

## THE SIEGE OF LICHFIELD.

## CHAPTER I.

## THE CATHEDRAL.

LICHFIELD CATHEDRAL, the principal scene of the following narrative, is one of the most complete and beautiful, though not amongst the largest, of those sacred edifices which were raised by the pious hands of our forefathers to the honour and glory of God. The spot on which it stands was chosen, probably, by its first founders as being watered by the blood of the ancient British martyrs, who, with their leader Amphibalus, were slaughtered in this vicinity.

NOTE.—The following is an ancient inscription preserved in the vestry of St. Mary's Church at Lichfield:

"In the second or third of Dioclesian's persecution here in Britaine, many Christians suffered martyrdom, amongst whom our protomartyr and first principal of Britaine was St. Alban of Verulam (now called St. Albans), who is said to suffer in the year of Christ cccxiii.; one of whom the poet wrote thus—

Fruitfull Britaine bringeth forth  
Alban, a martyr of high worth.

And shortly after, to the number of one thousand Christians, with Amphibalus, St. Alban's instructor, who being instructing of them, were taken at Lichfield, where they suffered martyrdom, under Dioclesian. But Amphibalus was taken and brought into Verulam, where he had first instructed St. Alban, and there [they] tormented him by slitting up his belly, and then whipping of his body round about a stake, till all his bowells were drawne out, and so stoned him to death. Since which time, by our ancient historians Lichfield was called Lichfield, which is interpreted to be *Cadaverum Corpus*,—That is, the Field of Dead Bodies.

"Since which martyrdom the Citty beareth for her armes an eschocheon of landskip with many martyrs in severall manner massacred.

Lichfield should be a field of good,  
Since it was watered with holy blood.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of the saints."—Psalm cxvi. verse 15."

The date of the present structure is uncertain. The greater part of it is supposed to have been built during the reign of King Henry III. Previously to the great rebellion, it presented the same general appearance as it does at present, except that it was surrounded by fortifications, the traces of which are now scarcely visible. "The whole Close," says Leland, who wrote in the sixteenth century, "was newly dyked and walled by Bishop Langton; who made a gate at the west part, a lesser at the south-east, and the bishop's palace at the east end. The glory of the Cathedral Church is the work at the west end, exceeding costly and fayre. There be three stone pyramids; two at the west end, and one in the middle. The prebendaries' houses in the Close, builded by divers men, be very fayre." The Cathedral, being situated on an eminence, was at an early period used as a fortress, and "enclosed about with a wall, and a good deep dry trench on all sides, except towards the city, where it is defended by a great marsh or pool." Thus it was a fortress of no inconsiderable strength, as well as a place of Christian worship.

Our present narrative commences early in the year 1642, previously to the breaking out of the great rebellion, when England was convulsed from one end to the other with factions rage, and the storm was gathering which soon burst with such destructive fury. The demands of the Parliament were such as no monarch could accede to with honour; much less one who, like Charles, had high notions of his prerogative, and considered it his sacred duty to hand down to his descendants the same royal power which he had received from his ancestors. It was now manifest that there must be an appeal to arms; and all persons were beginning to range themselves, according to their respective bias, on the side of rebellion or loyalty.

When danger approaches, men are wont to acknowledge the presence of God more strongly than at other times. Many pray who never prayed before; and even the prayers of good men are more fervent than usual. On the day when our story begins, the Cathedral was far more commonly thronged with worshippers; and the anthem's solemn peal called up in the hearts of those assembled, feelings of awe and reverence deeper and more lively than they had before experienced. Many who had but sparingly availed themselves of the privilege of worshipping God in His beautiful temple, or had often before knelt there with little reverence, now acknowledged for the first time that they had neglected means of grace well calculated to attune their hearts to high devotion; and those who had before felt the awfulness and sublimity of cathedral-service, only clung to

it with fonder attachment, now that the enemies of the Church threatened it with destruction. Thus it is that blessings, which we have slighted when in our possession, are more highly prized when there is danger of our being deprived of them; and our hearts are more keenly touched by the anticipation of loss than by the fulness of enjoyment.

