

ST. ALBANS

ARCHITECTURAL AND ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

Some Account of Relics preserved in a Church at Cologne, considered to be part of the body of St. Alban, Protomartyr of Britain. Read at a General Meeting of the St. Albans Architectural and Archæological Society, 23rd October, 1850, by HENRY J. B. NICHOLSON, D. D., Rector of St. Albans.

THE interesting work of Messrs. Buckler, published in 1847, on The Abbey Church of St. Alban, closes with a notice that relics of the martyr exist in a church at Cologne.

The statement raised in me a desire to pursue some inquiry into the subject; and the library of the British Museum offering the advantage of a very fine collection of Foreign Church Annals and Histories, I resorted to it in the first instance. From consulting so many ponderous folios, compiled out of a variety of ancient documents, there arises a confidence in the general outline of the history we are tracing, when we observe that it is common to them all. By comparing the statements which differ, we can sometimes reconcile them, or at least can form some opinion which is the most worthy of acceptance, while out of each work may be gleaned some minor details to be found only in the collection of the individual historian.

The martyrdom of St. Alban, as we have often heard and read, took place, probably, on the very spot where the Abbey Church now stands, about the year 303, the period of the Diocletian persecution, the last of the ten to which the church was subjected; after which comparative peace and security resulted to it, from the conversion of the Emperor Constantine.

About the year 429, Germanus, the bishop of Auxerre, was invited into Britain by the bishops of our church, that he might assist in combating the Pelagian heresy. When about to

return from his mission, he visited the church which had been built on the spot of the martyrdom of St. Alban; and which, in those early times, must have been an object of peculiar interest and veneration. The tomb was opened on the occasion, and he deposited therein certain relics, which he had brought with him into Britain, and received in return some memorial* of our martyr, taken from his earthly remains, in testimony of gratitude for the benefit he had conferred on the British Church.

The heresy, which had been in a great measure subdued by Germanus, again gained strength; and he returned, not long after, to renew his labours in the same field of controversy.

At length he quitted Britain for the last time; and foreign history records, that the relics obtained here were carried by him to Ravenna, where he was received with great honour by the Emperor Valentinian and the Empress-mother Placidia. On the death of Germanus, not long after, the empress carried the relics of St. Alban with her to Rome.

History is entirely silent regarding them for a period of about 550 years; and thus we pass on at once to some point of time, between the years 980 and 989, (for historians vary to this extent,) when Theophania the wife of Otho II., and mother of the reigning Emperor Otho III., came into Italy, and obtained these remains as a sacred gift from Pope Gregory V.

When the empress was on her way back to Germany, and had arrived near Octodurus in Alpibus, the present Martigny, the horse, which carried the relics, stumbled and fell down a precipice. The reliquary, or case containing them, was found not to have been broken by the fall, and its contents were recovered uninjured. A tract, printed at Cologne in 1502, to which we shall presently more particularly refer, records this circumstance, and adds, that a church was then existent on the spot where the accident occurred, and the festival of the saint annually celebrated with becoming honour.

The empress purposed depositing the relics at Cologne.

On the way she stopped at Moguntium, the modern Mayence; where another St. Alban, originally from the island of Naxos in the Mediterranean, and who had been sent by Ambrose, bishop of Milan, into Gaul to combat the Arian heresy, suffered martyrdom about the year 404, and was accounted the patron saint of the diocese. A monastery was built in his honour by Charlemagne, on a mount at Mayence, which still bears his name, and was probably the place of his martyrdom. There is also a small church at Cologne dedicated to him.

The Archbishop Willegisus received the empress and her sacred treasure (to use the historian's expression) with great

* See page 206

respect and honour. But he earnestly requested that the name of the British martyr should be changed into Albinus; fearing lest the histories of the two becoming in course of time confounded, the honour of their patron saint might be diminished. The favour sought was conceded.

Notwithstanding this precaution his anticipation seems to have been in some degree verified; for Nicolaus Serarius, in his "*Moguntiarum Rerum libri quinque, 1604,*" undertakes to unravel the perplexity, and gives the distinct histories of the two martyrs.

