

THE TOMB OF ST. HUGH AT LINCOLN.

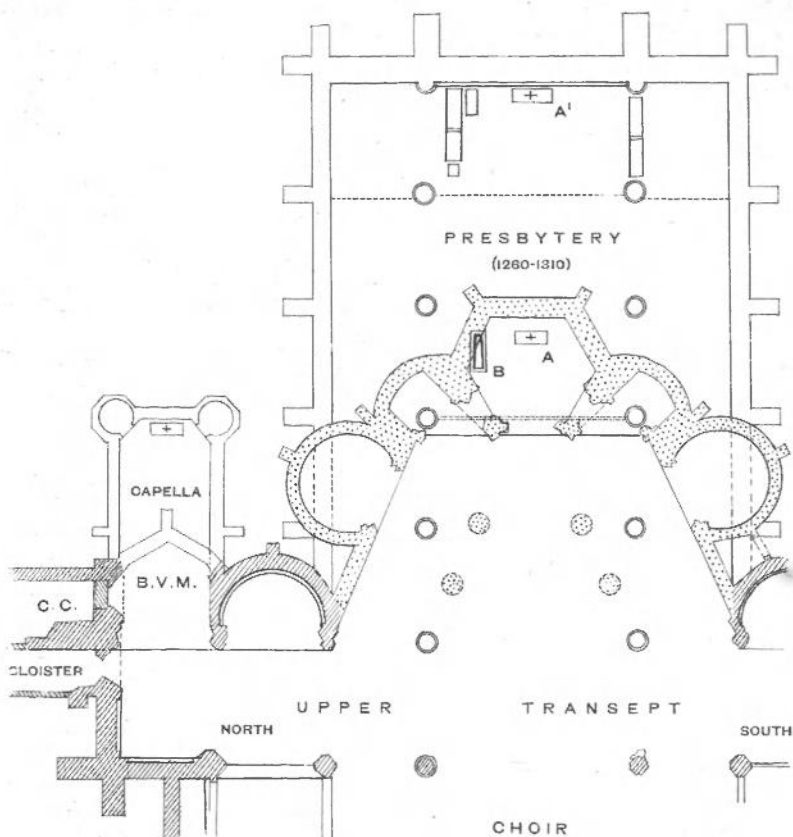
By T. J. WILLSON.

In vol. I., p. 37, of this journal, which appeared last summer, Precentor Venables, the skilled antiquary and accomplished ecclesiologist, whose words always deserve attention, has unfortunately adopted, as though it contained a fact, an erroneous statement made by the editor of the *Magna Vita* (Rolls series, No. 37), and has therefore impaired the credit otherwise so obviously due to his most interesting essay on *The shrine and head of St. Hugh of Lincoln*. The Precentor is not the first to have been misled by the marginal note on p. 377, stating that—"he was buried . . . on the northern side of the church," for we read in what Canon, now Archdeacon, Perry tells us of the burial in his well known *Life of St. Hugh of Avalon*, and elsewhere, that he places the tomb on the northern side of the church.

The lengthened researches of the learned editor, the late Canon Dimock, his pains and minute observations in elucidating obscure words and passages, render it painful to raise an exception, when it is probable that fatigue consequent on failing health is the true reason for any lapse of critical attention.

It is however time that a protest should be made against what bids fair to become the adopted view, and lest the old traditions which assigned dedications to certain altars being ignored, the entire plan and disposition of the church should become vague, instead of gaining the certainty we all desire.

Three short passages in the *Magna Vita* containing all that refers to the site of the burial may be noticed as most pertinent. On pp. 338-9, the author gives St. Hugh's words, where he is to be buried in the mother church of his diocese dedicated to the Mother of God, not



LINCOLN MINSTER. BURIAL PLACE OF ST. HUGH.

- A ALTAR OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST, A.D. 1200.
A' " " " " C. 1280.
B COFFIN OF ST. HUGH.
C.C. "CAMERA COMMUNIS."
PARTS OF THE CHURCH C. 1200
FOUNDATIONS ONLY

Scale 40 feet to an inch.

far from the altar of St. John Baptist. Again, at p. 340, he points out once more his holy patron's altar as the place of his burial, with a caution lest his tomb, as too often occurs, occupy too much of the floor of the chapel (*loci*), and be a stumbling block and a danger to those approaching, therefore he was to be placed where there seemed to be a fitting space, near to some wall. Again, at p. 377, occur the words:—"He was buried as he had instructed us, near the wall, not far from the altar of St. John Baptist, and as seemed most fitting, because of the people coming in crowds—*a boreali ipsius aedis regione*—that is to say, on the gospel side of the altar, or on the northern side of the chapel itself; so may we conclude certainly that the northern side of the church, *i.e.*, of the edifice at large, is never in question.

