THE OLDER SURREY EPITAPHS.

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BY

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I PROPOSE this afternoon to speak to you for a short time about our older Surrey Epitaphs—say those which date from before 1800. It will not be possible on such a subject to suggest much that is new, but just because the epitaphs are familiar to all those who know our Surrey churches, it may be interesting to review the subject on somewhat general lines, which I propose to illustrate by taking a few examples from the great wealth at our disposal in the county.

It was the opinion of Dr. Johnson that in the monkish ages, however ignorant and unpolished, the epitaphs were drawn up with far greater propriety than can be shown in those which more enlightened times have produced,[1] and for this opinion there is some justification. Inscriptions such as that in Lingfield Church, " Here lies (the epitaph is in fact in Latin) John Hedresham, who died on the feast of the Apostles Symon and Jude A.D. 1417, on whose soul God have mercy. Amen,"—a form very common in the fifteenth century,—or that also in Lingfield Church, " Here lyeth Master John Knoyll, sometime master of this College, which Master decessed the IVth day of July the yere of our Lord 1503, on whose soul Jhesu have mercy. Amen, " offer little target for criticism, for they are adequate for the identification of the deceased—the Hadreshams were a well-known local family and Knoyll's position is stated—and they express in a brief and adequate formula the aspirations of the survivors. Such short inscrip-

[1] " Essay on Epitaphs," *Works*, 5, 264.

tions though varying in form have, however, always been common in later ages. They do not attempt to comply with Dr. Johnson's further opinion that the principal intention of epitaphs is to perpetuate the examples of virtue. Perhaps those who wrote them have had doubts of the virtues of the deceased, or were unable or not anxious to spend more money on celebrating them at greater length. However this may be, it is doubtful whether the Middle Ages really took any very different view from Dr. Johnson in those cases which they considered sufficiently important to demand funeral eulogy. The second Lord Cobham, who was a man of great position in his own day and died in 1403, is described on his epitaph in Lingfield Church as being as bold as a leopard, sagacious in Council, though not rash, earning great honour everywhere, sumptuous in hospitality, handsome, affable, open-handed, staunch and generous. This eulogy is proclaimed in bad Latin hexameters, which surround the beautiful and interesting brass which represents him in full armour. No such eulogy exists I think in Surrey till a later date of any lesser man though it can be paralleled in its extravagance by the epitaph of a great Surrey magnate, the Lord of Bletchingley Castle, Richard, Earl of Gloucester, who died in 1262 and was buried at Tewkesbury. To him a Latin elegiac couplet ascribed the modesty of Hippolytus, the handsome face of Paris, the shrewdness of Ulysses, the piety of Æneas, and the wrath of Hector,[1] a description which, if it tells us little of value about the deceased, certainly reflects credit on the learning of a writer who had none of our classical dictionaries at his elbow.

But if we come to lesser men, for instance Sir John D'Abernoun, who died in 1277, a man of great local position, but not of course comparable to Lord Cobham, or the Earl of Gloucester, he has merely as his epitaph (in Norman French), " Here lies Sir John Daubernoun, Knight. God have mercy on his soul." The inscription on the second Nicholas Carew at Beddington, also a man of great local position, who was twice sheriff, though rather more elaborate, contains little detail. It tells us in Latin that " In the grace and mercy of God here lie the bodies of Nicholas Carew, Esquire, and formerly lord of this manor, of Isabella his wife, and Thomas, their son ;

[1] Lambert, *Blechingley*, I, p. 86.

which Nicholas, an old man and full of days, rested in peace on the 4th day of September in the year of Our Lord 1432."

But later the practice of writing elaborate epitaphs began to spread to lesser men. In Kingston Church there is a brass to Robert Skerne, who died in 1437. He is described in bad Latin elegiac verse as strong, trustworthy, eloquent, learned in the law, hating perfidy, steadfast in speech, life, sense and reason, anxious to mete out justice to everyone, an honour to the law, hating to deceive or be deceived. This type of inscription is rare in Surrey at so early a date, and the next brass to it, that of John Hertcombe, Gentleman, and his wife, merely states that he died in 1488 and she in 1477, " on whose souls may God have mercy "—the common form.[1]

These mediæval epitaphs, it will be observed, come mostly from the fifteenth century, and the number of epitaphs before 1400 surviving in Surrey is small. But there is no reason to suppose that they were more—indeed they were no doubt less —elaborate at an earlier date.

