

IV.

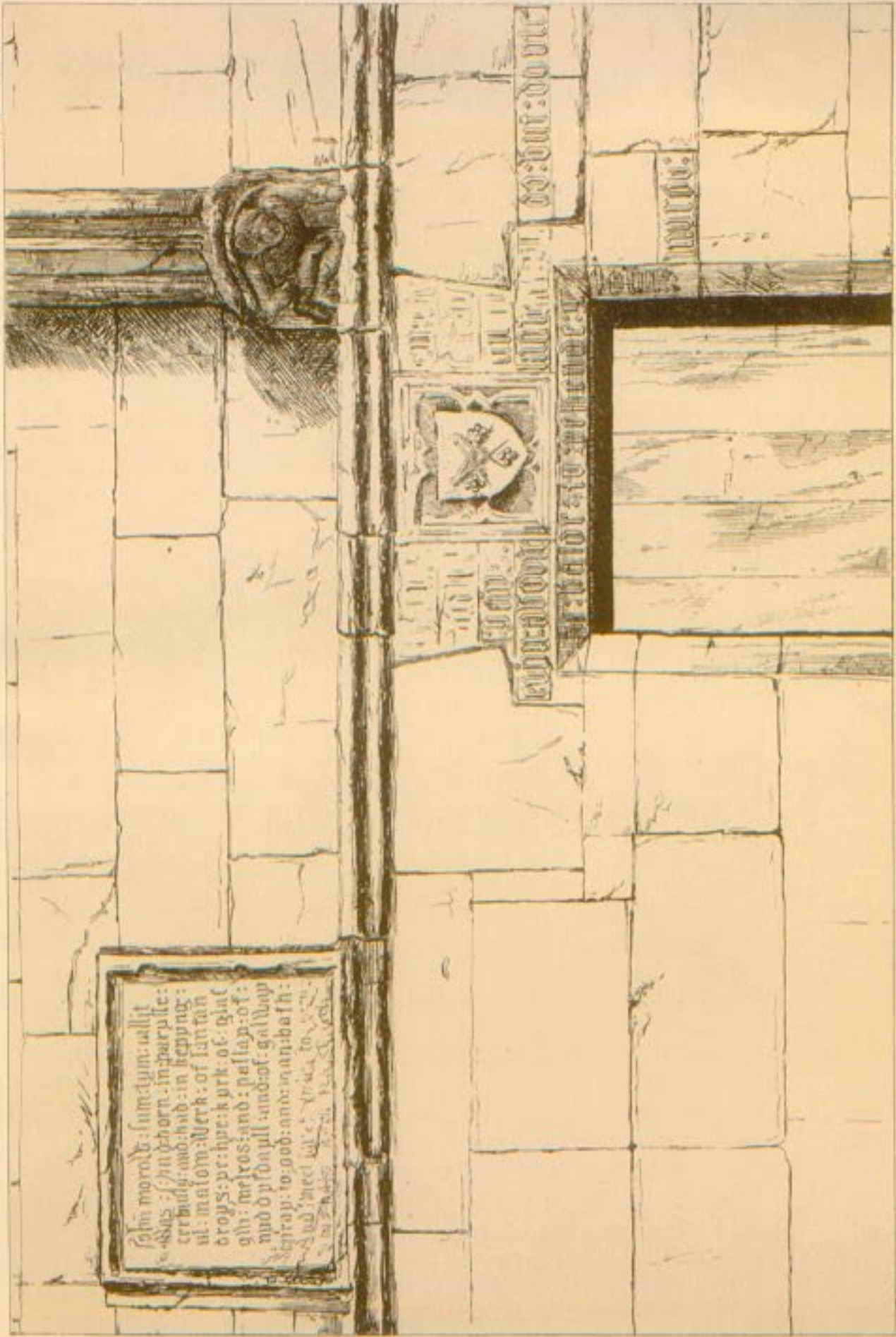
NOTES ON MELROSE ABBEY; ESPECIALLY IN REFERENCE TO INSCRIPTIONS ON THE WALL OF THE SOUTH TRANSEPT. BY JOHN ALEXANDER SMITH, M.D., Sec. S.A. Scot.

