

WILLIAM DODINGTON:

A Tragedy of St. Sepulchre's, Holborn, in 1600

BY

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"DODINGTON, rich Dodington,¹ yesterday morning, went up to St. Sepulchre's Steeple, and threw himself over the battlement, and broke his neck. There was found a Paper sealed about him, with this superscription. 'Lord Save my Sowle and I will praise Thy Name.'"

Thus wrote Rowland Whyte, Esquire, to Sir Robert Sydney² from Baynard's Castle, on Saturday, 12th April, 1600.

The accident naturally caused a great sensation in London, and Francis Bacon³ referred to the matter in a conversation with Queen Elizabeth. They were talking about the affairs of the Earl of Essex, and Bacon remarked to Her Majesty, "If I do break my neck, I shall do it in a manner as Mr. Dodington did it, which walked on the battlements of the church many days and took a view and survey where he should fall."

A good many details of Dodington's family and history can be pieced together from contemporary printed and manuscript records.

He belonged to an old Somersetshire family of which *his* branch had settled at Woodland, in the Parish of Meare, Co. Wilts. His father was John Dodington, an Auditor who dwelt in Bartholomew Close, London, by his wife Eleanor, daughter of William Shafter of Morden, Cambs. He had two uncles, William and Bartholomew (his father's brothers); and also three brothers, Bartholomew (d. 1590), Francis (d. 1592), and John (d. 1585), besides two sisters, Margaret, who married Peter Whetcombe in 1585, and Jordan, who died unmarried in

1592.⁴ His son, also William, was knighted by James I at his coronation in 1603. It will thus be seen that there were three Williams, and two Johns and Bartholomews, all living at the same time, which makes identification difficult and occasionally uncertain.

William Dodington first comes into notice as a student at Cambridge. He matriculated at St. John's College in 1545, was nominated the next year as a Fellow or Scholar of Trinity College in the Foundation Charter, and took his B.A. degree in 1547-8.⁵

Then comes a long gap in his history, but not long after 1569 he married Christine, the widow of John Tamworth, Esquire, a gentleman of the Privy Chamber to Queen Elizabeth and Keeper of her Privy Purse.⁶

She was the daughter of William Walsingham⁷ and sister of Sir Francis Walsingham, the famous Secretary of State. Her sister Mary was the wife of Sir Walter Mildmay, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Founder of Emmanuel College, Cambridge.

With these influential Ministers of the Crown William Dodington found profitable employment, and there are numerous references to him in the State papers in connection with various financial matters affecting the Queen and government business;⁸ but curiously enough as early as 1572 his affairs seem to have become embarrassed, and he concludes a letter to Lord Burghley by praying for assistance out of his troubles.

In 1573 he wrote a letter to Sir Francis Walsingham⁹ from Phullam (Fulham), which throws some light on the nature of his duties in the office of the Chancellor:—

“Good brother, I found great light, touching Mint matters, in your book. Some want I have for lack of a dictionary, which I pray you lend me for a while. There is in this many things, referred to the ancient orders of their Mint, whereof there is no mention made in the book. If you could by any means help us to understand what they were you would do us a great pleasure, and the whole commonwealth withal. Almost we have no

record, and indeed none at all to the purpose of those matters of monies. And albeit we have the same officers that they have for the most part, and that our orders seem wholly to be derived from them, yet are all things so out of frame by the embasing of the monies and so are we blind in all things, as no man knoweth what belongeth to his office, neither what way is to be taken in governing of so great a charge. I pray you, therefore, give us your help, and direct us to come to so needful information.

P.S.—I thank you for your good news, and pray you to impart to us such other as you have."

In 1578 he writes from Kensington, on 15th July, to Lord Burghley¹⁰ saying he "has received his Lordship's letter even now at midnight, but, having sent his horse and man to Newbury, is utterly unfurnished wherewith to wait on his lordship." "Besides," he adds, "if it be her Majesty's liking to have the indenture altered, it will be a matter of more travail, and require longer time than the place and time of her Highness' abode there will give leave to despatch. If his Lordship would set down in articles what he would have done, it should be done with all expedition."

About 1580 he acquired the Manor of Breamore in Hampshire, where he made his residence and established his family seat.¹¹

On Sir Walter Mildmay's death in 1589 he acted as Executor of his Will,¹² and in 1590 was named as overseer of Sir Francis Walsingham's Will¹³ and got a legacy of plate to the value of ten pounds. The following year he made a further considerable purchase of land,¹⁴ and in 1600 he is found in prison, his misfortune being brought about, he alleges, "by the perjury and other badd means employed by John Buckley and his felowes."

