VIII.—*The Burial-place of the Slavonians in North Stoneham Church, Hants, by the Very Reverend GEORGE WILLIAM KITCHIN, D.D., F.S.A., Dean of Winchester.*

Read January 19th, 1893.

THE village of North Stoneham, not far from the Eastleigh railway junction, eight miles from Winchester and four from Southampton, stands, as the name denotes, “Ad Lapidem,” at one of the milestones on the Roman road from Winchester to the waterside at Clausentum. The parish church has somewhat higher architectural pretensions than is usual with the simple Hampshire village churches; it has a nave and two aisles running the whole length of the building, but no structural chancel; it is almost a square, with a low fifteenth-century tower at the west end.

In the north aisle of this church, says Mr. Duthy,^a was the original burying-place of these Slavonian strangers; for the great ledger-stone, “a slab of polished foreign stone,” as Mr. Shore of the Hartley Institute calls it, which covered their remains, apparently lay in his time (1839) in that aisle. Since the date of Mr. Duthy’s book, it appears to have been removed to the middle of the church, just in front of the altar-rails. The north aisle had been given up to the Fleming family, the squires of the parish.

The rector, needing space for his choir, has lately boarded over the area in which the stone rests with a wooden floor; he has, however, kindly enabled me to get a rubbing of it, taken between the joists, after the planks of the floor had been removed for the purpose.^b

The stone is 6 feet 8 inches by 3 feet 7 inches, and so incised as to imitate a

^a The passage in Duthy runs thus: “On the pavement of the north aisle is a large stone, having round an eagle displayed the words SEPULTURA DE LA SCHOLA DE SCLAVONI ANO DNI MCCCCLXXXI. The import of the inscription has not been ascertained. It has been suggested, however, that it may point out the burial-place of a Slavonian named *De La Schole*, and that the arms may have been intended to designate his nation.” *Sketches of Hampshire*, p. 396.

^b By permission of the rector, the Rev. E. K. Browne, M.A., the wooden flooring has been cut through and hinged, so as to lift up to show the stone, at the expense of the Hampshire Field Club. The accompanying plate of the slab is from a rubbing made by Mr. W. H. St. John Hope, when this was done.

brass; round the edge runs an inscription, bordered by parallel lines; and at the angles are quatre foils with the symbols of the four Evangelists; in the middle of the stone is a well-designed shield, charged with a double-headed eagle. (Plate XV.) The inscription runs thus:

SEPVLTURA DE LA SCHOLA DE SCLAVONI ANO DNI . M.CCCC.LXXXXI.

These Italian words, for they appear to be medieval Italian rather than Latin, may safely be rendered as "The burial-place of the gild (or fraternity) of the Slavonians." Duthy, who at any rate saw that there was something interesting here, goes altogether astray in his rendering; for he thinks that "De la Schola" is the name of a person there interred, and explains the spread-eagle as the badge of his nationality, the Slavonian.

The words "Schola de Sclavoni," however, carry us at once to Venice; for there, as Molmenti tells us in his interesting volume,^a "these *Scuole* were a number of small but powerful republics (guilds, rather, or societies) which put themselves under the protection of some saint, erected buildings of their own, and adorned their churches with pictures by the best artists." These words may be only a generalisation from the one example at Venice; at any rate, it is known that a company or gild of Slavonian seamen had a settlement on the banks of the Grand Canal, at no great distance from St. Mark's. It still bears their name; that district being styled "la riva degli Schiavoni" to this day. Here they had their quay and landing-place, buildings for business, and a chapel of St. George, adorned, at their cost, with a fine scheme of wall-paintings by Carpaccio. This chapel was finished in 1501.^b

It is said, and I believe rightly, that this *Scuola* was composed of Illyrian or Dalmatian sailors, brought over to Venice at a time when a large part of the Adriatic seaboard was under the dominion of the Republic: they manned the galleys which carried the commerce and the products of the East to all parts of the western world. Flaminio Cornerio^c says that the Slavonians crossed the Adriatic "in 1451, many being sailors, and determined to found (in Venice) a charitable brotherhood under St. George and St. Tryphon, for the succour of poor seamen and others of their nation, and to conduct their bodies religiously to burial." We have, too, their own declaration on the subject, under date 1452, the year of their arrival in Venice, and the year before the world's catastrophe at Constantinople. Their aim, they say, is "to hold united in sacred

^a *La vie privée à Venise* (Ven. 1882).

^b A very interesting and complete account of St. George's Chapel is to be found in Mr. J. R. Anderson's Paper on Carpaccio's works, in the *St. Mark's Rest*.

^c *Notizie Storiche* (Ven. 1758) 167.

