

Wall, Charles J., *Shrines of British Saints*. Methuen & Co. London, 1905.
Larger images available on Historyfish.net

Public Domain text transcribed and prepared "as is" for HTML and PDF by Richenda Fairhurst, historyfish.net. August 2008. No commercial permissions granted. *Text may contain errors.* (Report errors to molly@historyfish.net or check the [historyfish](http://historyfish.net) site for current email addresses.)

CHAPTER IV [part five]

SHRINES OF PRELATES AND PRIESTS

ST. CUTHBERT

“When God shall have taken to himself my soul, bury me in the front of this my oratory, close under the eastern side of the cross which I have here erected. You will find on the north side of my dwelling a stone coffin, hid in the ground, the gift of Cudda, the venerable Abbot. In this place my body, wrapping it in the linen cloth which you will there find, a cloth which I was unwilling to wear in my lifetime, but, out of affection to its donor, Verca the Abbess [abbess of Tiningham][sic], favoured of God, I have kept it for my winding sheet.”¹

This was the charge given to Herefrid, abbot of Lindisfarne, when visiting St. Cuthbert, who had retired to his cell on Farne Island.

The monks of Lindisfarne longed to have the body of their late bishop to rest among them, and at last prevailed on the saint to give his permission, although he told them how for their sakes it were better he should be buried at Farne, for as he was notoriously a servant of Christ, culprits of every kind would flock to his tomb for sanctuary, and give them much trouble by compelling them to intercede on their behalf with the potentates of the land. His consent was given on condition that his body should be buried within the church, in order that they themselves might have the opportunity of visiting his grave at their pleasure, and yet have the power of excluding strangers whenever it seemed good. By this St. Cuthbert evidently anticipated great renown, and his prophetic vision saw the

streams of pilgrims who for centuries directed their footsteps to this tomb.

A few hours before his death St. Cuthbert admonished Herefrid in this wise : “Know and remember that if necessity shall ever compel you out of two misfortunes to choose one, I had much rather that you would dig

--176--

up my bones from the grave, and taking them with you, sojourn where God shall provide, than that you should on any account consent to the iniquity of Schismatics and put your necks under the yoke.” This wish, we shall see, was literally obeyed, not in consequence of schism, but of peril through the incursions of pagans.

St. Cuthbert died March 20th, 687, and we are told by an anonymous monk of Lindisfarne² how the brethren, after washing the body, robed it in the sacred vestures, and placed the sacramental elements on his breast. The body was conveyed to Lindisfarne and buried with all honour in a stone coffin on the right side of the altar.

When St. Cuthbert had been buried eleven years the brethren wished to take up his bones, expecting, as is usual, to find the flesh reduced to dust, and to place them in a feretory above ground for the veneration. They obtained the sanction of Bishop Eadbert, who ordered that it should be done on the anniversary of his burial.

When the coffin was opened they were astonished to find the body whole, as if it had been alive, the joints were flexible like one asleep, while all the vestures were not only sound, but wonderful for their freshness and gloss.

The amazed monks hastened to tell the bishop what they had found, taking also with them the chasuble in which the body had been buried. Acting under the direction of the prelate, they put new garments on the body of St. Cuthbert and placed it in a new coffin above the pavement of the sanctuary.

Then came the incursions of the Danes, the first of the long list of troubles to the church, which compelled them to follow the advice of St. Cuthbert and start on their historical travels with their precious burden.

The ravages of these pirates reached Lindisfarne on the

--177--

7th of June, 793. The church was robbed of its vessels and many of the monks martyred. When it was possible Bishop Higbald and the surviving ecclesiastics returned to their church, when to their joy they found that although stripped of all other valuables the body of St. Cuthbert was left undisturbed.³

After continuous alarms the monks were obliged to flee for safety from the island in 875.

Into the saint's coffin were placed other relics of various saints—the head of St. Oswald, some bones of St. Aidan and of the bishops Eata, Eadfrid, and Ethelwold, and they set out they knew not whither, followed by the lay inhabitants of the island.

They first fled to the Northumbrian hills, and then, as Symeon states, they moved from place to place like sheep fleeing from wolves. Wherever they went

the people received them with veneration and supplied their wants, and many miracles occurred at the various stopping places. Those who wish can trace their route by consulting the writings of Prior Wessington and Canon Raine.

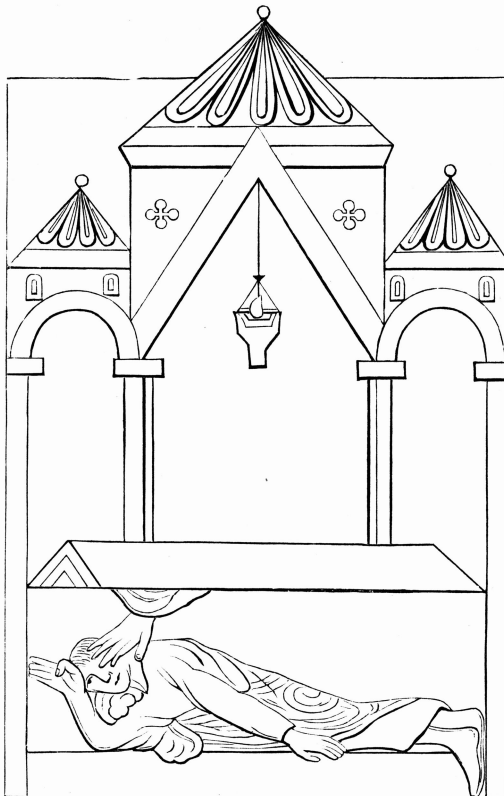
They wandered about until, despairing of a peaceful abode in England, they prepared to cross to Ireland. The idea emanated from the Bishop Eardulf, who communicated his intention to the elder monks, but kept the project from the junior monks and the laymen.

A ship was appointed to meet them at the mouth of the Derwent in Cumberland, the body of St. Cuthbert was carried on board, and the senior monks followed. As the wind filled the sails they shouted their farewells to the others on the beach, who then, to their amazement and grief, realised the deception. Then arose a wail of woe, "Thou," they cried, "thou our patron and our father, lo thou= art carried like a prisoner into exile ; we, equally

--178--

wretched and captive, are exposed to our raging adversaries like sheep to the teeth of wolves."

