

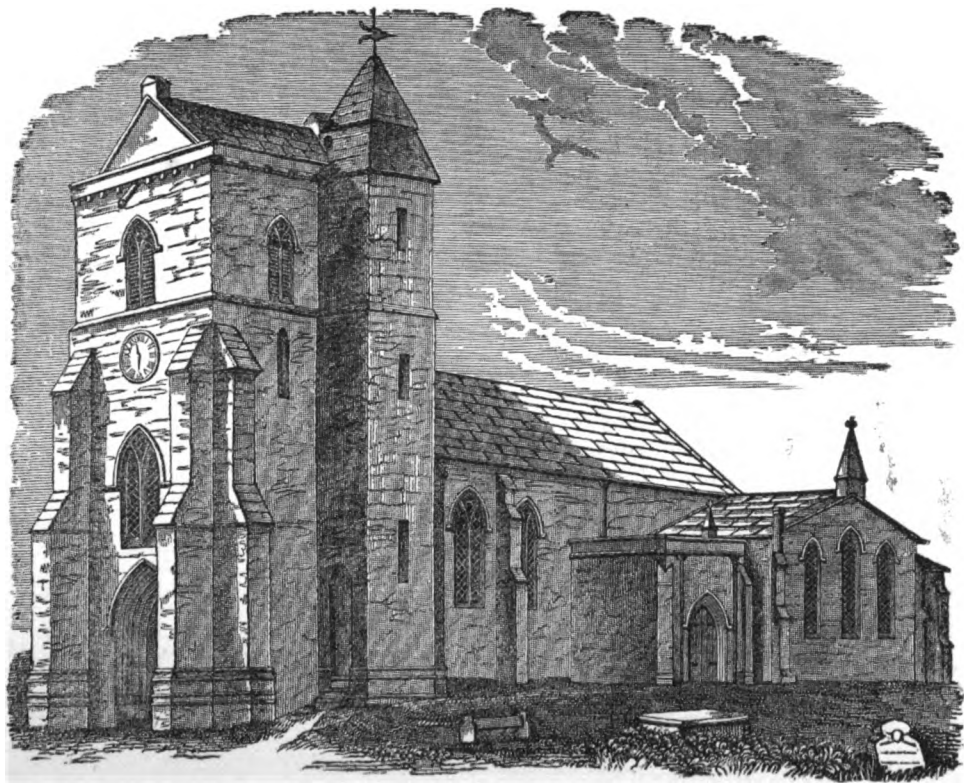
A WORD MORE ON THE "DOUBLE-FACED" BRASS IN
STONE CHURCH, WITH A FEW PARTICULARS
RESPECTING THAT EDIFICE, &c. IN A LETTER
FROM VICE-ADMIRAL W. H. SMYTH.

St. John's Lodge, 5—7—'61.

MY DEAR SIR,

My last letter upon this subject has given rise to a question or two, to which answers may very readily be given. In the first place it was asked—and reasonably enough—how the lower line of the Gurney inscription could have been restored, seeing that only a few marks remained? Now, to clear it from the imputation of being mere guess-work, I will shew that the approximation to date is founded on the principle enunciated by my friend Mr. Williams.

It will be recollected by readers of the "Records," that I alluded to the aid which was afforded to research by the mannerism and conventional form of the monumental inscriptions of that era; and the further proceeding before us may be thus stated for general information:—Upon examining the numeral (XVIII) of the day, in the preceding line, it will be found that the V has a curved top which rises above that line. This is a key-stone, for such a top is seen among the remains of the line in the place where measurement—and other indications—shew the second figure of the date must have been, and consequently proving it a V. As the first numeral was undoubtedly M, the year sought for must be somewhere between 1500 and 1520, the date of the inscription on the other side, which, though a little coarser, bears internal evidence of being all but contemporary. If the remaining part had had another V in it, we must infer that the top would have been curled as in the cited XVIII, and consequently, rising above the line, a portion of it would have remained visible, as appears in the place of the second figure beforementioned: as however no such indication appears, it follows that the numeral V did not form



