

## THE ROYAL TOMBS AT WESTMINSTER.<sup>1</sup>

Report of the substance of an Address delivered by Mr. EDMUND OLDFIELD, M.A., F.S.A.,  
at the Monthly Meeting of the Institute, on July 2nd, 1869.

IN 1854 the House of Commons granted 2500*l.* for "the repair of the Royal Monuments" at Westminster; but no steps were taken for applying this grant till the formation of the present Ministry. Mr. Layard, to whom Archæology and Art had so often been indebted for valuable services, was then appointed First Commissioner of Her Majesty's Works and Buildings, and in that capacity represented the Government in the administration of any funds the Treasury might now allow for undertaking the long delayed operations. He at once opened the question to the Dean of Westminster, who, as official guardian of the Abbey and all its treasures, warmly responded to any efforts conducing at once to the better preservation of the monuments and their more favorable exhibition, two objects which he held it his duty, as far as possible, to pursue in common. A meeting was accordingly convened, on April 12, 1869, of persons particularly conversant with such subjects. Besides Mr. Layard and the Dean, it included Mr. G. G. Scott, R.A. (the architect of the Chapter), Mr. E. B. Stephens, A.R.A., Mr. James Ferguson, then one of the Secretaries at the Office of Works, Dr. Percy, the eminent chemist, Mr. A. W. Franks of the British Museum, and two or three other gentlemen. After a careful inspection of the Royal tombs, they resolved unanimously on two points. 1. That measures ought to be taken to arrest the dilapidation of the monuments from any remediable defects of structure, such as the rusting of any iron fastenings, or decay of any of the materials. 2. That the monuments should be carefully cleaned with detergents.

<sup>1</sup> In consideration of the great public interest now attaching to the question of the proper preservation of our Regal and Historical sepulchral monuments, it has been thought advisable to print the

report of Mr. Oldfield's address in the form of a distinct paper, instead of merely incorporating it in the customary abstract of Proceedings at the Monthly Meetings of the Institute.

known to be innocuous, such as soap and water and ammonia; but no acid or chemical agent to be applied. These operations were to be conducted by Messrs. Poole and Son, the experienced masons employed by the Chapter. Before commencing them, however, Dr. Percy was to analyze the black filmy coating which concealed the gilded surface of the effigies and metallic ornaments, and ascertain how far it was connected with the substance beneath it. It was resolved to begin by cleansing the monument of Margaret, Countess of Richmond, in the south aisle of Henry VII.'s chapel; afterwards to proceed to the larger and more complex tomb of Henry VII. and Elizabeth his Queen, which needed not only cleansing but repair.

[Mr. Oldfield here briefly related the history and described the structure of these two monuments, referring to some contemporary manuscripts and antiquarian books in which they were mentioned.]

The experiments of Dr. Percy at once determined that the black coating was not a natural cuticle of the metal, but simply a concreted deposit of foreign matter, such as coal-smoke, animal grease, and dust. Accordingly, the Treasury having authorised the expenditure of a sufficient sum through the First Commissioner of Works, the monument of the Countess of Richmond was dealt with in manner agreed on, that is, first washed entirely with soap and water, and then the metal parts cleansed with spirits of ammonia. The proceedings were the means of bringing to light three interesting facts, which time, neglect, and ill-usage had concealed.

1. On removing the effigy, which lay unfixed on the tomb, there was found a thin plate of copper gilt, which had slipped underneath, beautifully decorated with portcullises and love-knots in pounced diaper-work. The form of the plate and the position of its rivet-holes showed it to have originally covered the marble top of the sarcophagus or chest of the tomb, on the left side of the figure, and a similar decoration, now lost, had evidently bordered the figure on the other sides.

2. The cushions beneath the head appeared, when cleaned, to be diapered all over with portcullises, fleur-de-lys, Tudor roses, and pomegranates,—an enrichment which, if known to the initiated, had certainly long been invisible to the ordinary eye.

3. On the application of soap and water, the face, hands, wimple, and ermine edging of the mantle were found covered with the remains of pigment, originally no doubt of proper colours, but now all turned nearly black. On these portions no further process of cleansing was attempted.

Parts of the monument, which may be seen in the plate in Sandford's "Genealogical History," are irrevocably lost, including the coronet from the Countess' head, much of the canopy and supporting pilasters of the tabernacle which encloses her figure, and one of the escutcheons from the north side of the sarcophagus. The black marble or touchstone of the sarcophagus itself is in perfect condition; and the greater part of the gilding with which the metal was covered is not merely preserved, but radiant as when new.

Work was next commenced on the great monument of Henry VII. and Elizabeth. On the preliminary inspection it had been apparent, from the opening of a horizontal joint between the bottom of the cover and the sarcophagus or chest, that the former was being lifted up by the corrosion of some iron fastenings within, a force which no superincumbent weight could resist. Unless this were remedied the whole monument was threatened with disintegration and ruin. Consequently it was indispensable to open the sarcophagus. Scaffolding was accordingly constructed, with the aid of Mr. Scott, by which, under the personal inspection of Mr. Layard and the Dean, the two effigies, as well as the slab on which they lay, were raised and carried over the enclosing screen into the eastern apse, where photographs were allowed to be taken of them. The interior of the tomb was thus exposed and its construction ascertained. Iron fastenings were found to have been unfortunately used in two places in immediate contact with marble; first, in cramping together the pieces composing the white marble cavetto immediately below the covering slab; secondly, and still more injuriously, in making four thin flat plates, one at each corner of the sarcophagus, immediately above its cornice and below the cavetto, which plates extended diagonally into the interior, so as to supply fixings for the pins by which the four angels seated above them were secured. [Mr. Oldfield here exhibited diagrams made by Mr. Poole, explaining the details of the construction, and also some detached pieces of the rust, nearly a quarter of an inch thick, which was found above and below

the iron plates.] The whole of these iron fastenings have since been cut out, and others precisely similar in size and shape, but of copper, have been substituted for them. At the same time the decayed wooden washers under the nuts at the inner ends of the bolts by which the metal pilasters of the fronts are held in position were replaced by pieces of stone.

