



The Roman Sarcophagus, discovered November, 1869, in the North Green, Westminster Abbey.

(Length, 7 ft. ; height of the cist, 18½ in. ; thickness of the cover, 6 in.)

OBSERVATIONS ON THE ROMAN SARCOPHAGUS LATELY
DISCOVERED AT WESTMINSTER.

By the Very Rev. ARTHUR PENRHYN STANLEY, D.D., Dean of Westminster.

IN November, 1869, the Green on the north side of Westminster Abbey was lowered, under the direction of Canon Prothero, in order to render the ground less unsightly. It was also hoped that some traces might be found of the pit in which the bones of the illustrious persons buried in the Abbey during the Commonwealth had been buried after their disinterment at the Restoration. The ground at that time had been occupied by two prebendal houses, which with their gardens occupied this part of the North side of the Abbey, and the pit is described as having been situated in the back-yard of one of these houses. It is uncertain whether this spot has been found. The whole ground, however, was filled with remains of human bodies, and it is possible that a spot, where they seemed to have been thrown together in more than ordinary confusion, may have been the grave containing the remains of no less persons than the mother of Oliver Cromwell, the famous Admiral Blake, and the Prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly. But in the course of these proceedings another discovery was made, wholly unexpected, and equal in interest to any which recent excavations have produced, not only in Westminster Abbey, but in the whole metropolis.

Under the remains of some ancient walls, immediately beneath the surface, was found a massive stone coffin, covered with a stone lid, and having, on one of its sides, an inscription of incised letters of the best and most refined forms of the Roman character.

I was absent at the time in Italy, and the coffin was not fully excavated nor opened till my return from Rome, when, on arriving in Westminster, the first tidings that greeted me was the discovery of a monument belonging to the same

epoch and nation as the great city which I had just quitted. It was then opened in the presence of myself, the Canons in residence, Mr. Gilbert Scott, Mr. Franks, and Mr. George Scharf, who made a sketch of the whole scene. The bones which were found inside were those of a complete skeleton, that appeared to have been turned over on its face, and the skull was placed at the lower end of the coffin. There was nothing to indicate the rank of the person, nor in fact anything but the skeleton, with the exception of a few fragments of brick, apparently Roman brick, and a piece of dark grey slag-like substance, about four or five inches across, and this was evidently part of a large piece, being indented as though worn. Mr. Franks arrived at the conclusion that this was a portion of a lava millstone, brought from the neighbourhood of Andernach, of which many examples have been found on Roman sites in this country. There were also some few fragments of a pasty substance, like lumps of quicklime which time had reduced to a paste, as though the floor of the coffin had been strewn with quicklime.

I now proceed to examine the different questions suggested by this interesting discovery. The first and most solid ground of conjecture is the inscription, which is as follows :—

MEMORIAE · VALER · AMAN
DINI · VALERI · SUPERVEN
TOR · ET · MARCELLUS · PATRI · FECER.

This inscription has been submitted to various distinguished antiquaries both at home and abroad, amongst others to the Commendatore de Rossi and to Dr. Henzen, at Rome, to Professors Mommsen and Hubner at Berlin, and to Dr. McCaul at Toronto; it has also been inspected by Mr. Waddington of Paris, and an interesting letter has been received by Mr. Wylie from Padre Garrucci, who has entered with enthusiasm into the subject. I have also received much assistance from Mr. Joyce of Strathfieldsaye, whose attention has been directed to questions of this nature by his own excavations at Silchester. The result of these enquiries is as follows. The lettering of the inscription is so good as to induce the belief that it belongs to as early a time in the third century, as other circumstances will

permit. The circular O and the well formed M have been pointed out as peculiarly classical. The elongated I in VALERI and PATRI came into use in the time of the Dictator Sulla (*circa* B.C. 82—78), and continued to the middle of the third century; after which date it is said to have become extremely rare. But the appearance of the shorter i in AMANDINI would seem to indicate that this inscription must have been cut at the time when the purer form was beginning to degenerate. With this coincides the fact that neither Valerius Amandinus himself nor his sons have any prænomen. It seems that the practice of claiming the full Roman nomenclature of three names went out of fashion after Caracalla had granted the right of citizenship to the whole empire (A.D. 216). The word "Amandinus" is also not of the most classical form of Latin. It is in the reign of Alexander Severus that we find the beginning of these diminutives, such, for example, as Verecundinus for Verecundus. If these indications are correct, these data would all point to a period of the latter half of the third century. The form "Memoriæ," although unusual in purely classical inscriptions, is found in no less than forty-eight tombs in the collection of sepulchral inscriptions in the Lapidary Museum at Lyons, most of which belong to the age of the Antonines. They differ however in most instances from this, in having the letters D. M., "Diis Manibus," prefixed. One, however,—that numbered 548,—has not these letters, and begins thus, "Memoriæ æternæ." In coins it appears that the term "Memoriæ" is frequent at the date of Constantius Chlorus (A.D. 292—306), but not in other reigns.

