

AN INCISED SLAB AT CUCKFIELD

BY MRS. ESDAILE

BURIED in the organ chamber at Cuckfield, and mounted on a blocked-up doorway immediately behind the noble Sergison monument of 1741 signed by Thomas Adye, is an incised slab of great interest in an alabaster setting; and when I saw it last it was in daily peril of injury from the miscellaneous objects placed against it. I myself removed a pair of steps and a pole on 29 January, 1941, and as the space is exceedingly confined and there is at present no light save that provided by an electric bulb, it is little short of miraculous that this work of art has not been more damaged; actually only one portion of the pediment is missing.

The alabaster frame with its delicate mouldings and panels of flower bells bears the Carleton coat, ermine three pheons argent on a bend sable with a crescent for difference, set in a charmingly designed border; below are the arms, of Vicars, argent a cross formy sable on a chief gules three cinquefoils or, impaled with those of Carleton; the frame to right and left is adorned with a species of oval between dots set horizontally; vertically, these are familiar as forming the gadroon edge of many works of the Southwark School. The inscription, which is cut within the outline of a heart and is flanked at the first text by three small incised hearts on either side, is as shown on the opposite page:

Over the outline of a heart enclosing this inscription is a demi-angel with outspread wings, with one hand pointing upwards, the other outstretched towards the devices in the sinister circle, one of four connected by other devices of a similar emblematical character:

1. Top dexter: an eye in the centre of a heart: motto
ΘΥΜΕ ΒΛΕΨΟΝ ΑΝΩ (take courage, look up).
2. Bottom dexter: a child leaning on a skull, the

HERE BEFORE LYETH THE BODYE OF GUY
Carleton SONNE OF *George* LO. BYSHOP
 OF CHICHESTER, A GENTLEMAN WELL QUALIFIED
 FOR HIS PIETIE, DESCRETION, COUERTESIE WORTHILY
 BELOUED. HE DIED OF A CONSUMPTION AT LEWES ON
 GOOD FRIDAY, AND WAS BURIED AT COCKFIELD
 APRIL XIII. cIo. Ioc. XXIIIX, BEING EASTER DAYE
 I PET. 4. 7.

THE END OF ALL THINGS IS AT HAND
 BEE YEE THEREFORE SOBER & WATCH VNTO

PRAYER

NEERE TO HIS BODYE LYETH *George Vicars* AND *Anne*
 HIS SISTER THE CHILDREN OF *Thomas Vicars* B. OF D.
 VICAR OF THIS CHURCH AND OF ANNE HIS WIFE THE DAUGH-
 TER OF BYSSHOP *Carleton*. THEY BOTH DIED INFANTS,
 AND AS OF THE SAME WOMBE SO OF THE SAME TOMBE
 THEY ARE PARTNERS. SHE DIED FEBRUARIE
 XXIIIX, cIo. Ioc. XXIV. HE NOVEMBER XXIV

cIo. Ioc. XXVII

Deuteron. 32. 29

O THAT THEY WERE WISE
 THAT THEY VNDERSTOOD THIS
 THAT THEY WOULD CONSIDER
 THEIR LATTER
 END

Below the above inscription:

MY LORD & MY GOD



INCISED SLAB IN CUCKFIELD CHURCH

whole encircled by the serpent of eternity: motto
FINIS AB ORIGINE PENDET.

Connecting the two is a vertical panel with a Latin cross round which a serpent twines; on the horizontal bar of the cross IOHN. III. XIV ('and as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so also must the Son of man be lifted up').

3. Top sinister: a flaming heart set on a clasped book [the Book of Life]; motto COR RECTUM INQUIRIT SCIENTIAM.

4. Bottom sinister: a skull set on an hour glass, ears of corn growing from it; motto: MORS VITÆ INITIUM.

The panel connecting the two bears an anchor inscribed: CRUX CHRISTI ANCHORA SPEI.

On the alabaster frame below the upper shield is cut the inscription HIS QUONDAM VICIMUS ARMIS.

Before discussing the art and artist, however, a word may not be out of place as to Bishop Carleton of Chichester (1559-1628), whose beloved son lies here, with two small children of his daughter Anne, who had married the Vicar of Cuckfield. A Northumbrian by birth, he owed much in youth to Bernard Gilpin, 'the Apostle of the North', went to Oxford at seventeen; became a fellow of Merton at twenty-one; became vicar of Mayfield in 1589; Bishop of Llandaff in 1618 for a year only; and was one of four Bishops to represent the Church of England at the Synod of Dort, where, though tending to Calvinism, he upheld episcopacy in the teeth of the extremist Synod. In 1619 he became Bishop of Chichester, holding office till his death in 1628; perhaps his most notable contribution to the literature of the day was a shrewd criticism of the eccentric Sir Christopher Heydon's *Defence of Judiciarie Astrologie* (1624); some of his arguments might be taken to heart to-day by the superstitious: 'The Madnesse of Astrologers'—the Bishop's phrase—is always in evidence in troubled times.

We may now return to the tablet itself and its technique of allegorical designs incised upon a touch panel

—the technique of the lattener applied to another material; it is interesting that the only parallel to them known to me should occur upon a monument bearing a signed brass, the altar tomb to Edmund West (d. 1618) at Marsworth, Bucks. The top is plain; at the north end is the brass, at the south end a coat of arms, and on the long sides east (facing a window) and west (facing down the aisle) incised touch panels alternate with alabaster shields in low relief bearing other allegorical subjects, one actually identical in subject with one of the incised panels at Cuckfield. All require description.

West Side.

Incised panel: weeping mourner.

