

## III.

NOTES ON A SCULPTURED STONE FOUND IN THE WALL OF THE SOUTH TRANSEPT OF ST NICHOLAS CHURCH, ABERDEEN. BY ALEXANDER WALKER, Esq., DEAN OF GUILD, ABERDEEN, F.S.A. SCOT. (PLATE X.)

The fire which destroyed the East Church of Aberdeen in October 1874, destroyed also the old stone tower and wooden spire of St Nicholas Church, and the peal of bells that hung there; of some of these bells a good deal may yet be told.

Architectural requirements, it appears, demand that the fine old arches, which, if not the oldest architectural remains in Scotland, are certainly among the most venerable in the north-eastern counties,—should be taken down in order that proper foundations should be got for the new granite tower and spire that is about to be built. During the progress of this work, in taking down the unsafe masonry of the wall above the old arches, several bits of mural architectural work of an older date than that in which they were encased were discovered. Among the rest, on the afternoon of the 13th February 1877, the workmen came upon a sculptured stone in the wall, about 37 feet from the present level of the floor of the transept, and about 8 feet from the spring of the western arch. The stone was built into the wall as a common building stone, and imbedded in lime. When cleaned, it was found to be, for its age, in a most excellent state of preservation. It is composed of a somewhat coarse-grained red sandstone; is about 3 feet 10 inches long, by 1 foot 6 inches broad at one end, and 1 foot 3 inches at the other, and 4 inches thick. A piece is broken off from one end; indeed, little more than a half of it has been preserved. The edge is bevelled with a hollow moulding. Round the border runs an inscription in an old type of the letter generally known as the Lombardic character, a letter seldom used for monuments after the middle of the thirteenth century. The inscription is incomplete; what is preserved of it reads

AM QUE QUODE : S : PRO ME PRECOR ORA +  
VIDES : STA : PE GE : FLORA : +

And at the narrow end IN PACE, which ought, perhaps, to be read in connection with

REQ VI  
ES CAT

which is inscribed, in the same character, on two voids unfilled with ornament on the centre of the stone. It is noticeable that these words are cut bottom upwards to the cross. This circumstance might suggest that they were a modern addition to the rest of the inscription; but judging from the character and form of the letters themselves, there seems no good reason for this supposition. The inscription is doubtless one of those commonly put on such monuments of the period we have indicated. The monkish rhymes want only seven words to make them the well-known

*“ Quisquis eris qui transieris, sta, perlege, plora  
Sum quod eris, fueram que quod es, pro me precor ora.”*

“ Whosoever thou be who mayest pass by,  
Stand, read, weep.  
I am what thou shalt be, and I  
Have been what thou art.  
I beseech thee, pray for me.”

Curiously enough, in our mural example these lines are transposed, and the spaces between the words are but indifferently attended to. But such variations were by no means uncommon at the period, when the workmen were no doubt illiterate, and working from a copy couched in a language they did not understand. “Vides” takes the place on the St Nicholas stone of “eris” on a brass at Thore, in Wiltshire, commemorative of John Bettesthorpe, lord of the manor of Chadenwyche, of date 1398.<sup>1</sup> There is a figure in armour on the brass, and the letters are in the old English character, a much later style than those on the stone under review.

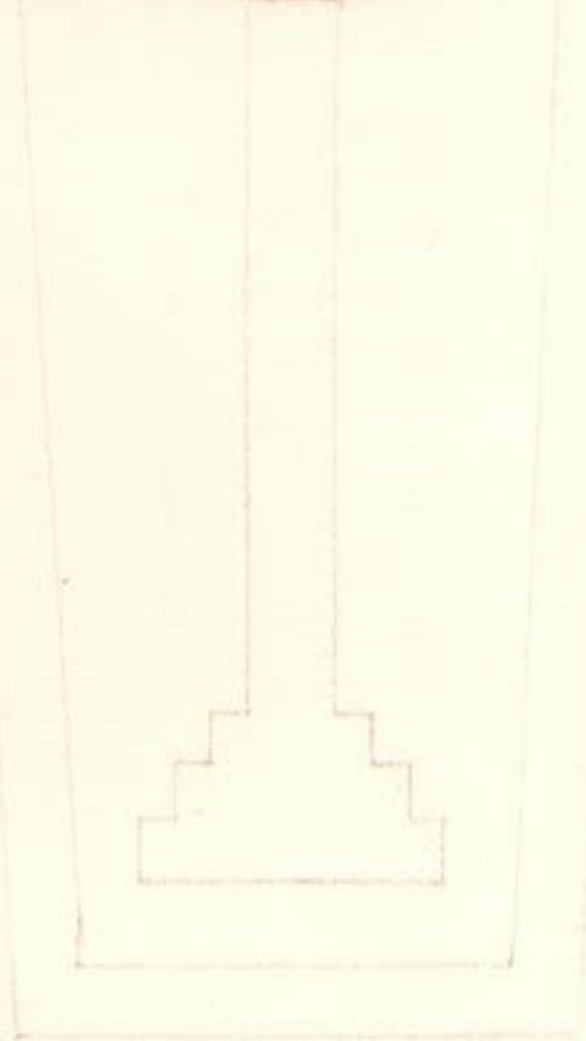
If we surmise rightly as to the inscription, the stone when complete must have been from 6 feet 9 inches to 7 feet long, and this would completely agree, as we shall see presently, with the figures which are wanting at its broad or lower end.

The ornamental work which covers the centre of the stone is in low

<sup>1</sup> Haines' Monumental Brasses, vol. i. p. 140.

relief. It is more common on English slabs and brasses than on Scottish examples, although there are one or two stones in the southern counties which have a strong affinity to it in general pattern; notably one lying in the old burial ground at Inveraray, in Argyll, which will, we understand, be afterwards brought under the notice of the Society. It has a cross somewhat similar in form with ornamentation, and a pair of "shears," but it had never been intended to have any inscription, although the letters *M F* and the date 1755 have been barbarously cut over the ornament, and some other additions made when it had been appropriated as a tombstone by some Highland magnate. Other examples exist at Hanbury, Staffordshire; Rushen, Isle of Man; Bakewell, Derbyshire; and several other old English sites. At the top is a conventionalised cross, with rosettes of different patterns filling in the spaces round the arms. On each side of the stem are spaces filled with ornament of that peculiar style common on such illuminated manuscripts as the books of Deer, Durrow, and others of that early date. Below this we have the head of a two-handed sword, surrounded by ornamentation, and on one side is seen what is no doubt the head of a dagger. The three dots as ornament, which are perhaps twice represented on the fragment, once below the cross, and again above the handle of the dagger, are curious, and indicative of an early date. They have been pointed out on thirteenth century slabs at Jersey, and considered emblems of the Trinity. They also occur in illuminated MSS. of the eighth and ninth century. That part of the stone is broken away on which the blade of the sword and its accompanying ornamentation had been cut; but if the stone had been long enough to contain the whole inscription, as given above, it would have admitted of the sword being completed of the usual length. The stone has evidently been broken at a very early date, and there are marks of its having been clasped with iron at some time, but this had been long prior to its being appropriated by the builders of St Nicholas as a makeshift in a common rubble wall.

The illustration (Plate X.) is reduced from an inked rubbing from the original, carefully collated and corrected afterwards with the original stone, which will be preserved in the restored aisles of St Nicholas. The other sketch shown on Plate X. is from the fragment of the top of an old coffin slab found in the same place.



IN ST NICHOLAS CHURCH,  
ABERDEEN.

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