When the empress arrived at Cologne, she deposited the relics in the church of the monastery of St. Pantaleon; being determined, probably, by the circumstance that Bruno, the archbishop of Cologne at that time, was brother to the late emperor her husband; and had built the church of St. Pantaleon, some years before, with the stones of a bridge over the Rhine which he had lately destroyed, in order to prevent the Eastern Franks from penetrating into Gaul. The empress, when consigning the remains to the care of the monastery, left her own circlet on the head of the martyr.

Hermannus Crombach, in his *Ursula Vindicata*, published at Cologne in 1647, writes, on the authority of an ancient MS., that the fame of miracles wrought by the Relics reached England, and produced a denial on the part of the English that the body of the martyr had been taken from his own country.* Hereupon Henry, the Abbot of St. Pantaleon, examined the contents of the Reliquary; and the manuscript testifies the remarkable state of preservation of the Relics, on the authority of an eye-witness; adding, that all the lower parts of the body were wanting, and were believed to be existent in England. The manuscript concludes, "Acta sunt hæc A.D. 1186 sub Philippo Coloniensi Archiepis°, et Abbate nostro Henrico;" which brings down the chain of history two hundred years subsequent to the time of Theophania. And this is the first mention made of the particulars comprehended under the general term *Relics*, or *some Relics*, which the early foreign historians had recorded to have been taken out of England by Germanus.

Ægidius Galenius, who published a work in 1645, *De Colonia Agrippinæ Magnitudine*, gives a transcript of a document entitled *Diploma Elevationis Sancti Albani*, issued by the Abbot Theodorus in the year 1330, and dated in *Vigilia Pentecostes*. This brings us down about 140 years lower. The instrument recites the possession of the Relics by Germanus—their being carried to Rome, and subsequently removed to Cologne, in the manner

* I have not been able to find any trace of this in the English Ecclesiastical Histories.

above narrated—and that they had remained in comparative obscurity in the chapel of the monastery, until they had been exhibited from the Feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist, three years before, up to the date of the Instrument—and that miracles of healing were wrought by them on the faithful. The Relics are stated to consist of the head, neck, arms, and ribs, enveloped in the cloth which had covered them for 350 years—alluding to the time when they were deposited in the monastery by Theophania. It concludes in the form of an encyclical letter to the clergy, urging them to excite the devotional feelings of the people towards the Saint.

This account is confirmed by Crombach on the authority of an old manuscript which he had found.

A fraternity was instituted in the Abbey of St. Pantaleon bearing the name of *Albinus*; and the chronicles of the Abbey state that John von Casia, who presided over the Abbey from 1419 to 1425, gave suitable statutes to the brotherhood.

Laurentius Surius, about the year 1550, in his work, *De Probatis Sanctorum Historia*, writes to nearly the same effect with those who had preceded him—that the Relics had long lain in a receptacle ill befitting such a treasure; but that the frequent miracles wrought by them, indicating the presence and the efficacy of a martyr, brought them into public notice; and that, under the abbacy of Theodorus, they were deposited in a more fitting receptacle, ornamented with gold and precious stones, in which they were preserved in his day, and exhibited to the people; many miracles of healing being wrought by them.

In the year 1502, a Tract was printed at Cologne entitled *De Incliti et Gloriosi Proto-Martyris Anglie Albani, quem in Germaniâ et Galliâ Albinum vocant, Conversione Passione Translatione et Miraculorum Coruscatione*. This very rare book was written in the monastery of St. Pantaleon, and dedicated by the abbot and monks to Henry VII., king of England. I have been unable to meet with a copy. It is not in the British Museum nor Bodleian Library, nor in those of Cologne or Heidelberg. I can therefore only give such extracts as survive in the pages of later historians who quote it. The preface states, that since the proto-martyr of Britain had been for many ages honoured at Cologne, and his shrine much resorted to, as well through devotional feeling as for the benefits of healing imparted by the Relics, as many of the English nation could attest, it seemed good to them to collect whatever they could of the true account of his life, and miracles, and translation; that through the influence of the King's Highness, the same might become known in England—"ut quemadmodum una in cœlis anima martyris gloriosa corporis sui Reliquias disjungi passa est, é diverso una iterum historia in animos hominum totam

ejus, quantum per nos ipsius zelatores licet, laudem gloriamque connectat.”

