V. *Account of an Ancient Manuscript of St. John's Gospel, by the Rev. John Milner, F. A. S. in a Letter to the Rev. John Brand, Secretary.*

Read June 5, 1806.

REV. SIR,

I HEREWITH send to you, for the inspection of the Society, a literary curiosity, namely a *M. S. copy of St. John's Gospel*, which is certainly between eleven and twelve hundred years old, and which is said to have been taken out of the tomb of St. Cuthbert, the celebrated patron-saint of Durham and Bishop of Lindisfarne.

You, Sir, are not ignorant that the body of St. Cuthbert was first raised from his tomb, in the aforesaid island of Lindisfarne, eleven years after his death, which took place at the desert island of Farne, in the year 687, and that on this occasion, it is reported by Ven. Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History*, and in both his *Prose* and his *Metrical Life of St. Cuthbert*, to have been found incorrupt. Having been afterwards removed, together with the episcopal see, to Durham, it was, with great pomp and publicity, examined by the then bishop of that see, a second time, 418 years after the death of St. Cuthbert, which corresponds with the year 1105, during the reign of Henry I. at which time it was again found incorrupt, with the limbs flexible and the vestments entire, as Simeon of Durham testifies, who declares that he not only saw, but handled the body. The same facts are reported by William of Malmesbury, Roger Hoveden, and other original writers, who were either contemporaries with these facts, or lived very near the times when they happened. The above-mentioned authors report that, amongst other things found in the tomb of St. Cuthbert, at this second translation

of his body, was a chalice, the cup of which was gold and the lower part onyx, as likewise the head of the great and good king of the Northumbrians, Oswald, who lost his life, fighting against the Danes.

The third and last time when the body was examined, was at the dissolution of the greater monasteries, in the reign of Henry VIII. on which occasion, as on the two former, the body is said by Harpsfield, who lived at the time of this event, and who afterwards became archdeacon (I think) of Canterbury, in his Latin *Ecclesiastical History*, in folio, to have been still found incorrupt. He mentions a sapphire ring that was taken out of the tomb, which he says he had seen. Dr. Richard Smith, bishop of Chalcedon, who wrote his *Flores Historiæ Anglicanæ*, (a thin folio) in the reign of Charles I, declares that he was in possession of that ring, and traces the history of it up to the aforesaid dissolution of monasteries, in the reign of Henry VIII. The said ring is still preserved at the house of the canonesses of St. Augustine, Rue Fossée St. Victor, at Paris, at which house Dr. Smith died. With respect to the body of St. Cuthbert, having, as we are told, been found incorrupt, contrary to the expectation of the Lord Cromwell's visitors, (whose intention it was to burn the bones, had they found nothing but bones in the coffin), the said visitors wrote up to Cromwell, in London, to know what they were to do in this extraordinary case. In the mean time, we are informed, that some of the monks contrived to steal away the body, which they buried in a private place, yet so as to transmit the secret to some of their successors, to be communicated to others after them, as long as Christianity should continue to be professed at Durham. Thus much I can say, from my certain knowledge, that there are always three gentlemen of the Benedictine order, who profess to know the identical spot, at Durham, where the body of St. Cuthbert rests, and who, as one of them dies, choose another to whom they impart the secret.

To speak now of the present M.S.; when I first heard of a Gos-

pel that had been buried with St. Cuthbert, (in consequence, as may be supposed, and as is now reported, of the value which the Saint set upon it), I own I rejected the whole story as a fabrication, because I was well aware of what Simeon of Durham relates in his History of that Church, namely, that St. Cuthbert caused a beautiful M. S. copy of the Evangelists to be executed by the monk Ealfrid, (who afterwards succeeded him in the See of Lindisfarne), and that Ethelwald, who was placed in the same See, in the year 721, caused this M. S. book to be illuminated with various figures in the inside, and to be magnificently bound with gold and precious stones on the outside. I had read the story, related by the aforesaid Simeon, (or rather by Turgotus of Durham, whose work he transcribed and continued), of this book's falling into the sea, as certain monks were endeavouring to transport the Saint's body into Ireland, and of its being recovered from thence, without any damage, several days afterwards. Lastly, I had examined and subscribed to the proofs adduced by the learned Selden, in his Preface to the *Decem Scriptores*; as likewise to those adduced by Smith, in his Preface to the *Catalogus Librorum M.S.S. Bibliothecæ Cottonianæ*, from which it appears, that this identical book is now preserved in the British Museum. But when I had examined and compared my different authorities, as well as the manuscripts themselves, together, I found that the claims of the large book in the Museum, no way interfere with the pretensions of my small book, now before the Society. For it is no where recorded that the former was *buried with St. Cuthbert*, though it was *written for his use*; and his being possessed of a folio copy of the Four Evangelists, with various Appendixes, &c. annexed to them, is no argument against his prizing, and frequently reading in a portable duodecimo-sized copy of the Gospel of St. John, as his master, Boisil, the Prior of Mailross, is said to have done before him. That this manuscript is not mentioned amongst the things found in his tomb by William of Malmsbury and other writers, is no argument against the presumed fact, because the last-mentioned Historian speaks of the chalice of gold and onyx, and

of the head of King Oswald, as being found at the second visitation; of which fact, Simeon of Durham makes no mention.

