

A LETTER FROM ADMIRAL SMYTH ON THE
PURSUIT OF ARCHÆOLOGY.

St. John's Lodge, near Aylesbury, 20—9—'58.

MY DEAR SIR,

I regret that a previous arrangement will prevent my attending the annual meeting of the Architectural and Archæological Society for the County of Buckingham; but a few words will express the pleasure I feel in the advance of an institution so well calculated to prove of very material local value. The day has passed when the antiquary was merely known by his longings for the possession of "auld nick-nackets," and trivial baubles of price and rarity; the pursuit of archæology has ripened into a science which contemplates the progressive development of man, and the aggregation of the race into families and communities: it has improved into characteristic investigations which, by inductive steps, throw such light on the obscurity of former periods by the consequent disclosures, that we can better understand the present, and enjoy a surer anticipation of the future.

There are, however, breakers on the horizon! The principal feature of the present age is strictly mechanical, the which—wonderful and beneficial as it undoubtedly is—displays no sympathy with by-gone or indeed any other times; for the sweeping march of Utilitarianism is rather reckless as to hereafter. 'Tis true that archaic sympathies must yield to political demands, and each year necessarily diminishes the land-marks of human occupancy in past ages; but surely wanton destruction is odious. The memorable threat of cutting through Westminster Abbey, so callous to the best feelings of human nature, was in itself quite sufficient to arouse the alarm and waken the vigilance of archæologists. Upon me the tocsin thus sounded struck with such force that, while occupying the post of Director of the Society of Antiquaries of London, I frequently bestirred myself in calling attention to the accelerating advance of destruc-

tion upon our national memorials, by the continual encroachments of the civil engineer: added to which, from the blamable carelessness of certain local authorities—the recent alterations in the law of interment, and the heartless strides of heave-ahead-ism under its delusive flag of expediency, many of our monumental remains have already been totally effaced. Such destroying powers united, must inevitably cause the utter loss of memoratives equally necessary to genealogy, chronology, and every branch of historical evidence. Nor has the danger been allowed to pass unobserved; Kent, Bedford, and Surrey have vigorously taken the field, the Spalding Society is on the alert, and most of our counties are arming; but above all, the greatest example is in the activity of the Antiquarian Society of Newcastle-on-Tyne, aided by the powerful patronage and intelligence of the Duke of Northumberland. This praise-worthy phalanx has not only undertaken the investigation of all the scattered materials jeopardized by the onset of improvement among its military posts, ancient towns, and castrametation, but is also bringing together the numerous monumental evidences wherewith to elucidate and confront them.

Now it is obviously as essential for all our Provincial Institutions to be awake as for the antiquaries of Northumberland; they are called upon to look to their local vestigia, and especially to collect authentic copies of the still-remaining brasses, incised slabs, and important lapidary inscriptions in their respective counties; and these copies might easily be catalogued, and deposited safely for future inquirers. In a word, the investigation of early remains, with the garnering of mute records have become a duty; and systematic research must be greatly furthered by the proposed amendment of that arch-enemy to excavation—namely the law of Treasure-trove. The necessity for these objects will presently appear; but in the mean time we may remind the beginner how valuable a series of names, dates, and facts is, hereby obtainable, without the alloy of imaginary virtues which render the tributary lays of many modern tombstones so worthless; besides the unimpeachable illustrations of arms, costumes, cognizances, devices, and ornaments thus accruing. The sound antiquary has studiously to detect every possible error in copies of the title deeds, con-

veyances, and documentary or inscriptive evidence of every kind; even though such might be deemed "charter-proof," it ought to be received under salutary doubt and prudent caution. All drawings by hand, and autograph copying are liable to woeful and sometimes to ludicrous blunders: for the copyer will inevitably follow conjecture upon doubtful or obscure marks, inso-much as to occasion a deplorable waste of time and stale learning among some of his readers. Even the pointing of inscriptions is so connected with the improvement and progress of language, that every one interested should as carefully copy the stops as the characters; besides which, the very form of the letters and monograms are often terse and significant. The Romans who dwelt in Britain sometimes placed marks of distinction at the end of each word, as may be seen in the numerous memorials preserved in our collections; but the present important usage and practice of punctuation were unknown to them. Hence much inference as to the exact date of a monument may be gathered wherever such stops occur, even though the words may run in Latin. This will be the more evident when we recollect that the notes in question were not all introduced simultaneously—the comma, the interrogative, and the period preceded the semi-colon, the colon, and the mark of admiration; nor do they all appear in use at the same time, till about the year 1600. Here then we have a range of about two centuries and a half—from about the middle of Edward the Third's reign to the close of Elizabeth's—to watch the inscribing progress by, from the *leaf* in the verbal divisions of the earlier records, to the stops and connecting ligatures of the more modern; and from the coarse uncial and Longobardic, to the old English black letter and the Roman type.

