THE OPENING OF THE TOMB OF BISHOP OLIVER SUTTON, AND THE DISCOVERY OF A CHALICE, PATEN, AND EPISCOPAL RING.[1]

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On the morning of Saturday, March 9th, 1889, the workmen engaged in repairing and partially relaying the pavement of the presbytery of Lincoln Minster, popularly known as the Angel Choir, preparatory to its being once more made available for purposes of worship, had occasion to raise the slab which was known to cover the grave of Oliver Sutton, who was Bishop of the See from 1280 to 1299. The position of the grave was under the second arch from the east end, on the north side, in a line with the recently erected cenotaph of the late Bishop Wordsworth, which occupies a similar place under the third arch. The slab covering Bishop Sutton's grave was one of very large size, measuring 12 ft. in length by 4 ft. in breadth, of Purbeck marble, which from its want of hardness and homogeneity had become grievously decayed and fractured. It is said, in Brooke's reprint of Sanderson's MS. catalogue of the sepulchral memorials in Lincoln Cathedral, taken before the devastation of the Great Rebellion, to have borne an inscription in Lombardic letters. Of this inscription, if it ever existed, all traces have disappeared. The covering slab being raised the workmen were led by a natural curiosity to pursue their investigations further than necessity required, resulting in the curious and interesting discovery which I am about to lay before the Institute.

Immediately beneath the slab was a layer of rough stones embedded in sand, below which lay slabs of the

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local Lincoln oolite, covering the grave as a lid, 1 ft. 7 in. from the level of the floor. The grave itself was an oblong rectangular stone chest constructed of dressed masonry, and, as already stated, covered with a stone lid. The dimensions of this chest were 7 ft. 3 in. long, 2 ft. 8 in. broad, and 1 ft. 10 in. deep. The whole of the interior was lined with sheets of lead, forming a shell containing the body. One sheet covered the bottom of the chest, rising up all round vertically to the height of 3 ins., and met by another sheet of lead running down the sides and covering the junctures, the whole being invested by a third sheet running all round the cavity from top to bottom. All the joints were carefully soldered. The whole aperture of the grave was covered by another horizontal sheet of lead, strengthened and kept in its place by four transverse iron bars, 1 ft. 6 in. apart, soldered to the lid by leaden "tabs," two to each bar.

On removing this last covering the skeleton of Bishop Sutton was discovered, in an excellent state of preservation, with the exception of the skull. The bones lay in the midst of a mass of decaying vestments, perfectly formless, having lost all that would indicate their material or texture. The flesh had completely decayed, leaving the bones bare. Though the skull had entirely disappeared, neither tooth nor fragment of bone remaining, a considerable mass of hair of a bright brown hue inclining to red, indicated the place where it had lain. Beneath it was a head-rest formed of a block of oak, 2 ft. by 6in., cased in lead supporting a mouldering woollen cushion.

The leaden receptacle shewed indications in the dark stain 2 in. deep all round, of the brine or other antiseptic liquid which had been poured in upon the corpse, upon closing down. The workmen informed me that the lid ran down with moisture when first opened.

To come now to the most interesting feature of this discovery. On the right side of the skeleton were a silver-gilt chalice and a paten laid on it as a lid, standing upright as originally placed nearly six centuries back. The vessels were covered with a piece of fine linen about 7 in. or 8 in. square, which, when first discovered, was hanging in graceful folds all round, the bright metal gleaming

through the rents time had made. On the admission of the air, the frail tissue soon fell to pieces. The chalice is of much the same shape and dimensions as that from Berwick St. James, Wilts, now in the British Museum, also of silver-gilt, which is figured in Mr. St. John Hope's memoir on "Mediæval Chalices and Patens," in *The Archæological Journal* (vol. xliii, p. 142). Its form is somewhat more elegant, the lower part of the stem below the knop having a more graceful concave curve. This chalice belongs to "Type A" of Mr. Hope's classification, to which he assigns the approximate date c. 1200—1250. These vessels are somewhat later in date, the bishop having died in 1299, but were probably of earlier construction, being almost certainly "massing vessels" not vessels expressly made for the purpose of interment with the corpse. The chalice stands $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. high. The bowl which is broad and shallow is 4 in. in diameter, and $1\frac{3}{8}$ in. deep. There is a slight quasi lip round its edge. The foot is circular, of the same diameter as the bowl. There is a bold knop to prevent the cup from slipping through the hand of the priest, projecting half an inch from the stem. The chalice was constructed of three pieces of metal, the bowl being soldered to the stem, and the knop with a ring below supporting it, riveted to it. The whole vessel is very carefully made, but is entirely destitute of ornamentation or symbol. The gilding is still brilliant on the inside of the bowl, but has disappeared from much of the outside surface of the vessel. From the carefulness of the fashioning of both chalice and paten, and from the solidity of their make, as well as from the preciousness of their material, Mr. Hope is of opinion that they must have been intended for use at the Sacrament of the Altar. The bishop probably had richer and more elaborate vessels for his customary use, but those now found would have been occasionally used by him. They almost certainly do not belong to the class of funeral vessels.