The tomb thus being made secure, it remained to cleanse the surfaces of the marble and the metallic parts by the means successfully applied to the tomb of the Lady Margaret. Owing to the discovery there made of pigment, Mr. Oldfield was desired by the First Commissioner personally to watch the cleansing of the two royal effigies; but notwithstanding the most careful observation, no traces of paint anywhere appeared. Though the modelling of the figures showed the same hand as the Lady Margaret, the surface embellishment was generally less rich, doubtless from the position not admitting the same close inspection. There was no metal plate under the effigies, and no part was diapered. The gilding, however, both on the effigies and the bas-reliefs and decorations of the tomb, was generally better preserved than on the other monument, having been more protected from public contact. The substance also of the monument, and in a less degree that of the enclosing screen, were generally in good condition, though in so large and complex a structure it is not surprising that many details, which it would be tedious to enumerate, have been lost.

The cleaning of the screen was then (July, 1869), still in progress.

The principal discoveries made were inside the tomb, which to all appearance had never before been opened. Its only contents were a gilt stud, with a glass jewel, from the crown of one of the effigies, probably broken off before the covering slab was fixed, and a small bronze ornament, and a piece of ruby glass, apparently not connected with the monument at all. The internal flooring displayed exactly the same workmanship and the same level as that without the tomb, indicating that the whole area was originally finished independently, and the monument placed on it afterwards. This pavement is, of course, better preserved in the interior, and shows an elegant pat-

tern of black marble, divided into lozenges, which are frosted with a tool, and each enclosed within a band, which is polished. But perhaps the most curious discovery was that of a name rudely cut on a stone worked into the brick lining of the sarcophagus.<sup>2</sup> The inscription may be read as "*scfmedolo*," i. e. *Franciscus* or *Francesco Medolo*, doubtless the name of a mason employed in the construction. He was perhaps brought over from Florence by Torrigiano, in the expedition in which that artist unsuccessfully tried to enlist the services of Benvenuto Cellini.

The proceedings here described had been strangely misrepresented in some letters and paragraphs in the press. Of the two kinds of work done, repair and cleaning, the former had hitherto escaped criticism, perhaps only because it was not yet generally known. But the cleaning of the metal—especially on the Lady Margaret's monument—had called forth various complaints, all alike unfounded. First, it was asserted in a weekly periodical that the whole of the metal had been regilt. When this was disproved, it was alleged that the escutcheons at least had been deprived of the heraldic tints which it was assumed they originally had. Why the colour should have been removed from the escutcheons, where it would probably have been an improvement, yet scrupulously retained on the effigy, where in its present state it is certainly not ornamental, was never explained. There is, however, no evidence in early books or engravings for the former existence of any colour on the armorial decorations; whilst the monument itself, now clearly displayed, sufficiently disproves it to the eyes of any competent observer. For the escutcheons are covered with plate-gilding the same in quality and mode of application as that upon the effigy, and evidently original. Had the artist intended to colour them, he would have left them ungilt, like the tinted parts of the effigy, and any subsequent removal of the pigment would have laid bare merely the ground of copper.

Another weekly periodical, the principal and generally very valuable organ of literary, scientific, and artistic intelligence, had indeed avoided any important misstatement of facts, but had applied to the real facts a nomenclature

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Oldfield exhibited at the Meeting a plaster cast of this inscription.

which had the same effect as misstatement. It had throughout described the operations on the Lady Margaret's monument, though limited to the cleansing which has been here explained, as "restorations." As well might it be alleged that the Elgin Marbles were "restored," when they were cleaned some twelve years since. To "restore," it need hardly be said, is to supply something which is lost ; to *cleanse*, is to remove a special something which, as a late statesman expressed it, is "in its wrong place." In like manner, the same periodical, with equal persistency, described what had been taken from the surface of the metal as "patina." Yet the merest tyro in archæology knows that gold never has a "patina." The whole of the metal here was gilded, and the black coating which had formed above it by the aid of the London atmosphere was altogether foreign to the monument itself. To apply therefore to what really was only *dirt* an unfamiliar and improper Latin name could serve no purpose but to darken knowledge, and mislead the public judgment.

The propriety of the cleaning Mr. Oldfield maintained both on archæological and artistic grounds. Its value to the antiquary was proved by the several interesting features of the monuments which it had recovered from oblivion. Of its artistic results it sufficed to say, that now first, after many generations, it presented the work of the sculptor as he intended it to be seen. Could any one seriously suppose that if it were possible now to refer the question to Torrigiano himself, he would prefer his handiwork to be kept concealed under a modern veil of soot and grease ?

The only plausible objection Mr. Oldfield had heard was, that the general harmony of tint which previously existed in the Abbey was broken by the splendour which two monuments had now resumed. Undoubtedly it was but too true that not only in the Abbey, but throughout London, dirt was more in harmony with surrounding tints than cleanliness. But the remedy was to be found, to borrow a recent political phrase, in "levelling up." Let at least all the monuments within such a precinct as the Abbey be freed from needless impurities by such harmless agents as had here been used, requiring only patience and gentleness in their application. Once properly cleansed, they would, at

any rate for many years to come, require nothing but dusting with a feather brush. And the building being now constantly warmed, their surfaces would condense less moisture from the atmosphere than formerly, and consequently be less tenacious of any floating impurities deposited upon them.