

XXII.—NOTES ON A MEDIAEVAL GRAVE COVER FROM
ALNWICK ABBEY.

BY THE REV. DR. BRUCE, LL.D., V.P.

READ ON WEDNESDAY, THE 2ND OF JULY, 1884.

A FEW days ago I was informed by Mr. Reavell, Clerk of the Works, at Alnwick Castle, that in cutting a drain in the Abbey grounds in Alnwick Park they had hit upon a tomb, which he asked me to come and see. I went accordingly, and was accompanied in my inspection by Mr. Hindmarch, solicitor, Alnwick. The slab covering the tomb is an elegant one. An elaborately carved cross occupies its centre and an inscription in ecclesiastical Gothic runs round its margin. The letters are clearly cut, but to eyes unaccustomed to their form the reading of them was a matter of some difficulty. With care and pains we made it out as follows:—“*Hac jacet in meta vibat redimita q: leta ✠ obruta Loreta de Botry per leta leta.*”

These words form two lines of hexameter verse. I was at some loss how to translate them. Mr. Hindmarch made a near approach to a correct reading of them. I sent a copy of them to our friend and associate Canon Raine. Writing to me in reply he says:—

“The inscription is curious. It is a fair sample of a style of epitaphs not uncommon in the 13th and the earlier part of the 14th centuries. No lady would be buried in the graveyard of a house of monks or of canons unless she were a person of distinction as a benefactress. The translation presents no great difficulty:—‘Loreta de Botry overthrown by cruel death lies in this trench (or grave); may she live and be joyful crowned, *i.e.*, have a crown of joy.’ There are many of these jingling inscriptions up and down the country.”

From the Records of Alnwick Abbey which are in the possession of Mr. Hindmarch, several persons of distinction, besides ecclesiastics, have been buried in the Abbey grounds. Wm. de Vescey, son of Eustace, was buried before the door of the Chapter House. Burga, his wife, was buried near him. John de Vescey was buried here in February 7th, 1288. Henry de Percy, second Lord of Alnwick, was buried here in 1351. Lady Mary Plantagenet was buried in the Abbey in 1362, and Henry Percy, third Lord, in 1368.

In cutting the drain already referred to, the foundations of the walls of the conventual buildings were in several places laid bare, and were found to be in an encouraging condition. His Grace the Duke of Northumberland has given orders for a complete examination of the foundations of the Abbey buildings to be made. In this way not only may some more tombs of illustrious personages be found, but the whole structure of the Abbey will probably be ascertained, of which only the gateway at present remains above ground.

These excavations will doubtless be an object of great importance to the members of the Royal Archæological Institute who are to assemble in Newcastle on the 5th of August next, and to visit the places of antiquarian interest in the neighbourhood.

Mr. Brown, of the Carver's studio, Alnwick Castle, has kindly furnished me with a careful drawing of Loreta's tomb (of which the Plate on the opposite page is a photo-lithograph), and in addition, in case there might be any uncertainty about any of the letters, has given me an impression in tinfoil of the whole of them. These I beg to lay before the meeting.

The stone is about seven feet long.

Grave Cover, Alntwick Abbey.



