

In Search of Gravestones Old and Curious eBook

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AN EARLY EXAMPLE AT HIGHAM

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3, *Widcombe*; 4, *Newhaven*; 5, *Lewes*

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PREFACE.

I am a Gravestone Rambler, and I beg you to bear me company.

This Book is not a Sermon. It is a lure to decoy other Ramblers, and the bait is something to ramble for. It also provides a fresh object for study.

Old-lore is an evergreen tree with many branches. This is a young shoot. It is part of an old theme, but is itself new.

Books about Tombs there are many, and volumes of Epitaphs by the hundred. But of the Common Gravestones—the quaint and curious, often grotesque, headstones of the churchyard—there is no record.

These gravestones belong to the past, and are hastening to decay. In one or two centuries none will survive unless they be in Museums. To preserve the counterfeit presentment of some which remain seems a duty.

Many may share the quest, but no one has yet come out to start. Let your servant shew the way.

I begin my book as I began my Rambles, and pursue as I have pursued.

William Thomas Vincent.

[Illustration: *Fig. 1. Newhaven.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 2. Newhaven.*]

IN SEARCH OF

GRAVESTONES

Old and curious.

CHAPTER I.

Old gravestones.

I was sauntering about the churchyard at Newhaven in Sussex, reading the inscriptions on the tombs, when my eyes fell upon a headstone somewhat elaborately carved. Although aged, it was in good preservation, and without much trouble I succeeded in

deciphering all the details and sketching the subject in my note-book. It is represented in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1—At Newhaven, Sussex.

The inscription below the design reads as follows:

“Here lyeth the remains of Andrew Brown,
who departed this life the 14th day of
January 1768, aged 66 years. Also of
Mary his wife, who departed this life the
3d day of July 1802, aged 88 years.”

This was the first time I had been struck by an allegorical gravestone of a pronounced character.

The subject scarcely needs to be interpreted, being obviously intended to illustrate the well-known passage in the Burial Service: “For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised ... then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in Victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” The reference in another ritual to the Lord of Life trampling the King of Terrors beneath his feet seems also to be indicated, and it will be noticed that the artist has employed a rather emphatic smile to portray triumph.

It was but natural to suppose that this work was the production of some local genius of the period, and I searched for other evidences of his skill. Not far away I found the next design, very nearly of the same date.



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Fig. 2.—At Newhaven, Sussex.

The words below were:

“To the memory of Thomas, the son of
Thomas and Ann Alderton, who departed
this life the 10th day of April 1767, in the
13th year of his age.”

The same artist almost of a certainty produced both of these figurative tombstones. The handicraft is similar, the idea in each is equally daring and grotesque, and the phraseology of the inscriptions is nearly identical. I thought both conceptions original and native to the place, but I do not think so now. In point of taste, the first, which is really second in order of date, is perhaps less questionable than the other. The hope of a joyful resurrection, however rudely displayed, may bring comfort to wounded hearts; but it is difficult to conceive the feelings of bereaved parents who could sanction the representation of a beloved boy, cut off in the brightest hour of life, confined and skeletoned in the grave!

[Illustration: *Fig. 3. Widcombe.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 4. Newhaven.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 5. Lewes.*]

Above the coffin on Alderton's headstone is an ornament, apparently palms. It is not unusual to find such meaningless, or apparently meaningless, designs employed to fill in otherwise blank spaces, though symbols of death, eternity, and the future state are in plentiful command for such purposes. Something like this same ornament may be found on a very old flat stone in the churchyard of Widcombe, near Bath. It stretches the full width of the stone, and is in high relief, which has preserved it long after the accompanying inscription has vanished. The probable date may be about 1650.

Fig. 3.—At Widcombe, near Bath.

In Newhaven Churchyard, though there are but these two striking examples of the allegorical gravestone, there is one other singular exemplification of the graver's skill and ingenuity, but it is nearly a score of years later in date than the others, and probably by another mason. It represents the old and extinct bridge over the Sussex Avon at Newhaven, and it honours a certain brewer of the town, whose brewery is still carried on there and is famous for its "Tipper" ale. Allowing that it was carved by a different workman, it is only fair to suppose that it may have been suggested by its predecessors. Its originality is beyond all question, which can very rarely be said of an

old gravestone, and, as a churchyard record of a local institution, I have never seen it equalled or approached.

Fig. 4.—At Newhaven, Sussex.

Under the design is the following inscription:

“To the Memory of Thomas Tipper, who
departed this life May y'e 14th, 1785, Aged
54 Years.

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“Reader, with kind regard this *grave* survey
Nor heedless pass where *tipper’s* ashes lay.
Honest he was, ingenuous, blunt, and kind;
And dared do, what few dare do, speak his mind.
Philosophy and *History* well he knew,
Was versed in *PHYSICK* and in *Surgery* too.
The best old *stingo* he both brewed and sold,
Nor did one knavish act to get his Gold.
He played through *Life* a varied comic part,
And knew immortal *HUDIBRAS* by heart.
Reader, in real truth, such was the Man,
Be better, wiser, laugh more if you can.”

That these were all the especial eccentricities of this burial-place disappointed me, but, with my after-knowledge, may say that three such choice specimens from one enclosure is a very liberal allowance.

Suspecting that sculptors of the quality necessary for such high-class work would be unlikely to dwell in a small and unimportant fisher-village such as Newhaven was in the middle of the eighteenth century, I went over to Lewes, the county town being only seven miles by railway. But I found nothing to shew that Lewes was the seat of so much skill, and I have since failed to discover the source in Brighton or any other adjacent town. Indeed, it may be said at once that large towns are the most unlikely of all places in which to find peculiar gravestones. At Lewes, however, I lighted on one novelty somewhat to my purpose, and, although a comparatively simple illustration, it is not without its merits, and I was glad to add it to my small collection. The mattock and spade are realistic of the grave; the open book proclaims the promise of the heaven beyond.

[Illustration: *Fig. 6. Plumstead.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 7. Dartford.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 8. Dartford.*]

FIG. 5.—AT LEWES.

“To Samuel Earnes, died May 6th, 1757, aged 21 years.”

The coincidence of date would almost warrant a belief that this piece of imagery may have emanated from the same brain and been executed by the same hands as are accountable for the two which we have seen seven miles away, but the workmanship is

really not in the least alike, and I have learnt almost to discard in this connection the theory of local idiosyncrasies. Even when we find, as we do find, similar, and almost identical, designs in neighbouring churchyards, or in the same churchyard, it is safer to conjecture that a meaner sculptor has copied the earlier work than that the first designer would weaken his inventive character by a replication. The following, which cannot be described as less than a distortion of a worthier model, is to be found in many places, and in such abundance as to suggest a wholesale manufacture.

Fig. 6.—At Plumstead, Kent.

“To Elizabeth Bennett, died 1781, aged 53 years.”

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It is obvious that the idea intended to be represented is figurative of death in infancy or childhood, and illustrates the well-known words of the Saviour, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God," quoted on the stone itself. In this and many similar cases in which the design and text are used for old or elderly people, they have been certainly strained from their true significance. The figure of a little child is, however, employed occasionally to represent the soul, and may also be taken to indicate the "new birth."

There is an almost exact reproduction of the foregoing example in the same churchyard, even more remarkably at variance with Scriptural interpretation.

It is dedicated

"To John Clark, died 1793, aged 62 years;
and Rebecca his wife, died 1794, aged 61
years."

The inscription adds:

"What manner of persons these were the last
day will discover."

Gravestone plagiarism of this sort is very common, and there is to be found at West Ham, Essex, the same symbolical flight of the angel and child repeated as many as five times.

The pilfering is not so weak and lamentable when the copyist appropriates merely the idea and works it out in a new fashion. The term new can hardly be attributed to the notion of a plucked flower as a type of death, but it occurs in so many varieties as almost to redeem its conventionality.

The sculptor of a stone which is in Dartford burial-ground probably had the suggestion from a predecessor.

Fig. 7.—At Dartford.

"To James Terry, died 1755, aged 31 years."

But not far from it in the same burial-ground, which is really a cemetery separated from the parish church, and one of the oldest cemeteries in England, is another imitation quite differently brought out, but in principle essentially the same.

Fig. 8.—At Dartford.

"To....Callow, died....1794...."



At the churchyard of Stone (or Greenhithe), two or three miles from Dartford, both these floral emblems are reproduced with strict fidelity.

This first chapter and the sketches which illustrate it will serve to introduce and explain my work and its scope.

In pursuing my investigations it was soon evident that the period of the allegorical gravestone was confined sharply and almost exclusively to the eighteenth century. I have seldom met one earlier than 1700, and those subsequent to 1800 are very rare. Of gravestones generally it may almost be said that specimens of seventeenth-century date are exceedingly few. There are reasons for this, as will afterwards appear. But the endurance even of the longest-lived of all the old memorials cannot be very much longer extended, and this may be my excuse for preserving and perpetuating the features of some of them as a not uninteresting

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phase of the vanishing past. I do not claim for my subject any great importance, but present it as one of the small contributions which make up history. One other plea I may urge in my defence. This is a branch of study which, so far as I can ascertain, has been quite neglected. There are books by the score dealing with the marble, alabaster, and other tombs within the churches, there are books of epitaphs and elegies by the hundred, and there are meditations among the graves sufficient to satisfy the most devout and exacting of readers, but the simple gravestone of the churchyard as an object of sculptured interest has I believe found hitherto no student and is still looking for its historian.

CHAPTER II.

The evolution of gravestones.

Although there may be no expectation of discovering the germ of the pictorial or allegorical gravestone, a section of the samples collected for this essay may be displayed to shew the earlier forms in which the ruder class of masons prepared their sculptured monuments for the churchyard. There is little doubt that the practice originated in an endeavour to imitate on the common gravestone the nobler memorials of the churches and cathedrals, the effort being more or less successful in proportion to the individual skill of the artist. The influence of locality, however, must always be a factor in this consideration; for, as a rule, it will be found that the poorest examples come from essentially secluded places, while localities of earlier enlightenment furnish really admirable work of much prior date. Take, for instance, that most frequent emblem, the skull. I have not sought for the model by which the village sculptor worked, but I have in my note-book this sketch of a skull, copied from a sixteenth-century tomb at Frankfort on the Maine, and there are doubtless a vast number equal to it in English cathedrals and churches of the same period.

Fig. 9.—At Frankfort, Germany.

Regarding this as our ideal, the primitive work which we find in rural localities must be pronounced degenerated art. Generally speaking we may assume that the carver of the stately tomb within the church had no hand in the execution of the outer gravestone; but that quite early there were able masons employed upon the decoration of the churchyard headstone is shewn in many instances, of which the one presented in Fig. 10 may serve as a very early specimen.

Fig. 10.—At East Wickham.



“To Eliza and Lydia, the two wives of Anthony Neighbours, died 18th Nov. 1675 and 11th March 1702.”

The dates are remarkable in connection with such an elaborate work. East Wickham is little more than a village even now, and this carving is very creditable in comparison with other attempts of the same early period; but the high road from London to Dover runs through the parish, and may have carried early cultivation into the district. All the rougher illustrations which I have found have been in remote and isolated spots, or spots that were remote and isolated when the stones were set up. The first of these which I discovered was in the little churchyard of Ridley in Kent, “far from the haunts of men.”

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Fig. 11.—At Ridley.

“To the three sons of Will. Deane, died 1704,
1707, and 1709, aged 2 weeks, 2 years,
and 5 years.”

It is difficult to believe that the face here delineated was meant to represent a skull, and yet, judging by the many equally and more absurd figures which I have since met with, there is little doubt that a skull was intended by the engraver, for this and all others of the class are incised, simply scratched or cut into the stone; nothing so poor in drawing have I ever found which has risen to the eminence of relief. It may, of course, be also surmised that the face here cut into the stone is meant for a portrait or to represent an angelic being. The radial lines may have been intended for a halo of glory or a frilled cap, but, as will be seen by comparison, the whole thing is easily to be classed with the skull series.

[Illustration: *Fig. 9. Frankfort.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 10. East Wickham.*]

It will be noticed that we have in this instance a form of headstone differing materially from those of later times, and wherever we find the rude *incised* figure we nearly always have the stone of this shape. Such homely memorials are distinguished in nearly every instance by dwarfishness and clumsiness. They are seldom more than 2 feet in height, and are often found to measure from 5 inches to 7 inches in thickness. A prolific field for them is the great marshland forming the Hundred of Hoo, below Gravesend, the scene of many incidents in the tale by Charles Dickens of “Great Expectations.” It is called by the natives “the Dickens country,” for the great author dwelt on the hilly verge of it and knew it well. The Frontispiece shews the general view of one of these old stones at Higham, in the Hoo district.

FRONTISPIECE.—AT HIGHAM.

“To Philip Hawes, died June 24, 1733, aged
19 years.”

In this case the top space is occupied, not by a head or skull, but by two hearts meeting at their points—a not unusual illustration.

At Hoo is one of the coarsest exemplifications of masonic incompetency I have ever encountered.



FIG. 12.—AT HOO, NEAR ROCHESTER

“To Robert Scott, Yeoman, died 24 Dec. 1677,
aged 70 years.”

The nimbus or nightcap again appears as in the Ridley specimen, but, whatever it be, the teeth are undoubtedly the teeth of the skeleton head.

This stone has another claim to our notice beyond the inartistic design. It marks one of the very rare efforts in this direction of the seventeenth century.

The prevalent shape of these old memorials and their almost contemporary dates seem to indicate a fashion of the period, but they are met with in other places of various conformations. There is one at Erith almost square-headed, only 2 feet high, 1 foot 6 inches wide, and 7 inches thick.



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Fig. 13.—At erith.

It may be noted that this also is of the seventeenth century, and the mode of describing John Green's age is, I think, unique.

High Halstow is a neighbour of Hoo, and has only of late been penetrated by the railway to Port Victoria.

From High Halstow we have another curious and almost heathenish specimen, in which we see the crossbones as an addition to the "skull," if "skull" it can be considered, with its eyes, eyebrows, and "cheeks."

[Illustration: *Fig. 11. Ridley.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 12. Hoo.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 13. Erith.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 14. High Halstow.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 15. Frindsbury.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 16. Higham.*]

Fig. 14.—At high Halstow.

"To Susan Barber." The date is buried, but there is a similar stone close by dated 1699.

Nearer Rochester, at Frindsbury, there is the next illustration, still like a mask rather than a death's head, but making its purpose clear by the two bones, such as are nearly always employed in more recent productions.

Fig. 15.—At Frindsbury.

"To William David Jones, died 1721."

There is, however, another at Higham of about the same date, in which, supposing a skull to be intended, the inspiration of the bones appears not to have caught the artist. The portrait theory may possibly better fit this case.

Fig. 16.—At Higham.

"To Mr Wm Boghurst, died 5th of April 1720, aged 65."



That some of the carvings were meant for portraits cannot be denied, and, in order to shew them with unimpeachable accuracy, I have taken rubbings off a few and present an untouched photograph of them just as I rubbed them off the stones (Fig. 17). The whole of the originals are to be found in the neighbouring churchyards of Shorne and Chalk, two rural parishes on the Rochester Road, and exhibit with all the fidelity possible the craftsmanship of the village sculptors. They will doubtless also excite some speculation as to their meaning. My belief, as already expressed, is that the uppermost four are the embodiment of the rustic yearning for the ideal; in other words, attempts to represent the emblem of death—the skull. Nos. 1 and 2 are from Shorne; Nos. 3, 4, and 5 from the churchyard at Chalk.

In No. 1 we have, perhaps, the crudest conception extant of the skeleton head. The lower bars are probably meant for teeth; what the radial lines on the crown are supposed to be is again conjecture. Perhaps a nimbus, perhaps hair or a cap, or merely an ornamental finish. The inscription states that the stone was erected to the memory of “Thomas Vdall,” who died in 1704, aged 63 years.

