

Wall, Charles J., Shrines of British Saints. Methuen & Co. London, 1905.
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CHAPTER I

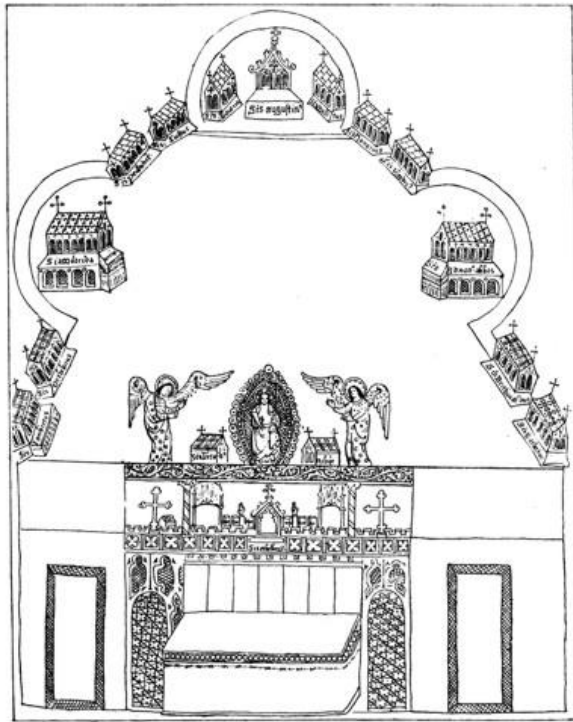
GENERAL REMARKS ON SHRINES (Part Two)

The name of "Peter the Roman citizen" may still be read on the shrine he made for St. Edward the Confessor, but of all the artificers of such works the greater number of names perpetuated are of skilful Irishmen. Three smiths, "expert at shaping," MacCrecht, Laebhan, and Fortchern, are mentioned as belonging to St. Patrick's family, or monastic brethren ; and three skilful artificers, Aesbuite, Tairill, and Tassach. St. Bridget's principal artist in gold, silver, and other metals was Bishop Conla. To properly understand a bishop being so employed, his peculiar position in a Celtic monastery must be considered. St. Dageus, who lived in the sixth century, was a prolific maker of shrines ;¹ and of the hereditary mechanics of the monastery at Kells, Sitric MacAeda stands pre-eminent in the eleventh century.

The reputation of the saint influenced the position of the shrine, and in some cases controlled the plan of the church in which the shrine was erected. Various saints were held in different degrees of veneration by the faithful according to their local popularity, their lives , deaths, or the number of miracles attributed to them.

The space behind the high altar, the beam above the altar, or a separate chapel, was appropriated to the site for the shrine by the devotion accorded to the saint. Sts. Cuthbert and Swithun had small enclosures to the east of the high altar to contain their shrines, which enclosure at Durham was generally called "the *Feretory*." St. Thomas and St. Edward the Confessor were honoured with chapels to the east of the high altar, and in each case the position for the shrine was considered in the architectural design for the rebuilding of Canterbury Cathedral and Westminster Abbey. The position of the numerous shrines in St. Augustine's monastery at Canterbury may be seen in a MS. written about 1414, now preserved in

Trinity Hall, Cambridge. There, behind the high altar, a screen is carried the entire width of the sanctuary, and in that part between the doors which lead to the chapels beyond is a reredos, or retablo, arranged for the reception of reliquaries. In the centre are the relics of St. Ethelbert,