The chief arguments, of a positive nature, in favour of the fact in question, are the three following: first, the *inscription* at the beginning of the work; secondly, *tradition*; thirdly, the *intrinsic evidence*, arising from the writing itself.

The inscription, which is on the leaf opposite to the beginning of the Gospel, is as follows: *Ewangelium Johannis quod inventum fuerat ad capud Beati Patris nostri Cuthberti, in sepulchro jacens anno translationis ipsius.* This inscription is in a very ancient hand-writing, though vastly inferior to that of the Gospel itself. It is of a later date than the character of *Magna Charta*, with which Mr. Planta and myself compared it; but it is not very much inferior to it. Probably it is as ancient as the reign of Edward I. or Edward II. By the very terms of it, in which St. Cuthbert is called *Patris nostri*, it is traced to the church, of which that Saint was the patron, *viz.* to Durham. I may add, that its binding, which seems to be of the time of Queen Elizabeth, is in part composed of parchments, which all relate to persons or things connected with Durham.

Hence we may rationally suppose, that the present book was preserved in the treasury at Durham, till the dissolution of monasteries; when, for the sake of its costly binding, or some other cause, like the copy in the Museum, it got into private hands; and became the property of the ancient family of the Lees, one of whom, in the reign of Charles II. became Earl of Lichfield. Thus much is certain, that the book in question was, for time immemorial, preserved in the aforesaid family as the undoubted *Manual*, or *Vade Mecum* of St. Cuthbert, during his lifetime, and as having been buried with him at his death. The last Earl of Lichfield, as a paper at the end of the book testifies, gave it to the Rev. Thomas Philips, the well-known writer of the *Life of Cardinal Pole*, who bestowed it on the College of the Jesuits, at Leige, in the year

IN PRINCIPIO ERAT UERBUM
 ET UERBUM ERAT APUD Deum
 ET Deus ERAT UERBUM
 HOC ERAT IN PRINCIPIO APUD Deum
 OMNIA PER IPSUM FACTA SUNT
 ET SINE IP SO FACTUM EST NIHIL
 QUOD FACTUM EST IN IP SO ULTERAius
 ET ULTERAius LUX HOMINUM
 ET LUX IN TENEBRIS LUCET
 ET TENEBRAE EAM NON COMPRE
 HENDERUNT
FUIT HOMO MISSUS A Deuo
 CUI NOMEN ERAT IOHANNES
 HIC UENIT IN TESTIMONIUM
 UT TESTIMONIUM PERHIBERET
 DE LUMINE
 UT OMNES CREDERENT PER ILLUM
 NON ERAT ILLE LUX
 SED UT TESTIMONIUM PERHIBEREt

J^d Basire, sculp^t

Fac-Simile of the first Page of an Ancient Manuscript of S.^t John's Gospel.

Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London, 23rd April, 1809.

1769. From the said College it was brought to England by some of the members of it, after the suppression of their order.

The characters of the manuscript, and the mode of writing, bear intrinsic evidence of an antiquity as high as the age of St. Cuthbert.* The text is without chapters, verses, diphthongs, or points of any kind. The letters are all uncial, or capitals, being for the most part Roman, with a mixture of the Saxon. Mr. Planta, who assisted me in comparing this manuscript with the one in the Museum, is decidedly of opinion, that it is, of the two, the more ancient. Now the latter is demonstratively of the time of St. Cuthbert.

The text is the Latin vulgate; but, as in the few passages I have compared with the present vulgate, there are certain various readings, differing from it; I am inclined to think it is of the old Italic vulgate, which existed previously to the corrections of St. Jerome. It perfectly agrees with the text of St. John in the said *Liber Evangeliorum S. Cuthberti*, now in the Museum, as far as my leisure would allow me to compare them together.

I shall conclude with remarking, that the history of the *Woman taken in Adultery*, which is wanting in many ancient copies of St. John, both in the Latin and the Greek, is found both in the present manuscript, and that of the Museum.

I have the honour to remain,

Rev. Sir,

Your most faithful Servant,

J. MILNER, F.S.A.

The Rev. J. Brand, M.A.
Secretary to the Society of Antiquaries.

A fac simile of the first page is exhibited in the annexed plate.