

I.

NOTICE OF AN ORIGINAL INSTRUMENT RECENTLY DISCOVERED AMONG THE RECORDS OF THE DEAN AND CHAPTER OF CANTERBURY, DESCRIBING THE MIRACULOUS CURE EFFECTED ON A CITIZEN OF ABERDEEN WHILE ON A PILGRIMAGE TO THE SHRINE OF ST THOMAS AT CANTERBURY, DATED 27TH JULY 1445. BY JOHN STUART, Esq., LL.D., SECRETARY.

In the course of the arrangement of some documents in the Treasury of the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury, recently effected by Mr J. B. Sheppard, the Instrument to which I have referred was discovered, and having been communicated to me by the Rev. James Craigie Robertson, one of the Canons, I now with his permission bring it under the consideration of the members of the Society of Antiquaries.

The copy which I use has been collated by both these gentlemen, and is as follows:—"Universis sancte matris ecclesie filiis, ad quos presentes littere pervenerint, Johannes permissione divina prior Ecclesie Christi Cant. et ejusdem loci capitulum, salutem et in sanctorum meritis semper in Domino gloriari. Cum quilibet Christicola divine majestatis cultor de mirifica Dei potentia gloriari tenetur, apostolica sententia sic proclamante, 'Qui gloriatur, in Domino gloriatur,' In divine majestatis laude gloriari undique ore et mente profundimus (!) cum in sanctis suis semper est [Deus] operator mirabilis, et in miraculis semper choruscat gloriosus. Unde cum nuper in sancta nostra Cant. ecclesia, tocus Anglie metropoli, grande et nimis stupendum in sancto Dei martire Thoma Cant. per divinitatis potenciam experimur miracolum, [gloriari opus, cum] totus in orbe terrarum mundus exultare nobiscum non cessat, in laudem ejus qui cuncta orbis climata celestibus donis promovet et exaltat. Nam cum Alexander Stephani filius de Abyrden in Scocia natus xxiiii^{or} annis ab ortu ejusdem pedibus contractis et vermibus perhorridis (cautibus) videlicet in eisdem latentibus miserime laborabat, post votum emissum in loco peregrino beate Dei virginis Marie de Sequit vocato per grandia laborum (?) vehicula cum ceteris impotencium instrumentis super genua debilia ad feretrum sancti martiris Thome iter deflectens, oculis patentibus hominum illuc gloriosus Dei athleta horribilibus cantibus [cautibus?] prius evulsis, bases et plantas ij^o die mensis Maii prox. ante datum presencium [ei] restituit, et continuo posterius per triduum eundem Alexandrum

divina opitulante clemencia terram leviter calcando hinc inde cum gaudio salve ac firmum et sanum abire permisit. Hujus rei gestum verissime cernimus plenissime comprobatum cum dictus Alexander ad sanguinem sanctum de Wylsnake peregre deinceps cum Dei gracia in voti sui supplementum emissi adivit, et demum ad feretrum sancti martiris Thome, deinde cum illius martiris gracia prospere et pedester revererat. Nos igitur gloriosi martiris Thome gloriam sub ignorancie tenebris latitare nolentes, sed super fidei candelabrum ponendo volentes omnino cunctis Christi fidelibus eandem clarescere in divine majestatis laudem, ea que de jure ad perfectionem requiruntur miraculi sub sacramento dicti Alexandri legitime pridem peracto, necnon aliorum fide dignorum testimonio, Alexandri Arat generosi, Roberti filii David, et Johannis Thomæ filii, de opido predicto in Scocia subito quasi divina providente clemencia prefato die mensis Maii in nostra presencia comparentium, juxta juris exigenciam in nostra sancta Cant. ecclesia fecimus solempniter publicari. Unde universitati vestre supplicamus quatinus dignemini Deum laudare in sanctis ejus, et dignis eidem jubilarè preconiiis, qui in meritis sancti martiris Thome Cant. ecclesiam suam unicam sibi sponsam variis choruscantibus miraculis in confusionem heresum et errorum mirifice decoravit. Datum Cant. in capitulo nostro xxvij die mensis Julii, anno Domini millesimo quadringentesimo quadragesimo quinto. In cujus rei testimonium sigillum nostrum commune presentibus est appensum.”¹—*MS. c. 1303, in the Treasury of Canterbury Cathedral.*

There are two or three words of doubtful meaning in the document, but its general purport is sufficiently intelligible.

