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With the Rector's Compliments.

An Account

of the

Old Registers of St. Botolph,

Bishopsgate.

NOTE.

THE transcript of the Registers is now in course of publication, and the first part (112 pp.) is ready. Succeeding parts will follow at intervals of three months. The number of copies is limited to 500. Parishioners who wish to subscribe (4/- quarterly, or 16/- yearly) are requested to communicate with the Rev. R. H. HADDEN, the Parsonage, Skinner Street, Bishopsgate, E.C.; the names of non-parishioners will be received by the Rev. A. W. CORNELIUS HALLEN, the Parsonage, Alloa, N.B.

1340
December 1st, 1886.

AN ACCOUNT
OF THE
OLD REGISTERS OF ST. BOTOLPH
BISHOPSGATE,

BY THE
REV. A. W. CORNELIUS HALLEN, M.A.

(Reprinted from the CITY PRESS.)

PARISH REGISTERS.

EVERY parish in England possesses books about which Englishmen have, until lately, known but little, but which contain information most valuable to the student, most interesting to the intelligent scholar, and not unattractive to the general reader.

To know the history of our land and trace the causes which have made it what it now is, we must do something more than read the annals of royal and noble families, of foreign and domestic wars, of great revolutions, rebellions and conspiracies. We must study the manners of the people, the origin of our trades and industries, and the composition of our present population.

A NATION'S PEDIGREE.

A nation has a pedigree just as a family has, and it is necessary to a knowledge of history to find out when and how new blood was introduced, and with what results. It may be affirmed that while many of us can talk glibly about our Saxon or our Norman ancestors, but few know anything about the vast quantity of Flemish and Walloon blood that was infused into English veins in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the study of parish registers can best—nay, in some cases can alone—teach us these things. The more

the knowledge of parochial and provincial life extends, the more possible will it be to understand the political and social history of our country. The transcriber of registers feels called upon to write an apology for them, the more that he is constantly asked "Cui bono?" What is the use of so much labour? Men of education, men who therefore ought to know better, ask this, forgetting apparently the axiom, "that the whole is made up of its parts," and the logical deduction, that as the whole is what its parts make it, so to know the whole there must be a knowledge of its parts, and alas it often happens that instead of taking a rational view of parish registers, the custodians of them—the clergy—often know but little of, and are therefore apathetic about, the treasures preserved to us from the past.

DESTRUCTION OF OLD REGISTERS.

In some cases they have allowed them to be injured or destroyed by damp and fire. Even now they are sometimes kept in open boxes or closets in vestries, or flung aside in the lumber room of the rectory-house, where they are in danger of being sold, at the incumbent's death, with old paper and rubbish. Utter strangers have been permitted to consult them without any supervision; they have been lent to antiquarians and their restoration never cared for, leaves have been cut out and sent to genealogists to save the labour of transcribing—nay, it has fared worse with them than that. The parish clerk, when also the village tailor or shoemaker, made measuring strips out of the oldest of the parchment leaves, and the parson's wife covered her jam-pots with the records of the sixteenth century. Even where not injured by neglect, or ruthlessly mutilated, their treatment at the hands of the parson is often most unsatisfactory.

IGNORANCE OF LAWS CONCERNING REGISTERS.

Some parsons, even in this enlightened nineteenth century, do not seem to know the purposes for which they hold these books in trust, or the terms on which they hold them. We have known restrictions placed on the right of

search utterly illegal, arising from indolence probably, more than from greed of gain. We have known them handed over to the custody of those who had no claim to any official position in the parish, in oblivion of the fact that the parson, and not an unqualified lay person, would be held responsible in case of loss or mutilation. We have been told that the expense of searching them would depend on the antiquity of the first search, and that the fees were fixed by a vestry meeting; just as if the law had not fixed the fee, and had made a search in the sixteenth century and a search in the nineteenth, equally cheap, and open to all applicants.

It will be well for the student, when parsons, as a body, not only understand the laws about registers more thoroughly, but recognise more clearly the purposes the books are meant to serve.

USES OF REGISTERS.

