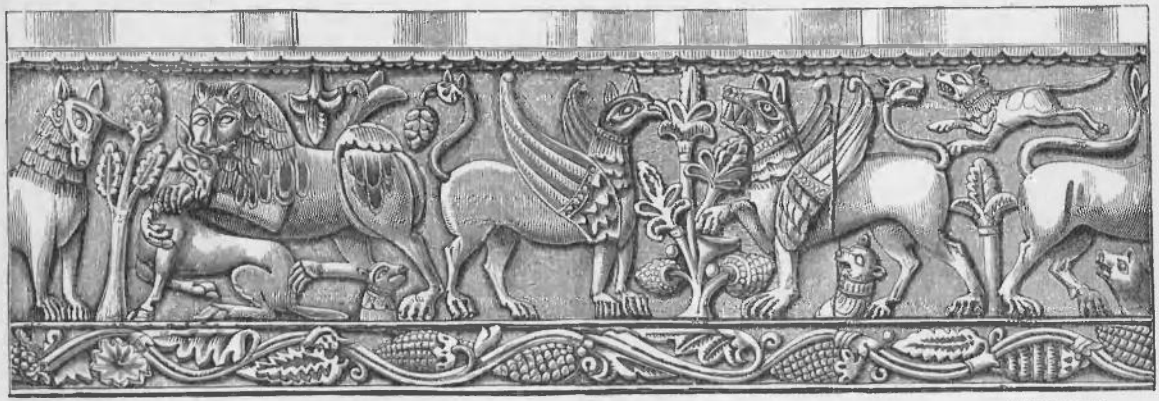

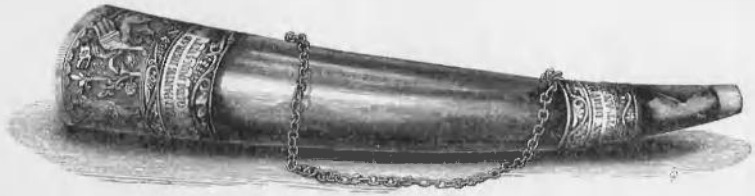

Sculptured Ivory Tusk, in the Treasury, York Minster. Length (outer curve), 54¾ in. Diameter of the mouth, 5 in.

The Archaeological Journal.

MARCH, 1869.

THE HORN OF ULPHUS.

By ROBERT DAVIES, F.S.A.

THE accounts which have hitherto been given of the interesting relic preserved in the Treasury of York Minster, called the Horn of Ulphus, are far from being satisfactory or complete.[1] This history of an object which is not only singularly curious in itself, but is associated with a remarkable tradition of great antiquity, seems to be worthy of a more exact and critical investigation.

The traditionary story, as it has been current in the Church from a very early period, is to the effect that a large portion of the territorial possessions of the See of York were bestowed upon St. Peter, before the Norman Conquest, by a wealthy Anglo-Danish chieftain called Ulf, the son of Torald, and that he used the horn which bears his name as the symbol or instrument of endowment.

The earliest historical notice we possess of this tradition is found in a Latin poem preserved among the Cottonian manuscripts in the British Museum, which professes to be an account of the lands given to the Church of York by

[1] The Horn of Ulphus was engraved by Virtue in 1718, and given by the Society of Antiquaries in the Vetusta Monumenta, vol. i. pl. 2, from a drawing by B. M. The two inscriptions on silver bands attached to it in 1675, by Henry Lord Fairfax, when it was restored to the Dean and Chapter, and replacing those of gold, as alleged, with which it was formerly enriched, are given on Virtue's plate. An engraving, on a very reduced scale, was also published in Drake's Eboracum, in 1736, p. 480; the horn has likewise been figured in the Historical Guide to York Cathedral, by the Rev. G. A. Poole, and Mr. Hugall, in 1850. It has recently been given amongst the admirable illustrations of the Handbook to the Cathedrals of England, Northern Division, part I., pl. ix., p. 83, by Mr. R. J. King. The Institute is indebted to the kind liberality of Mr. Murray for the accompanying illustrations, executed for that beautiful work by the late Mr. Orlando Jewitt.

