ON THE MONUMENTAL EFFIGIES IN COBERLEY CHURCH, GLOUCESTERSHIRE.[1]

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In offering a few remarks on the monumental effigies in Coberley Church, it is a somewhat ominous preface to have to say that the whole church, save the tower, which has been left in its integrity, apparently under a sort of protest, has been re-built within the last few years.

It is almost an axiom, in what is called "the thorough restoration" of an old church that, whatever else happens, the tombs must be well pulled about; no "restoration" would be complete without this particularity. With reference generally to these long-suffering memorials, in earlier days the clerk and the sexton vied with each other in the violent wresting of the brass plates from their stony beds. Effigies were turned out into the churchyard, soon to be blurred by moss or grassed over; buried, like those at Gonalston, under pews; broken up, despoiled and counterchanged, like the tombs, brasses, and effigies of the six Sir Thomas Greenes at Greene's Norton; hidden under seats, as at Holdenby, or cut up into altar steps as at Bradbourne; while those rare and beautiful works in wood often found a last resting place in the vestry fire, though, certainly, the figure of John de Hastings at Abergavenny has been saved by being mounted up upon a window sill, and that of William de Combermartin at Alderton, Northamptonshire, rescued from the "restoration" of 1848 by being banished to an upper stage of the tower. We must be thankful for small mercies! Other effigies were transported into fields and found useful as gate posts; others again were handed off by *dillettanti* squires to decorate their grottos—there is a notable example near Walsall—with the full consent and approval of those, their proper custodians, whose pride it should have been to cherish such records. In one brilliant district of "the Herald's Garden," the alabaster effigy of no less a man than a scion of the great House of Vere, one who fought at Bosworth, the "picter insolid" of his pious will, is suffered to remain in the church, but to furnish a nostrum for the local children known as "Vere Powders." These are a few examples of a large class taken at random, but melancholy enough; a still larger number has been claimed by the modern builder for foundations, how large a number we shall never know, and probably as many have been turned upside down for the paving of dairies and less cleanly places, or brutally broken to bits for general utilitarian purposes.

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A glance through a county history of a hundred years ago shows how much we have thus lost in the shape of monumental records, and the dreary blanks in countless old churches to which we have travelled, hoping to find effigies exhibiting the concentrated history of heraldry and costume, serve but to remind us, if not exactly what shadows we are, at least what shadows we often pursue.

Some forward spirits foresaw the impending voids as long ago as 250 years, and Weever wrote :—"Alas! our noble monuments and precious antiquities, which are the great beauty of our land, we as little regard as the parings of our nails." The author of *Funeral Monuments* spoke rightly, and, taking "monuments" in its narrow sense as monumental effigies, his words apply as much to our own time as to his, and so we come back to the point at which we started, namely the scant regard that is paid to the claims of the monuments and effigies of founders and benefactors when a church is "restored." It may, however, be borne in mind that the historical value and human interest of these memorials consists first of all in their remaining in the places where they were originally set. They were certainly not put into particular arched recesses, under certain windows, within or without the sacrarium, upon high tombs, or level with the floor, without special reasons, and reasons far more intense in their religious nature than such as at the present day prompt orderly persons to chose a niche in the catacombs of suburban cemetaries, or to pitch upon a particular spot in the deep shade of a spreading yew in a country churchyard.

But effigies and monuments are not the only things that suffer. Most of us are familiar with the process and results of "restoration," many of us have seen an old church in the agonies; the roofs off,—all at once, of course, so that the frescoed walls can be well soaked by the rains and provide a plausible excuse for stripping off the plaster and pointing rubble masonry which never before was pointed; the old oak stalls and seats turned out to make way for harsh frameworks in pitch pine, and re-appearing later on in the emporiums of "art manufacturers," transformed into grotesque dining-room sideboards and "Early English" occasional tables for the benefit of those unhappy people to whom some demon has whispered "have a taste." When the effigies and tombs of the founders and benefactors are routed out of the chancels or chapels often built specially to contain them, they are, as being, according to the fatuous modern principle "so much in the way," conveyed by the loving hands of the British labourer to a part of the church which they do not fit, while such trifling details as sculptured alabaster angels and heraldic shields are abolished, lost, carried away by the builder to decorate his summer house, or, as in a certain village in the before mentioned "Herald's Garden," utilized for a pigsty. This is but a light sketch of the kind of work that usually goes on in a "restoration," and when it is remembered that it has been taking place all over England for the last fifty years, some idea may be gathered of what we have lost under the head of monuments alone; we shall see a dark side of the picture indeed, as regard architecture, and church fittings generally, when we visit East Anglia. It does not, however, appear that we are even yet sufficiently aware of our position, and it would be interesting, but verily depressing, if one could calculate how few persons in all those re-opening congregations realised how much "restoration" had deprived them of which