1. To supply legal evidence required to establish a pedigree, and through it the right of succession to property, in which case it is only fair that the legal fees should be exacted for search, and where needed for properly-attested extracts.*

2. To furnish information to the general student of history, to the compiler of works of a topo-

* The Registration Act of 1836 enacts that "every rector, vicar, or curate who has the keeping of any register book of births, deaths, or marriages, shall at all reasonable times allow searches to be made of any register book in his keeping, on payment of one shilling for a search of one year, and sixpence for every additional year, and of two shillings and sixpence for every entry certified under his hand as a true copy of the register." It has been decided (*Steele v. Williams*, Exchequer Reports, viii. p. 825), that a person paying for a search was entitled to make whatever extracts he pleased during the period for which he had paid the search fee, and that no further payment could be demanded for certificates unless the person searching required the extract to be certified by the minister. In this same case the judges held that each extract should be charged as a separate search. A fee of thirteen shillings was allowed for twenty-five extracts taken during a period extending over four years. See *Waters' Parish Register*, p. 87.

graphical or genealogical description, and to the editor of the writings and lives of great men. For such purposes it is clear that no hard-and-fast line can be laid down. Government in the regulations by which students are permitted to search wills at Somerset House free of charge, sets an example that most of the clergy are quite willing to follow. It is to be hoped that those who, from mistaken ideas, still withhold permission to students, or place unnecessary and vexatious obstacles in their way, will consider what will be the certain result if such conduct should continue to be common; all registers will be collected in London for the purpose of preservation and consultation, and the clergy and their parishioners will be deprived of the privilege of retaining them in their old homes.

PARISH REGISTERS IN SCOTLAND.

This has been done in Scotland, and a movement has commenced to procure the same being done in England; but only the obstructive conduct of some of the present custodians will ever justify this step.

HISTORY OF PARISH REGISTERS IN ENGLAND.

Parish registers date from 1536, when the keeping of such books was first ordered, but only eight registers are known to exist of a date prior to 1538, when Thomas, Lord Cromwell, Vicar General of the kingdom, issued an injunction to "The curate of every parish church" to keep a register of weddings, christenings, and burials, under a penalty of a fine for every omission. As the result of this injunction, we have in England 812 registers commencing in 1538. It is melancholy to think how many must have perished. Though this new law was obeyed, much opposition was shown to a scheme which struck terror into the mind of the old-fashioned Englishman, who regarded *omne ignotum pro horribile*. Such an enrolment suggested all sorts of possible evils—taxes and levies were the probable outcomes—but these fears gradually passed away. The earliest registers being written in paper books were liable to suffer from damp and frequent handling. Elizabeth, on her accession

in 1558, made provision that registers should be carefully kept, and many—the St. Botolph registers included—date from that year, but still paper books were used.

REGISTERS TRANSCRIBED IN 1599.

About the year 1599 orders were given to transcribe all existing registers into parchment books. The title-page of the St. Botolph register reads thus: "This Register booke belongeth to the parish church of St. Botolph, Bushopsgate, London, wherein is conteyned ye names of such as have bene Married, Christened, & buried. Since the beginning of the Raigne of our Sovereigne ladie Queene Elizabeth. And new written according to hir Maiesties Iniunctions in the XLith yeare of hir highnes Raigne. Anno domini 1599." Most probably the church accounts contain an entry somewhat similar to the one at St. Mary Woolnoth.

"1599. Item paid for faire writing into the same parchmente booke all the christenings, weddings, and burialls from Anno 1538 untill this yerre, 1599. iij li."

Sometimes, however, the transcriber was not a professional scrivener, for in the registers of St. John's parish, Peterborough, is the following interesting entry:

"1569. 10. Aug. Item. Sara Stowkes, the daughter of Henry Stowkes, was christned the Xth day, who afterwardes in this yeare of our lord god 1599 did coppinge this Regester Book wth her owne handes, then being the wife of John Lansdune."

This general transcription while it has preserved the earlier names, has, in many cases, reduced the register to a list of mere names and dates, for in the few instances where the paper books have been preserved, a comparison shows that the transcriber omitted many particulars which he may have regarded as useless or offensive, as savouring of Popery.