King Athelstan and others.[2] It contains the following lines :—

"Consul et insignis Eboracensis Comes, Ulfus,
Prædia prebendis prebuit ille sua ;
Tradens ex Ebore Cornu Petroque sigillum,
Investituram constituit solidam.
Cornea buccina, candida, lucida, testificatur
Munus et eximium largifluum Comitis
Sanctus et Edwardus Rex, Confessor venerandus,
Omnia confirmat, et recitando probat."

In these stanzas we have the tradition set forth with much circumstantial precision. Ulf, the benefactor of the church, is described as a distinguished earl and ruler in Yorkshire ; the horn is spoken of as the instrument of investiture, and its beauty is extolled ; and the gifts of Ulf to the church are said to have been confirmed by King Edward the Confessor.

It is not known that the traditionary story appeared in any printed book of an earlier date than Camden's Britannia. In the original editions of that celebrated work, which were published towards the close of the sixteenth century, we find the following passage :—

"Tunc etiam multis et magnis beneficiis ecclesiam Eboracensem principes cumulaverunt, precipuè Ulphus Toraldi filius (ex veteri libro adnoto, ut rara quædam consuetudo in dotandis ecclesiis elucescat). Dominabatur Ulphus ille in occidentali parte Deiræ, et propter altercationem filiorum suorum senioris et junioris super dominiis post mortem, mox omnes fecit æquè pares. Nam indilato Eboracum divertit, et cornu quo bibere consuevit, vino replevit, et coram altari Deo et beato Petro Apostolorum principi omnes terras et redditus flexis genibus propinavit. Quod cornu ad patrum usque memoriam reservatum fuisse accepimus."[3]

In Holland's translation of the Britannia, first published in 1610, the passage is thus rendered :—

"Then it was also that princes bestowed many and great livings and lands upon the church of York, especially Ulphus, the son of Torald. (I note so much out of an old book, that there may plainly appear a custom of our

[2] Cott. MS., Cleopatra, c. iv. p. 25. The age of this MS. it is not easy to determine. Most probably the verses are the production of the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

[3] Britannia, third edit., London, 1590, p. 571; edit. Gough, 1806, vol. iii., pp. 243, 306.

ancestors in endowing churches with livings.) This Ulphus aforesaid ruled the west part of Deira, and by reason of the debate that was like to arise between his sons the elder and the younger, about their lordships and seigniories after his death, forthwith he made them all alike. For without delay he went to York, took the Horn with him out of which he was wont to drink, filled it with wine, and before the altar of God and blessed Saint Peter prince of the Apostles, kneeling upon his knees he drank, and thereby enfeoffed them in all his lands and revenues. Which Horn was there kept as a monument (as I have heard) until our father's days." [4]

I propose to inquire how far the truth of this tradition, which has been accepted by the Church for many centuries, is capable of being established by authentic evidence.

It appears from the Domesday Survey that in the reign of Edward the Confessor an English thegn, bearing the name of Ulf, held large territorial possessions in various parts of that division of the kingdom of Northumbria which was afterwards called Yorkshire, and that a considerable portion of these possessions had, at the time of the survey, become the property of the See of St. Peter of York, but in what manner or at what time the possessions of Ulf were acquired by the Church is not stated in the survey, except in a single instance, in which it is recorded that Ulf gave six bovates in Stanegrif [Stonegrave] to St. Peter.[5]

From the same unimpeachable record we learn that numerous manors and a large extent of territory in various parts of the East Riding of Yorkshire, which are classed under the general title of *Terra Archiepiscopi Eboracensis*, were at the time of the Conquest held by Archbishop Ealdred, but the name of the previous owner is not mentioned. By other evidence we ascertain that these manors and lands had also been among the vast possessions of Ulf.

In a survey of the county of York taken in the reign of King Edward I., commonly known as Kirkby's Inquest, certain manors and lands in the East Riding, which in Domesday Book are stated to be held by Archbishop Ealdred,

[4] "Britain, or a Chorographical Description of England, Scotland, and Ireland: written first in Latine by William Camden, Clarenceux K. of A., translated newly into English by Philemon Holland, Doctour in Physick:" Fol. 1610. p. 704. E.