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No. 2 has the inscription buried, but it is of about the same date, judging by its general appearance. The strange feature in this case is the zig-zag “toothing” which is employed to represent the jaws. Doubtless the artist thought that anything he might have lost in accuracy he regained in the picturesque.

No. 3, in which part of the inscription “Here lyeth” intrudes into the arch belonging by right to the illustration, is equally primitive and artless. The eyebrows, cheeks—in fact all the features—are evidently unassisted studies from the living, not the dead, frontispiece of humanity; but what are the serifs, or projections, on either side? Wondrous as it is, there can be only one answer. They must be meant for *ears*! This curious effigy commemorates Mary, wife of William Greenhill, who died in 1717, aged 47 years.

No. 4 is one of the rude efforts to imitate the skull and crossbones of which we find many examples. It is dedicated to one Grinhill (probably a kinsman of the Greenhills aforesaid), who died in 1720, aged 56 years.

Most strange of all is No. 5, in which the mason leaps to the real from the emblematic, and gives us something which is evidently meant for a portrait of the departed. The stone records that Mary, wife of Thomas Jackson, died in 1730, aged 43 years. It is one of the double tombstones frequently met with in Kent and some other counties. The second half, which is headed by a picture of two united hearts, records that the widower Thomas Jackson followed his spouse in 1748, aged 55 years.

Upon a stone adjacent, to Mary London, who died in 1731, there has been another portrait of a lady with braided hair, but time has almost obliterated it. I mention the circumstance to shew that this special department of obituary masonry, as all others, was prone to imitations. I may also remark that intelligent inhabitants and constant frequenters of these two churchyards have informed me that in all the hundreds of times of passing these stones they never observed any of their peculiarities. It ought, however, to be said that these primitive carvings or scratchings are not often conspicuous, and generally require some seeking. They are always on a small scale of drawing, in nearly every instance within the diminished curve of the most antiquated form of headstone (such as is shewn in the Frontispiece), and as a rule they are overgrown with lichen, which has to be rubbed off before the lines are visible. It may safely be averred, on the other hand, that the majority of the old stones when found of this shape contain or have contained these remarkable figures, and in some places, particularly in Kent, they literally swarm. There is a numerous assortment of them at Meopham, a once remote hamlet, now a station on the London, Chatham, and Dover Railway. I have copied only one—an early attempt apparently to produce a cherub resting with outstretched wings upon a cloud, but there are a good many of the same order to keep it in countenance.



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Fig. 18.—At Meopham.

“To Sarah Edmeades, died 1728, aged 35 years.”

In the churchyards of Hawkhurst, Benenden, Bodiam, Cranbrook, Goudhurst, and all through the Great Weald these incised stones are to be discovered by hundreds, very much of one type perhaps, but displaying nevertheless some extraordinary variations. I know of no district so fruitful of these examples as the Weald of Kent.

Even when the rude system of cutting into the stone ceased to be practised and relief carving became general, grossness of idea seems to have survived in many rural parishes. One specimen is to be seen in the churchyard of Stanstead in Kent, and is, for relief work, childish.

FIG. 19.—AT STANSTEAD.

“To William Lock, died 1751, aged 16 years.”

However, the vast number of gravestones carved in relief are, on the whole, creditable, especially if we consider the difficulty which met the workmen in having to avoid giving to their crossbones and other ornaments the appearance of horns growing out of their skulls.

[Illustration: *Fig. 18. Meopham.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 19. Stanstead.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 20. Old Romney.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 21. Crayford.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 22. Shoreham.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 23. Lewisham.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 24. HOBNSEY.*]

Fig. 20.—At old Romney.

“To William Dowll, died 1710, aged 40 years.”

The winged skull probably typifies flight above.

Fig. 21.—At Crayford.



“To John Farrington, died Dec. 8, 1717, aged above forty years.”

In the appropriate design from Shoreham the same idea is better conveyed both by the winged head and by the torch, which when elevated signifies the rising sun, and when depressed the setting sun. The trumpet in this case would seem to mean the summons. The two little coffins are eloquent without words.

Fig. 22.—At Shoreham.

“The children of Thomas and Jane Stringer, died Sept'r 1754, aged 10 and 7 years.”

In Lewisham Churchyard is one of the death's head series almost *sui generis*.

Fig. 23.—At Lewisham.

“To Richard Evens, died May 18, 1707, aged 67 years.”

The chaplet of bay-leaves or laurel doubtless indicates “Victory.” Not only is this an early and well-accomplished effort, but it is remarkable for the presence of a lower jaw, which is seldom seen on a gravestone. The skull turned up by the sexton is usually the typical object, and to that we may presume the nether jaw is not often attached. It is found, however, on a headstone of a somewhat weak design in Old Hornsey Churchyard.



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Fig. 24.—At Hornsey.

“To Mr John Gibson, whipmaker, died Oct.
30, 1766, aged 44 years.”

The hand seems to be pointing to the record of a well-spent life which has won the crown of glory.

There is another of the lower jaw series at Teddington, which is also, in all probability, the only instance of a man's nightcap figuring in such gruesome circumstances.

Fig. 25.—At Teddington.

“To Sarah Lewis, died June 11, 1766, aged
63 years.”

The emblem of Death was quite early crowned with laurel to signify glory, and associated with foliage and flowers in token of the Resurrection. One at Finchley is, for its years, well preserved.

Fig. 26.—At Finchley.

“To Richard Scarlett, died July 23, 1725.”

Another at Farnborough is, considering the date, of exceptional merit.

Fig. 27.—At Farnborough.

“To Elizabeth Stow, died 1744, aged 75 years.”

[Illustration: *Fig. 25. Teddington.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 26. Finchley.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 27. Farnborough.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 28. Chiselhurst.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 29. Hartley.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 30. West Wickham.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 31. Hornsey.*]

A few others of the skull pattern with various additaments may conclude this chapter. The cup in the Chiselhurst case is somewhat uncommon.



Fig. 28.—At Chiselhurst.

Name obliterated; date Nov. 1786.

The conventional symbols in the next example are clearly to be read.

Fig. 29.—At Hartley.

“To Eliza Andersen, died 1771, aged 70 years.”

The West Wickham specimen has its prototype in the old churchyard at Hackney, and in other places.

Fig. 30.—At west Wickham.

“To Richard Whiffen, died 1732, aged 3 years.”

In Fig. 31, from Hornsey, the two skulls present the appearance of having been pitched up from the grave.

Fig. 31.—At Hornsey.

“To William Fleetwood, died Jan. 30, 1750, aged 15 months.”

CHAPTER III.

Artistic gravestones.

In the later half of the eighteenth century greater pains and finer workmanship appear to have been bestowed upon the symbolic figurement of the gravestone, and the more elaborate allegorical representations of which a few sketches have been given came into vogue and grew in popular favour until the century's end. Nor did the opening of a new century altogether abolish the fashion; perhaps it can hardly be said

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to have been abolished even now at the century's close, but the evidences extant combine to shew that the flourishing period of the pictorial headstone lay well within the twenty-five years preceding Anno Domini 1800. For the sake of comparison one with another, I have taken, in addition to the sketch at page 1 (Fig. 1), three examples of the device which seems most frequently to typify the resurrection of the dead. In two of these the illustration is accompanied by a quotation explanatory of its subject, but the words are not the same in both cases. The stone at Horton Kirby, near Dartford, depicted in Fig. 32, shews the inscription clearly.

Fig. 32.—At Horton Kirby.

“To John Davidge. died April 22, 1775, aged 75 years.”

[Illustration: *Fig. 32. Horton Kirby.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 33. Cliffe.*]

In the second instance, at Cliffe, the inscription has been in great part obliterated by time, but the words written were evidently those of the chapter from Corinthians which is part of the Burial Service: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” They are, however, almost illegible, and I have made no attempt to reproduce them in the picture.

Fig. 33.—At Cliffe.

“To Mary Jackson, died March 26, 1768.”

There is a second stone of similar pattern in Cliffe Churchyard, dated 1790. It differs from the foregoing only in having the spear broken. The sculptor of another specimen at Darenth, near Dartford, thought the subject worthy of broader treatment, and transferred it to a stone about double the ordinary width, but did not vary the idea to any great extent. Indeed, Horton Kirby and Darenth, being next-door neighbours, have most features in common; the falling tower, which symbolizes the Day of Judgment, appearing in both, while it is absent from the more distant examples at Cliffe and Newhaven. The introduction of the omniscient eye in the Cliffe case is, however, a stroke of genius compared with the conventional palm branches at Horton Kirby, or the flight through mid-air of the tower-tops both at Horton Kirby and at Darenth.

Fig. 34.—At Darenth.

“To John Millen, died June 11th, 1786, aged 82 years.”



Outside the county of Kent I have met with nothing of this pattern, and pictorial art on a similar scale is seldom seen on the gravestones anywhere. Specimens from Lee, Cheshunt, Stapleford Tawney, and elsewhere, will, however, be seen in subsequent pages.

The day of joyful resurrection is prefigured possibly in more acceptable shape in the next instance, no imitation of which I have seen in any of my rambles.

Fig. 35.—At Kingsdown.

“To Ann Charman, died 1793, aged 54 years.”

No one to whom I have shewn this sketch has given a satisfactory interpretation of it, but it will be allowed that the design is as graceful as it is uncommon. That it also in all likelihood refers to the Day of Judgment may perhaps be regarded as a natural supposition.



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Even the open or half-open coffin, shewing the skeleton within, may possibly have some reference to the rising at the Last Day. We have this figure employed in a comparatively recent case at Fawkham in Kent, being one example of nineteenth-century sculpture.

Fig. 36.—At Fawkham.

“Thomas Killick, died 1809, aged 1 month
1 day.”

A crown is usually the emblem of Victory, but held in the hand, as in this instance, it indicates, I am told, an innocent life.

Other coffins displaying wholly or partly the corpse or skeleton within are perhaps not intended to convey any such pious or poetic thought as do the two foregoing, but simply to pourtray the ghastliness of death, a kind of imagery much fancied by the old stonemasons.

[Illustration: *Fig. 34. Darenth.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 35. Kingsdown.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 36. Fawkham.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 37. Swanscombe.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 38. Ashford.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 39. Cooling.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 40. Hendon.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 41. East Wickham.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 42. Snargate.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 43. East Ham.*]

Fig. 37.—At Swanscombe.

“To Elizabeth Hall, died 1779, aged 76 years.”

Fig. 38.—At Ashford.

“To Stephen Kennedy, died Sept. 1791, aged
61 years.”



In the latter illustration there are three stars to which I can give no signification. The snake-ring is, of course, eternity, and the book, as before surmised, may stand for the record of a good life.

More ingenious, more didactic, and altogether more meritorious than these is another series of designs belonging to the same period of time. They are not only as a rule conceived in better taste, but are, almost consequently, better in their execution. The following example from Cooling, a small village in the Medway Marshes, is an excellent specimen of its class, and a very exceptional “find” for a spot so remote.

Fig. 39.—At cooling.

“To M’r Richard Prebble of Cliffe, died April 1775.”

One of later date at Hendon, Middlesex, is also to be commended. The lyre, cornet, and tambourine speak of music, and the figures of Fame and Hope are hardly to be misunderstood, but the large box in the background is not quite certain of correct interpretation.

Fig. 40.—At Hendon.

“To Ludwig August Leakfield, Esq., died Nov. 22, 1810, aged 48 years.”

The following is rougher in form, but seems to have suffered from the weather. It needs no explanation.

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Fig. 41.—At East Wickham.

“To Thomas Vere of Woolwich, shipwright,
died 10th August, 1789.”

The two next subjects are to be found in many variations. The angel with the cross in each case may represent salvation proclaimed.

Fig. 42.—At Snargate.

“To Edward Wood, died Sept. 1779, aged
50 years.”

Fig. 43.—At East Ham.

“To Mr Richard Wright, died July 28, 1781,
aged 39 years.”

The winged scroll in Fig. 44 is unfolded to display, we may suppose, a register of good and holy deeds done in an extended life. The scythes and the reversed torches may be taken at their usual significance, which is death. This is copied from a stone in the churchyard of Wilmington by Dartford Heath.

[Illustration: *Fig. 44. Wilmington.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 45. Wanstead.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 46. Southfleet.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 47. Wilmington.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 48. Lewisham.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 49. Bunhill fields.*]

Fig. 44.—At Wilmington.

“To Richard Barman, died 1793, aged 71 years.”

More elegant testimony is paid by the figure of a winged urn in Wanstead Old Churchyard, the flame which burns above indicating, it would seem, that though the body be reduced to ashes, the soul survives.

Fig. 45.—At Wanstead.



“To William Cleverly, died 1780, aged 40 years.”

Eternity is usually, as we have seen, represented by an endless ring—often as a serpent. It is so in the Southfleet sketch, in which appear the two horns of the archangels, and the living torch, with some other objects which are not quite clearly defined.

Fig. 46.—At Southfleet.

“To John Palmer, died 1781, aged 61 years.”

In another selection from Wilmington the winged hour-glass may be read as the flight of time, the cloud is probably the future life, and the bones below convey their customary moral.

Fig. 47.—At Wilmington.

“To Ann Parsons, died Nov. 3, 1777, aged 60 years.”

Sometimes, but not often, will be found engraved on a stone the suggestive fancy of an axe laid at the foot of a tree, or some metaphorical figure to the same intent. An instance occurs at Lewisham in which the idea is conveyed by the pick and shovel under a flourishing palm.

Fig. 48.—At Lewisham.

“To Thomas Lambert, died Nov. 25, 1781, aged 59 years.”

A symbol so simple and yet so significant as this is scarcely to be surpassed. One almost in the same category is the following, a small anaglyph in Bunhill Fields Burial-ground, London.



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Fig. 49.—At Bunhill fields, London.

“To Elizabeth Sharp, who died Oct. 20, 1752,
aged 31 years.”

It is easy to read in this illustration the parable of death destroying a fruitful vine, and as a picture it is not inelegant. It is more remarkable as being, so far as I can find, the one solitary instance of an allegorical gravestone among the thousands of gravestones in the vast and carefully guarded burial-place in the City Road. Strictly speaking, death's heads and crossbones are allegorical, but these must be excepted for their very abundance and their lack of novelty. Possibly, also, the lichen, damp, and London climate, which have obliterated many of the inscriptions in this old cemetery, may have been fatal to the low relief which is requisite for figure work of the kind under consideration. But Bunhill Fields and similar places in and near London and other great towns have taught me the law to which I have already referred—the law that the picture-tombstone was country bred, and could never have endured under the modern conditions of life in or near the centres of civilization.

There are exceptions, perhaps many, to this ruling, as there are exceptions to every other. For instance, a stone at the grave of a Royal Artillery Officer in Woolwich Churchyard combines the emblems of his earthly calling with those of his celestial aspirations in a medley arrangement not unusual in rural scenes, but hardly to be reconciled with the education and refinement of a large garrison and school of military science which Woolwich was in 1760. This must be set down as one of the exceptions which prove the rule.

Fig. 50.—At Woolwich.

“To Lieut. Thomas Sanders, late of the Royal
Regiment of Artillery, who died March
1760, aged 60 (?) years.”

There is a more recent case in which the same idea is portrayed in somewhat different fashion on a headstone in the obsolete graveyard of St. Oswald, near the Barracks at York. It is dedicated to John Kay, a private in the Royal Scots Greys, who died July 9, 1833, aged 34 years.

But, on the whole, it may be accepted as an axiom that originality has shunned the town churchyards, and the absence of curious varieties of the gravestone among the well-sown acres of Bunhill Fields and such-like places of the period at which they were by comparison so abundant in less considered localities admits of a simple explanation.

In the eighteenth century town and country were much more divided than they are now. London and the rural districts were not on their present level. Taste in art and in the



ordinary affairs of life was being cultivated in town; it was not even encouraged in the country. Education and refinement were not thought to be desirable accomplishments in a rustic population, but dwellers in cities had been for generations improving their manners, and thus it was that no such provincial vulgarity as a decorated tombstone could be tolerated in the choice metropolis.