It is an Instrument in the name of the prior and convent of Canterbury, dated at Canterbury on the 27th of the month of July 1445, setting forth, by way of exordium, that every follower of Christ is bound to glorify the wondrous power of God, according to the apostolic saying, “Let him that glorieth glory in the Lord,” and that we are bound to celebrate it with mouth and heart everywhere, since God is wonderful in his saints, and shines gloriously in miracles. And since lately, as had been proved by them, a stupendous miracle had been wrought in the church of Canterbury, the metropolitan church of all England, by the divine power, it was right that the whole world should join in the praise

¹ The seal is gone.

of him who exalts and endows with gifts all regions of the earth. Thus, when Alexander Stephenson, born in Aberdeen, a town of Scotland, and of the age of twenty-four years, who from his youth had his feet contracted, and suffered miserably from worms and sores within them, having made a vow to go in pilgrimage to the Shrine of St Mary of Sequit, diverged from his way, and came, carried with much trouble, and supported by other contrivances for the weak, approaching on his knees to the shrine of the holy martyr St Thomas, in the sight of men, the glorious athlete of God having first eradicated the horrible sores, restored to him the use of his feet and soles, on the second of the previous month of May, and thereafter, he for three days dancing on the ground, he permitted him to depart with joy safe and sound. The truth of this they most surely perceived, when the said Alexander, who in supplement of his first vow went to the Holy Blood of Wylsnake, in foreign parts, and had returned prosperously and on foot to the Shrine of St Thomas the martyr. They, therefore, being unwilling that the glory of the saint should be hid in darkness, but wishing rather that it should shine on all the faithful, and having first received the oath of the said Alexander on those things which are requisite to the perfection of a miracle, which was corroborated by the testimony of other worthy men, to wit, Alexander of Arat, Robert Davidson, and John Thomson of the said town [of Aberdeen], who unexpectedly, and as if by divine providence, appeared on the foresaid day of May in our presence. Therefore, we beseech all those present, that they would glorify God in his saints, and proclaim in joyful praise how, through the merits of St Thomas the Martyr, of Canterbury, he hath wonderfully enriched his Church and only Spouse with many shining miracles, in confusion of heresy and error.

This document is the only one of the kind which has come under my notice, although it refers to a religious custom of great prominence and influence in the religious habits of our forefathers. It may excuse a few remarks in farther illustration of early pilgrimages; but, in the first place, I may describe the circumstance which had made the Holy Blood at Wylsnake an object of such popular reverence as to draw its votaries from distant places in the north of Scotland.

The church at Wilsnack, in Brandenburg, had attained its celebrity suddenly in the beginning of the fifteenth century. The church there having been burnt by a robber knight, it was alleged that the priest of the place

afterwards found in a cavity of the altar, three consecrated wafers of a red colour, supposed to be produced by the blood of our Lord. The Bishop of Havelberg and the Archbishop of Madgeburg, within whose jurisdiction Wilsnack was situated, adopted the relation; innumerable cures were said to have been wrought by the miraculous host, by making vows to it; prisoners had obtained deliverance, and combatants had gained the victory in duels; and the offerings of the pilgrims whom it attracted were enough to rebuild the whole village with a new and magnificent church. On a reference by the Archbishop of Prague to Huss and other two commissioners to investigate the alleged miracle, they reported that there was much imposture in it; and Huss set forth a tract in which he combated the popular belief in relics and the craving after miracles, and strongly denounced the frauds of the clergy, who for the sake of money, deluded the credulous people. In consequence of this, the Archbishop forbade all resort from his own diocese to Wilsnack, although the miraculous hosts continued to attract pilgrims, until they were burnt by a reforming preacher in 1552.¹

The idea of pilgrimage arose out of a variety of motives. From the earliest Christian times the "Holy Places" of Palestine presented an object of attraction to devout minds in all lands; and while they were at the outset visited with the view of kindling feelings of devotion and love, and to gratify a reverent curiosity, the pilgrimages thither in later times were made to subserve as well the ends of ecclesiastical discipline, and with the hope of effacing or atoning for crime.

