NOTICE OF A VISITATION MANDATE FROM ARCHBISHOP BONIFACE TO THE DEAN AND CHAPTER OF S. PAUL'S.

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ALTHOUGH the life of Archbishop Boniface has already been written with a degree of minuteness sufficient to make even an outline of it unnecessary, a particular account of one of its most curious episodes will be desirable to introduce to the reader the very interesting document, a fac-simile of which is now before him.

Boniface, son of Thomas, Count of Savoy, and uncle of four queens, among whom was Eleanor, wife of our Henry III. occupied the archiepiscopal throne of Canterbury from 1245 to 1270. He obtained the primacy through the influence of his family connections, and at a time when England was prejudiced against foreigners in general, and his countrymen in particular. There was nothing, unhappily, in either the antecedents or the temper of the new archbishop to make him popular with those over whom he was to rule. With a fondness for military pomp, and a haughtiness of manner described as insufferable, he appeared to consider the English as fit subjects for outrageous demands, and as a flock which might be fleeced with impunity whenever the needs or wishes of the spoiler made such a course expedient or agreeable. Not but that he had on his part most righteous cause of complaint. The onerous taxations which had been made, during the vacancy before his consecration, on the manors of the archbishopric had impoverished the estates and involved the see in a debt of upwards of twenty-two thousand marcs. The primate's difficulties were great, the demands on him enormous, and he had nothing to satisfy their imperious claims. As his needs were extraordinary, it appeared to him that extraordinary also might be his mode of removing them. He contended,

accordingly, that he had a right as metropolitan to levy contributions from the whole of his province, and claimed the first fruits of all benefices for the seven years next ensuing. And even this, much as it was, was not all. He endeavoured to compel his clergy to pay heavy procurations and fees for visitation. And what appeared to add to the injustice of the claim was the patent fact that he had held no visitations for which such dues were demanded—an anticipation of certain modern examples of a dignitary's requiring payment for work *not* done with which we ourselves are not entirely unfamiliar. It was clearly an attempt to extort by diverting a constitutional right to his own private purposes. Such at least was its aspect in the eyes of his suffragans, who immediately took measures to resist the aggression.

The archbishop was abroad, occupied with military pageants and the tactics of continental politics, while these schemes were in process of maturing. He was not, however, so wholly engrossed by his pleasures or his family interests as to fail either to realise his position in England, or to decide on the course by which he might bring to acquiescence his rebellious subordinates. Feeling that his presence was urgently required at home, he left the gay scenes which had so many and delightful charms for him, and soon found himself in the thick of another conflict, forced upon him, as he maintained, against his will, and to which he was reduced by the injustice, prodigality, and avarice of others.

Matters were at this pass, when, in order to remove the main force of the alleged objections, the primate announced, on his enthronement at Canterbury on All Saints' Day, 1249, his intention of holding a general visitation in person. Boniface was not a man to go thus far and no farther. He immediately proceeded to put his declaration in practice by visiting his own cathedral. The monks soon found that they were powerless against their diocesan, and prudently made peace in the way of all else that their visitor desired. They thus at one and the same time acted in agreement with the solemn dictate of their own consciences, and pleased the superior who was so kind as to relieve them from severer measures by graciously accepting a fine. From thence he proceeded to Feversham, where his requirements

were acceded to forthwith. Rochester followed with a similar result.

The London visitation then commenced. Notice was first given to the Dean and Chapter of S. Paul's that the primate was about to honour them with his presence as their visitor. But here in London he was not to have his way quite so easily as he had had in his own diocese. The clergy of the metropolitan cathedral were determined to oppose him to the last. And indeed it must be admitted that their treatment of him was more than enough to provoke a temper far more placable than that wherewith the Savoyard primate was gifted. He was met by the dean, Henry of Cornhill, together with his chapter, at the great west door of the church. But it was only to be informed that they resisted his visitation, and appealed to the Pope against his demands. He then ordered his people to force their way into the cathedral. But on their entrance they found it empty. Every observance that could signify a reception of him in his asserted character of their visitor was studiously omitted. No organ sounded, no priests advanced to meet him, no bells welcomed his arrival. The choir and chapter-house towards which he next proceeded were closed against his entrance. He retired in high displeasure, and avenged his outraged dignity by issuing against the dean and canons a sentence of excommunication.