Stone Church.

any part of the remaining portion of the date in question. Hence it may be pronounced that it could not have been V—VI—VII—VIII—XV—XVI—XVII—or XVIII: in which series IV is not included, because, in the inscriptions of that time, four was represented under the more archaic form IIII. We are thus limited to I—II—III—IIII—IX—X—XI—XII—XIII—and XIII. Now, when measuring the space where the V of MV must have been, and the place where the first letter of the word following the date (*on*) must have been, there is abundant room for the greatest number of these numeral letters. We may therefore, without scowering the shield too closely, or making any untoward hesitation, accept of 1514 as the true date of this portion of the Brass.

In my former communication to you, this inscription, and not the sculptures, was my only object in writing; but, from a cause which will presently appear, I might as well have said that there is a little group of six sons by the side of the effigies of Thomas, and there are three daughters represented behind Agnes. From the number and evident respectability of the Gurneys formerly located in this vicinity, I enquired of my old and esteemed friend Mr. Hudson Gurney—so long the popular Vice-President of the Society of Antiquaries—whether he was aware of their having been any connection between the Buckinghamshire and the Norfolk families of that ilk? Though now in his 86th year, I received an immediate and cheerful reply, in which, after a few general details, he thus proceeds—

There is the grant of the manor of Wendover by Stephen to Hugh de Gournai—and a *regnant* to the seventh Hugh Gournay 1180,—whose end was unfortunate. Going over from King John to Philip Augustus, he was attainted and confiscated in England: and the French Chronicle says of him—'Hoc anno Hugo de Gurnay capite multatus est, ut planus et manifestus proditur.'

Of the Gurneys of Stone there are five descents given in the Escheats of Stone and Aylesbury, in the reign of Henry the 8th. In Cole's Escheats, and in Daniel Gurney's notes, I find—'Joseph Gurney, a baker in Park-street, London, says his family are from Stone or Bishopstone, near Aylesbury, where they had been settled more than a century, (June, 1831)'—or rather from time immemorial. If I find more, I will send it to you by another post.

To Mr. Hudson Gurney's account, I may as well add that a very curious charter among the archives of the Dutchy of Lancaster, is signed by Hug de Gurnai, as one of the

witnesses; and there is both internal and presumptive evidence that this same document was drawn up A.D. 1190, the commencement of the reign of Richard the First. Moreover, in the *Rotuli de Oblatis et Finibus* there are to be found, in the year 1384—1393—1395—1402—and 1462, fines on the messuages, lands, and rents of Stone and Bishopstone, which thereby confirmed the rights and established the position of the Gurneys. Among the early records preserved in the Evidence-room at Hartwell House, is a curious rent-roll dated on the 30th day of November, 1459, (*38th Hen. VI.*) in favour of D. Witts Gurney, de Bysshoppeston.

It is plain that the family of the Gurneys was pretty numerous in this vicinity, for the name constantly occurs in the records of marriages, baptisms, and deaths: and it still exists around, though not in the same consideration. In endeavouring to trace when such a decadence might have occurred, there is a sad hiatus of 350 years; that is, between the time above cited and that of Henry VIII., in whose reign the laudable Parish Records were instituted. Numerous documents may have been preserved by the Monks: but though monasteries were the safe-guards of religion and literature in the dark ages, they were also the strong-holds of superstitious bigotry and spiritual despotism, under which influence many of their manuscripts were garbled. I was therefore confined to the Parish Registers, the wading through which may not be deemed at all entertaining reading.* But those who view them only as a dry and dull series of insignificant names and dates, are certainly not of that archaic taste which calls upon the grave to render up its still occupants, and re-animate them for the moment, thereby to throw a light upon circumstantial evidence—genealogical testimony which is still to be held in trust for future investigations—

They whisper truths in Reason's ear,
Would human pride but stoop to hear.

