

WEST HORSLEY PLACE AND THE LITERARY ASSOCIATIONS OF WEST HORSLEY.

BY

HENRY ELLIOT MALDEN, M.A.

WEST HORSLEY PLACE may perhaps not be the original manor-house of West Horsley. The name suggests that it was not, "Place" being a common name for the new great house on a manor not on the site of the original *domus capitalis*. Such are "Sutton Place" and "Smallfield Place." Be this as it may, a peculiar series of interesting associations belong to what has been for long the great house of the manor. By a curious accident—for only two of the literary names connected with it were at all connected with each other—West Horsley has more literary associations in the past than any place in Surrey outside the old theatrical suburbs of Bankside and Paris Garden.

The history of the ownership of the manor need not detain us long. It will be found fully set out in the forthcoming third volume of the *Victoria County History*, not precisely as it was given by Manning and Bray. Briefly, that we may be introduced to the persons of whom we wish to speak at more length afterwards, it passed as follows, from the fourteenth century onwards:—Sir John Berners, who died 1361, left a son James, then aged fourteen. James Berners was a favourite of Richard II, and among the victims of the Lords Appellant who executed the king's friends in 1388. The king, however, restored his lands to his widow,¹

¹ The reference in the note, Manning and Bray, III, 38, is wrong. It should be Pat. R. 13 R. II, p. 3, 28, and 16 R. II, p. 3, 11.

and the grant was confirmed by Henry IV after the revolution of 1399. Anne the widow died in 1403. Her son Richard succeeded, and it is said, on doubtful authority I believe, that he was summoned to Parliament as Baron Berners. He died 1417, leaving an only daughter, Margery. She married John Ferriby before 1420. He died in 1441, and in the same year she married Sir John Bouchier, who was summoned to Parliament as Baron Berners in 1455, and died in 1474. His son Humphrey had died before him, killed at Barnet on the side of Edward IV in 1471. His son John, born 1470, was a distinguished soldier and courtier under Henry VII and Henry VIII, but found court life expensive. He mortgaged West Horsley, in 1518, to Henry Unton, Merchant of the Staple, father probably to Alexander Unton, who married one of his daughters, and died in debt to the king in 1532. He left two daughters, Catherine Unton, who died childless, and Joan, who was wife of Edmund Knyvet, and in favour of whose descendant the Barony was called out of abeyance in 1832. Edmund Knyvet and his wife had livery of Lord Berners' lands in 1534,¹ but West Horsley is not named. It went into the king's hands, probably because of the debts of Lord Berners, and was granted to Henry Courtney, Marquis of Exeter. He was attainted in 1538. West Horsley was granted to Sir Antony Browne, who married Lady Elizabeth Fitzgerald, daughter of the Earl of Kildare. Sir Antony died 1548. His widow held West Horsley in dower, and married Edward Fynes Lord Clinton in 1552. He was created Earl of Lincoln in 1571 and died 1585. She died in 1589. Her stepson, Sir Antony's son by a former marriage, now Lord Montague, succeeded to the manor and died in 1592. His grandson and heir, Lord Montague, succeeded. His son was a royalist and got into money difficulties. He mortgaged his estates to Sir John Evelyn of Godstone, who was on the winning Parliamentary side, and in 1656² sold West Horsley to

¹ Pat. R. 25 H. VIII, p. 2, 17. Note deficient in Manning and Bray.

² Feet of Fines, Easter 1656.

Carew Raleigh, son of Sir Walter Raleigh, who was also naturally on the side against the Stuarts. Time brought about reversals of fortune. In 1664 Carew Raleigh, who had sat in Parliament under the Commonwealth, sold West Horsley to Sir Edward Nicholas, former Secretary of State to Charles I and Charles II. Sir Edward died in 1669. His son John, who had married Penelope Spencer, daughter of the Earl of Northampton, who had fallen fighting for Charles I, died in 1704. His fine monument in West Horsley Church is in imminent danger at this moment of tumbling into ruin. He left three sons, Edward, John and William, who succeeded in turn. The last dying childless, in 1749, left West Horsley to Henry Weston, of the ancient Surrey family of Weston, in Albury, and of West Clandon and Ockham, whose descendant is still lord of the manor.