One use of these earlier registers, apart from genealogy, is to afford an insight into the nature of the population of each parish—an important matter rightly considered,—the growth of proper names, the changes they underwent when

in common use, and the principal trades carried on in the parish, which also often give a clue to the unravelling of family history.

After 1599, when registers were usually kept by the parson or the clerk, rough memoranda were generally made in a "fowle booke" and allowed to accumulate, so that when fairly written out omissions and mistakes were a natural result.

SPELLING OF NAMES.

In the 17th century the style of writing grew very slovenly, and the spelling would shock a pupil of a modern Board school; indeed, no rule seems to have existed as to the spelling of names, and to excuse the scribes of past centuries it is necessary to remember that they had never in earlier and only rarely in later times any written information to go by. Men had no fixed rule for spelling even their own names. The parish clerk of St. Botolph, at the close of the 16th century wrote his name, by way of attestation, at the bottom of every transcribed page, "Richd. Wyly," nor was his writing bad. The scrivener year after year entered the baptism of this clerk's children, and wrote the name "large and fair," Weoly. To this the owner of it neither offered protest nor paid attention; he let it stand and still held on to his old form. Yet the scrivener's version was probably the correct one, and tells us of an origin in a Herefordshire parish, Richard of Weobly, or Weoly.

When people now talk of the spelling of their names as if a Wheler with one "e" was quite distinct from a Wheeler with two, they do not realize what strange forms names often assumed, and how immaterial anything beyond an approximation to the sound was regarded.

FOREIGN NAMES.

Foreigners fared worst. Sometimes they assumed a simple English name, sounding—not looking—something like their own. Sometimes they apparently resigned themselves to fate, and allowed their neighbours to call them what they would. Parish constables when making out official lists of "Strangers" did fearful things, turning Wilbert

Spirs into Gyllyam Spease, Klawson into Flawson, Elbers into Alburt, while Le Jeune became Young, Wilde, Savage, &c.

MENTION OF OLD TRADES.

When the older registers give any indication of the trade of the person entered the information is extremely valuable. A perusal of the older London registers is constantly adding to our knowledge of London industries, and explaining obsolete words or phrases. The St. Botolph registers give the following: Thred maker, Nedle maker, Pin maker, Fether maker, Button maker, Garbler, Horse courser, Water bearer, Sope boyler, Hat-band maker, Sheir grinder, Stiller, Brukler, Fustian dresser, Cole meater, Hemp dresser, Wire drawer, Sheave maker, Pointer, Thraster, and many other trades rare, if not extinct, at the present day.

As we might expect where the work was heavy, and the scrivener possibly neither a parishioner, nor closely interested in the parish, exuberant matter is rare; in country parishes the parson had more opportunity for showing his individuality. We must here mention Mr. Chester Waters's interesting little work on *Parish Registers*,* and also a lecture by the Rev. W. D. Sweeting on "The Registers of St. John's, Peterborough," † to both of which gentlemen are owing our obligations for much information, and for some of the following quaint extracts, at the same time explaining that the St. Botolph books are by no means barren, as will be seen when the opportunity for perusing them arrives.

ST. PETER'S IN THE EAST, OXFORD.—"1569. There was buried, Alyce, the wiff of (a naughtie fellow whose name is) Mathew Manne."

KYLOE, NORTHUMBERLAND.—"1616. Bur. Dec. 7., Henry, ye son of Henry Watson, of Fenwick, who

* *Parish Registers in England: Their History and Contents.* By R. E. Chester Waters, B.A., London. Fred. J. Roberts, Little Britain, E.C. 1883.

† "The Old Registers of the Parish of St. John Baptist, Peterborough." By the Rev. W. D. Sweeting, M.A., Peterborough. G. C. Casten.

lived to the age of 36 yeare, and was so great a fooll, that he never could put on his own close, nor never went a quarter of a mile off ye house, in all this space."

