



A LION IN ALABASTER

AN ENGLISH ALABASTER LION OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

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THE lion, illustrated herewith, of the fourteenth century and executed in English alabaster, was in the collection of the late G. M. Arnold, F.S.A., of Milton Hall, Gravesend; on his museum being sold by auction, this sculpture passed into my possession. Unfortunately it appears to have suffered somewhat since it was removed from its original use, the presence of traces of mortar in the recesses of the carving pointing to its having been employed as material for building, the face, fore-legs, and hinder part being to some extent restored. The mane of the lion, the fringes of hair on its legs, and the termination of the tail were relieved with gold, while its eyes and claws were painted black. The royal beast appears as couchant, with its tail brought up under its right hind leg and lying against its right side; along the entire length of its back is a sharply defined square ridge, roughened upon its upper surface, evidently for the purpose of securing adequate adhesion between it and the flat slab which formerly rested upon it. As to the purpose which this lion might have originally served, two uses at once suggest themselves: (1) that it might have formed part of the base of an alabaster throne, in which case there would have been two such lions, each with its tail so disposed as to face the spectator;

(2) that it was one of a series of couchant lions which supported upon their backs a flat tomb-slab, upon which lay a recumbent effigy. It is this latter which seems really to have been the lion's function.

What will readily strike the observer is the very hard and metallic rendering of the lion's mane, and this is explicable when we remember that there are preserved in Amiens Cathedral two recumbent thirteenth-century effigies in bronze of ecclesiastics, the tomb of each of whom has the slab upon which the figure rests borne upon the backs of six lions, three being placed along each side of the tomb, at right angles to its length. In addition to the two examples in bronze of the thirteenth century quoted above, there is also a marble tomb of the following century in which the supporting lions are in style very similar to the one which forms the subject of this note. Unfortunately nothing is now known as to the provenance of this alabaster lion, which, so far as I am aware, is quite unique in this country, and is of some importance as showing a new style in tomb construction in the English ateliers of the Middle Ages.