The vessel had made but little way when a storm broke over them, the wind drove them back ; St. Cuthbert would



SHRINE OF ST. CUTHBERT

Illustration: Shrine of St. Cuthbert

not leave those so devoted to him in loneliness far from their homes. Before those on board could land, the book of the Gospels, which was carried on the coffin, fell into the sea and disappeared. As soon as they found themselves again on land the bishop and his companions fell

--179--

prostrate and acknowledged the justice which had thwarted their scheme. The grief of those who were to be left behind was turned to joy, and they cheerfully began to search along the coast in the hope that the lost book might have been washed ashore. It was at last found so far away as Whitherne, in Galloway.

This book is now preserved in the Cottonian MSS., British Museum, and its appearance confirms the account of having been immersed in water, though it is by no means as the legend says, "much more beautiful than before."

The lay folk had lost confidence in their bishop through the late proceedings, and many deserted the company to find for themselves homes, leaving an insufficient number to draw the car containing the coffin ; but a horse and bridle were miraculously found, and readily appropriated to the saint's service.

They now journeyed to Chester-le-Street, which was reached in the spring of 883 ; there the king built and endowed a cathedral of wood for them, and Eardulph, the sixteenth and last bishop of Lindisfarne, became the first bishop of Chester-le-Street.

The fame of St. Cuthbert spread, and large domains were given to him.

King Athelstan visited the shrine and offered numerous gifts of plate, vestures, and land ; some of which we shall hereafter see are still preserved at Durham. Many other kings and prelates did the same, and St. Cuthbert's devotees accumulated great wealth.

The Danes again disturbed the saint's repose, and the bishop, with his clergy, taking St. Cuthbert and the treasures, hastened to Ripon in the early part of the year 995.

The danger passed, and they started to return to the church which they had formerly inhabited (probably Lindisfarne). They reached a place called Wrdelan (Wardley?)

--180--

—when the vehicle containing the body became stationary, no effort could move it. For three days the clergy fasted and prayed, then the saint acquainted them that he wished to rest at Durham.

Upon the top of a hill a small church of boughs was built to contain the coffin, to be immediately succeeded by a better edifice of wood until a church of stone could be erected. In three years this was built, and the body of St. Cuthbert was reverently deposited there in September 4th, 999.

"In times of old," says Reginald, "there flourished one Elfred Westoue, who, for the love he bore to S. Cuthbert, was distinguished by peculiar

privileges conceded to no one but himself—for, as often as it pleased him, he might freely and with impunity open the coffin of the saint, might wrap him in such robes as he thought fit, and he could obtain from him whatever he requested. It was his custom to cut the overgrowing hair of his venerable head, dividing and smoothing it with an ivory comb, and to cut the nails of his fingers with a pair of silver scissors which he had made.”

With the coming of William of Normandy the monks in fear again stared on their peregrinations. They went to Lindisfarne, but returned to Durham during the Lent of 1070.

In 1093 the old cathedral was demolished to give place to the present building, but before the old church was taken down the bishop, William Carilpho,

“did prepare a faire and beautifull tombe of stone in the Cloyster garth, a yard high from the ground, where S. Cuthbert was laid untill his shrine was prepared for him in the new church that now is. Over which tombe was layd a faire and comely marble. But when his body was translated to the Feriture where it was inshrined, in honour of him they made a goodly large and curious image of marble representinge S. Cuthbert, in that forme in which he was wont to say masse, with his miter on his head and his crosier staff in his hand, and his other

--181--

vestments very curiously engraven on the said marble, which, after his body was inshrined in the new church, was placed above the said tombe.”⁴

In this cloister tomb the relics of St. Cuthbert rested until the year 1104, when they were translated into the present cathedral. Of this translation there are two accounts—one in the *Acta Sanctorum*, which is anonymous, and the other by the monk Reginald (about 1180).

“Under the head of miracles, all do not entertain one and the same opinion, either with respect to the presence of the sacred body of S. Cuthbert, or its state of incorruption. Some, founding their opinion on various conjectures, dream that before this our time his body had been removed to some other place, but that his grave, although it can no longer boast of its occupant, is not deprived of the glory of his virtues ; but, in proof of its old possessor, gives frequent miraculous manifestations even at the present time. Others admit that the sacred remains are still here, but that the frame of a human body should remain undissolved during the revolutions of so many ages is more than the laws of nature allow of ; and that notwithstanding the Divine Power may command all created things to undergo its pleasure, yet that in the case of this body, and its state of incorruption, they have before them the testimony of no one who had explored it either with his hand or eye, and that therefore it was a difficult

matter to believe with respect to this man, however much a saint—a thing not in his case proved, and which they were well aware had been conceded to a very few only of holy men. In this manner the one party conjecturing that the holy body had been carried away elsewhere, and the other not allowing its incorruption, the brethren who affirmed that it was there, and in a perfect state, were disbelieved, and they became in consequence anxious for their reputation. On this account they betook themselves to God in Prayers, and

--182--

entreated that He, who is wonderful in his saints, would prove Himself wonderful in the manifestation of so great virtue, and would, to the glory of His name, exclude all doubt by indubitable signs.

“In the meanwhile, the church which has been founded by William, the late Bishop of Durham, was almost finished, and the time was at hand for transferring into it the venerable body of Father Cuthbert, to occupy the place prepared for it by the ingenious hands of workmen, and receive the meed[sic] of worthy veneration.

“The 29th of August, 1104, the day appointed for the solemn removal being at hand, the brethren entered into a resolution, that as no one was alive who could give them accurate information, they themselves, as far as they should be allowed by the permission of God, should examine into the manner in which each individual thing was placed and arranged about the holy body, for this purpose, that they might make it ready for removal on the day approaching, and without loss of time furnish it with things fit and becoming, lest when the hour of festive procession had arrived, any difficulty, proceeding from want of foresight, should cause delay, and from that delay any unpleasant feeling should arise in the minds of the numerous assemblage which had come together to witness such a solemnity.

“The brethren, therefore, appointed for the purpose, nine in number, with Turgot their Prior, having qualified themselves for the task by fasting and prayer, on the 24th of August, as soon as it was dark, prostrated themselves before the venerable coffin, and amid tears and prayers they tried to open it with fearful and trembling hands. Aided by instruments of iron, they soon succeeded in their attempt, when, to their astonishment, they found a chest covered on all sides with hides, carefully fixed to it by iron nails. From the weight and size of this chest, and other facts which presented themselves, they were induced to believe that there was another coffin within it, but fear for a long time prevented them from making the experiment. At last, the Prior having twice or thrice commanded them to proceed, they renewed their task, and having succeeded in opening the iron bands, they lifted the lid.

