

## INSCRIPTIONS IN CHILLINGHAM CASTLE.<sup>1</sup>

I BEG permission to make a few remarks upon an interesting paper read at the last Monthly Meeting of this Society by Lord Ravensworth, whom I rejoice to see in the chair on this occasion, as his lordship will have an opportunity of hearing what I have to say upon the subject, and, if he shall see reason so to do, of re-considering one at least of the opinions which he was kind enough to bring before the Society in connection with that paper. I have thought it best to put my notions in writing, for both your sake and my own. To you, much valuable time may thus be spared, and with respect to myself, I shall be the better able to state, in a clear and succinct way, one or two ideas which have struck me upon reading his lordship's essay in the local newspapers.

There is, it appears, at Chillingham Castle, a chimneypiece formed out of a block of stone, in a portion of which, whilst it was in preparation for the purpose to which it was intended to be converted, was found a *nidus* or cavity containing a living toad. Accounts agree in reporting that this chimneypiece stood for a long period of time in the entrance hall of the castle, with the cavity remaining in the state in which it had

<sup>1</sup> Our volume ends with the subject of its commencement. The hand of death has been heavy in 1858. The late Dr. Raine proposed to inspect the inscriptions at Chillingham, to which the excellent paper which is given above refers, and to revise his essay in accordance with their date so ascertained. The lamentable decay of his health prevented his intended journey. His words now can only be given as they were read at our anniversary meeting, but they possess a high interest as almost his last literary effort and for their admirable delineations of character.

To Lord Ravensworth's abandonment, in page 1, of the theory which connected Bishop Cosin with the inscriptions, it need only be added that it was founded on a tradition that a Bishop of Durham was their author, on the prominent character of the first Lord Grey, and on the mention of Harvey, who died in 1657.

The Editor, from such information as he has received, is inclined to believe that the inscriptions are really of the first half of the seventeenth century, and a statement of Dr. Raine's opinion of their authorship, on a similar assumption, shall conclude his paper, in brackets.

That the want of evidence, for one date or another, produced so valuable an essay, is one of those satisfactory results which are often consequent upon difficulties arising from antiquarian subjects of a secondary importance.—Ed.

been discovered; but that afterwards it was removed into another apartment in the same fabric, in which it now remains, and the cavity was filled up with plaster, or some such material.<sup>2</sup> But whether the precise locality of this said cavity can now be traced or not, it does not appear; neither is it of importance to my present purpose. Before the removal of the stone into the room in which it is now preserved, it further appears that there was, and still continues to be, over it, or near it, upon a tablet of wood, a rude painting of a toad, in figure considerably above the ordinary size. According to his lordship's account, the toad is depicted in its natural colour upon a white background interlaced and garnished with snakes; and on each side of the toad, either upon other tablets, or upon a continuation of that containing the animal itself, (his lordship's paper is not quite clear upon this point, which after all is of but little consequence), are inscriptions in white [gilt] letters, upon a black ground, of which his lordship was kind enough to submit to the Society copies, accompanied by translations, and a commentary to make them intelligible. The writer of these two inscriptions, Lord Ravensworth, for certain reasons which are brought forward, takes to have been Bishop Cosin, who presided over the see of Durham from 1660 to 1673; and the person spoken of in one of them as a hero to have been the first Lord Grey of Wark, who died in 1674. With the inscriptions themselves I propose not at present to meddle, as I may have somewhat to say of them before I bring my remarks to a close. My object is, in the first place to enquire whether, all things considered, Bishop Cosin could possibly have been the writer of these inscriptions as the noble lord has somewhat more than conjectured; whether, in truth, they do not belong to a much later period. And then, if there shall appear to be somewhat of plausibility in my facts and reasonings, it will be my business to offer a few suggestions with respect to the person from whose pen they may in reality have proceeded.

