

ON AN INCISED SLAB IN NEWTON-PURCELL CHURCH.

BY MR. EDGAR. P. LOFTUS BROCK.

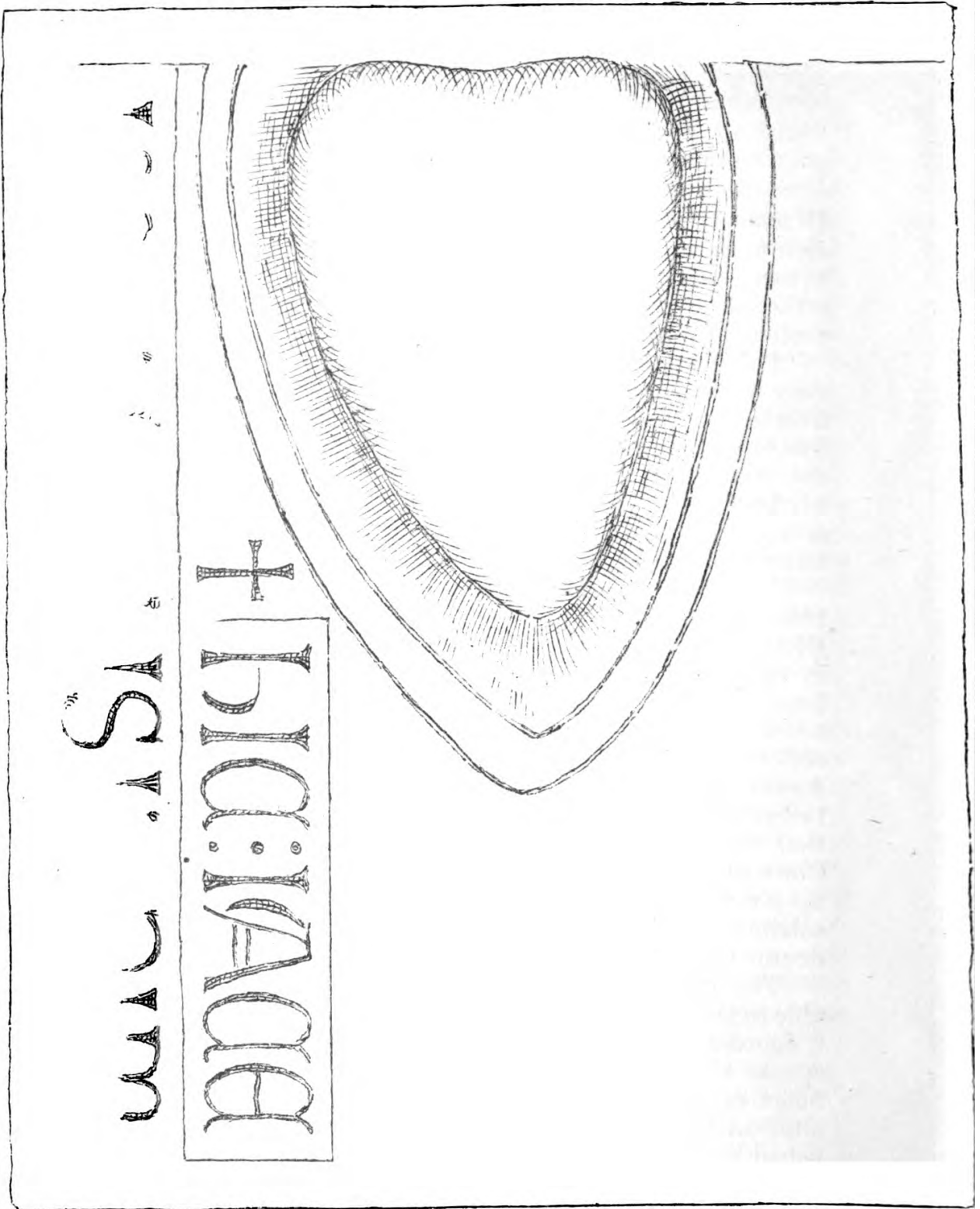
DURING the repairs of Newton-Purcell Church an incised slab to the memory of a heart was discovered, ten inches square, and two inches thick. It had apparently been removed from its original position, and been built up in a niche in the chancel wall.

This curious relic of antiquity indicates a practice of very ancient date. The heart being the centre of affection in man, the offering of a heart naturally formed a touching memorial to a loved one; or, when a man on the point of death noticed how difficult it would be for his body to be laid in some spot held dear to him in life, it is not uncommon to find that request was made for the heart to be transferred to the spot.

The old chronicler Capgrave ("Book of the Illustrious Henries," ed. 1858, p. 179) relates, that, Henry, son of Richard, King of the Romans, being murdered in 1271 in a church at Viterbo, his body was embalmed and brought to England for burial at Hayles Abbey, while his heart was "nobly enshrined at Westminster beside the coffer containing the relics of the blessed Edward." Again (p. 105), Lionel de Clare (dying at Pavia), just before his death, had given commandment to his attendants that his heart and his bones should be conveyed to the Convent of the Hermit Friars of St. Augustine at Clare, in England, but that his flesh and entrails should be solemnly interred beside the grave of that distinguished doctor (S. Augustine) at Pavia.

The offering a heart was considered supremely acceptable to the heathen gods. Mr. J. S. Phené, F.S.A., in the "Journal of the Archæological Association," 1873, p. 35, speaks of offerings of this kind to Mexican deities, while a heart is found amongst the sculptured offerings of an altar in Egypt. A bronze heart-shaped object is published by Waring, which has an incision on one side, and is considered by him as an ancient British object of veneration. David speaks of the "offering of a free heart" that he would give to the Lord.

