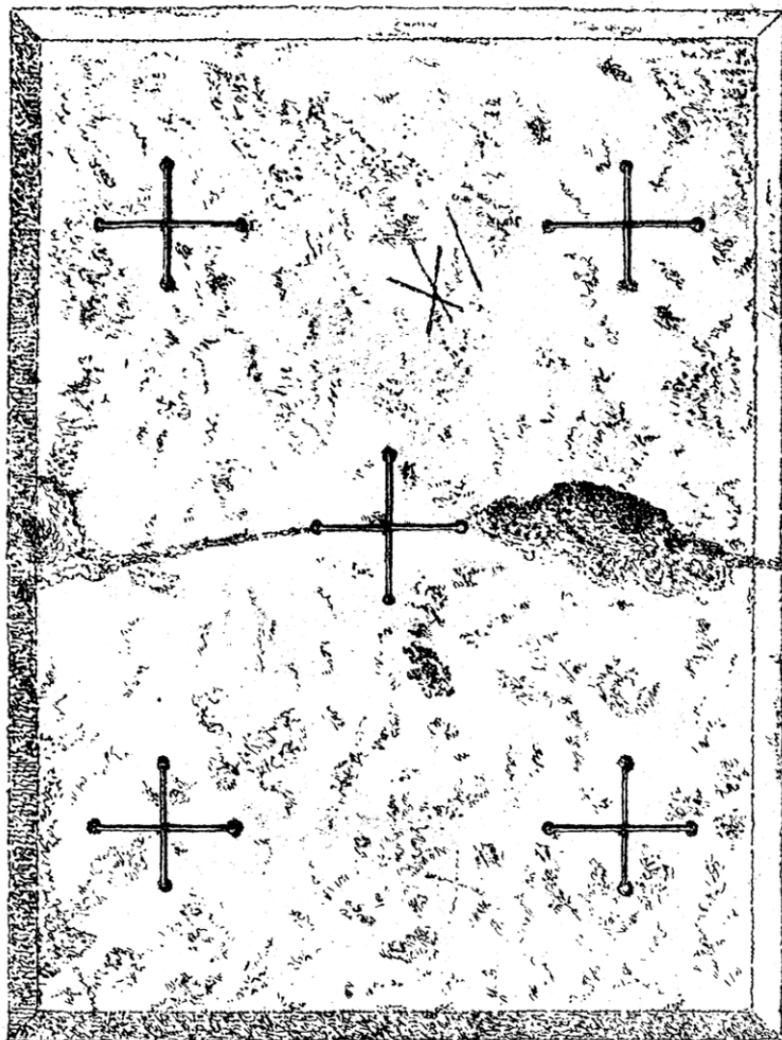


ART. XXI.—*On the probable use of certain Stones found in the Ruins of Calder and Furness.* BY THE REV. T. LEES.
Read at Furness Abbey, August 16th, 1877.

AT the visit of this Society to Calder Abbey in 1872, among other relics then stored in the cloister at the south side was exhibited an oblong slab of fine red sandstone, $10\frac{1}{8}$ inches long, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches broad, and three-quarters inch thick; the upper edge terminated by a bevel half-an-inch wide, and the surface ornamented with five incised crosses bourdonees placed one at each corner, and one in the centre. Some member of our party suggested that it had been used as a pavement tile in the sacarium; but there seemed to me no doubt that it was a super altar, or portable altar, and subsequent search into the subject has convinced me that the opinion I then expressed was correct. The crosses were used as emblems of our Saviour's five sacred wounds, and anciently placed on all altar slabs fixed or portable. It is, perhaps, worth while pointing out that in this example the particular form is the cross bourdonee, so named, Planche says, from its "terminating in single knobs or pomels, like the bourdon, or pilgrim's staff;" and the same form of cross is used in an early example of the Arms of Jerusalem, as a christian kingdom. Thus the form of these crosses throws our thoughts back to the times of the Crusades, when the prelates and priests who accompanied those expeditions would carry with them portable altars for the administration of the Eucharist to the church's warriors. In 1873, Mr. Charles Ferguson discovered a portion of another super altar built into a wall at the parsonage at Lanercost. This fragment contains three of the crosses, and is therefore rather more than half the size of the original slab, which must have been