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The clergy were always the masters in such matters, and their influence is seen in many places, even in the villages, in keeping the churchyard free from ridicule; but, broadly speaking, there is no doubt that the rectors and vicars in London and other large cities began quite a hundred years earlier than those of the villages that control and supervision over the carving and inscriptions on the tombstone which is now the almost universal rule. It was unquestionably the adoption of this practice by the country parson, late in the eighteenth century or early in the nineteenth century, that put an end in rural places to the “period” of illustrated epitaphs which had long gone out of fashion, or, more likely, had never come into being, among the busier hives of humanity.

A rare variety of the cloud-and-angel series, which are so frequent, is seen in Longfield Churchyard on the Maidstone Road. Trumpets of the speaking or musical order are frequently introduced to typify the summons to resurrection, but here we have the listener portrayed by the introduction of an ear-trumpet.

[Illustration: *Fig. 50. Woolwich.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 51. Longfield.*]

Fig. 51.—At Longfield.

“To Mary Davidge, died 1772, aged 69 years.”

Allegorical gravestones of recent date, that is of the time which we call the present day, are very seldom seen, and such as there are do not come within the scope of this work. There is one in West Wickham Churchyard devoted to a chorister, and sculptured with a representation of the church organ-pipes. Memorials to deceased Freemasons are perhaps the most frequent of late carvings, as in the sketch from Lydd in the Romney Marsh district.

Fig. 52.—At Lydd.

“To John Finn, died June 9th, 1813, aged 30 years.”

Occasionally, too, some plain device appears on even a modern headstone, such as the following, which is one of the few I have from the London area. The graves of the same half-century may be searched without finding many carvings more ambitious than this.

Fig. 53.—At st. JAMES’S, bermondsey.

“To Charles Thomas Henry Evans, died 1849.”

Churchyards beside the Upper Thames are nearly all prolific in old gravestones, the riparian settlements having been well populated during the favourable period. This is especially the case at Richmond and Twickenham, but of the great number of



eighteenth-century stones in both churchyards there are few very remarkable. Richmond has a rare specimen of the *full-relief* skull. The death's head has on either side of it the head of an angel in half-relief. The stone is a double one, and I have never met its fellow.

Fig. 54.—At Richmond.

“To Annie Smedley (?), died 1711, aged 90 years.”



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As companions to this I present a pair of dwarf stones with full-relief heads of seraphs and cherubs—an agreeable change—from the same county.

Fig. 55.—At Ripley.

“To Sarah wife of Henry Bower, died 1741.
To Henry Bower, died March 23rd, 1758.”

The Rector of the parish passed as I was sketching these interesting objects, and was surprised to find that he had anything so unusual in his churchyard.

[Illustration: *Fig. 52. Lydd.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 53. Bermondsey.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 54. Richmond.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 55. Ripley.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 56. Cobham.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 57. Barnes.*]

CHAPTER IV.

Professional gravestones.

It is more than likely that somewhere will be found a pictorial accompaniment to the verse which has been often used as an epitaph for a village blacksmith. I have met with the lines in two or three versions, of which the following, copied in the churchyard at Aberystwith, appears to be the most complete:

“My sledge and hammer lie reclined;
My bellows too have lost their wind;
My fire extinct, my forge decay’d,
And in the dust my vice is laid.
My coal is spent, my iron’s gone;
My nails are drove, my worck is done.”

There are many instances in which the implements of his craft are depicted upon an artizan’s tomb; these also for the most part being of the eighteenth century. In the churchyard at Cobham, a village made famous by the Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club, is a gravestone recording the death of a carpenter, having at the head a shield bearing three compasses to serve as his crest, and under it the usual tools of his



trade—square, mallet, compasses, wedge, saw, chisel, hammer, gimlet, plane, and two-foot rule.

Fig. 56.—At Cobham, Kent.

“To Richard Gransden, carpenter, died 13th March, 1760.”

This one may serve as a fair sample of all the trade memorials to which carpenters have been, before all classes of mechanics, the most prone. The carvings bear the same strong resemblance to each other that we find in other series of gravestones, but have occasional variations, as in the following specimen, which mixes up somewhat grotesquely the emblems of death and eternity with the mundane instruments of skill and labour, including therein a coffin lid to shew maybe that the man, besides being a carpenter, was also an undertaker.

Fig. 57.—At Barnes.

“To Henry Mitchell, died 1724, aged 72 years.”

It was only to be expected that the prominent agriculturists of rural districts would be figuratively represented on their gravestones, and this will be found to be the case in a number of instances. The following illustration is from the churchyard of Frindsbury, a short distance out of Rochester and on the edge of the Medway meadows.



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Fig. 58.—At Frindsbury.

The inscription is effaced, but the date appears to be 1751.

The overturned sheaf presumably refers metaphorically to the fate of the farmer whom the stone was set up to commemorate. The old-fashioned plough is cut only in single profile, but is not an ineffective emblem. I imagine that the ribbon above the plough bore at one time some inscribed words which time has obliterated.

[Illustration: *Fig. 58. Frindsbury.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 59. Sutton at Hone.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 60. Bromley.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 61. Beckenham.*]

The design invented by the sculptor at Sutton at Hone, near Dartford, is less original and also less striking.

Fig. 59.—At Sutton at Hone.

“To Richard Northfield, died Oct. 19, 1767, aged 71 years.”

In the case of John Bone, bricklayer, of Bromley, Kent, it would probably be wrong to associate with his calling the tools engraved on his headstone. They were probably meant with the rest of the picture to represent the emblems of mortality.

Fig. 60.—At Bromley.

“To John Bone, Bricklayer, died Dec. 14, 1794, aged 48 years.”

There is, however, one stone which may be included in the category of trade memorials, though its subject was not a mechanic. Mr. John Cade was a schoolmaster at Beckenham, and appears to have been well liked by his pupils, who, when he prematurely died, placed a complimentary epitaph over his grave. The means by which he had imparted knowledge are displayed upon the stone, and below are the lines hereinafter set forth.

Fig. 61.—At Beckenham.



“To the memory of John Cade, of this parish, schoolmaster. One skilled in his profession and of extensive ingenuity. As he lived universally beloved, so he died as much lamented, August 28th, 1750, aged 35 years. Several of his scholars, moved by affection and gratitude, at their own expense erected this in remembrance of his worth and merit.

“Virtue, good nature, learning, all combined
To render him belov’d of human kind.”

Greenford, near Harrow-on-the-Hill, had quite recently a worthy inhabitant who was a gardener and presumably a beekeeper also. Accordingly a beehive appropriately decorates his gravestone.

Fig. 62.—At Greenford.

“To William King, upwards of 60 years
gardener of this parish, died Dec. 16th,
1863, aged 84 years.”



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The next problem is rather more doubtful, and in considering the possibility of the memorial indicated being “professional,” we must remember that the parish of West Ham, now a populous place, was quite out of town and almost undiscovered until a comparatively recent time. Its eighteenth-century gravestones are consequently for the most part rustic and primitive. The skull and other bones here depicted, decked with wheat-ears and other vegetation, probably have some literal reference to the agricultural pursuits of the deceased, although of course they may be only poetical allusions to the life to come.

Fig. 63.—At west Ham.

“To Andrew James, died 1754, aged 68 years.”

CHAPTER V.

A typical tramp in Kent.

This unpretentious work makes no claim to deal with the whole subject which it has presumed to open. Its aim is rather to promote in others the desire which actuates the author to follow up and develop the new field of antiquarian research which it has attempted to introduce. As old Weever says, in his quaint style:—“I have gained as much as I have looke for if I shall draw others into this argument whose inquisitive diligence and learning may finde out more and amende mine.”

This book, then, is not a treatise, but simply a first collection of churchyard curiosities, the greater number of which have been gathered within a comparatively small radius. It is only the hoard of one collector and the contents of one sketch-book, all gleaned in about a hundred parishes. Many collectors may multiply by thousands these results, bring out fresh features, and possibly points of high importance.

Two chief purposes therefore animate my desire to publish this work. One is to supply such little information as I have gleaned on a subject which has by some singular chance escaped especial recognition from all the multitude of authors, antiquarians, and literary men. I have searched the Museum libraries, and consulted book-collectors, well-read archaeologists, and others likely to know if there is any work descriptive of old gravestones in existence, and nothing with the remotest relation thereto can I discover. [1] There are, of course, hundreds of books of epitaphs, more or less apocryphal, but not one book, apocryphal or otherwise, regarding the allegories of the churchyard. Can it be that the subject is bereft of interest? If so, I have made my venture in vain. But I trust that it is not so.

[Footnote 1: The Rev. Charles Boutell published, in 1849, parts 1 and 2 of a periodical work entitled “Christian Monuments in England and Wales,” proposing to complete the

same in five sections; the fifth to treat of headstones and other churchyard memorials, with some general observations on modern monuments. The two parts brought the subject down to the fifteenth century, and were so ably written and beautifully illustrated as to intensify our regret at the incompleteness of the task.]



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The second object is to recommend to others a new and delightful hobby, and possibly bring to bear upon my theme an accumulation of knowledge and combination of light. Gravestone hunting implies long walks in rural scenes, with all the expectations, none of the risks, and few of the disappointments of other pursuits. From ten to fifteen miles may be mapped out for a fair day's trudge, and will probably embrace from three to six parish churchyards, allowing time to inspect the church as well as its surroundings. Saturdays are best for these excursions, for then the pew-openers are dusting out the church, and the sexton is usually about, sweeping the paths or cutting the grass. The church door will in most cases be open, and you can get the guidance you want from the best possible sources. A chat with the village sexton is seldom uninviting, and he can generally point out everything worth your observation. But the faculty of finding that of which you are in search will soon come to you. In the first place, the new portion of a churchyard—there is nearly always a new portion—may be left on one side. You will certainly find no ancient memorials there. In the next place, you may by a little observation pick out the eighteenth-century stones by their shape, which is as a rule much more ornamented and curvilinear than those of later date. They may also be detected very often by the roughness of their backs as well as by their weather-beaten complexions, and with a little experience and practice the student may guess correctly within a few years the age of any particular one seen even in the distance.

[Illustration: *Fig. 62. GEEENFORD.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 63. West Ham.*]

To tempt the reader therefore to take up the study which I have found so pleasant, so healthful, and so interesting, I now propose to place in order the proceeds of a few of my rambles, and shew how much success the reader may also expect in similar expeditions. His or her stock-in-trade should consist of a good-sized note-book or sketch-book of paper not too rough for fine lines, a B B pencil of reliable quality, and a small piece of sandstone or brick to be used in rubbing off the dirt and moss which sometimes obscure inscriptions. No kind of scraper should ever be employed, lest the crumbling memorial be damaged; but a bit of brick or soft stone will do no harm, and will often bring to view letters and figures which have apparently quite disappeared. If a camera be taken, a carpenter's pencil may be of service in strengthening half-vanished lines, and a folded foot-rule should always be in the pocket. A mariner's compass is sometimes useful in strange places, but the eastward position of a church will always give the bearings, and a native is usually to be found to point the way. A road map of the county which you are about to explore, or, if in the vicinity of London, one of those admirable and well-known handbooks of the field paths, is useful,

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and the journey should be carefully plotted out before the start. A friend and companion of congenial tastes adds, I need not say, to the enjoyment of the excursion. My constant associate has happily a craze for epitaphs, but does not fancy sketching even in the rough style which answers well enough for my work, and I have had therefore no competitor. Together we have scoured all the northern part of Kent and visited every Kentish church within twenty miles of London. The railway also will occasionally land us near some old church which we may like to visit, and it was while waiting half an hour for a train at Blackheath station that I picked up the accompanying choice specimen in the ancient burial-ground of Lee.

Fig. 64.—At Lee.

“To Eliza Drayton, died 11th May, 1770.”

In this allegory Time appears to be commanding Death to extinguish the lamp of Life. The sun may mean the brighter life beyond. The building to the right is an enigma.

Often the first six or seven miles have to be encountered before we reach unexplored ground. The Cray Valley, for instance, may be cited for one day’s experience. First a walk of seven miles to Orpington, one of the five sister churches of the Crays—all said to be Anglo-Saxon and of about one date. I must not digress to speak of churches, but it is only reasonable to suppose that the student who is capable of taking up as a pastime the investigation of churchyards has previously acquired something more or less of archaeological taste, and will not fail to notice the churches.[2] We reach the churchyard of Orpington, visit the church, and then my companion and I separate for our respective duties. I am not fortunate in securing any special prize, but it is well to select some object if only as a souvenir of the visit, and I jot down the following, which may be classed among the commonest order of all figurative headstones, but is nevertheless noticeable as a variant.

[Footnote 2: There are several handbooks of church architecture, and the rudiments of the various orders and dates are easily acquired.]

[Illustration: *Fig. 64. Lee.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 65. Orpington.*]

Fig. 65.—At Orpington, Kent.

“To Hosa Mansfield, daughter of John and Martha Mansfield, died 24th May 1710, aged 26 years. Also James Mansfield,

son of John and Martha Mansfield, died
30th Dec'r 1746, aged 48 years."

The work in this instance is crude, and apparently done by an inexpert craftsman. The stone is, however, decayed, and it is possible that it is the draughtsman who has blundered. The two skulls, being of different sizes, suggest the male and female occupants of the grave, and would therefore assign the production to the later rather than the earlier date. The two bones are not often found in so

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lateral a position, and the vampire wings are clumsy in the extreme. I have collected varieties of the skull and crossbone character in many places, and seen the eccentricities of many masons in the way of wings, but have met with very few so far astray as these. While I am engaged in transferring the specimen to my book, our epitaph hunter has been round and discovered a treasure. I shall not trouble the reader with him henceforth, but I may note just this one of his successes as a sample of the rewards which attend his part in the pilgrimage. He has found a stone thus inscribed:

“Here lyeth the body of Mary, the wife of
John Smith: she died March 17th, 1755,
aged 58 years.

“Here lyeth Mary, never was contrary
To me nor her neighbours around her;
Like Turtle and Dove we lived in love,
And I left her where I may find her.

“Also John Smith, husband of the above.”

(Date sunk underground.)

A short walk through the village and by the Cray River brings us to the church of St. Mary Cray, where I secure a new species, in which Death is doubly symbolized by the not infrequent scythe and possibly also by the pierced heart. The latter might refer to the bereaved survivor, but, being a-flame, seems to lend itself more feasibly to the idea of the immortal soul. The trumpet and the opening coffin indicate peradventure the resurrection.

Fig. 66.—At st. Mary Cray.

“To Thomas Abbott, died May 21, 1773, aged
75 years.”

[Illustration: *Fig. 66. St. Mary Cray.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 67. St. Paul's Cray.*]

Only a short distance farther, for the churches are small, we reach St. Paul's Cray, the burial-ground of which shews that the foregoing allegory was immediately duplicated, apparently by another hand, with just a little variation to redeem the piracy. The coffin is quite opened and empty, instead of being slightly open and tenanted, which is almost the only difference between the May and the September work.



Fig. 67.—At st. Paul's Cray.

“To John Busbey, died 1st Sept'r 1773, aged 70 years.”

Foot's Cray is a good long step beyond and does not yield much profit, but I select the most novel specimen, which is a combination of ordinary emblems, with little attempt at symmetry, or even arrangement, other than the awkward juxtaposition of the cherubins' inner wings.

Fig. 68.—At Foot's Cray.

“To Elizabeth Wood, died February 8, 1735-6, aged 58 years.”

The churchyard at North Cray added nothing at all to my collection. This was the only blank drawn that day, but a beautifully kept ground surrounding a delightful church well repaid the visit. A call at Old Bexley Church completed the day's work, and gave me one of the few sketches belonging to the nineteenth century which I have made.



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Fig. 69.—At old Bexley.

“To Susannah, wife of Henry Humphrey,
died 26th December 1805, aged 57 years.”

The anchor stands for Hope, the draped urn signifies mourning for the dead, and the figure reading the Holy Book suggests consolation. From Bexley Church to the railway station was but a brief space. The day's tramp was ended.

