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MONUMENTAL BRASSES.

By M. Adeline Boulter-Cooke.

UNIVERSAL as was the use of monumental brasses in Europe, England is particularly fortunate in the number which have been preserved to the present day, and which are of the greatest historical value and form authentic records of heraldry, arms and costumes of the period. Belgium, it is true, possesses—or possessed—some excellent specimens; two cathedrals contain some of the finest that Germany has to offer; French brasses were entirely destroyed during the reign of Terror, so that the four thousand and more which still remain in our country naturally gain an added interest and can scarcely be thought of too highly. It is curious, therefore, that despite their wide popularity, the metal or latten, as it was called, had to be obtained from the Continent up to about 1649, and the cost of procuring it and difficulty of transport very probably originated the difference between the style of the Flemish and the English brass since the latter was more sparing with the use of the precious metal.

Flemish brasses, of which there are some in England, are distinguished by having a background to the figure filled in with scroll work or elaborate designs, the lines being broad and shallow and cut with a flat, chisel-like tool.

In English brasses, with which, of course, we are all familiar, the figures are cut out in separate pieces and let into indents or matrices of corresponding form sunk to receive them in the face of the slab which constitutes the background. Perhaps the brass which best instances the divergence between the Continental and English method is the one at Constance, which commemorates Hallam, Bishop of Salisbury, who died in 1416 while attending the Council.

The early brasses are the most excellent and show masterly ability, simplicity and boldness of original treatment. The attempts at shading which were afterwards introduced deteriorated the plates, and when sheet brass was manufactured in England and easily obtainable, although the number of brasses increased exceedingly, they lack both execution and interest and thus declined in artistic value. Heraldic accessories such as coats of arms were

sometimes embellished with enamel, and this is seen in the earliest known brass in our country, the far-famed one of Sir John D'Aubernon, who died in 1277.

It is to be regretted that it was not the custom for the craftsman who designed and executed the work to sign it with his name or a mark, as considerable interest would have been derived in the same manner that the marks of founders on bells and masons' marks give rise to details concerned with the men who practised these arts. An avenue of thought and exploration is thus closed, and we know next to nothing about those who laboured so patiently upon the brasses which exist in all their perfection of detail and design at the present day. And where they have perished it has not been the fault of the original workers, but neglect, thoughtlessness or greed for the commercial value of the metal. There are, however, a few examples where the name has been engraved on the brass, and at Evreux in Normandy a brass is signed " Guillaume de Plalli me fecit."

Inscriptions on brasses are wonderfully fascinating but difficult, inasmuch as they vary considerably and time and practice is necessary to decipher them. The characters are either Lombardic or Longobardic, single letters placed in specially cut indents in the slab and arranged so as to form a border, or black letters of which there are two kinds. Inscribed strips of latten are placed in a variety of positions, some of which impart a peculiar effect especially when starting in curves from the throat or head or in strips held in the hand. They are usually in French or Latin and give the name of the person represented by the brass, a prayer that the departed soul may enjoy repose, or the simple words, " Jesu, Mercy."

Another very interesting peculiarity about brasses is the fact that some of them have been found to be graven on both sides. Two circumstances probably gave rise to this curious custom.

During the spoliation of monastic houses in the reign of Henry VIII numbers of brasses were reft from the position they had occupied for years, were engraved on the reverse side, and appropriated to memoralize some other person. Stories have been related about prosperous but mean-minded individuals who felt they were doing a good bargain in securing a brass of this description which naturally cost much less money than an entirely fresh plate. Sometimes, however, when, perhaps, the person was not very particular, the

inscription plates have been removed and reinscribed, or the person who desired a memorial in brass at the smallest cost had certain alterations effected by shading so as to bring it up to date and make his little world believe it to be an entirely new representation. Interesting as many of these palimpsests are, they throw much light on the doubtful practices of that period.