--183--

“Here they saw within a coffin of wood which had been covered all over by coarse linen cloth of a threefold texture, of the length of a man, and covered with a lid of the same description. Again they hesitated, for a doubt arose whether this was the dwelling place of the holy body, or that there was still another coffin within. In this stage of their operations they called to mind the words of Bede, which record that the body of S. Cuthbert had been found by the brethren of Lindisfarne in a state of incorruption eleven years after its burial, and had been placed above ground for the purpose of worthy veneration. With this information before them, they discovered that *this was the very same coffin* which had for so many years preserved the deposit of so heavenly a treasure. Under this conviction they fell upon their knees, and prayed to S. Cuthbert to intercede with the Almighty for pardon for their presumption. They rejoiced and at the same time they were afraid. Their fear resulted from the certainty that they had before them so great a treasure inspiring them with delight, their joy burst forth into tears, and with thankful hearts they conceived that their desires had been amply satisfied. To make a further examination appeared to be a rashness which would unquestionably bring down upon them the Divine vengeance ; and therefore, laying aside their intention of more minutely investigating the sacred body, they entered into deliberation as to the manner in which it should be removed on the day of translation which was approaching.

“But amongst the brethren who were present, there was one, a man of great constancy in Christ, who, by the effect of grace, had become that in fact which his name implied. His name was Leofwin, which means in English, *a dear friend*. He was dear to God, and God was a friend to him. God proved Himself to be his Father by the chastisements which He compelled him to undergo, and he evinced himself to be a son of God by patiently and thankfully submitting to the rod which corrected him. All who knew his life and conversation had no doubt that his breast was the temple of the Holy Spirit. He, when he saw the brethren afraid of opening the coffin which they had discovered, and viewing the proof of celestial grace and matter of new exaltation which it might contain, stepped forward into the

--185--

midst of them and speaking in a more fervent spirit than was his custom, exclaimed, ‘What do ye, my brethren? what do ye fear? That deed will never fail of being attended by a happy result, which begins from the inspiration of God. He who gave us the will to make the investigation, gives us the hope of discovering what we seek. The progress which we have already made without difficulty, is a proof of the good which we may hope to arise from what remains to be done. Our beginning would never have been so successful if it had been the Divine will that we should not persevere to the end. Our object in investigating these sacred relics proceeds from no contempt or diffidence of his holiness, but that the Lord

of virtues, the King himself of glory, may be the more glorified by all men in proportion to the mightiness of the miracle manifested in the present day. Let us then examine the inner parts of the hospitable chest that upon a matter which we have seen with our eyes, and have thoroughly examined, which our hands have handled, our testimony may be credited, and on argument may be left to the doubtful for disbelieving our assertions.’ The devout brethren regained their confidence by this admonition, and moved the venerable body from behind the altar where it had hitherto reposed, into the middle of the choir—a place more spacious and better adapted to the investigation.

“Their first step was to removed the linen cloth which enveloped the coffin, yet still they feared to open the coffin itself ; and under a hope that its contents might be ascertained through a chink, or by some other means, they carefully examined its exterior by candle-light, but without success. They then, but not without fear, removed the lid, and no sooner had they done this than they found another lid, placed somewhat lower, resting upon three transverse bars, and occupying the whole breadth and length of the coffin so as to completely conceal the contents beneath. Upon the upper part of it, near the head, there lay a book of the Gospels. This second lid was raisable by means of two iron rings, one at the head, and thither at the feet. A doubt no longer remained. They knew that the object of their search was before them, but still they hesitated to handle it.

“Whilst they were in this state of doubt, being encouraged by

--185--

the command of the Prior, and the exhortation of the brother above mentioned, at last they raised the lid, and having removed the linen cloth which had covered the sacred relics, they smelt an odour of the sweetest fragrance ; and, behold, they found the venerable body of the blessed Father, the fruit of their anxious desire, laying on its right side in a perfect state, and, from the flexibility of its joints, representing a person asleep rather than dead. The moment they saw this, a tremendous fear thrilled through their limbs, and they shrunk back to a distance, not daring to look at the miracle before their eyes. Oft and many a time they fell upon their knees, beating their breasts, and exclaiming with eyes and hands raised to heaven, ‘Lord have mercy upon us.’ Whilst they were in this state, each related to the one who was nearest to him what he had seen, just as if he had been the only one favored with the sight. After short interval, they all fell flat on the ground, and amid a deluge of tears, repeated the seven penitential psalms, and prayed the Lord not to correct them in his anger nor chasten them in his displeasure. When this was done, approaching the coffin on their hands and knees rather than on their feet they found in it such a mass of holy relics, that the moderate size of the coffin could never had contained them had not the holy body of the Father, by reclining upon its right side, allowed them on this side and on that a larger portion of space for reposing along with him. These relics, as is gathered from old

books, consisted of the head of the glorious King and Martyr Oswald, the bones of the venerable Confessors Aidan, Eadbert, Eadfrid, and Ethelwold. There were, besides, the bones of the venerable Bede ; these had obtained a resting place by this side, and along with the rest were contained in a small linen sack. It has been already stated who removed them (the bones of Bede) hither from Jarrow, the place where they were buried.⁵ In fact, he who transferred to the Church of Durham the bones of St. Boisil, the same by revelation transferred to the same place those of the Dr. Bede, and placed them in different parts of the Church. Moreover, they found in the same place very many relics of other Saints. Their first which was to remove the holy body

--186--

from its lateral position and place it on its back ; but they were unable to effect this on account of the multitude of relics which surrounded it. They determined, consequently, to remove it altogether for a while, that they might collect and place the relics by themselves and then restore it to its own proper abode. But still they dreaded to touch it with their hands, until being encouraged by the brother above mentioned, they at length became ready to execute the commands of their seniors.