SHRINES IN ST. AUGUSTINE'S ABBEY
MS., Trinity Hall, Cambridge

Illustration: Shrines in St. Augustine's Abbey

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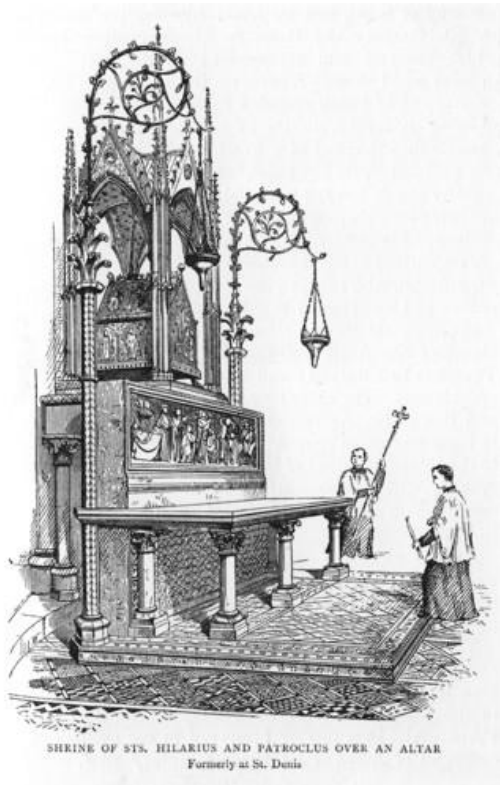


Illustration: Shrine of Sts. Hilarius and Patroclus

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the king of Kent, and on either side are the books sent by St. Gregory the Great to St. Augustine, amongst which are two arm reliquaries ; on the north side is another small chest. Above, on the beam, rest two relic chests, one of which contains those of St. Letard. This drawing is most valuable as showing the arrangement surrounding the altar of a great church in England, and the position of the "beam," of which antiquaries frequently speak, but fail to explain. Behind the altar-screen are three chapels in which, and between which, are many shrines and feretories. Beginning at the left, or north side, are the shrines of Sts. Lambert and Nothelm, archbishops ; St. Mildred, who usurped the place of St. Augustine as the patron of Canterbury ; Sts. Deusdedit, Justus, Laurence, Augustine, Mellitus, Honorius, and Theodore, archbishops ; St. Adrian, the abbot who accompanied St. Theodore to England ; and Sts. Brithwald and Tatwine, archbishops. The three large shrines have altars attached, and that of St. Augustine occupies the place of honour in the easternmost chapel. A similar position was allotted to the intended shrine of King Henry VI in Westminster Abbey, when unsuccessful efforts were made for his canonization as the patron saint to England instead of St. George.

As we look at this drawing it is easy to understand the words of St. Dunstan when he said that every footstep he took within the precincts of St. Augustine's Abbey was planted on the grave of a saint.²

The position occupied by the feretory of Sts. Hilarius and Patroclus, when not being carried in procession, is seen in a representation of an altar which was formerly in the Lay Chapel of the Abbey of St. Denis, near Paris. And in a picture preserved in the sacristy of the cathedral of Arras is a thirteenth-century altar, formerly

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PLATE IX

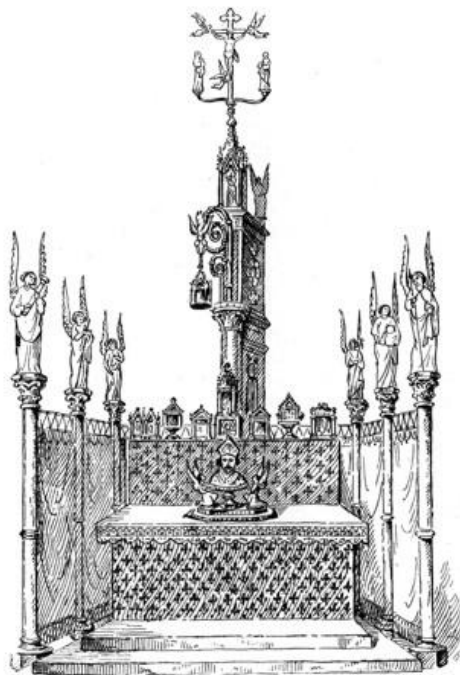


RELIC CHESTS ON THE PARCLOSE SCREEN, WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL
EARLY 16th CENTURY
FROM "THE TOMBS OF THE KINGS OF ENGLAND"

Illustration: Plate IX Relic Chests, Winchester

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ARRANGEMENT OF RELIQUARIES
Formerly at Arras

Illustration: Arrangement of Reliquaries

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In that cathedral, showing the arrangement of reliquaries for a festival, where they form the retinue of the Divine Martyr of Calvary, flanking a pendent pyx containing the Host. In this a head shrine occupies the prominent position.