The night that followed this mortifying repulse brought neither peace nor placability to the mind of Boniface. But he was not to be daunted. With a view of protecting himself from the casualties to which his known unpopularity might expose him, he took the unseemly precaution of wearing armour under his sacred vestments, and in this array proceeded to visit the Canons of the Priory of S. Bartholomew. At first all seemed to promise success. The prior of the house was from home, but the sub-prior was ready to receive him, clad in a magnificent cope, and accompanied by his convent, also splendidly attired in similar though less splendid vestments, in solemn procession, and with a multitude of lighted tapers, while the sweet and sonorous bells of the priory pealed forth their welcome to the primate of all England. These compliments, however, were all but lost upon Boniface.

He had come, he said, to visit the canons. Those ecclesiastics were now assembled in the choir—the place, be it remembered, not of visitation, but of divine service, which was now, spite of tumult and pressure, about to commence. The archbishop understood in a moment the line of tactics arranged by his new opponents, which only differed from that of the previous day in being more aggravating and calculated to inflame. If, however, a doubt remained of their intentions, it was removed by one of the canons themselves, who formally returned answer that they had a bishop at once skilful and diligent, whose office it was to visit them when necessary, and that they neither would nor ought, in apparent contempt of that officer, to be visited by any other. Boniface could endure no more. He rushed on the sub-prior, as that worthy man was standing in the middle of the church, and dealt him a blow with his fist, first on his aged breast—the chronicler exhausts his epithets in his horror at the offence—then on his venerable face, then on his hoary head, repeating the process again and again, shouting out that English traitors deserved no other and better treatment, and demanding in his madness, with the addition of sundry expletives which the historian professes his inability to place before the polite eyes of his readers, that his sword should be brought to him immediately. The tumult still increased. The canons endeavoured to rescue their sub-prior from the violent hands of his persecutor, while, to complete the sum of his offending, the archbishop rent the magnificent cope already mentioned, which was evidently so valued an ornament of the conventual vestry, and tore off the morse, rich with gold, silver, and jewels, with which it was fastened. The splendid clasp was trodden under foot and lost in the melée, while the "most noble" cope itself was trampled on, torn, and irreparably injured. Neither yet was the Savoyard appeased. Pushing the sub-prior backwards against a projecting bar which divided two of the stalls, and was made for the base of a pulpit, he so crushed that aged ecclesiastic that the internal injuries inflicted were a source of misery to him for the remainder of his life. The bystanders at length interfered, and rescued, although with considerable difficulty and from the jaws of death, the un-

happy sub-prior. As they thrust away the oppressor from his victim he staggered backwards, and, with his robes disarranged and turned aside, exhibited the shameful spectacle of an archbishop in armour. The multitude was struck with horror at the sight. It was quite clear, they said, that he had come thither not to visit or to correct irregularities, but rather to excite a battle. While this was proceeding his followers and fellow-countrymen attacked the rest of the canons, who, as men of peace, unarmed and unprepared, were unable to resist. In this work of outrage, striking, wounding, throwing down, and trampling on many of them, they did but obey their master's orders, and followed his example.*

These proceedings were followed by an immediate appeal to the bishop, who referred the petitioners to the King at Westminster. Four of the canons proceeded to the Court, but the King declined to receive them or listen to their complaint, and they returned in great trouble and perplexity to their church. The Londoners, however, were disposed to treat the affair in a very different manner. They proposed to ring the alarm-bell, and threatened the primate, whatever might betide, with instant death. They rushed in crowds in hot pursuit of him, determined to revenge the wrongs of their clergy by tearing their persecutor limb from limb, as he was retreating by water to his palace at Lambeth, where he could repose in safety, and devise other and more successful schemes.†

The archbishop, however, soon discovered that these and similar proceedings could have but one and that a disadvantageous result. He calculated wisely that oppression would elicit opposition, and that the wide-spread disaffection which he perceived to exist on every side, and of which he heard some alarming rumours borne to him by "a bird in the air" from various quarters, would soon be too powerful for successful resistance. His suffragans had met at Dunstable, urged as it would appear by the remonstrance of the Bishop of London in reference to the proceedings just narrated, and four thousand marcs had been sub-

* Matt. Paris, Hist. Maj. ed. Wats, fol. Par. M DC.XLIV. pp. 522, 523.