In the first place, there is very strong internal evidence that these inscriptions could not have been written by Bishop Cosin. To his most valuable theological writings, which are well known—nay, which are, as it were, text books to every one who has had occasion to study the history of the Church in general, or that of England in particular—it would hardly perhaps be fair or reasonable to have recourse in proof of his character as that of a man not given to indulge in such levities as these. His published writings are professedly upon grave subjects, in which, as he was no Bishop Latimer or Dr. South, it would be in vain to look for wit or humour—but, happily, there are other sources of in-

<sup>2</sup> See page 174.—Ed.

formation with respect to him, and the workings of his daily mind, to which I may, I think, reasonably and legitimately refer in aid of my argument. Among the hundreds of letters written by him, which I have had an opportunity of seeing, not only during his episcopate, but from a very early period of his life, I can fairly say that I have met with nothing in the shape of a joke—nothing of literary trifling like this, or even of the most harmless kind. Surely, if anywhere, one might expect to find in a man's letters—such a man at least as Bishop Cosin, with all his stores of learning—letters written during a long period of forty years upon the most varied subjects—some outbursts of wit or humour, if wit or humour had been component parts of his mind—some indication of the playful spirit with which he must have taken up his pen to write all this pompous nonsense about a toad in a hole. But on the very contrary, throughout the whole of his correspondence, all is stiff and severe—satirical now and then, and not unfrequently something more than this—exceedingly rough and rude and testy—especially (what makes not a little for my argument) during the period in which he presided over the see of Durham—(I mean from 1660 to 1673)—a period during which he was scarcely for a single day free from the most excruciating pain, arising from an internal disorder, which, happily for us, the surgical skill of the present day could have speedily and effectually removed. Such were the bishop's sufferings from the complaint to which I have referred, that, as I have reason to believe, he officially visited the Northumbrian portion of his diocese only once in person, during the thirteen years of his episcopate, his other visitations having been conducted under a commission for that purpose; and surely there is every fair and legitimate reason to conclude that he would hardly upon that one occasion, under such painful circumstances, (if even he had been admitted into Chillingham Castle as a guest,) have been in a condition to play the fool, and compose what we may call a laborious enigma upon a toad, if even there had been any wit about him in his healthy hours.

But I must proceed a step further, and venture to express my opinion that neither was the first Lord Grey of Wark a person with whom our bishop could have been at his ease; nor was the bishop himself a man whom Lord Grey could possibly have received into his house without the most painful recollections of his own grievous disloyalty to his sovereign, and his long persecution of this very man to whom he was thus offering his bread and salt. I may illustrate the precise position in which the peer and the prelate had long stood with reference to each other, by what once happened to myself in an official capacity. In

granting probate of a will, not long ago, I observed that two executors were named in it; and as one of them only appeared before me, I naturally enquired of the man who was present, what had become of his colleague, especially as there had been presented to me no renunciation of the office under hand and seal. "Sir," said the man, with a sort of half-smile, "he'll appear to-morrow. We could not possibly walk up the street together. Just now, Sir, we're chalk and ink." Lord Grey and Bishop Cosin had been, as it were, chalk and ink for many a long year. Lord Grey had been an open and most violent partizan of the usurper Cromwell—one of the six peers who passed the act of attainder which led to the beheading of Archbishop Laud, one of the bishop's most intimate friends—and, moreover, one of the party who had voted down the Book of Common Prayer and the Church of England—one of a party which had driven Bishop Cosin into the long banishment of nearly twenty years from his preferment and his country.

And then, again, would the bishop have so far belied his true feelings as to have called the Lord Grey of his day a *hero* (for this word occurs in the first line of the second inscription), when, in plain English, he had been nothing more or better than an open (and for a while a successful) rebel, and had carried his hostility to his true sovereign so far as to have been mainly instrumental in bringing him to the scaffold? Bishop Cosin knew well the previous history of Lord Grey of Wark; he had had good reason to remember it, and most assuredly, as he was an honest man, the word *hero* could never have fallen from his pen as descriptive of such a person. Lord Grey was among the first to cringe and sue out his pardon upon the restoration of the lawful King of England; but, if he had any shame left, he would have been the last to have invited the aged Bishop of Durham to his house; and most assuredly he would have been the very last man in the world whom this high and right-minded prelate could have visited with anything like pleasure or gratification.

Who was it, then, who composed the Chillingham inscriptions? This is a question to which I feel myself unable at present to give anything like a positive answer; but, if I am not much mistaken, I think I can supply the name of the person by whom that referring to the toad was first placed where it now stands; and, as the two are unquestionably by the same hand, we may fairly assume the same period for the erection of the other, and reduce our enquiry into the name of their writer to the middle of the eighteenth century, a full hundred years after the period of Bishop Cosin and Lord Grey of Wark.