could never be brought back, and how many were simply glamoured by the gaudy new tile paving, the golden fleurs-de-lis on the heavenly blue organ pipes, and the lawn sleeves,—and rejoiced in their simplicity that all things had become new.

But the exasperating part of "restoration" is that, with more discretion and less zeal, we might so easily have retained all that was so valuable, and also have had the church seemly and tranquil as it should be, without the violent dislocation of its continuous history, and with the evidence of its long local record still legible upon it.

We have intimated above that we must be thankful for small mercies, and it is fair to say that, whatever the Coberley effigies may have lost in interest by being removed from their original sites in the chancel, they have been tenderly dealt with in their transference to the new altar tomb upon which they now lie in the south aisle. Here we have a man fully armed in the most picturesque of all military harness, that of the extreme end of the reign of Edward II. He wears a high pointed and ridged bascinet, to which a plain camail, with a fringed lower edge, is attached at the line of the nostrils by four sunk studs on either side of the face, and not hung on in the usual way as in later years, by laces threaded through staples. The dexter shoulder is protected by four articulated plates, reinforced by large roundels filled in with rosettes, and, the arms being encased in plate, the elbows are similarly protected by coudes, with single articulations, and reinforced with roundels containing roses. The fore arms are protected in like manner by tubular double-hinged and strapped plates. The gauntlets have slightly peaked cuffs, strapped over leather foundations, the fingers and thumbs being defended by small articulated plates on leather, the whole forming a gauntlet of which we may in vain seek for an original example. A shield, now gone, has been suspended on the sinister arm. This appears, from certain existing iron stumps, to have been separately fixed on and may have been of wood, covered with gesso, and painted with the wearer's arms. Over the body is worn a surcote representing some thin material, probably silk, reaching in front to the middle of the thighs and then cut away until it falls in long folds nearly to the ancles behind. The opening thus formed in front discloses the lower edges of the following garments:—A haketon ornamented with rosettes and a gambeson decorated in the same way and fringed; below this again appears the pourpoint covering of the thighs. There is no hauberk visible, unless, indeed, the fringed garment below the haketon may be taken to be it, which is improbable. The surcote is confined at the waist by a plain narrow cingulum, and, transversely across the hips, is the sword belt studded at intervals with great rosettes, and to it is attached by a single locket close to the cross piece, a long sword with a well-decorated scabbard. The knee pieces are plain and fringed on the lower edges; the jambs or greaves, of plain plate, thrice hinged and strapped, and the feet, shod by four articulations, rest against a lion with a vast and free flowing tail. The heels are armed with spurs of great elegance, with their rowels in rare preservation, with long leaf-shaped points; the right leg is crossed over the left—a not uncommon conventional English attitude long after the Crusades, with which this particular posture has nothing to do—and between the lion and the surcote is some free leafy foliage which the sculptor, like a true artist, untrammelled by the

exigencies of "high art" chose to introduce, rather than cut away a good piece of material. The whole figure is boldly and freely sculptured in hard yellow limestone, and is in excellent condition. There is a fine natural lie in the statue which gives the idea of its having been discovered in the stone—after the manner of Michael Angelo—and not laborious measured and "pointed" for according to the modern practice. The man's head rests upon a pillow, and is supported by two angels with long feathered wings.