Some very curious examples of the usefulness, and even the necessity, of attending to these minutiae have lately been brought to light in what are designated "palimpsest" brasses; or those whereon the sepulchral memorials of individuals in one generation have been displaced, or altered, in order to make way for those belonging to another. Thus a slab which might have been voted in honor for a deserving functionary, or which manifested the affection of a family, has, when the living had died out, or the

relations were removed, been turned face downwards, and the new surface blazoned as pride or wealth dictated. Yet, happily for the ends of justice, the characters and attributes on the two sides are generally in such open and palpable antagonism, that to the practised eye truth remains triumphant. Of this species of *cuckoo-piracy*, the specimen lately found in the chancel of Hedgerley church in this county, and described by my friend Mr. Albert Way, was a notable detection. In this case the first surface had been elaborately engraven in memory of an Abbot, hight Thomas Totyngton, who was gathered to his forefathers in 1312. Here his dignity reposed for more than a couple of centuries, when all his friends having passed away, and Hedgerley becoming peopled by those who knew not Totyngton, the brass was reversed, and its other surface richly incised to record the person and children of Dame Margaret Bulstrode, who died in 1540.

Now stringent accuracy being the very sheet-anchor of transcription, and well-knowing some lamentable errors in consequence of the oversights of copyers, I resolved whenever I should be under the necessity of making use of a votive record, or inscription of any grave import, to use every endeavour to obtain a rubbing, or a cast: and latterly the new and beautiful process of photography has been successfully applied to this purpose, in some cases. I might enlarge upon certain serious mistakes which have resulted from the hand-copying of our memorabilia, but we need here only dwell upon local bearings, and even on them the notice shall be brief. While engaged in writing the *Ædes Hartwelliana* poor Perkin-a-Leigh came before me, and his noted epitaph was to be found in Camden, Browne Willis, Pennant, Lysons, and others; but on close examination I found that they all differed, in a slight degree, from each other. Though on the whole the differences were of no material import to the general meaning, the discrepancies were annoying, as evincing a want of that care which carries conviction; for what is worth copying at all, is worth copying correctly. And as my son—Charles Piazza Smyth—was then travelling into the north, I prevailed on him to tarry at Macclesfield in order to make me a rubbing from the brass itself; and the inscription given in that work (page 94), is the true reading.

But I will submit another instance, as still more in

point with the tenour of this communication. Just above the ancient piscina on the left of the communion-table in Dinton church, there is a small brass plate, engraved in Roman capitals, to the memory of Eleanor Hampden, the heiress of Hartwell, who was married to Sir Thomas Lee, to whom she conveyed the manor and appurtenances to which she had succeeded. Here the subject is of sufficient consequence, and the inscription plain enough through any spectacles; yet instead of copying it accurately for his expensive County History, Dr. Lipscomb has printed it with a diminutive pica type (Part III, page 156) thus:—

Here lyeth the bodie of ye Ladie Dame Elianor the Wife
to Sir Thomas Lee of Morton Knt. who had issue between
them 24 children. She departed this life the 6th day of
April 1633.

Her children lost a mother at her death
The church a member, and ye poor a friend.

No antiquary could have expected so much inaccuracy in so recent a publication; and especially where there exists an easy access to the original.* Not only are the spellings, the contractions, the stops, the line-lengths, and the diphthongs neglected, but, as I remarked in the *Ædes*, (page 59) the Doctor has actually dealt a *death-blow* to the rhyme of the concluding couplet. From an excellent rubbing which was expressly made for me by Mrs. Smyth, the following are the exact words and measure:—

HERE LYETH THE BODIE OF Y^E LADIE DAME ELINOR
LEE WIFE TO S^R THOMAS LEE OF MORTON . K^T
WHO HAD ISSVE BETWENE THEM 24 CHIL-
DREN, & SHE DEPARTED THIS LIFE THE 6TH
DAY OF APRIL 1633.

HER CHILDREN LOST A MOTHER AT HER END
THE CHVRCH A MEMBER & Y^E POORE A FREND.

Shortly after this was printed in the *Ædes*, Dr. Lee caused a rubbing from the same brass to be made and

* In an interesting volume on the Forest of Dean, just published by Mr. Murray, the Rev. H. G. Nicholls has shown a curious and indisputable fact; for the evidence is from a "brass" of the XVth century, now in Newland church. On this memorial, it is clearly seen that the present custom of the men holding a stick between their teeth on which to fix a candle during their subterranean task—together with the scull-cap, the peculiar mattock, the thick vestments, and the mineral hod—have continued identically the same among the miners of that Royal Forest, for upwards of 400 years.

mounted for his own collection at Hartwell House; but on my mentioning that I was about to write to you on the subject, he kindly authorized my presenting it to the Architectural and Archæological Society, in his name; and it is herewith forwarded. Assuredly so flagrant a sample of gross inattention as is thus exposed, shows the urgent necessity for a re-examination of the various details hitherto given of the County's *vetusta monumenta*. Such an undertaking—and, with many, such a labour of love—allotted in parochial or other portions, is truly a legitimate aim for County Associations; and by such means County Histories will become, as they ought, more and more useful and trustworthy in reference. Moreover, while these matters are under attention, strides will necessarily be made towards the desirable end of compiling an archæological map of the county, showing the sites of the tumuli, monoliths, roads, passes, encampments, and relics of every description, whether pre-historic, British, Roman, Saxon, Danish, or Norman—which, to use Bacon's expression, "have casually escaped the shipwreck of Time:" and this is rendered the easier, inasmuch as our excellent Ordnance Maps afford a correct basis.