The first of our Northumbrian historians to make mention of the toad

and its inscription, is Mr. Wallis, whose book was published in 1769; and in his second volume, p. 488, we have the following statement—“In one of the ground rooms,” says Mr. Wallis, “is a marble chimney-piece, wherein a live toad was discovered in sawing the block in two:—the *nidus* of the toad visible, till plastered over by the order of the late Lord Tankerville. In the same room is a painting of it, from which the late Mr. Warburton took a drawing, and prefixed to it the following verses.” And then he proceeds to give a copy of the inscription as it now stands.

Now it must be confessed that there is here somewhat of difficulty in ascertaining the precise meaning of Mr. Wallis's words. It is clear that Warburton took a drawing of the toad as it then existed; but does the historian mean that he (Warburton) prefixed to this his drawing the inscription here spoken of, having copied from the board or tablet on which it had been previously inscribed, or does he intend us to understand that he (the said Warburton) *placed* this inscription near the toad, as something new which had not been there before? This difficulty would probably disappear in a moment upon an examination of the paintings themselves, or even from a faithful copy of them. In the meantime, I am strongly inclined to coincide with the latter opinion, viz., that the inscription was first placed in its present position by Warburton; and if such was in truth the case, it may be worth our while to devote a few more words to the subject.

The late Mr. Warburton, of whom Mr. Wallis speaks, could, I think, have been no other than John Warburton, Somerset Herald in the College of Arms, who died in 1759, just ten years before the publication of Wallis's History, and who had been much in Northumberland from 1716 (in which year he published a map of the county from a personal survey) down to the very time of his death. In 1751, as it appears, he was an active coadjutor in forming the military road along the line of the Roman Wall from Newcastle to Carlisle; and in 1753 he gained to himself a notoriety, with which his name will be for ever disgracefully associated, as a wholesale pilferer from Horsley's magnificent work, the *Britannia Romana*, the substance and very essence of which he coolly made his own, and presented to the world in a book to which he gave the title of “*Vallum Romanum*.” If, then, the inscription upon the toad first made its appearance in this man's hands, and was by him placed near the object to which it refers, and where it now remains, a question immediately arises, was he its writer? This question must, I think, be answered in the negative. The two compositions (for they must be taken together as the work of one pen) betray a no small amount of

reading and scholarship. Full of quibbles and points and mysterious allusions, they, no doubt (as was remarked at your last meeting), must have sadly puzzled the ordinary class of persons by whom they must have been read from time to time; but now, thanks to Lord Ravensworth, they are no longer Sybilline books or sealed tablets, but have received every thing of satisfactory elucidation which they deserve, and perhaps somewhat more. Now, under such circumstances, from the character which has come down to us of Warburton and his literary attainments, it seems pretty clear to me that he could not have been the writer of these inscriptions. Toms, a very intimate friend of his, tells us that "he had great natural abilities, but no education." Captain Grose, a gentleman to whom we antiquaries are apt to look up with great respect, and at whose portrait we may look with a secret wish never to be afflicted ourselves with such obesity as it manifests, says Warburton was ignorant, not only of the *Latin* but of his *native* language. These testimonies go far, I think, to settle the point of authorship against Warburton. It seems to me that he could not have been the man to have mystified Northumberland in this way for the long period of an hundred years, and that we have still to look elsewhere for the name of the person who has doubtless caused so many sleepless nights to bishops and rural incumbents, to say nothing of the lords, and baronets, and squires, who have lived under the shadow of the Cheviots.

Assuming, as I have above said, that these inscriptions are not older than Warburton's time, I must beg that the conjectures which I am now, in conclusion, going to offer to you, in order to remove the difficulty under which it is our misfortune to labour in this enquiry, may be taken at just what they are worth—I mean, as conjectures, founded perhaps upon better grounds than mere conjectures generally are, but still as conjectures in the absence at present of anything like certainty.