An English martyrology published in 1608, of which there is a copy in the British Museum, introduces the name of our martyr three times into the calendar. Under date of 16 April is entered *Translatio Albani Proto-Martyris*; and then follows a short history, agreeing in the general with what has preceded, and stating that the anniversary was appointed in memory of the removal of part of the venerable body of St. Alban from Rome to Cologne by Theophania.

Hermannus Crombach, who lived at Cologne about the year 1640, and from whose works I have made quotations, speaks of his having been favoured with a sight of the Relics, and that they consisted of the parts of the body which have been before described.

Godefridus Henschius, one of the editors of the *Acta Sanctorum*, published at Antwerp, a friend and cotemporary of Crombach, accompanied him on the occasion of a second inspection in the year 1660, and confirms his account.

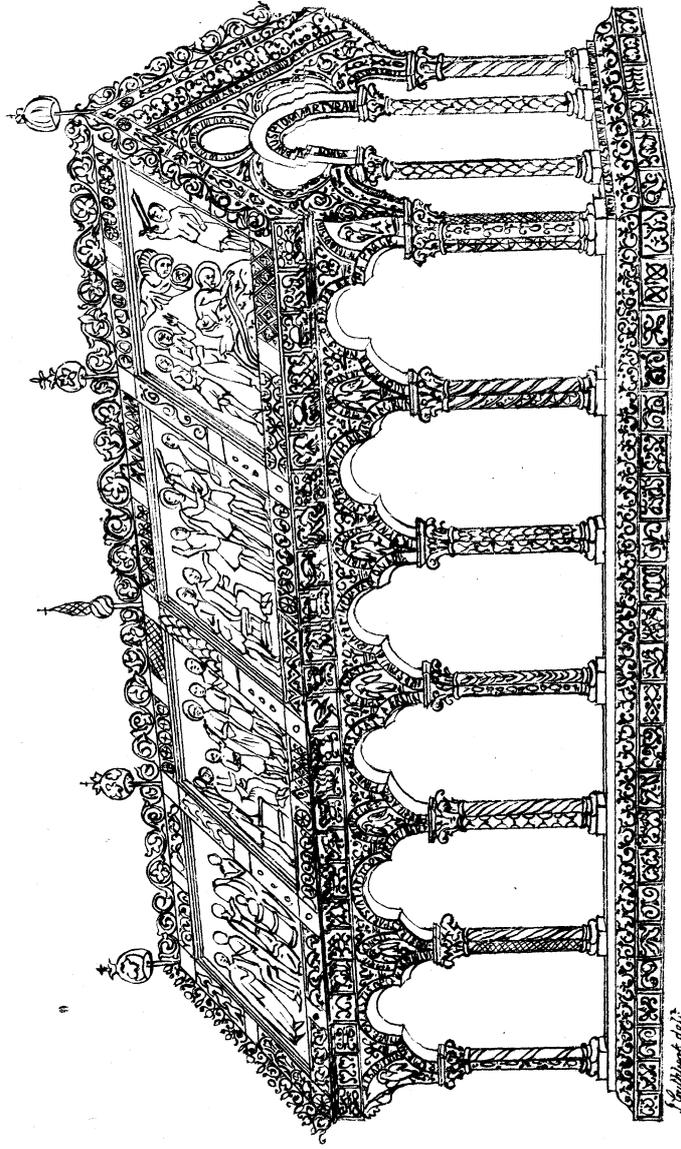
Lastly, the Breviary of Cologne, printed in 1780, gives the same description of the Remains.

With the view of learning the subsequent history of these relics, I lately remained a day at Cologne, when passing up the Rhine, having the advantage of a letter of introduction from Professor Donaldson to Mr. Zwyrner, the architect to whom the distinguished honour has been assigned of completing the magnificent Cathedral, begun in 1248. This gentleman, being previously aware of the interest with which I was prosecuting the inquiry, had most obligingly caused the drawings to be taken for me which are now lying on the table, and which I will presently describe.