The sentiment which might be supposed to actuate devout pilgrims has been described by Tasso in his "Jerusalem Delivered"—

"Scantly they durst their feeble eyes dispreed
Upon that town where Christ was sold and bought;
Where for our sins he faultless suffered pain,
There where he died, and where he lived again,

"Their naked feet trod on the dusty way
Following the ensample of their zealous guide;
Their scarfs, their crests, their plumes, and feathers gay
They quickly doft, and willing laid aside."

Fairfax's Trans. b. iii. stanz. 5, 7.

¹ The above notice of Wilsnack is taken from Canon Robertson's "History of the Christian Church," vol. iv. p. 233.

In the arrangements of the early Celtic Church in Ireland and in Scotland, we discover many traces of pilgrims. Various notices occur in Adamnan's Life of St Columba, which show that pilgrimages were of ordinary occurrence in his day; and that while at times they assumed the shape of penitential discipline, at others they found their end in the gratification of devotional intercourse with men whose character for saintship had been widely spread.

Thus, on one occasion, an Irish bishop from the province of Munster appeared at Iona as a humble pilgrim, "*peregrinus humilis*," wishing to disguise his ecclesiastical character, and to benefit by the teaching of St Columba as a disciple. But the saint saw through his disguise while at the altar, and invited the stranger to celebrate the communion, saying, "*Benedicat te Christus frater; hunc solus episcopali ritu frange panem; nunc scimus quod sis episcopus.*" (P. 85.)

On another occasion, an Irishman from the province of Connaught, came on pilgrimage to Iona "*ad delenda in peregrinatione peccamina*," and was enjoined a penance of seven years, which he performed in one of the many monastic institutions on the island of Tiree.

At the Columbian House of Kells in Ireland, there was a disert endowed with lands expressly for the reception of devout pilgrims.

The earliest vestiges of our Scottish laws recognise pilgrimage as an established institution. Thus one of the assizes of King David I. provides that "*thai men that ar in pilgrimage and at for thar saule hele visites in haly stedis, our ferme pece thei sal haff in gangand and cumand sa that na man doo to thaim wrang eschewand thaimself that thai contayn thaim leilly [that is to say that thai sall doo na wrang to ger our men doo thaim ony myse.]*

By the 77th chapter of the Laws of the Burghs, it is provided that "*Gif ony man of the Kyngis burgh be passyt in pilgrimage with leyff of the Kyrk and of his nychtburis, in the Holy Lande or than to Sancte James, or till ony othir haly stede for the hele of his saule his house and his meynze sal be in oure lord the Kyngis pece and the bailzeis quhil the tym that God bryng hym hame agayne.*"

By the seventh chapter of Regiam Majestatem, it is provided that if a man should be away on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, or St James, or Rome, a plea against him should be stayed till his return, unless he absented himself fraudulently or maliciously.

In later times every country in Europe had certain shrines containing relics of saints, to which pilgrimages were made, not only for purposes of devotion or penance, but which were sought by the sick for restoration from disease.

Thus pilgrimages to the Church of St Triduana at Lestalyrk, were undertaken by those who had diseases of the eyes. Sir David Lyndsay, in his "Monarchie," describes an image of the saint which was preserved at Lestalyrk, and speaks of the pilgrimages of those who came to St Tredwell "to mend their ene."

At times a pilgrimage was the result of a vow after escape from some danger, or recovery from an illness. Thus, in 1435, Eneas Silvius (afterwards Pope Pius II.) was sent from Rome on a mission to the King of Scotland, and having embarked at Sluys in the Low Countries, he encountered two terrible storms on his voyage. Being in despair, he vowed a pilgrimage, and on his reaching land, he immediately set out barefoot for the celebrated shrine of our Lady at Whitekirk, in East Lothian. It was in the time of winter, when ice was upon the ground, and the distance was ten miles, so that we may readily believe the statement of the Nuncio, that he never recovered from the effects of his journey, but suffered aches in his joints to his dying day.

The shrines of St Duthac at Tain, and of St Ninian at Whithorn, were in great repute in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; and a letter from James IV. to Pope Innocent X., assures his Holiness that pilgrims from England, Ireland, the Isles, and the adjoining countries, yearly flocked to Whithorn; while a charter by the same monarch to Sir Alex. M'Culloch, erecting his place of Myrton into a burgh of Barony, narrates the necessity of providing for the bodily wants of the pilgrims congregating to St Ninian's shrine.

