



# The Berks, Bucks & Oxon Archæological Journal.

## Gossip of an Antiquary.

As I am writing everyone is looking forward to Christmas which, as Old Herrick sings, "sees December turned to May," and makes "the chilling winter's morn smile like a field beset with corn." We can echo Sir Walter Scott's lament over the decline of the ancient modes of celebrating the festival, and the time has long past since

"England was merry England, when  
Old Christmas brought his sports again;  
A Christmas gambol oft would cheer  
A poor man's heart through all the year."

The "Lord of Misrule" has been dead many years, and been decently buried, though when alive he did not always merit that epithet. The Yule-log is no longer drawn in state into the baron's hall, but we have still some fragments of ancient revels left. Our village youths are busy rehearsing the mummers' curious performance, a relic of the mediæval miracle-play of St. George and the Dragon. There is a curious old-world ring about the words

"I am St. George, that noble champion bold  
And with my trusty sword I won ten thousand pounds of gold;  
'Twas I that fought the fiery dragon, and brought him to the slaughter,  
And by these means I won the King of Egypt's daughter."

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Mummers have various names. In Cornwall they are known as "Geese dancers," a corruption of the Staffordshire "Guisers," evidently connected with the word *guise*, and Celtic *gwis*. The Sussex Mummers are called Tipteerers, and we have in Lincolnshire,

"Plough Bullocks." It would be a pity if this curious performance were allowed to die out, and the words which have been handed down by tradition for centuries entirely forgotten.

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Those who wish to know all about the Ancient Customs connected with Christmas should read a very exhaustive and seasonable book entitled *Christmas, its Origin and Associations*, by W. F. Dawson, (Elliot Stock). All that is known or can be known concerning the Festival and its observances has been collected by this omniverous recorder who is certainly enamoured of his subject. He tells of the great historical events connected with this season, its legendary lore, its picturesque customs and popular games. Here are found accounts of the primitive celebrations of the Nativity, ecclesiastical decisions fixing the date of the festival, the connection of Christmas with the festivals of the ancients, Christmas in times of persecution, Early celebrations in Britain, Stately Meetings of Saxon, Danish and Norman Kings, Christmas during the Wars of the Roses, under the Tudors, Stuarts and Georgian Monarchs, at the Colleges and Inns of Courts, and accounts of Christmas celebrations in different parts of the World. It is a noteworthy volume, and is moreover embellished with very numerous illustrations which add much to the attractions of this singularly interesting book.

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Mr. Compton Reade, whose name is familiar to the readers of this Journal, who comes of a Berkshire family and is well known as the author of *A Record of Redes*, has undertaken the stupendous task of writing a history of *the Smith family*. In introducing his book to the public the author says :—"I lay claim to be the first to produce a popular work of Genealogy. By 'popular' I mean one that rises superior to the limits of class or caste, and presents the lineage of the farmer or tradesman side by side with that of the nobleman or squire. Genealogy, a science which by rights should be the handmaid of History, will never escape the reproach of snob-bishness until it broadens downwards. The moral effect of an honest pedigree consists in the sense of balance it imparts. It makes good men better, and in obliterating the false pride that apes humility, raises its possessor to a due sense of his dignity, as a true citizen, having a personal and lasting interest in the sacred soil of our Mother England." The history of the Smith family records an ancient and honoured race, and the blood of the Smiths and Smyths

flows in the veins of a very considerable proportion of the Peerage and Baronetage. As regards antiquity, Professor Mahaffy tells us that there was in Egypt a man so named in the 20th year of the third Ptolemy, 227 B.C. Beside this other English names sink into insignificance as regards antiquity, and Mr. Reade tells us that had a perfect system of registration prevailed it would have been possible to prove that every other Englishman one meets has a strain of Smith blood in his veins.

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As early as 1433 we find the name of Smith or Smyth occupying a place among the gentry. At that time Berks and Bucks had no families of that name in the Visitations, but Oxon was rich in Smiths. In the "Domesday of Inclosures 1517-18," John Smith is mentioned as tenant of John Morys, at Compton, Berks, and that Richard Smyth owned 30 acres in Ludgershall, Bucks, while Thomas Smyth held lands in Cookham, under the Abbot of Reading. Smyth of Abingdon appears on the Herald's Visitation (1634), who was Usher to Queen Elizabeth and his son Richard was a great book collector and is mentioned in the Dictionary of National Biography. Want of space forbids me from diving deeper into this fascinating volume which contains so much that is interesting to a large number of readers who are in some way connected with the numerous branches of this wide-spread family. The author is endowed with the "saving grace of humour," which renders his narrative racy as well as instructive.