[Illustration: *Fig. 68. Foot's Cray.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 69. Bexley.*]

CHAPTER VI.

More typical tramps.

How far county divisions might affect the early fashions in gravestones was one of my first questions, and, having seen much of Kent, time was soon found for a scamper through the country bordering Epping Forest and along the backbone of Essex.

At Barking, just within the old Abbey gate, I came upon an enigmatical illustration.

Fig. 70.—At Barking.

Inscription illegible. Date appears to be 1759.

The signification of the four balls I am unable to suggest, unless they be connected in some way with the planetary system and point man's insignificance. They appear to emanate from a cloud resting upon the hour-glass, and may help the other emblems in symbolizing time and eternity. The nicker candle is also of doubtful interpretation. It may mean the brevity of life; it can hardly be needed, in the presence of the skull, to indicate death. The candle is sometimes employed alone, occasionally extinguished. At Woolwich there is an instance in which the candle is in the act of being put out.

Fig. 71.—At Woolwich.

“To Siston Champion, died 27th Feb. 1749-50
(a few days after the birth of her child),
aged 28 years.”

The candle is indeed commonly used as a simile of life's uncertainty in all countries, and it may be that where it is represented in a state of burning it may be meant as a lesson



on the number of our days. It is seen with the skulls in the churchyard of St. Nicholas, Deptford, and other places.

Fig. 72.—At Deptford.

“To William Firth, died 1724, aged 21 years.”

In West Ham Churchyard may be seen the figure of the kissing cherubs rather prettily rendered, but to be found in various forms in many places, and always expressive of affection.

Fig. 73.—At west Ham.

“To Sarah Moore, died 1749.”

Wanstead Churchyard is remarkable for the abundance and originality of its old gravestones. Here is one (Fig. 74) which carries more distinctly the fanciful idea suggested at West Ham (page 34, Fig. 63); flowers and foliage, and even fruit, combining with the lowered torch and summoning trumpet to tell of life beyond the grave.



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Fig. 74.—At Wanstead.

“To William Bosely, died 1712, aged 79.”

[Illustration: *Fig. 70. Barking.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 71. Woolwich.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 72. Deptford.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 73. West Ham.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 74. Wanstead.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 75. Wanstead.*]

There are several other variations of the same symbol in the elegant enclosure at Wanstead Church; but the most remarkable of the old stones is one which has at the top corners two projecting skulls, the one facing nearly to the front and the other in profile, both standing out in full relief, carefully and accurately sculptured, but too ghastly to be beautiful. This one, the Richmond example, and the two at Ripley constitute my entire experience of full relief work on a mere gravestone.

Fig. 75.—At Wanstead.

“To William Swan, died 1715, aged 16 years.”

Other churchyards in the locality we found less fruitful, and taking rail to Buckhurst Hill, we struck across Epping Forest to Chingford, also without profit, and walked on to Walthamstow, where another of the enfoliated death's-head pictures was found; the novelty being two skulls with ivy sprays, symbolical of evergreen recollections.

Fig. 76.—At Walthamstow.

“To Jane Redfern, died 1734, aged 52 years,”

In the Broxbourne example on the same Plate (*Fig. 77*) branches of oak, bearing leaves and acorns, are used with good decorative effect on either side of a porch in which is seated a mourning figure, but I cannot undertake to explain the symbolical significance of the oak in sepulchral masonry.

Fig. 77.—At Broxbourne.

“To Mrs Rowe, widow, died 6 May 1798.”



My excursions into Essex have been too limited in scope to trace or test peculiarities in that county, but I have found by observation in a number of counties that, although there are occasional evidences of local invention, or at least of local modification, in certain districts, the same set of types which prevails in one county serves pretty well for all the rest.

It is well therefore to guard against disappointment. Pilgrimages like ours, having for their real purpose healthy exercise and physical enjoyment, are not to be counted failures when their ostensible errand seems to have borne no result. It is necessary for the pilgrim to be armed with some such reflection as this against the shafts of discomfiture. There have been occasions when, at the close of the day, conscious as I might be of the pleasant hours past, the freshened brain and the body reinvigorated, I have yet covetously mourned the scanty and valueless additions to my note-book. Other pilgrims may therefore take warning, be prepared

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for blank days in barren coverts, and sully not their satisfaction with regrets. But it will be a blank day indeed which does not carry its pleasures with it and store the mind with happy recollections. One walk on a winter's day over the hills from High Barnet to Edgware I reckoned sadly unproductive of the special novelties I sought, but it afforded me the contemplation of some landscapes which I can never forget, and it printed on my brain a little *papier-mache*-like church at Totteridge which was worth going miles to see. Better fortune next time should be the beacon of the gentle tramp. The long jaunt I had from Chigwell Lane Station through the pretty but unpopulous country west of Theydon Bois, uneventful as it was, made an ineffaceable mark on my memory. I picture now the long and solitary walk across fields and woodlands, with never a soul to tell the way for miles and miles, crossing and recrossing the winding Roden, startling the partridges from the turnips, and surprising, at some sudden bend in the footpath, the rabbits at their play. It is not without excitement to steer one's course over unknown and forsaken ground by chart and compass. These needful guides then prove their value, and in a hilly country an altitude-barometer is a friend not to be despised. It is not without some pride in one's self-reliance to find one's self five miles from a railway station, as I did at Stapleford Abbots; and, though my special quest was all in vain at several halting-places that day, I met with a Norman doorway at Lambourn Church which archaeologists would call a dream, the axe-work of the old masons as clean cut and as perfect as though it had been done last week; and in taking a near cut at a guess across country for Stapleford Tawney I mind me that I lost my way, or thought I had, but the mariner's needle was true, and emerging in a green avenue I saw before me a finger-post marked "To Tawney Church." I took off my hat and respectfully saluted that finger-post, and was soon in the churchyard, where I haply lighted upon one of the gems of my collection, the headstone sculpture of "The Good Samaritan."

[Illustration: *Fig. 76. Walthamstow.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 77. Broxbourne.*]

Fig. 78.—At Stapleford Tawney.

"To Richard Wright, died 3d March 1781,
aged 76 years."

I have, however, an earlier study of the same subject from the churchyard at Shorne Village, near Gravesend, which, is here given for comparison, and I have seen two others at Cranbrook. They all have some features alike, but there are differences in the treatment of details in each case.

Fig. 79.—At Shorne.

“To Mary Layton, died Jan. 12, 1760; Joseph Layton, died May 21, 1757; and Will. Holmes, died Aug. 26, 1752.”



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The stone at Shorne being close to the church door is well known to the villagers, by whom it is regarded as a curiosity. The schoolmaster was good enough to give me a photograph from which my sketch is made. But such rarities are seldom esteemed by, or even known to, the inhabitants of a place, and are passed by without heed by the constant congregation of the church. At Stapleford Tawney, just named, a native, the first I had seen for a mile or two, stopped at the unwonted sight of a stranger sketching in the churchyard, and I consulted him as to application of the parable of the Good Samaritan in the case under notice. His reply was that, though he had lived there "man and boy for fifty year," he had "never see'd the thing afore." He condescended, however, to take an interest in my explanations, and seemed to realize that it was worth while to seek for objects of interest even in a churchyard. This was decidedly better than the behaviour on another occasion of two rustics at Southfleet. They had passed my friend jotting down an epitaph, and the turn of a corner revealed me sketching a tombstone, when one to the other exclaimed, "Land sikes, Bill, if 'ere ain't another on em!"

[Illustration: *Fig. 78. Stapleford Tawney.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 79. Shorne.*]

CHAPTER VII.

Earlier gravestones.

Although memorials of the dead in one shape or another have apparently existed in all eras of ethnological history, it would seem that the upright gravestone of our burial-grounds has had a comparatively brief existence of but a few hundred years. This, however, is merely an inference based on present evidences, and it may be erroneous. But they cannot have existed in the precincts of the early Christian churches of this country, because the churches had no churchyards for several centuries. The Romans introduced into Britain their Law of the Ten Tables, by which it was ordained that "all burnings or burials" should be "beyond the city,"[3] and the system continued to prevail long after the Roman evacuation. It was not until A.D. 742 that Cuthbert, eleventh Archbishop of Canterbury, brought from Rome the newer custom of burying around the churches, and was granted a Papal dispensation for the practice. The churchyards even then were not enclosed, but it was usual to mark their sacred character by erecting stone crosses, many of which, or their remains, are still in existence. Yet it was a long time before churchyard interments became general, the inhabitants clinging to the Pagan habit of indiscriminate burial in their accustomed places. We hear nothing of headstones in the early days of Christianity, but there are occasionally found in certain localities inscribed stones which bear the appearance of rude memorials, and these have been regarded as relics of our National Church in its primitive state. It is also suggested that

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these stones may be of Druidical origin, but there is nothing to support the theory. Among the aboriginal Britons the custom of simple inhumation was probably prevalent, but there are not wanting evidences in support of the belief that cremation also was sometimes practised in prehistoric times. An instance of early interment was discovered in a tumulus at Gusthorp, near Scarborough, in 1834. In a rude coffin scooped out of the trunk of an oak-tree lay a human skeleton, which had been wrapped or clothed in the skin of some wild animal, fastened at the breast with a pin or skewer of wood. In the coffin were also a bronze spearhead and several weapons of flint—facts which all go to establish a remote date. The absence of pottery is also indicative of a very early period. Regarding the skins, however, it may be remarked that Caesar says of the Britons, when he invaded the island, that “the greater part within the country go clad in skins.”

[Footnote 3: The ancient Jewish burial-ground had to be no less than 2000 cubits (or about a mile) from the Levitical city.]

Christian burials, as we have seen, cannot be dated in England earlier than the eighth century, and monuments at the grave may have possibly originated about the same period, but there is nothing whatever to sustain such a belief, and we cannot assign the earliest of existing memorials to a time prior to the eleventh century. Indeed it is very significant to find that the tombs within the churches are only a trifle older than the gravestones outside, scarcely any of them being antecedent to the sixteenth century. As burials inside churches were not permitted until long after the churchyards were used for the purpose,[4] it is indeed possible that no memorials were placed in the edifice until Tudor days; but this is scarcely feasible, and the more probable explanation is that all the earlier ones have disappeared. Those which can boast an antiquity greater than that of the common gravestone are very few indeed. It might have been supposed that the sculptured shrine under the roof of the sanctuary, reverently tended and jealously watched, might have stood for a thousand years, while the poor gravestone out in the churchyard, exposed to all weathers and many kinds of danger, would waste away or meet with one of the ordinary fates which attend ill-usage, indifference, or neglect. This indeed has happened in a multitude of places. Who has not seen in ancient churchyards the headstones leaning this way and that, tottering to their fall? Are there not hundreds of proofs that the unclaimed stones have been used, and still serve, for the floors of the churches, and actually for the paving of the churchyard paths? It was not thought strange, even within the memory of the present generation, to advertise for owners of old graves, with an intimation that on a certain date the stones would be removed; and vast numbers of them were thus got rid of—broken up perhaps to mend the roads. But still greater



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perils have been survived by the earlier of those memorials which remain to us, both without and within the churches. The dissolution of the Papal power in Great Britain was the cause of one of these hazards; for, towards the latter end of Henry VIII.'s reign, likewise during the reign of Edward VI., and again in the beginning of Elizabeth's, commissioners in every county were vested with authority to destroy "all graven images" and everything which seemed to savour of "idolatry and superstition." Under colour of this order, these persons, and those who sympathized in their work, gave vent to their zeal in many excesses, battering down and breaking up everything of an ornamental or sculptured character, including tombs and even the stained windows. Moreover we are told by Weever[5] that the commission was made the excuse for digging up coffins in the hope of finding treasure. Elizabeth soon perceived the evil that was being done by the barbarous rage and greediness of her subjects, and issued a proclamation under her own hand restraining all "ignorant, malicious, and covetous persons" from breaking and defacing any monument, tomb, or grave, under penalty of fine or imprisonment. This checked, but did not wholly cure, the mischief; and, although in her fourteenth year of sovereignty she issued another and sterner edict on the subject, the havoc was perpetuated chiefly by a sect or party whom Weever describes as "a contagious brood of scismaticks," whose object was not only to rob the churches, but to level them with the ground, as places polluted by all the abominations of Babylon. These people were variously known as Brownists, Barrowists, Martinists, Propheyers, Solisidians, Famelists, Rigid Precisians, Disciplinarians, and Judaical Thraskists. Some who overstepped the mark paid the penalty with their lives. One man, named Hachet, not content with destroying gravestones and statuary, thrust an iron weapon through a picture of the Queen, and he was hanged and quartered. Another, John Penry, a Welshman, was executed in 1593, and of him was written:

"The Welshman is hanged
Who at our kirke flanged
And at her state banged,
 And brend are his buks.

And though he be hanged
Yet he is not wranged,
The de'ul has him fanged
 In his kruked kluks."

[Footnote 4: The unhealthy practice of using churches for this purpose was continued some way into the nineteenth century. The still more objectionable plan of depositing coffins containing the dead in vaults under churches still lingers on. In 1875 I attended the funeral (so-called) of a public man, whose coffin was borne into the vaults of a town church, and left there, with scores of others piled in heaps in recesses which looked like wine-cellars. Not one of the many mourners who shared in that experience failed to feel



horrified at the thought of such a fate. Some of the old coffins were tumbling to pieces, and the odour of the place was beyond description. In the words of Edmund Burke: “I would rather sleep in the southern corner of a country churchyard than in the tomb of the Capulets.”]



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[Footnote 5: Weever's "Funeral Monuments," A.D. 1631.]

And there was a danger to be encountered far later than that which was due to the anti-Popery zealots of the Tudor dynasty. On the introduction of the Commonwealth there arose such a crusade against all forms and emblems of doctrinal import as to affect not only the ornaments of the churches, but the gravestones in the churchyards, many of which were removed and put to other uses or sold. The Puritans, as is well known, went to the extremity of abolishing all ceremony whatever at the Burial of the Dead.[6] The beautiful Service in the Book of Common Prayer, now used more or less by all the Reformed Christian denominations of England, was abolished by Parliament in 1645—that and the Prayer Book together at one stroke. In lieu of the Prayer Book a "Directory" was issued on the conduct of public worship, in which it was said:

[Footnote 6: There does not appear to have been any form of prayer for the dead prior to the issue of Gaskell's "Prymer" in 1400. The Service now in use dates from 1611.]

"Concerning Burial of the Dead, all customs of praying, reading, and singing, both in going to or from the grave, are said to have been greatly abused. The simple direction is therefore given, that when any person departeth this life, let the body upon the day of burial be decently attended from the house to the place appointed for public burial, and there immediately interred without any ceremony."

Penalties were at the same time imposed for using the Book of Common Prayer in any place of worship or in any private family within the kingdom—the fine being L5 for a first offence, L10 for a second, and a year's imprisonment for the third.

The Puritans, however, are to be thanked for stopping the then common practice of holding wakes and fairs in the churchyards—a practice traceable no doubt to the celebration of Saints' Days in the churches, and for that reason suppressed as remnants of Popery in 1627-31.

It need not be said that the Burial Service and the Prayer Book came back with the Restoration, but the discontinuance of fairs in churchyards seems to have been permanent. Many instances, however, have occurred in later years of desecration by pasturing cattle in the churchyards,[7] and offences of this nature have been so recent that the practice cannot be said with confidence to have even now entirely ceased. But we return to the gravestones.

[Footnote 7: At the Archbishop's Court at Colchester in 1540 it was reported that at a certain church "the hogs root up the graves and beasts lie in the porch."]

From one cause or another it is pretty certain that for every old gravestone now to be seen twenty or more have disappeared.



