

THE COURT OF STAR CHAMBER.

could appease the vindictive spirit of the haughty archbishop but the ruin of the man to whom he owed his elevation. For some frivolous pretence he was brought before the Star Chamber, and fined £10,000, committed to the Tower during the king's pleasure, and suspended from office. In order to levy this fine, the officers seized the furniture and books of the palace of Bishop Williams, and found there, among some refuse papers, some letters from one Osbaldiston, a schoolmaster, directed to the bishop. In these the writer spoke of a *little great man*, and in one place of a *little urchin*. As Laud was diminutive in stature, it was conjectured that these expressions referred to him; whereupon the bishop was tried for receiving such scandalous letters, though he had never shown them to any one, and Osbaldiston for writing them; and the first was fined £8,000, and the other sentenced to pay a fine of £5,000, and to have his ears nailed to the pillory in sight of his own school.

These will suffice to show the nature of the offences of which this court took cognizance, and the character of the punishments which it imposed. The cases of Prynne and Lilburne, already mentioned, will serve to show the spirit and character which pervaded the proceedings, by which the court accomplished its purposes. Both these trials took place in the time of Charles. The Puritans had already obtained a strong foothold in England, and were making themselves felt, by their bold advocacy of civil as well as religious liberty. Whoever, therefore, was in any manner identified with this odious sect, was particularly obnoxious to the vengeance of the Star Chamber. Among the peculiarities of the Puritans was a strict observance of the Sabbath, as well as aversion to stage plays and profane sports generally. To counteract this spirit, the clergy were required by proclamation to read what was called "the Book of Sports" in their churches, by which certain sports and pastimes were to be used by the people on Sundays, after the evening service. Add to this, that Charles and his queen at times were present at the exhibition of stage plays, and that she at times took part herself in masques and other like exhibitions at court.

In this state of public feeling, Prynne,

who was a barrister-at-law of Lincoln's Inn, and a Puritan of the strictest sect, published his famous *Histrio Mastix*, a huge volume of a thousand quarto pages, aimed at stage plays, music, dancing, public festivals, Christmas sports, bonfires, and May-poles. For this "libellous volume" he was arraigned before the Star Chamber. What made it a little more remarkable, he had been licensed by Abbott, Laud's predecessor, as Archbishop of Canterbury, to publish a considerable part of this work. In his address to the court, Mr. Noy, the Attorney-General, states several of the offensive parts of this work, and among other things states what it attacks: "witchery, church ceremonies, &c., indistinctly he falleth upon them; then upon altars, images, hair men and women, bishops and bonfires, cards and tables, do offend him, and perukes do fall within the compass of his themes." The trial occupied three days, and the fourth was consumed in pronouncing sentence against him. Among his judges was Richardson, the Chief Justice of the King's Bench, who began with this significant language: "Since I have had the honor to attend this court, writing and printing of books have been exceedingly found fault withal, and have received sharp censure, and it doth grow every day worse and worse; every man taketh upon him to understand what he conceiveth, and thinks he is nobody except he be in print. We are troubled here with a book,—a monster,—*monstrum horrendum, inform, ingens!*" &c. "I would to God in heaven the devil and all else that had their heads and hands therein, besides Mr. Prynne, were, &c.; for I think they are all ill willers to the State, and deserve severe punishment as well as Mr. Prynne doth." "For the book, I do hold it a most scandalous, infamous libel to the king's majesty, a most pious and religious king; to the queen's majesty, a most excellent and gracious queen,—such a one as this kingdom never enjoyed the like, and I think the earth never had a better." "I say, eye never saw nor ear ever heard of such a scandalous and seditious thing as this misshapen monster is." He then proceeds to read sundry extracts from the book, drawing from them inferences the most forced and unnatural. Thus, in his general sweep for historical illustrations