“The two deputed to remove the venerable body from the coffin took their stand, the one at its head and the other at its feet ; and whilst they were raising it, holding it by those parts, it began to bend in the middle like a living man and sink downwards from its natural weight of solid flesh and bones. Upon this a third monk ran up, and supporting its middle in his arms they reverently placed it upon the pavement. In the meantime the relics of the saints having been removed they restored the body of the Father to its coffin. The hour of midnight devotion was at hand and prevented them from lingering any longer over it at present. They therefore chanted the *Te Deum* in a low voice, and afterwards singing Psalms of exultation, carried the body back again to the place from which they had removed it.

“The following night the same brethren again brought forth the body into the middle of the choir. The outer covering was a robe of a costly kind, next below this was wrapped in a purple Dalmatic, and then in linen, and all these swathements retained their original freshness without any stain of corruption. The chasuble which he had worn for eleven years in his grave had been removed by the brethren of that period, and is now preserved elsewhere in the church as a proof of incorruption. When, therefore, by examining it with their eyes, but handling it with their hands, by raising it and lowering it, they had clearly discovered that this was a body in a state of incorruption, with solid nerves, and had ascertained that it has been tended with solemn care, in addition to the robes which it already wore, they clothed it with the most costly pall which they could find in the church, and over this they placed a covering of the finest linen. Having wrapped it in these, they restored it to its peaceful abode with the

fervent devotion of prayers and tears. The other things which they had found along with him, they also replaced in his

--187--

coffin, namely, an ivory comb and a pair of scissors, till retaining their freshness, and as because a priest, a silver altar, a linen cloth for covering the sacramental elements, a paten, a chalice, small in size, but from its materials and workmanship, precious, its lower part representing a lion of the purest gold which bore on its back an onyx stone, made hollow by the most beautiful workmanship, and by the ingenuity of the artist, so attached to the back of the lion, that it might be easily turned round with the hand, although it might not be separated from it. Moreover, of all the relics which had been found there, the only one which they restored to its place, by the side of the glorious bishop, was the head of the blessed King Oswald. The other relics, as has been already said, which had been removed from thence and decently arranged, are preserved in a frequented part of the church. [The minor relics were placed in reliquaries of ivory and of crystal, and arranged round the saints' chapel; but those of S. Bede had a separate shrine in the Gallice.][sic] As soon as the body of the blessed Father was shut up in the coffin, they covered the coffin itself with linen cloth of a coarse texture, dipped in wax, and restored it to the place behind the altar where it had formerly rested."

The historian recounts the unbelief of some of those who had assembled for the translation, how the body was again exposed for their benefit and how they were convinced, the carrying of the relics into the new church, and concludes his narrative with an account of the miraculous cure of Richard, Abbot of St. Albans.

Reginald also gives an account of this investigation which agrees with the previous record; but he also tells us how the decomposition of the other relics was decaying the bottom of the coffin, so they placed another plank standing upon four short feet above it that the body of the saint should repose on a seemly couch. He tells us how this inner coffin is made entirely of black oak, and the whole of it is externally carved with very admirable engraving, the compartments are very circumscribed and

--188--

small, and they are occupied by divers beasts, flowers, and images, which seem to be inserted, engraved, or furrowed out of the wood. This coffin is enclosed in another outer one, which is entirely covered by hides, and is surrounded and firmly bound by iron nails and bandages. The third coffin, which is the outermost of all, is decorated with gold and precious stones, which, by means of indented flutings projecting from the second coffin, for which, in due order, similar projections are fabricated in this, is closely attached and fastened to it by long iron nails. This coffin cannot possibly be separated from the rest, because those nails can by no device be drawn out without fracture.

The body was enveloped in the winding sheet given him by the Abbess Verca, then came an amice, alb, and purple face cloth. Upon the forehead was a fillet of gold. Stole and maniple ; tunic and dalmatic, both of great elegance, in the later are interwoven birds and small animals and with a border of thread of gold. Next to the dalmatic his holy body is clothed with other costly robes of silk, above which there has been put around him a sheet. This was removed and instead were put upon it others much more elegant and costly, of silk, purple cloth, and fine linen. There were likewise in the coffin an altar of silver, a cloth for covering the sacramental elements, a golden chalice and paten, and a pair of scissors and his ivory comb perforated in the middle.

After the verification of the body of St. Cuthbert and the satisfaction of the curiosity of those present, for which purpose it would seem the coffin had been conveyed from the cloister tomb to the choir of the new church, the relics were carried shoulder high, preceded by all the caskets containing the other saints, in a glorious procession. As it issued forth the people pressed around, making it difficult to proceed, and the voices of the singers were

--189--

drowned in the exaltations of the enthusiastic multitude. They compassed the church, then halted, outside, for the bishop's sermon, which was so long that the people became weary, "touching many points," we are told, "not at all appropriate to the solemnity," when suddenly the brightness of the day was overcast and a violent torrent of rain began to fall. The monks, interrupting the sermon, snatched up the coffin and hastened into church, where it was placed in the apse behind the high altar.

Of the shrine at this period we know but little, save that the feretory rested on a stone slab which was supported by nine pillars, and that around it lamps were perpetually burning, to defray the expense of this various donations are recorded.

The eastern apse of the church became dangerous, and in the year 1235 we have an *Indulgence* of the Bishop of Ely, in which he says the body of St. Cuthbert, "more precious than gold and precious stones, reposes in the church of Durham, where, above his sacred sepulchre, devout men of old erected a vaulted roof of stone, which at the present day is so full of fissures and cracks that its fall seems approaching." At the end of the thirteenth century the eastern part of the cathedral was rebuilt in the form we now have it, including the space containing the shrine, which is constantly called the *feretory*, as space 37 feet long and 23 feet broad, in the midst of which stood the shrine.

In A.D. 1372 John Lord Neville of Raby spent £200 upon the substructure of the shrine. The work was enclosed in chests in London—there is a tradition it came from France—and was conveyed by sea to Newcastle at the cost of the donor, but thence it was taken by road to Durham at the cost of the Church. He also gave the altar screen, which also forms the west side of the feretory, or chapel of the shrine.

--190--

The shrine had now reached the completed beauty as known to our forefathers and to the streams of pilgrims until the disastrous day of Henry VIII., and the description was given in the *Rites* conveys some idea of what it was :—

“In the midst of the feretory the sacred shrine was exalted with the most curious workmanship of fine and costly green marble, all worked and gilt with gold, having four seats, or places convenient beneath the shrine for the pilgrims and infirm sitting on their knees to lean and rest in during their prayers and offerings to God and holy S. Cuthbert for his miraculous relief and succor, which being never wanting, made the shrine to be so richly invested that it was esteemed to be one of the most sumptuous monuments in all England, so great were the offerings and jewels bestowed upon it even in these latter days, as is more patent in the history of the church at large.