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In Gough's "Sepulchral Monuments of Great Britain" many instances are given of the wanton and wholesale destruction of church and churchyard memorials, even late in the eighteenth century. In some cases the church officers, as already stated, gave public notice prior to removal of gravestones, in order that persons claiming an interest in the remains might repair and restore them; but more frequently the stones were cleared away and destroyed, or put somewhere out of sight without observation. Sometimes this was the act of the Rector; at other times individuals, exercising rights of ownership, have done the disgraceful work, and occasionally the whole of the parishioners have been implicated. Gough says that the inhabitants of Letheringham in Suffolk, being under the necessity of putting their church into decent order, chose to rebuild it, and sold the whole fabric, monuments and all, to the building contractor, who beat the stones to powder, and sold as much at three shillings a pound for terrace (?) as came to eighty guineas. A portion of the fragments was rescued by the Rev. Mr. Clubbe, and erected in form of a pyramid in the vicarage garden of Brandeston, in the same county, with this inscription:

[Transcriber's note: the following is enclosed in a narrow border]

Indignant Reader! These monumental remains are not, as thou mayest suppose, the Ruins of Time, But were destroyed in an Irruption of the Goths So late in the Christian era as 1789. Credite Poster!

CHAPTER VIII.

Reform among the gravestones.

That the state of the old churchyards in this country, down to the middle of the nineteenth century, was a public scandal and disgrace, is a remark which applies especially to London, where burial-grounds, packed full of human remains, were still made available for interments on a large scale until 1850 or later. The fact was the more discreditable in contrast with the known example of Paris, which had, as early as 1765, closed all the city graveyards, and established cemeteries beyond the suburbs. One of the laws passed at the same time by the Parliament of Paris directed that the graves in the cemeteries should not be marked with stones, and that all epitaphs and inscriptions should be placed on the walls, a regulation which appears to have been greatly honoured in the breach. In 1776 Louis XVI., recognizing the benefit which Paris had derived from the city decree, prohibited graveyards in all the cities and towns of France, and rendered unlawful interments in churches and chapels; and in 1790 the National Assembly passed an Act commanding that all the old burial-grounds, even in the villages, should be closed, and others provided at a distance from habitations.[8] Other States of Europe took pattern by these enlightened proceedings, and America was not slow in making laws upon the subject; but Great Britain,

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and its worst offender, London, went on in the old way, without let or hindrance, until 1850, For fifteen years prior to that date there had been in progress an agitation against the existing order of things, led by Dr. G.A. Walker, a Drury Lane surgeon, living in a very nest of churchyard fevers, who wrote a book and several pamphlets, delivered public lectures, and raised a discussion in the public press. The London City Corporation petitioned Parliament in 1842 for the abolition of burials within the City, and a Select Committee of the House of Commons was at once entrusted with an enquiry on the subject.

[Footnote 8: In France in 1782-3, in order to check the pestilence, the remains of more than six millions of people were disinterred from the urban churchyards and reburied far away from the dwelling-places. The Cemetery of Pere la Chaise was a later creation, having been consecrated in 1804.]

The following were the official figures shewing the burials in the London district[9] from 1741 to 1837, and it was asserted that many surreptitious interments were unrecorded:

From 1741 to 1765 588,523

" 1766 to 1792 605,832

" 1793 to 1813 402,595

" 1814 to 1837 508,162

Total 2,105,112

In the same year (1842) a Export was presented to Parliament by the Select Committee on "The Improvement of the Health of Towns," and especially on "The Effect of the Interment of Bodies in Towns." Its purport may be summed up in the following quotation:

"The evidence ... gives a loathsome picture of the unseemly and demoralizing practices which result from the crowded condition of the existing graveyards—practices which could scarcely have been thought possible in the present state of society... We cannot arrive at any other conclusion than that the nuisance of interments in great towns and the injury arising to the health of the community are fully proved."

[Footnote 9: London was much increased in area by the passing of Sir Benjamin Hall's "Metropolis Local Management Act of 1849."]

Among the witnesses examined were Sir Benjamin Brodie and Dr. G.R. Williams.



In 1846 a Bill was prepared to deal with the matter, but it was not until 1850 that an Act was passed "To make better provision for the Interment of the Dead in and near the Metropolis." Powers were conferred upon the General Board of Health to establish cemeteries or enlarge burial-grounds, and an Order in Council was made sufficient for closing any of the old churchyards either wholly or with exceptions to be stipulated in the order. One month's notice was all that was needed to set the Act in operation, and in urgent cases seven days; but it was found necessary in 1851 to pass another Act for the purpose of raising funds; and in 1852 a more stringent Act was put upon the Statute Book to deal summarily with the churchyards. This was, in the the following session, extended to England and Wales, the General Board of Health having reported strongly in favour of a scheme for "Extra-mural Sepulture" in the country towns, declaring that the graveyards of these places were in no better condition than those of London.

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Consequently, in the years which followed 1850, a general closing of churchyards took place throughout the Metropolis, and to a lesser extent throughout the kingdom, and an active crusade against all similar burial-grounds was instituted, which may be said to be still in operation. The substitution of new cemeteries in remote and mostly picturesque places was of immediate advantage in many ways, but it did little or nothing to remedy the dilapidated appearance of the old graveyards, which indeed, now that they brought in no revenues, became in many cases painfully neglected, dejected, and forlorn. Happily, in 1883, the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association was established, and its influence has been very marked in the improvement of the old enclosures and their conversion into recreation grounds. The Metropolitan Board of Works, the London County Council, the City Corporation, public vestries, and private persons, have shared in the good work, but the chief instrument has been the Public Gardens Association.

Of old burial-grounds now open as public gardens in the London district there are more than a hundred. Care is always taken to preserve the sacred soil from profane uses, games being prohibited, and the improvements confined to paths and seats, levelling the ground and planting with trees and flowers. The gravestones, though removed to the sides of the enclosure, are numbered and scheduled, and all in which any living person can claim an interest are left untouched. No stones are ever destroyed in the process of reformation, but previous ill-usage and natural decay have rendered very many of them illegible, and in another century or so all these once fond memorials will probably have become blank and mute.

To the middle of the nineteenth century may also be assigned the change which we now see in the character of our gravestones. Quite in the beginning of the century the vulgar and grotesque carvings and Scriptural barbarisms of the eighteenth century had given place to a simple form of memorial in which it was rare to find the least effort at ornament; but, as soon as the Burial Acts were passed and the old churchyards were succeeded by the new cemeteries, the tasteful and elegant designs which are to be seen in every modern burial-ground were introduced, founded in great measure upon the artistic drawings of Mr. D.A. Clarkson, whose manifold suggestions, published in 1852, are still held in the highest admiration.

CHAPTER IX.

Preserving the gravestones.

Mankind in all ages and in all places has recognized the sanctity of the burial-place. Among the New Zealanders, when they were first revealed to Europeans as savages, the place of interment was *tapu*, or holy. The wild and warlike Afghanistans have also a profound reverence for their burial-grounds, which they speak of expressively as "cities of the silent." Among the Turks the utmost



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possible respect is paid to the resting-places of the dead, and nowhere, perhaps (says Mrs. Stone in "God's Acre"), are the burial-places so beautiful. The great and increasing size of Turkish cemeteries is due to the repugnance of the people to disturbing the soil where once a body has been laid. The Chinese and the inhabitants of the Sunda Isles (says the authority just quoted) seem to vie with each other in the reverence with which they regard the burial-places of their ancestors, which almost invariably occupy the most beautiful and sequestered sites. The graves are usually overgrown with long grasses and luxuriantly flowering plants. In like manner the Moors have a particular shrub which overspreads their graves, and no one is permitted to pluck a leaf or a blossom.

The simple Breton people are deeply religious, and their veneration for the dead is intense. They are frequently to be seen—men, women, and children—kneeling on the ground in their churchyards, praying among the graves. It may therefore be well believed that in the period of burial reform which overspread the Continent in the earlier part of the nineteenth century there was great opposition in Brittany to the establishment of remote cemeteries. The thought of burying elsewhere than in the parish churchyard was to the minds of the parishioners a species of impiety. When reasoned with they would answer:

"Our fathers were buried here, and you would separate us from our dead. Let us be buried here, where our kinsfolk can see our graves from their windows, and the children can come at evening to pray."

In vain they were shewn the danger of accumulating corpses in a place which was usually in the centre of the population. They shook their heads and cried:

"Death comes only by the will of God."

Possibly, to some extent, this feeling is universal among mankind. There is in our hearts an innate reverence for the burial-place; we tread by instinct lightly over the sleeping-places of the dead, and look with silent awe upon their tombs. The feeling being part of our humanity, we might suppose it to be universal, and be apt to conclude that, in our more primitive churchyards at least, we should find some effort to preserve the whole or a large proportion of the memorials which are there dedicated to departed merit, hallowed by love and made sacred by sorrow. But it may truthfully be said that of all the headstones (not to speak alone of *decorated* headstones) which were set up prior to the beginning of the nineteenth century, by far the greater number have disappeared! Indeed the cases in which the old churchyards have been the objects of any care whatever are lamentably few, while attempts to preserve the old gravestones are almost unknown. The ordinary experience is to find the churchyard more or less neglected and forgotten, and the grey and aged stones either sinking into the earth or



tottering to their fall. It cannot be imagined that the clergy, the wardens, and the sextons have failed to see these things; but they have, presumedly, more pressing matters to attend to, and it seems to be nobody's business to attend to such ownerless and worthless objects.

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Some gravediggers will tell you that the natural destiny of the gravestone is the grave! They will shew you the old fellows slowly descending into the ground, and they have heard the parson say perhaps that the “trembling of the earth” will in time shake them all inevitably out of sight. I have heard it mentioned as an article of belief among sextons that a hundred years is the fair measure of a head-stone’s “life” above ground, but this reckoning is much too short for the evidences, and makes no allowance for variable circumstances. In some places, Keston for instance, the church is founded upon a bed of chalk, and out of the chalk the graves are laboriously hewn. It is obvious therefore that the nature of the soil, as it is yielding or impervious, must be a prime factor in the question of survival. It may be granted, however, that our progenitors in selecting their burial-grounds had the same preference for a suitable site as we have in our own day, and, notwithstanding exceptions which seem to shew that the church and not the churchyard was the one thing thought of, the law of a light soil for interments is sufficiently regular to give us an average duration of a gravestone’s natural existence. The term “natural” will apply neither to those fortunate ones whose lives are studiously prolonged, nor of course to the majority whose career is wilfully, negligently, or accidentally shortened. But that, under ordinary circumstances, the stones gradually sink out of sight, and at a certain rate of progression, is beyond a doubt. Two illustrations may help the realization of this fact, such as may be seen in hundreds of our churchyards.

[Illustration: *Fig. 80. Bethnal green.*

Illustration: *Fig. 81. Plumstead.*

Sinking gravestones.]

The sketch of Bethnal Green (Fig. 80) was made just as the churchyard was about to undergo a healthy conversion, and it marks a very long period of inaction.

The Plumstead case (Fig. 81), though less extreme, is even more informing, as it seems to measure the rate at which the disappearance goes on; the dates on the three stones coinciding accurately with their comparative depths in the ground. Whether the motion of the earth has any influence in this connection need not now be discussed, because the burying of the gravestones may be accounted for in a simple and feasible manner, without recourse to scientific argument. It is undoubtedly the burrowing of the worms, coupled with the wasting action of rain and frost, which causes the phenomenon. Instead, however, of the sexton’s supposititious century, the period required for total disappearance may more accurately be regarded as from 200 to 250 years. It has been found by careful observation in a few random cases that the stones subside at the rate of about one foot in forty or fifty years, and, as their ordinary height is from 5 feet to 5 feet 6 inches, we can readily tell, providing



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the rate rules evenly, the date when any particular stone may be expected to vanish. In confirmation of this theory is the fact that scarcely any headstones are discoverable of a date earlier than 1650, and whenever they have been left to their fate the veterans of 150 years have scarcely more than their heads above ground. Wherever we find otherwise, it may be assumed that conscientious church officers or pious parishioners have bethought them of the burial-ground, lifted up the old stones and set them once more on their feet. Of recent years there has grown up and been fostered a better feeling for the ancient churchyards, and the ivy-clad churches of Hornsey and Hendon may be cited as examples familiar to Londoners in which the taste engendered by a beautiful edifice has influenced for good its surroundings. In both churchyards are many eighteenth-century stones in excellent preservation. Neither place, however, has yet been "restored" or "reformed" in the modern sense, and there is no reason why it should be. In many places, as the town grows and spreads, it is well to convert the ancient graveyard into a public garden, so that it be decently and reverently done. But this ought never to be undertaken needlessly or heedlessly. There are scruples of individuals to be regarded, and a strong case ought always to exist before putting into effect such a radical change. But it usually happens that transformation is the only remedy, and nothing short of a thorough reaction will rescue God's Acre from the ruin and contempt into which it has fallen. Yet we should ever remember that, whatever we may do to the surface, it is still the place where our dead fathers rest.

"Earth to earth and dust to dust,
Here lie the evil and the just,
Here the youthful and the old,
Here the fearful and the bold,
Here the matron and the maid,
In one silent bed are laid."

The utilitarian impulse, though frequently blamed for the "desecration" of our churchyards, is really less accountable for these conversions than the culpable neglect which in too many cases has forced the only measure of correction. Therefore they who would keep the sacred soil unmolested should take heed that it be properly maintained. A churchyard is in hopeful case when we see the mounds carefully levelled, the stones set up in serried ranks, and the turf between rolled smooth and trimmed and swept. There is no outrage in levelling the ground. The Christian feeling which clings to the grave, and even to the gravestone, does not attach to the mound of earth which is wrongly called the grave. This mound is not even a Christian symbol. It is a mere survival of Paganism, being a small copy of the barrow or tumulus, of which we have specimens still standing in various parts of our islands and the Continent, to mark the sepulchres of prehistoric and possibly savage chieftains. No compunction should be, and probably none is, suffered when we remove the grave-mounds,

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which is indeed the first essential to the protection and beautification of an obsolete burial-place. But, if possible, let the churchyard remain a churchyard; for, of all the several methods which are usually resorted to for “preservation,” the best from the sentimental view is that which keeps the nearest to the first intent. There can be no disputing that a churchyard is in its true aspect when it looks like a churchyard, providing it be duly cared for. Some persons of practical ideas will, however, favour such improvements as will banish the least elegant features of the place and range the more sightly ones midst lawns and flowers; while others, still more thorough, will be satisfied with nothing short of sweeping away all traces of the graves, and transforming the whole space at one stroke into a public playground. The choice of systems is in some degree a question of environment. Wherever open ground is needed for the health and enjoyment of dwellers in towns, it is now generally conceded that, with certain reservations and under reasonable conditions, disused churchyards—especially such as are neglected and deformed—shall in all possible cases be transferred from the closed ledger of the dead to the current account of the living.

The following lines, which were written upon the restoration of Cheltenham Churchyard, may be applied to most of such instances:

“Sleep on, ye dead!

’Tis no rude hand disturbs your resting-place;
But those who love the spot have come at length
To beautify your long-neglected homes.
How loud ye have been speaking to us all!
But the mammon and the fading pleasures
Of this busy world hath made us deaf.

* * * Forgive the past!

Henceforth flowers shall bloom upon the surface
Of your dwellings. The lilac in the spring
Shall blossom, and the sweet briar shall exhale
Its fragrant smell. E’en the drooping fuchsia
Shall not be wanting to adorn your tombs;
While the weeping willow, pointing downwards,
Speaks significantly to the living,
That a grave awaits us all.”

[Illustration: *Fig. 82. Cheshunt.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 83. Hatfield.*]



But in rural spots, where there is abundance of room and almost superfluity of nature, a well-kept churchyard, with all its venerable features, studiously protected and reverently cared for, is one of the best inheritances of a country life. Illustrations of this may occur to most observers, but as a case in point I may refer to Cheshunt, on the borders of Hertfordshire. Some distance from the town-fringed highway, the village church, ancient and picturesque, stands amidst its many generations of people—living and dead—hard by a little street of old-world cottages. The spot and its surroundings are beautiful, and the churchyard alone gives proof that the locality has been under

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the influence of culture from generation to generation. In few places are there so many and such artistic specimens of allegorical carvings on the headstones. The usual experience is to find one or two, seldom more than a dozen, of these inventions worth notice, and only in rare instances to light upon anything of the kind distinctly unique; but at Cheshunt there are more than a hundred varieties of sculptured design and workmanship, all the stones standing at the proper angle, and all in good condition.