The earliest mention of this family in the Parish Register, nor could it well be earlier in such a record, is Francis Gurney, 'sonne of Hen. Gournay the Younger,'

* Under the date *Novber 29th, 1763*, is the curt entry—"A woman, name unknown, Cook to the late Sr Thomas Lee." This uncouth record of the once most important personage in the household staff, may be imputed to her having been always addressed by the title of her calling.

who was christened on the 7th of October, 1538; and a "Margarett Gourney" was married in the following month. These entries are, of course, on the first leaf, for it was the year in which the practice was ordered; and there is inferential testimony that they were then a family 'well to do,' as there are inscriptions and an altar-tomb to some of them; although they are entered repeatedly afterwards—ladies as well as gentlemen—as being buried according to that unpopular act of Parliament (*30th Car. II*) which was passed and acted upon in 1678, in woollen grave-clothes only—which a payment would have evaded. Pope has recorded the agitation which the decree occasioned in the dying moments of a fair one—

'Odious! in woollen! 'twould a saint provoke!
Were the last words that poor Narcissa spoke.*

The observance of this compulsory enactment was strictly enforced, under the plea of thereby lessening the importation of linen from abroad and increasing the consumption of wool: and all the Parish Registers which I have examined, bear ample proof of the carrying out of this law. Though no authentic notice has met my eye of the custom having been practiced after the year 1789, it was not formally repealed till 1814. While in full operation it was a most unpalatable regulation for submitting to: and as no corpse could be interred, nor any funeral ceremony be entered upon without the qualifying affidavit—which it was sometimes very difficult to procure—inconvenient delays often occurred, to the annoyance of domestic feeling. That all the provisions of the Act had been complied with, had then to be certified by the Minister; in default of which a fine of five pounds was to be levied on the goods and chattels of the deceased, or failing those, on the goods of the person in whose house the death occurred, or of any person concerned in the enshroudment of the defunct. The Registration then—with the Clergy-

* This was Mrs. Oldfield, the celebrated actress, who died in 1731. She however escaped the 'odious woollen;' and was buried in Westminster Abbey, in a Brussels lace head-dress, a holland shift with tucker, double lace ruffles, and new kid gloves, (*Gentleman's Magazine for March, 1731*). The fine was, of course, paid by somebody. It seems tyrannical to fulminate grave enactments for funeral habiliments. Near the communion-rails of Chetwode Church, in this county, some coffins—apparently of ecclesiastics—were opened, the bodies in which were found to be wrapped in leather.

man's *ita esse test.*—was placed under the occasional inspection of the local magistrates, who signed the entries to attest their having duly examined the details. There is ample evidence before us, that these conditions were strictly observed: and to a record of the Gurneys in 1698, I observed three signatures of so remarkable a tenour, that I took a tracing of them thus:—

April 29th 1713 Sir Thos Gos
 Tho: Lee
 Ri: Beke
 Simon Mayne

Here we have the sign-manuals of Sir Thomas Lee, of Hartwell, son of the friend of Hampden and Ingoldsby; of Colonel Richard Beke, the favourite of Cromwell, and husband of Sir Thomas's third daughter; and of Simon Mayne, whose autograph—save in the *i* for *y*—singularly resembles that of his father the regicide, as shown on the death-warrant of Charles the First. He was permitted to enjoy the lands in Dinton though they had escheated to the Crown. Beke, it will be recollected, was knighted by Oliver, though on the restoration of royalty he thought it prudent to drop his title, in order to facilitate his application for special indemnity under the great seal.* The pardon thus obtained is in Dr. Lee's possession: in its general provisions it follows not only the public act of Indemnity and Oblivion, but also enters into several particulars not provided for by the statute 12 Car. II; and it is