GRAVE-SLAB OF A GILD OF SLAVONIANS, 1491,

IN NORTH STONEHAM CHURCH, HANTS.

bonds men of Dalmatian blood, to render homage to God and His saints by charitable endeavours and by religious ceremonies, and by holy sacrifices to help the souls of the brethren alive or dead." Both these passages point to the same anxiety for the welfare of those of their people who died in foreign lands.

This then is the starting-point of our Slavonians: and our records show that it is just after this time that they appear at Southampton. These Illyrians and Dalmatians have ever been famous seamen: to this day they furnish the best part of the crews of the Austrian navy. They are not Ragusans, for these were Latins, and their "argosies" were not manned with Slavonian crews; on the contrary, a bitter hostility ruled between them and the native people of Illyria and Dalmatia. Venice, on the other hand, had no such feeling, but recruited her ships from every quarter, much as our English merchant-navy is largely manned with Norwegians or with Lascars. It was therefore perfectly natural that, when the east shores of the Adriatic fell under Venetian control, the Slavonian seamen should be transferred in large numbers to the City on the Lagunes.

The next point is, how did these Slavonians come to leave traces of themselves in a quiet Hampshire village? We must, to answer the query, look first into the records of Venetian trade with England; it is plain that if we find a connexion between the Venetian galleys at Southampton and Winchester we shall be on our way to a solution of the problem.

Now, there is plenty of evidence that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Venetian traders, though they dealt mainly with the wealthy cities of the Low Countries (the convoys were usually styled "the Flanders fleets"), were also in frequent communication with England, through London or Southampton. We find that merchandise sometimes passed up the Thames, and sometimes was landed at Southampton.

This commerce was so great that it enabled the Venetians to send out fleets of considerable size, and the ships acted as a protection to one another. Each vessel, we learn, besides her 180 oarsmen, mostly Slavonians, her pilots, scribes, and craftsmen, musicians and physicians, carried a body of thirty archers for defence; the archers were commanded by four youths of the patrician rank, told off specially for this duty, "in order that the noble youth of Venice may see the world." For the oligarchy knew that their position could not be sustained unless their sons were trained to become familiar with the conditions under which their trade was carried on. The Venetian State Papers show that there was also a need for these skilled fighting-men. Almost on every occasion on which they make mention of visits to Southampton they tell us of unfriendly relations between the crews and the townsfolk. Thus, in 1323, a serious affray occurred. The patrons, merchants, masters, and seamen of five Venetian galleys fought the

Southampton men, and there was bloodshed as well as much destruction of goods. Again, in 1384, there came a Decree from the Senate, replying to a communication from the captain of the fleet, who had asked leave to run over to Southampton to complete his cargo. The Senate tell him that if his council (the masters of all the galleys with the merchants) think good to go to Hampton, he may go; only they beg him earnestly not to let his rowers land, lest there should ensue bad blood and affrays. And, in 1386, we find that "should the captain and the shipmasters deem it too perilous to touch at Hampton, they might forbear." Even when, as in the fifteenth century, in 1451, a Venetian ship is ordered to put ashore at Southampton the goods for Venetian merchants in London, a similar anxiety is shown. So that a state of ill-will and angry jealousy appears to have existed all through these two centuries.

After the middle of the fifteenth century the resort of the galleys to Southampton became far more frequent. For troubles in London, political and commercial, made that city very unsafe for the Italians. Sir James Ramsey, in his lately published volume, entitled *York and Lancaster*, refers to these London disturbances, and their effect on Italian trade. These troubles, in fact, caused the transfer of the whole commercial business between London and Venice to Southampton and Winchester. This took place in 1456, 1457. "About the end of April (1456)," he writes, "serious disturbances broke out in London, probably in connexion with the attempt to prohibit the sale of foreign silks. The servant of a mercer picked a quarrel with an Italian and assaulted him. The mayor next day, having committed the offender to prison, the entire 'mercery' of the city rose and released their fellow. The houses of several Italians were sacked; foreigners hid themselves, or fled to Winchester and Southampton. The duke of Buckingham was sent into the city with a commission of *Oyer et Terminer* . . . even the king (Henry VI.) was brought into the city to appease the people. On the 5th of May the disturbances rose to such a height that the king was taken back to Westminster By 10th May order was restored, two or three men having been hung. 'The Lombards to occupie the merchandizes as thei dide till the Counsail or Parliament have otherwise determined.'"^a These troubles brought matters to a head. The Italian traders appealed for protection against the intolerable arrogance and violence of the Londoners; and the Senate, after some delay, issued a decree that "in consequence of insults by artificers and shopkeepers of London" the Venetians, Genoese, Florentines, and Lucchese should henceforth have nothing more to do with the capital. Their trade, however, was too valuable and their spirit too high to be crushed by the

^a *Fabian*, 630. *Paston Letters*, i. 384.

unmannerly behaviour of the islanders, “*toto disjunctos orbe Britannos*” even in the fifteenth century. They therefore selected Winchester as their headquarters and emporium, with orders that “no Venetian ship should go to London so long as the merchants remain absent;” and, remembering how badly the Italians had fared before the justices in the capital, they added “that the merchants should insist on having at Winchester a judge for all law suits between English and Italians, and between the Italians themselves, so that they may not have to go to London to the Courts.” 23rd August, 1457.