The names themselves throw but little light on the matter. "Amandus," from which "Amandinus" seems to be the diminutive, occurs in one of the Lyons inscriptions.

But the word which attracts most observation is "Superventor." Its juxtaposition leaves no doubt that it is a proper name, like Marcellus, designating the eldest of the two sons of Valerius Amandinus. It occurs, as far as is known, once only in the ordinary literature of Rome. In Ammianus Marcellinus (xviii. c. 9), mention is made of a body of troops entitled Præventores and Superventores. The explanation given of these terms in Wagner's annotations on Ammianus (I know not on what authority) is that they were light-armed troops, the Præventores being em-

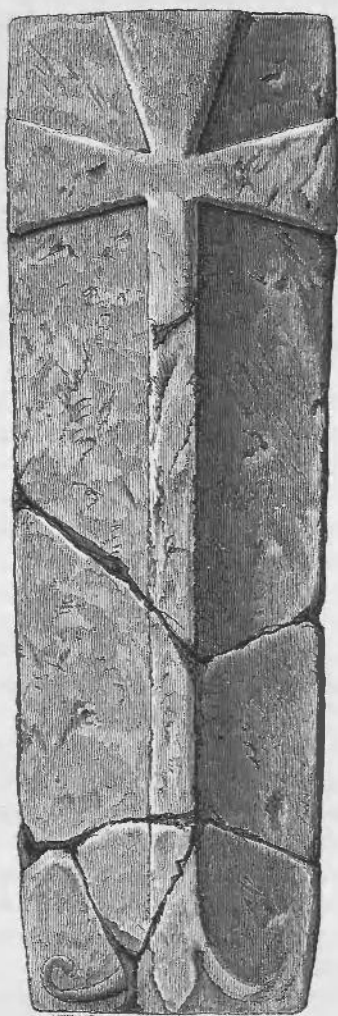
ployed as scouts, the *Superventores* as skirmishers and foragers. Mr. Black, in his ingenious discourse on the sarcophagus, delivered to the Middlesex Archæological Society, has pointed out four passages in the *Notitia Imperii*, where the word occurs, twice as "*Milites Superventores*," twice as "*Superventores Juniores*," but without further explanation. It is also found in the subscriptions of the Bishops to the first Council of Orange (A.D. 441; *Mansi Concil.*, vol. vi. p. 441), where, at the end of the list, appears "*Ego Supervisor pro patre meo et Episcopo Claudio subscripsi et recognovi*." It is in this place interpreted by Ducange as "proxy." But for this there is no authority. It would seem from the various readings in the text of the Acts of the Council that the word occasioned some difficulty, but there can be no doubt that here, as on the sarcophagus, it is a proper name. In mediæval Latin it is (as appears from Ducange) used for a "marauder" or "robber."

The most curious circumstance in the appearance of the word in this inscription is that so exceptional a military term should already have been converted into a proper name. This would combine with other indications in inducing us to place the inscription as late as the other data will admit.

Beyond these several conclusions it seems impossible to form any clue as to the character, history, or rank of this the earliest Magnate connected with the sepulchral history of our great national cemetery. Those who remember the interesting and ingenious romance of Mr. Lockhart, of which the hero Valerius was a Roman Briton, may, if they choose, figure to themselves, by a pleasing illusion, that this sarcophagus belonged to him or his descendants.

2. With regard to the decoration of the sarcophagus, it may be observed that the two shield-like ornaments (*peltæ*) which appear at the corners resemble exactly those we find on Roman monuments in the Northern counties and also repeatedly in Scotland, as figured by Gordon, Horsley, and in Mr. Stuart's *Caledonia Romana*, with the exception that on some of the Scottish and the Northumbrian monuments the heads of the shields are carved into the form of the heads of the Roman eagles.

3. The next question which arises is, whether the skeleton found within the sarcophagus belongs to Valerius Amandinus,



The cover of the Roman Sarcophagus found at Westminster Abbey.
 (Length, 7 ft. ; width, at the head, 2 ft. 5 in. ; at the foot, 2 ft. ; greatest thickness, 6 in.)

or is that of a second interment ? And this again branches out into three separate inquiries.

First, is the sarcophagus in its original position ? With all deference to the ingenious argument of Mr. Black, we must be allowed to doubt whether this is possible. It is evident that the coffin was framed with a view to standing against some wall or cloister, in which the front would be visible, and the roughly hewn back invisible. Such was not the position in which it was actually found ; and, further, the surrounding wall seemed to shew that it could not have been thus placed except through subsequent transportation.