In spite of his family bereavements he was not left entirely without friends, and Anne Russell, the granddaughter of the Earl of Bedford, came to his assistance. In an undated letter preserved amongst the Hatfield

MSS. she writes to Mr. Raynsford, "attending on Mr. Secretary [Cecil]":—

"Mr. Secretary [Cecil] and My Lord Admiral [the Earl of Nottingham] at my suit delivered this gentleman, Mr. Dodington, out of prison, and for that he hath few friends, and myself tied so much to his wife for her long service, I am loth to leave him till he be freed from his trouble. And now that I hear the Queen hath given commandment that there shall be a pardon for divers, I entreat you to be a suitor to Mr. Secretary in my name that his name may be in the pardon. Mr. Attorney hath promised me that if he may have the least warrant from your master or any of the Council, he will willingly affect it."¹⁵

Threatened with an action in the Star Chamber¹⁶ and all hope of escape from his anxieties being exhausted, the unhappy Dodington took his own life as already described, leaving behind, on the top of St. Pulcher's tower, his staff and a letter of which the following is a copy:—

"Oh Lett me lyve and I shall call upon thy name. Let now other man be troubled for that which is myne owne fact. John Buckley¹⁷ and his felowes, by perjury and other badd meanes, hath brought me to this end. God forgive it them and I do. And, O Lord, forgive me this cruel facte upon myne owne body which I utterly detest and most humbly pray him to cast it behind hym, and that of his exceding and infinite mercye he will forgive it me, with all my other sinnes. But surelie after they had thus slandered me, every day that I lived was to me a hundred deathes, which caused me rather to chuse to dye with infamie than live with infamie and torment.

O Summa Deitas, quæ Cælis et Inferis
Præsides, et mediis medere miseris,
Ut spretis Inferis, lætar Superis,
Reatis dona veniam."¹⁸ [*sic*]

Such a scandal in high life was abhorrent to the

Authorities, especially as an enterprising young printer named Tony Higgins (just out of his apprenticeship and anxious to earn an honest penny), had printed and circulated a Broadside setting out all its startling details.¹⁹

A meeting of the Privy Council was called at Greenwich Palace on the 4th of May, 1600, at which were present, Whitgift, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Sir Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper, Lord Buckhurst, Lord Treasurer, and the Earl of Nottingham, Lord Admiral. After due consideration of the matter, they decided to issue a Warrant to suppress the scurrilous rag! The *Acts of the Privy Council*²⁰ contain a Warrant to the Master and Wardens of the Company of Stationers in London. "Whereas we understand that there is printed and published by Anthony Higgins, Thomas Morley and others, Printers in London, under colour of their privileg, a certain pamphett or ballade touching the death of William Dodington Esquire, which pamphlett . . . wee thinke verie unmeet to be published, wee do therefore hereby will and require you by vertue of this our Warrant forthwith to make diligent search and enquire for all the said pamphletts or ballads imprinted and to take into your custodie and deliver to Mr. Dr. Stanhope,²¹ and if any partie . . . shall refuse to deliver them you shall . . . bring them before me, the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury to be ordered therein as shalbe cause, which to perform you may not faile. And this shalbe your warrant in that behalf."

No Will²² of William Dodington has come to light, but he is referred to in that of this brother John,²³ whose executor he was and from whom he received a "Triangle dyamond for a remembrance" (1585).

A few contemporary references relating to Dodington's sad end and the subsequent disasters attending his descendants must conclude this narrative.

The Revd. J. Graves²⁴ in his edition of the *Letters and Despatches relating to the taking of the Earl of Ormond* by

O'More in 1600, quotes a remark made soon after the occurrence:—

“They who are so apt to lay this accident as an imputation to my government, may as well tax the Mayor of London because Dodington brake his neck from the steeple of St. Pulchers.”

In a letter from Sir Henry Boughchier²⁵ to Archbishop Ussher,²⁶ dated London, Dec. 4 1629, is this passage:—

“One thing I must not overpass and that a strange and monstrous accident lately happened in England. One Dodington (a younger son of Sir William Dodington of Hampshire and grand-child of that Dodington who brake his neck from St. Sepulchre's steeple in London) being reprehended for some disorderly courses by his mother, drew his sword and ran her twice through, and afterwards, she being dead, gave her many wounds; and had slain his sister at the same time, had he not been prevented.”