[5] "In Stanegrif tenuit Ulf vi. bovatas. Idem dedit S. Petro.'

were found by the inquisition to be then the property of the Church of York, and opposite to the description of them are placed the words "*de dono Ulfi.*" Thus, if the information afforded by the Conqueror's survey respecting the gift of Ulf to the church be but slight, it is very materially supplemented by the inquisition taken before John de Kirkby about two centuries later, the record of which is acknowledged to be second only in value and importance to the great Domesday Book itself.[6]

But whatever may have been the extent of Ulf's benefaction to pious uses, it is certain that the wealthy thegn did not endow the church of York with the whole of his lands and revenues. He neither impoverished himself by his liberality to St. Peter, nor did he disinherit his sons. Ulf himself retained the manor of Crathorne in Cleveland, and other manors and estates in that district of Yorkshire, as well as the manor of Aldborough and other possessions in the East Riding of the county. The two sons of Ulf, whose names were Archil and Norman, are styled in Domesday Book thegns of the king. In the time of Edward the Confessor, Archil held Thoraldby,[7] Faceby, Goulton, and Marton, in Cleveland; and his brother Norman held Ayton, in Cleveland, besides Upsall, Hinderwell, Rousby, Lackenby, Marske, Upleatham, and Wilton, all places in the same district; and even this enumeration does not include all the territories held by the sons of Ulf in Yorkshire. It will be observed that among the lands of which Archil was the proprietor the name of Thoraldby [Toraldesbi] occurs. This place, which is now an obscure hamlet within the parish of Stokesley, must have been originally the seat of a person bearing the name of Torald. It is situate in the centre of the large estates in Cleveland which were held by Ulf and his sons. This fact seems to contribute to confirm the accu-

[6] Kirkby's Inquest, edited with remarkable care and industry by Mr. R. H. Skaife, of York, has been recently published by the Surtees Society. Vol. 49. 1867.

[7] In that part of the East Riding where St. Peter of York held divers lands *de dono Ulfi*, there is another Thoraldby [Turaltbi], which at the time of the Domesday Survey was held by a king's thegn called Game, who is also returned as holding in Lilling, in the North Riding, what had previously belonged to Ulf, and as having possessed lands at Ugthorpe in Cleveland, and jointly with Ulf and Orm, at Sutton-upon-Derwent, in the time of Edward the Confessor. In this reign, Orm, a king's thegn, was the joint possessor, with Archil and Norman, the sons of Ulf, of lands at North Dalton and Whitwell-on-the-Hill, and he held the manors of Ormesby and Kildale in Cleveland in 1086.

racy of the tradition as to the paternity of Ulf, the benefactor of the church of York.

A century and a half after the publication of the "Britannia," Mr. Samuel Gale, a learned antiquary, son of Dr. Thomas Gale, Dean of York, wrote "An Historical Dissertation upon the antient Danish Horn kept in the Cathedral Church of York," which is printed in the first volume of the Archæologia.[8]

Mr. Gale, adopting implicitly the facts of the tradition which are embodied in the Cottonian manuscript and repeated with additions in the Britannia, attempts to give an illustration of them by the following fanciful statement:— "Ulphus," he says, "being a Dane, governed in the western part of Deira, where, and in the city of York itself, he held large possessions, probably the rewards of his military exploits and courage in assisting Cnut to reduce and conquer these northern parts, and who, having the example of his royal master before him, might from thence be induced to make the like princely donation; the time I take to have been a little after the death of King Cnut, which happened in 1036, when that controversy arose between the sons of Ulphus about sharing their father's lands."[9]

Mr. Gale was unquestionably mistaken in assuming that the Ulf of the tradition was the same person as the illustrious Dane of the time of King Cnut, whose descent and alliances are well established historical facts. Ulf, the great Danish jarl, was the son of Thurgills Sprakaleg. His wife, Estrith, was the sister of King Cnut. His own sister, Gytha, was married to the English Earl Godwine.[1] Unhappily, Ulf gave offence to King Cnut, his brother-in-law, and by that monarch's orders he was cruelly murdered at Roskild in Denmark, soon after the Danes were defeated by the Swedes at the battle of Kelga in the year 1027.[2] Although Ulf Jarl was one of the most distinguished characters in the Danish history or romance of the time, it is said that in English history he scarcely played any part.[3] His wife Estrith, the sister of Cnut, bore him three sons. The eldest was the famous Swend Estrithson, afterwards king of the