Fig. 82.—At cheshunt.

“To Mary Lee, died July, 1779, aged 49 years.”

In the illustration I selected at Cheshunt the left half of the picture appears to denote Life and the right half Death. In the former are the vigorous tree, the towers and fortresses, the plans and working implements of an active existence. In the latter the withered tree, with the usual emblems of death and eternity, emphasizes the state beyond the grave, and in the centre are mushrooms, probably to point the lesson of the new life out of decay.

Hatfield is another instance of preservation without change, none of the old stones having, so far as one can judge, been allowed to sink into the earth, nor, as is too often the case, to heel over, to be then broken up, carted away, or put to pave the church and churchyard. There is quite a collection of primitive and diminutive headstones, carefully ranged against the south wall of Hatfield Church, dating from 1687 to 1700; and the specimens of carving in the older parts of the churchyard are of great number and many designs. The one which appears in the sketch (Fig. 83) is curious by reason of the peculiar decoration which fringes the upper edge of the stone. It is somewhat worn away, and I cannot discover whether the ornament was intended for some sort of aigrette, or, which it closely resembles at the present time, a string of skulls.

FIG. 83.—AT HATFIELD.

“To the wife of John Malsty (?), died 1713.”

There appears here, as elsewhere, to have been a tendency at times to repeat unduly such familiar figures as the open book, but, as a whole, Hatfield is a good example of a country churchyard. There are many other old burial-grounds thoughtfully kept in as good, or even better, order than the two here quoted; but it is for the respect shewn to the ancient memorials of the village fathers, rather than the churchyards themselves, that I have ventured to select them as patterns for imitation. There is another curious border on a stone in the secluded but well-kept country churchyard of Northolt, Middlesex.



[Illustration: *Fig. 84 Northolt.*]

Fig. 84.—At Northolt.

“To William Cob, died 25th September 1709,
aged 68 years.”

Twickenham, in the same county, but now grown into a town, has modified its churchyard to its needs, without much change, and I give it a sketch in recognition of a sufficient and not excessive well-doing. Neither of these two examples call for other remark, being of simple interpretation.



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[Illustration: *Fig. 85. Twickenham.*]

Fig. 85.—At Twickenham.

“To Elizabeth (?) Haynes, died 1741, aged 35 years.”

But while we find the few to be commended, what a common experience it is, on the other hand, to come upon a neglected churchyard; the crippled stones bending at all angles, many of them cracked, chipped, and otherwise disfigured, and the majority half hidden in rank weeds and grass. In some places, owing to climatic conditions, moss or lichen has effaced every sign of inscription or ornament from the old stones; and there are localities which appear to be really unfortunate in their inability to resist the destructive influence of the weather upon their tombs, which, perhaps because they are of unsuitable material, go to decay in, comparatively speaking, a few years. As a rule, however, these relics of our ancestors need not and ought not to prematurely perish and disappear from the face of the earth. Where the graveyard is still used as a place of interment, or remains as it was when closed against interments, the sexton or a labourer should have it in perpetual care. The grass and weeds should be kept in constant check, and the tombs of all kinds preserved at the proper perpendicular. If not too much to ask, the application of a little soap and water at long intervals might be recommended in particular instances; but all such details depend upon circumstances, and may be left to the individual judgment. Provided there is the disposition, there will always be found the way and the means to make the holy ground a decent and a pleasant place.

Reverence for the dead, especially among their known descendants, will generally operate as a check upon hasty or extravagant “improvements,” and it may be expected that those responsible for the administration of local affairs will, for the most part, when they set about the beautification of their churchyard, decide to do what is necessary with no needless alterations. This plan of preservation, as already intimated, is probably the most desirable. But we know instances, especially in and around London, where good work has been done by judiciously thinning out the crop of tombstones, clearing away the least presentable features of the place, and making the ground prim with flower-beds and borders. To do this much, and to introduce a few seats, will leave the graveyard still a graveyard in the old sense, and requires no authority outside the church. It may be prudent to take a vote of the Vestry on the subject as a defence against irate parishioners, but, if nothing be done beyond a decorous renovation of the burial-ground, the matter is really one which is entirely within the functions of the parson and churchwardens. Moreover, although it is not generally known, the expenses of such works are a legal charge against the parish, provided the churchwardens have had the previous countenance of their colleagues the overseers. The account for



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the due and proper maintenance of the disused churchyard may be sent to the Burial Board, if there be such a board, and, if not, to the overseers, and the cost will in any case fall upon the poor-rate. Converting the ground absolutely into a public garden is quite a different matter, and, notwithstanding its difficulties, it is the course usually adopted. First, the consent of the Vestry is imperative, and every step is carefully measured by a stringent Act of Parliament. A petition for a faculty must be presented to the Bishop of the diocese, and before it can be granted there must be an official enquiry in public before the Diocesan Chancellor—always a profound lawyer, learned in ecclesiastical jurisprudence. Everybody who has any claim or objection as to any particular grave-space, or to the whole scheme altogether, has a right to be heard; all reasonable requests are usually granted, and the closing order, if made, is mostly full of conditions and reservations in favour of surviving relatives and others who have shewn cause for retaining this tomb and that stone undisturbed. In practice it is found that there are not very many such claims, but it sometimes happens that serious obstacles are left standing in the way of the landscape gardener. One almost invariable regulation requires that places shall be found within the enclosure for all the old stones in positions where they can be seen and their inscriptions read; to range them in one or more rows against the interior of the boundary fence is usually accepted as compliance with this rule. Injudicious arrangement occasionally obscures some of the inscriptions, but they are all accessible if required, and anything is better than extinction. It is earnestly to be hoped that at least equal care is taken of the memorials in burial-grounds which are less ceremoniously closed. Where the work is thoughtfully conceived and discreetly accomplished, much good and little harm is done to a populous place by clearing the ground, laying out footpaths, and planting trees and flowers. But the gravestone, the solemn witness “Sacred to the Memory” of the dead, is a pious trust which demands our respect and protection, at least so long as it is capable of proclaiming its mission. When it has got past service and its testimony has been utterly effaced by time, it is not so easy to find arguments for its preservation. There is no sense or utility in exhibiting a blank tablet, and I have seen without scruple or remorse such superannuated vestiges employed in repairing the church fabric. But this, be it understood, is only when the stone is irretrievably beyond *memento mori* service, and on the clear condition that it is employed in the furtherance of religious work. It is true that a stone is only a stone, whatever it may have been used for, but a peculiar sanctity is in most minds associated with the grave, and we ought not to run the risk of shocking tender-hearted people by degrading even the dead memorial



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of the dead to profane and secular purposes. And yet, what has become in too many cases of the old gravestones? The very old ones we may perhaps account for, but where are the middle-aged ones of the eighteenth century? It cannot be doubted, alas, that they have in many churchyards been deliberately taken away and destroyed to make room for new ones. Districts comprising many parishes may be pointed out with all their old churches in the midst of their old churchyards, but without one old gravestone standing. The rule and practice have been to quietly remove the relics of the forgotten sires in order to dig new graves for a new generation. The habit, as just said, rules by districts, and this is the case in most matters connected with the subject of this essay. It is a general and remarkable truth that “good” and “bad” churchyards abound in groups. The force of example or the instinct of imitation may explain the fact, but it affords a sad reflection upon the morality of the burial-place. Kirke White asks:

“Who would lay
His body in the City burial-place,
To be cast up again by some rude sexton?”

In my experience the chief sinner is not the city, but the country, sexton.

Other memorials than the headstone are scarcely included in my subject. Few of the slate slabs which answer the purpose in Wales and some of the bordering counties can maintain their inscriptions in legible condition for a very long period, and they are in all respects inferior to stone in durability. This thought would have given no anxiety to the writer of some Chapters on Churchyards which appeared in “Blackwood’s Magazine” about 1820. Said he:

“In parts of Warwickshire and some of the adjacent counties, more especially in the churchyards of the larger towns, the frightful fashion of black tombstones is almost universal—black tombstones, tall and slim, and lettered in gold, looking for all the world like upright coffin-lids.... Some village burial-grounds here have, however, escaped this treatment, and within the circuit of a few miles round Warwick itself are many small hamlet churches each surrounded by its lowly flock of green graves and grey headstones.... some half sunk into the churchyard mould, many carved out into cherubins with their trumpeter’s cheeks and expanded wings, or with the awful emblems, death’s heads and bones and hour-glasses.”

Of the so-called black tombstones I have seen none other than slate.

In a short tour through Wales, in 1898, I found very few old headstones. Most of the memorials in the churchyards were constructed of slate, which abundant material is devoted to every conceivable purpose. There is a kind of clay-slate more durable than some of the native stones, and even the poorer slate which perisheth is lasting in

comparison with the wooden planks which have been more or less adopted in many burial-places, but can never have been expected to endure more than a few brief years. Wherever seen they are usually in decay, and under circumstances so forlorn that it is an act of mercy to end their existence.



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FIG. 86.—AT HIGH BARNET.

I conclude my English illustrations of the gravestones with one selected from the churchyard at Kingston-on-Thames, and I leave its interpretation to the reader.

[Illustration: *Fig. 86. High Barnet.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 87. Kingston-on-Thames.*]

Fig. 87.—At Kingston-on-Thames.

“To Thomas Bennett, died 7th Dec. 1800,
aged 13 years.”

The remainder of my unambitious book will be mostly devoted to impressions gained in Ireland and Scotland and on the Continent in my autumn holidays.

CHAPTER X.

Old gravestones in Ireland.

[Illustration: *Fig. 88. Swords.*]

In entering upon a chapter dealing with “Old Gravestones in Ireland,” one is tempted to follow a leading case and sum up the subject in the words: “There are no old gravestones in Ireland.” But this would be true only in a sense. Of those primitive and rustic carvings, which are so distinctive of the eighteenth-century memorials in England, I have found an almost entire absence in my holiday-journeys about Ireland—the churchyards of which I have sampled, wherever opportunity was afforded me, from Belfast and Portrush in the north, down to Killarney and Queenstown in the south. But there are unquestionably old gravestones of quite a different order of simplicity in the Irish burial-places, the most common type being the rough slab of stone, several of which are here sketched at random from the graveyard of the large village or little town of Swords, ten miles or so north of Dublin (Fig. 88). Very few of these stones bear any inscription, and, according to the belief of the local residents, never have been carved or even shaped in any way. In one or two instances, however, the effort of trimming the edges of the stone is clearly visible, and in rare cases we see the pious but immature attempts of the amateur mason to perpetuate, if only by initials, the memory of the deceased.[10] Some such records still remain, but many have doubtless perished, for the material is only the soft freestone so easily obtainable in the district, and the rains and frosts of no great number of years have sufficed to obliterate all such shallow carvings; the surfaces of the laminated rock being even now in process of peeling off before our eyes.



[Footnote 10: In a barren record of facts, such as this chapter is meant to be, I avoid as far as possible deductions and reflections apart from my immediate subject; but it is impossible to pursue an investigation of this character without being deeply interested both in the past history and present life of the people. I cannot help saying that in one day's walk from Malahide to Balbriggan I learnt

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far more of the Irish peasantry, the Irish character, and the Irish “problem” than I had been able to acquire in all my reading, supported by not a little experience in the capital and great towns of Ireland. The village streets, the cabins, the schools, the agriculture and the land, the farmer and the landlord, the poverty and the hospitality of the people, were all to be studied at first hand; and there were churches by the way at Swords and Rush which the archaeologist will seek in vain to match in any other country. The Bound Tower (Celtic no doubt) at the former place, and the battlemented fortalice, which is more like a castle than a church, at Rush, are both worth a special visit.]

The cross and “T.L.” scratched on one of the stones appears to be recent work, and the wonderful preservation of the stone to Lawrence Paine, of 1686, can only be accounted for by the supposition that it has long lain buried, and been lately restored to the light. The stone is of the same perishable kind as the others, and it is certain that it could not have survived exposure to the atmosphere, as its date would imply, for upwards of 200 years. It may even be found that the weather has chipped off the edges of the stones which now appear so jagged, shapeless, and grotesque; but, from recent evidences gathered elsewhere, it is but too probable that these rude pillars have been, and still are, set up as they come from the quarry, without dressing and free from any carving or attention whatever.

Many instances may be found in which slabs of stone, or even slate, have been erected quite recently, the edges untrimmed, and the name of the deceased simply *painted* upon them more or less inartistically, as in the sketch from Drogheda (Fig. 89). Such crude examples are the more remarkable in a busy and thriving port like Drogheda, and amid many handsome monuments, than among the peasantry of the villages; and it is easy to imagine that if nothing more durable than paint has been employed to immortalize the dead in past times all traces must have speedily disappeared. The illustrations from Drogheda give the whole inscription in each case, neither having date nor age, nor any other particular beyond the name. The memorial on the left hand is of slate—the other two of freestone; and the slate in the northern parts of Ireland is the preferable of the two materials.

[Illustration: *Fig. 89. Drogheda.*]

There are at Bangor, ten miles west of Belfast, many such slate records, which have endured for more than a century, and are still in excellent preservation. One which attracted my especial notice at Bangor was of the professional character here depicted, and in memory of one of those bold privateers who were permitted to sail the seas on their own account in the old war times.

Fig. 90.—At Bangor, Ireland.

The following is the epitaph, as clearly to be read now as on the day when it was carved on this slab of Irish slate, more than a century since:



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“Born to a course of Manly action free,
I dauntless trod ye fluctuating sea
In Pompous War or happier Peace to bring
Joy to my Sire and honour to my King.
And much by favour of the God was done
Ere half the term of human life was run.

One fatal night, returning from the bay
Where British fleets ye Gallic land survey,
Whilst with warm hope my trembling heart beat high,
My friends, my kindred, and my country nigh,
Lasht by the winds the waves arose and bore
Our Ship in shattered fragments to the shore.
There ye flak'd surge opprest my darkening sight,
And there my eyes for ever lost the light.

“Captain George Colvill of the Private Ship
of War ‘Amazon,’ and only son of
Robert Colvill of Bangor, was wrecked
near this ground 25th February 1780, in
ye 22nd year of his age.”

A possible explanation of the long endurance of this slate slab may be found in the practice which prevails in this and some other churchyards of giving all such memorials a periodical coat of paint; of which, however, in the case here quoted there is no remaining trace.

Altogether, primitive as they may be, the gravestones of the last century in Ireland, so far as I have seen them, compare favourably with the works of the hedge-mason in England which we have seen in earlier chapters. Even the poor pillar of rough stone, unhewn, ungarnished, and bare as it is, represents an affectionate remembrance of the dead which is full of pathos, and has a refinement in its simplicity which commands our sympathy far above the semi-barbarous engravings of heads and skulls which we have previously pictured. The immaturity of provincial art in Ireland is at least redeemed by an absence of such monstrous figures and designs as we at the present day usually associate with the carvings of savages in the African interior.

But the eighteenth-century gravestones in Ireland are not all of the primitive kind—many of them being as artistic and well-finished as any to be found in other parts of the British Isles. The predominant type is the “I.H.S.,” surmounted by the cross, which appears on probably four-fifths of the inscribed stones of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Ireland. The only instances which came under my notice bearing any resemblance to the incipient notions of human heads so frequently met with in certain parts of England were the three here copied (Fig. 91). Nos. 2 and 3 are taken from gravestones in the old churchyard near Queenstown, and the other appears in duplicate



on one stone at Muckross Abbey by the Lakes of Killarney.[11] The stately wreck of Muckross Abbey has in its decay enclosed within its walls the tombs of knights and heroes whose monuments stand in gorgeous contrast to the desolation which is mouldering around them; while on the south side of the ancient edifice is the graveyard in which the peasant-fathers of the hamlet sleep, the green mounds which cover them in some instances marked by carved stones taken from the adjacent ruins. Both Abbey and grounds are still used for interments, together with the enclosure about the little church of Killaghie on the neighbouring eminence—a church which (like a few others) enjoys the reputation of being the smallest in the kingdom.