One shrine attracted others to its vicinity : thus at Canterbury Cathedral the "corona" of St. Thomas the Martyr also received the shrines of St. Odo and St. Wilfrid, the one on the north and the other on the south. To receive sepulchre [to have your remains placed] near the tomb of a saint was considered on of the greatest honors that it was possible to bestow. It was thought to be helpful to the future life, and King John secured a potion between two shrines which, sadly enough, he evidently anticipated would make an unrivalled presentation at the heavenly court.

The beam over the altar frequently bore one or more reliquaries, and at Canterbury a beam in another position served the same purpose, for we find in a book of obits of Christchurch Cathedral, from 1414-72, the following entry :—

"In the year 1448, on the ninth of the calends of April, four brethren of this church took from the high altar the shrine with the bones of St. Fleogild (Feologeld), archbishop of Canterbury, and carried it after the Lord's body to the shrine of St. Thomas and placed the shrine upon the beam spanning the arch leading into the chapel called the 'corona,' between the shrine of St. Thomas and the crown of St. Thomas."

Another position, but slightly differing from some of the those mentioned, in which it actually formed the reredos [ornate wall or screen behind or near the altar], was adopted on the introduction of a different type of shrine—a glazed chest, or glass coffin, enclosing the body of the saint. This may be seen in the picture of Mont St. Claude, where the relics are enshrined behind the retablo [a shelf or mantle behind the altar] of the altar, and in the silver chapel of St. Carlo

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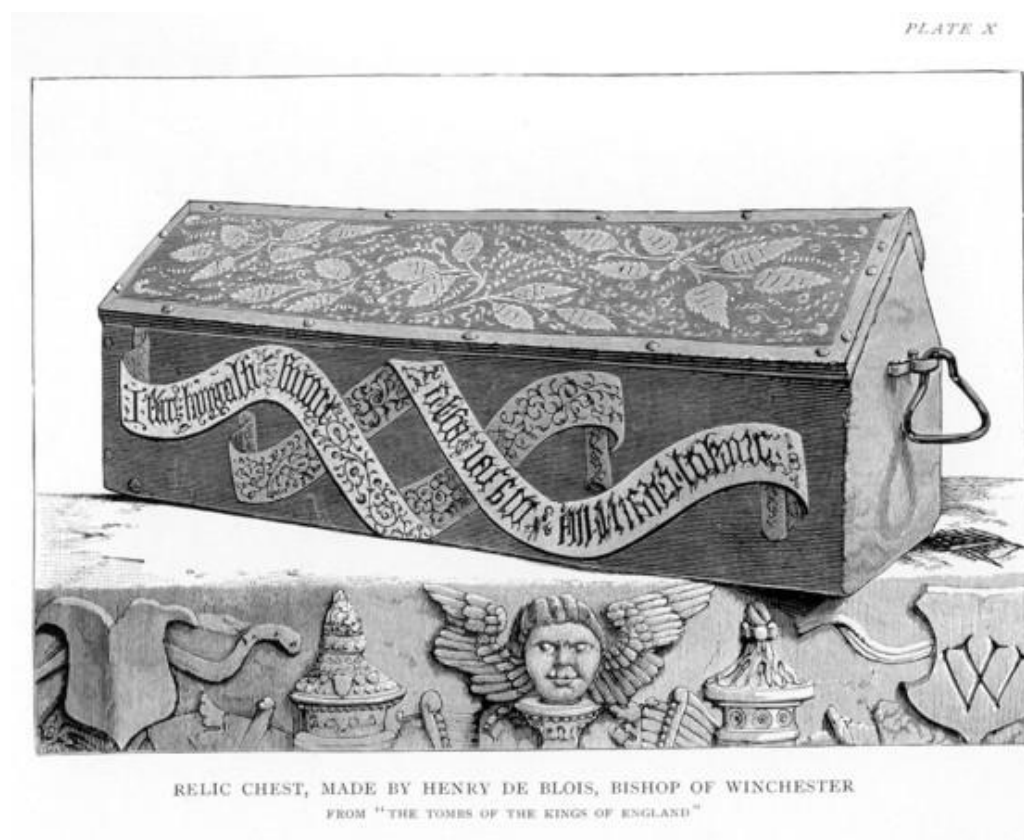


Illustration: Plate X Relic Chest, made by Henry De Blois

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Borromeo, beneath the pavement of Milan Cathedral. This custom never appears to have found favor with the churchmen of England, although the chest of our own Archbishop Edmond, at Pontigny, is glazed on the eastern side. In these pages continental examples have been noticed only so far as they assist in defining the fashioning and the position of shrines in England before the ruthless destruction of the sixteenth century ; the only exception are of British saints whose relics are enshrined in foreign countries.