11 $\frac{1}{4}$



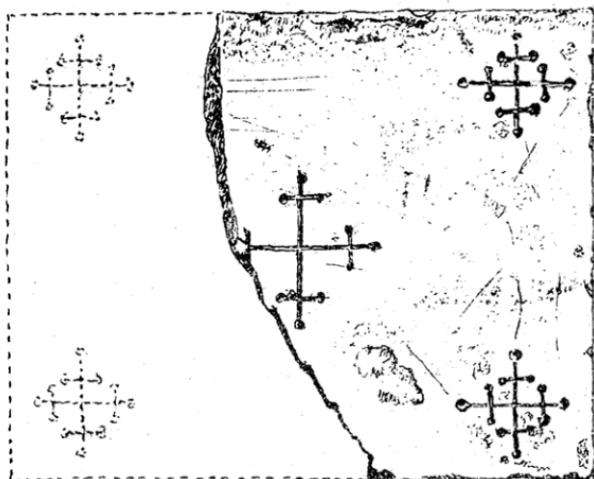
Super-altar, Altare viaticum.

Calder Abbey

1/4 size. one inch thick. Crosses not exact.

fractured.

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super altar,

Lanercost Priory

1/4 size

11 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, and 9 inches wide. In this case, instead of crosses bourdonees, we have cross-crosslets bourdonees. The use of the "bourdon" would seem to suggest that both these slabs had been used as *portable* altars.

Such slabs bore various names, indicative of various uses ; but, whether used as a super-altar or a portable one, each slab must be of sufficient size to hold the chalice and paten. Thus the super-altar was so called from its being placed on a wooden or other altar to supply any deficiency in the consecration ; and it formed the cover or lid of the "sepulchre" or cavity in which the relics were contained. Used in this way it was called the "seal" of the altar ; and Durandus tells us in case it got accidentally broken or moved the altar must be reconsecrated. When used as a "seal" this covering-stone would be on the same level as the surface of the altar. The steep bevel around the top of the Calder stone militates therefore against its use as a "seal," but is quite consistent with its being a portable altar. "Altare gestatorium, portabile, portatile, itinerarium, viaticum," are also other names which imply their use as portable altars. The Ἀντιτύχιον in the Greek church serves the same purpose. Such were in requisition at celebrations of mass away from the church altar, in oratories, private chapels, or journeys, and at the communion of the sick. Bede, in his Ecclesiastical History, Bk. v., c. 10, makes mention of two priests of the English nation, named from the colour of their hair, Black Hewald and White Hewald, who, after a long sojourn in Ireland, about A.D. 690, went as missionaries to the Anglo-Saxons ; and states that they took with them "sacred vessels, and a consecrated slab for an altar." Ælfric, in his canons, A.D. 994 prohibits celebrations in unconsecrated buildings—"except it be in the army ; then let a tent be had to this only, and a hallowed altar, and on that let the ministration of the mass song be accomplished." This last quotation I owe to Scudamore's "Notitia Eucharistica,"

appendix, section v., where much curious information on this subject is gathered together. The materials of which these portable altars were constructed were often very costly, as jasper, ebony, marble, and ivory. Dr. Rock possesses one made of serpentine, supported on silver pillars, and otherwise richly ornamented. The consecrated slab, to prevent its fracture, was framed, and sometimes completely encased in precious metal. The one found in St. Cuthbert's coffin is of oak, covered with silver, but for a description of that most interesting relic I must refer you to Raine's "St. Cuthbert," pp. 199-202. The materials, however, were not invariably of a costly nature. Hincmar, Archbishop of Rheims (845-882), allowed the use of marble, black stone, or slate slabs, "de marmore vel nigrâ petrâ aut litio, honestissimo." (Capital Ann. xii. ciii. p. 732.) One made of two pieces of wood, fastened with silver nails, and bearing the inscription, "Alme Trinitati, agie Sophie, Sancte Maria," was found on the breast of Acca, Bishop of Hexham, when his tomb was opened about A.D. 1000.