“At the west end of the shrine of S. Cuthbert was a little altar adjoining to it on which to say Mass, only upon the great and holy feast of S. Cuthbert’s day in Lent ; at which solemnity the Prior and the whole convent did keep open household in the Frater-house, and did dine together on that day, and on no day else in the year. And at this feast, and certain other festival days, in time for divine service they were accustomed to draw up the cover of S. Cuthbert’s shrine, being of wainscot, whereunto was fastened unto every corner of the said cover, to a loop of iron, a very strong cord, which cords were all fastened together over the midst of the cover, and a strong rope was fastened unto the loops of binding of the said cords, which rope did run up and down in a pulley under the vault over S. Cuthbert’s Feretory, for the drawing up of the said shrine ; and the said rope was fastened into a loop of iron to the north pillar of the feretory, having silver bells fastened to the said rope, so that at the drawing up of the cover the bells made such a good sound that it stirred all the people’s hearts that were within the church to repair unto it, and to make their prayers to God and holy S. Cuthbert, and that the beholders might see the glorious ornaments thereof. Also the cover had at every corner two rings made fast which did run up and down

--191--

on four staves of iron when it was being drawn, which staves were fast to every corner of the marble that S. Cuthbert’s coffin did lie upon ; which cover was all gilded over, and on either side was painted four lively images curious to the beholders ; and on the east end was painted the picture of our Saviour sitting on a rainbow to give judgment, very lively to the beholders ; and on the west end of it was the picture of our Lady and our Saviour on her knee ; and on the top of the cover from end to end was most fine carved work cut out with dragons and other beasts, most artificially wrought, and the inside was varnished with a sanguine colour that might be more perspicuous to the beholders ; and at every corner of the cover was a lock to keep it close, but at such times as was fit to show

it.

“Also within the said feretory [a name applied here to the chapel][sic], both on the north side and on the south, there were almeries[cupboards] of fine wainscot, being varnished and finely painted, and gilded over with little images very seemly and beautiful to behold, for the relics belonging to S. Cuthbert to lie in, that were offered to him. When the cover to his shrine was drawn up then the said almeries were opened that every man who came hither at the time might see the holy relics, gifts, and jewels therein, so that for these things and other relics that hung about within the said feretory upon the irons, was accounted to be the most sumptuous and richest jewels in all this land, with the beauty of the fine little images that did stand in the French-pier within the feretory, for great were the gifts and godly devotion of kings and queens and other estates at that time towards God and holy S. Cuthbert in the church.”

The French-pier here mentioned was the altar screen, the east side of which formed the west side of the chapel. The account goes on to describe the lights on the screen and the banners which were kept around the shrine.

From this description we have no difficulty in picturing the appearance of the shrine ; the structure was in principle the same as St. Edward's at Westminster, St. Edmund's

--192--

at Bury, etc., and the same means were taken for the preservation of the offerings by the use of a cover.

Near the shrine there stood a money-box called the “pix of S. Cuthbert” which had a slit in the lid just such as is used nowadays. Into this were dropped the offerings of the poor pilgrims whose gifts were not costly enough to hang about the shrine ; but it proved a productive source of income. In the year 1385-6 it yielded the sum of £63 17s. 8d., which according to the current value[c1905] of money would make the offerings for that year amount to £1,277 13s. 4d.

By the diligence of the late Canon Raine a list of some of the custodians of the shrines of Sts. Cuthbert and Bede has been gathered from various sources, together with their associates who assisted in the responsibility of such great treasures, and who held one of the two keys of the above-mentioned box. The assistant is first called, in the yearly rolls, his *socius*, then his *consocius*, but by a blunder first made in 1440, which was perpetuated in after years, he was called his *consciis*. It is the most complete list of these officers existing, and as such is reproduced, with several additions from the Feretrars' Rolls recently printed by Canon Fowler :—

	Feretrar	Consocius
1022	Elfred Westoue	---
1333	Peter de Hilton	---
1372	John de Cornwall	---
1375	Hugh de Hawick	John de Alverton.

1378	John de Alverton	Robert de Blackburne.
1378	John de Alverton	Thomas Dautre.
1383	Richard de Segbrok	---
1385	Thomas de Lyth	---
1391	Robert de Langchester	---
1398	Thomas de Lyth	John Durham
1402	William Poklyngton	---

--193--

	Feretrar	Consocius
1409	William Southwick	---
1411	Robert de Crayk	John Durham
1418	John Durham	John Lethom.
1420	" "	Roger de Langchestre.
1421	" "	Thomas Hesilrig.
1423	" "	Thomas Ayre.
1425	" " (solus)	
1427	" "	Thomas Hexham.
1428	" " (solus)	
1433	" "	John Gaytesheved.
1434	Richard Barton	Thomas Lewyn.
1439	John Burnby	Robert Emylton.
1441	Robert Emylton	John Rypon.
1444	William Dalton	" "
1453	John Pencher	William Kellow.
1457	John Warner	Thomas Caly.
1458	" "	Richard Bylingham and John Greyne.
1459	" "	John Steyllle.
1460	John Warner and Richard Blacborne	" "
1480	John Lee	Richard Steyllle.
1488	John Manby	John Claxton
1501	Robert Werdal	" "
1513	John Halywell	John Thrikkeld.
1525	Richard Harryngton	Cuthbert Heghyngton.
1536	William Wylom	" "
1538	William Watson	George Bates.

The Feretrar, or shrine keeper, at Durham had a busy time. It was his duty to attend personally when anyone of consequence made a pilgrimage to St. Cuthbert, or to offer anything at his shrine, and if he requested to have the cover drawn so as to see it—

“The Clerk of the Feretory gave intelligence to his master the Sub-Prior, the Keeper of the Feretory. And then the said

master did bring the keys to the shrine with him, giving them to the clerk to open the locks. His office was to stand by and to see it drawn. And when they had made their prayers, and did offer anything to it, if it were either gold, silver, or jewels, straightway it was hung on the shrine. And if it were any other thing, as an Unicorn horn, Elephant Tooth, or such like thing, then it was hung within the Feretory (chapel) at the end of the shrine. And when they had made their prayers the clerk did let down the cover thereof, and did lock it at every corner, giving the keys to the Sub-Prior again.”

