

CHAPTER IV.

Macaber Dance in England.—St. Paul's.—Salisbury.—Wortley Hall.—Hexham.—Croydon.—Tower of London.—Lines in Pierce Plowman's Vision supposed to refer to it.

WE are next to examine this subject in relation to its existence in our own country. On the authority of the work ascribed to Walter de Mapes, already noticed in p. 24, it is not unreasonable to infer that paintings of the Macaber Dance were coeval with that writer, though no specimens of it that now remain will warrant the conclusion. We know that it existed at Old Saint Paul's. Stowe informs us that there was a great cloister on the north side of the church, environing a plot of ground, of old time called Pardon church-yard. He then states, that "about this cloyster was artificially and richly painted the Dance of Machabray, or Dance of Death, commonly called the Dance of Paul's: the like whereof was painted about St. Innocent's cloyster at Paris: the meters or poesie of this dance were translated out of French into English, by John Lidgate, Monke of Bury, the picture of Death leading all estates; at the dispence of Jenken Carpenter in the reigne of Henry the Sixt."⁷⁸ Lydgate's verses were first printed at the end of Tottell's edition of the translation of his *Fall of Princes*, from Boccaccio, 1554, folio, and afterwards, in Sir W. Dugdale's *History of St. Paul's cathedral*.⁷⁹ In

⁷⁸ *Survey of London*, p. 615, edit. 1618, 4to.

⁷⁹ In Tottell's edition these verses are accompanied with a single

another place Stowe records that "on the 10th April, 1549, the cloister of St. Paul's church, called Pardon church-yard, with the Dance of Death, commonly called the Dance of Paul's, about the same cloister, costly and cunningly wrought, and the chappel in the midst of the same church-yard, were all begun to be pulled down."⁸⁰ This spoliation was made by the Protector Somerset, in order to obtain materials for building his palace in the Strand.⁸¹

The single figure that remained in the Hungerford chapel at Salisbury cathedral, previously to its demolition, was formerly known by the title of "Death and the Young Man," and was, undoubtedly, a portion of the Macaber Dance, as there was close to it another compartment belonging to the same subject. In 1748, a print of these figures was published, accompanied with the following inscription, which differs from that in Lydgate. The young man says :

Alasse Dethe alasse a blesful thyng thou were
Yf thou woldyst spare us yn ouwre lustynesse.
And cum to wretches that bethe of hevy chere
Whene thay ye clepe to slake their dystresse
But owte alasse thyne own sely selfwyldnesse
Crewelly werneth me that seygh wayle and wepe
To close there then that after ye doth clepe.

wood-cut of Death leading up all ranks of mortals. This was afterwards copied by Hollar, as to general design, in Dugdale's St. Paul's, and in the Monasticon.

⁸⁰ Annales, p. 596, edit. 1631. folio. Sir Thomas More, treating of the remembrance of Death, has these words: "But if we not only here this word Death, but also let sink into our heartes, the very fantasie and depe imaginacion thereof, we shall perceiue therby that we were never so gretly moved by the beholding of the *Daunce of Death pictured in Poules*, as we shal fele ourself stered and altered by the feling of that imaginacion in our hertes. And no marvell. For those pictures expresse only y^e lothely figure of our dead bony bodies, biten away y^e flesh," &c.—Works, p. 77, edit. 1557, folio.

⁸¹ Heylin's Hist. of the Reformation, p. 73.

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Death answers :

Grossless galante in all thy luste and pryde
 Remembyr that thou schalle onys dye
 Deth schall fro thy body thy sowle devyde
 Thou mayst him not escape certaynly
 To the dede bodyes cast down thyne ye
 Beholde thayme well consydere and see
 For such as thay ar such shalt thou be.

This painting was made about the year 1460, and from the remaining specimen its destruction is extremely to be regretted, as, judging from that of the young gallant, the dresses of the time would be correctly exhibited.

In the chapel at Wortley Hall, in Gloucestershire, there was inscribed, and most likely painted, "an history and Daunce of Deathe of all estatts and degrees." This inscribed history was the same as Lydgate's, with some additional characters.⁸² From a manuscript note by John Stowe, in his copy of Leland's Itinerary, it appears that there was a Dance of Death in the church of Stratford upon Avon: and the conjecture that Shakespeare, in a passage in *Measure for Measure*, might have remembered it, will not, perhaps, be deemed very extravagant. He there alludes to Death and the fool, a subject always introduced into the paintings in question.⁸³

On the upper part of the great screen which closes the entrance to the choir of the church at Hexham, in Northumberland, are the painted remains of a Dance of Death.⁸⁴ These consist of the figures of a pope, a cardinal, and a king, which were copied by the ingenious John Carter, of well-deserved antiquarian memory.

⁸² Cotton MS. Vesp. A. xxv. fo. 181.

⁸³ Leland's Itin. vol. iv. part i. p. 69.—*Meas. for Meas. Act iii.* sc. 1.

⁸⁴ Hutchinson's Northumberland, i. 98.

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Vestiges of a Macaber Dance were not long since to be traced on the walls of the hall of the Archiepiscopal palace at Croydon, but so much obscured by time and neglect that no particular compartment could be ascertained.

The tapestries that decorated the walls of palaces, and other dwelling places, were sometimes applied in extension of this moral subject. In the tower of London, the original and most ancient seat of our monarchs, there was some tapestry with the Macaber Dance.⁸⁵

The following lines in that admirable satire, the Vision of Pierce Plowman, written about the year 1350, have evidently an allusion to the Dance, unless they might be thought to apply rather to the celebrated triumph of Death by Petrarch, of which some very early paintings, and many engravings, still exist; or they may even refer to some of the ancient representations of the infernal regions that follow Death on the Pale horse of the Revelations, and in which is seen a grotesque intermixture of all classes of people.⁸⁶

Death came driving after, and all to dust pashed
Kynges and Kayzers, Knightes and Popes,
Learned and lewde: he ne let no man stande
That he hitte even, he never stode after.
Many a lovely ladie and lemmans of knightes
Swouned and sweltd for sorrowe of Deathes dyntes.

It is probable that many cathedrals and other edifices, civil as well as ecclesiastical, in France, Germany, England, and probably other European countries, were ornamented with paintings and sculpture of this extremely popular subject.

⁸⁵ Warton's H. E. Poetry, ii. 43, edit. 8vo.

⁸⁶ And see a portion of Orgagna's painting at the Campo Santo at Pisa, mentioned before in p. 33.

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