It is not of course possible to assign any exact date to changes in form in epitaphs, but with the sixteenth century, especially in the latter part, a change comes over them, not merely in the omission of a formula such as " Pray for the Soul " of the deceased, which was discarded at the Reformation. For one thing English tends to displace Latin, a tendency which had already begun in the fifteenth century, but had not finally asserted itself even in Dr. Johnson's day, for it will be remembered that when he was asked to write an epitaph on his friend Oliver Goldsmith in 1776 he replied that " he would never consent to disgrace the walls of Westminster Abbey with an English inscription," and on another occasion he declared that the language of the country of which a learned man was a native is not the language for his epitaph, which should be an ancient and permanent language. " Consider, Sir," he said, " how you should feel were you to find at Rotterdam an epitaph upon Erasmus in Dutch." [2] Although the epitaphs of ordinary persons were usually in English in Elizabeth's time Latin maintained its place for more important inscriptions till towards the end of the seventeenth century,

[1] For these Kingston brasses see *S.A.C.*, VIII, pp. 61, 63.
[2] Boswell, 2, 59.

and sporadically in the eighteenth century. Thus the epitaph of Archbishop Abbot at Guildford, who died in 1633, like those of his predecessors Grindal and Whitgift in Elizabeth's time, who were buried at Croydon, was in Latin, as were those of his successors Sheldon (1667) and Wake (1736), who were also buried at Croydon. But Archbishop Potter in 1747, and Archbishop Herring in 1757, were buried at Croydon with epitaphs in English.

Turning to secular persons it is interesting to note that the Earl of Nottingham, better known to history by his earlier title, Lord Howard of Effingham, who was buried in Reigate Church in 1624 without any monument, has a plate on his coffin recording in English that there lay the body of Charles Howarde, Earl of Nottinghame, Lord High Admirall of Englande, Generall of Queene Elizabeth's Navy Royall att sea agaynst the Spanyards invinsable Navy in the year of our Lorde 1588. The epitaph of Sir Edward Nicholas, Secretary of State to Charles I, who died in 1669 and is buried at West Horsley, is in Latin, but it is noteworthy that in this case there is also an English inscription. The Mores of Loseley were buried at Guildford from 1549 with English epitaphs. Richard Evelyn, who died in 1640, has a Latin epitaph at Wotton, but he buried his wife in 1635 with an English one, the equality of the sexes being held in small esteem in the seventeenth century. His son, John Evelyn, the diarist, had an English epitaph when he died in 1706, but the Rector of Wotton, whom he had presented to the living and who died in 1716, has again a Latin epitaph. The clergy indeed clung to Latin long after the laity had discarded it, and *e.g.* the Rev. Benjamin Anderson commemorated a little boy whom he lost in 1770 at Guildford in that tongue. But even then Latin was not entirely confined to the clergy, for James Evelyn, a lawyer, was buried in Godstone Church in 1793 with a Latin inscription put up by his son-in-law, a layman like himself.

Probably the Civil War and Interregnum which swept away so many things, which like the military tenures were useless relics of an earlier age, gave a death-blow to the use of Latin in epitaphs, and though it lingered for another century or more, it became more and more exceptional. Certainly the English language in the Elizabethan age, and still more the prose of

the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which was much superior to that of the Elizabethans, was quite as good as Latin, and in the hands of Englishmen who knew how to use it, was for their own purposes a greatly superior instrument.