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[Footnote 11: The Muckross stone (No. 1) was overgrown with ivy which quite covered up the inscription, but its date was probably about 1750. Of the two from Queenstown, No. 2 is to Mary Gammell, 1793, aged 53; and No. 3 to Roger Brettridge, 1776, aged 63.]

[Illustration: *Fig. 90. Bangor, Ireland.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 91. Muckross and Queenstown.*]

I leave to the ethnologists the task of accounting for these abnormal carvings in the South of Ireland, and associating them with the like productions of the same period in the South of England. Or perhaps I ought rather to excuse my insufficient researches, which, though spread over a broad area, are yet confined to but a few of the many spots available, and may very probably have passed by unexplored the fruitful fields. But, in the words of Professor Stephens, the apostle of Runic monuments, I claim for this work that it is "only a beginning, a breaking of the ice, a ground upon which others may build." My pages are but "feelers groping out things and thoughts for further examination."

CHAPTER XI.

Old gravestones in Scotland.

A very peculiar interest attaches to the old stones which survive in the burial-grounds of Scotland. Regarded generally they are of a description quite apart from the prevalent features of their English and Irish prototypes. Taking the same period as hitherto in limiting our purview of the subject, that is from the latter part of the seventeenth to the early part of the nineteenth century, it may perhaps be said that the Scottish headstones are tablets of Scottish history and registers of Scottish character during a long and memorable time. The one all-prevalent feature everywhere is indicative of the severe piety and self-sacrifice of an age and a people remarkable for one of the simplest professions of faith that has ever existed under the Christian dispensation. The rigid discipline, contempt for form, and sustained humility of the old Covenanters are written deeply in the modest stones which mark the green graves of their faithful dead during a period of fully two hundred years. The vainglory of a graven stone to exalt the virtues of imperfect men and women was to them a forbidden thing; the ostentation even of a name carved on a slab was at variance with doctrine; the cravings of a poor humanity to be remembered after death had to be satisfied with bare initials, and initials are all that were written on the gravestones in many thousands of cases, probably ninety per cent, of the whole, throughout the eighteenth century and approximate years. But the rule was not without its exceptions, often of novel and peculiar description. The skull and crossbone series, so common in the south, have no place in North Britain; while the symbol of the cross, so frequent in Ireland, is very rarely to be found in any shape

whatever within the boundaries of a Scottish burial-place. I present four specimen types from the old chapel-yard at Inverness.



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[Illustration: *Fig. 92. Inverness.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 93. Braemar.*]

Fig. 92.—At Inverness.

On the stone No. 2 the tailor's tools—shears, goose, and bodkin—are clear enough, and I was told that the figures on the stone in the lower left-hand corner (No. 3) are locally recognized as the shuttle and some other requisite of the weaver's trade. Inverness had spinning and weaving for its staple industries when Pennant visited the place in 1759. Its exports of cordage and sacking were considerable, and (says Pennant) "the linen manufacture saves the town above L3000 a year, which used to go to Holland."

In the 1698 example (No. 1) the short "and" (&) leaves no doubt that W.F. & J. McP. (probably McPherson and his wife) are there buried; and the similar information is almost as certainly conveyed in the manifold cases in which appears the sign which occupies the same position in the two lower stones (Nos. 3 and 4). These, however, are all of later date, and may be set down as developments, or rather corruptions, of the original form. The same signs, however, constantly occur in all the northern graveyards.

Scotland has also its cruder form of memorial in the rough unhewn slabs of native freestone, which are used in all parts of the British Isles wherever such material is readily procurable.

Fig. 93.—At Braemar.

Two of these slabs of different degrees are seen in my Braemar sketch, but both seem of one family and serve to shew us the unconscious evolution of a doctrinal law into a national custom. The employment of initials, originally the sacrifice and self-denial of a dissentient faith, is here, as in other instances, combined with the Catholic emblem of the Cross. This little graveyard of Braemar, lying among the moors and mountains which surround Balmoral, and accustomed to receiving illustrious pilgrims whose shoe-string the poor gravestone tramp is not worthy to unloose, is still used for indiscriminate burials, and furnishes several examples of Roman Catholic interments. Wherever such are found in Scotland, bearing dates of the eighteenth century, they are usually of the rough character depicted in the sketch. The recumbent slab in the same drawing is given to illustrate the table or altar stone, which throughout Scotland has been used all through the Covenantic period to evade the Covenantic rule of the simple anonymous gravestone, for such memorials are almost invariably engraved and inscribed with designs and epitaphs, sometimes of the most elaborate character. But these are not mere gravestones: they are "tombs."

[Illustration: *Fig. 94. Stirling*]

Fig. 94.—At Stirling.

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In all parts of Scotland at which we find departures from the conventional simplicity of the gravestone, the variation inclines abundantly towards the symbols of trade and husbandry. At Stirling, in the noble churchyard perched on the Castle Rock, the weaver's shuttle noticed at Inverness appears in many varieties, for Pennant tells us that in 1772 Stirling, with only 4000 inhabitants, was an important factory of "tartanes and shalloons," and employed about thirty looms in making carpets.[12] Occasionally the bobbin is represented alone, but the predominant fashion is the shuttle open and revealing the bobbin in its place. This is as it appears in No. 1 of the four sketches from Stirling, where it seems to indicate, with the shovel and rake, a mingling of weaver and agriculturist. The other trade emblems speak for themselves, excepting the reversed figure 4 in the stone of 1710 (No. 3). This sign has been variously interpreted, but the most reliable authorities say that it is a merchant's mark used not only in Stirling but in other parts of Scotland, if not of England. There are in Howff Burial-ground, Dundee, and in many country churchyards round about that town and Stirling, numerous varieties of this figure, some having the "4" in the ordinary unreversed shape, some with and some without the *, some of both shapes resting on the letter "M," and others independent of any support whatever. It has also been supposed to have some connection with the masons' marks frequently to be seen in old churches, and is even regarded as possibly of prehistoric origin.[13]

[Footnote 12: Pennant pronounced the view from Stirling heights "the finest in Scotland."]

[Footnote 13: The vulgar explanation of the sign is "4d. discount on the shilling," and some of the guide-books are not much better informed when they assume that it marks Stirling as the fourth city of Scotland, for in the old roll of Scottish burghs Stirling stands fifth.]

Fig. 95.—At Blairgowrie.

The stone copied at Blairgowrie is an enigma which I scarcely dare to unravel, but it will admit of several interpretations. "I.E." probably stands for John Elder and "M.H." for his "spouse," but to set out John Elder's name in full, and at the same time to insert his initials, shews either a misconception of, or disregard for, the principles and usages of the Presbytery. Otherwise, in some respects, this example is almost worthy to be classed with the more degenerate forms of churchyard sculpture in England; the skull, the crown, the hour-glass, the coffin, and the bones being all well-known and conventional signs. The compasses may stand for John Elder's profession, but the figure which resembles a cheese-cutter, just below the crown, can only be a subject of conjecture. This stone, which is one of the least artistic I have met with in Scotland, is an evidence to shew that the rural sculptor was as ready in the north as in the

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south to blossom forth had he not been checked by the rigours of the Church. At times indeed the mortal passion for a name to live to posterity was too strong to be altogether curbed, as we may see manifested even in the prescribed initials when they are moulded of heroic size, from 8 to 10 inches being no uncommon height. Remarkable also is the fact just mentioned (page 86) that, concurrently with the erection of these dumb headstones, there were flat or table stones^[14] allowed, upon which not only were the names and virtues of the departed fully set forth, but all sorts of emblematical devices introduced. The table tomb was probably in itself a vanity, and, the boundary passed, there appears to have been no limit to its excesses. There are a great many instances of this at Inverness, Aberdeen, Keith, Dunblane, and elsewhere, and the stone which appears in the sketch from Braemar is only one of several in that very limited space. Such exceptional cases seem to indicate some local relaxation from the austerity of the period, which was apparently most intense in the centres of population. Humility at the grave extended even to the material of the gravestone. At Aberdeen, the Granite City, few of the last-century gravestones are of any better material than the soft sandstones which must have been imported from Elgin or the south. The rule of initials was almost universal. In like manner, when it became the custom to purchase grave-spaces, the simplest possible words were employed to denote the ownership. I noticed one stone in Aberdeen bearing on its face the medallion portrait of a lady, and only the words of Isaiah, chapter xl. verse 6: "The voice said, All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field." At the back of the stone is written: "This burying ground, containing two graves, belongs to William Rait, Merchant. Aberdeen, 1800." The practice of carving on both faces of the headstone is very common in Scotland, and, so far as I have observed, in Scotland alone; but, strange as it may seem, Scotland and Ireland when they write gravestone inscriptions have one habit in common, that of beginning their epitaphs, not with the name of the deceased person, but with the name of the person who provides the stone. Thus:—

Erected by William Brown
to his Father John Brown,
etc., etc.

[Footnote 14: It has been suggested to me that these "tombs" were the luxuries of the wealthier inhabitants.]

[Illustration: *Fig. 95. Blairgowrie.*]

[Illustration: *Fig. 96. Laufen.*

1. Cut into stone.
2. Anchor of iron on dwarf stone pillar.



3. Heart and anchor of thin iron on dwarf stone pillar.
4. Iron plate and rod.
5. Wooden cross.
6. Wooden cross.]

CHAPTER XII.

Old gravestones abroad.



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“Abroad” is a big place, and no sufficient treatment under the head of this chapter is possible except to one who has had very great experience and extended research. Nevertheless I may, with all due diffidence and modesty, tell the little I know on the subject. My opportunities of investigation have been few, and restricted to a limited area—so restricted and so limited that I cannot tell whether or not the observations I have made may be taken as indications of national habits or merely as idiosyncrasies of the people inhabiting the particular localities which I was able to visit. All the churchyards which I have seen in France, Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland very much resemble each other, and are altogether unlike the graveyards of Great Britain and her children. It is to the villages we should naturally go for primitive memorials of the dead, but in all the continental villages which I have visited memorials of a permanent character, either old or new, are scarcely to be seen. Occasionally a stone slab may be encountered, but almost always of recent date. At Laufen in the Canton of Zurich, near the Falls of the Rhine, I selected almost at random the examples of memorials shewn in my sketch (Fig. 96), one or other of which was at the head of nearly every grave.

Fig. 96.—At Laufen.

The average height of these mementoes was about 2 feet, and all the dates which I saw were of the last twenty-five years. Permanence indeed is apparently not considered as it is with us in the like circumstances. The British gravestone is trusted to perpetuate at least the names of our departed friends down to the days of our posterity, but the provision made by our neighbours seems to have been for the existing generation only. Posterity does not trouble the villagers of Switzerland nor their prototypes of other nations around them. This fact was strongly exemplified at Neuhausen, a small place on the other bank of the Rhine, “five minutes from Germany” we were told.

Fig. 97.—At Neuhausen.

In the churchyard at this place was one handsome tombstone, shewn in the drawing, erected apparently in 1790. This was evidence of somewhat ancient art, and I looked about for the old gravestones which should have kept it company. Erect in its place there was not one, but in the remotest corner of the enclosure I came upon several stones lying flat, one upon another, the uppermost and only visible inscription bearing the recent date of 1870! Only twenty years or so “on sentry” at the grave, and already relieved from duty! There was likewise a miscellaneous heap of old crosses, *etc.*, of iron and wood, the writing on which had disappeared, and they might reasonably have been condemned as of no further service; but that gravestones in perfect preservation should have been thought to have served their full purpose in a little over twenty years, and be cast aside as no longer requisite, was a remarkable lesson in national character. All the graves were flat, and at the head of every recent one was a small iron slab bearing a number. Many of those which had crosses were hung with immortelles, composed generally of glass-beads.

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[Illustration: *Fig. 97. Neuhausen.*]

In Neuhausen Graveyard, at the end of the row of graves, are seen two rings protruding from the ground. Lying near is an iron shield with two similar rings surmounting it. It is readily supposed that the first-named rings are also attached to a shield buried in the earth, and so it proves. In order that no space may be lost between the graves, the shields are used alternately to serve as the dividing wall, and are then drawn out, thus enabling the sexton to pack the coffins close together.

The towns and cities abroad have their cemeteries beyond the outskirts, as is the practice here. Occasionally an old churchyard is to be met with, but never an old gravestone as we know it. Still there are instances in which ancient carvings of the same character have been saved by attachment to the church or churchyard wall. Several such are to be seen in German churchyards long since converted to purposes of recreation, and one at Heidelberg may be taken as an example.

FIG. 98.—AT HEIDELBERG

To “Barbara Fosterii,” died 1745, aged 67.

Beneath is the text from the First Epistle of Peter, chapter i. verses 24 and 25.

“All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever.”

At Lucerne, under similar conditions, the striking figures of two skeletons, partly in military garb, keep guard over the tablet which records the virtues of a departed hero. He was probably a soldier, but the figure of a *lictor* on the left with his *fascēs* of axe and rods seems to betoken some civil employment. In ancient times the *lictors* walked in advance of the magistrates, and executed sentence when pronounced.

[Illustration: FIG. 99. LUCERNE.]

[Illustration: FIG. 98. HEIDELBERG.]

FIG. 99.—AT LUCERNE.

To “Iodoco Bernardo Hartman,” died 1752, aged 67 years.

The two last-given illustrations may possibly belong to the category of mural tablets rather than that of gravestones, being fixed apparently by original design, and not by afterthought, as in our “converted” burial-grounds, against the outer walls of the church.



There are, however, no other remains which I could discover bearing any resemblance to the old British headstone, and the evanescent character which seems to have attached for a certain period to the memorials of the dead among our neighbours abroad forbids the expectation that any such as those which have appeared in our earlier chapters are to be found in Europe outside the boundaries of our Empire. In more modern observances, especially in the centres of population, English and continental manners more nearly approximate; and in the many new cemeteries which are now to be found adjacent to the cities and large towns of Western Europe there are tombs and gravestones as many and as costly as are to be found in any round London. In Germany the present practice appears to be single interments, and one inscription only on the stone, and that studiously brief. Thus:



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[Transcriber's note: inscriptions below enclosed in a border]

Eduard Schmidt
Geb d. 8 Oct., 1886.
Gest d. 10 Jan., 1887.

This I copied in the cemetery at Schaffhausen. But at Hendon, a north-west suburb of London, has recently been placed against the church wall a still simpler memorial, a small slab of marble, inscribed:

Carl Richard Loose
B. 21. 1. 52: D. 14. 10. 81.

For brevity *in excelsis* the following, from the cemetery at Heidelberg, can hardly be eclipsed:

Michael Seiler
1805.—1887.

Sometimes the asterisk is used by the Germans to denote birth, and the dagger (or cross) for death, thus:

Hier Risht in Gott
Natalie Brethke
* 1850 +- 1884

CHAPTER XIII.

VERY OLD GRAVESTONES.

Although, for reasons already explained or surmised, the gravestones in our burial-grounds seldom exceed an age of 200 years, there has probably been no time and no race of men in which such memorials were unknown. Professor Dr. John Stuart, the Scottish antiquary,[15] opines that "the erection of stones to the memory of the dead has been common to all the world from the earliest times," and there are many instances recorded in the Old Testament, as when Rachel died and Jacob "set a pillar upon her grave" (Genesis, chapter xxxv. verse 20); and another authority, Mr. R. R. Brash,[16] in a similar strain, comments on the sentiment which appears to have been common to human nature in all ages, and among all conditions of mankind, namely a desire to leave after him something to perpetuate his memory, something more durable than his frail humanity. This propensity doubtless led him in his earliest and rudest state to set on end in the earth the rough and unhewn pillar stone which he found lying prostrate on the surface, and these hoar memorials exist in almost every country.