Some there were, however, amongst that congregation, who appeared to have little sympathy with the hallowed feelings of the rest,—men on whose lip sat the sneer of scorn and defiance, and who seemed to view the whole service with a look of indignation and contempt, and to despise from their inmost hearts the humble worshippers who knelt before them.

As soon as the service of prayer was concluded, the congregation adjourned, as it was customary at that time, from the choir to the nave of the Cathedral, where they were joined by the congregations from the other churches in the town, and all assembled together to hear the sermon.

There was nothing extraordinary in this arrangement; still the nave of the Cathedral presented, on that day, an unusual appearance; for the attendance was larger than common; and there were new faces amongst the congregation, of men who came evidently for no good purpose, and manifested a disposition to interrupt the service. Many churches in different parts of the country had already been made the scenes of indecent interruption, and the spirit of irreverence and insubordination was fast spreading throughout the land.

The preacher on this occasion was Dr. Arnway, the canon in residence,—a man of high reputation for learning as well as piety and charity, giving an example of liberality which was more frequent in those days than the present. Twelve poor men were yearly clothed by his bounty, and as many were regaled each Sunday at his hospitable board. It was his custom to seek out for poor householders who were ashamed to beg, and privately to relieve their wants. Many poor and aged men did he employ in his service; inasmuch that people were wont to say of him, that "he gave men wages to eat up his meat." No man was more devoted than Dr. Arnway to the cause of loyalty and true religion, or more determined to act or to suffer in the holy cause.

He took for his text two verses of the epistle of St. Paul to Titus: "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, and to be ready for every good work; to speak evil of no man; to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness to all men." These were a portion, he said, of the directions given by Paul the apostle to Titus, bishop of Crete, touching the duties which it was necessary for a Christian minister to enforce on those committed to his charge. As a preacher of the Gospel, he should be guilty of neglect of duty, if, from fear or favour, he forbore to bring these subjects before them as occasion served. Submission to rulers—especially to the King as supreme—was a clear and undoubted portion of our Christian obligation; and ministers of the Gospel were at all times bound to stand fearlessly forward, and put men in mind of their sacred duties. Especially in times of angry excitement it became them to endeavour, in God's name, to calm the troubled waters, and infuse into men's hearts the humble and peaceable spirit of the Christian faith. Could they be said to follow the example, or obey the precept, of the blessed Jesus, who refused submission to their lawful King? who scrupled not to speak evil of dignities, and to excite brawls and evil passions, and stir up strife in a peaceable land? Would God continue to bless a nation which thus disregarded His heavenly commands? He alluded pointedly to the concessions already made by the King to the wishes of his subjects,—concessions which proved his generous disposition, and his desire to do all for the preservation of peace which a king could do with honour.

He described, in a pathetic and touching manner, the great happiness which the nation had so long enjoyed, its domestic peace and holy worship; then contrasted with it the turbulence which was beginning to arise, the desecration of churches, the insults offered to God's ministers; and he ended by a fervent prayer that God might yet preserve us from those evils which we so righteously had deserved.

The sermon was listened to with awful attention, and a loud "Amen" rolled through the arched roof of the Cathedral at its conclusion. The calm dignity of the preacher, the high respect in which he was held, the moderation and holy sincerity of his address, and the care with which he had avoided speaking in an irritating manner, even of those whose proceedings he condemned, had hitherto kept the intruders tolerably silent; but it was manifest that they were not disposed to leave the Cathedral without some act of disrespect. Accordingly, no sooner was the sermon concluded, and the blessing pronounced, than they raised up on a seat, which overtopped the rest, one James M Rorer, a fanatical and seditious fellow, who had recently come to the town, no one knew whence, and had employed himself too

successfully in stirring up a factions spirit amongst the poorer classes. This man began to harangue the congregation in a loud voice, and with a peculiar nasal twang, which showed him at once to be of the puritan persuasion:—

