



Ancient Fresco Painting, representing
"the Law": formerly part of the Ceiling of the
Chapter House, in York Cathedral.

FIGURE OF THE LAW

FROM YORK CATHEDRAL,

AND

ANCIENT STONE COFFIN-LID AND COLUMN FROM DURHAM.

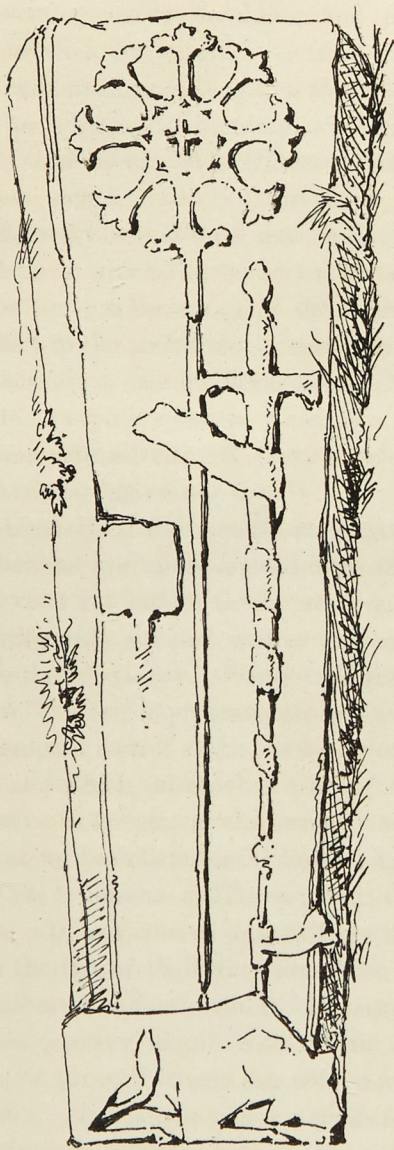
COMMUNICATED BY

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OUR honorary member, Sir Francis Palgrave, in his no less amusing than instructive volume, the *Merchant and Friar*, tells us that some five hundred years ago, during the reign of Henry III., the council-chamber of the Palace of Westminster was richly decorated with sculpture and paintings, "many of them symbolical or allegorical, and belonging to a class which sometimes strangely perplexes the antiquary, until he learns to read the mystic lore displayed to every observer, and yet concealed. Here might be seen the Law under the semblance of a Queen, her crown falling from her tresses: a thick veil covers her downcast eyes: the broken tables drop from her grasp. Opposite, is the emblem of the Gospel, a maiden brightly looking heavenwards, her head endiademed, the budding lily in her hand. These occur in the deep recesses of the windows: the wall between them displays the legendary tale of Solomon and Marcolphus, a fiction possibly rabbinical in its origin, and recounting the trials which the wisdom of the monarch sustained from the rude mother-wit of Syrian husbandmen. Over the throne reserved for the king was a representation of the Day of Judgment. But the portal opening into the chapel had no other ornament, excepting a vine springing from the impost

of the door, spread around, richly filling and most gracefully entwining every moulding and columnette with its flowing branches, its tendrils, its fruit, and its leaves. Each of these embellishments taught a lesson connected with the purposes to which the building was applied. It was the custom of the mediæval architects thus to appeal to the imagination, sometimes to the conscience, in the decoration of their edifices, by which they gave a degree of sentiment to their structures which the moderns cannot attain. Allegory constitutes the intellectuality of the æsthetic arts; but it is wholly alien to the multitude in our own age. We have no means whereby it can be vernacular. None of the forms, none of the graphic symbols which we can beg or borrow, ever become naturalized. We may be clever mocking-birds, but we have no song of our own."

I have transcribed the passage at length, sure that such of our members as are unacquainted with the original will be glad to have it set before them; and equally sure that those who are differently situated will be thankful that it should be recalled to their memory. "*Indocti discant et ament meminisse periti.*" For the present purpose it would have sufficed to have confined myself to the first of the figures which he mentions, and which, in another part of his book, p. 12, he states to have been among the ornaments of the cloisters of Norwich, as well as of the Cathedrals at York and Rochester, the *Lieb-Frau Kirche* at Treves, and the *Stadt-house* at Nimeguen. In our own county, I fear, it is no longer to be seen; but the fact of its having ever been there made me recognize the same subject with great pleasure at York, in the course of a journey to the North with my daughter, Mrs. Gunn, last August. It was painted on a board, then lying on the ground; having, in consequence of recent alterations, been torn from the place it previously occupied in the ceiling of that remarkable building, the Chapter House, which bears upon its door the merited eulogium, "*ut rosa flos florum, sic*



Top of a Stone Coffin in Durham
Churchyard. Durham Cathedral.

est domus ista domorum." The slight sketch I enclose may, therefore, I trust be acceptable. It will serve for a memorial of what we could once show in Norfolk; and I shall be happy if the Society should think it on this account deserving of a place in their volumes.