[Footnote 15: “The Sculptured Stones of Scotland” (two volumes), by John Stuart, LL.D., Secretary to the Scottish Society of Antiquaries.]

[Footnote 16: “Ogam Inscribed Monuments,” by R.R. Brash; edited by G.M. Atkinson.]

A remarkable instance is afforded by Absalom, the son of David, who himself set up a stone to record his memory: “Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king’s dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom’s place” (2 Samuel, chapter xviii. verse 18).

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Professor Stuart indeed declares that there is no custom in the history of human progress which serves so much to connect the remote past with the present period as the erection of pillar stones. We meet with it, he says, in the infancy of history, and it is even yet, in some shape or other, the means by which man hopes to hand down his memory to the future. The sculptured tombs of early nations often furnish the only key to their modes of life; and their memorial stones, if they may not in all cases be classed with sepulchral records, must yet be considered as remains of the same early period when the rock was the only book in which an author could convey his thoughts, and when history was to be handed down by memorials which should always meet the eye and prompt the question, "What mean ye by these stones?"

To such remote antiquity, however, it is probably undesirable to follow our subject. It will no doubt be thought sufficient for this essay if we leave altogether out of view the researches which have been made in the older empires of the earth, and confine ourselves to the records of our own country. Of these, however, there are many, and they are full of interest. In date they probably occupy a period partly Pagan and partly Christian, and it has been conjectured that all or most of those discovered had their source in Ireland, with a possibility of an earlier importation into Ireland by Icelandic, Danish, or other peoples. Many of these stones have been found buried in the ruins of old churches, and most of them may be supposed to owe their preservation to some such protection. The drawings of one or two may be given as samples. Those here sketched (Figs. 100 and 101) are in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, and occupy with others a considerable space, being well displayed to shew the inscriptions on both sides.[17] It is by the fact of both sides being written upon that we assign to them the character of gravestones, that is upright gravestones; but it is also well authenticated by historical records that the memorial of a Pagan chief in Ireland was a cairn with a pillar stone standing upon it, and there is little doubt that the Irish invaders carried the practice with them into Scotland. It is indeed in Scotland that a large proportion of these stones have been discovered, and there are more than a hundred of them in the Edinburgh Museum. In the Museum at Dublin there is also a good collection, conveniently arranged; but the British Museum in London has less than half a dozen—only five—specimens. The number in each of the three museums fairly represents the relative abundance of such remains in England, Scotland, and Ireland. Marked on a chart the discoveries are thickly grouped in the North-Western parts of Scotland, in the South of Ireland, and on the South-Western promontory of Wales. In Cornwall and Devonshire, along the coast line, there have been found a goodly few, and the others are dotted sparsely over the whole kingdom—England, as just indicated, furnishing only a modicum.

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[Footnote 17: The National Museum of Antiquities in Queen Street, Edinburgh, is unequalled by any other collection of British and Celtic remains. All these memorial stones are carefully catalogued, and have, moreover, the advantage of being described at length, with full illustration, in Professor Stuart's copious work (previously mentioned) on "The Sculptured Stones of Scotland."]

[Illustration: THE BRESSAY STONE FIG. 100.

LUNNASTING AND KILBAR STONES. FIG. 101.

OGAM AND RUNIC INSCRIPTIONS.]

The inscriptions upon such stones, when they are inscribed, are usually in Ogam or Runic characters. An example of the Ogam writing is shewn on the edges of the Bressay stone (Fig. 100), and also on the front side of the Lunnasting stone (Fig. 101a). The Ogam style was used by the ancient Irish and some other Celtic nations, and the "Ogams," or letters, consist principally of lines, or groups of lines, deriving their signification from their position on a single stem, or chief line, over, under, or through which they are drawn, perpendicularly or obliquely. Curves rarely occur; but some are seen in the inscription on the Bressay stone, which has been thus interpreted by Dr. Graves, Bishop of Limerick: "Bentire, or the Son of the Druid, lies here." "The Cross of Nordred's daughter is here placed." This stone was found by a labourer about 1851, while digging in a piece of waste ground near the ruinous church of Culbinsgarth at Bressay, Shetland. The design is said to be thoroughly Irish, and the inscription a mixture of Irish and Icelandic. The stone measures 4 ft. by 1 ft. 4-1/2 in. by 2 in. It is attributed to the ninth century.

The stone 101a is a slab of brownish sandstone, 44 in. by 13 in. by 11/2 in., from Lunnasting, also in Shetland. It was found five feet below the surface in 1876, and, having probably lain there for centuries, was in excellent preservation. The authorities, however, are unable to make a satisfactory translation. The cross or dagger is also of doubtful explanation; and Mr. Gilbert Goudie thinks it is a mere mason's mark. It is, however, admitted on all hands that the stone is of Christian origin, and probably of the period just subsequent to the termination of the Roman rule in Britain. It has been suggested that most of these ancient gravestones were carved and set up by the Irish missionary monks not earlier than A.D. 580. The Ogam inscription on the Lumasting stone has been made by one expert to read:

EATTUICHEATTS MAHEADTTANNN
HCCFFSTFF NCDTONS.

A strange and inexplicable aggregation of consonants.

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The stone represented below, 101 *b*, bears an inscription in Runic characters. Runic is a term applied to any mysterious writing; but there were three leading classes of “runes”—Scandinavian, German, and Anglo-Saxon—all agreeing in certain features, and all ascribed by some authorities to the Phoenicians. The stone 101 *b* was found in 1865, at Kilbar, Barra, a remote island of the outer Hebrides, off the north-west coast of Scotland. It measures 6 ft. 5-1/2 in. in height, and its greatest width is 15-1/2 inches. Mr. Carmichael has conjectured that it was probably brought from Iona about the beginning of the seventeenth century, and erected in Barra at the head of a grave made by a son of McNeil for himself. But it is believed to have been in any case a Norse memorial in the first instance, though certainly Christian, for it reads:

“Ur and Thur Gared set up the stones of Riskar.[18] May Christ guard his soul.”

[Footnote 18: Riskar, or Raskar, is a surname of the Norwegians, who were early settled in the Western Islands and adopted the Christian faith.—“Old Northern Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England,” by Dr. George Stephens, F.S.A.]

The Barra stone has on the reverse side a large cross, carved in plaited bands. Dr. Petrie has pointed out that the cross is not necessarily indicative of belief, the ancient Danes and other peoples having used various signs—the cross frequently—to mark their boundaries, their cattle, and their graves.[19] There is little doubt, however, that in most of these British and Irish memorials, although the stones may originally have been Pagan, the cross is typical of Christianity. We are told that it was not unusual for St. Patrick to dedicate Pagan monuments to the honour of the true God. On one occasion, it is related, on the authority of an ancient life of the Saint, that, on coming to the Plain of Magh Solga, near Elphin, he found three pillar stones which had been raised there by the Pagans, either as memorials of events or for the celebration of Pagan rites, on one of which he inscribed the name of Jesus, on another Soter, and on the third Salvator, along probably with the cross, such as is seen on nearly every Christian monument in Ireland. In the same way on two of five upright pillars in the parish of Maroun, Isle of Man, are crosses deeply incised. This spot is traditionally associated with St. Patrick as the place where he preached, and the stones appear to be remains of a Druidical circle.

[Footnote 19: “Christian Inscriptions in the Irish Language.” Collected by George Petrie, and edited by Miss M. Stokes.]

This practice is quite consistent with the principles upon which the Christian conversion was established by the early missionaries. Thus, Gregory, in a letter from Rome, in 601, directed that the idolatrous temples in England should not be destroyed, but turned into Christian churches, in order that the people might be induced to resort to their customary places of worship; and they were even allowed to kill cattle as sacrifices to God, as had been their practice in their previous idolatry. Hence also arose the system of establishing new churches on the sites previously held as consecrated by heathen worship.



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Of the five old gravestones in the British Museum, four are from Ireland and one from Fardell in Devonshire. The Fardell stone was found about the year 1850, acting as a footbridge across a small brook at Fardell, near Ivybridge, Devonshire—a district once inhabited by a Celtic tribe. It is of coarse granite, 6 ft. 3 in. high, 2 ft. 9 in. broad, and from 7 to 9 inches thick. It bears an Ogam inscription on two angles of the same face, and debased Roman characters on the front and back. It reads, according to Mr. Brash, in the Ogam, “Safagguc the son of Cuic;” and, in the Roman, “Fanon the son of Rian.”

The three Irish Ogam stones were presented to the British Museum by Colonel A. Lane Fox, F.S.A., who dug them out of an ancient fort at Roovesmore, near Kilcrea, on the Cork Railway, where they were forming the roof of a subterranean chamber. No. 1 cannot be positively deciphered or translated; No. 2 is inscribed to “the son of Falaman,” who lived in the eighth century, and also to “the son of Erca,” one of a family of Kings and Bishops who flourished in the ancient kingdom of Ireland; and No. 3, which is damaged, is supposed to have been dedicated to a Bishop Usaille, about A.D. 454. All the stones came probably from some cemetery in the district in which they were found.

It has been remarked that the distribution of these old stones marks clearly the ancient history of our islands; their frequency or rarity in each case corresponding accurately with the relations existing in remote times between Ireland on the one side, and Wales, Cornwall, and Scotland on the other. Further enquiry into the subject is scarcely to be expected in this rudimentary work.

To seek for the germ of the gravestone is indeed a far quest. Like the *ignis fatuus*, it recedes as we seem to approach it. In the sculpture galleries of the British Museum there are several examples preserved to us from the ancient Empire of Assyria, and one described as the “Monolith of Shahnaneser II., King of Assyria, B.C. 850,” is almost the exact counterpart of the headstones which are in vogue to-day. It stands 5 ft. 6 in. high, is 2 ft. 9 in. wide, and 8 inches thick. Like the Scottish stones of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it is inscribed on both faces.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE REGULATION OF GRAVESTONES.

It has been already pointed out, and is probably well known, that the clergyman of the parish church has possessed from immemorial time the prerogative of refusing to allow in the churchyard under his control any monument, gravestone, design, or epitaph which is, in his opinion, irreverent, indecorous, or in any way unbecoming the solemnity and sanctity of the place. This authority, wherever exercised, has been subject to the higher jurisdiction of the Diocesan Bishop, and presumably to the rule of the Ecclesiastical Courts; but, as we have seen, the authority has been

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but indifferently employed, and the inference is that the clergy have in times past been woefully ignorant or lamentably careless as to their powers and obligations. A more healthy system now prevails, and we seldom or never find anything in the way of ornament, emblem, or inscription of an offensive or ridiculous character placed in any of our burial-grounds, the Burial Boards being as strict and watchful over the cemeteries as the rectors and vicars are in the management of the churchyards. Nor has there been, so far as we have gone, any difficulty in reconciling this stringency of supervision with the Acts of Parliament which have been passed in recognition of religious equality at the grave; and it is not too much to hope that there is in the present day such universal prevalence of good taste and propriety under the solemnity of death as to ensure concurrence among all sects and parties in securing decorum in all things relating to interments. To the incongruities which have been left to us as legacies from our ancestors we may be indulgent. They are landmarks of the generations which created them, and records of times and manners which we would fain believe that we have left behind in these days of better education and better thought. They are therefore of value to us as items of history, and, though we would not repeat many of them, we shall preserve them, not only because we reverence the graves of our forefathers, but because they are entitled to our protection as ancient monuments. However uncouth they may be in design or expression, they must be tolerated for their age. It cannot be denied that some of them try our patience, in the epitaphs even more perhaps than in the carvings, and “merely mock whom they were meant to honour.” Two out of a vast number may be selected as painful evidences of a departed century’s tombstone ribaldry. The first, from a village near Bath, is a deplorable mixture of piety and profanity, sentiment and vulgarity:
“To the memory of Thomas and Richard Fry, stonemasons, who were crushed to death, Aug. the 25th, 1776, by the slipdown of a wall they were in the act of building. Thomas was 19 and Richard 21 years.

“They were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in death were not divided.

“Blessed are they that die in the Lord, for their works follow them.

“A sacred Truth: now learn our awful fate.

“Dear Friends, we were first cousins, and what not:
To toil as masons was our humble lot.
As just returning from a house of call,
The parson bade us set about his wall.
Flush’d with good liquor, cheerfully we strove
To place big stones below and big above;
We made too quick work—down the fabric came;



It crush'd our vitals: people call'd out shame!
But we heard nothing, mute as fish we lay,
And shall lie sprawling till the judgment day.
From our misfortune this good moral know—
Never to work too fast nor drink too slow."

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The other is at Crayford, and is as follows:

“Here lieth the body of Peter Isnet, 30 years clerk of this parish. He lived respected as a Pious and a Mirthful Man, and died on his way to church to assist at a wedding on the 31st day of March 1811, aged 70 years. The inhabitants of Crayford have raised this stone to his cheerful memory and as a Tribute to his Long and Faithful Services.

“The age of this clerk was just three score and ten,
Nearly half of which time he had sung out *Amen!*
In his youth he was married, like other young men,
But his wife died one day, and he chanted *Amen!*
A second he took. She departed: what then?
He married and buried a third, with *Amen!*
Thus his joys and his sorrows were *Treble*, but then,
His voice was deep *Bass* as he sung out *Amen!*
On the Horn he could blow as well as most men,
So his horn was exalted in blowing *Amen!*
But he lost all his wind after Three Score and Ten,
And here with Three Wives he waits till again
The trumpet shall rouse him to sing out *Amen!*”

The habit of imitation which we have noticed in the masonry of the gravestone is even more pronounced in the epitaphs. One of the most familiar verses is that which usually reads:

“Affliction sore long time I bore,
Physicians were in vain,
Till Death did seize and God did please
To ease me of my pain.”

These lines, however, have undergone variations out of number, a not infrequent device being to adapt them to circumstances by such changes as—

“Affliction sore short time I bore,” *etc.*

The same idea has an extended application at the grave of Joseph Crate, who died in 1805, aged 42 years, and is buried at Hendon Churchyard:

“Affliction sore long time I bore,
Physicians were in vain:
My children dear and wife, whose care
Assuaged my every pain,
Are left behind to mourn my fate:
Then Christians let them find



That pity which their case excites
And prove to them most kind.”

But the most startling perversion of the original text I saw in the churchyard at Saundersfoot, South Wales, where the stone-carver had evidently had his lesson by dictation, and made many original mistakes, the most notable of which was in the second line:—

“Affliction sore long time I bore,
Anitions were in vain,” etc.

The following from Hyden, Yorkshire, is remarkable:

“William Strutton, of Padrington, buried 18th May, 1734, aged 97 years, who had by his first wife 28 children, by his second, 17: was own father to 45, grandfather to 86, great-grandfather to 23; in all 154 children.”

Witty tombstones, even when they are not vulgar, are always in bad taste. Two well-known instances may suffice—



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On Dr. Walker, who wrote a book on English Particles:

“Here lie Walker’s Particles.”

On Dr. Fuller:

“Here lies Fuller’s Earth.”

The same misplaced jocularity must be accountable for an enigmatical inscription at St. Andrew’s, Worcester, on the tomb of a man who died in 1780, aged 65 years:

“H.L.T.B.O.
R.W.
I.H.O.A.J.R.”

This, we are told, should be read as follows:

“Here lyeth the Body of
Richard Weston
In hope of a Joyful Resurrection.”

Rhymed epitaphs have a history almost contemporaneous with that of the old gravestones, having their flourishing period between the middle of the seventeenth century and the early part of the nineteenth century. They were little used in England prior to the reign of James the First, and it is supposed that Mary, Queen of Scots, brought the custom from France. She is also said to have been an adept at composing epitaphs, and some attributed to her are extant.

It may be suspected also that other inventors have written a vast number of the more or less apocryphal elegies which go to make up the many books of epitaphs which have been published; but this is a point wide of our subject, and we must be careful in our Rambles that we do not go astray.

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