

pose, read some portion of sacred writ to his fellows as they sat at meat. Nor have we seen on the east wall, exterior of the south transept the political gargoyles, seemingly misplaced upon a sacred edifice;—caricatures in stone of political figures, prominent in the past century, among others, Mr. Gladstone represented, pen in mouth,



Chester Cathedral: Political Gargoyles.

vigorously engaged in upheaving a church with a huge bar of some kind, a lasting symbol of the vatican pamphlet. These and countless remaining details we cannot inspect now; only before leaving Chester it will, I think, repay us to spend a few minutes examining the seats of the choir stalls. These are regularly used as seats in the Church of England service, but their original intention was quite other. Misericords, they are called, from the Latin *miserericordia*, compassion. They are square, hinged pieces of oak, four or five inches thick, the upper surface smooth, the lower surface carved with grotesque figures. The lower surface is decorated because the normal position was primarily upright, with this show-side exposed to view, and the smooth top-side resting against the panel at the back.

The upper surface in this position, just the thickness of the wood, is smooth and slanting toward the sitter; so that it is possible to use the misericord as a rest merely, for if perpendicular pressure is brought to bear upon the bevelled upper surface the whole subsides and takes on its secondary use as a seat proper. And here is the two-fold explanation of the name: a canon becomes weary during the prayers and chants of the service; rests himself drowsily against the misericord; his muscles relax; the misericord falls with a loud bang and brings him rudely to his senses, awake, humiliated; his fellow priests hear and see and sympathise; the misericord has excited their compassion. The alternative explanation is that these were intended