[8] Archæologia, vol. i. p. 168.
[9] Ibid., p. 172.
[1] Lappenberg's Anglo-Saxon Kings, by Thorpe, vol. ii. pp. 203, 236.
[2] See Freeman's Norman Conquest, vol. i. p. 476.
[3] Ibid., p. 467.

Danes. Of the two younger sons, Biorn was murdered by his kinsman Swegen, the son of Earl Godwine, in 1049,[4] and Osbion the other was banished.

In the year 1778, Mr. John Charles Brooke, Somerset Herald, communicated to the Society of Antiquaries "An Account of a Saxon Inscription remaining in the Church of Aldbrough in Holderness, in the East Riding of Yorkshire."[5] In this inscription the name of Ulf, who was lord of the manor of Aldbrough, is commemorated as founder of the church; and in attempting to identify him with Ulf, the benefactor of the see of York, Mr. Brooke falls into the same error as his predecessor, Mr. Gale. He entertains no doubt that Ulf, the great Danish jarl, who, he says, lived in the time of the Confessor, and probably died in his reign, was the person who endowed the church of York with his lands. Mr. Brooke, however, whilst admitting the general authenticity of the tradition, ventures to impeach its accuracy in one important particular. Upon the authority of the Domesday Survey, he maintains "that the whole of Ulf's fortune was not given to the see of York, but that some of it remained to his sons, who probably were deprived of the greatest part of their possessions at the Conquest, for, when the survey was made, Aldbrough belonged to Drogo de Bruere, to whom the Conqueror had given the whole territory of Holdernesse."

Mr. Brooke further asserts that Ulf left two sons, one of whom, named Styr or Stirre, became a rich citizen of York, and the other, William, in after times had a liberal grant from King Henry I. of lands in the East Riding in the neighbourhood of the estates which belonged to his father.[6] It is obvious that Ulf, the father of Styr, was not the benefactor to the church of York. The Chronicle of Simeon of Durham contains a charter by which Styr, the son of Wulf or Ulf, gave the town of Darlington and its appendages to the church of Saint Cuthbert, and this grant was afterwards confirmed by Styr in the presence of King Ethelred, Ulstan the archbishop, and other great men then assembled at York. It seems impossible that Ulf, whose son endowed the church of Durham whilst Ethelred was on the throne, was the same person as Ulf the son of Torold, who was living

[4] Anglo-Saxon Chron. Transl. p. 139.
[5] Archæologia, vol. vi. p. 59.
[6] Archæologia, vol. vi. p. 39.

more than seventy years after the reign of Ethelred had terminated.[7]

There is no reason to suppose that Ulf, the son of Torold, whose possessions contributed so largely to enrich the metropolitan see of the north, was a person of any historical importance. His name denotes him of Scandinavian origin, and the Domesday Survey ascribes the rank of thegns of the king both to him and to his sons. But neither in the Saxon Chronicle, nor in Domesday Book, nor in the Codex Diplomaticus of Mr. Kemble, nor in the Diplomatarium Anglicum Ævi Saxonici of Mr. Thorpe, is to be found a person described as Ulf the son of Torald. The only Englishman at this period who bore the name of Thorold,[8] was a wealthy thegn who was sheriff of Lincolnshire, and founded the priory of Spalding; but there is no reason whatever to suppose that the benefactor of the church of York was his son. As witnesses to charters in the reign of King Edward the Confessor, the names occur of Ulf the son of Tofus, minister; Ulf of Lincoln, minister; and Ulf the bishop, a Norman priest, to whom the Confessor gave the see of Dorchester;[9] but none of these can be identified with the Yorkshire thegn.

