



The Shiplake Virtuoso.

By Emily J. Climenson.

WHEN young William Plowden decided to follow the fortunes of his King and Master, James II., to France after the advent of William III. in 1688, the consequent expenses caused the Plowden family to sell Shiplake Court, which had been in their possession from the time of Queen Elizabeth, and to retain their Shropshire estate of Plowden, and Aston-le-Walls in Northamptonshire. William's mother, Penelope Plowden, a widow, was left to conclude the sale of Shiplake. William did not attain his majority till March 31st, 1689, and on April 3rd in the same year a deed is made by Sir William Turner, Mr. Caryll and Penelope Plowden to part with "Shiplack" to Mr. Robert Jennings and his son James. William Plowden the next year after the sale, though only 22 years old, commanded King James's second regiment of foot guards at the battle of the Boyne on July 1st. 1690. After the defeat William Plowden retired to France for two years. His uncle, Francis Plowden, was Comptroller of James II. Household, and he and his wife and three children were already at St. Germain, but it is with the Jennings family we have to deal with. Mr. Robert Jennings was a Fellow of St. John's College, Oxford, and had been Head Master of Reading and Abingdon schools. He was of great descent, a cousin of Sarah Duchess of Marlborough of the Jennings of Sandridge, and on either paternal and maternal pedigree descended from royalty.

From a Jennings paper lent to me by a descendant of the family, it appears, Mr. Robert Jennings was ejected from the Mastership of the Reading Grammar School, to which he had been recommended by Sir Bulstode Whitelock. "Probably he was more particularly an object of persecution because he had borne arms for Charles I. within the garrison of Oxford. When he left Reading (in 1654) he became private tutor in the family of the Powys' at Hardwick, and was afterwards Master of the Free School, Abingdon."

Barnard in his *Life of Heylin* mentions Mr. Jennings as "an ingenious person ejected from his Fellowship of St. John's, Oxford,

as one of the constant visitors to Dr. Heylin at Abingdon, who had been Charles I.'s chaplain."

Anyhow Mr. Jennings seems to have got a considerable fortune at Abingdon (said to be from capitation fees, etc.) Robert Jennings married his cousin Mary Jennings of Long Wittenham, and by her had two sons and two daughters. James his eldest son and heir, married Frances, daughter of Henry Constantine of Merley and Lake, Dorset, a very ancient family descended from George, Duke of Clarence, brother of Edward IV. By her he had ten children, nine of whom were born at Shiplake. In 1694 Mr. Robert Jennings was nominated High Sheriff of Oxon, but pleading old age his son James officiated in his place. Robert Jennings died 1703, ætat 83. Of James Jennings' ten children Henry is the one of interest to us. He married Susannah Kent, a great heiress in Dorset, and owning vast estates at Mondego Bay, Jamaica. They had five children, four sons and one daughter, their fifth child a son *Henry Constantine* is the subject of this sketch. His father Henry Jennings died at Aix in 1739, was embalmed and brought to Shiplake for burial, his son Henry Constantine being only eight years old, his elder brother Robert 12, and his sister Susannah 14, the other two boys died very young. Robert entered the East India Merchant Service, was second mate on the "Walpole," and died in 1751. From hence Henry Constantine became the only son and heir of the Jennings' property. He had been educated at Westminster School, and it was there he acquired that taste for classics and the arts which distinguished him ever after. On May 1st, 1749, in George II.'s reign Henry Constantine Jennings was gazetted to the first regiment of foot guards, and for the three years he was in the Army was quartered at London or its outskirts and occasionally at Windsor. After the death of his elder brother he resigned his commission on Jan. 16th, 1752. In 1753 his mother placed him in possession of his property at Shiplake and elsewhere. He now commenced what was then called the "grand tour" and visited the Continent with the Marquis of Blandford (afterwards George, fourth Duke of Marlborough). He resided some while in France thence crossing the Alps into Italy, where he remained eight years, three of which he spent at Rome. He spent his time agreeably but expensively in Italy. Whatever his faults were, he was of a most refined and cultivated taste, and must have been an agreeable companion. His other fellow-traveller was Lord Monthermer, only son of the Duke of Montagu, and a connection of his own on his grand-mother's

side. Jennings now began to make his first collection of objects *de vertu*, statuary, etc., and from the following circumstances acquired the vulgar name of "Dog" Jennings, a soubriquet that stuck to him through life. The story shall be told in his own words :—

"I happened one day to be strolling along the streets at Rome and perceiving the shop of a statuary in an obscure street, I entered and began to look around for any curious production of art. I at length perceived something uncommon at least, but being partly concealed behind a heap of rubbish I could not contemplate it with any degree of accuracy. After all impediments had been removed, the marble statue I had been poking for was dragged into open day ; it proved to be a huge but fine dog ; and a fine dog it was and a lucky dog was I to discover it and to purchase it ! On turning it round I perceived its tail was docked : this gave me a hint. I also saw the limbs were finely proportioned and that the figure was noble—that sculpture in short, was worthy of the best age of Athens, and that it must be of the age of Alcibiades, whose favourite dog it certainly was. I struck a bargain on the spot for 400 Scudi, and as the muzzle alone was damaged, I paid the artist a trifle more for repairing it. It was carefully packed and being sent to England after me, by the time it reached my house in Oxfordshire it had cost me £80. I wish all my other bargains had been like it for it was exceedingly admired, as well I knew it must be, by connoisseurs, by more than one of whom I was offered £1,000. In truth by a person sent, I believe, from Blenheim I was offered £1,400 ; but I would not part with my dog ; I had bought him for myself and I liked to contemplate his fine proportions, and admire him at my leisure, for he was doubly dear to me as being my own property and my own selection."

This quotation is taken from Timbs' "English Eccentrics," in which there is a short life of Mr. Jennings.

(*To be continued.*)

Proceedings of Societies.

BERKS ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY.—On the 26th ult., the President gave a most interesting lecture on the Churches of Stanford-in-the-Vale, Hatford and Shellingford, and the Chapels of Goosey and Baulking. As usual the lecture was illustrated by lantern slides, from photographs specially taken by Messrs. Walton Adams.

The Two-day Excursion of the Society will be to Chichester on the 11th and 12th of June.