Very often sums of money were bequeathed by will to provide for suitable brasses, and although the greater number represent personages of exalted rank and wealth, high-born knights and their ladies, abbots and ecclesiastics, yet when the merchant princes increased in opulence they saw to it that they were also commemmorated in like manner although they did not disdain the signs of their trade, for instance, a sheep or a ram denoting a popular woolstapler. However, the merchants did more than arrange for the execution of brasses, for they left nobler memorials to succeeding generations in the stately churches which they either built or re-edified. Many of these are to be found in the Cotswold Country, where the famous wool made many fortunes. The beautiful church at Northleach probably surpasses all others in brasses to wool merchants which include the Forteys, who were benefactors to the church. John Fortey has one foot on a woolpack and another on a sheep; in the Busshe brass the sheep or ram has curling horns. An early fifteenth century brass at Chipping Campden represents William and Marion Greviel, and Chipping Norton also possesses some examples commemorating woolstaplers.

Although the most fascinating brasses represent figures, yet there are many which are simply engraved with crosses treated and ornamented in diverse ways. Some have figures within the crosshead, and an excellent example of this description is the fourteenth century brass of an ecclesiastic in Merton College Chapel; others merely show the Latin cross, or perhaps there is a symbol or a saint at the head. Another different form is the bracket with tall shafts, or figures standing in a bracket covered with canopies.

The size of brasses varies very considerably, and sometimes only half the figure is engraved; often they are of quite small dimensions, or they may be of considerable importance. The brasses commemorating persons of rank placed on superb "altar tombs" are naturally of great extent, while others—like the celebrated brass at Cowfold—are some ten feet in length and occupy the floor of the central aisle.

This is usually considered the finest brass in Sussex, although local tradition claims this distinction for the fine fifteenth century brass to Sir William Fiennes at Herstmonceaux.

The Cowfold brass represents Thomas Nelond, Prior of the Cluniac monastery of St. Pancras at Lewes, who died on April 18, 1429. He is habited as a Cluniac monk and stands under a Gothic canopy above which the Virgin and Child are seated beneath another canopy. St. Pancras and St. Thomas à Becket are also portrayed on this splendid brass. Like many celebrated brasses this is now most carefully covered, secured and padlocked, and it is impossible to view the saintly Prior who reposes underneath the carpet amid some dust without having resort to the custodian. Somehow such usage appears to be a mistake. People do not mutilate brasses like monuments by cutting their initials, and if time is an object it is most annoying to be compelled to attend upon the slow methods of vergers.

Sussex brasses are deservedly renowned, and both the Grinsteads contain interesting examples. When St. Swithun's church at East Grinstead was destroyed by fire in 1785 the brass of Sir T. Grey and R. Lewkener, of Brambletye, who were successively wedded to Catherine, daughter of Lord Scales, was removed from the ruins and replaced when the edifice was rebuilt. Catherine and her second husband had been great benefactors to the church, and the inscription on the brass, although some of the words are undecipherable, is so quaint and also so expressive of the ideas of the period that it is worth recording.

"Here under this marbille stone lyeth Dame Kateryne Grey, daughter of Thomas Wintyne lorde Scalis, wiff to Sir Thomas Grey Knyght and banneret and after wiff unto the honourable Esquyer Richard Lewkener the elder of Brambilletey and one of the ladys to Quene Elizabeth of blessid memory wiff of Edward the III and afterwards to quene Elizabeth wiff unto oure sofferyne lorde Kynge Henry the VII the wiche passe oute of this transitory worlde the IX day of June the yere of oure blessid lord God MCCCCCV and the same Dame Katheryne and Richard her husbande have founded—this present church—to the laude and honour of God—and a almshouse of III parsons on whose soulis Jhesus by Thy bitter passion have on them Thy marcyfulle compassion. Amen."

The best thirteenth century brass is that of Sir Roger de Trumpington, 1290, who accompanied Prince Edward to Palestine and is represented crosslegged. Fourteenth and fifteenth century brasses are particularly interesting, and in the latter century attained the

highest excellence both for design and execution, a very good specimen being the fine brass of Eleanor Bohun, Duchess of Gloucester. Another fine example is the brass of Robert Stanton, 1458, garbed in plate armour.

