

## Sculptures on the West Doorway of St. Mary's Church, Taunton.

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BY MR. C. E. GILES.

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THE sculptures represented in the accompanying plate, decorate the western portal of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Taunton. And although the magnificent tower of which they form a portion, has been often described and is generally known, I am not aware that any allusion has been made to these interesting relics of medieval art.

The tower is built of two different kinds of stone; the dressings and portions of the ashler work being the inferior oolite from the celebrated quarries of Hamdon Hill, and the walls chiefly of a perishable stone of the red sand stone formation. Much of the Hamdon Hill stone used in the tower is inferior to that found in other churches of the neighbourhood. It has been suggested that the earlier workings of these quarries exhibited a harder and more durable material than for some centuries has been obtained. From some little acquaintance however with these quarries, I can vouch that stone of very good description is still available, but the

beds vary considerably, and require care in selection. Some little time ago this doorway was placed under my care for restoration; and it was while examining it, that my attention was drawn to the carvings filling the spandril. Thickly covered with coats of yellow ochre, they appeared at first sight to be of similar stone with the doorcase itself; but after carefully cleansing them they were found to be cut in slabs of a close grained freestone, let into the position which they occupied, and had evidently been originally coloured and gilded.

The dedication of the church led me to conclude that the subject of the sculpture No. 2, was our Saviour appearing to Mary Magdalene in the garden after his resurrection. There is a space fenced in, being a conventional way of representing a garden. The figure of our Lord, though much mutilated, is a very distinguishable type, and is dignified and expressive. He is raising his hand as Mary kneels before Him, and appears to be uttering the words, "Touch me not, &c." Mary seems to hold the spices in her hand. On the ground is a flower rudely carved, which I believe to be the sun flower, an emblem of faithfulness; there are two trees overshadowing the group, on which are angels with outstretched wings. Outside the paling is a kneeling figure vested in a cope, apparently some ecclesiastic.

The sculpture No. 1, I could not explain; but supposing the task might not be difficult to one well

acquainted with medieval legends, I transmitted a cast to Mr. Pugin, who kindly furnished me with a solution, most satisfactory to any person who takes the trouble to examine the original. Mr. Pugin says, that "it represents the miraculous vision of the resurrection of our Lord by St. Gregory, (or Pope Gregory the Great) when officiating at high mass." The details are clearly to be discerned; the altar with the niche containing the cruets, (the forms of the latter being most intelligible) the conventional tomb,—a stone sarcophagus with our Lord rising, and two angels with outspread wings removing the shroud. St. Gregory raising the consecrated wafer, stands on the steps of the altar, one acolyte supports the chasuble, another the taper; while two figures, apparently priests, are seated a little to the rear and at the side, one of them holding the triple crown of St. Gregory. Grotesque heads, with bold foliage, fill up the angles. A very peculiar and not very decent figure is supporting the altar. The features appear to have been systematically and wholly destroyed, but the drapery will be found to be very bold and effective. To my regret it was considered necessary to renovate these most interesting carvings, to correspond with the restored doorcase. Mr. Richardson (who restored the beautiful effigies of the Temple Church,) has added the new portions in mortar, in order that the original work might be altered as little as possible.