Secondly, what is the date of the lid bearing the large cross carved in low relief ? That the lid itself is of the same epoch as the sarcophagus may seem probable, from the circumstance that they are of the same stone (*viz.* Oxfordshire oolite), as appears unquestionably from the examination of the inside, both of the lid and of the tomb ; but it is another question, whether the lid has not been carved by subsequent hands into the form of the cross, as it now appears. Mr. Joyce has produced coins of Galla Placidia (*c.* 417—423), in which a figure of Victory is represented as holding a cross of the size of the human form, and being nearly of the shape of this one ; and he argues, that before a cross so formed could have found a place on the reverse of a coin, it must have been already made prominent before men's eyes elsewhere ; and, if so, that it may have been sculptured on the receptacles of the dead. This, if it could be maintained, would give to the sarcophagus an unique interest, as being the only example belonging to a Roman Christian under the Cæsars, in Great Britain. This is almost too good to be true. I am bound to confess that if, with Padre Garrucci, we are compelled to limit the sarcophagus to the third century, the general impression of antiquaries has been against ascribing such an antiquity to a cross of this form. Not to speak of the well known fact of the entire absence of a cross in the Christian catacombs, the cross of this lid appears to be much more rudely hewn than the letters of the inscription are engraved ; and it has been alleged that the floriated shape of its foot indicates a mediæval origin. It is for antiquaries to determine how far down in the history of England this cross compels us to descend. It may still, perhaps, be thought that even if not belonging to the Roman epoch, it

indicates that the second interment was of an earlier date than any other of which we have proof in the precincts of Westminster Abbey. If it can be proved to be of an earlier date, so much the better.

Thirdly, there is the examination of the skeleton. It has been carefully handled by the two most eminent authorities whom it was in my power to consult. One was Professor Huxley; the other, who has had the opportunity of examining it at greater leisure and in greater detail, was Dr. Thurnam, of Devizes. Their conclusions, on the whole, agree. "The skeleton," says Dr. Thurnam, "is that of a young man, probably not more than thirty years of age, as appears chiefly from the teeth, which are of full size, the crowns all eroded, doubtless from the use of grain coarsely prepared. The upper wisdom teeth are still protected by their bony sockets; that on the right of the lower jaw has not long penetrated the gum; that of the left side has not been developed." This circumstance seems fatal to the identity of the body with that of Valerius Amandinus. The two stalwart sons, Superventor and Marcellus, who erected the monument, could hardly have been the children of the youthful possessor of these wisdom teeth. To whom the bones belonged must, therefore, remain unknown. But we can conjecture something of his appearance and of his character. "The thigh bones measure $18\frac{1}{4}$ in.; the leg bones 15 in. The length of these bones doubled, gives 5 ft. 7 in. for the stature of the man, which is likewise the probable conclusion indicated by Professor Humphrey's rule, that the proportion of the stature is to the length of the femur as 100 to 27.5. The bones are thick and strong, and are evidently those of a well-developed muscular man." Professor Huxley ventured to remark, "that, if they were the bones of a churchman and Christian, he must have been a very militant churchman, and a very muscular Christian." "The skull, for that of a male," as Dr. Thurnam states, "is exceptionally small; the forehead is shallow, low, and receding; the globella full and prominent. The occiput is in great part absent from decay; perhaps in consequence of a certain amount of lime having been thrown into the coffin. The sutures of the skull are far advanced towards obliteration. The skull has none of the characteristics usually ascribed to the Romans. In particular, it wants that peculiar square-

ness of the forehead and face which are usually seen in the Roman cranium. It might be that of one of the men who served as auxiliaries to the Roman legions, but it is far more probable that it belongs to a later period. It has a very mixed, or so to speak, mongrel aspect."

We must, therefore, conclude that whoever was the second occupant—although he may have been a giant in strength and form—he was far from being entitled, by breadth or height of intellect, to interment amongst the heroes of Westminster Abbey.

Dr. Thurnam has pointed out two passages in the history of the Venerable Bede which illustrate the use of a Roman sarcophagus for the interment of great persons in later ages. The one is Sebbi, king of the East Angles; the other is Etheldreda, the Saxon princess who founded the Cathedral of Ely.¹ It is related that Sexburga, her sister, wishing to give Etheldreda a more honorable burial, and finding in the marshes of Ely no stone worthy to construct a coffin, sent to Grantchester, probably a Roman station near Cambridge, where a well worked sarcophagus and lid had been found (the *Liber Eliensis* presumes almost by miracle), in which the bones of the sainted foundress were placed. This coffin, which was unfortunately destroyed at the time of the Dissolution,² was doubtless such an one as that of which we are now speaking.

The sarcophagus has been removed, first to the cloister, and then, for the sake of greater security, to the nave of Westminster Abbey. It is there placed in what is called the "Whigs' Corner," under the north-west tower, where it is hoped that it will be sufficiently protected from injury, and at the same time the public will be enabled to inspect at ease the oldest and the youngest glory of that great edifice.

¹ Bede, *Hist. Eccl.*, lib. iv. c. xi. and xix.

² Dr. Caius, who saw it at the time of the Dissolution of the monastery of Ely, speaks of it as being of very ordinary stone.

It was suggested by Dr. Rock that the interment of so eminent a person (as is implied by the sarcophagus) in so un-

usual a position as the north side of the abbey, may have arisen from his having been excommunicated.

Mr. Prothero called attention to the circumstance that the whole surrounding gravel was filled with bones, and also contained graves, lined with chalk, in the direction of the shrine.