He further assisted me by introducing me to Mr. Schaffrath, the curé of the parish of St. Mary, in Schnurgasse; from whom I learned that, in the year 1820, the Church of St. Pantaleon was appropriated as a garrison church, and the Lutheran service established in it; on which occasion, the Reliquary of our martyr was transferred to the neighbouring church of St. Mary, and deposited behind the grating on the Gospel side of the altar.

On the 24th March, 1843, the shrine was placed upon what was formerly the altar of St. Anne, against the east wall of the south aisle, inclosed in a wooden case made for its reception, and surmounted by a figure of the martyr, holding in one hand a small cross and a branch of palm; in the other a sword, indicating the manner of his death.

The wooden case bears the inscription — RELIQUIARIUM
S. ALBINI M.



RELIQUIARIUM S. ALBINI M.

*in the Church of Saint Mary, in the Schnurgasse Cologne.
Length 4^{ft} 11¹/₂ in., Breadth 1^{ft} 5¹/₂ in., Height 2^{ft} 2 in., (Engl. Measure.*

Five separate locks of the case were opened, and the reliquary, constructed in the time of Abbot Theodorus, in 1330, lay open for my inspection. (*See drawing annexed.*)

Much costly and curious workmanship still remains; but it experienced very ill treatment, and not a little spoliation, at the hands of the French, towards the close of the last century. It is of the usual shape of the larger reliquaries—that of a house with a high pitched roof: the form being probably adopted as resembling the nave of a church, and measures four feet eleven inches in length, one foot five inches and a half in breadth, and two feet to the top of the ridge.

The pilasters, against what may be termed the walls of the structure, are of metal enamelled. The eight compartments, into which the roof is divided, are of silver gilt, the figures standing out in high relief. The twelve compartments of the walls and the three of the chief gable, which are left blank in the drawings, were once occupied by figures of the same workmanship; the names of each being still preserved in the inscriptions on the arches above. The fraternity of Saint Mary, when the reliquary found refuge in their church, supplied the place of the lost originals by designs sufficiently well executed.

The inscriptions, as given in the drawings, are not all of them decipherable, partly from their being written in a contracted style, but still more from the evident want of acquaintance with the Latin language in the artist who copied them. Some two or three difficulties I was able to clear up when inspecting the original; but shortness of time, and a reluctance to draw too largely on the courtesy of the priest, would not admit of examining all.

The four compartments of the roof on one side, represent the four principal events in the history of our Lord, when he was “manifest in the flesh;” each having an appropriate legend.

THE NATIVITY.

*Quem sine matre pater genuit nunc et patre mater,
Nascendi jura . . . * antur in hac genitura.*

THE CRUCIFIXION.

*Dempta restaurantur dol . . hostis . . . antur,
Mors Salvatoris res est cause potioris.*

THE RESURRECTION.

*Nil corruptele referens sed signa medele,
Vim reprimeus mortis XPC surgit Leo fortis.*

THE ASCENSION.

*Inde reversurus hominumque repensa daturus
Astra Deus scandit suaque magnalia pandit.*

* Perhaps *quassantur*.

The compartments on the other side of the roof refer to four principal circumstances in the History of Alban.

In the first, Amphibalus appears in the garb of a priest instructing him out of a book, and then administering to him the sacrament of baptism by immersion:

*Hic informatur Cristi et fide solidatur.
Quenam sectetur, qualis sit et unde fatetur:*

In the second, Alban is represented as being brought before the judge, under accusation of being a Christian:

*Et baptizatus fit agendo iuxta beatus.
Martyr discussus et nomen dicere jussus.*

In the third, he is scourged in presence of the judge. A figure standing by, with his hands apparently manacled, may be the executioner—a soldier—whom history records to have been converted by the behaviour of Alban, and to have suffered with him. Authors give him the name of Heraclius. He is mentioned in the Roman martyrology:

*Letatur cesus fit ei protectio Jhesus.
Fert plagas mitis illatas a parasitis.*

The fourth represents the martyrdom. Alban appears on a hill, which is thick set with flowers, kneeling to receive the stroke of death. Beneath him a rill of water is flowing, in accordance with the tradition that it gushed out miraculously, in answer to his prayer for the relief of his thirst.