GLASS SHRINE AT THE BACK
OF AN ALTAR

Illustration: Glass Shrine

Very few shrines remain which contain or contained the relics of English saints, although this country was formerly unsurpassed such riches. William of Malmesbury was convinced that “nowhere could be found the bodies of so many saints entire after death”—typifying, as he thought, the state of final incorruption—as in England.

“I myself know of five, but people tell of more. The five are Sts. Ethedreda and Werburga the virgins, King Edmund, Archbishop of Elphege, and the old father Cuthbert. All these,

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perfect in skin and flesh, from their flexible joints and lively warmth, appear to be merely asleep. To the above I can add the body of St. Ivo, St. Edward the King and Confessor, St. Wulstan the Bishop, St. Guthlac the Hermit, and those English Saints who died in foreign lands, namely, St.

Edilburg the Virgin ; St. Lullus, Archbishop of Mentz ; and St. Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury.”³

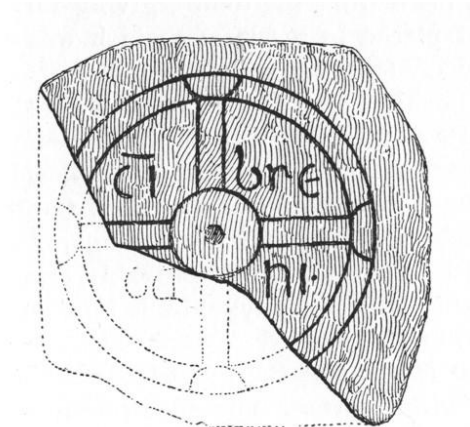
Now we can only assemble around the shrine of St. Edward the Confessor, the solitary survival of a great shrine retaining the relics of the saint, in this country—a Marian restoration ; or visit the reliquary of St. Eanswith at Folkstone, the only one of the kind in England known to have been preserved undisturbed ; unless a journey is made across the seas to the shrine of St. Edmund at Pontigny, or to some of those foreign places where relics of Celtic saints may yet be found. True, England still possesses a few of the relics of her saints, but even those are for the most part in debased positions and all but forgotten. It is not generally known that the skulls of Sts. Probus and Grace are hidden in a cavity of the wall behind the altar of Probus church in Cornwall. They were recently exposed when the church was restored, but again walled up, awaiting the time when they may be brought forth without fear of desecration. Nor is it common knowledge that the relics of Sts. Bede, Cuthbert, and Oswald lie beneath the pavement at Durham. For those few which have again been enshrined the country is indebted to the energy of papal churchmen.

The shrines of Great Britain which are now to be considered are principally of two kinds, which united made the complete shrine ; the fixed shrines of masonry and the portable feretra, with a few of the quadrangular reliquaries, traced through the writings of the chroniclers, from draw-

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ings made by hands long since dissolved in mother earth, or from fragments recently recovered from obscurity.

Yet in searching for some knowledge of the great shines the more simple memorials of our saints must not be ignored. The humble tombstone of St. Breacan’s Head at Hartlepool, inscribed CI (capiti) BRECANI (sixth century) ; his grave at Kilbreacan, in which was a spherical black stone inscribed, in Irish, “Pray for Breacan the Pilgrim” ; or the rudely sculptured tombstone of St. Molio at Arran,



ST. BRECAN'S HEADSTONE, HARTLEPOOL

Illustration: St. Brecan's tombstone

and many other exalted to no honoured state, are in their way as truly shrines as were those of magnificent workmanship.

The humility of the saint is oftentimes seen in his choice of a place of burial. St. Swithun desired a grave outside his cathedral at Winchester over which the passer's foot might tread and the rain from the eaves would fall. Others are amusingly credited with discontent if their tombs are not exalted to greater honor.