It may be added that the particularly inappropriate form of Latin epitaph which begins by calling on the traveller to stop is uncommon in Surrey, though a monument was put up to Thomas Stydolf by his brother at Mickleham in 1625 which begins "Siste paululum, viator,"—Stay awhile, traveller,—and there is another instance at Crowhurst dated 1675. And the rhyming verses which begin the epitaph of John Booth, the ex-Bishop of Exeter, who was buried at East Horsley in 1478, should be added:

Quisquis eris, qui transieris,
Sta, perlege, plora.
Sum quod eris, fueramque quod es
Pro me, precor, ora,

which I will venture to render in English:

Whoe'er you are who pass by, stay!
Read, grieve at what you see!
I am what you shall be, I was
What you are—Pray for me.

As Dr. Johnson insisted, since the Romans were accustomed to bury their dead by the side of the highway and not in churches, these imitations of their appeal to the traveller to stop are really absurd.

But our epitaphs underwent other and subtler changes. It is hardly possible to conceive of any mediæval writer of epitaphs composing one like that of Robert Gardnar, Chief Sergeant of the Queen's cellar, who was buried at Leatherhead in 1571. It is in verse, the lilt of which to our ears irresistibly recalls John Gilpin, and it begins:

Here fryndly Robart Gardnar lys
Well borne, of right good Race,
Who served in Court with credytt styll
In worthi Rowl and Place,

and it enlarges on his courtesy, and says that he was "of merrye moode and pleasant spetch, However happ did fall." These are virtues which some men no doubt possessed in mediæval as in Elizabethan England, but to the mediæval

epitaph writer they would not have seemed worthy of such commemoration. The Renaissance, as we know from many indications, had turned men's attention more to the value of individuality, and this feeling found expression in more elaborate description, with more detail, and more speaking likenesses on the tombs. And indeed I suspect that most sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Englishmen, however much artistic fashions may at times have favoured the generalized and the idealized, agreed in their hearts with Dr. Johnson when he said, " I had rather see the portrait of a dog that I know, than all the allegorical paintings they can show me in the world." [1]

Be this as it may, there is no doubt that the Elizabethans attached an importance to epitaphs much greater than either the Middle Ages or we ourselves do. It will be remembered that when Antonio in the Merchant of Venice is expecting to die he says to his friend :

> You cannot better be employed, Bassanio,
> Than to live still, and write mine epitaph ;

and when Henry V is contemplating the conquest of France he declares that he will succeed

> Or lay these bones in an unworthy urn,
> Tombless, with no remembrance over them :
> Either our history shall with full mouth
> Speak freely of our acts, or else our grave,
> Like Turkish mute, shall have a tongueless mouth,
> Not worshipped with a waxen epitaph,

that is, without even a temporary inscription in wax before the permanent record was cut in stone.

However much we may wish to have our memories vindicated or however ambitious we may be of living in the pages of history, no one would to-day speak of his epitaph in such terms as these.

The tendency to elaboration which set in with the Renaissance affected epitaphs both favourably and unfavourably. They became more informative, giving far more details about a man's career, his children and other family matters. The new fashion thus greatly increased their length, and it sometimes opened the door to an exaggerated pride of descent,

[1] Quoted by Mrs. Esdaile in *Johnson's England*, II, 77.

and sometimes to an elaborate triviality. It also gave rise to the dignified and balanced epitaphs, in which the age of Anne in particular delighted, though good examples are to be found both before and after her time. There is, for instance, an admirable example of the stately balanced epitaph in Banstead church to the memory of Sir Daniel Lambert, who died in 1750.

As illustrating the excessive length to which inscriptions sometimes ran, it may be mentioned that the epitaph of Edmund Slyfield at Great Bookham, who died in 1590, runs to nearly 60 lines of laudatory and genealogical doggerel. That of the last Lord Lumley at Cheam, who died in 1609, is in Latin, and avoids except for the last four lines the somewhat deceptive attractions of verse, but after praising the character of the deceased the epitaph proceeds on the explicit ground of what was due, not to Lord Lumley, but to the Lumley family, to trace their descent from before the Norman Conquest. These epitaphs, however, though other cases could be quoted, are of exceptional elaboration. As an example of a very elaborate Queen Anne epitaph that of James Clarke, steward of the Duke of Ormonde, who was buried at East Molesey in 1709, may be quoted.