The figure standing by with uplifted hands, and having the head encircled by a nimbus, is no doubt the appointed executioner before mentioned, awaiting his own death:

*Impius sontem precepit scandere montem.
Ense cruentatur et in etheris arce locatur.*

Of the two gables, one is occupied only by tracery, the other exhibits an arcade of three compartments, in which are the figures of St. Germanus, St. Alban, and the Empress Theophania. This last has the title *nutritrix* added to her name, in allusion, probably, to the veneration and care she had exhibited for the relics of the martyr.

Above the arch of the central niche is the legend,

Hunc cui se donat dilectio vera coronat.

Over all—

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*Primi Martirio florentis in orbe Britanno
Nobilis Albani quem sanguis candidat Agni
Iste decens locus claudit venerabile corpus
Anglia quod Iomæ quod Roma remisit Agrippæ.*

The arches on the walls bear the following inscription over the respective figures:—

*Pastor ovile rege Petre XPO produce rege.
 Te . . . bat Andrea doctrina crucis et trophea.
 Hanc Gereon serva quæ dat tibi vota Cæterva.
 Contere Maurici* dux bella potens inimici.
 Victicis palme flos es Pantaleon† Alme.
 Prestet Riemori‡ tua mors pretiosa
 Refer Martine§ celestis opem medecine.
 Nostra pater Kuniberte. ||
 Presul Agrippine¶ rege pasce gregem Severine.**
 Præsta vergo pia lucem cum prole Maria.
 Ursula†† flos urbis es subveniens prece turbis.
 Audiat ante Cæcilia‡‡ dræm decor.*

The seven spandrils of the arches on one side exhibit the sacred emblem, (the Dove,) bearing the several inscriptions, *Sp. Spiritus Sapientie, Sp. Consilii, Sp. Intellectus, Sp. Pietatis, Sp. Scientie, Sp. Fortitudinis, Sp. Timoris Dei*. Those on the other side are occupied by demi-figures, having their hands in the

* *Maurice* was the commander of a Roman legion, in the time of the Emperor Maximian, about the year 290. It was named the Theban Legion, from the Thebais in Egypt, where it was raised; and many Christians were enrolled in it. These soldiers formed part of an expedition against the Gauls. When passing the Alps the army was halted at Octodurus in Alpius (the present Martigny); and orders were issued to sacrifice to the gods for a successful issue to the campaign. The Theban Legion refused, and withdrew to Agaunum, where they suffered martyrdom with Maurice at their head. Charlemagne afterwards founded a monastery there in memory of the circumstance, and the name of the place was changed to St. Maurice.

Gereon was an inferior officer of the legion, who escaped with the men under his command as far as Cologne; where they were overpowered and put to death. There is a church in that city dedicated to their memory.

† *Pantaleon*. This is the saint in whose monastery at Cologne the relics were preserved for so many centuries. He was physician to the Emperor Maximianus, and was martyred at Nicomedia, in the time of the Diocletian persecution, A.D. 303; and therefore contemporaneously with our proto-martyr. Physicians honour him as their chief patron after St. Luke.

‡ *Riemori*. These letters are accurately given from the drawing; but I have not been able to trace the name in the martyrologies.

§ *Martine*. The well-known bishop of Tours, who died in 396; celebrated in the Roman church for his many miracles of healing. He built the cathedral, and dedicated it to St. Maurice, of whom we have just made mention.