The same order was observed when the cover was drawn during the singing of *Te Deum*, at High Mass, and for *Magnificat*. He also had to attend on the banner of St. Cuthbert, which contained the Corporax cloth used by the saint at Mass, and to give similar attention to the shrine of St. Bede in the presence of pilgrims or when it was carried in procession.

In the Feretrars’ Rolls from 1375 to 1538 are many interesting entries to do with the shine of its keeper.⁶ The latter received a sum of five shillings on the feast days of St. Cuthbert, and his colleague three and fourpence. Another official, termed the Clerk of the Shrine, usually received twenty shillings a year ; it would be his duty to keep the accounts.

A frequent entry is “For repairing of rings at the shrine, 5s. 0d.,” an evidence of the constant wear by frequent expositions to pilgrims. The steady influx of gifts necessitated a great deal of work in fixing applicable offerings to the shrine. It must a have been a good item in the income of the goldsmith, who charged sevenpence for setting an emerald.

		s.	d.
For two locks for the doors of the shrine	. .	3	0
A cloth for the shrine	. . . .	6	8
For repairing the box of S. Cuthbert	. .	0	6

		s.	d.
For a jewel bought and given to the shrine	. .	4	0
For four bells bought for the shrine	. . . .	11	8
For a cord bought for the shrine	. . . .	11	8
The expences[sic] of a London goldsmith and his men coming from York to Durham to see the shrine, by order of the Lord Bishop.	. . . .	18	0
For writing a prayer around the shrine.	. .	0	6
Received 20d. for the old cord taken from the shrine.			

These are but a few representative notes which associate the life of that

time with the present, and these little matter-of-fact entries help one to realise the care bestowed on the shrine's maintenance.

The inventories of relics, vestures, and jewels in the care of the feretrar are of tremendous length. There is in the York MS. a list of relics preserved at Durham about the end of the twelfth century, another compiled in 1383 by Richard de Segbruk, keeper of the shrine, and a third by Thomas de Lyth in 1401. A supplementary list as made in 1417, altogether making a very large collection. The chief relics, in the building termed the feretory, were arranged on three shelves or gradines on the south side of the shrine ; on the lowest of these stood an enamelled coffer containing the cloak in which St. Cuthbert lay on the ground for eleven years. In another part were the gloves of St. Cuthbert, in an ivory coffer adorned with gold and silver.

The destruction of this shrine must be taken from the *Rites*, with which all other authorities agree.⁷

“The sacred shrine of holy S. Cuthbert was defaced in the Visitation that Dr. Lee, Dr. Henley, and Master Blytheman held at Durham for the subverting of such monuments, in the time of King Henry VIII., in his suppression of the abbeys, where they found many worthy and goodly jewels, but especially one precious stone belonging to the shrine, which, by the estimate

--196--

of those three visitors and their skilful lapidaries, was of value sufficient to redeem a prince.⁸ After the spoiling of this ornaments and jewels, coming nearer to his body, thinking to have found nothing but dust and bones, and finding the chest that he did lie in very strongly bound with iron, the goldsmith did take a great fore hammer of a smith and did break the said chest open, and when they had opened the chest, they found him lying whole, uncorrupt, with his face bare, and his beard as it had been a fortnight's growth, and all his vestments upon him as he was accustomed to say Mass, and his met wand of gold lying beside him. Then, when the goldsmith did perceive that he had broken one of this legs when he did break open the chest, he was very sorry for it, and did cry, 'Alas, I have broken one of his legs.' Then Dr. Henley, hearing him say so, did call upon him, and did bid him cast down his bones. Then he made answer again that he could not get them in sunder, for the sinews and the skin held it that it could not part. Then Dr. Lee did step up to see if were so or not, and did turn himself about, and did speak in Latin to Dr. Henley that he was lying whole. Yet Dr. Henley would give no credit to his words, but sill did cry, 'Cast down his bones.' Then Dr. Lee made answer, 'If ye will not believe me come up yourself and see him.' Then did Dr. Henley go up to him, and did handle him, and did see that he lie whole and uncorrupt. Then he commanded them to take him down, and so it happened contrary to their expectation, that not only his body was whole and uncorrupt, but the vestments wherein his body lay and wherewithal he was accustomed to

say Mass, were safe, fresh, and not consumed. Whereupon the Visitors commanded he should be carried into the vestry, where he was close and safely kept in the inner part till such time as they did further know the King's pleasure what to do with him, and upon notice of the King's pleasure therein the Prior and Monks burying him in the ground, under a fair marble stone, which remains to this day, where his shrine was exalted."

--197--

Harpsfield says, in consequence of the command of Bishop Turnstall a greave was made in the ground in that very spot previously occupied by his precious coffin.

This last statement has been disputed, but confirmation of its correctness is obtained from the treasury bills of expenses of the church from Michaelmas, 1541. In November of that year 2*s.* was paid to John Symson for four day's work in removing the tombs of Sts. Cuthbert and Bede, by Robert Dalton, the First Prebendary of the Seventh Stall. In addition to which the original bill for making the grave for St. Cuthbert is extant, of which we subjoin a translation :—

	1542.—After the feast of Michael	
Concerning	Given to George Skelis, on the first day of	
S. Cuthbert	January (1541-2), for two days and a half	
	about making the grave of S. Cuthbert. . .	15 <i>d.</i>
	Item, given to the same for John Paxton (at	
	the rate of 3 <i>d.</i>), John Wylliamson (at the	
	rate of 3 <i>d.</i>), John Oxenett (at the rate of	
	3 <i>d.</i>), for two days and a half.	22½ <i>d.</i>
	Item, given to the same for William Tayller	
	(at the rate of 3 <i>d.</i>), for a day and a half . .	4½ <i>d.</i>
	Item, given to Cuthbert Johnson for two	
	days and a half.	15 <i>d.</i>
	Item, given for 5 ells of linen for a sheet, at	
	8 <i>d.</i> per ell	3 <i>s.</i> 4 <i>d.</i>
	Item, given for a load of lime	4 <i>d.</i>
	Item, given to Stokell for nails and iron	
	Bars.	4 <i>d.</i>
	Item, given to George Skeles for four days	
	at the Feast of Epiphany, working at the	
	grave of S. Cuthbert, and for a morning. .	2 <i>s.</i> 2 <i>d.</i>