† Matt. Paris, p. 523.

scribed as a sort of defence fund against the primate and his aggressions. The clergy at large were moving in the same direction, and taxing themselves to supply the necessary cost of an appeal. The archbishop was a man of far greater ability and knowledge of mankind than it has been the fashion to suppose. He was perfectly aware of the importance of the situation, and the momentous nature of the issue before him. He forthwith made up his mind and chose his line, a line which secured to him all that was possible, while it resigned, if resignation it could be called, what was untenable and impracticable. He bent to the storm, suspended his visitation, admitted that he had been inconsiderate if not in error, and entered into various stipulations for the prevention of similar excesses for the time to come.

Nor was it left to the good feeling or the prudence of Boniface alone. In a while the Curia Romana interfered to put the practice of visitation on a better and more equitable foundation. Both parties had rights in the matter, and those rights were carefully considered and wisely adjusted. It was ordered on the one hand that an archbishop or prelate to whom the right of visitation belonged should hold such visitation in a due and proper manner; and on the other that the clergy visited should not be aggrieved by excessive procurations, but that the cost of each visitation should be limited and taxed according to a regular and exactly defined scale.*

In the year 1253 the primate made his second visitation, and this introduces us to the immediate subject of my present communication. He appears to have taken the same order as before, visiting in succession the houses of Feversham and Rochester, and then the Canons of S. Paul's and others in London. The scene, however, was widely different from that presented on the former occasion. "Propter moderationem," says Matthew Paris, "admissus est benignè. Et hæc cautè fecit, ut scilicet sic visitandi haberet ingressum et possessionem."† His former troubles had at least added to his quality of prudence, even if they had not entirely removed the spirit of earlier and less gracious days.

* Matt. Paris, p. 577. † Matt. Par. p. 581.

The fac-simile here given is that of the archbishop's original mandate of visitation to the Dean and Chapter of S. Paul's. It reads thus:—

"Bonefacius mifacione diuina Cantuarien̄ Archep̄s tocius Anglie p̄mas. Decano ⁊ Capło ecclie Sc̄i Pauli Londiniar' salm̄ ⁊ scinc̄am in dño caritatem. Cum die iouis p̄xima ante festum ꝺe marie magdalene: ad eccliam uŕām dante dño accedere pponamus: ut uisitacōnis officiū ex̄ceamus ibidem: disc̄cioni vr̄e tenore p̄senciū mandamus, quatinus noꝺ dc̄a die in ꝑcuracōne ratione uisitac̄ois debita ꝑuidere curetis. Valt̄ in dño. Dat̄ apud Lamhee die t^anslōis ꝺi bn̄dc̄i Abbatis. anno. dn̄i. M°.C°C°.L° t̄°cio."

Or thus, literally, in English:—

"Boniface, by divine compassion Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of all England, to the Dean and Chapter of the Church of S. Paul of London, greeting, and sincere charity in the Lord. Whereas on the Thursday next before the feast of the Blessed Mary Magdalene [17th July] to your church, the Lord granting, we propose to come, that we may exercise the office of visitation there, we by the tenor of the presents do commit to your discretion, that for us on the said day, in procuration due by reason of visitation ye take care to provide. Farewell in the Lord. Given at Lambeth, on the day of the Translation of the Blessed Benedict, Abbat [11th July], in the year of the Lord one thousand two hundred and fifty-third."

A fragment of the seal of green wax is annexed, containing a part of the figure of the archbishop *in pontificalibus*. The legend has, and apparently long since, perished.

The document must of course have had a place among the archives of the dean and chapter, and was probably taken from the records belonging to that body in one of those troublous eras during which the muniments of S. Paul's have repeatedly been endangered. I know nothing, however, of the perils through which it may have passed, and can only state that it was purchased by me of a well-known London dealer in the autumn of last year. Notwithstanding the obscurity of its antecedents, of its genuineness and authenticity there cannot be the shadow of a doubt.

I have only to add that the Messrs. Brooks and Day have done their work in a most creditable manner, and that I feel much pleasure in presenting my readers with as accurate a copy as art can make of a document, which, as well from its connection with the vexed question of visitation as for other and very suggestive reasons, may be considered of nothing less than historical importance in the annals of the Church of England.