* As the only representative of the ancient Beke family, I cannot but cite my friend Dr. Beke, the spirited and persevering Abyssinian Traveller; one who, from his Nilotic investigations, may yet force the mighty and mysterious river to yield up its source. Indeed appearances indicate that one of the great problems of all ages, the *Caput Nili*, is on the very point of being settled. There are epitaphial inscriptions to the Bekes both in Haddenham and Dinton Churches, but as those given by Lipscombe are not quite accurate, Dr. Lee had rubbings made from them.

drawn up with such point and precision as, apparently, to meet every possible case. An instance will shew this:—

“*Know ye*, therefore, that we of our special grace & of our certain knowledge & mere motion, *have pardoned*, remitted, & released, & by these patents do pardon, remit, & release to Richard Beke, of Haddenham, in our county of Buckingham, Esquire, or by whatsoever name or surname, or addition of name or surname, office, or place the same Richard Beke be deemed, called, or named, or lately was deemed, called, or named, all & all manner of treasons, crimes of lese majesty, levyings of war, rebellions, & insurrections & conspiracies, & misprisions, of the same treasons, crimes of lese majesty, levyings of war, rebellions and insurrections, & all & singular murders, and killings, & slayings of men *per insidias* (by lying in waite), by assault or of malice aforethought, homicides, felonies, robberies, burnings of houses, depredations piratical, offences, crimes, contempts, misdemeanours & transgressions, counselled, commanded, attempted, done, perpetrated, or committed by the aforesaid Richard Beke before the 10th day of June last past,” &c. &c.

Three years after the date of these signatures, Sir Thomas Lee and Simon Mayne, had the severe contested election for Aylesbury, upon which the House of Commons resolved that persons deriving benefit from Bedford's Charity in that town, are thereby disabled from voting: which right was to be confined to householders not receiving alms.

This decision was equally unexpected and annoying to the vested birth-right men, since they had been led to regard the Bedford bounty as a largess independent of all other charitable institutions of the town; and much dissatisfaction was evinced on thus reducing a number of freemen—pot-wallopers in electioneering parlance—to the condition of mere paupers. But before the Reform Bill was passed, the borough had long *enjoyed* an unenviable notoriety for stratagems not altogether right-worshipful in constitutional engagements; and corrupt practises in parliamentary candidates were openly and shamelessly carried on by all parties. Even so late as 1802—according to living testimony—the town-crier publicly announced the Inn where voters were to apply for their fees of three guineas each from the agent; but some of the more wily purity-men received a larger bonus, besides heavy guttling, from the election-money. To those who are not conversant with the local affairs of this part of the County, it may be necessary to explain what Bedford's Charity means, in order to prevent any collision with the admirable benefac-

tion at Bedford.* A gentleman of Aylesbury, John Bedford, by his will dated on the 12th of July, 1493 (9 *Henry VII*), bequeathed a real estate for the perpetual use of the Parish, in amending its highways and relieving the poor inhabitants. The bequest then consisted of a certain quantity of land and messuages, of the annual rental of about £30. It now consists of eleven dwelling-houses, and nearly 106 acres of land in and near the town, with £89 in the funds—the present income being about £600 per annum.

Another question which has been gravely asked, is to the effect of *wondering* how it was first known, that this Gurney brass was 'two-faced'? Now although pretty well versed in its whole story, I thought it the most advisable step to have it recorded in the *ipsissima verba* of the actual discoverer—the Rev. J. B. Reade, the former Vicar of Stone, who brought its duplicity to light. On applying to this gentleman upon that and other points under consideration, he promptly returned the following details from Ellesborough Rectory:—

I will gladly devote a portion of my solitude here to your service, acknowledging that you have claims upon me; but I must first thank you for your 'excellent discourse'—to use the stereotyped form of approval—on the double-faced brass in the old Church.