St. Edward the King and Martyr was at first ignominiously buried in an unknown spot, and when his body

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was discovered it was removed to a tomb at the north side of the high altar of Shaftesbury Abbey. Some of the stones subsided and the uppermost slab was displaced. It was said that St. Edward was wrath at so lowly a station, and by this upheaval demonstrated his displeasure. The report reached the ears of King Ethelred, for whose elevation to the throne the crime had been perpetrated, and he, stricken with remorse, decide that reparation should at last be made and his former rival duly honoured. The relics were lifted from the tomb—giving forth a fragrant odour—and placed in a feretory which was deposited in the "Holy of Holies" with the relics of other saints. The exact position of this "Holy of Holies" at Shaftesbury is not mentioned, it may have been on a beam above the high altar ; but from the attention it afterwards received, the rich offerings made, from Canute throughout the Middle Ages, and the indulgences granted to pilgrims to this shrine, it was probably one of the great shrines of the Canterbury type, built in a separate chapel behind the high altar.

The usual features of the great fixed shrines consisted of three distinct parts. The substructure of stone, or marble, built with recesses in the lower portion—in which pilgrims, seeking the healing virtues of the saint, might crouch as close as possible to the relics—was decorated with a wealth of sculpture or mosaic. This part, as we have seen in the shrine of St. Egwin, was appropriately called *the throne*. On this rested the feretrum, or chest, containing the body,

covered with plates of gold, surrounded by golden statues, and which the offerings of generations of pilgrims enriched with precious cameos and jewels. To preserve these treasures the third portion—a wooden box-like cover—was made to work on pulleys and could thus be raised for exposition to the pilgrims, or lowered over the feretory and locked to secure it from

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thieves, a very necessary precaution when the value of the offering is considered.

These offerings were not—as is too often assumed—taken by the priest in charge for his own advantage ; but were always allocated, and careful accounts were rendered, as is shown by the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* and the fragments of church accounts still preserved.

When St. Osmund was canonised the Papal Bull expressly disposed of them. The first object was to be the proper adornment of the shrine, then the debts due to those who had leant money for the purposes of the canonisation were to be paid, and the rest to be applied to the repair of the fabric of the cathedral.

All the choir of Rochester Cathedral was built from the offerings at St. William's shrine ; while the money alone, without the various jewels, offered a St. Thomas's shrine at Canterbury averaged to an amount which would now be equal to about £4,000 a year. Yet were these shrines occasionally spoiled for causes righteous as well as unrighteous, independently of the final sacrilege of Henry VIII. Twice was the gold stripped from the feretory of St. Alban during times of famine to save the lives of the poor, though again it was defaced to raise funds for the purchase of an estate. King Ethelred, on the authority of the spurious Ingulph, in his attempt to free the land of the ravaging Danes by bribery instead of by arms, not only seized the sacred vessels of churches but even ordered the very shrines of the saints to be spoiled. Through a dispute with their bishop, the monks of Rochester had to coin the silver shrine of St. Paulinus to defray the expenses incurred ; and the shrine of St. Wulfstan at Worcester was melted down to pay the tribute imposed on the monks by Prince Louis of France.

In addition to this kind of robbery another danger had

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to be guarded against—the thieving of relics. Many instances will be met with in the following pages of the ecclesiastics of one church robbing another of the relics of saints for the greater honour of their own establishment, the refined deceits they had recourse to for that purpose, and also the trickery resorted to by the possessors of such treasures to frustrate unholy covetousness.

The most famous monasteries were at times guilty of such nefarious deeds ; Glastonbury, Durham, and Ely were not free from this reproach, and in some instances two or more different churches claimed to possess the entire body of the same saint ; this, however, seldom affected the devotion of the faithful, but it has affected many details of history.

Small wonder that custodians were appointed to specifically care for the shines, a post which was no sinecure at a popular place of pilgrimage. It was a charge of no mean responsibility, and the *Custos Feretri* or *Feretarius* in many cases had certain retainers to assist him, not only in cleaning and exhibiting, but in guarding it against those apparently pious folk who, scorning to steal a jewel, would not hesitate to avail themselves of an opportunity to gain possession of a fragment of the actual relics. By such robberies were the bones of St. Bede and St. Lewinna surreptitiously *translated*, while the will was not wanting through the means were not available to do the same with St. Alban and St. Dunstan.