Shield bearing skull with ears of wheat growing from it, crossbones below; motto: MEMENTO MORI.

Incised panel: mourner with face hidden in hood.

Circular shield of arms in the centre.

Incised panel: Death holding a scythe.

Shield with two skulls and wheat ears; motto:
RESPICE FINEM.

Incised panel: the Risen Christ.

East Side.

Incised panel missing.

Shield: skull resting on thigh bone.

Incised panel: young male figure extending one hand towards the sun, his left hand on a spade resting on a celestial globe, probably an allegory of Man labouring towards heaven, seeking inspiration from above.

Shield with skull round which is twined the serpent of eternity, a torch below.

Incised panel: a mourner.

The brass on the north end represents a monument on which West reclines; his family kneel round the base of a monument from which a curtain is withdrawn; Death stands behind it poisoning his spear in one hand, the serpent of eternity in the other. This brass is signed by Epiphanius Evesham.

Here, then, we have the same rare technique, the same devotional character, the same use of mottoes, and in one case the identical design—the skull pierced by the full corn in the ear; that the Cuckfield monument is also by Evesham there can be no doubt; even the details of the alabaster frame are typical of his work elsewhere.

Until January 1932 Evesham as an artist was saved from oblivion solely by one sentence extracted by Vertue from Penkethman's edition of Owen's *Epigrams* (1624), and conscientiously chronicled in the *Anecdotes of Painting*, by Horace Walpole; the full text is as follows: 'Give me leave to insert his [Owen's] Epitaph which is Engraved in a plate of Brasse, and fixed under his Monumental Image: formed and erected by the most exquisite Artist Mr. Epiphanius Evesham—within the Cathedral church of St. Paul.' Consequently, when Mr. Ralph Griffin sent me photographs of a monument at Lynsted, Kent, with the note 'this is signed: does the name Epiphanius Evesham mean anything to you?' I was able to say it did, and by the help of the photographs to identify a group of works which had puzzled me for years. Evesham made his bow to this generation in *The Times* of 30 January 1932; a subsequent correspondence elicited further facts; and the list of works, a few of which are signed, that can now be ascribed to him is a long one. The absence of signatures, during the first half of the seventeenth century, is a small matter; there are more documented works by Edward Marshall for instance, none, as it happens, signed, than there are signed works; only in one case does Nicholas Stone put his initials to an effigy—the discovery is Mr. W. H. Godfrey's—though his documented works are reckoned by scores; we need have no hesitation, therefore, in ascribing unsigned works to Evesham, of whose career something is now known. He was the fourteenth and youngest child of a Herefordshire squire, and was born in 1570; he evidently showed a taste for art, since he, like Stone's master Isaac James, was apprenticed to the Anglo-Flemish sculptor Richard Stevens (1547-92), and in the 1590's was already executing monumental

tablets; a brass sundial, now in the museum at Hereford, dated 1589 and bearing his signature, proves that he was trained in incised work as well as in sculpture proper, and his brass at Marsworth has already been noticed, as well as the small lost brass to Dean Owen in St. Paul's by which alone his name was for three centuries preserved, but it is safe to say that the phrase 'most exquisite master' was based on the knowledge of works more important than such comparative trifles as those just mentioned.

We know something of Evesham's brothers; John, the gallant sailor, whose account of a 'Voiage to Portugall' is extant in the British Museum; Robert, the Merchant Taylor; Alexander, the herald and antiquary, who seems—though not holding an heraldic office—to have been closely connected with the College of Arms, and who, like Epiphanius himself, owned a copy of the family pedigree, his being now in the College of Arms, while that belonging to Epiphanius, with his own notes bringing it up to date and giving an account of his father's death and funeral in 1584, is in the British Museum. The date of his death has not yet been discovered, but it probably took place in the 1640's.

It is impossible for reasons of space to give an account of the works which can now be ascribed to him; they are characterized by admirably carved effigies, exquisite reliefs, and a devotional character unparalleled at the time; he has a special tenderness for children, whom he treats as individuals, not as diminutive men and women, and will represent a group of mourners each differently affected by their common sorrow in a fashion unknown elsewhere. In the visual representation of texts of Scripture, of ideas, and of mottoes Evesham indeed has something in common with Blake, as when, at Old Coulsdon, he shows us Wisdom casting the globe from her hand as she gazes on the light of heaven, to illustrate the lines on the long and curious epitaph, beginning:

Wisdom the world surveyes and throwes behind,
 Much greeved with the sense of her condition,
 Contemplates Heavn, joyes permanent to find,
 Where she to God prefers this short petition.

The only other monuments in Sussex which can be regarded as Evesham's are at Chiddingly, where there is a pretty mural monument to a Jefferay (d. 1611), with shield and moulding above and angel-headed columns framing a kneeling family group; a second, illegible from below, on which a cherub head of Evesham type above and delicately carved panels frame an inscription tablet; and a third to Mrs. Jefferay and her daughters, erected in 1620, with a great urn framing a skull flanked by seated figures, the recess in which the skull lies inscribed *FUI MARGARITA*. All seem to me to show the hand of Evesham, whether in his method of grouping figures, his heraldry, the details of the alabaster settings, or the imagination in the Margarita monument. Is it too much to hope that the Cuckfield tablet may, after the War, be placed in a position worthy of it, if possible in its original position above the Carleton vault; this might be ascertained from the Burrell MSS., when these are again available; meanwhile it is to be hoped that steps and other objects which at any moment might damage the shields or the details of the alabaster frame will be banished elsewhere; the glory hole is no fit setting for a work of art.

We are indebted to the kindness and skill of Major Thomas Sutton for the photograph of the Cuckfield tablet here reproduced.