ST. NICHOLAS, DURHAM.—"1592. Aug. 8, Simson, Arington, Fetherstone, Fenwicke, and Lancaster, were hanged for being Egyptians." The severe statute of Queen Elizabeth against gipsies was only repealed in 1783.

HOLY ISLAND, NORTHUMBERLAND. — "1691. William Cleugh, *bewitched to death*, buried 16 July."

TEDDINGTON, MIDDLESEX.—"1743-4. James Parsons, who had often eat a shoulder of mutton or a peck of hasty pudding at a time, which caused his death, was buried 7 March, aged 36."

TUNSTALL, KENT.—"1557. Mary Pottman nat. and bapt., 15 Apr. Mary Pottman nat. and bapt., 29th June. Mary Pottman, sep. 22nd. Aug.,—from henceforward I omit the Pottmans."

SEA SALTER, KENT.—"1734. Oct. 29. Old Tom Taylor, the great smoaker of Whitstable, and a deaf old woman called Elizabeth Church, were married at Sea Salter with two rings. *Si quis ex successoribus nostris hoc forte legat, rideat si velit.*"

It must not be supposed that parsons were often so jocose at the expense of their people. Many of the annotations are of a character more suited to the occasion.

ST. JOHN'S, PETERBOROUGH.—"1579. 27 Jan. Elizabeth Rawson, widdow, the mother of the said Jone Copeland, who was very charitable in relieving pore people, was buried the xxvij day."

Perhaps one of the most striking entries is one in the same books, 1624. Aug. "Dust a stranger Bur : 13 day" that is all. Unknown Dust, a stranger and a pilgrim, returned to dust again.

Having given a general account of registers, we would now say something about those in which we have a special interest, and which will soon be printed for the perusal of parishioners and the public.

ST. BOTOLPH'S REGISTERS.

The registers of St. Botolph's parish date from 1558, and were very carefully transcribed into the existing parchment book in 1599. The original paper volume has disappeared, so that it is impossible to know what omissions of earlier notes took place. Very much, however, of interest still remains. Each set of old registers has its own distinctive features, and yours is no exception. It may be well to speak briefly on the most prominent of these.

WELSH AND WEST COUNTRY NAMES.

Welsh and West Country names abound in the earlier portion. Welsh names are not common in the printed transcripts of London registers which we have examined, but here there seems to have been quite a colony of Welshmen. Some reason must have existed for this, and probably when these registers are published, archæologists will set themselves to work to discover the cause. West Country names naturally are present where Welsh names abound, and we have recognized several of which we know sufficient to assign them a locality with tolerable certainty. One of these has undergone a change which thoroughly disguises its nationality, which is pure English. The family of Seliman or Selman was of good position in the parish of Cam, Gloucestershire, in the fourteenth century. Members of it became merchants in Bristol, others settling here. That these last were of the same stock we feel certain, for they are found in company with other names common in the same parish—Weight, Parker, Brassington—but Seliman was soon changed into Solomon, and it is almost certain that of the many Solomons now to be found in London some may have their origin amongst the fruitful orchards of the Vale of Berkeley rather than amongst the vineyards of the Far East.

ABUNDANCE OF FOREIGN NAMES.

Another noticeable thing in Bishopsgate registers is the abundance of foreign names. The 16th century saw a vast incursion of Flemish and Walloon Protestants

driven from their homes by persecution. Most of the towns of England harboured some of these. In London as the metropolis they were to be found in greatest numbers. Some City parishes, however, held more than others, for they naturally tried to keep together, and planted small colonies here and there—one of these, Petty France (little France), being close to St. Botolph's Church. It is to be noted of them that they had the privilege of worshipping in churches of their own, where, as a rule, their children were baptized and registered. Some of these registers still exist, and one, that of the Dutch church, Austin-friars, has lately been printed.* The registers of the City churches therefore contain few baptisms of the children of "strangers," as these foreigners were called. When a "stranger" married a "stranger" the ceremony usually took place in one of their own churches, but when one of the couple was English it was usually performed in the parish church. The St. Botolph books contain many such mixed marriages, amongst them that of a direct ancestor of the writer, he being a Flemish "stranger." But "strangers" do not seem to have possessed more than two or three burial grounds, and only occasionally buried in vaults within their own churches. As a result of this, London parish registers contain numerous entries of their burials, and as Petty France was in St. Botolph parish the books are particularly valuable as containing a greater number than usual. If English names were a trial to the parish clerk, foreign names must have been a positive annoyance. We have referred to this already, and only mention it again to prepare the reader for finding the same name spelt in a variety of ways, some of them strange and uncouth. †