The Treasurer's accounts enable us to understand in how many ways the king's pilgrimages combined the features so vividly portrayed by Chaucer in his Canterbury Tales. Thus, when James IV. set out in October 1504, on his journey to St Duthac, we discover that he was accompanied by his dogs and hawks, with which he enjoyed sport at various places on the way.

When he was lodging at Strathbogy with the Earl of Huntly, he got a payment from the treasurer of twenty French crowns "to play at the

cartis." He had with him four Italian minstrels, and he gave a doceur to the "Piparis of Abirdene," and in Dunotter "to the chield that playit on the monocordis." Moreover, he rewarded "the madins of Forres that dansit to the king; while he had madins that dansit at Elgin, and others that dansit at Dernway."

To his devotions at the shrine of St Duthac the king added offerings of money, which appear in the treasurer's accounts; and we find that organs to be used in divine service were carried in his company, as they were also when the king went in pilgrimage to the Chapel of St Adrian in the Isle of May.

The pilgrimages by James IV. to Whithorn took place once or twice in the year, when he generally had with him a numerous retinue and his minstrels. In the treasurer's accounts we find entries of payments made by him to priests, minstrels, and pilgrims, and of his offerings at the shrine of St Ninian and other holy places at Whithorn. In 1504 he was at Whithorn, and on his way back he met some people who had come from Tain in Ross-shire, and were on pilgrimage to St Ninian's shrine at Whithorn, apparently not contented with their own local saint, St Duthac.

In 1506 the queen was delivered of her son, and had a bad recovery. In order to procure her restoration to health, the king made a pilgrimage from Edinburgh to Whithorn on foot; and after the queen had regained her strength, the king and queen, with a large retinue, passed in pilgrimage to Whithorn, to return thanks at the shrine of the saint.

The passion for pilgrimage was founded in the faith of the pilgrims, but so rooted was the custom in the popular mind, that it survived the overthrow of that on which it was originally based; and while the former, by its sudden collapse, showed the slenderness of the hold which it had come to have, the latter survived for many generations.

The burgesses of Aberdeen were remarkable for their loyalty to the old faith, and manifested their devotion in the foundation of altars, and gifts of chalices and ornaments, up to the time immediately preceding the Reformation. But no sooner did the storm burst, than they took possession of the religious houses, and resolved to turn them to account for the defence of the liberty of the realm, expelling of strangers, and suppressing of idolatry. They joined the Congregation, and disposed by

roup of the whole silver work and ornaments of their churches, including many chalices, copes, and chasubles.¹

While the faith of the people was thus readily diverted into a new channel, they clung to certain superstitious customs with great tenacity. Among these was the kindling of fires on Midsummer eve, and pilgrimages to wells and sacred places. Against the use of these, by the burgesses of Aberdeen, many enactments occur in the Ecclesiastical Records of the time, in this respect resembling the burgesses of Edinburgh, who were strong in their devotion to St Giles, joining in the annual procession with his image and relic, until the change came, when they threw his image into the North Loch, or as Knox describes it, "that great idol Sanct Geyle was first drowned in the North Loch, after brunt."

Pilgrimages to wells and chapels continued to be the subject of denunciations by the Kirk for many years, and the authority of Parliament was added to them by an Act, dated in 1581, which refers to the "pervers inclination of mannis ingyne to superstitioun through which the dregges of idolatrie yit remanis in divers pairtis of the realme be using of pilgrimage to sum chappellis, wellis, croces, and sic other monumentis of idolatrie, as also be observing of the festual dayis of the santes sumtyme namit their patronis in setting forth of bain fyres, singing of caroles within and about kirkis at certane seasons of the yeir." (Vol. iii. 212.)

These pilgrimages to wells were in certain cases for purposes of devotion, as in the case of Lady Aboyne (recorded by Father Blackhall), who made a yearly pilgrimage to the chapel of our Lady of grace in Murrayland, a distance of forty miles, the two last of which she walked barefooted. In other cases, the pilgrimages were made with the view of recovering the health of diseased children and others, part of whose dress was left in the water, and a small piece of money deposited as an offering. The attempts to put down these and similar practices were numerous and severe, but many of them have survived till recent times, if indeed some of them do not still boast of a few faithful votaries.

¹ Selections from the Eccl. Records of Aberdeen, p. xxvi.