"He was always," it says, "a true son of the Church of England, to the interest of which he firmly adhered, his chief pleasure was to do good, and be useful to mankind ; he was a dutiful son, a kind brother, a most affectionate Husband, a prudent Father, a sincere Friend, a faithful Servant, and an excellent Master ; he was pious without superstition, chearfull without Levity, and generous without profuseness, Truly eminent for his exact Justice, unshaken Honesty, singular good Humour, and extensive Charity, which vertues made him beloved by the good, honoured even by the Bad, regarded by the Great, consulted by the Wise, and justly valued by all that knew him.

"He dyed universally lamented November 20, 1709, aged 75 years."

And indeed, if he was all this, we need not wonder that he was universally lamented. Unfortunately as Goldsmith's cynical Chinaman remarked, [1] "When we read these monumental histories of the dead it may be justly said that all

[1] *Works*, 2, 119.

men are equal in the dust ; for they all appear equally remarkable for being the most sincere Xtians, the most benevolent neighbours, and the honestest men of their time." To this we might answer in Dr. Johnson's words that " No man ought to be commended for virtues which he never possessed, but whoever is curious to know his faults must inquire after them in other places," and we may add that the panegyric is as convincing, and much more stately and beautiful, than Lord Cobham's bad Latin verses.

Goldsmith's criticism suggests the question whether our ancestors had less regard for truth than we ourselves have. Perhaps they had—who shall say ? They were certainly more bound by conventional standards than we ourselves, but if anyone is disposed to base a charge of untruthfulness on their epitaphs some voice from the tomb might retort that the accusation ill befits a generation which, with the growth of advertising, tolerates, if it does not actually enjoy, the grossest exaggerations in its streets and on its buildings and in its press. And the voice might add that those exaggerations are prompted by the desire of commercial gain, which is a far meaner motive than the narrowest formalism or the most absurd family pride.

And there, I think, we must leave that interesting inquiry undetermined.

It would be easy to quote any number of post-mediæval epitaphs which give information about the deceased such as no one would have thought of recording in the Middle Ages. Thus the epitaph of Laurence Tomson at Chertsey (1608) tells us that he had travelled in Sweden, Russia, Denmark, Germany, Italy and France, and knew twelve languages ; that of Margaret Vachell, also at Chertsey (1663), that she played the lute and sang divinely ; that of Marc Benoit, a French tutor, at Richmond (1687), that he was acceptable to many of the principal Nobility and Gentry. But the linguists, amateur musicians, and social successes of the Middle Ages are, as far as their epitaphs in this county are concerned, entirely unknown to us. And, lest I seem to have spoken too disparagingly of inscriptions in verse, let me quote one of 1653 on a little child, Anne Worly, who died at the age of 8 and was buried in Reigate Church. In its slightly conventional form, especially in its

conclusion, it is characteristic of its age. But the expression is charming, and is something entirely beyond the reach of the mediæval epitaph writer.

> In quiet sleepe here lyes the deare remayne
> Of a sweet Babe, the Fathers joye and payne:
> A prytty Infant, lovèd and lovinge, she
> Was Bewtye's abstract, Love's epitome.
> A lytle Volume, but devine, whearein
> Was seen both Paradice and Cherubin.
> While she lived here, wch was but lytle space,
> A few short yeares, Earth had a heavenly face:
> And, dead, she lookt a lovely peice of Claye,
> After her shineinge Soule was fled awaye.
> Reader, hadst thou her dissolution seen,
> Thou would'st have weept, hadst thou this marble been.[1]