Although the preceding investigation shows that the traditionary history of the acquisition by the church of York of the *Terra Ulfi* and the *Cornu Ulfi* is, in some points, inaccurate, no facts have come to light in the course of the inquiry which tend to throw any discredit upon the popular account of the manner in which the act of endowment was performed by the wealthy thegn. The horn used as the symbol or instrument of transfer and investiture which is said to have been the pious benefactor's ordinary drinking vessel, yet remains in the possession of the venerable guardians of the church, and is preserved by them as one of the oldest and noblest of their title deeds.[1]

We are told that the warriors of the north, in ancient days, drank from horns. Drinking-horns are mentioned in documents of the tenth and eleventh centuries, and were

[7] See Simeonis Dunelm. Hist.; Gale's Scriptores X. col. 80, 29; Leland's Collect., vol. i. p. 377; Surtees Soc., vol. 51, pp. 150, 155.

[8] He was the brother of the Lady Godiva, famous in legend.

[9] See Codex Diplom., vol. iv.

[1] See Fabric Rolls of York Minster, by the Rev. Canon Raine. Surtees Soc., vol. 35, p. 86 and note.

used as appendages of the banquetting table until a much later period.[2]

It is well known that the practice of transferring land by the delivery of a horn or some other portable object prevailed in mediæval times. A few examples are well authenticated, and the symbols used are yet in existence, as the Pusey horn, the Borstall horn, and some others.[3] This custom must not be mistaken for that which is called the tenure or service of cornage, which involved the performance of certain duties or service by the holder of the land, with which his possession of a horn was associated. The object used as the symbol of the transfer of land was regarded as an important muniment of title, but "had no further connection with the tenure of the land, or the services due from it."[4]

The identity of the curious relic, called Cornu Ulphi, which is now in the Treasury of York Minster, rests entirely upon the tradition. The church is unable by documentary evidence to trace her possession of it to any period antecedent to the fourteenth century. But that it had long previously been an object of great interest appears from the form of the horn having been sculptured in stone upon the walls of the Cathedral, in parts of that structure which are known to have been commenced before the year 1300.[5] John Newton, who was installed treasurer of the church in 1393, and died in 1414, was at the cost of decorating the horn with ornaments of silver-gilt, a fact which is recorded in an Inventory of "all the jewels, vessels of gold and silver, and other ornaments, vestments, and books, in the custody of the sub-treasurer of the church," drawn up soon after the commencement of the sixteenth century, and containing the following entry: "Unum magnum cornu de ebore ornatum cum argento deaurato, ex dono Ulfi filii Thoraldi, cum zona annexa, ex dono magistri Johannis Newton, thesaurarii."[6] The account of the custodian of York Minster for

[2] Archæological Journal, vol. ii. p. 261. These horns, as well as such as were used in the transfer of land, were the horns of animals common in the locality, as the ox, the deer, &c.

[3] See Archæologia, vol. iii. p. 1.

[4] See a Dissertation upon the Tenure or Service of Cornage, by Francis M. Nichols, Esq. Archæologia, vol. xxxix. p. 349.

[5] A sculptured shield of the imaginary armorial bearings of Ulf (6 lions rampant, 3, 2, and 1), with a figure of the horn beneath it, is placed above one of the arches in the nave, and is repeated in the choir.

[6] Fabric Rolls of York Minster, Surtees Soc., vol. 35, p. 223.

the year 1481—2, contains the entry of a payment of seven shillings to John Girdler, "pro j. zona pro magno cornu et j. quart. et di. velveti pro eodem cornu et pro factura ejusdem zonæ."[7]

The Cornu Ulphi differs from all the known examples of horns which were used either as drinking vessels, or as symbols of the transfer of land, in the tenth and eleventh centuries. It is not, strictly speaking, a horn. It is the tusk of an elephant, having its surface decorated with sculptures, executed by no mean artist. The art of carving for ornamental purposes was practised at an early period by the Scandinavians, the material they chiefly used being the tooth of the walrus or sea-horse.[8] In the reign of King Cnut, the game of chess, a favourite amusement of the Danes, was brought into England, and the carved pieces used in playing the game were composed of that substance.[9] In the former half of the eleventh century, Harold Hardraad, king of Norway, received a present from Greenland, consisting of, amongst other things, a set of chess-men, exquisitely carved. The connection of the Scandinavian countries with the far east is said to have been established as early as in the eighth century, and continued until after the conquest of England by the Normans.[1] Ivory and other precious productions of Asia would be brought by the Arabian merchants who visited the coasts of the Baltic, and would thus become known to the Danes, and other nations of the north. Hence it is not surprising that the tusk of the monster of the Asiatic jungle should be in the possession of a wealthy Englishman of Scandinavian descent living in the eleventh century, or that the best attainable skill should be employed in the decoration of an object of so much rarity and value.[2]