Some time ago I took a careful tracing of the well-known inscribed tablet on the west wall of the south transept of Melrose Abbey, which I exhibit to the Society. The whole surface of the stone is gradually crumbling away, so much so, that it may be feared in the course of a comparatively short time the wasting process will obliterate the greater part of the inscription, the lowest lines of which are now quite illegible. The inscription which is given below is in black letter of old character (as shown in the annexed Plate VI., and the woodcut of the first two words—JOHN MOROW, p. 168); and the last two lines are supplied from old authorities.

Jōhn̄ : morow : sum : tpm : callit
 was : ꝥ : and : borū : in : paryffe :
 certanly ; and : had : in : keppng :
 al : malom : werk : of : lantan
 droys : pe : hpe : kyrk : of : glaf
 gw : melros : and : pallay : of :
 nyddpfdapll : and : of : galway
 ✠ pray : to : god : and : mari : bath :
 And : [sweet : sanct : Jōhn : to : keep :
 this : halp : kyrk : fra : skait] :

It appears to me strange that the individual mentioned in this inscription, who seems to have been connected with several of our older ecclesiastical edifices, should now be all but unknown. As the first step, therefore, in any attempt to trace his history, it is of importance to ascertain the correct reading of his name, which, with few exceptions, has been carelessly or incorrectly copied, from its first published appearance in Monteith's *Theater of Mortality*, Part II., in 1713, down to the recent valuable work of Mr Billings, on the *Baronia and Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Scotland*.

Adjoining to the tablet in the wall already referred to, and over the centre of a doorway on the same side of this south transept (see sketch, Plate VI.,



John morold: sum: tyn: uallit
 Bas: sch: horn: in: bur: pite:
 cer: m: and: hid: in: keppng:
 ul: malorn: Werk: of: lant: an
 droy: pr: hpe: k: yrk: of: ghal
 gh: melros: and: p: allap: of:
 mid: dy: full: and: of: gall: bay
 pray: to: oob: and: man: bash:
 ad: 'neet: w: e: v: sic: to: v: m:

INSCRIBED DOORWAY AND TABLE IN THE SOUTH TRANSEPT OF MELROSE ABBEY

Tablet of the same. See page 10.

carefully copied from a photograph), there is a sunk panel inclosing a shield, which displays two mason's compasses partially opened laid across one another, so as to form a figure somewhat like a saltire, and on each side, and in base, what has been described as a *fleur de lis*; forming probably a combined masonic and heraldic blazon. The compass is the badge of a Master Mason, and the three lilies may be those of the shield of France, his native country. On each side of this panel there is the remains of a black letter inscription in relief (shown in Plate VI., and the second woodcut on next page), which bears marks of having possibly been retouched, although I am inclined to consider the different states of preservation of the letters to be dependent principally on the varying hardness and durability of the stones employed. The explanation given of it in the oldest authority I can find—viz., Monteith's *Theater of Mortality*—including apparently the carving on the shield itself, as if it were symbolic of as word, is as follows:—

“ Above another Door of the said Church.

Even as the Compass gaes even about,
So doth Truth and Lawty, but doubt.
Behold to the End of John Murvo.”

It is next published by the Rev. Mr Adam Milne, in his *Description of Melrose Parish, 1743*, in the following terms:—

“ Sa gayes the compass ev'n about,
So truth and laute do but doubt.
Behald to the end. JOHN MURDO.”

The inscription, from the partially wasted surface of the stone, and the unequal spaces between some of the words, is manifestly imperfect (Plate VI.), and the explanation given above can scarcely be confirmed now from inspection. I shall, however, only notice the latter part of it, which is cut in the same style of raised lettering on the bevelled edge of the doorway across the top, returning a short way down the left side, and ending with the name MORVO, which runs across the surface of the wall; it is as follows:—BE : HALDE : TO : YE HENDE : Q : JOHNE : MORVO : not Behold, as it is described, but BE : HALDE : (*i.e.*, let it be held, or holden) TO THE END QUOTH JOHN MORVO; the conclusion apparently of a devout sentiment of laute or praise, at the termination, shall we say, of the restorations of the building, which the who had the mason work in keeping prays may be held to the end, at-testing it by his name. Here the name seems to read Morvo; I took casts of

this and of the other name at the commencement of the inscribed tablet; and these which I exhibit have been carefully copied in the subjoined woodcuts.