On the following day we met with the stone Coffin-lid and Column, of which I also send outline sketches, and, I own, with the same hope. The former of these occurred to us in the burial-ground of Durham Cathedral, among many of an interesting character; and it is, if my memory be correct, unlike any of the great variety figured in the *Sepulchral Monuments*. The Cow at the foot of the Cross at once attracted our notice; so obvious appeared the inference that the sculpture could scarcely fail to refer to the legend which assigned its present locality to the sacred building. Dogs, lions, and different animals, emblematical of fidelity, strength, courage, &c., we know to be commonly found in a similar position; but how, except by such reference, could we account for a cow? The curious tradition is detailed at much length in Hutchinson's *History of Durham*; and Davies, in his edition of the *Antient Rites and Monuments of the Cathedral*, relates it with more terseness and naïveté. From this latter, therefore, are mainly gathered the following particulars, requisite to throw light upon the sculpture. When the Danes in the ninth century ravaged Holy Island and destroyed the church of Lindisfarn, the depository of the remains of St. Cuthbert, Eardulph, the bishop, attended by many of the monks and inhabitants, fled southward, carrying with them this their most precious possession. They wandered and wandered, till, finding no rest for the soles of their feet, they determined to cross the sea, hoping to meet with that repose and safety in Ireland, which seemed denied them at home. But storms and tempests, accompanied with fearful portents, forbade their passage; and they returned, disheartened and irresolute what course to take, till, by a fresh interposition from above,

“a red horse came running towards them, and did offer himself to be bridled, and to ease their pains by carrying the chest wherein St. Cuthbert’s body was laid.” Thus aided and comforted, they transported their charge to Craike near Easingwold, and, after a residence there of four months, proceeded to Chester-le-Street, where King Guthred built them a Cathedral. Here they remained 111 years; at the expiration of which time another incursion of their former enemies occasioned another flight, and they sought refuge in Ripon. The war soon ceasing, they thought to return to Chester, but had proceeded no further than Wardlaw in their way thither, when on a sudden the body became immoveable: it was wedded, as it were, to its mother earth, and all human efforts were powerless towards effecting a removal. It were injustice to my author not to allow him to relate the subsequent part of the story in his own words: “This strange and unexpected accident,” he says, “wrought great admiration in the hearts of the Bishop’s monks and their associates; and, ergo, they fasted and prayed three days with great reverence and devotion, desiring to know by revelation what they should do with the holy body of St. Cuthbert: which thing was granted unto them, and therein they were directed to carry him to Dunholme. But being distressed because they were ignorant where Dunholme was, see their good fortune! As they were going, a woman that lacked her cow, did call aloud to her companion to know if she had not seen it, who answered with a loud voice that her cow was in Dunholme, a happy and heavenly echo to the distressed monks, who by that means were at the end of their journey; for there they should find a resting-place for the body of their honored saint.” At Dunholme accordingly they interred him, nothing reluctant; and over his grave they erected first a small church, and subsequently a splendid cathedral. The historian proceeds to relate, how, in the construction of the latter, Aldwinus, the then bishop, and



Fragment of the Columns
which once formed the East end of the
Chapter House of Durham Cathedral.

Ronulph Flambard, in conformity with the instructions of William Carliphe, the founder, placed "the portraiture of a milkmaid milking her cow on the outside of the north-west turret of the Nine Altars, in thankful remembrance of that maid, who so fortunately, in their great perplexity, directed them to the appointed spot, where the body of their great saint was to rest until the resurrection; and this monument, though defaced by the weather, is there to be seen to the present day." There too the same is to be seen in our own day; but not in the defaced and mutilated state in which it is described by the editor of the *Rites and Monuments*, and is figured by Hutchinson; for the zeal and piety of the nineteenth century have replaced it with modern sculpture.

The Column is an object that seems to call for no other observation than that it is remarkable for the obvious antiquity displayed in the sculpture as well of the capital as of the shaft, and is deserving of notice as one of three, the only specimens now left of the architecture of the Chapter House, denominated by Carter, in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1809, p. 33, as "a relic of superb Saxon workmanship," and by the learned historian of North Durham, in his *Brief Account of Durham Cathedral*, p. 108, as "unique in its architecture, venerable for its age, and associated with the history of the See more than any other part of the Cathedral." But these are points upon which it would be out of place here to offer any remarks; and still more so would it be to touch upon the former glories of the building, upon the much interesting matter connected with it, as recorded in the book of the *Rites and Monuments*, or upon the motives and details of its destruction. The last was an "abomination of desolation," which, far as Durham is removed from Norfolk, all the members of our Society will join in lamenting; and of the first some slight, very slight, idea may be formed by what is here offered to their notice.