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The practice of inscribing houses with mottoes is a very pleasing one and has the merit of antiquarian custom. Hitherto there has been no collection of such inscriptions, and it was a happy thought which inspired Mrs. Caulfield to write her new volume on *House Mottoes and Inscriptions: Old and New (Elliot Stock)*. The volume, with some good illustrations, is an attractive one, and will doubtless lead many to follow the example of our forefathers, and carve or paint over their halls and doorways the pleasing welcome, quaint rhymes, or pious reflections which adorn many old houses. The records traced by hands long laid to rest, on public and private dwellings are touching revelations of human thought and personal feeling. There is, however, a grave fault in Mrs. Caulfield's book. Her Latin inscriptions and their so-called translations, are full of errors, and it would be a useful holiday task for a Public School boy to correct the mistakes which appear therein. If a second edition of

the work is called for, I would recommend the authoress to have the Latin mottoes thoroughly revised. For example, on page 24, *siti non ebrietate*, placed over a cellar door, is translated "sufficient not drunkenness," when of course it means *for thirst not for drunkenness*. Evidently the translator has confused *siti* for *satis*. On the same page *manquam* appears for *nunquam*. There is an amusing translation of the inscription on the Corn Exchange, Windsor, dated 1707 :

"Arte tua sculptor non est imitabilis Anna ;

Anna ; vis similam sculperere sculpe Deam,"

"which may be rendered into English" (says the author).

"In thine own art a sculptor, Anna is inimitable ;

Anna, if thou wilt one in sculpture, produce a goddess."

It certainly cannot be so rendered, as any Fifth Form boy could assure the lady. We puzzled over *Bonidesi derabilis* (pg. 96). Of course, it ought to be *Bonis desiderabilis*. The book however is full of interest, and many of my friends will doubtless be selecting mottoes to adorn their walls. Mrs. Caulfield has cast her net widely and collected examples from Italy, Germany, France, and other countries.

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Berkshire has a few mottoes. At Bere Court, Pangbourne, the country seat of the Abbots of Reading, there are several inscriptions, amongst which is the scroll issuing from the mouth of the portrait of Hugh Farringdon *In te domine speravi*. In Long Whittenham Church there is this inscription under the royal arms of Charles II.,

"Qui Leo de Juda est et Flos de Jesse liones

Protegat et flores, Carole magna, tuos."

referring to the heraldic insignia of the monarch. St. Mary's Church, Reading, has an old motto over its poor box : "1627, Remember the poore, and God wil bles thee and thy store." Sandleford Priory Church has this inscription :

"Lancea, crux, clavi, spina, mors quam toleravi\* :

Demonstrant qua vi miserorum crimina lavi.

In cruce sum pro te, qui peccas ; desine pro me ;

Desine ; do veniam ; dic culpum ; corrige vitam."

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In Oxfordshire there were inscribed beneath the sign-board of the "King's Head," at Collins End, between Hardwick House and Goring Heath, the following lines :

"Stop, traveller, stop ; in yonder peaceful glade

His favourite game the Royal Martyr played.

Here stripped of honours, children, freedom, rank,

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\* In the book the word is printed *tolerari* which is palpably an error.

Drank from the bowl and bowled for what he drank.  
Sought in a cheerful glass his cares to drown,  
And changed his guinea ere he lost his crown."

Charles I. is said to have ridden there from Caversham, where he was a prisoner, and diverted his thoughts by joining in a game of bowls.

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Buckinghamshire has one house, Harleyford, Marlow, which can boast of thirty-one mottoes. The following are perhaps the best :—

"If thou speakest evil of thy neighbour,  
Come not nigh the door of this house."  
"Peace on earth, goodwill towards *women*."

A noteworthy piece of advice anent the rules of good breeding, is found over another door :

"In waiting for a late guest, insult is offered to the punctual ones."  
The following gives a hint worth recording :  
"An obedient wife governs her husband."

Our authoress recommends this to the consideration of every young wife, and assures them that "to yield in the first instance is the most gracious and the surest way to conquer in the end." Husbands, beware !

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Every book-lover knows the *Book-lover's Library*, Edited by H. B. Wheatley and published by Elliot Stock. In it have appeared many useful works, which have taken their places as authorities on the subjects of which they treat ; some are valuable works of reference, while others have afforded entertaining reading on bookish subjects. I am glad to welcome a cheaper edition of this series, and no book-lover however small his purse, need be without his library. Vol. I. is by the Editor of the series, and tells *How to form a Library*, as few besides Mr. Wheatley can tell ; and Vol. II. by W. Carew Hazlitt, treats of *Old Cookery Books* which contain some amazing recipes ; but I must keep this volume in my most secret shelves lest my cook should discover it and try to prepare for me some wonderful dishes which even an antiquary would fail to relish.

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A very useful and interesting Handbook to Wellington College and its neighbourhood has been published by Mr. Thomas Hunt. I find graphic accounts by local antiquaries of Sandhurst, Finchampstead, Bramshill, Yateley, and Wokingham. Mr. Kempthorne traces well and accurately the Roman road, and the story of the origin and history of the College is well told.