[From Inscribed Tablet.]

[From Inscription over Doorway.]

In the tablet, JOHN : MOROW : is described as having been born in Paris, reminding one of the French name of MOREAU; yet from the use of the final W (unless we suppose this a subsequent change), we must believe him to have been not French but of foreign extraction. The two names are in all likelihood the same, the latter possibly a monkish change for euphony's sake at the close of the inscription, the second last letter resembling the (**h**) *v* in *even* of the former part of this inscription, and the last being O; unless indeed we should consider the two last letters to be VV, or to form an imperfect W, and the O to be omitted, as occurs on the inscribed tablet with the name of Glasgow, GLASGW. The name Morow reminds me very much of the local Roxburghshire pronunciation of the Scottish name of Murray, which is exactly similar in sound to Morow; but I know no instance of the name of Murray being spelled like the former.

We may conjecture that, in addition to this sculptured doorway, inscribed with the old mason's name,—possibly “In memoriam,” to hand down to later times some information regarding the man who had brought his work so successfully to a conclusion,—the tablet detailing his place of birth and the responsible offices he held, was prepared, and the finished ashlar wall of the transept cut into for its reception; as shown by its being cut a little into the string course which runs below it, as well as by the long narrow stone, unlike the shape of the other courses, which is placed vertically across them on the outside of the tablet at the one end, so as to complete the building of the wall, which had been broken up (see Plate VI.) This inscription, which has its moulded framing decorated with a series of richly-carved leaves, now almost obliterated, also concludes in devout prayers, in this case, for the preservation of the building.

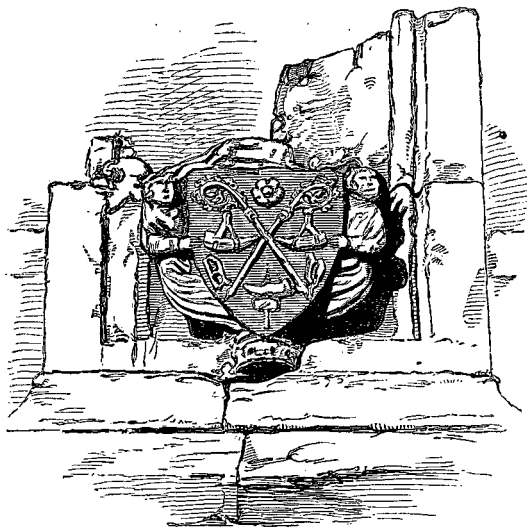
Mr Billings states that no portion of the present buildings of Melrose Abbey appears to be more ancient than the fifteenth century, and he refers, in connexion with the French forms of architecture in this and the other Scottish ecclesiastical buildings, to the tablet now described, which he believes cannot be older than the sixteenth century; he says, "it is not likely that *Mundo*, whose name would indicate a Scottish origin, performed any functions beyond repairs and restorations." Some parts of the present Abbey have, with considerable certainty, been ascribed to the latter half of the fourteenth century. The inscribed tablet evidently dates from an earlier period than that fixed on by Mr Billings, for reasons to be afterwards stated; and I cannot but think the sculptured lintel of the old doorway (the details of which he figures incorrectly in his view of the south transept; and to which he does not allude in connection with the *Mason*), tells a tale of ancient, as well as very considerable renovation of the old Abbey. Indeed, the state of apparent imperfection of this inscribed doorway, which may have been assumed from the varying size of the stones with which it is built, is no proof of any comparatively modern repair; as the same thing may be remarked in other parts of the building, where there is not the slightest appearance of any recent restorations having taken place, and was most probably dependent on the difficulty the builders had experienced in getting proper materials, rather than on any comparatively recent patching up of the old walls.