A special license was required to enable a priest or layman to possess one. Many such licenses occur in the registers of the bishops of Durham, and when a priest was buried his portable altar, chalice, paten, and corporax cloth were placed in his coffin.* It is owing, I conclude, to its having been thus concealed that the Calder stone escaped the iconoclasm of the Reformation, when stone altars were marked out as special objects for destruction. The wooden frame, in which it would be set originally, had most probably rotted away before its exhumation. The nobleman disposed of his altars among his other treasures. Katherine, Lady Hastings; daughter of Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, (whose first husband, William Bonville, Lord Harrington, had property in the west of Cumberland,) in her will dated 22nd November, 1503, leaves her

* Reginald of Durham, speaking of St. Cuthbert says: — "Preterea habet secum in sepulcro altare argenteum et corporalia, calicem aureum cum patena."

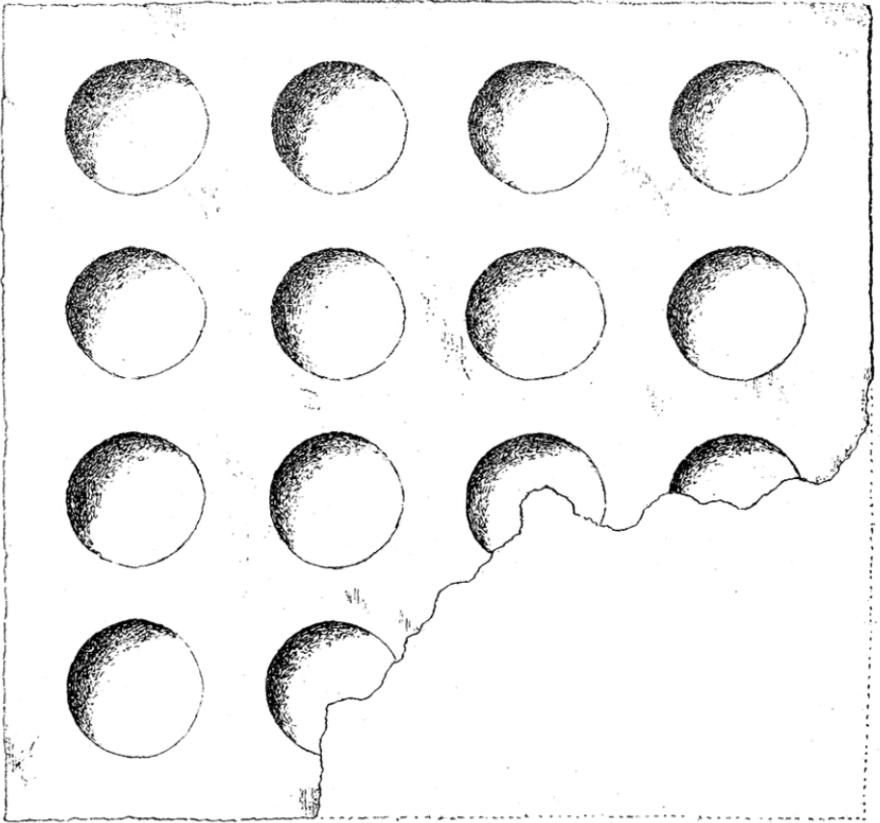
sons Richard and William, "two super-altars, oon of white (probably marble or ivory), to Richard, and oon of jet to William," (Nicolas's *Testamenta Vetusta*, vol. II., p. 454.) The benediction of a portable altar was always performed by a bishop with license from the Pope. The "*Benedictio Lapidis Portabilis*" will be found on pp. 124-132 of the "*York Pontifical*," recently published by the Surtees Society. The rubrics of this service contain some very curious particulars, and the subject is thus referred to in "*Becon's Catechism*," p. 297.—"and this their altar and 'superaltare' likewise must be consecrate, have prints and characters made thereon, washed with wine, oil, and water, be covered with a cloth of hair, and be garnished with fine white linen cloths and other costly apparel; or else whatsoever was done thereon was counted vain and unprofitable." Archbishop Grindal, in his "*Injunctions*," A.D. 1571, orders churchwardens, "that the altar stones be broken, defaced, and bestowed to some common use." The Lanercost altar would, probably, be broken in consequence of this injunction.

