

An Altar Tomb at Curry Malet.

BY A. MALET, ESQ.

AS the Church of St. James at Curry Malet is about to be restored, the Rev. C. Leigh Pemberton proposes to remove from its present position an altar tomb, which Collinson in his *History of Somersetshire* thus notices: "In the north aisle is a large tomb in which are deposited the remains of one of the family of Mallet, but the inscriptions are quite illegible. About 60 years since, on opening this tomb, the corpse was found entire, with one of the legs drawn up, which corresponds with the tradition that the person interred herein had a contracted leg."

The tomb is traditionally said to be that of Lord William Malet, and the rector kindly invited Messrs. Arthur and O. Warre Malet to consult with him previously to his forming any decision as to its removal; they, therefore, met the rector and the churchwardens, Messrs. W. Thwaites and T. C. Walrond, with the builder, Mr. Blackmore, on the 23rd April, 1879.

The tomb stands in the first bay of the north aisle, against the first detached pillar; it consists of a chest hollowed out of a solid block of Ham Hill stone, with a slab of the same sort of stone, without any visible trace of inscription or sculpture. One of the corners of the chest is partially chamfered, as if to accommodate something that formerly abutted on it. The slab or lid has one of its corners cut away apparently for a similar purpose: neither of these mutilations is necessary in the present position of the tomb. The middle of the slab at the west end is cut to fit the pillar against which it stands, so that the chest might be placed against it to gain more space about the pulpit and reading-desk to which it is rather inconveniently close.

All this seems to lead to the conclusion that the present is not the original position of the tomb.

The covering slab, which is 7 ft. 7½ in. by 3 ft. 9 in., was so far moved by Mr. Blackmore and his workmen that the inside could be partially examined. The chest is hollowed out leaving walls

of about $3\frac{1}{4}$ in. in thickness, and in it is a coffin of oak 5 ft. $11\frac{1}{2}$ in. long, 1 ft. $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide at the head, $10\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide at the foot,—inside measurements. The sides and ends are in good preservation, the top a good deal broken; the bottom was not examined, the planks are roughly cut, the marks of the saw being still visible.

There is a quantity of decayed wood in the chest, some of it considerably thicker than the present coffin; it is possible that this may be the debris of an outside casing of some more perishable wood than oak, or of the original coffin replaced at some removal by the present one.

The bones, which have been previously slightly disturbed, seem to be all in good preservation; the under jaw, in the opinion of those present who had seen many bodies, being remarkably large and powerful, with very good teeth, precluding the idea of any advanced age.

The body had been carefully and tightly swathed in linen, a good deal of which still adheres to the bones, especially to the hands; portions of this and of some other substances adhering to the thigh bone were removed for more minute examination, as an opinion had been expressed that the body had been embalmed. No peculiarities or marks which could lead to identification were observed, and the slab was replaced on the chest.

It was the opinion of all who were present that the tomb is not in the position it first occupied, and that it now interferes very inconveniently with the arrangements for seating the congregation; it was therefore deemed that, if another suitable place were proposed, there could be no valid objection to its removal.

The Rector of the parish of Curry Malet, Mr. C. Leigh Pemberton, then decided to remove the tomb a few feet only from its present position, and to place it under the east window at the end of the north aisle; sufficient space being left between it and the walls to allow all sides of it to be seen.