Thomas Hearne²⁷ in his preface to Camden's *Annals of Queen Elizabeth*, quotes a passage out of a book called *The Royal Legacies of Charles I to his Persecutors and Murderers* (1649). “How many presidents have we of judgements which hunt and pursue Impropriations and such as divest the Church of her sacred dedication? Were there no more than that upon the family of Sir William Dodington of Hampshire,²⁸ a family of a civil government, yet as heavily plagued as any before it; one, and a father of them, brake his own neck from the church of St. Sepulchre in London: the Lady of Sir William, a most virtuous woman, received fifteen wounds into her body from the hand and sword of her own son: the son for this horrible matricide, was hanged in sight of the house where he was untimely born: one of Sir William's brothers and a most virtuous gentleman, is now (if living, and hath been these many years) blind. These pursuits of vengeance, and many more better known to others, have followed that family of honour and virtue, and by observation the like have continued

upon it from the time some one of that house greedily enriched himself with those matchless Church robberies of King Henry VIII.²⁹ Insomuch as this virtuous Sir William hath even undone himself, by returning almost his whole estate (consisting of such revenues) to the church, from whence it was stolen, though not by himself."

The doleful story comes to an end when Thomas Fuller, the witty Prebendary of Sarum,³⁰ (though further piling up the horrors) adroitly manages to introduce a final ray of light to illuminate the consistent gloom of the earlier narrations. This is what he says:—

"Sir William Dodington, Knight, High Sheriffe of this County (Hants) in the third of King James, kept a bountiful house at Bremer therein. Succeeding to an unexpected estate, he had the words of David frequent in his mouth, 'What am I? or what is my Father's house, that thou has brought me hitherto?' Having a *Godly jealousy* that some former *dysasters* in his family had been caused by God's displeasure on his *Ancestors* for holding so many *Impropriations*, he freely and fully restored them to the Church, settling them as firmly as Law could devise to a greater yearly value than many will believe, or any imitate. Yet was he a man of *Mourning*, or son of *Affliction*, all the days of his life. No sooner had he seen Herbert his eldest son, a most hopeful Gentleman, married to a considerable co-heir in Somersetshire, but he beheld him snatcht away by an untimely death. What *Tragedies* have since happened in his household is generally known. All these he bare with saint-like Patience; 'hearing the Rod (that is, *understanding and obeying it*) and him who appointed it' (Micah, vi. 9). In a word, God, the skilful Lapidary, polished him with sharp Instruments that he then did glisten as a Pearle here, who now shineth as a Starre in Heaven. He died about the year of Our Lord, 1638."

NOTES.

¹ The name is spelt in a variety of ways; e.g. Doddington, Dodyngton, Dorrington, etc., but Doddington seems to be the most correct form and is used here for the sake of uniformity.

² Whyte was a gentleman employed by Sir Robert Sydney (the brother of the famous Sir Philip) to *sollicit* his affairs at Court and to relate what passed there, for which he was allowed a salary.—*Sydney Papers*, ed. Arthur Collins, Vol II, p. 187.

³ In 1601—Campbell's *Lives of the Chancellors*, Vol. III, p. 36.

⁴ Dr. G. W. Marshall in the *Reliquary*, Vol. XV, p. 90; B.M. Addit. MSS. 5815, f. 137; *Reg. of St. Margaret Westr.*, ed. A. M. Burke—*passim*; and P.C.C. Wills.

⁵ *Athenæ Cantab.*, C. H. Cooper, Vol. II, pp. 164 and 546. On the strength of a passage in Strype's *Annals*, Vol III, Appen., pp. 37 and 38, Cooper surmises that he later became a Solicitor. (Suit of Mr. Ed. Carey and Mr. Doddington, his *Sollicitor*, c. 1581.)

⁶ The history of his family is given by Nichols in his *History of Leicester*, Vol. III, p. 477. The burial place of the family was St. Botolph's, Aldersgate. Nichols quotes the Inscriptions on their tombs.

⁷ E. A. Webb, *Hist. of Chislehurst*, p. 127.

⁸ S.P.D. Cal. 1572, p. 436; 1574, pp. 477, 493; 1576, p. 521; 1579, p. 640; 1591, p. 3. In one pedigree he is called "of the Exchequer, servant to Sir Walter Mildmay." This term infers nothing derogatory to the character of a gentleman, although he might even have to wear the livery of his lord. Younger sons might be "servants" to their elder brothers as Thomas and Maurice Berkeley were to William, Lord of Berkeley (Owen and Blakeway, *Hist. of Shrewsbury*, Vol. I, p. 236n).

⁹ Hatfield MSS. Cal. Pt. 2, p. 66.

¹⁰ Hatfield MSS. Cal. Pt. 2, p. 188.

¹¹ *V.C.H. Hants.*, Vol. IV, p. 598.

¹² Hatfield MSS. Cal., Vol. VII, p. 500.

