SERGEANT HOSKYNS AND THE WALLAS EPITAPH.

By James Clephan.

"Bequeathing his deposed body to the ground," the fallen monarch moralizes :—"Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs."

In the year when the play of "Richard the Second," from which these words are taken, was printed, Shakspeare's great contemporary, Camden, author of the "Britannia," received his appointment of Clarencieux King-at-Arms. Round about the historian in his study, odds and ends of notes and extracts were accumulating day by day, growing into materials for some new and more miscellaneous work. Epitaphs that had caught his fancy, in course of reading or conversation, were of the number. Prose and verse, grave and gay, churchyard rhymes and records lay among the studious litter ; and in the increasing heaps were lodged the droll conceits of a literary aquaintance, one of which has come down, with verbal variation, to our own time and town. In jingling measure it keeps alive the name of a parochial officer of uncertain date, flourishing at the foot of Pilgrim Street we know not exactly when ; although, were Dryasdust to give his mind to the search, he might worm the secret out. Few memorial lines are better known. The world is familiar with them everywhere, and will not willingly let them die. They enter into books of epitaphs ; they form a portion of the history of Newcastle ; Bourne and Brand and Mackenzie treasure them ; and yet, unconscious of their pedigree, how few of our townsmen suspect them to have been struck off, in one of his lighter moods, by "the most ingenious and admired poet of his time!"

History, local and general, has its enigmas for the ingenious. The Roman Wall, after serving the purposes of its builders, leaves problems to posterity, some of them still awaiting solution. Gateshead and Pandon, and the Tyne that flows between, are names whose derivations must be numbered with the nuts yet uncracked by the curious. Who

shall declare to us the builders of our ancient churches? St. Andrew's—was it present to the mind of King James when he embalmed "the sair sanct for the Croon" in a proverb? St. Nicholas'—who was its architect, retiring behind his work, and leaving in shadow the author of its crowning grace—the outflowering glory that inspired the admiration of Robert Stephenson, and moved him to the remark "that he knew not whether more to marvel at the genius that conceived the design, or the courage that dared to fling it into the air?" The curate of All Saints', Henry Bourne, could neither discover by whom his church on the hill was founded nor in what year it was built, having no other certainty than that it was standing on the spot before 1286. And the cautious chronicler, preparing for print the inscriptions gathered within its walls, could give no better authority than blank hearsay for the unsculptured rhymes thrown in at the close, commemorating the existence of a traditional parish-clerk.

Copying the worthy curate's prudence — keeping well within my tether — intermeddling neither with Pandon nor Pons Ælii — it may not be too presumptuous to take up the question of the parish-clerk and his epitaph, and see if it cannot be more successfully assailed and solved than some of the more ambitious riddles that lie strewn along the line of the Roman Wall. The controversy is humble; yet is there a pleasure in antiquarian chase, even though the game to be run down is insignificant. It has a zest and an amusement for the family of Monkbarns. It runs up to high prices the first edition of an old ballad. Some venerable chap-book, published originally at a penny, will fetch a pound; and as the prototype of the All Saints' epitaph was in print when the English press was little more than a centenarian, to place a copy of it in the hands of every member of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle may be no unacceptable boon.

"An epitaph said to have been made upon Robert Wallas, formerly clerk of this parish," are the words with which the lines were introduced to the public in 1736:—

Here lies Robin Wallas,
The king of good fellows,
Clerk of All Hallows,
And a maker of bellows:
He bellows did make till the day of his death,
But he that made bellows could never make breath.

"Said to have been made," is the careful statement of Bourne, who had clearly never seen the rhymes in stone; yet they have since found free course in print as an actual churchyard inscription, though nothing more than a social joke, the offspring of a poet's playfulness prior to the Armada. The wisest and most serious of men can stoop to humour. The author of "Paradise Lost" could so far unbend as to write, not one epitaph only, but two, on the Cambridge carrier "whose wane was his increase;" and as Milton could amuse his friends with tributes to the memory of the inexorable Hobson, so a contemporary son of song indulged before him in jocular verse over an Oxford bellows-mender.

Our north-country edition of the epitaph had long kept sole possession of the field, till an earlier variety turned up in 1868, in the commonplace-book of a young subject of Queen Elizabeth, begun near the close of her reign, and continued for a short time after her death. John Manningham had entered the Middle Temple on the 16th of March, 1597–98, with two members of the inn as his sureties, one of whom was Sergeant Hoskyns. The observant student fell into a habit of making jottings of all kinds in his leisure moments. Men and books, pen and ink, filled up the passing hour. Editing the *omnium gatherum* for the Camden Society, the late Mr. Bruce remarks, as to the anecdotes comprised in it, that the peculiarity which will strike the reader, in this case as in all others of the same description, is their singular want of originality:—"Good things, which were current in the classical period, are reïnvented, or warmed up, for the amusement of the contemporaries of King James. And the same thing occurs over and over again, from generation to generation. *Mots*, which descended to the time of Manningham, reäppear in the pages of Joe Miller; are recorded among the clever sayings of Archbishop Whately; and, in one instance at least, may be found among the pulpit witticisms of Rowland Hill."