The planting of the inscribed tablet in what was the finished wall of the transept, I am inclined, as I have already stated, to look upon as an afterthought of rather later date than the sculptured doorway. It is a very difficult matter to attempt to solve the subject of dates; yet, as a step in that direction, I may notice the position which these inscriptions in the transept wall bear to the styles of architecture shown in the adjoining parts of the ruined Abbey. We find then these inscriptions occupying apparently a central position in the midst of highly-finished masonry of excellent design and workmanship, of the Curvilinear or Decorated style, as shown in the great south window immediately adjoining over the doorway of the transept, with its flowing tracery, and richly-sculptured and canopied niches outside; and the architecture apparently runs into newer styles on each side.

Towards the east, it changes almost immediately to a more rectilinear character, a Scottish example of the Perpendicular style, which indeed is seen in the upper windows of the transept itself in this direction, with their transoms, and mullions running from top to bottom, and culminates in the beautiful great eastern window of the fabric. The Perpendicular style, however, the architect by no means closely copied, skilfully varying it at pleasure, changing to the Curvilinear character again when it suited his convenience or taste, as

shown on the other side of the Abbey, in the eastern windows of the north transept.

Returning again to the south transept, we trace a continuation of the Decorated style, with its flamboyant-like tracery, in the chapels towards the west; and here we find at least an approximation to the date at which part of this latter range of chapels had been erected, if not, indeed, to the true date of the completion at least of the principal part of this southern range of the Abbey itself; in a shield carved at the base of a now ruined niche on the fifth buttress from the south transept, and displaying the armorial bearings of Abbot Andrew Hunter. (See woodcut, copied from a photograph and casts.)

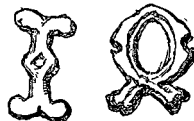


These consist of two Abbot's crosiers in saltire, with a stringed hunting-horn below the heads of the crosiers on each side, and, what appears to have been overlooked, possibly from the decaying surface of the stone, one also in base; it also displays the rose in the middle chief point, and a mason's mallet, *Scottice* "Mell," on the base point of the shield, a device for the name of Melrose; his initials (A. H.) are on the shield, one on each side, below the hunting-horns; and two draped figures of angels, and not mermaids as they have been described, carry the shield between them, supporting it with their hands on each side, the raised wings of the angels being distinctly seen running back on the sides of the sculpture; and something like the remains of a crown is placed under the

point of the shield, thus supporting it on the buttress below. This Abbot Andrew Hunter was confessor to James II., and filled many important offices from 1448 to 1460: he held the office of Lord High Treasurer of Scotland from 1449 till 1453.*

All the masonry to which I have been referring appears to be of a closely similar character, and excellent style of workmanship. After this point, however, it immediately becomes much inferior as we proceed more to the west, the sculptures being poor in design, and badly executed; and at its termination in this direction we have the only date, as far as I am aware, that exists on these ruins, in a large tablet, with the Royal arms of Scotland sculptured on it in high relief, planted in a moulded panel, on the front of the eighth or westmost and terminating buttress.

As this stone is now wasting fast under the action of the weather, it may not be considered out of place to give a detailed description of these arms, which consist of the lion rampant of Scotland displayed on the shield, within its floriated double tressure; over it an open royal crown, above which there is the remains of a scroll, showing apparently the letters . . . FENS: the termination of the inscription IN DEFENS: The shield is supported by the unicorns on each side; their left fore-legs extended up the sides of the shield, and the right with the knees meeting in the middle, immediately under it, support the shield below, the feet being bent back to the body; the horns of the unicorns are ringed, the necks encircled with the crowns, from which depend the chains passing round the body, and terminating behind in the large ring; the tail of each unicorn being brought between the hind-legs, and curled upwards towards the back. Above the head, and outside the horns of the unicorns, we have on the right side the letter I, and on the left the figure four, the ancient form of the fourth figure, being the initials of Jacobus IV. (See woodcut copied from photograph and cast.) The letter I is now so much wasted, that it appears to be on the point of dropping from the surface of the stone; in fact, it adheres to the tablet merely by its lower extremity, and to all appearance cannot stand the effects of the first frost. Between the unicorns below, we have the crumbling remains of the raised wings and head of an angel or cherub, carrying in his arms a smaller shield, now utterly defaced; and to the right side of this shield, the mason's "mell" or mallet, and at the left, the rose of Melrose; while across the base of the tablet there is cut in ornamented letters the date ANNO DNI 1505. (See the woodcut, copied from a cast of this inscription.) A moulded



* *Vide* "Morton's Monast. Annals of Teviotdale."

string course, ornamented with sculptured leaves, runs across the front of the buttress below the tablet, and gives a graceful finish to the whole.