The relics of saints were necessary, Durandus tells us, to the consecration of a fixed altar, and were inclosed, as I have before mentioned, within it, but they were not necessary to a travelling or portable one. In speaking of cases where reconsecration might be required, he says, "Sixthly, a travelling altar, if the stone be removed from the wood in which it is inserted, which in some sort representeth its seal, and be replaced again in the same, or in other wood, some think should be reconsecrated, but others only reconciled. But although it be often, by the command of the bishop, transferred from place to place, and carried on a journey (on which account it is called a portable or travelling altar), yet it is not reconsecrated in consequence of this, nor yet reconciled." Neale and Webb's "*Durandus*," p. 129. That magnificent M.S. the *Pontifical of Clifford*, Bishop of London, 1406-1436,
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in the library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, has, at the commencement of the office for the "Consecratio Altaris Portabilis"—(I quote Dr. Henderson, editor of the York Pontifical)—"a drawing of the Bishop standing in front of an altar, attended by two acolytes in albs, bearing one a censer, the other a reliquary. On the altar are lying the small altars to be consecrated, square in form, with five small crosses on each." On "VI. Id. Jun" (*i.e.* May 27th) 1447, Pope Nicholas V., then in the first year of his pontificate, granted a brief to John Kempe, Archbishop of York, to make concession of ten super-altars to certain eminent men. Between the years 1448—1451 the Archbishop granted nine of these altars, and no concession seems to have been made of the tenth. The object of the grant is thus stated in Kempe's letter to Hugo Wyllughby, Armiger, who received the first of these stones, "ut altare portabile cum debitâ reverentiâ et honore possis habere, super quo in locis ad hoc contingentibus et honestis possis per proprium aut alium sacerdotem in tuâ et familiarum tuorum domesticorum præsentîâ missam et alia divina officia sine juris alieni præjudicio celebrari facere." "York Pontifical," p. 387.

As I have remarked above, the first altar was granted to Hugh Wyllughby, and I would now point out that the second was given to "Thomas Syngitton, Armiger." This last surname, I presume, is our modern "Singleton." If it be so, I wish you to observe these very remarkable facts that, as recorded by his grave-stone, a "Robertus de Wilughby" was formerly abbot of Calder, and that the name Singleton is connected with Drigg and Bootle. So that it is not quite beyond the bounds of probability that this altar may be one of those granted by Archbishop Kempe.

II. On the same occasion another stone attracted our attention, and various conjectures were hazarded as to the purpose for which it was originally intended. This was a slab



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Sketch of
Cresset-stone at Calder Abbey
1877

Cavities $2\frac{1}{4}$ deep
stone $4\frac{1}{2}$ thick.

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slab of new red sandstone $22\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, $21\frac{1}{4}$ inches broad, and $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick.

Though somewhat mutilated, it shewed clearly that when perfect it had sixteen circular, cup-shaped cavities, each $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter and $2\frac{2}{3}$ inches in depth, scooped out of the level surface in four rows of four each. For a long time this stone was a complete enigma both to myself and to all the gentlemen whom I consulted about it, but the following passages in the "description or briefe declaration of all the ancient monuments, rites, and customs" of the monastical church of Durham, written in 1593, (Surtees Society, vol. XV.,) entirely solves my doubts.