You apply the lignum so sharply to robbers of Churches, that I think such offenders would rather have a monument than an Admiral standing over them. However, with respect to the Stone brass, there is clearly no case of *Tharpe v. Gorney* for the decision of your court of "Records" (*Acts XIX. 37.*) The worker in brass committed no robbery, and Tharpe was never a much-trodden-upon individual, in Stone Church at least, as Gorney is proved to have been by the trituration of his brass. In fact the fresh and therefore somewhat coarser character of the Tharpe inscription, satisfies me that his brass was never laid down: the edges of the letters are perfectly sharp, and their depth of cutting has not suffered from the feet of Church-going people.

The double reading was discovered in 1844, when we restored the Church. It was then necessary to remove all the tomb-stones on the floor of the edifice; and lest the organ of acquisitiveness should be unduly excited in any *wandering Antiquary*, if we may describe a pilferer

* This most useful and liberal endowment is owing to Sir William Harpur and Dame Alice his wife, who, in 1556, left 13 acres of land—then on the skirts, but now in the heart of London—to Bedford, the knight's native town. It quickly improved in value, and in 1668, the annual rental was £99; but in 1836, when I was a Trustee of its management, it amounted to the magnificent sum of £13,500 per annum! And Bedford possesses lots of other Charities.

so mildly, I took all their brasses to the Vicarage and had them ultimately carefully replaced. A few of the best encaustic tiles, having figures of swan, &c., remained in the Church—or rather ought to have remained—but some *wandering Antiquary* got hold of them. Other memorials of the past perished also. A new chancel, as you are aware, was erected; but the time-honoured features of the old chancel—too elaborate for the naked architecture of the modern builder—were ruthlessly destroyed. To my inquiry for the fine old sedilia, foliated canopies and columns, &c., the reply was ‘Oh Sir, the Architect has ordered them to be brayed into sand!’ I held my tongue for very shame and sorrow. No wonder that your holy places are disfigured by railway-roofing!

The discovery of the second inscription on the Gurney brass led our friend Thorpe, of Stone, to claim the grave as family property. It was therefore opened for the purpose of identification from coffins or otherwise, and, curiously enough, we found exactly as many pairs of thigh bones as there are figures of the Gurneys—namely, the old people, six sons, and three daughters. No other part of the bodies remained, with the exception of a small portion of one of the vertebræ; neither was there a trace of coffins or wood. All had perished. A striking comment on the words *pulvis et umbra*.

We also ascertained by thus opening the ground that Lipscomb is wrong—you will say *as usual*—when he asserts that the Church is built “on an artificial mount, probably an ancient barrow.” For it is erected, beyond all question, on one of the natural sand-hills which are so common in the parish, and the lines of stratification in the sand below the grave, and on its sides, proved beyond mistake the character of the formation. No barrow of any kind had anything to do with it.

We get, however, by Lipscomb out of Kennet, the accurate date of the consecration of the Church, viz. 1st June, 1273, (2. *Edward I.*): and it may amuse you to learn, on an authority you will readily admit, that the chancel then consecrated had but just been built—and not very well built either. At the time of our restoration of the Church, this dilapidated chancel found a restorer in the lay-impropriator, Dr. Lee. I happened to be present when a portion of the wall at the south-east angle was taken down, and with my own hand I took from between two of the largest stones a silver penny of Edward the First; thus obtaining satisfactory proof that the chancel was built in the reign which had not long commenced.—The weakness of the structure was found to arise from the fact of the south wall having *no foundation!* The lowest stones—and those of a *crumbling* kind—were placed only just below the surface: and the only wonder is, that it had the power of self-support at all, through upwards of 500 years.