In the first place, then, why may not these inscriptions have proceeded from the pen of a youth who, about the very period of their composition, must have been already a finished scholar, perfectly equal to any such manifestation of laborious humour, as in the year 1758 he gained for himself the proud position of Senior Wrangler in the University of Cambridge. I refer to Robert Thorp, son of the then vicar of Chillingham, and himself vicar upon the death of his father, domestic chaplain to the Earl of Tankerville (and therefore closely connected with the Castle of Chillingham), eventually Archdeacon of Northumberland, and most extensively known in the world of learning as the author of an elaborate Commentary upon Newton's *Principia*. Dr. Thorp must, at the time these inscriptions were first heard of, have

been in the very plenitude of youth, in the very joyousness of an elegantly cultivated mind; and that he would at that time of his life be much under the roof of his father is most certain.

I proceed to another conjecture, in which it may perhaps appear that there is still more of plausibility. There died in 1752, in a cottage at the end of Twisell bridge upon the Till, in the parish of Norham, not far from Chillingham Castle, a quack doctor of the name of James Purdy, at the age of eighty-one. He was buried in the chapel-yard at Cornhill, and in due time there was placed over his grave an inscription of which the following is a copy:—"Eheu! quis mortis jam retardabit falcem? Archiater ille inclytus, ad pontem Twysili Jacobus Purdy non vacat ægris. Obiit," &c. It proceeds to give the names of his wife and niece, and thus concludes:—"At bono sis animo, viator; fortasse vivas. Superstes *Jacobo* viget natus *Samuel*, sub patrio lare artes exercens patrias. Si quæris sanitatem hunc adi."

Now I cannot refrain from thinking that this inscription very strongly resembles those at Chillingham. It would really appear to me to be the product of the same mind. It develops the same rapid turn of thought, the same interjectional humour, and it savours not a little of the same kind of terse phraseology. There were at that time living in the very parish in which this man had died two very remarkable scholars:—Sir Francis Blake, of Twisell Castle, the owner of the cottage in which Purdy had practised his art, a man who took a pleasure in Latin inscriptions, for he devoted a sum of money to the best composition in that language in memory of one of his sons, who had died a schoolboy at Westminster; and the other learned person to whom I have alluded was Robert Lambe, vicar of Norham, a man who (as Sydney Smith once said of Mr. Tate, the Master of Richmond School, in Yorkshire,) was literally dripping with Greek and Latin—who was, moreover, thoroughly saturated with good humour and fun—and who, when he had no graver matter upon the anvil, could dexterously *forge* subjects of amusement for his neighbourhood and the world at large. His Appendix to his edition of the old ballad of the Battle of Floddon Field teems with discursive disquisitions upon subjects of the highest interest in classical and ancient literature; and as a proof of his roguery (if I may use such a word), he was the clever forger of the pretended old ballad of the Laithley Worm of Spindleston Heugh, and the inventor of the legend of the stone coffin now lying in fragments in the chapel at Tilmouth, in which (upon his sole authority) people believe that once upon a time the body of St. Cuthbert floated down the Tweed from Melrose. To these two men, for the reasons which I have assigned, I am strongly

inclined to give the credit of the Chillingham inscriptions; provided always, as I have said, that they are of Warburton's period. Warburton, as we know, was a herald, and therefore a painter and limner, and as such he would be easily able to ornament them in the way in which we find them, if they do not betray an earlier date in their characteristics.

I have now only one point more to touch upon before I conclude my remarks. In the second inscription, mention is made of a *hero*, an allusion which Lord Ravensworth thinks may fitly refer to the Lord Grey of Wark, in the time of Bishop Cosin. But, at any rate, I think we must feel ourselves compelled to dismiss that prelate from our minds as the author of these inscriptions; and if so, we shall stand in no further need at present, of the Lord Grey, who was his contemporary. But was there in the Chillingham family any hero, the owner of its castle, to whom this word might with propriety have been applied in the time of Warburton, by the composer of the inscription in which it occurs. I have no difficulty in introducing to you a nobleman who answers to this description infinitely better than the first Lord Grey of Wark, a man who was a soldier *indeed*, and not a rebel. Charles, Earl of Tankerville, who succeeded to his title and to the Chillingham estate in 1753, had entered the army in 1734. In 1739, he was appointed to a company in General Wentworth's Regiment of Foot. In 1740, he went to the West Indies under Lord Cathcart. In 1741, he was at the attack of Fort St. Lazarre, and for his bravery was, on the 30th of April, made major of the regiment commanded by Colonel Cotterell. In 1743, he was made lieutenant-colonel, with the command of a company of the 1st Regiment of Foot Guards, under the Duke of Cumberland, the colonel. In 1748, he was elected member for Northumberland.