--198--

Concerning	Item, given to the same for John Paxton,	
S. Cuthbert	John Wylliamson, John Oxinet, four days	
	at 3 <i>d.</i> per day ; and for a morning's work,	
	to each a penny ; and for William Tayler,	4 <i>s.</i> 5 <i>d.</i>

at 3*d.* per day 3 days, and a morning's
work at a penny ; and for Richard Yggle
and Roland Robson, half a day 4*d.* . . .
Item, given to Cuthbert Johnson for himself
(at 6*d.* per day), and his servant three
days, for working at the grave of S.
Cuthbert, and at the marble stone, and at
the church on account of the wind. . . . 2*s.* 3*d.*
Item, given to his wife for sewing of a
sheet. 2*d.*

This should dispose once and for all of the reported tradition that the resting-place of St. Cuthbert is a secret known only to three Benedictine monks of the Roman obedience, a tradition unheard of until the early part of the last century. And now we come to that which leaves no loophole whatsoever for the existence of that tradition ; the opening of the tomb and examination of the contents of that coffin on the 17th of May, 1827, in the presence of some of the chapter, and recorded by that renowned antiquary, Canon Raine, who was among those present.

The slab of Frosterly marble was with difficulty removed, beneath about twenty inches of soil another large slab of grey stone was reached, it was the gravestone of one Richard Heswell, monk, placed in an inverted position, name downwards, to avoid the possibility of mistaking it for his greave. The monks were not allowed burial within the church, but found their resting-places in the cemetery garth. This slab covered a stone-built grave 7 feet long, 4 feet wide, and between 4 feet and 5 feet in depth.

--199--

At the bottom of this grave was a large coffin of oak in a decaying state. This was the outer chest, made new in 1542.

After the fragments of this were removed another coffin was found, more decayed than the former ; in some placed portions of a white, adhesive substance, which had been a covering or envelope, were clinging to it. This, no doubt, was the coffin described in 1104 as the second coffin of St. Cuthbert, which was then covered with skins. The lid was especially rotten, and at the lower end fragments of the wood were confused with a number of loose bones—a skull, ribs, arm, leg, and thigh bones, and the skull and rib bones of an infant. The adult relics Raine thinks to have been of the early bishops of Lindisfarne, placed in St. Cuthbert's coffin in 875, and taken out in 1104. They had been preserved in the feretory, and at the Dissolution may have been buried with the patron. Probably the sheet mentioned in the foregoing accounts may have been to enclose them, as it was seen not to have been used for the saint. In the inventory of relics numerous entries of the "bones of the Holy Innocents" accounts for the remains of infants.

When the wood and bones were removed the lid of a third coffin was found, in an advanced state of decay. It will be remembered that at the investigation in 1104 the coffin was enveloped in a coarse cloth saturated in wax,

which, after the examination, was renewed, that the coffin was beautifully carved, and that two iron rings were fixed to the lid. Here all was again found, one iron ring was found, and the loop which held the other in its place. Numerous fragments of coarse waxed linen were still adhering to the wood, and the carving or incised lines were in some places entirely filled with the wax. And what are the carvings, now being examined, on the identical coffin in which the body of St. Cuthbert was

--200--

laid in A.D. 698? The lid, ends, sides, and bottom were occupied by engravings, the subjects delineated by incised lines have been cut upon the surface, partly with a knife of chisel, and “partly by some such instrument



INCISED FIGURE OF ST. JOHN

Illustration: Incised Figure of St. John

as the screeve of the woodman,” furrowed in the wood, as Reginald states.

Nearly all the figures have the nimbus, the right hand in benediction, and the left holding a book. St. John, on one of the sides here represented, is quarter the size

--201--

of the original, and is the most perfect. Many of them are mere fragments, but some are yet discernible with their names—St. Thomas, St. Peter with the keys, St. Andrew, St. Michael, St. Paul. The figures on the lid and bottom were of a larger size, but in a yet more imperfect state—the lower part of St. Luke, the Virgin and Child, and portions of the winged emblems of the Evangelists and of various names.

The next step was to examine the body of the saint which had for so many ages commanded the devotions of the faithful. By an arrangement of boards the sacred remains were raised to the surface in an undisturbed state.

The outer covering had been linen of the finest texture, though only small pieces were left. In two records of the state of the relics in 1104 we are told that these coverings—silk, cloth, and linen—were put around the body for its preservation. The robes within the winding-sheet were still more decayed, so that it was impossible to detach them one from the other. Canon Raine says that he found five distinct silks, which we may readily conceive to be the remains of tunic, dalmatic, chasuble, and the two swathings beneath the winding-sheet.

After the linen the first was of thin silk of amber colour, the ornamental parts being done in gold leaf.

The second was of thick, soft silk in a variety of rich colours. The ground within the circle was red, the boat red, the ducks yellow, the water purple, the porpoises yellow and red ; the border is purple, with yellow foliage and fruit and red stalks ; and the border at the bottom is red. The learned Raine thinks the rabbits, ducks, and porpoises refer especially to St. Cuthbert and his island hermitage, where rabbits abound, where the eider ducks are known as “Cuthbert’s ducks,” and around the rocks of which sport schools of porpoises ; if so, may not the

--202--

fantastic vessel which he calls an “urn or flower basket” be an idealised form of the traditionary floating coffin?

The third fabric (the chasuble?) was of amber silk, diapered, edged with lace “resembling the coach lace of the present day,” 1¼ inch wide.

The fourth (the dalmatic?) of purple and crimson silk, diapered with crosses.

The fifth (the tunicle?) of rich silk damask, figured in ovals enclosing an urn supported by griffins, in crimson and purple.

The stole, broken into five pieces, is in other respects perfect, the gold in the fabric being quite brilliant. It is 2½ inches wide, and the groundwork is entirely of flat gold thread. Figures are embroidered upon it, mostly in crimson, the prominent folds being outlined in gold thread. The pavements on which the figures stand are of various hues outlined in gold ; the nimbi are of scarlet and gold, the names green, though in a few cases red. The border is scarlet ornament on a gold ground edged with scarlet and brown. It is lined with thin dark red silk, having a narrow stripe of gold at either side.

At the back of the neck is a quatrefoil enclosing an Agnus Dei.