The most curious specimens of Scandinavian workmanship now known are the chess-men which were found in the

[7] Ibid., p. 124. A chamberlain's roll for the year 1371, records a payment of 10*s.* to five canons present at the celebration of the obit of Ulf. This obit, the editor says, was always observed, but the date of its foundation is not known.

[8] Archæologia, vol. xxiv. p. 244.

[9] Ibid., p. 281.

[1] Worsaae's Danes and Norwegians, p. 103.

[2] No example of a drinking vessel formed of the tusk of an elephant, of earlier date than the sixteenth century, is noticed by Mr. Hudson Turner. Archæological Journal, vol. ii. p. 261. Ivory hunting horns, with ornaments sculptured in the North of Europe, are said to be preserved in Hungary, and the possession of one specimen is attributed to a Hungarian chief of the tenth century. Ibid., vol. viii. p. 101.

Isle of Lewis in the year 1831,[3] and another object, supposed to be a chess-man, which was found among the ruins of Kirkstall Abbey, about forty years ago.[4] They are formed of the tusk of the walrus, and elaborately carved by artists who were probably of the 11th or 12th century. The carvings do not present any similarity of type to those which decorate the Cornu Ulphi, and are inferior to them both in design and execution. The peculiar character of the ornamentation of the Cornu Ulphi is very remarkable. A border about 4 inches broad, carved in low relief, encircles the upper or thickest end of the horn or tusk. The design represents four principal figures. Two of them, facing each other, have between them a tree bearing palmated leaves, and fruit in the shape of a cone. One of these is a gryphon, a fabulous creature, with the body of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle. The other monster has the body of a lion with the wings of an eagle and a head resembling that of a wolf or dog. The tails of both are borne erect, and each terminates in the head of a wolf or dog. The other two principal figures have between them a smaller stem of the same description of tree or plant, with a single cone at the top. One of the animals is a lion of the ordinary type in the act of grasping and devouring a fawn or young deer. The other represents a monster having the body and mane of a lion with the head of an antelope armed with one horn, and its tail terminating in the head of a wolf or dog. The heads and collared necks of three wolves or dogs are rising from the base of the circle, and in the upper part is seen a similar animal in the act of running. A band beneath the principal circle, and two narrower bands round the smaller parts of the horn, are ornamented with scrolls composed of the stem, leaves, and fruit of a plant or tree similar to that represented in the principal design.

These carvings bear the impress of oriental art and feeling. The gryphon and other monsters resemble, both in form and mode of treatment, the fabulous creatures represented on several of the Nineveh sculptures. The conventional forms of the stem, leaves, and fruit of a tree are not unlike those of the sacred tree which occurs so frequently

[3] Archæologia, vol. xxiv. p. 203.

[4] See Mr. Albert Way's notices, Arch. Journ., vol. iii. p. 139, and vol. vi. p. 170, in which this and similar objects are described and illustrated with his wonted elegance and perspicuity.

upon the Assyrian marbles. Perhaps it may be thought that the grotesque caudal extremities of some of the monsters bespeak the taste of the Gothic rather than of the Oriental artist; and, indeed, examples are not wanting of similar extravagancies in Scandinavian art.[5] The introduction of so many repetitions of the animal resembling a wolf may be allusive to the name of the owner of the horn. The English word by which we now designate that ferocious quadruped has been transmitted to us from præ-Norman times, and is found in most of the northern dialects with varying orthography.[6]

[5] See Archæological Journal, vol. xv. p. 281.

[6] Danish, Ulv. Woulf.; Swedish, Ulf; Icelandic, Ulfr; A.-S. Wulf.