In conclusion, as far as my present knowledge of the character of these inscriptions goes, I must repeat my opinion that they are not older than the period of Warburton. We may perhaps, before long, be favoured with accurate drawings of these tablets, which will go far to establish their real date—and in the mean time, I would venture to suggest that it might perhaps be expedient for the Society to consider the propriety of withholding Lord Ravensworth's very valuable translations and comments—as it really does appear that, whoever may have been the writer of these inscriptions, it could by no means have been Bishop Cosin. If they do in reality belong to the period of the first Lord Grey of Wark, I think I could at once suggest the name of the person from whose pen they must have proceeded, and in whose eyes Lord Grey would be a 'hero.'

In the course of my remarks I have had occasion to introduce to



your notice Robert Lambe, who became vicar of Norham, now upwards of a century ago. I have said that he was an excellent scholar; and I think I may venture to wind up this somewhat dull disquisition by an anecdote respecting him of an amusing kind, which goes far to prove that he was by no means free from what is not unfrequently a companion of talent and habits of deep thought—I mean an absence of mind in worldly matters, even of the most personal and tender kind. The tale has not yet, as far as I know, appeared in print, and it has the further recommendation to this Society that it is now becoming an antiquity. I had it from the widow of his successor in the living, now forty years ago.

Lambe was, I believe, a Durham man. He had been a minor canon in the cathedral, and was preferred by the Dean and Chapter to his vicarage. He had not been long settled at Norham before he began to feel the want of a wife; and along with the want came the recollection of a young woman who resided in Durham, of the name of Philadelphia Nelson, the daughter of a well known carrier between London and Edinburgh, and a female of high character and respectability, upon whom he was not long in settling his affections. The result was a proposal by letter; and in due time the lovesick vicar was accepted. Another request was then made, which, even to the carrier's daughter, must, I think, have appeared to be of somewhat an unusual kind:—"I cannot leave my parish to come to *you*. I really wish you would put yourself into one of your father's waggons, and come down to *me*. I will meet you on such a day at Berwick; but as I want our meeting to be as private as possible, and as I have no very distinct recollection of your personal appearance, I have to propose that you will meet me upon the pier there, with a tea-caddy under your arm, to prevent any chance of mistake." There was then living in Berwick a person of the name of Howe, who had risen to high rank in the navy, and who, thrice a day, for the sake of exercise, walked to the end of this said pier, and then returned home to his meals. One day, before dinner, the gallant old admiral met in his walk a young woman with a tea-caddy under her arm, who, as he saw at once, was a stranger; but he took no further notice of the matter. Before tea, after an interval of three or four hours, he met in the same place the same person walking up and down with the tea-caddy under her arm, and looking townwards with an anxious eye; but still he spoke not—neither did she. Late in the evening, the admiral went out for his third and concluding walk; and, sure enough, there was the self-same female, no longer walking up and

down with the tea-caddy, but sitting upon a stone, fairly worn out, with the tea-caddy beside her, and apparently anxiously wishing to be spoken to, that she might have an opportunity of telling her tale of distress. The admiral's gallantry was touched by her beseeching eye. He addressed her, and heard her tale of Lambe, and his breach of promise to meet her there on that very day, and make her his wife at Norham. "Ha!" said he, "Robin Lambe is a great friend of mine. This is just like him. He has forgot all about it; but he'll make you a capital husband. Come home with me, young woman, and you shall be kindly treated for the night." The girl, nothing fearing, complied. In the morning he put her into a coach, and went along with her to Norham. Lambe blushed and apologized; and the two were married a few days afterwards—the admiral giving the bride away. The poor girl died in childbed of her first child—a daughter—who became in due time the wife of a gentleman in Berwickshire; and her descendants are now numerous and respectable. It was to occupy his mind after the death of his wife, that Lambe, as he tells us, prepared his edition of the ballad of Floddon Field, of which I have above spoken.

JAMES RAINE.