It will be at once apparent that a harness, such as has been thus coldly described, is full of interest to students of armour. A specialist could dilate long, for instance, upon the fashion of the bascinet, and show—such is the technical knowledge that has been acquired—how this particular shape had gradually grown, almost year by year, from earlier forms, and, as gradually lapsed into later ones, and finally vanished as a recognized head-piece for protection with the end of the civil wars. Or he could indicate from this stony text how the surcote had its rise, and its accidents of form during the reigns of Henry III and the great Edward; how it lost in time, first, its long-flowing front portion, and then its useless flapping hinder part; how it passed, in fact, from long and loose to tight and short; and, developing into the jupon, passed finally away about 1420; when men were clad entirely in steel, with no mail or textile fabric visible, to reappear not long after in the totally different shape of the heraldic tabard.

All this, and much more, a specialist could do, and sustain the interest also, if he had the time—but we have it not on the present occasion. Or he could take the armour for the hand, as one of our members has done, and again trace it down in its varying forms from the mail muffler with the empty palm, to the rattling gauntlet of the doomed "White King," for there will be always something fresh to learn; or he may deal with the sword, the sword belt, or the spur, and accurately set forth the chronicle of each from the evidences of monumental effigies alone. Alongside with these studies the enquirer cannot fail to corroborate and illustrate general history, and, what is better still, rescue much local story that has well nigh perished. All this interest may spring up at the contemplation of monumental effigies which church "restorers" find "so much in the way," and which are usually dismissed by casual visitors with the frivolous remark, "It is a pity that their noses are broken." The effigy of the lady is simple almost to coarseness, and the drapery is arranged rather as that of a standing than a recumbent figure. She wears a wimple, or chin-cloth, pinned up to the temples over smooth pads, which, being placed over the hair, caused the wimple to stand out free from the neck for the sake of appearance and coolness. She wears a close dress, of which the upper edge is cut low in the neck and covers the bottom of the wimple, and a long sleeved gown falling in heavy folds to the feet, which it covers.

In front of this tomb is a diminutive effigy of a female wearing a veil and a long gown draping the feet, and girded with a strap, after the manner of a French bathing woman; it is not a graceful figure, but an interesting one of a very small class concerning which antiquaries have not quite made up their minds, the question being whether children or adults are thus represented. Examples occur, varying in length from two to four feet, at Westminster, Mapouder, Horsted Keynes, Tenbury,

Ayot St. Laurence, Little Easton, Long Wittenham, Anstey, Salisbury, Abbey Dore, Gayton, Fawsley, and Haccombe. The example at Coberley is two feet ten inches long, including the lion at the feet. She wears a cuffed glove on the left hand, and holds the other in the right; these details indicate a person of quality, probably a Berkeley, and near relative of Thomas de Berkeley and his wife, who are supposed to be represented in the paramount figures.

With further regard to the character of the armour of Thomas de Berkeley, it is clearly by the same sculptor as those at Leckhampton, near Cheltenham, and Alvechurch, in Worcestershire, and we have identified others in the western counties from the same workshop.

Under a low arch, in what is now the organ chamber, is an interesting stone effigy of a man in civil dress. He wears a tunic with close-buttoned sleeves to the wrists, a long gown falling in large folds to the feet, a supertunic opening from the waist downwards, and a hood with loose careless folds lying on the left side of the neck. A young man is represented with regular features, a delicate mouth and straight under eyelids, that peculiar fashion of Edwardian sculptors, occasionally seen in real life, and when, in conjunction with grey eyes, giving a most piquant effect to the countenance. The youth wears a remarkable profusion of hair, cut square over the forehead and standing out four and three-quarter inches on either side of the face. It is a capital example of civil costume; he is "saying endless prayers in stone."

There is also in the chancel of Coberley Church an interesting memorial of a heart burial, probably of a Berkeley lord. It represents a half figure of a knight in mail holding a heart in front of a heater-shaped shield, the whole being set within a trefoiled arch under a plain gable, and apparently forming part of a credence. By the process of "restoration" this has been removed from the north to the south side. Its change is to be regretted, inasmuch as the records of heart burials of this character are not numerous, and form the most interesting illustrations of the long "Chronicle of Human Tears."