If we take up now the literary associations of these names, we find that the daughter of James Berners, of Richard the Second's time, was the Lady Juliana Berners, who may be called our first distinguished authoress. She was Prioress of Sopwell in Hertfordshire, but her work, *The Boke of St. Albans*, shows rather the training of the young lady of fashion than of the Nun. Hunting and Hawking, the Science of Heraldry, and the additional *Treatyse of Fysshing with an Angle*, are reminiscent of the downs above her father's house, of the banks of the Mole on the limits of her father's manor, and of the court of the elegant pleasure-loving Richard, more than of the Prioress's cell; though the contemplative man's recreation may also have been the recreation of a contemplative Prioress. The book is known now less for its contents than from the fact that it is among our early printed books from the press of Wynkyn de Worde in 1494. Her distant kinsman, Lord Berners, the lord of the manor in Henry VIII's reign, translated Froissart's *Chronicle* into English for the first time. Froissart would have always been delightful though not always true. But the influence of his *Chronicle* upon English views of Edward III and

the Black Prince, shown in the too favourable estimate of Edward III, and the stress laid upon the undoubtedly real gentleman-like attributes of the Black Prince, all which mark the English chroniclers of the next hundred years, are to be attributed to the fact that Lord Berners made the book accessible to English readers in a translation of true literary ability. Not for the last time the literary skill of an author and a translator has given to a history more credit than it deserves. Lord Berners must have felt it a congenial task to set forth the praises of the patrons of his ancestor Sir James, for Richard the Second, as well as his father and grandfather, unmistakably appeals to Froissart's sympathy.

The next literary lady of West Horsley is memorable, not for writing books, but for having poems written about her. The Lady Elizabeth Fitzgerald, wife of Sir Antony Browne and of the Earl of Lincoln, who resided chiefly at West Horsley from 1543 to 1589, was the Fair Geraldine of Surrey's Sonnets. It is difficult to over-estimate the services of Henry Howard Earl of Surrey to English poetry. Wyatt may have been his superior in depth of thought, but the man who introduced the Sonnet into English, and who naturalized Blank Verse, did a great work. No doubt critics can always argue that someone else would have done it, if he had not. The imitation of Italian methods was in the air. So Marlowe, if he had not been killed too soon, would have written great tragedies had no Shakespeare lived. But the man who did the thing must always deserve the praise he gets. To have been in any sense the inspiration of Surrey's verse is a claim to distinction in the history of Literature.

But we must not overrate the actual influence of the Fair Geraldine. Surrey was married to someone else when she was six years old. She was about twelve to fourteen when the poems addressed to her were completed. They were probably begun when Surrey was at Windsor in 1537, when she was nine. She was married to Sir Antony Browne when she was fifteen, and she was only eighteen when Surrey was beheaded.

Hers was the name which, after the fashion of the age and style, he chose to celebrate as that of his love. The story of the Magic Mirror, showing the lady reading—

“ That favoured strain was Surrey’s raptured line,
That fair and lovely form, the lady Geraldine.”

seems to be an invention of the poet Drayton before Scott made it popular. To look for a serious passion in the sonnets of a poet of the age, is to show absolute ignorance of the prevailing fashion.

Many personal reminiscences are extant, however, of the fair Geraldine, when she was Countess of Lincoln. She was one of the many correspondents of Sir William More of Loseley. She often wrote to him from West Horsley. She was indignant at an attempted enclosure of the waste, to the detriment of many poor tenants and her own manorial rights. On 20th July, 1588, she wrote of the depressing news that the Spanish Fleet had come to Calais roads, and that she heard that there was much disquiet in the Court. She begged Sir William to come to stay with her at West Horsley. The lonely lady, a widow now, wanted protection perhaps. But Sir William had other things to do when the Armada was still in the Channel. He was deputy-lieutenant in joint command of the County levies. He asked her, however, to come to Loseley, and she apparently accepted, and was setting out on her journey shortly afterwards, when the Spaniards were running before the gale into the North Sea, but when no sure news had yet come of the danger being ended. She died in January the next year. The second Lord Montague who succeeded in 1592, did his best to keep up literary traditions by bringing to West Horsley, as his wife, the daughter of that Lord Buckhurst who had helped to write the *Mirroure for Magistrates*, and the first real English tragedy. Carew Raleigh was at least the son of a literary man, for the great Sir Walter, if he had not been everything else, would be remembered as the author of the *History of the World*. There is a persistent

