

## Westminster Abbey.\*

THE Abbey, while it ranks as a cathedral, has no Bishop. It had one for ten years, A.D. 1540-'50 in the person of Bishop Thirlby, but he was the first and the last Bishop of Westminster. The name seems to be derived from the Western Monastery, or "Minster of the West," founded by certain monks of the Benedictine order on the site of the present edifice, then known as the Isle of Thorns—"a wilderness thicket affording cover to the wild ox and red deer that strayed into it from the neighboring hills." Tradition has it that an ancient temple of Apollo on this site was transformed into a Christian church about A.D. 153; but it is not until A.D. 616 that the story of the Abbey becomes historical. Its reputed founder was King Sebert who who died in that year, and whose grave is still pointed out within the Abbey. Sebert's church having in the lapse of time fallen into decay, Edward the Confessor cleared out the old foundations and erected what was considered at the time a magnificent edifice, dedicated to St. Peter, the patron saint of the original church. And so it comes that the full title of Westminster Abbey to-day is, "The Collegiate Church or Abbey of St. Peter's at Westminster." Edward lived to see the completion of his grand Minster and was buried with great pomp in front of its high altar (1066.) Henry III. pulled down the Confessor's cathedral, all but a fragment of the nave, and erected the present splendid edifice, the first stone of which was laid in the year 1221. It was intended that it should surpass in splendour every sacred edifice then in existence. Its Chapter house and its ornaments were exquisite. Eminent foreign painters and sculptors were invited to show their skill in decorations; mosaics, enamels, and marbles were brought from Italy. The result of Henry's pious notion was the fine specimen of Gothic architecture which now attracts thousands of visitors from all parts of the world every year. There are larger cathedrals in England and elsewhere, and much older; but nowhere is there an ecclesiastical structure invested with such a continuous succession of historic associations as this. The history of the Abbey, it may be

said, is the history of England for eight hundred years.

The chapel known as Henry the Seventh's is especially beautiful. It occupies the site of the Lady Chapel which Henry III. had erected and dedicated to the Virgin, and appears now as an extension of the choir of the cathedral proper. It was erected by Henry VII as a mausoleum for himself and his successors. In it was interred the royal builder, whose effigy, enclosed in a splendid shrine of brass, is one of the most conspicuous objects in the Abbey. Within this sacred edifice the Kings and Queens of England have been crowned from William the Conqueror (1066) to Queen Victoria (1838). A most interesting relic is the stone of Scone, encased in a wooden chair, in which all those monarchs have sat for coronation. It is the famous stone which Edward I. stole from Scotland long ago—that on which the Pictish Kings had been crowned at Dunstaffnage and Scone, which had served the same purpose on the sacred hill of Tara in Ireland—where it was known as the 'Stone of Destiny,' and, if we follow the legend to its source,—the stone which Jacob had for his pillow at Bethel! No grander pageants have ever been seen than some of these coronations; but a coronation, however splendid, is soon forgotten. It is otherwise with the tombs and monuments of the illustrious dead. The Abbey, in this respect, is the most perfect 'sermon in stone' that exists at the present time. The number and variety of its historic tombs far surpass those at Roskilde in Denmark, St. Denis, in France, and even the Santa Croce of Florence, and the Campo Santo of Pisa. Perhaps the most striking monuments in the Abbey are those to Elizabeth—the most illustrious queen up to her time that ever swayed the English sceptre—and to her unfortunate cousin, Mary Queen of Scots. "Elizabeth lies in the same vault with Mary her persecutor, and in the same chapel with Mary her victim"—"their envy buried in the dust!" George II and Queen Caroline were the last of the English sovereigns buried in Westminster. The hand-book of the Abbey gives the names of 544 persons who are commemorated here, but the actual

\* Historical Memorials of Westminster Abbey, by Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, D.D., Dean of Westminster: pp. 704; London, 1867-1882.