Brasses are, of course, specially valuable, not only from the representation of knights, ladies, ecclesiastics and merchants, but because they furnish authentic records of contemporary arms, costume and heraldry. The study of costume alone is sufficiently interesting, and although it cannot be considered that we perceive *portraits* of those commemorated, yet there is enough divergence for imagination to be let loose regarding their characters and their lives.

The little village of Stoke Charity possesses some good specimens of diverse kinds, and the brass of Thomas Wayte, who died on April 10, 1482, shows a special feature which is not commonly met with. It is a representation of Christ issuing from the tomb, which is made to appear quite like the raised altar tomb of the period; the hands of the emaciated Figure are crossed and the head, circled by a nimbus, is slightly bent. The slab, as is often the case, bears the family shield beside the name and a label inscribed " Jesu fili Dei miserere mei."

A large monument in the same church with brasses to Thomas Hampton and his wife Isabella, who died respectively in 1483 and 1475, is very characteristic of the manner in which the entire family were included in the memorial. Below the representation of the parents are engraved their two sons in loose robes and hands in the customary position of prayer, and six daughters all so exceedingly alike each other that the same " portrait " must certainly have been made to do duty for them all. Very likely, however, these long-necked ladies did not in the least resemble the Hampton damsels, four of whom we know were wedded, for panels on the side of the tomb contain heraldic shields of the houses into which they married. Is there not also a story that brass engravers kept sons and daughters to a certain recognized pattern to be cut off as required!

Whitchurch also boasts of a fine brass, now screwed to the wall, which includes a large family; but this is of much later date and therefore the costume is different and more becoming, for it need not be said that a ruff is particularly charming in brass.

The earliest brasses commemorating women are the celebrated

ones of Lady Camoys and Lady Joan Cobham. The costume of the period is followed more or less, loose tunics, wimples and veils; but the hair is sometimes worn free, or parted and plaited, or braided, or worn in nets as fashion decreed. Curious hats are worn by ladies of the Elizabethan period in conjunction with the ubiquitous ruff of the time and a species of close coif which is somewhat becoming.

Brasses to ecclesiastics are very frequent and are of considerable interest and value. Priests are frequently represented holding a Chalice, of which there is a good example at St. Peter's, Bristol. St. Cross possesses a very early example, which shows a priest wearing a cope.

A feature which almost all brasses possess in common is the position of the hands, which are invariably folded in prayer, and although the same attitude occurs over and over again it never fails to be appropriate. Almost it seems a pity that the custom of thus memoralizing the departed has practically died out, for though some modern brasses exist the modern spirit seems attracted for the most part by more material methods of remembrance. Who can say in this hard-headed century whether a larger vision has or has not been thus attained!

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DR. BARNARDO'S HOMES.

It is a pleasure to call attention to the fifty-third Annual Report of this splendid institution, just issued under the appropriate title "For God and Country." It gives a strikingly vivid and interesting account of the year's work on behalf of the destitute children of our country, and of the blessing which God has vouchsafed to the efforts of the workers. The Council state at the outset that they desire to sound the note of gratitude and praise. The work has moved steadily forward during 1918. A fine spirit has inspired the staff. The health and happiness of the children have been almost miraculous when the untoward conditions from which most of them come are remembered. With a deepening conviction the Council believe that in so far as their efforts have been put forward in the spirit of the Master, they have been unfailing as ever in their redemptive power.

The Great War has thrown upon Dr. Barnardo's Homes an unprecedented task. They received during the four and a half years of the conflict 2,220 babies and young children, whose fathers in most cases either had been killed or were fighting at the Front. The 7,131 children to-day in the care of the institution would scarcely have had a chance to become useful and noble citizens had not the Barnardo Homes reached out a hand and led them along the better way. We commend the work of the Homes to readers of the CHURCHMAN. For many years they have supported it by their prayers and their gifts. Having regard, however, to the enormous increase in the cost of living, the need of financial help is greater than ever.