Before speaking of the northern apse, it may be remarked of the entire eastern transept and choir—barely completed in the year 1200—how striking is the entire work and as to the former especially, how suggestive. Its north and south arms bear marks of more than one successive change and alteration, and all leads to the idea that Gilbert de Noiers was an architect of genius wrestling with new ideas as they crowded upon him. He was one of the earliest after the final abandonment of the round arch to hasten the new style in its progress, in its aspiring outline and its subordinate parts, by designing piers, arcades, windows, buttresses and the sculpture and mouldings adorning them, with originality and consistence. The ground plan—all we have left to us—of the eastern end was probably a novelty and unique in its day: there need be no difficulty in attributing it exclusively to the mind of St. Hugh's architect. Should a resemblance however close be found to exist elsewhere, the claim of originality may nevertheless be bestowed equally on each of two artists working in parallel lines from similar points of departure.

The novel assumption that the northernmost apse must be the chapel of St. John Baptist, considered whether as possible or probable, seems equally without warrant. No record tells us it was so and looked at structurally, it appears more than doubtful if it ever could have been a

chapel: a glance at the plan is enough to confirm this. An important doorway with many shafted jambs enters into it from the "common room" immediately to the north, so that clerks and choristers coming thence to choir, would of necessity make a sort of vestibule of this apse, and perhaps a "vestiarium" as well; while, for an altar there seems no sufficient or reverent space, and a tomb of course would add seriously to the difficulty.

Whatever purpose this apse was put to, it lasted but for a short period; we find the doorway walled up with careful masonry characteristic of the earliest decades of the thirteenth century, perhaps executed when the curved wall was removed and the deep rectangular chapel carried out eastward, as is conjectured, not later than 1220.

This larger chapel, described by Bishop Sanderson and others as the *capella beatae Mariae Virginis*, and thus figured on Hollar's plan, doubtless had this dedication: it was reputed to have been fitted with stalls and was known continuously by its title until the "improvements of the period" required its destruction, more than a century ago. It is true the phrase "Lady chapel" is not seldom applied by writers to the eastern portion behind the high altar of most of our large churches—at times correctly, but not so in regard to Lincoln, and the words must often be taken to have no special or accurate meaning, but rather as convenient where definite information is wanting. The identity of the Lady chapel being so well known that of the Baptist is now equally so: it needed only the discoveries of November, 1886, to demonstrate palpably what tradition had told us.

The place of honour, the high altar of course excepted, given to St. John was the central eastern chapel, until its removal down to its foundations when the new presbytery was completed, after which we naturally find that this altar again occupied the chief position under the great window of the new square east end, as is recorded in the book of chantries (*Liber Cantuariarum*). Here, to its left hand, stood not many years later the tomb of Queen Eleanor; and at the altar itself were founded chantries for her, for Edward II., his Queen Isabella, and for various lesser personages.

Thanks to the action of the Dean and Chapter in

having the pavement taken up, and the consequent discovery among the exposed foundations of Gilbert de Noiers' design in the "capicium," the head or termination of St. Hugh's church, the massive stone coffin with its inner one of lead was laid bare and all doubt of what we are to understand in reading the *Magna Vita* disappears. The coffin occupies the very place of its original situation where the bishop's body was deposited at the funeral, and where after an interval, being inspected, both lead and stone were solidly sealed up to protect the contents from curiosity or theft, although these precautions, as we learn, were forestalled by the eagerness of those who snatched pieces of the vestment as the funeral was on its way to Lincoln. A few years, or perhaps months only, seem to have elapsed before the venerated remains were taken up from their double coffin, leaving those where they still are: the body being then newly enclosed and placed within a tomb of marble above the level of the floor. Thus the first translation would virtually have been effected and the injunctions of the papal bull anticipated by the ardour of the faithful.

Though the dates of the miracles recorded seem wanting we are indebted to Mr. Dimock for pointing out that the cure of John Burdett, following upon many other instances, occurred in 1206; it is not therefore difficult to imagine that a shrine, or a costly chest of some sort was early in existence, and before the canonization in 1220. As to its position we are justified in supposing that it never varied; such seems to have been the regard paid to the saint's dying injunctions that, instead of being placed centrally, as in many notable instances the shrine, even when adorned with the costliest art, still stood over the original grave; thus it would seem the "translation" was not a removal from one part to another, but merely raising the remains vertically above the site of the coffin. The cramps which showed where the iron trellis was attached to the floor no longer exist, but the engraved plan and the words "north of Dallison's tomb" remain as evidences, a part only it may be, of such as satisfied the pious Bishop Fuller when he erected the marble cenotaph over the spot where the massive stone coffin reposes to this day.

It may in conclusion be satisfactory to the many who are attracted by whatever concerns our cathedral churches and their uses, to find there is less complication surrounding the facts of St. Hugh's obsequies and the translation of his remains, than seemed to be likely, owing to the difficulty of reconciling certain local facts with an unintentional literary error affecting the narrative bequeathed to us by Adam the biographer.