On examining the southern range of the Abbey, the only apparent change in the character of the building, and style and character of the carving, which I have been able to detect, seems to take place just beyond the fourth buttress to the west from the south transept; or rather at the spring of the moulded arch of the window beyond; and the fifth buttress in this direction is the one which displays the shield of Abbot Hunter. The shield, as well as the upper part of the buttress itself, seems evidently to belong to the older and finer character of the building towards the transept, the lower part, from the appearance and colour of the stones, being probably more modern; so that one is naturally tempted to conclude that this chapel, the fifth from the transept, with its terminal buttress, bearing Hunter's arms, had been the last belonging to the older building; the restoration of which had been completed, we may suppose, in Abbot Hunter's time; shall we say from its previous partial destruction by King Richard II. in 1385. This chapel had in all probability been afterwards partially damaged or destroyed under some of those outrages to which the Abbey was occasionally subjected by our southern neighbours; and had been again repaired or rebuilt at the last restoration of the Abbey; with the addition of the chapels extending still farther to the west, terminating with the eighth or westmost buttress, on which the Royal arms are displayed, bearing the date of 1505. The different appearance of the stone of this later addition is rather striking, the sandstone being much more uniformly of a darker and redder character; and on inspecting these chapels from the inner side, next the nave or interior of the Abbey, we find the fifth chapel combining the styles of masonry of both the older chapels to the east, and the newer to the west, proving that it had at least undergone extensive restorations and repairs. This is curiously and manifestly shown in the courses of hewn stone that fill up the space between the mouldings of the arches over the pillars of these chapels, and the additional moulded arches above. We have first the richly-moulded arch springing from the enriched capital at the top of the pillars of the chapels on each side, and above it a flatter arched moulding, which springs from the central shaft of each pillar, and forms in this way an upper mantling or double arch. Now the hewn courses

of stones filling up this space in the older arches are all laid horizontally, one beyond another, like ordinary coursed masonry, without any regard to the curve of the arch, as we see them in the arches towards the east, and in the one half of the arch of this fifth chapel itself, from the fourth pillar up to the centre of the arch; while from the top of this arch and down its corresponding side to the west, that is, to the top of the fifth pillar, the stones are laid side by side, with their sides cut vertically, and arranged to suit the curve of the arch, like the stones of an arch itself; and this latter arrangement is carried on without variation in all the chapel arches to the western extremity of the building; manifestly showing in this way a change, both in the style of the building itself; as well as in the inferior character of the design and execution of the sculptured or decorative portions of this the newest part of the edifice, which had been brought to a conclusion in 1505, as shown in the inscription on the tablet below the Royal arms of King James the Fourth.

The range of chapels to which I have been referring (one of which was used as the school in the boyish days of my grandfather), would appear never to have extended beyond this western extremity, the masonry on the outside of the gable being entirely free from all traces or stains of lime, and giving no appearance of a damaged or broken wall; and projecting stones, or tusks as they are called, are left in the wall above, to enable the masonry to be continued onward when desired; and, strange to say, the nave itself appears never to have been completed, as the western pillars have the portions of the unfinished moulded arches projecting towards the west, with masonry built out horizontally over them, to protect them from injury, showing apparently that the arches were not finished at the time they were built; and the wall above has also a series of unbroken tusks or stones projecting regularly from its western extremity, to enable the building to be carried on still more to the west, at some future opportunity; proving that the last renovations of the building had been incomplete, or perhaps that facilities had been left for the greater enlargement of the pile at some future opportunity, which apparently never occurred; and that its present state was not caused by any destructive agency, at least at this part of the Abbey. These facts as to the unfinished state of the building to the westward, which appear never before to have been noticed, were pointed out to me by my father, Mr James Smith, who first observed them when amusing himself taking sketches of the Abbey, upwards of sixty years ago.