[\*\* And now it is right to state what Dr. Raine's view of the authorship of the strange compositions at Chillingham, supposing them to range from 1600 to 1650, was. There lived (he told me) at that time, but one man to whom they could be ascribed, one who was intimately connected with the Grey family, and who could perform his task before the rage of civil dudgeon separated Lord Grey from the respect of his brother's learned master. The pages of Dr. Raine's own work on *North Durham*, and of Brand's *Newcastle*, furnish the following notice of the Newcastle worthy to whom allusion is made.

Amor Oxley was the fourth son of Mr. Amor Oxley who died at Morpeth in 1609, leaving ten children, of whom one only (Thomas) was of age and was probably at the above period a schoolmaster in the neighbourhood of Chillingham. In 1623, Sir Ralph Grey died, and his son Sir William Grey, who was created Lord Grey of Wark in that year, became head of the house of Chillingham. In that same year, Sir Ralph's widow, by her will, gave her sons Robert and Edward Grey and their portions, to trustees, *with an injunction that they should be*

*tought by Amor Oxley*, who was to have 20*l.* per annum for his pains. Dame Dorothy Grey's will however was not proved until 1635, and long before her death the boys had become of age and were their own masters, the celebrated Dr. Robert Grey having been born in 1610. That he was educated by Amor Oxley after he quitted the excellent school of Northallerton, where he had delivered an address to James I. in 1617, is considered as certain. In 1630, Oxley was ordained priest, and about 1637, he was master of the Grammar School of Newcastle. In the conflict between monarchy and democracy, Lord Grey espoused the cause of the people and acted as lieutenant-general under Fairfax, but refused to go with the Earl of Rutland in 1643, to invite the Scots to enter England in pursuance of an order of the Commons. For this offence he was committed to the Tower. Harry Martin had a while before moved that Scotland should be repaid for its assistance by assigning to it the counties of Northumberland and Cumberland; and that if this were not enough of recompense, two other northern counties should be given into the bargain. The proposal was not agreed to, but Lord Grey might have his fears for the result of a similar motion when the Scots had crossed the Border. Lord Grey appears to have been soon released, for in 1644 he was one of six peers who passed the ordinance of attainder against Archbishop Laud. His brother John Grey was a colonel for the Parliament, and was slain in Ireland; but Robert, to whom Amor Oxley's brother Thomas addressed a letter in 1637, as his "much honoured friend," stood stoutly by his king and the constitution. In 1645, Amor Oxley was displaced from Newcastle school for his loyalty, by an order of the Lords and Commons. After his sequestration he suffered the greatest distress. In 1656, the Common Council voted him 40*l.* in part of his arrears due to him at the time of his discharge, and even for this tardy and partial return to honesty, the Council give as a reason that it was "in consideration of the great wants and necessities and poverty and indigent condition of the said Amor Oxley." His successor had been appointed with a salary of the same sum.

In 1662, he was restored to his school, with a salary of 100*l.*; in 1665, he obtained the vicarage of Kirknewton in addition, and in 1669 he died. By his will of that year, he desires to be buried at the entrance of the quire of Saint Nicholas, near his wife. To his church of Kirknewton he gave 20*l.*, a fair green carpet and a suit of linen cloths for the communion table. In exchange for the communion cup, his executors were to supply a handsome silver chalice with a handsome silver plate for the bread, and to exchange two of his own pewter flaggons for two new pewter flaggons for the church. The library of the free school in Newcastle had shared the fate of his own when the town was stormed and plundered by the Scottish army; both were lost. He therefore bequeaths several classical and patriotic works towards a library for the school. To Mr. Edward Lumsden, who [who had been his usher at Newcastle in 1637 and] was now schoolmaster of Morpeth, he gives 40*s.*, and his canonical coats, and to Sir [Robert] Grey who had come in the same capacity, 40*s.* And then we have the interesting bequests:— "To my dear

friend Doctor Grey; one interlineal Hebrew, Greek and Latin Bible in folio, and one new Greek Testament of Steevens' print in folio: 'To my cousin Amor Wills my best cloak and best suit, which I desire him to keep to be worn by him only at the funeral of friends.' He seals with a chevron between three *oxen* passant, and mentions his nephews Charles and Amor Oxley. In 1692, one Amor Oxley, the rector of Chicknal St. James, Essex, was buried there. For the interesting will of Lord Grey, after his return to loyalty, I must refer to Dr. Raine's *North Durham*.—Ed.]

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