¹³ Printed in *Wills from Doctors' Commons*, Camden Soc., Vol. LXXIX, p. 69. The paragraph relating to Doddington is as follows:—"Lastlie I desire my most lovinge bretheren Edward Carie, Robert Beale, and William Doddington Esquire (to everie of whiche persons I bequeathe also one piece of plate of tenne poundes price in token of my good affection towards them) to be the overseers of this my laste will and testamente, most earnestlye prayinge them with the bestc counsell, advice and aide to help my executor [i.e. Ursula, his wife] in the execution thereof." The Editor adds the notes: "William Walsingham, father of Sir Francis, married Joyce Denney; and she was remarried to Sir John Carey, K.B. His son, Sir Edward Carey of Berkhamstead, Co: Herts., was father of the first Lord Falkland. . . . He died July 16th, 1618. Robert Beale, one of the Clerks of the Council, died in 1601. He married Edith St. Barbe, who died in 1628. . . . William Doddington married Christina, sister of Sir Francis Walsingham and widow of John Tamworth. Ursula was daughter of Henry St. Barbe, Esq. of Ashington, Co: Som^t. She first married Rich: Worsley, Captain of the Isle of Wight, who died 1565; secondly Sir Francis Walsingham. She died in 1602 and was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral with her second husband. . . . The Testator's three overseers were thus his 'bretheren' each in a different way."

¹⁴ S.P.D. Cal. 1591, p. 3.

¹⁵ Hatfield MSS. Vol. X, p. 444. Anne Russell was the only surviving daughter and heir of John Russell, styled Lord Russell. She was married, 16th June 1600, at St. Martin's Ludgate, in the presence of Queen Elizabeth, to Henry Somerset, Earl of Worcester and Lord Herbert of Chepstow. She died in 1639, and her husband in 1646. (G. E. C. *Peerage*, Vol. VIII, p. 202.)

¹⁶ B.M. Addit. MSS., 5815, f. 137.

¹⁷ This is no doubt the John Bulkeley who sold the Manor of Charford, Hants. in 1600 (*V.C.H. Hants.*, Vol. IV, p. 562).

¹⁸ There are two versions of the letter. The above is taken from B.M. Lands, MSS. 99, No. 2, and is endorsed "A lamentable ejaculation of William Dodington's distressed soul, intimating his intention of self murder. Another is in B.M. Addit. MSS. 5821, f. 204 and 205.

¹⁹ *Stationers' Company Reg.*, Vol. II, p. 179, "Anthony Higgins son of Wm. Higgins of Wolverhampton in Co: Warrick, yeoman, hath putt himself apprentice to Thomas purfoote the elder Citizen and Stationer of Lond. for the term of 7 years from the date of these presentes: 2s. 6d. (6th March 1592)." The ballad was not registered and no copy appears to be in existence.

²⁰ New Series, ed. Dasent, Vol. XXX, p. 289.

²¹ A Chancery lawyer.

²² The extent of his possessions may be gathered from his *Inquisitio post mortem* at the P.R.O. It extends to two large skins of parchment closely written in Latin, and was taken at Romsey, on 6th Aug., 42 Eliz. (1600). It describes the deceased as of "Breamore, Co: Hants" (see Chancery Ser. II, Vol. CCLXI, No. 28).

Reference may also be made to the Patent Rolls, also at the P.R.O. viz: 1 Eliz. 33, 2 Eliz. 41, 3 Eliz. 60, 4 Eliz. 110, 10 Eliz. 221 and 222, 11 Eliz. 246, 247 and 249, 12 Eliz. 262 and 263, 13 Eliz. 283, 22 Eliz. 10, 24 Eliz. 4, 26 Eliz. 24, 27 Eliz. 15, 32 Eliz. 25, 33 Eliz. 17, 37 Eliz. 40, 43 Eliz. 38.

²³ P.P.C. Brudenell 57.

²⁴ *N. & Q.*, 3 Ser., Vol. III, p. 132.

²⁵ Later Earl of Bath. He died *s.p.* 1654 (G. E. C. *Peerage*, Vol. II, p. 19).

²⁶ *Life*, ed. by Dr. Richd. Parr, p. 145.

²⁷ Referred to by the Rev. Wm. Cole, the Cambridge Antiquary, in B.M. MSS. Addit. 5821, f. 204 and 205.

²⁸ He was son and heir of William Dodington and was knighted in 1603 at the Coronation of James I (Metcalfe, *Book of Knights*, p. 146). He married Mary, d. of Sir John Herbert (MSS. Addit. 5815, f. 137) and had several children. His son Herbert married Elizabeth Colles and died *s.p.* in 1633, so his younger brother John became the heir (*V.C.H. Hants.*, Vol. IV, p. 598). His daughter Anna was christened at St. Marg. West., on 10th Oct. 1614. (Regr. p. 88).

²⁹ E.g. The possessions of the Gild of the Holy Ghost, Basingstoke, Hants., were granted in 1550 to John Dodington and William Warde (*V.C.H. Hants.*, Vol. II, p. 211).

³⁰ *Worthies of England* (pub. 1662), Vol. I, p. 414.