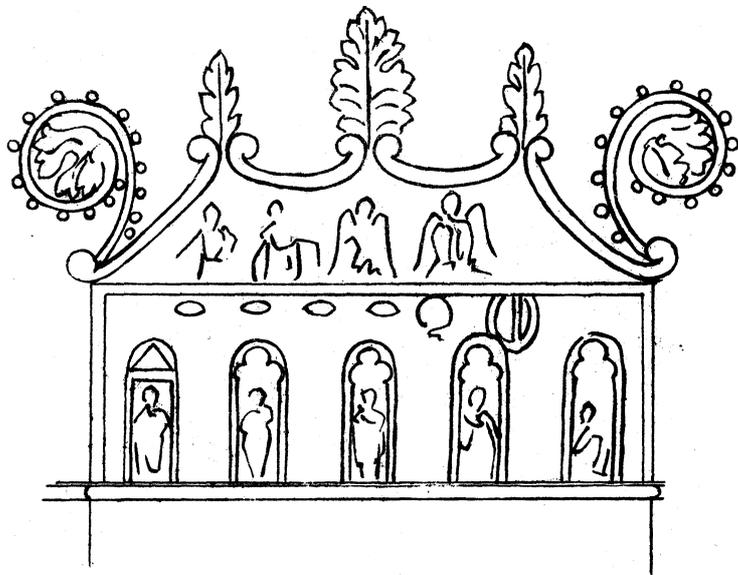
|| *Kunibert* lived in the time of Dagobert king of the Franks, about 643. He became bishop of Cologne. The presence of his body is said to have stopped a fire raging in the church of St. Peter in 1097. The martyrologist, who records the circumstance, adds, nor is this to be wondered at; since, when living, he had subdued the fiercer flames of human passions.

¶ *Agrippine*. Agrippina, daughter of Germanus, was born in Oppidum Ubiorum, and Claudius Cæsar, who married her, established a colony there at her request, and gave it the name of Colonia Agrippina.

** *Severinus* was the third archbishop of Cologne, elected *circ.* 349. He greatly subdued the Arian heresy by his exertions and vigilance; and he built the church in that city which now bears his name. It is said that he heard the choir of angels as they were bearing away the spirit of St. Martin.

†† *St. Ursula*. A British princess, the leader of 11,000 virgins martyred by the Huns at Cologne, about the year 453. She is regarded as the patroness of schools and other establishments, which bear reference to the support, moral and physical, of the young.

‡‡ *St. Cæcilia*, the well-known patroness of music.



living abroad, wrote *Annales Ecclesiæ Britannicæ*, published at Liege, in 1669. In his account of the monastery of St. Pantaleon, he uses the doubting expression, "*ubi Albani corpus requiescat.*"

And Godefridus Henschius, one of the compilers of a Martyrology, to which I have several times referred, states that he has been very full and particular in collecting and arranging the accounts of St. Alban, the proto-martyr of England, and those of St. Albin, whose relics are deposited at St. Pantaleon, that the reader may have before him all the information which now exists, enabling him to draw a conclusion as to whether they regard the same saint.

His own opinion is, that Germanus left the body of Saint Alban at Verulam; taking with him the memorial which the English historians assign to him, and which was deposited in some unknown asylum in Rome; that in the long course of more than 500 years immediately following, during which, as we have remarked, history is altogether silent on the subject, error crept in, and the identity became lost; that the Empress Theophania did not receive what had been taken from England by Germanus, and that, consequently, *the relics at Cologne are not those of Saint Alban, the proto-martyr of Britain.*

Among many interesting MSS. in the British Museum, is one which formerly belonged to the Abbey of St. Alban, "The Histories of Offa, 1 and 2," by Matthew Paris, a monk of the Abbey, who wrote about the year 1240. A memorandum in red ink states that Brother Matthew gave the book to God and the Church of St. Alban. Wats, who published the works of M. Paris, does not consider this note to be the autograph of the author, but he infers from it that the book certainly belonged to him.

Each of the pages is embellished with an illustration of the subject in pen-drawing; and, where the finding of the body of the Saint by Offa, and its solemn removal to the church which had been built on the spot of the martyrdom within ten or twelve years after the occurrence, is related, the procession is depicted, and the annexed engraving is a copy of the reliquary or coffin containing the remains.

It is just possible that some traditional account might have been then existent of the form and ornaments of that made by Offa for the occasion. But if we reject such a supposition, at least we may with some confidence infer that we have here (*see drawing annexed*) a general representation of the reliquary made under the direction of Geoffrey of Gorham, who ruled the Abbey between the years 1119 and 1146, inasmuch as it was the object of chief reverence and interest which came every day under the artist's notice.

H. I. B. N.