The figures around the stole were Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Amos, and

Obadiah, Hosea, Joel, Habakkuk, Jonas, Zacharias, and Nahum, and a fragment of another, with their names scattered from side to side.

The right end is embroidered on the obverse with a half figure of St. John ; on the reverse is the inscription “ÆLFFLÆD FIERI PRECEPIT,” proving that the stole was made by order of Ælfled. The obverse of the left end has the half figure of St. Thomas, and on the reverse, “PIO EPISCOPO FRIDESTANO,” showing that it was made for the Pious Bishop Frithestan.

The maniple is 32¼ inches exclusive of the fringe. The

--203--

centre, resting on the wrist or the first finger—for it was worn under the thumb and fell across the palm and back of the hand in those days—has a quatrefoil enclosing the Divine hand of the Eternal Father. At one side are St. Gregory the Pope and Peter the Deacon, the termination figuring St. John Baptist[sic] and on the reverse, “PIO EPISCOPO FRIDESTANO.” On the other side are St. Sixtus Bishop and Laurence the Deacon ; on the termination is St. James, at the back of which we are told that Ælfled commanded this to be made.

This Ælfled was queen of Edward the Elder, and had these vestures made for Frithestan, bishop of Winchester A.D. 905-931. The question arises, How came these on the body of St. Cuthbert? Bishop Frithestan, who had resigned his see in 931, died the following year. Soon after his death Athelstan, son of King Edward, visited the tomb of St. Cuthbert at Chester-le-Street, and there offered among other things a stole, a maniple, a girdle, and two bracelets of gold. There can be no doubt that by these means St. Cuthbert became possessed of the vestures worked for the other prelate, especially as there were also found the girdle and bracelets. The girdle or zone was 37 inches long and 7/8 inch wide, woven with a similar flat gold wire as the stole, and red thread, same as the zone, but with a checked border, and measure 9 inches in circumference.

When they were placed in the saint's body is unknown, probably by the relic collector Elfred, who used to take all sorts of liberties with his sainted patron ; and, as Reginald says, he opened the coffin with impunity and wrapped him in whatever robes he thought fit.

There was also found a second maniple which must have been put in some time after 1104, and which from its

--204--

workmanship evidently dates from about the middle of the thirteenth century.

Upon the breast was a pectoral cross of gold set with fifty-three garnets, one in each angle, and twelve upon each of the arms. Raine considers this to be a personal relic of the saint during his lifetime. There were found upon his breast a super-altar, an ivory comb, and a burse.

The “silver altar” coeval with the saint and mentioned by our two historians, was of oak 6 inches by 5¼ inches and about ½ thick, covered with a thin plate of silver slightly raised at the margin, attached to the wood by silver nails. It is, however, so fragmentary that it is impossible to determine the

inscription. The underside had also been covered with silver, on which was figured a saint in priestly robes, and letters which might have been either *Peter* or *Paul* the Apostle. The exposure to the air and moving caused the wooden part to fall to pieces, but on two of the fragments is sufficient evidence to show that it had been used as a portable altar before it was embellished with silver; this is an inscription "In honour of S. Peter," and two crosses deeply incised.

The comb, mentioned by Reginald, and exactly corresponding to his description, was lying in the folds of one of the uppermost robes, upon the lower part of the breast of St. Cuthbert. The matter had so perished that it broke at the slightest touch.

We hear of a comb for the first time in connection with St. Cuthbert when the aforementioned Elfred (about 1022) used to say that he periodically renewed the saint's tonsure (page 181), and, as he fabricated the silver scissors for that purpose, he is likely also to have been the maker of the comb.

Near the same position was the bourse which formerly held the corporal used by the saint at Mass, but which

--205--

had been enclosed in the middle of a banner to be carried to the battle of Neville's Cross, October 17th, 1346.

The bones were then laid bare ; of course they were disjointed, but all whole and in their respective positions except the fingers and feet. The right hand, it should be seen, had been raised on to the breast in benediction.

These relics of St. Cuthbert were reverently laid in a new coffin with the outer relics as before, and again placed in the grave.

Again have those relics been exposed, this time for an object which comes within the scope of our present subject, for it was to take out the fragments of the original wooden coffin, which had been made and carved by the monks in 698.

It was on March 1st, 1899, that the grave was reopened and the grave stone of the monk Heswell again removed. Once more was seen the almost complete skeleton of Father Cuthbert, one of the greatest of English Saints, and the frontal bone of the large skull of the Northumbrian king, St. Oswald, together with other sacred relics. The grave from whence it was raised was largely constructed with slabs of Purbeck marble, which may have formed part of the shrine.

The fragments of the wooden coffin have now been reconstructed, and we can again see the actual primitive shrine of St. Cuthbert which was made over twelve hundred years ago. The outer lid has a figure of our Lord on a large scale incised upon it, and at the angles are the evangelistic symbols. At one side are figures of arch-angels, and on the other side are two rows of the apostles with St. Paul and another whose identity is undecided, making in all fourteen figures. The head of the coffin was wider than the other end, and it contains figures of the archangels St. Michael and St. Gabriel, while on the

--206--

panel at the foot is engraved the figure of the Blessed Virgin with the infant Saviour on her knees.

The so-called coffin of 1827 was but a packing-case or crate which fell to pieces when touched. A new oaken chest was now made with a horizontal partition. In the lower partition the bones of the "Holy Innocents" and the miscellaneous relics were placed ; and in the upper portion the relics of St. Cuthbert and the cloven skull of St. Oswald were reverently enclosed. On the lid of this chest was incised the cross of St. Cuthbert, surmounted by a crown in reference to King Oswald.

This chest of relics was restored to the grave on March 17th.

Marginalia: Shrine discovered 1911. Caldey Island. Tenby.

--207--

Footnotes~

1. Bede, V.S.C., xxxvii.
2. Boll. Mon., lib. iv. § 13.
3. Symeon.
4. *MS. Cosin.*
5. See p. 110
6. See *Durham Account Rolls*, 3 vols, Surtees Society, 1898-1900.
7. Harpsfield ; MSS. Hunter, 44 and 45 ; MS. C. and Butler.
8. This was probably the jewel which Sir William Scrope was commanded by the king to offer at the shrine by way of penance, and which was to be of the value of at least £500. 1,578½ ounces of precious metal were taken from the shrine besides the innumerable jewels.

-end chapter four, part five-