Epitaphs and funeral monuments are usually put up by the bereaved relations, but it would not be safe to suppose that this has always been the case. The monument and inscription in Carshalton Church to Nicholas Gaynesford, Esquire for the Body of Henry VII, and his wife, was evidently prepared if not actually put up by himself in his lifetime, for the dates of their deaths have never been inserted. And some men have claimed upon their tombs whatever credit may attach to them for composing their own epitaphs. Thus Caleb Lovejoy, a benefactor of the parish of St. Nicholas, Guildford, where he was buried in 1676, says, "These verses which were of his own inditeing Now set in Brass are by his own apoynting," an appointing which finds more justification in their religious fervour than in their literary merit. Sir Robert Clayton's great monument in Bletchingley Church was evidently erected by him after his wife's death in 1705, he himself not dying until 1707. But indeed it seems clear that they must have both sat to the sculptor to enable him to produce the life-like figures which stand in front of the monument in their habits as they lived—unlike Donne, who sat in his grave-clothes for his effigy in St. Paul's. And at the bottom of the monument we read "Gulielmus Clayton Nepos et Hæres D.D." Sir Robert had no surviving child, and made his nephew his heir, so we may suppose that the fortunate nephew who succeeded to his great wealth was anxious to show that he had done all he should do, just as Sir Nicholas Throckmorton did when he buried his

[1] *M.B.*, I, 319.

uncle, Sir Francis Carew, at Beddington in 1611 and succeeded to his great estate and name. Nor can the motive have been different in the case of Edmund Slyfield, already referred to, at Great Bookham, for the fifty or sixty lines of doggerel verse are followed by the statement that his eldest son Henry "caused this to be made in faithful performance of the will of the dead."

There is an unusual brass in Bletchingley Church to Richard Glyd, who died in 1666, and his descendants, of whom it gives a full account. At the end we read, "Recollected A.D. 1700 by M.G. one of the oblidged nephews." The Glyds were an unfortunate family with a heavy mortality, and the monument was apparently the expression of spontaneous regret and affection. The verses commemorating Sir Thomas Cawarden, who was buried at Bletchingley in 1559, have also a curious history, for the brass plate on which they are inscribed was only found at Loseley in 1836. They were probably composed by Cawarden's friend, Sir William More of Loseley, but why they were not put on the tomb at the time is not known.

In strange contrast to the gratitude evinced by the Glyd monument is one erected in Weybridge Church, which runs as follows—the first part is in Latin—

Here lies William Bowridge, Esq., of whom we could speak much praise, but his sad wife desired that nothing else should be said than that he lived, and died on the 6 Nov. 1709, aged 43.

Below is the following in French:

Lecteur, que voulez vous qu'on rapporte ?
Bowridge vivait, Bowridge est mort.
Requiescat igitur in Pace.

This foregoing was compos'd by Mr. Hutchinson, Rector of this Place in 1711.

This is much more unkind, though perhaps not much more complimentary than the epitaph placed over William Lambert in Chaldon Church in 1656—"He lived the husband of Patience his wife 33 yeares and departed this life in the 79th yeare of his age."

The epitaph was occasionally libellous or insulting to the living. In Reigate Church was buried Edward Bird. His monument, showing a half-length figure in armour, recorded

that he "Dyed the 23rd of February 1718. His age 26." This man, who belonged to a well-known Reigate family, was a Lieutenant in the Marquis of Winchester's Regiment of Horse, and in the previous September had killed a waiter in a disreputable haunt in Golden Square, and had been hanged for the murder. The inscription, as originally put up, censured the Judge and jury, and this part had to be obliterated.

Very strange to our ideas is the epitaph in Beddington Church put up in 1634 to the memory of Thomas Greenhill of Magdalen College, Oxford, and Steward to Sir Nicholas Carew, by his brother and sister. The last four lines of Greenhill's epitaph are :

> He once a Hill was, fresh and greene,
> Now withered, is not to be seene.
> Earth in Earth, shovelled up, is shut
> A Hill into a Hole is put.

Nor does the suggestion seem less odd that the Court Caterer, John Angell, who died in 1675 and was buried in Crowhurst Church, took his name from Heaven, or that any inquiry about the fate of his son, William Angell, also buried there, was superfluous, since an Angel had flown to Heaven.