This transference of the merchants, with all the machinery of their commerce, to Winchester brings us close to the point of our enquiry, why the Slavonians should have made North Stoneham church their place of sepulture. For Southampton was the port and Piræus of Winchester; and the Italian galleys for half a century regarded that town as the true commercial gate and port of entry for all England. A lively traffic at once converged on that sheltered harbourage; and as a necessary consequence of it, the twelve miles of Roman road, which in those days were the only land connection between the two towns (the river having become too shallow for anything except boats), were thronged with travellers and the rich store of goods from the eastern world. This Roman street issuing forth from the south gate of Winchester follows a straight course southward, through the villages of Compton and Otterbourne; and to this latter place the modern high road runs along the ancient line, as may be seen from its inflexible directness. At Otterbourne, the present highway, bearing slightly to the right, climbs a steep gravel hill, while the Roman street, now almost entirely obliterated, continued in a straight course, passing midway between the present railway and the high road, till it reached the two Stonehams, villages a Roman mile apart. Up and down this street passed the foreign seamen with their loads of merchandise; the Slavonians being as handy and as regularly employed in this work as in that of navigating the Venetian galleys. They even appear to have ventured, more boldly than prudently, to penetrate into the country districts with packs of goods, acting as hawkers and traders on their own account. For we find in 1499^a “that a few days before some of the galley-crews were travelling through the country hawking their wares, when about twenty miles from Southampton three of them were attacked by highwaymen, who killed two of the three. The king of England (Henry VII., who was friendly towards the foreign traders, as befitted a prince who had a head on his shoulders), on hearing of the mishap from the captain of the galleys, promptly inquired of it, captured two of the robbers, sent them to Southampton, where they were forthwith hanged.”

^a Venetian State Papers, No. 782.

It was for the sake of those who had perished in such a manner or who might have died from natural causes, that the "Slavonian School" set itself to make due provision of a burial-place, according to its declared duty, "to succour the living, and find an honourable resting-place for their dead." And this they appear to have done by getting leave either to build or to take possession of this north aisle of North Stoneham church, at the first halting-ground of their convoys after issuing from Southampton Bargate.

Why should they have pitched on this, rather than on some one of the many churches, apparently so much more handy for them, within the town walls? Clearly because relations were so strained between the Venetians and the townsmen of Southampton, and the dislike felt for the foreigners was so strong, that it would have been very difficult for them to get possession of a church, or even of a portion of a church, inside the walls. And even had they been able to get such a chantry chapel of their own, their tenure of it would have been always most insecure; during their long absences no one would have been left behind to protect their *Campo Santo*; their dead would have been exposed to insult and plunder from the rude islanders. They had no factory at Southampton; it is true that in 1495 one Thomas Oare was their consul in the town; for we learn that he was elected to and confirmed in the office that year; but there is no trace of more than this; and we know that in the orders given from headquarters the shipmen were often forbidden even to land there. Such narrow jealousy on the part of the English, whether in London or Southampton, against men who brought in their train prosperity and plenty, was unreasonable and shortsighted, and did much to quicken the steady loss of wealth and trade which the records of the time deplore in plaintive terms, as if our people were not to a very large extent the causes of their own depression. This jealousy perhaps also explains the fact that as yet no traces of these Slavonians or of the Venetian traffic are to be met with in the somewhat abundant records of the town of Southampton.

Thus debarred from having their chapel in the town, the seamen naturally looked out for some quiet place on their line of route at which they might find a fitting cemetery for their dead. South Stoneham, through which they passed after leaving the town, was probably not available, as it was in the hands of the monks of St. Denys in the suburbs; and they therefore went on a Roman mile, and paused at the other Stoneham. Here they secured what they wanted. It may be that the rector of the parish, who about this time appears to have been engaged in the work of restoration or enlargement of his church, was glad of the substantive aid which the foreigners could give; he may too have made friends with them as they passed through, for Englishmen I suppose are not all brutes, and their offer, in accordance with the rules of their guild, to build or beautify at

their own charges the north aisle of the church was no doubt willingly accepted by the good priest. And so the "Sepultura de la Schola de Slavoni" was established at North Stoneham. The aisle has in it, though much changed since that time, touches of a higher art than is commonly to be met with in Hampshire village churches. Thus, the little figures which stop the mouldings round the head of the east window of the north aisle (if, indeed, they are in their original position, which does not seem to be quite certain) are full of life and vigour of treatment.