The burial of a heart apart from the body is traceable



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*Incised Slab to the memory of a heart, found in the Chancel of Newton
Purcell Church near Buckingham.
Size. 10 x 8 inches. 2 inches thick.*

to a very remote period. Mr. Phené speaks of ancient British urns being found which were the receptacle of hearts, and mentions one in the possession of Professor Rolleston at Oxford; and in an early volume of the "Archæologia," it is stated that a heart-shaped mummified substance was found in a British urn. These examples appear to have been buried beside a larger urn containing burnt bones.

The heart of Robert Bruce lies buried still, most probably, beneath the high altar of ruined Melrose Abbey. It was carried after his death in 1329, by Sir James Douglas, towards the Holy Land, at the request of the dying monarch. After the battle against the Moors in Spain, in which Sir James was slain, the heart of Bruce was found beneath his dead body. The Douglasses still bear a human heart imperially crowned, in memory of this dying trust so valiantly defended.

Edward I. being unable to fulfil his promise of pilgrimage to the Holy Land, charged his son, when on his death-bed in 1307, to forward his heart there, with two thousand pounds of silver and an escort of one hundred and forty knights with their attendants. This bequest was never, however, complied with.

It has commonly been supposed that these heart bequests date from the period of the Crusades, and the evidence is certainly in favour of their having become at least usual at this period, but the custom was not confined to any one class. Thus the famous Earl of Mellent and Leicester, Robert, who died at the Abbey of Preaux in 1118—one of the early Crusaders—had his heart preserved in salt at the Hospital at Brackley, while his body was buried at Preaux.

The heart of Ethelmar, Bishop of Winchester, and half brother of Henry III., is buried in Winchester Cathedral, anno 1261. The heart of Isabella, wife of Richard, brother of Henry III., who died at Berkhamstead in 1230, was sent in a silver cup to her brother, then Abbot of Tewkesbury, and was interred before the high altar. Her body was buried at Beaulieu, Hants.*

* The leaden box containing the heart of Richard Cœur de Lion, which was dug up at Rouen in 1838, was inscribed, "Hic jacet cor Ricardis regis" ("Through Normandy," by K. S. Macquoid).—ED.

Scotland furnished two other well-known examples of much interest. The heart of John Baliol of Barnard Castle, who died in 1269, was embalmed and enclosed in an ivory casket enamelled with silver, at the desire of his widow Devorgilla. The casket was placed daily on the widow's table, and on her decease it was placed on her bosom. They were thus buried together near the altar of New Abbey in Galloway, which she had founded, and which has since been called Sweet-heart Abbey.

A human heart was found in 1806 below the pavement in the Abbey Church of Culross, and was proved to be that of Lord Edward Bruce, who was killed in a duel in 1613.

The custom prevailed to a late period in England, and the burial of the heart of Sir Robert Peckham is recorded in the church at Denham, in Buckinghamshire. Dying abroad in 1569, his heart was sent to England, but it does not appear to have been interred for seventeen years, there being a record of its interment in the parish Register under the date July 18, 1586.

The monuments still remaining are most interesting, and some of them may be noted briefly and for comparison. There is a brass to the memory of Sir Richard Kerville in St. Mary's, Wiggenhole, Norfolk, in which a human heart is depicted in the centre with four scrolls let into the stone, with legends at the angles. A monument at Chichester Cathedral has an inscription ICI . GIST LE COVER MAUD DE—. This is on an incised slab containing a trefoil; from two of the extremities two human hands support a heart, which hangs from the extremity of the third trefoil—the whole being a very curious and early composition.

The brass of Dame Anne Muston in Saltwood Church, Kent, appears also to indicate the burial of a heart only.

At Bredon Church, Worcestershire, there is a curious heart-shaped slab, from which issue two arms supporting a human heart. This is in a recess beneath a plainly pointed arch and there is no inscription.

At Loddon in Norfolk, and at Elmstead in Essex, there are brasses on which hands are represented issuing from clouds, and these sustain hearts.

At Allhallows, Barking, London, there is a brass dated 1437, to the memory of John and Joanna Bacon, on

which is a heart inscribed "Mercy" and enclosed in a scroll. This may not, however, indicate heart-burial.

It may also be noticed that the appearance of a heart on a sepulchral monument does not always justify the belief that a heart only is buried beneath, although this may be most usually the case. At Margate Church there is a curious brass, showing a heart from which issue three inscribed scrolls. There is an inscription beneath, which sets forth that the monument commemorates the death of Master John Smyth, formerly vicar—1433. (See the Oxford Society's Manual, p. cxiv.)

There is a heart at Higham Ferrars with the monogram I. H. C. At Martham in Norfolk a heart has inscribed the words, "Post tenebras spero lucem laus deo meo." This is to Robert Alen, and is dated 1487.

Boutell instances other hearts inscribed "Credo quod" or the word "Credo" only; the remainder of the passage being on accompanying scrolls; and also the passage, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," etc., which is not uncommon.

There is a bleeding heart inscribed I. H. C., upheld by two hands, at Lillingstone Dayrell, Bucks, commemorating the burial of John Marston, Rector 1446, and at Hitchen, Herts, there is a punning or rebus heart. The effigy is that of an ecclesiastic named Hart, and above is a wounded and bleeding heart. (Boutell, "Monumental Brasses and Slabs, p. 103."*)

The example of Newton-Purcell most probably commemorates a heart burial, and its date is about the middle of the thirteenth century. The inscription "hic jace" does not seem to be an abbreviation.

* Paul Whitehead, the poet, bequeathed his heart to his patron, Lord Despencer. He died December 30, 1774; and on January 16, 1775, the heart was placed in an urn, and deposited, with a grand ceremony, in the mausoleum at West Wycombe (*Monthly Miscellany*).—ED.