The eighteenth century did not always despise the pun. Near the South door of the church at Ockham is a monument erected in 1736 to a carpenter named Spong, the inscription on which—improbable as it may seem—was composed by a Fellow of the Royal Society. It begins :

> Who many a sturdy oak has laid along,
> Fell'd by Death's surer hatchet, here lies Spong.
> Posts oft he made, yet ne'er a Place could get,
> And lived by Railing, tho' he was no wit.
> Old saws he had, altho' no Antiquarian ;
> And Stiles corrected, yet was no Grammarian.

The pun has had a long history since Ajax in the Greek tragedy punned on his name in his despair, and it was not many years before Greenhill's death that Shakespeare made John of Gaunt pun upon his. The pun has sadly come down in the world, but as most people seem to think, deservedly. At any rate we do not now pun in our epitaphs.

Funeral inscriptions, despite the suspicions entertained of their sincerity, throw from time to time a strong light upon their

own age. In Ockham Church is an epitaph on Nicholas Bradshaw, the Rector, who died in 1648 after holding the living for 48 years. He was the father of 18 children, which is by no means unparalleled in those days, but what is unusual is that 15 of them grew up. They were all apparently by one wife, as were the 20 children which John Angell of Crowhurst had (only 9 of whom survived him), and the 17 which John Aldersey, who was buried at Oxted in 1616, had. Bradshaw's 48 years' tenure of the living was long even for the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, though Puttenham had two Rectors, father and son, of whom the father was Rector for 38 years, and the son for 56 years, dying in 1692, while Banstead had only four vicars between 1663 and 1823—an average of 40 years apiece.

Epitaphs, like contemporary memoirs and letters, bring before us in startlingly concrete form the terrible birth and death rates which prevailed among our ancestors. If the epitaph on Mrs. Morton, buried at Kingston in 1634, can claim that she lived to see near 400 issued from her loins, Dr. Edward Staunton, who became Vicar of Kingston in 1631, laments "Ten children in one grave, a dreadful sight, seven sons and daughters three, Job's Number right." Perhaps the most striking case is one in the Stoughton family buried in Stoke by Guildford. The epitaphs show that Nicholas Stoughton married his wife on 1 December 1625 when she was a little over 15 years of age, and had four children by her in 1626, 1628, 1629 and 1630, two of whom died when only a few months old. She herself died in 1631, and another child died four years later. Stoughton married again, and had three children by his second wife, none of whom survived him, so that when he died in 1647, of the two families only one child, a daughter of the first marriage, was alive. The disappearance of the Glyd family at Bletchingley recorded on the monument of 1700, already referred to, is not less remarkable. Richard Glyd had seven children, three out of the four boys, and one girl, dying young. His one surviving son had eight children, five of whom died young, and as the son's one surviving son died unmarried in 1689, the name became extinct.

It would not be difficult to illustrate other points in social history from our epitaphs, and it is tempting to diverge from

the epitaphs themselves to the monuments of which they are an essential part. For the monuments, like the epitaphs, reflect the views and tastes of the generations which erected them, and show every gradation of good taste and judgement from the exquisite beauty of Mrs. Audley's recumbent figure in Sanderstead Church—one of the most beautiful funeral monuments in Surrey—to mere vulgar ostentation. But to wander so far is hardly within the scope of this little paper, and enough has been said. If I may revert to Dr. Johnson's opinion quoted at the beginning of these remarks, I will say that the writing of epitaphs is a perilous business at best. The Middle Ages with their short, stereotyped inscriptions were generally on safer ground than later ages, and thus avoided the egregious failures into which later generations often fell. But the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century epitaph, when it succeeds, has a greater fullness, and thanks to the use of English at its best a greater beauty and dignity, than mediæval Latin could ever reach. It aims at, and occasionally attains, what Camden declared to be the object of an epitaph.[1] "Among all funeral honours," he said, "Epitaphs have always been the most respective (that is, as we should say in modern English, proper or fitting), for in them love was shown to the deceased, memorie was continued to posterity, friends were comforted, and the Reader put in mind of human frailtie."

[1] "Remains concerning Brittaine (1629)," *Epitaphs*, p. 308.