It is even so. Chaucer remarked, and Sir Walter Scott quoted, and there will always be somebody repeating, that there is nothing new but what it has been old. The familiar sayings—the stock stories that wear so well—are for ever renewing their youth. They come up again and again, for the delight of the present hour, as juvenile as before—the old acquaintances of some, the new friends of others—and secure

from the tooth of time. Those quarterjacks of the grey church tower, heard too often in the Spital Sermon of Dr. Parr, have sounded with over-frequent reiteration in the ears of prolix speakers, with a difference of note, from the time of the clepsydra; and in one form or other, as we may feel quite assured, the joke will exist so long as protracted addresses are delivered, and listeners grow impatient for their close. The ancients compete with the moderns in wit and wisdom. Scrope Davies, writing to Raikes of the Diary in the first year of the present reign, and alluding to the limits of a dinner party, copies the saying ascribed to Lord Chesterfield, "Not fewer than the Graces, and not more than the Muses," and adds—"It is as old as Aulus Gellius." And the Wallas epitaph must be counted in its turn with the "good things" that have higher antiquity than is commonly supposed by the readers of Bourne. The student of the Middle Temple had pen in hand on the 16th of October, 1602; and having first entered a small joke in his Diary of an attorney concerning "an action brought to trie the title of one Rooke, an infant, for a house and certaine land"—viz., that "all this controversie was but for a little rooke's nest"—he closes his acquisitions of the day with "An Epitaphe upon a Bellowes Mender."

> Here lyes Jo. Potterell, a maker of bellowes,
> Maister of his trade, and king of good fellowes;
> Yet for all this, att the hower of his death,
> He that made bellowes could not make breath.

In the course of years, Manningham's manuscript fell under the eye of some critical reader, who annexed "B. J." to the epitaph, probably conjecturing Ben Jonson to have been the author, and, as commonly happens, guessing wrong.

At the time when the young Templar was making his notes, Camden was gathering together his stray papers, and compiling his famous "Remaines of a Greater Worke, concerning Britaine, the Inhabitants thereof, their Languages, Names, Surnames, Empreses, Wise Speeches, Poesies, and Epitaphes." The dedication was written on the 12th of June, 1603; and in the year of Gunpowder Plot the small quarto volume, destined to run through a succession of editions, was printed in London by "G. E."

The "Epitaphes" cover thirty or more pages, passing "to lively from severe." The Head Master of Westminster could lay aside the sceptre for a season. Mirth mingles with his wisdom. Fearing to be drowsy, he lights up his "Wise Speeches" with Merry Sayings; and so, too, he can brighten his budget of "Epitaphes." Lest he had "overcharged the reader's minde with dolefull, dumpish, and uncomfortable lines, for his recomfort" he ends the chapter "with a few conceited, merry, and laughing epitaphes, the most of them composed by Maister John Hoskines when he was young, and will begin with the bellowes-mender of Oxford."

> Here lyeth Iohn Cruker, a maker of bellowes,
> His craftes-master and king of good fellowes;
> Yet when he came to the hower of his death,
> He that made bellowes could not make breath.

So, then, in the autumn of 1602, Manningham was unconsciously copying the rhymes of one of his own sureties, John Hoskyns, a choice wit of the age of Elizabeth.

"It 's a far cry" from Robin Wallas, hero of a parochial legend, to Sergeant Hoskyns of the Middle Temple; yet the parish-clerk of All Saints' and the Oxford scholar are drawn together by a thread of history; and the learned gownsman, now that we have hold of him, may be detained over a page or two of the "Archæologia Æliana," and domiciled for all time on the hearthstone of Tyneside. Born in Herefordshire about the time of the Northern Rebellion, his days ran down to the eve of the Long Parliament. The heir of small fortunes, he was of large natural endowments; and when his father would have sent him to trade, he besought him that he might be a scholar. The wish was gratified, and the youth gradually raised himself in the social scale by the ladder of learning. Oxford was quitted with unwonted distinction. Somersetshire then received him, and he had for some time the life of a country schoolmaster, his toils as a teacher enlivened by the compilation of a Greek lexicon. The diversion, perchance, was somewhat severe; but the pedagogue was assiduous, and worked his way to the letter "M." Was the initial a mere coincidence, or a portent of Matrimony? Certain it is that a rich widow, willing to wed again, and happily named Benedicta, now came in his way, and the