To the westward of these unfinished arches of the nave the bases of three square pillars of simple coursed masonry, without any ornamental mouldings, have been exposed, running outwards from the line of the northern range of the pillars of the nave, towards the west. This would show a continuation of building further to the westward, though of a totally different and apparently

more recent character than the nave itself; and no bases of pillars corresponding to them have been found in a line with the southern pillars of the nave.

I may refer also to a peculiarity in the nave, which was pointed out to me by my friend Mr John Smith, architect, Darnick, and that is, the peculiar rounded or rather flattened segmental character of the arches of the clerestory windows next the interior of the abbey, immediately above the arches of the south side of the nave, and over which there runs an ancient moulded string course ornamented with carved leaves. These peculiarities may puzzle any one attempting to define the different styles of architecture in the Abbey, but are dependent entirely on an alteration of comparatively modern date, to suit the spring of the modern roof—the corresponding windows of the north side, which are partially hid behind the modern wall, added to support the roof when the Abbey was used as the parish church (and which now partially fills up and defaces the nave), still remaining of the ordinary Pointed character of the rest of the building. And the ornamented string course had apparently been taken from some other part of the Abbey, probably from the outside, and been added to the interior when this modern wall was built.

The comparatively recent character of some parts of this Conventual Church is also shown in rather a curious way in the richly decorated cloisters, where the present walls appear to have been founded on, or at least partially to cover, the tombstones of a previous generation. I refer especially to the east wall of the cloister, which forms also the western wall of the north transept; under it we find numbers of sepulchral stones showing black-letter inscriptions, and portions of incised figures, apparently crosses, &c., peeping out below the base of the wall, and between it and the earth now collected above the old surface level of the cloister yard. These partially seen inscribed stones, have long seemed to me a tempting subject for antiquarian exploration; but before any thing can be done in this direction at all satisfactorily, a considerable clearance of the present surface soil would require to be made. Still it is much to be desired that some means were taken to gather up any stray gleanings of information that may be lying hid in this way, as an addition either to the history of the Abbey itself, or of those old indwellers in the district whose remains, or at least whose sepulchral stones, now lie so closely around its walls.

Another circumstance may be noticed, which was also pointed out long ago by Mr James Smith, and that is, the cool manner in which these masons of the olden time, with all their skill, apparently made alterations or remedied mistakes. This is shown in the front wall of the Abbey, on each side of the great door of the south transept; between the mouldings of the doorway, and the buttresses at the sides, where you find appearances leading you to believe that the building of the doorway and the walls at each side had been carried on at the same time from

different points, and the planes of the walls had been projected too far forwards, and, accordingly, did not suit the line of junction with the doorway. To remedy this defect on the east side, they simply run a bevel across the surface of the wall, three inches in depth (the difference of the projection), so as to join the correct plane of the wall at the door, and the line of this bevel is carried perpendicularly upwards to the moulded string course below the great south window, which it breaks by its projection. On the west side of the doorway again, the projection appears not to have been so great, and the mistake had apparently been discovered before the wall had been built so high; here, therefore, they remedy it by bevelling down the projection on the side, to the lower plane of the rest of the wall, and the bevel is returned horizontally along its upper part, in the line of the other stone courses, making the projection on this side to appear like part of a raised panel.

In conclusion, returning again to John Morow, I may state, that from these inscriptions in the transept wall, and the position which they bear to the rest of the building, I am inclined to believe that, under his "kepyng," the finest and perhaps most ancient part of this southern range of the Abbey, instead of mere modern restorations and repairs, had in all probability been executed. It would be interesting, therefore, by a careful examination of the Chartularies of the churches and abbeys mentioned in the inscribed tablet, and other old records, such as the Chamberlain's Rolls, to ascertain whether any notices might be gleaned respecting JOHN MOROW, to whose genius as a Master Mason, or Architect, so many of our old Scottish buildings may have been indebted for their architectural order and beauty; and, may we not suppose, that having concluded his various works with Melrose Abbey, some friendly hand had there placed his final stone of memorial, as a record of his labours.



(Sketch from Arms of James IV., *vide* p. 171.)