BONES DISCOVERED IN A STONE COFFIN IN THE CRYPT OF CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL,
IN A CENTRAL POSITION, WEST OF THE SITE OF THE "TOMB OF ARCHBISHOP BECKET."
SURGICAL REPORT ON A SKELETON FOUND IN THE CRYPT OF CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL.

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I was shewn the bones—mixed up together in a box—in Mr. H. G. Austin's house on January the 25th, 1888. The condition they were in gave no idea of the probable date of their interment, but they appeared to be very old.

Having arranged these bones, I placed those of the body and limbs on a board in anatomical order; the bones of the skull I fitted on a mould of modeller's clay.

Taking the bones in the order of body, limbs, and skull, the following is the result of my examination:

There were the bodies of 19 out of the 24 Vertebrae (spine), some having all their processes. Also large portions of the Sacrum (the lower end of the spine), and numerous pieces of the Pelvis (hip). Both Clavicles (collar bones) were perfect. None of the ribs, with the exception of the 1st on the right side, were entire, but there were many broken pieces.

None of the bones of the arms or legs were missing, excepting the right Patella (knee-cap). There were a few of the small bones of each hand, and a large number of the feet. The finger and toe bones are not fully represented in our Plate.

The bones of the face were for the most part perfect. The greater portion of the right Superior Maxilla (upper jaw) was missing, only the outer 2-3rds of the dental portion having been found. The inner ½ of the right ascending ramus of the Inferior Maxilla (lower jaw), and its left condyle and coronoid process, were missing.

There were 5 teeth; right and left upper canines (eye teeth), 1st lower bicuspids, and 2nd right lower molar (1st and 4th double teeth).

The Occipital bone (back of the head) was very nearly perfect.
It was in firm articulation with both Parietals along its superior borders. There was no foramen magnum, nor any portion of the bone anterior to a line drawn from the posterior margin of the foramen magnum to the jugular processes.

Of the two Parietals (the bones forming the upper halves of the sides, and the hinder portion of the crown, of the head), the left was the most perfect. It was in close union with its fellow, with the Frontal, as far as the coronal suture, and with the Occipital. The right Parietal was much smaller than the left on account of a piece missing, which was broken off just above the temporal ridge, and 1 to 1 1/2 inches outside the sagittal suture. It measured according to the aperture in the skull 2 1/2 inches by 1 1/2 to 1 3/4 inches. The fracture across the crown of the skull has evidently been caused very recently, probably during the removal of the bones from the Crypt. This was the case in the fracture of the left Femur.

The Frontal bone (forehead) formed a continuous brow, extending from one external angular process to the other. The right half of the Frontal is almost perfect, but the left, 2 inches above the orbit, is broken into pieces.

The right temporal bone, in which the ear is situated, consisted of its petrous, mastoid, and the greater part of its squamous portion, the latter with its zygomatic process, but only a piece of the squamous portion of the left Temporal was found.

The bones of the body and limbs gave the idea of great strength. The rough places on the bones, where the muscles were inserted, especially on the arm and leg bones, were larger and rougher than is usually met with in skeletons.

The Clavicles (collar bones) were thick and rough, and each measured 8 1/2 inches.

The arm and leg bones also appeared thicker in their circumference, especially the Femurs (thighs) than are ordinarily seen. They measured in length as follows:—Right Humerus (arm), 13 3/4 inches; left, 13 1/4. Right Radius (forearm), 9 1/2; left, 9 1/2. Ulna (outer bone of forearm), 10 1/4. Femur (thigh), from notch between outer and inner condyles to upper border of neck, 17 1/2 inches; from bottom of internal condyle to top of great trochanter, 18 1/2; from same to top of head, 19 1/2. Tibia (leg), 15 1/4. Fibulae (outer bones of legs) were too much fractured for accurate measurements.

Taking the length of the skeleton, on its right side, as it lay on the board, with the bones in an unbroken line, and in close order, from the plantar surface of the Os Calcis (heel) to the superior
border of the Clavicle (collar bone), it measured 60 inches. Allowing 4 inches for the cervical vertebrae (neck), 6 for the skull, and 14 for the soft parts (skin, etc.), the total height of the living body would be 714 inches, or 5 feet 114 inches.

Now the allowance of 4 inches for the neck is small, and so also is 6 inches for the head, which measurement, it is said, should be \(\frac{1}{4}\)th of the total height. So taking 5 inches for the neck, 8 for the head, and 2 for the soft parts, the height of the body would be—and this would be a full, but no extravagant, computation—6 feet 3 inches. Comparing this measurement with that suggested by the length of the long bones, it would seem that the living body of this skeleton stood more than 6 feet in height, probably 6 feet 2 inches.

The skeleton was that of an adult man, rather above middle age, say from 45 to 55. Mr. Luther Bell, the surgeon-dentist, in this town, judged, from the condition of the five teeth, that the age was about 50 years.

With regard to the skull, it was undoubtedly of large size. Its circumference, with the tape over the brows and greatest prominence at back of the head, was 22\(\frac{2}{3}\) inches. The measurement across the orbits, from right to left external angle, was with the tape 5\(\frac{3}{4}\) inches, with the calipers just upon 5 inches. From the occipital protuberance to immediately above the nasal bones with the tape 12\(\frac{1}{2}\) inches, with the calipers 8 inches. (This last caliper measurement I have given from memory, having lost the record of it.)

In connection with these measurements, according to phrenological science, the breadth of the brow would give large perceptive qualities; the rising appearance of the fore part of the skull would shew much intellect; the flat appearance at the centre of the head would denote worldliness; and the immense volume of skull at the back indomitable energy.

With regard to any injuries which may have happened to this skull, it will be seen that the crown is perfect, there being a continuous run of bone from the back of the head to the forehead, which varied in breadth from 5 to 6 inches.

The sides of the skull are, as shewn before, the damaged portions. On the right side the Frontal extended back in an unbroken surface to join the right Temporal. This right side might have been fractured by a blow from a mace or pickaxe, but not by a sword-cut.

On the left side, by far the greatest injury seems to have occurred. Here there was an aperture from 5 to 6 inches long, extending from a line drawn upwards from behind the position of
the ear to the centre of the forehead. Besides the loose pieces of bone, partly filling up this aperture, there was another piece, about an inch broad and 1\(\frac{1}{2}\) long, not represented in our Plate, lying opposite the junction of the Frontal and left Parietal bones. This unrepresented piece of bone had a continuation of the coronal suture marked upon it. Accordingly, if this be Thomas à Becket's skull, no pieces of bone of any size could have been removed to be kept as relics.

It is remarkable that the edge of bone which forms the upper border of this aperture is almost in a straight line for 5 to 6 inches, so that if this left side of the skull was injured by force during lifetime, or after death, it is unlikely that it would have been done by a pickaxe or a mallet, but it might have been caused by a heavy cutting instrument, such as a two-handed sword.

Extending from the upper edge of this aperture, there is a crack in the skull about an inch and a half long, which might have been caused during lifetime, inasmuch that it only goes through the outer plate of the bone; and also, had it been made after the bone of the skull had become dry, it would have appeared, in all probability, as a rough fracture.