tradition that Carew Raleigh kept his father's head at West Horsley. The evidence of a skull found near his grave seems inadequate. We would fain hope that Sir Walter's head was buried with his body in St. Margaret's, Westminster, after his execution, on 29th October, 1618, not on 28th October, as his (much later) monument says, nor on 18th October, as Manning and Bray suggest in correction. On a par with the story of the head, is the following, communicated by an old servant of the Nicholas family, to Thomas Russell of Guildford: "Mr. John Nicholas, of Horsley Place, in taking up the stones of the present drawing room, which had formerly been a chapel, discovered an earthen pot, or urn, in which was supposed to be contained the bowels of Sir Walter Raleigh." Why it was so supposed, the deponent sayeth not. What is more interesting, and probably more authentic, is Russell's account from a paper he had seen, that Carew Raleigh sold the manor to Sir Edward Nicholas, though the reporter wrongly says to Sir William, for £9,750, a very good price.

West Horsley enters upon its final appearance as a place of learned if not of literary interest with Sir Edward Nicholas. He, born in 1593, had been brought up to the public service. He was in important office by 1618, clerk to the Council Extraordinary in 1626, clerk to the Council in 1635, Secretary of State, 1641 to 1649, during the whole civil war of Charles the First's reign. He went abroad, and was Secretary of State to Charles II from 1654 to 1662. Here he brought his vast collection of State papers and confidential letters. If the MSS. preserved at Loseley are without doubt the most important in Surrey for county history, and those at Wotton most important from a literary point of view, the Nicholas Papers which were at West Horsley were the most important in the county for general historical interest. They form one of the indispensable sources for the history of the time. Part of them are now in the British Museum, as Egerton MSS. 2533 to 2562. Part of them are in the Bodleian Library among the

Clarendon State Papers, which include many letters from Sir Edward Hyde (Lord Clarendon) to Nicholas, which we should naturally have expected to find in the Nicholas papers, where are, however, only three such letters. A great deal is now missing altogether. Edward Nicholas, grandson of Sir Edward, made a sort of catalogue between 1720-23, which includes much now lost. Some originals, now lost, were copied by Dr. Thomas Birch (Historical Transcripts, Brit. Museum, Add. MS. 4180), in 1750-51, just after the death of the last Nicholas. The MSS. now at Oxford came from William Man Godschall, Esq., of Albury, in 1782. Some other papers are at Wotton, and Dr. Birch's Transcripts were apparently made at Wotton, and include papers now in the British Museum and at Oxford. It seems as if the whole collection must have gone to Wotton, when William Nicholas died in 1749. The Wotton part was printed by W. Bray in 1818; the Egerton MSS. are being printed by the Royal Historical Society. But it was at West Horsley that history was preserved, if not written.

The house, as we began by saying, is possibly not the oldest manor house. Some part of the back of the building may easily be as old as the time of the Earl and Countess of Lincoln, at any rate. The front has been transformed. The two wings once projected further than at present; the foundations of the projections have been found. In the west wing was a gallery on the first storey, since cut up into rooms, and cut short by the curtailment of the wing. The gallery was very possibly built by the second Lord Montague (1592-1629), who resided a good deal at West Horsley and died there. It is rather characteristic of his time, or of that immediately before him. The present appearance of the house is probably chiefly due to Mr. Weston, to whom it was bequeathed in 1749. He, it is said, contemplated a complete rebuilding, but contented himself with alterations. So many different families of note had some connexion with the place, so many—Berners, Bouchier, Courtney, Browne, Raleigh, Nicholas—passed

away without male heirs, that there was a certain fitness in the final bestowal of the property upon Mr. Weston, whose family, one of the oldest recorded in the county, might seem to sum up and represent its past history. There is a good collection of portraits of historical and family interest in the house.