As the chancel in question was not exactly square with the Church, I proposed that the new south wall should stand about 4 or 5 feet more northward, in order that the central lines of the Church and chancel might coincide. On preparing the ground for this object, the workmen found a deep and well-laid foundation of a former wall exactly similar in character to the foundation of the north wall of the chancel. There was no doubt in our minds as to this foundation having *done duty* in supporting the first chancel of the ancient Church, and being so, the continuity of the central line from east to west was, in the first instance, preserved. That continuity is restored with good effect in the present—or third—chancel, which does in fact stand upon the first foundations; for time would have been thrown away in an attempt to destroy the skilled labour of the close of the eleventh century. As A.D. 1150 is the date of the earliest historical notice of the Church, there can be no doubt that the south porch and the massive pillars of the semi-circular arches

are, at least, as early as 1100. Why a new chancel should have been built so soon as 1273 is a question of curious speculation. As the tooth of time could scarcely reach maturity in a couple of centuries, we must look for wanton destruction, accident, or design. The priests may perhaps have craved more room, with suitable and comfortable *sedilia*. At all events a second chancel was then erected, and not improbably the transepts and tower also: and the formal consecration of the Church, as *St. John the Baptist's*, then took place.

Such is my story, and remember it is virtually at your bidding that I write, and thus record for your amusement a few facts to which you will readily assign their archæological value: but as connected with some of the happiest years of my life, it is to me very cheering to be called upon to refer to them. The old Parish and the old Church are not to be forgotten places. 'Many a time and oft' I may have given most of these particulars to you *vivâ voce*; but I now take a hint from your valuable paper and—transfer them—if they are worth it—to the safer keeping of the *litera scripta*.

With this lucid explanation, our remarks on the Gurney Brass may be concluded: and I append a view, or rather as an antiquated landskip-monger would have had it—a south-west prospect of the Church. It will be seen that Mr. Reade's conjecture that the 'two faces' were not the result of fraud, or involved in sacrilege, coincides with my own expressed opinion. Indeed such numbers of mere double-faced and true palimpsest brasses have turned up of late, that, keeping all the inducements in view, I cannot but think if both sides could be examined, that a very large portion of these memorials would be proved to have been used twice. This curious custom might have originated in a singular view of economy; and cannot be put in parity with deeds, conveyances, or other manuscript writings—wherein both the scarcity and dearth of the proper materials may account for the practice. And here I take leave to present the Society with a copy of the new application of lithography to Rubbings, so ably carried into execution by Mr. Williams. The following brief notice will give all that I know about it; and however little that may prove to be, it can in no way interfere with the value of the document.

Away in the west of England, and not far from the fair town of Helston, in Cornwall, there is a small and rather obscure village named CONSTANTINE in all our maps and directories; though as it is vernacularly enunciated *Constann-tinn*, I could not but suspect that the classic orthography has led us adrift from the real meaning of the name; which, as mining is still a principal occupation

there, seemed more in allusion to stanneries and tin, than to the Roman appellation. Being fully aware of the peril of jumbling facts and fancies together, I submitted my conjecture to Sir Richard Vyvyan, of Trelowarren, whom I well knew to be the highest Cornish reference. The returning post brought me the following reply:—

The Church of Constantine is a fine old building in the neighbouring granitic region of this district. It has always been supposed to have derived its name from Constantine the son of Cador, Duke of Cornwall, and cousin to King Arthur by his alliance in marriage; who succeeded Arthur by his will as King of Britain in 542 A.D. (*Speed, page 273.*) Thus far as regards the existence of the man, who is moreover said to have reigned three years, to have been killed in battle by Aurelius Conanus his successor, and to have been buried at Stonehenge.

It is remarkable that Speed, following older writers, names *Stonehenge* as the place of sepulture of those earliest *Anti-Saxon* Kings, who were constantly at war with the invaders. He names thirteen such Kings from Vortigern to Cadwallader—from 400 and odd to 686 A.D., say 250 years: Constantine was the sixth of this dynasty, the predecessor of an equally violent tyrant.

I am surprised that modern antiquarians have not made more of the tradition about Stonehenge, as the sacred place of Britain, long after the arrival of Hengist and Horsa.

My excellent friend having thus demolished the baseless vision which I had called up, we will proceed with the story which brought the inquiry forward.