"Also there is standinge in the south pillar of the Quire doore of the Lanthorne, in a corner of the said pillar, a four-squared STONN, which hath been finely wrought, in every square a large fine Image, whereon did stand a four-square stone above that, which had twelve cressetts wrought in that stone, which was filled with tallow, and everye night one of them was lighted, when the day was gone, and did burn to give light to the monks at midnight, when they came to mattens." p. 19.

The second quotation I take from the description of the monks' dormitory:—

"In either end of the said Dorter, was a four-square stone, wherein was a dozen cressets wrought in either stone, being ever filled and supplied with the cooke as they needed, to give light to the monks and novices when they rose to theire mattins at midnight, and for their other necessarye uses." p. 72.

Among the antiquities exhibited at a meeting of the Archæological Institute on July 7, 1865, was a drawing, contributed by the Rev. Frank Newington through Mr. Thomas Bond, of a stone similar to, but smaller than, the one which forms our present subject. It was found in the south wall of a small chapel on the north side of the chancel

chancel of Wool church, Dorset, and had most probably been brought, like many other stones used in that fabric, from the neighbouring Cistercian abbey of Bindon. It is a block of coarse Purbeck marble, 10 inches long, 8 inches broad, and 5 inches high. "On one face there are four cup-shaped cavities, each 3 inches in diameter and in depth; the surface of these cups is blackened, as if by unctuous matter burnt in them. It has been supposed that they may have been used as cressets, or lamps." (Journal of Archæol. Inst. vol XXII.) After referring to the stone in Durham dormitory, the report goes on to say, "We are, however, indebted to Canon Rock for the suggestion that the cavities in the stone found at Wool were intended to hold the three *ampullæ* for the holy oils, and the vessel for the salt used at baptism." It seems to me that the statement of the cups "being blackened as if by unctuous matter burnt in them," is decidedly in favour of the cresset-stone theory. I am informed, too, that a flat round stone, rather over two feet across, with seven holes scooped out on the top, about two inches in diameter, was found some years ago near the font of an old church in Cornwall. This is most probably another example.

III. The discovery of the forementioned stones at Calder prompted me to search for similar relics among the ruins of Furness, and my search was not unrewarded. Lying in the hospitium there a stone was pointed out to me by the guide, which he stated had proved food for conjecture to many previous visitors. It takes the form of a flat block of squared red sandstone, 14 inches long, 12 inches broad, and 5 inches thick. The upper edge is surrounded by a bevel $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches in width, and presents to our view five circular cavities, viz:—one large centre one 5 inches in diameter and $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches in depth; two of $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches each in diameter and $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches in depth; and two of 3 inches in diameter and $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches in depth. The two last-named holes are flat-bottomed, and the three other and larger holes cup-shaped,

shaped, or hemispherical in form. It has been suggested that this has been the capital of a cluster of five pillars, the said pillars having been inserted in the holes. But this cannot have been the case, the round bottoms of three of the holes and the varied diameters forbid it. It seems to me that there can be no reason to doubt that this stone was probably used as a stand in which to place the three *ampullæ* containing the oils for the unction of the sick and catechumens, and chrism. These would occupy the hemispherical holes; and the flat-bottomed ones would hold either the cruets containing the wine and water for the ablution after mass, or the vessels containing the salt and ashes used in the preparation of holy water, and water used in benedictions.

The following passage from Durandus would seem to suggest a slightly different appropriation of these holes:—
 “Although, therefore, the spirit and water would suffice for the perfect operation of baptism and the consecration of a church, yet the holy Fathers who have made this constitution wished to satisfy us not only in those particulars which pertain to the efficacy of the sacraments, but in those also which relate to its greater sanctification. On this account they have added *salt, wine, oil, ashes, and chrism*. (For Philip, when he baptised the eunuch, had neither oil nor chrism.) Therefore, not one of these ingredients ought to be wanting, and they ought all to be mixed together, because the people of God, which is the church, is neither sanctified nor released from sin without the union of these qualities.”