In addition to the constant watchers appointed over these treasures, dogs were sometimes employed. During the winter months, at Canterbury, the shrine was guarded by a troop of fierce ban-dogs,⁴ and Dalmatian dogs were used for the protection of the shrine in the church of St. Anthony at Padua.

Altars dedicated to a particular saint were frequently

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built adjoining his shrine. The position of the altar of St. Edward the Confessor, restored at the time of the coronation of Edward VII, was clearly discernible at the west end of this shine by a slab of mosaic, which formed the reredos, and in which were holes at either side for the riddels, or curtain rods, to be fixed.

Curious expedients were sometimes resorted to—according to monastic chroniclers—to determine the ownership of saints' relics and the locality for the shrine, when a contention arose between rival churches for such an honour. After the death of St. Patrick there was a keen contest between the church of Saul and Armagh. To settle which would be the happy possessor, two untamed bulls were yoked to the card which bore his body and left to go whither they would. They stopped at a spot where now stands the church of Downpatrick, and there we are told he was buried. In 1186, Giraldus Cambrensis says, his body was found in that place together with the bodies of St. Columba and St. Bridget, and that when they were translated from so humble a position the following couplet was written :—

“In the town of down, buried in one grave
Bridget, Patrick, and the pious Columba.”

If the travels of sundry relics—and consequently of their feretories—were recorded, it would be a wondrous story of devotion, hardship, and terror, combined with legend, and not altogether free from superstition.

The peregrinations of St. Cuthbert's shrine are well known, and the journeyings of St. Columba's shrine were almost as extensive ; but whereas the first became settled in one place and the relics of the saint are yet with us, the latter have been utterly lost.

St. Columba was buried in the royal burying ground in the island of Iona. About the beginning of the ninth century Connachtach, Abbot of Iona, carried the relics to

Kells, in Ireland, evidently in order to have them placed in one of those beautiful Irish reliquaries ; and there St. Columba's bones were enshrined. In 807, when the Book of Armagh was written, this shrine was preserved in the church of St. Patrick, County Down. In 818 Diarmid returned to Ireland, taking with him St. Columba's shrine, which had become a title-deed of the Columban community at Iona. A rumor of the richness of this portable shrine excited the cupidity of the piratical Northmen who, in 825, descended on the isle, and Iona was devastated, but they failed to discover the object of their raid. When the Danish ships were seen to approach, the monks had hastily dug a grave for the shrine and covered it with turf. The brethren were slain ; life was offered to St. Blathmac if he would deliver to them the precious metal which enclosed the bones of the saint, but refusing, he too was martyred. In 850 King Kenneth MacAlpin built a church at Scone, or Dunkeld, into which he moved the shrine.⁵

In 878 it was again in Ireland, and apparently remained there until it was siezed by the Danes of Dublin in the twelfth century. The relics were restored, but of the shrine we hear no more. Saul, Downpatrick, Durham, Dunkeld, and Glastonbury contended that each had his relics, while many another monastery asserted that they possessed fragments.

In regarding the formation of the shrines it must be remembered that the virtues of the saint are held to permeate the structure, and that by contact with the shrine those virtues are *by faith* transmitted to the pilgrim. The diseased limb was pressed into one of the niches provided around the basement for that purpose, into which sundry articles were placed to receive the benediction of the holy one, and in the illumination of St. Edward's shrine

