but was shortly after re-captured on his way to Wales, bound with cords, and driven back to Verulam, where he was stripped of his garments, tied to a stake, and put to death in a manner too barbarous to relate.

It is unfortunate for the conjecture of Cantuanus, that, though he had doubtlessly sufficient grounds for ascribing the close of the life of St. Amphibolus to evisceration, it is morally certain he had none for ranking him as a Bishop; and such the mitred sufferer in his tablet evidently was; and so likewise was St. Erasmus, on whom we have abundant testimony that the like refined cruelty was practised: whence we surely need feel little scruple in looking upon the sculpture as commemorative of his fate. To return to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, a subsequent writer there, Dr. Samuel Pegge,* (see Vol. LIV. Part II. p. 965), gives the following particulars of the Emperor Maximian's sentence upon the saint, extracted from a manuscript legend of him in his possession:

“Kytt ye with a knyff hys body all abowtt,
That all hys gutts at hys navyll may cum owtt,
And wynd hym upon a long spytte,
And let hym than doe all his profytte.”

Dr. Pegge still farther tells us, that, in a manuscript *Manual of Prayers*, he has a drawing of the holy man so martyred; but that the biographer, like him of St. Amphibolus, is silent as to the mode of his death, contenting himself with the general remark, that “*insignem martyrii palmam adeptus*

* Avowedly, this article is by “Mr. T. Row,” a name Dr. Pegge was in the habit of using in his communications to the *Gentleman's Magazine* at that time; as, thirty years previously, in sending the account of the pieces of sculpture found at Wakefield, mentioned above, he signed himself “Paul Gemsege,” and commonly did so then.—See the list of his publications in that work, printed in Vol. LVI., Part II., pp. 979, 1081.

est." How are we to account for this circumstance, and how for the still more extraordinary fact, that precisely the same secrecy is preserved in every other hagiology I am acquainted with? They do not hesitate to paint it in all its horrors; but they will not defile their tongue or their pen by relating it. Thus in a very curious quarto volume, entitled "Der heyligen Leben das Summerteil," printed by Schonsperger, at Augsburg, 1494, more than fifteen columns are filled with the life of St. Erasmus; but a curtain is dropped over his end. This, nevertheless, we see, by way of head-piece, figured as in the Buckenham and Bouchier tablets, without, however, their pomp and circumstance; nothing farther being introduced than a couple of rustics, of the age and country of the book, who are turning the spit over the Saint. Again, in the *Legenda Sanctorum*, we have equally minute details of his life,—a life full of the most astonishing sufferings from the cradle to the coffin, and equal taciturnity as to its close. So too with Surius, in his *De Probatiss Sanctorum Historiis*; and so with the *Martyrologium Romanum*, edited by Cardinal Baronius; and with the *Vitæ Sanctorum* of Haræus; and with the *Catalogus Sanctorum*. The author of the last-mentioned work is brief in his narrative, to which he prefixes the unmeaning plate of a bishop in the act of benediction. Yet briefer still is our own countryman, Alban Butler, who, in his *Lives of the Saints*, bestows a very few lines only upon our martyr, and gives it as his opinion that but small dependance is to be placed upon what is recorded of his acts and sufferings, whether in Greek or Latin. Without entering at all into the details of these sufferings, it may still be agreeable to the Society to be put in possession of the following summary of them as related by Baronius: "Sanctus Erasmus, Episcopus et Martyr, primùm in Campaniâ sub Diocletiano Augusto plumbatis cæsus, deinde fustibus gravitèr mactatus, post resinâ, sulphure, plumbo, pice, cerâ oleoque perfusus, illæsus apparuit. Mox Formiis, sub Max-

imiano, diversis atque immanissimis suppliciis iterum cruciatus, sed ad confirmandum cæteros a Deo servatus, tandem, vocante Domino, martyrio clarus sancto fine quievit."

I have purposely deferred to the last the most decisive of my proofs that it is St. Erasmus to whom Mr. Beauchamp's present is properly ascribed. For this, reference must be had to a plate in the *Archæologia*, (Vol. XV. p. 405,) after a drawing communicated by Mr. Samuel Lysons, from an ancient mural painting in the Trinity Chapel, in Cirencester Church. The subject is there divided into three compartments,—a Bishop, named S. Erasmus, standing with a crozier in his left hand, his right raised in the act of giving the blessing; the martyrdom of the same bishop, just as in the sculptures and plates we have been reading of, but with a greater number of nobles and attendants; and, below, the arms of William Prelatte, the "right trusty and well-beloved Squier and Servant" of Richard Duke of York, father of Edward IV., to whose time the painting may consequently be assigned.

Long as I have already trespassed, my dear Sir, upon your patience and upon that of the Society, I feel I should not do right, were I here to neglect inserting the inscription under the second compartment of the picture just described. Independently of its claim upon our attention as a matter of curious Archæology, it may possibly be allowed to have a still higher one, as illustrative of what we must presume to have been recognized as points of faith in those days, inasmuch as we find them in the body of a church, exposed to public view.

"What mā othir womā worschip^t this holi se'nt Bisschop and mart' e'vry Sunday that within the yere is, with a pater noster and an ave, othir ony almus gevith to a poer man or brenge ony candill lyght, lass or more, he shall have v Yiff'tis graunted of God.

"The firste is, he shall have reysonabil gode to his lyvis

end; The secunde is, that his enimys schall have no power to do hym no bodely harme nor dysese; The iij is, what reysonabil thynge that he woll aske of God and that holy seint ht schall be graunted; The iiij is, that he schall be unbounde of all his tribulacion and dysese; The v is, that in his laste ende he schall have schrift and housill and grete repentaunce and sacramente of annewntinge; and then may he come to that blysse that never hath ende. Amen.”

It remains that I add a few words, and they shall be very few, upon the subject of our Tablet, unconnected with its peculiar sculpture. Two similar ones are preserved in the churches of St. Peter of Mancroft and St. Stephen, at Norwich. The former of these exhibits a group of female Saints; the latter of male; neither of them with apparent reference to any particular individual or occurrence. Mention is made in Chambers' *History of Norfolk*, (Vol. I. p. 42) of two more, discovered at Beachamwell, in the same situation as that at Buckenham; one of them with the effigies of two persons taking down our Saviour from the cross, and with the Virgin and St. John standing by it; the other with the effigy of St. Peter with a key and book in his hand. Both of them, we are told, were well carved and had been curiously gilt and painted. To go out of our own county, the remains of a fifth were found last year by the Rev. William Trivett, in the course of the reparations of his church at Bradwell, Suffolk; and, to take a still wider range, Mr. Hart tells me he lately saw in a shop at Norwich, one brought from Holland, with St. Nicholas in his episcopal robes, surrounded by his clergy. I might also refer to those at Wakefield, mentioned in the beginning of this paper. All this seems to justify Carter's observation, when, speaking of *that* in St. Peter's Mancroft, figured by him in his *Antient Sculpture and Painting*, (Vol. II. p. 8) he says, "they are frequently seen over altars." He gives no other specimen, nor has it been my good fortune to meet with any; but I

presume they may be classed with the cases I have observed attached to the walls in the church of St. Salvador, at Bruges, and in the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St. Chad, at Birmingham, filled with diminutive figures, some in low, some in high relief, and some entire, so disposed as to represent certain of the more important events in Scripture History, and thus convey instruction to the untaught, and rivet the attention and impress the minds of the learned; that

“Indocti discant, et ament meminisse periti.”

I am, my dear Sir,
Very faithfully yours,
DAWSON TURNER.

