A FORGED ACCOUNT OF THE DEMOLITION OF THE SHRINE OF ST.
THOMAS OF CANTERBURY.

THE precise circumstances of the demolition of the tomb of St. Thomas at Canterbury in September, 1538, are involved in such obscurity that any account of it hitherto unnoticed merits attention. Such an account, professing to date from the sixteenth century, is to be found in Grenville MS. xii. in the British Museum.¹ Its terms are as follows:—

After this (viz. in 1538) his highness caused Thomas Becket's Tombe to be rased, his highness standing by and seuerall of the Privy Councell and of the Clergy then being present. This tombe being opened there was the bones and scull of Thomas Becket entire, notwithstanding the Monkes had shewed another scull in lieu of the true one, which being giuen unto the king, he sayd to the Lords of his privie Councell and to the Clergy there present, 'Bring me here the other scull which these Rokeish monkes shewed unto myne and my predecessors subiects for the reall one. Lett these two sculls be brought, I command yee, and all these bones that wee may dispose of them otherwise, and not haue our subiects gulled and made to Idolators.' At whose command a box was fetcht and the Bones locked up therein and the Bishop of Canterbury and Sr Thomas Cromwell charged to dispose of them and to seporate them where they may noe more be knowne from others. . . .

Within this Monument the monkes had an hollow passage under ground, wherein there was found as much gould as filled two chests soe full that each of these chests required eight strong labouring men to carry them from thence. This was not all the Treasure, for there was found a Jewell which had been offered by Lewis the 7th sometime King of France, which the monkes called the Royall of France, which was valliewed at an hundred thousand crownes, and allsoe a lardge goulden cuppe. His highness prising the stone had it put into a Ring and wore it on his thumbe.

His highness haueing gott soe greate a Treasure by demolishing of Thomas Becket's Tombe, sayd unto his Privy Councell, 'Behold, sirs, all this and an hundred times more haue the jolly fatt monkes gott from our predecessors and from the gentry and commons of our Realm, euer since Henry the 2^d Raigne, and this tombe together with their Innumerable fables of scandalising the Princes our progenitors and pretended miracles forged thereby haue bin the Chiefe Bugbeare which the Bishops of Rome were wont frighten them and us with euer and anon in their Bulls signifyeing "Remember S^t Thomas of Canterburyes Murthar." Therefore, were there noe prophanation or Idolatry and fallacy with the monkes and my subiects in this case, but this Romish fetch of the Bishop of Rome, it is sufficient for us to demolish it.'

¹ It is also numbered Additional MS. 33740, the manuscripts forming part of the Grenville Library having recently been transferred from the department of printed books to the charge of the Keeper of MSS. and catalogued among the acquisitions of 1890.

What is most remarkable in this narrative is the active part it assigns in the proceedings to Henry himself, whose presence on the occasion is not even hinted at, so far as I can ascertain, by any other authority. It is of importance therefore to test the genuineness of the record, and fortunately means are not lacking, the doubts that arise from the strangeness of the matter and the suspicious character here and there of the wording being strengthened on a close examination of the volume. This is a small quarto of forty-six leaves, written in the latter part of the seventeenth century and having the title 'Memoirs taken out of the notes of S^r Henry Sidney, Knt., some time Lord Deputy of Ireland, and out of the Lord Cecills papers, ab Anno 1580 ad Annum 1566, as they were collected by James Usher, late Primat of all Ireland and Archbishop of Armagh.' The 'Memoirs,' which really extend only to 1544, consist of notices of events year by year, with summaries of a few tracts, sermons, and speeches interspersed, the whole being characterised by a strong anti-Catholic bias. The 'Lord Cecill' of the title is no doubt Lord Burghley, and as both he and Sir Henry Sidney died before the end of the sixteenth century, the contents claim a respectable antiquity, while, if properly described, they must have been extracted from their papers before 1656, the date of Ussher's death. But the fact is, the title is grossly misleading, and it is impossible to believe that the compilation was really made by Ussher; for the framework of the volume is evidently derived, not from original papers, but from Morgan Godwin's 'Annals of England,' first published in 1630 and again in 1675. This work, which makes no reference to papers of either Sidney or Cecil, was a translation of the Latin 'Annales' of Bishop Francis Godwin, the translator's father, published in 1616; but there is abundant proof that the real compiler of these 'Memoirs' copied from the English version. One curious piece of evidence to this effect may be seen at the very beginning, where, under the year 1580, he includes among the three ambassadors sent by Henry to the Pope an otherwise unknown Edmond Le Wolsey. Now, in Bishop Godwin's 'Annales' the name is given correctly as *Edwardum Leum, Eboracensem (post sublatum Wolsacum) archiepiscopum*, in which there is nothing to account for the blundering entry in the Grenville MS.; whereas in the younger Godwin's translation we get the significant collocation of names, 'Edward Lee Wolsey his successor in Yorke.' It is easy to see from this that it was one or the other of the English editions that the pseudo-Ussher had before him, and the numerous cases in which its language is reproduced almost without variation leave no room for doubt that it supplied him with the bulk of his materials. To a less extent he made similar use of Stowe's Annals, and possibly of other printed authorities, and, having thus collected genuine history enough for his purpose and given it a false stamp of originality

by fathering it upon Sidney and Cecil, he appears to have made it the medium for venting his theological antipathies by foisting in concoctions of his own. The passage about Becket's tomb quoted above affords one example, I believe, of such a plausible admixture of truth and falsehood, and other passages are equally open to suspicion, notably a curious account of the origin of the famous Six Articles of 1539, in which Gardiner and Bonner are the leading actors. Nor is the likelihood of imposture at all diminished when the name of the writer of the manuscript is made known. After some trouble, by comparison of the hand with that of Add. MS. 4813, I have identified him with Robert Ware, son of the Irish antiquary Sir James Ware, and 'author of 'The Hunting of the Romish Fox,' 1683, and other pamphlets of a similar kind. No one who has read the essay on this unscrupulous controversialist in the Rev. J. E. Bridgett's 'Blunders and Forgeries,' 1890, pp. 209-296, needs to be enlightened on his character and methods, and as to the manner in which his malicious inventions (frequently associated, as here, with the names of Sidney, 'Lord Cecill' and Ussher) have found their way into the pages of unsuspecting historians. Apparently, such has not yet been the case with the tainted matter in the Grenville MS., and, having given this warning in the hope to prevent it in the future, I will not pursue the subject further. Mr. Bridgett, indeed, may fairly claim Robert Ware as his special game, and, now that I have started him on a fresh scent, I will leave him, if he please, to follow it up.

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