It was my intention to have appended a few of my own "experiences" in this line, with respect to the readiest methods of making rubbings, and obtaining fac-similia in cases of difficulty; but recollecting that my friend Mr. John Williams, of Somerset House, is perhaps the most practised hand in England in that particular department, as well as in taking exquisite casts of gems and coins, I requested him to favor me with information regarding his process. In an immediate reply, this gentleman has very openly related his management, the which is so likely to prove useful to the antiquarian Tyro, that I take the liberty of subjoining a copious extract.

I beg to remain, my dear Sir,

Your's faithfully,

W. H. SMYTH.

The Rev. CHARLES LOWNDES, F.R.A.S.,

Hon. Sec., &c.


Extract of a Letter from Mr. WILLIAMS to Admiral SMYTH, dated—

SOMERSET HOUSE, Sept. 19th, 1858.

"According to your desire I send you an account of my method of copying inscriptions on stone or brass with facility and perfect accuracy. I was led to its adoption by the following circumstances:—In the year 1832 I was engaged in the study of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics, and as I found I could not depend upon the accuracy of printed or engraved copies of Egyptian monuments, I endeavoured to find some method by which I might be able to copy mechanically, with rapidity and at the same time with perfect accuracy such inscriptions as I might require. The result was the adoption of the method I am about to describe, and I may add that during that and the four succeeding years I successfully copied the inscriptions on nearly the whole of the monuments then in the British Museum. I also copied those in the museum of Sir John Soane including the celebrated Belzoni Sarcophagus, together with those in the possession of Dr. Lee, and in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, with many others in different private collections. These inscriptions, all of course the exact size of the originals, now occupy four large volumes, and were taken from some hundreds of monuments."

The following is the method which he adopted :

"A paper blackened on one side is prepared as follows:—Take a small portion of yellow soap, say about the size of a nut, rub it up carefully with water until it becomes of the consistency of thick paste, without lumps of any kind; to this add a sufficient quantity of black lead in powder; mix these intimately, adding a few drops of water, if necessary, so as to keep it of the consistency I have already mentioned, viz., that of thick paste. Spread this on the surface of paper of any kind, and scrape off as much as possible of the superfluous colouring matter. Suffer it to dry, and now again scrape the surface so as to remove all the composition that might come off in patches in the succeeding manipulation, the object being to leave on the paper an exceedingly thin film of black lead spread as evenly as possible over it; this when laid with the blackened side on white paper will leave a trace even by merely passing the finger nail over it.

"This is the copying paper; in addition to this a piece of wood must be provided about six inches long, half an inch thick, and of about the same width, the end of this should be hollowed out so as to leave an edge projecting a little shaped, in short, like this figure. The edge of this can be applied readily to the paper, and is essential to the production of a good copy. 

"The paper I employed in making my copies was of the sort known to stationers as "double crown." This is a thin white paper of considerable size, and answers better than a thicker paper, as the structure of the latter frequently prevents the taking of many of the finer lines.

"In order to copy an inscription with these materials, we must first fix, by means of a little paste (shoemakers stiff paste is the best) one of the sheets of double crown over the object to be copied: applying the paste at the corner of the sheet of paper will be found quite sufficient, as it is merely required to keep the paper in its place. Lay upon this a piece of the prepared paper with the blackened side downwards, and rub it on the back with the edge of the piece of wood. The black comes off readily, and covers all the prominent parts, while the inscription and other sunken parts remain white. The flexibility of the paper enables

it to be applied in all directions, and consequently the copy can be made as sharp as possible; any parts that are imperfect can readily be retouched and as the blackened paper is not permanently fixed in any way, the progress of the work can be ascertained readily. When finished the copy is easily detached, and if necessary the traces of the paste used in fixing it, can readily be removed with a wet sponge. The time occupied in copying an object is very short.

I may also add that by using a lithographic compound for blackening the paper and transfer-paper for the copy, I was enabled to remove it to a lithographic stone, and thus multiply the copies *ad infinitum*."

* * In order to spare certain feelings in this vicinity, I have forbore to instance the discreditable and rapid destruction of Quarendon Chapel and its interesting marbles (*see Ædes Hartwelliana, page 62*): a spoliation which cannot be imputed to rail-roads, or other improvement.

W. H. S.