The paten is $4\frac{3}{4}$ in. in diameter. Both the inner and outer depression are circular, uncusped. In the centre of the inner depression is the *Manus Dei* issuing from conventional clouds, in the act of benediction. This symbol marks an early date. In later times the *Vernicle*

—*i.e.* the Face of the Blessed Lord—or the *Agnus Dei* were more in favour.

The ring had dropt from the finger, and was found between the legs of the skeleton. It is pronounced by an experienced jeweller to be of pure gold, 22 carats fine. After the dirt was washed from it it was as bright as the day it was first put on, and still bore marks of the burnishing tool. It is of large size, probably intended for the index finger of the right hand. The hoop is massive, circular in section, not at all flattened. It is joined to the bezil directly without any shoulder, or lateral spreading out. The bezil is large and massive, gabled in section, roughly oval in shape, adapted to the outline of the large piece of rock crystal with which it is set. The bezil is strengthened with four slender bands of circular section. A similar rim runs round it and unites it to the setting which encircles the crystal. The face of the stone is perfectly flat and highly polished. Mr. Hope writes, "the ring is clearly Oliver Sutton's ring, and not undertaker's stuff. The crystal may be a pale sapphire, or the bishop may have liked the crystal."

This is the third episcopal ring in the keeping of the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln. The other two are those of Bishop Gravesend, which has lost its stone, and of Bishop Grosseteste, which is set with a sapphire of fine hue. The chalices and patens found in the graves of these prelates, when opened at the close of the last century, are also preserved, with others, in the Cathedral Library.

On the left side of the skeleton lay the mouldering remains of a crozier. This was of wood, and was in the last stage of decay. Mr. Hadley was enabled to take photographs of the head of the staff, which was exquisitely carved with vine or maple leaves.

A few biographical notes of Bishop Sutton may not be out of place. He was originally a Canon of Lincoln, and was elected Dean in 1275. It is recorded of him as an unusual merit, that as Dean he kept residence at Lincoln. By the faithful and kindly performance of his decanal duties Sutton so completely gained the confidence and goodwill of his Chapter that on the vacancy of the See by the death of Bishop Gravesend he was chosen his suc-

cessor, *per inspirationem*, the choice being accepted by the king. He is described as *vir litteratus*, who being a regent in arts had studied canon and civil law, and had purposed to devote himself to theology, and proceed to the highest degree in that school had he not been elected Dean. Both as Dean and Bishop he proved himself a careful governor, both in temporal and spiritual matters. "Entirely averse from avarice" he caused all the fines and amercements paid to him by offenders against the ecclesiastical laws to be made over to the mendicant friars, poor nuns, and the poor and needy of the parishes where the offences had been committed, "not retaining a penny for himself." He never distressed the people of his manors with exactions or tallages beyond their legal dues, and distributed liberal alms to the more needy among them. To his Cathedral and his Chapter he was a great benefactor. He increased the Commons of the Canons, and for the protection of the Canons as they went to the nocturnal services, from evil disposed persons who had previously made the Close their rendezvous, he obtained the license of the King, Edward I., for the erection of an embattled wall round the Close, strengthened with towers and with double-gate houses at all the entrances to the precincts. For the use of the parishioners at St. Mary Magdalen, whose church had been pulled down by Remigius for the erection of his cathedral, and who had up to this time been accommodated in the nave of the Minster, Sutton erected a separate church, where its successor now stands, between the north-western gate-houses—the Exchequer Gate—of the Close. He also caused the cloisters to be erected, and commenced a college for the residence of the vicars, Senior and Junior, who had previously lived dispersedly, and not always very reputably, in different houses in the town. This "Vicars' Court," as it is termed, left unfinished at his death, was continued by his executors.

Bishop Sutton died during his attendance at Matins, in the Minster on St. Brice's Day, Nov. 13, 1299. He breathed his last as the choir were singing the last words of the Antiphon—

Iste confessor Domini sacratus
Festa plebs cujus celebrat per orbem
Hodie lætus meruit secreta
Scandere cœli.

Schalby, Sutton's registrar, to whom we are indebted for these particulars of the bishop, states that he had conversed with Sutton's confessor after his death, whose simple and emphatic testimony was "non possum negae quin justissimus, constantissimus et mundissimus homo fuerit."