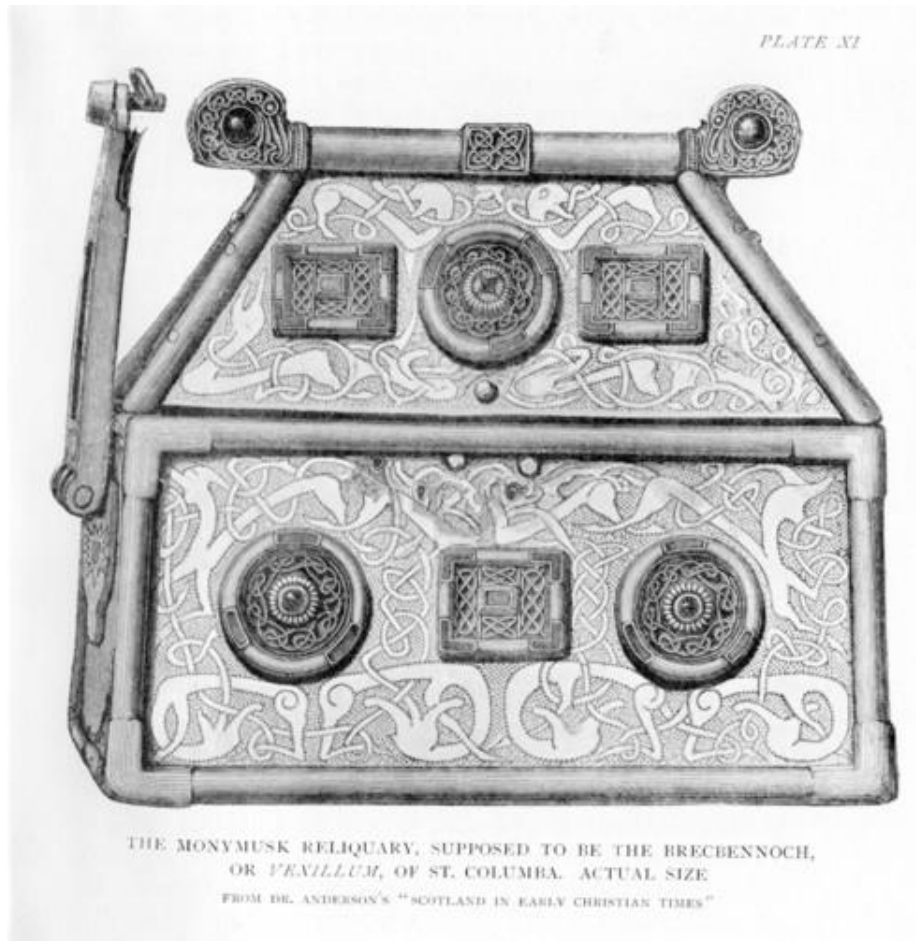


Illustration: Plate XI The Monymusk Reliquary

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(page 227) a pilgrim may be seen creeping through an opening. There was also a prevailing idea that a healing oil exuded from the tombs of certain saints as those of St. Andrew, St. Katherine, and St. Robert, the founder of the Robertines at Knaresborough, which are said to have sweated a medicinal oil.

The sanctity of an oath was considered far more binding if taken upon the relics or shrine of a saint. For this reason was the Saxon Harold made to swear on a shrine as before mentioned (page 17). Through the continuance of this custom did the priest of Drumlane lose possession of the feretrum of St. Moedoc (page 80). For this purpose did many people resort to the shrine of St. Telio (page 96) ; and in the *Romance de Parise la Duchesse* the two combatants—Milio and Berengiers—swear to the righteousness of their cause on—

*“ . . . la chase del baron San Martin,
Cet del baron San Gile, et del cor Saint Firmin.”*

In medieval times it was customary, both at home and abroad, for the custodians of many of the shrines to manufacture tokens of lead which were sold to pilgrims who pinned them to their hats or dress, whereby publishing to the world their pilgrim achievements, in the same manner as the Mahomedan, who has visited the tomb of his prophet at Mecca, wears a special badge. Many of these "pilgrims' signs" have been found at different times ; those of St. Thomas of Canterbury by far exceeding in number and variety of design those of any other saint, whereby confirming the popularity of the Canterbury shrine. These emblems being so closely associated with the shrines, come few of them are represented in the articles on those shrines where the tokens were bestowed.

In a few instances—as with St. Cuthbert and St. Thomas—more particulars are considered than are abso-

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lutely necessary for a description of those shrines. A few details are given which bear a close relation to the actual relics. They serve to show the spirit which influenced the erection and embellishment of such monuments, and to reveal the *raison d'être* of certain ceremonies observed in the translation of the relics from one shrine to another of greater beauty and more distinguished position.

1. *Æt. SS Aug.*, iii, 659 n.
2. *Acta Sanctorum*, May 4th, p. 78
3. William of Malmsbury, bk. ii. c. 13.
4. Ellis's *Original Letters*, 3rd Series, iii, 64.
5. *Chronicon Pictorum*.

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