The work done by the Slavonians, whatever it may have been, in the interior of this aisle, has all disappeared. Still, we may be sure they gave much heed to it. They may have brought over, in those brightest days of Venetian art, some rich picture as an altar-piece, from which as they worshipped they drew sweet memories of the sunny mistress of the Adriatic, their adopted home.

The records of North Stoneham make no reference to these picturesque strangers; they have vanished as completely as the Roman road along which they passed.

That they really needed some such burying-place is clear; many were the perils they faced in coming to England. They had to bear the illwill of Southampton; in the open country were hungry and savage highwaymen; the Wars of the Roses had filled the land with lawless folk; maladies, engendered by rough living aboard and ashore were rife, and went under the convenient general name of the Plague; even the seacoasts were infested with freebooters. Only three years before the date of our ledger stone, the Venetian State Papers (No. 547) provide us with an example of these dangers: "On Christmas Day (1488) while the Doge and the Ambassadors were at session in St. Mark's, came letters from London addressed to Giovanni Frescobaldi, the Florentine money-changer and usurer, under date of Nov. 3rd, wherein it was set forth that the Flanders Galleys, Piero Malepiero, captain, which had sailed out from Antwerp for Hampton on Oct. 26, when off St. Helen's were accosted by three ships, which bade them strike sail. The galleys, seeing they were English, drew nigh, saying they were friends; whereon the English tried to board the galleys; but Piero blew his whistle and beat to quarters, and so drave off the assailants, slaying eighteen of them. The English however chased them into Hampton harbourage. Then Piero wrote to the King of England to deprecate his anger; and Henry sent down to him my Lord of Winchester (Bishop Peter Courtenay), who bade him have no fear; that those who had been killed must bear their own loss; and that of a truth a *pot de vin* (a gratuity) would settle the whole affair."

One thing about the ledger-stone is a puzzle, the very thing which ought to have thrown light on the Slavonians. This is the shield with a double-headed eagle. Yet it is altogether uncertain to whom it points. In these days the

cognisance makes us think of the Holy Roman Empire and Maximilian the Penniless. In the Nuremberg Chronicle, then just issued, there are plenty of these uncanny birds. In fact, in 1491 it might, in point of time, indicate allegiance to the empire; on the other hand, it is certain that no Slavonians would have at that day acknowledged any such lordship. And besides, the double-headed eagle was then more properly Slavonic than Germanic. "This eagle," says Mr. T. Graham Jackson, A.R.A., in a letter in reply to an enquiry I made of him, "was the badge of the Nemagna dynasty of Servia, who usurped the throne in 1150, and ruled till the fatal day of Kossovo in 1389. The Servians never had a fleet, because, like the King of Bohemia with the seven castles, they never had a seaboard. The double-headed eagle is now borne by the Prince of Montenegro, who aspires to represent the old empire of Stephen Dushan. But they only date from Kossovo, or rather from 1516, so far as the present dynasty is concerned, and of course they never had any seaport till the treaty of Berlin the other day. Austria cannot have anything to do with it. She had no footing in Dalmatia till the treaty of Campo Formio, and never even appears in Dalmatian history."

I cannot help thinking that these poor seamen, feeling quite unprotected in England, knowing that this eagle was a true Slavonian badge, though not properly theirs, and finding that in those days it was very much respected in England, as connoting in English minds the empire under Frederick IV., boldly carved it on their ledger-stone as a protecting symbol.

The use of this little *campo santo* by the Slavonians cannot have lasted long. Changes in the commercial routes, new relations between East and West, the steady downfall of the prosperity of Southampton and Winchester, made it ever less and less tempting for the Venetians to visit England. Ere long the unfriendly shores of Southampton saw the last of our Slavonians. Their fleet set sail thence for the last time on the 22nd of May, 1532; and, though single ships put in from time to time, by the time of Edward VI. "the galleys of Venice and the carreckes of Jeane (Genoa) had altogether ceased to visit that port."

Thus the Slavonians made use of their "sepultura" for only about forty years. After that time this "burying-place to bury strangers in" remained deserted, till in the days after the Reformation, we know not when, it was thrown into the church, and the separate chantry with its altar and ornaments disappeared.

And so ended this dim little episode in the medieval trade relations between England and the East.

P.S.—Mr. Hope points out that there remain on one side of the stone (*see* Plate XV.) the marks where two large iron rings have been fastened to lift the stone by, as if it covered some vault or common burying-place. The holes for fixing the rings are now filled with lead.