remainder of the alphabet was left in the lurch. From the lexicon he turned to the law; was called to the Bar; got into the House of Commons—and the Tower. "In speaking his mind" in the short and only session of the Parliament of 1614, "he made a desperate allusion to the Sicilian Vespers," and, with a couple of other members, Christopher Neville and Walter Chute, was thrown into prison. Two more of his countrymen coming under suspicion, went hurrying after; so that, now, there were five victims of the rhetorical flourish; and already the State stronghold had illustrious inhabitants. The Earl of Northumberland was there; and so, also, Sir Walter Raleigh, whose great historical work was published in this very year. Hoskyns had long months of durance, extending far away down into 1615; and at this period, probably, "he who polished Ben Jonson" was revising Raleigh; for "'twas he," says Anthony Wood, "that viewed and reviewed the History of the World before it went to press." He had leisure, too, long lingering on the Thames, to indulge in verse; and his wife, who had released him from one-half of the Greek alphabet, strove also, assisted by his Muse, to free him from the Tower. Lines that were written, professedly, by herself, but in reality by her husband, she brought under the eye of King James, to move his mercy. Two or three of them may be reprinted from the biographical sketch in "Lardner's Cyclopedia."

> What if my husband once have erred,
> Men more to blame are more preferred.
> He that offends not, doth not live,
> He erred but once: once, King, forgive.

How it came about—whether by virtue of this appeal or otherwise—does not appear; but Hoskyns, at the end of a year or more, resumed his wonted place in society, and rose in his profession. 'Tis said he was more profound in Divinity than in Law; yet, however this may have been, he became a Justice Itinerant for Wales, and was also appointed to the Council of the Marches. "Always facete and pleasant in company," and much valued and sought after for his critical judgment, he had troops of friends; and if, by an oratorical escapade, he could lessen the number, he could so winningly add to it as to make a duel the stepping-stone to a life-long attachment with his foe. He had the love and respect of Camden and Selden, Daniel and Donne, and

many others of the like kind. "Few or none that published books of poetry but did celebrate his memory in them." If less remembered in the present day (for Time effaces memories and revises verdicts), he is set down in the "Athenæ Oxonienses" of Wood as "the most ingenious and admired poet of his time"—and that time the age of Elizabeth. In what esteem he was held by Sir Henry Wotton, and on what terms they dwelt together, may be learnt from their Dialogue "Riding by the Way," included among the "Reliquiæ Wottonianæ" brought out by Izaak Walton in 1651. Here are the concluding stanzas of the cantering conversation.

HOSKYNS.

Thus, with numbers interchanged,
Wotton's muse and mine have ranged,
Verse and journey both are spent.

WOTTON.

And if Hoskyns chance to say
That we well have passed the day,
I, for my part, am content.

"Epitaphs in Latin and English" flowed from the scholarly Sergeant's pen; and Wotton's rhymes could run in the same vein. Sir Henry wrote in 1639, for the tomb of Sir Albert Morton and his wife (who died in close succession), the lines so often afterwards adopted in similar circumstances:—

He first deceased: she for a little tried
To live without him: liked it not, and died.

Wotton's verses, "How happy is he born and taught, That serveth not another's will," must ever keep his memory green; and the epitaph of his friend on John Cruker, trifle as he thought it at the time, has made him, by its transfer to the parish-clerk of All Saints', a contributor to our local annals; in which, henceforward, he will have an enduring niche assigned to him by all future historians of Newcastle.

The three friends, Wotton, Walton, and Hoskyns, were a congenial group. The author of "The Complete Angler," biographer of "that undervaluer of money," Sir Henry — now Ambassador abroad, now Provost of Eton at home — lovingly passes him onward to posterity. He pictures before us his "brother of the angle" with rod and line,

"sitting quietly of a summer's evening on a bank a-fishing. A calm content did cohabit in his cheerful heart with a world of blessings;" and he was wont to say, "'Twas an employment of his idle time, which was then not idly spent;" an apology which, if one be needed, the writer hopes to have extended in his direction, as he casts his line, and brings home the Wallas epitaph to the angler's friend, Sergeant Hoskyns. Living to a fair old age, transcending the three-score and ten of the Psalmist, the venerable lawyer, who had filled so large and honourable a place in the public eye, died in the year 1638, and was buried in an abbey-choir of his native shire, on the banks of the Dour; where over his grave was reared an altar tomb bearing no fewer than four-and-twenty Latin verses; for he that wrote epitaphs for others was not unremembered himself.