Usually, the holy oils and chrism were contained in a chrismatory of costly materials and skilful workmanship, but among the Cistercian monks, who were noted for the plainness both of their buildings and “instrumenta,” a plain red sandstone stock might well take the place of the more magnificent chrismatory of other orders. The holy oils and chrism were always kept locked up in a locker, or almerly,
 near

near the high altar, and this block of stone would serve as a stand in which to place them, and prevent them from being upset or damaged by the other articles in the same cupboard. The "Fardle of Facions," printed in 1555, contains the following passage apropos of this subject:—"Upon the right hand of the highe aulter . . . there should be an almorie, either cutte into the walle, or framed upon it, in the whiche they woulde have the sacrament of the Lord's Bodye, the holy oyle for the sick, and chris-matorie, always to be locked." (Neale and Webb's Translation of Durandus on Symbolism, p. cxxxv.)

These three relics, differing as they do in form and the uses to which they were respectively applied, yet possess the one common characteristic that they are all constructed of the very plainest and commonest materials available for the purpose. Extreme simplicity was aimed at by the Cistercians, not only in their mode of life, but in all its adjuncts. Their monasteries were unadorned by carvings or representations of saints; the crucifix only was allowed. Their chasubles were of fustian, napkins of coarse cloth, crosses of wood, and the only article of precious metal was the chalice. This rule, as these "instrumenta" show us, was carried out here in its strictness, and this is further manifested by the fact that the jambs, capitals, and shafts of the abbeys of Calder and Furness are all constructed of the red sandstone of the country, instead of the more precious marbles used in the houses of other orders. Difficulty of transportation does not account for this, for both abbeys are within easy distance of the sea, and it would be as easy to bring here granite, marble, or Caen stone, as to convey them over the fens to Crowland or Ely.

I may, perhaps, be here allowed to mention, by way of a digression, a Cistercian custom which seems to me to contain the germ of a very curious, but repulsive, death-bed superstition prevailing to my certain knowledge within
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the last 20 years in Cumberland, and which, I am informed, is found also in Sussex, Surrey, and Cheshire. When a Cistercian monk lay a-dying, after extreme unction and the viaticum, when his end drew very near, blessed ashes were spread in the form of a cross on the floor of the infirmary; over these, with straw between, a serge cloth was extended. On this the dying monk was placed, and the community, summoned by the bell, knelt round their departing brother, and recited the seven penitential psalms. The Cumbrian custom I refer to is this—When a man's dying moments were unusually protracted, some one of the onlookers would suggest that the bed contained game-feathers which in some occult way prevented the extinction of the vital spark. The patient's friends would then spread a straw mattress on the floor, and lay him thereon, and so help, as they intended in a spirit of kindness, the transit of the soul. At the present time "*live feathers*" (*i.e.*, feathers plucked from living birds or gathered in the fields) are said to produce the same effect, and the obnoxious *bed* is removed from underneath the dying man, who is thus left lying on the "caff bed."

During the ages when the religious orders were most popular, laymen sometimes purchased the privilege of affiliation to some order that they might have the benefit supposed to be conferred by wearing at death the garb of a monk. One thus affiliated would be treated in extremis in the same way as a brother of the order. Thus the custom would spread outside the walls of the monasteries, and when the suppression of the religious orders removed the real reason of the practice, the excuse for its continuance was found in some more ancient heathen superstition.

In concluding, I wish to express my sincere thanks to Mr. Jackson and Canon Knowles for their kindly aid in procuring me particulars both of the altar and cresset stones. To the latter I am particularly indebted for his very careful drawings of both the Calder stones, and for

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information

information of which I have gladly availed myself. I also beg to tender my thanks to the Rev. A. G. Loftie, of St. Bridget's, Beckermeth, for the permission, so kindly accorded, to exhibit on this occasion the Calder portable altar.