In the old Church of this old village is a funereal brass, the obverse, or visible part of which had immemorially commemorated a worthy gentleman and his wife, small in size, but standing beneath canopies, in Elizabethan habiliments. From a shield of arms between them, it may be inferred that he was one of the Gervis family; there exists however no inscription in proof, but on the whole there is reason to think he died *circa* 1570. Now it came to pass that Constantine Church lately needed repairs, in consequence of which the said memorial was taken down from the place it had occupied for nearly 300 years; when, to the surprise of the spectators, it was found that the reverse bore the effigies of some person of note, and that it was a portion of a Flemish brass of superior workmanship, in exceedingly sharp preservation. From particulars in the boldly incised armour, and other indications, the date of this specimen is evidently towards the latter part of the XIVth century—say between 1360 and 1380: but there is nothing to throw any light whatever on the name of the individual. Yet, though all written trace appears beyond reach, it is just possible that the arms on the surcoat might

afford a clue. And here I cannot do better than quote Mr. William's own account of the steps which he took to ensure the discovery, and promote a general knowledge of so interesting an archæological fact: the letter which I received is dated 26th February, 1861—

"This beautiful brass was exhibited at the first meeting of the Society of Antiquaries this session, at Somerset House, by Mr. J. G. Waller. and commanded very great attention. I obtained the permission of that gentleman to take a copy. As the reverse appeared to be of considerable interest, and Mr. Waller thought that the brass was about to be replaced in its original situation, in which case the obverse only could be visible, and as I could hardly expect to get a better example, I considered it a good opportunity to apply to it my process of rubbing, so modified as to enable me to produce a lithographic copy. The result is the lithograph in question, which I now have the pleasure of sending for your kind acceptance.

"I have had this process in view for many years, my first specimen of a lithographic copy of an object dating in December, 1834. The method appears to excite a great deal of attention; and being very easy, and comparatively speaking not very expensive, I quite hope to see it adopted in cases of particular interest, as thus, with the labour of one rubbing only, authentic copies may be multiplied to any extent."

From what I have since heard, I believe that the Constantine Brass has actually been restored to its place over the family commemorated on the obverse side, and there secured; so that the subject of Mr. Williams's excellent lithograph is once more concealed, probably for ages. In the great concern which this incident excited among antiquaries, Mr. Albert Way has suggested, in a letter to me, that valuable palimpsests which accident or other cause may bring to light, instead of being again fastened down should be supported by a hinge-apparatus, so that either side of the sculptures might be readily open to examination. The proposal is a good one, and it is to be hoped that he will agitate the point, it being of deep archæological importance to times past, present, and future.

To the very natural inquiry as to how so fine a mortuary fragment—evidently in honour of some great man—should ever have got into so distant a region as Cornwall, it may be answered that, probably, it is a relic of the reckless spoliation of Churches which took place in the Netherlands, a few years previous to the later date above given. In that calamitous time, the infuriated mob of fanatical reformers broke into the various sacred fanes, mutilating and destroying everything around them, and tearing up the brasses that bespoke the merits and services of the individuals buried there. The brasses thus wantonly

desecrated by iconoclastic plunderers were sure of a ready sale, from the known superiority of the then manufacture of metal in the Low Countries—called latten, brass, or cullen (*Cologne*) plate: the dealers in such articles took them, of course, to the best markets. Hence we may account for the presence in England, of the curious specimen under our consideration.

Of this enough: but in closing such a lucubration it is impossible to view the sacrilegious callousness, and dishonest perversion, with which the sacred memorials of one generation have been desecrated to glorify a squad of unknown interlopers of another, without recollecting the beautiful lines in Pope's pathetic elegy on an Unfortunate Lady—

So peaceful rests, without a stone, or name,
 What once had beauty, titles, wealth, and fame.
 How lov'd, how honour'd once, avails thee not,
 To whom related, or by whom begot;
 A heap of dust alone remains of thee,
 'TIS ALL THOU ART—AND ALL THE PROUD SHALL BE!

I beg to subscribe myself, &c.,

W. H. SMYTH.