"Woe to the rebellious city, and to them that dwell within its fenced walls! Woe to all steeple-houses; and to you with your three steeples, desolation, mourning, and woe! The house of Baal shall be laid even with the ground, and there shall not be left one stone upon another. And you, ye priests of Baal, from the prelate who sits in the stall, to the singing-man who bellows in the choir! What is all your church music but the roaring of antichrist? It is not the noise of men, but the bleating of brute beasts! the choristers bellow the tenor, like fat bulls of Bashan; they bark the counter part, like a kennel of dogs; squeak the treble, like a litter of young pigs; and grunt the bass, as it were a sty of hogs! Woe unto you, ye sons of Belial, for your city shall be made desolate, and your place shall be no more found. The Lord shall bring speedy vengeance on all popes, prelates, atheists, profane and damnable heretics, and destroy their habitation even to the ground; and shall rear up, in the stead thereof, the new Jerusalem, the holy city, yea, the pattern of Mount Sion."

How long the fanatic might have proceeded in this strain, it is impossible to say. The female part of the congregation had left the Cathedral in alarm as soon as the sermon was concluded; and the men, partly taken by surprise, and partly restrained by a reverential feeling, being unwilling to desecrate the temple of God by making it a scene of strife, had suffered him to proceed thus far. Dr. Arnway, who had descended half way from the pulpit to the body of the Cathedral, endeavoured to persuade him to desist; but in vain,—the intruder, gifted with a stenorian voice, seemed determined to have his turn. At this moment, a young man of resolute mien and commanding appearance came across the church, and respectfully addressed a few words in a low tone to Dr. Arnway; whereupon the worthy canon, raising his voice, said to the intruder in a tone of authority, "I command you, by virtue of my office as magistrate within the Close, to cease from brawling in God's consecrated house."

"Consecrated house!" said the fanatic, "it is the house of Baal, a den of thieves!"

But he was not permitted to proceed. Upon a signal from Dr. Arnway, the young man who had addressed him, and another as determined as himself burst through the knot of intruders with that irresistible determination which strong indignation alone can give, and laying a iron grasp on the shoulder of the fanatic, led him, though a strong man, in spite of his struggles and imprecations, out of the holy edifice, nor left him until they had conveyed him through the west gate of the Close, followed by the rabble, who had not the courage to attempt a rescue. The gates of the Close were then shut and barred, and the sacred precincts of the Cathedral restored to their usual quietness.

In ordinary times a broil of this sort, if it occurred at all, would be looked on as a mere outbreak of insane violence; but when coupled with the alarming circumstances of the times, it left a deep and sad impression on those who had witnessed it. They knew that similar scenes had occurred in other places,—nay, in some towns the church-service had been interrupted, and the pulpit forcibly occupied by irreverent intruders. Was the time indeed come when the sanctity of God's house was to be invaded by the rude voice of blasphemy? Was their holy religion to be mocked with impunity, and their most solemn feelings outraged? Was violence even at their doors? Thus it is that men who have lived long in peace, may hear of wars and rumours of wars, and tumults in distant places, with comparative unconcern; but when the danger is close upon them, and the quiet tenour of their lives is actually disturbed, then a small thing fills them with terror, and they know not whither to turn for safety.

And as when a tempest is gathering, hollow blasts are heard, and gusts of wind, and strange murmurings in the air; so before the breaking out of civil strife, angry voices are lifted up, and strange uncouth men come into notice, and lawless events, like that described, take place; and men surmise and wonder, while such things become more frequent daily, until at length the torrent of strife bursts over the land, and all is ruin and desolation.

It frequently happened in those days, as it has more recently, that two or three blasphemers have been able to interrupt a whole congregation in their service. Christian worshippers should be prepared to repress such insults. The best way of proceeding on such occasions is, for every able-bodied man to rise from his seat, and place himself under the direction of the magistrate or the churchwarden, who during the service and in the house of God is armed with magisterial power.

It is related by Dr. Hackett, afterwards bishop of Lichfield, that about this time, or somewhat later, "one Sunday, while he was reading the common prayer in his church (St. Giles's, Holborn), a soldier of the Earl of Essex came and clapped a pistol to his