* *The Marriage, Baptismal and Burial Registers—1571 to 1884—of the Dutch Reformed Church, Austin Friars, London.* Edited by William J. C. Moens. 1884.

† The whole number in the registers is far too great to give here, but the following are a few foreign names not specially selected: Clowen, Maliard, Levine, Vallen, Pettifriar, De Powntes, De la Foy, De la Mote, Dezprez, Ballow, Petoite, Rosca, Corne, Battest, Fambella, Lature, Paravicini, Preveaw, Mansh, Milder, Van Hale, Campion, Bassana, Van Court, De Cora.

In most cases after the latter part of the 16th century the age is given, which will prove of very great value to the genealogist, and in the case of foreigners, "Sr." or "Stranger" in full, is added also.

SETTLEMENT OF SURNAMES.

With the introduction of so many hundreds of foreign names came a greater fixity in the use of surnames in general, and St. Botolph's registers will yield their quota of information. Old English names were, as a rule, formed from places, trades, or personal peculiarities. To these was added, in the 16th century, a whole mass of names which carried no particular ideas with them, and so led to names being dissociated from their former surrounding and their derivation being lost sight of. We have referred to the frequent entries of Welsh and Huguenot names; but there are many others which deserve notice. Some were clearly derived from trades as Skinner, Panmaker, Forge or DeForge, in the last two instances the owners being probably "strangers." John Panmaker may be the John Pannes, of the Dutch Church (dates and Christian names of his family coincide); De Forge was perhaps from one of the many Forges in Flanders.

Some names clearly belong to foundlings, as "Botolph Aldgate." The custom, however, of naming these waifs after the parish was not as common here as in some other city parishes, at least previous to 1628. At St. Mary's Woolnoth, more than thirty received at various times the surname, "Woolnoth." Probably much depended on the taste of the parish clerk, to whom the selection of a name in such cases would naturally be left.

SINGULAR NAMES.

Some names are quaint, either from the combination or the circumstances under which they appear. "Christian Helmet," "Henry Hardup that died in the cage," "Peter Parchment," "All Saints Wright," "Onlye Toolarge," "Fortune Hunt," "Crooke Back," "Orange Encore," "Milkesopp." A very rare female christian name occurs twice,

"Mirabella," derived probably from Flanders, where a family of Mirabelle existed. We would urge the importance of collecting as many instances as possible of rare names from the various parish registers, and grouping them in families, not so much primarily for genealogical purposes, as to discover the varied and strange forms they assumed, and thus gain some idea of the number of families now supposed to be of pure English descent, which are but ramifications from some Dutch or Walloon root. The history of our local industries, of the prosperity of our large cities, and of the political events of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is very closely connected with the presence of "strangers," whose names at an early date ceased to indicate their nationality and whose influence has thus been quite lost sight of by the historian.

BEDLAM.

The registers contain many entries in which "Bethlehem" or "Bedlam" is mentioned. This refuge for the insane was in St. Botolph's parish, and afforded the best home and treatment known at the time for such poor creatures. We cannot refrain from giving one entry as of peculiar interest, because of the name, rank, and age of the person. Are we to regard it as of a fictitious character? If not, more may be discovered about her.

1608, Ap. 9. "Buried, Ladye Marye Bohun, alias Stafforde, bd. out of Bethlehem House, aged 140."

CHIEF INDUSTRIES.

The chief Bishopsgate industries were leather dressing, iron or metal founding, and weaving. The position of the parish on the edge of the City doubtless offered convenience for carrying on works requiring some space, but the records show that it did not escape the penalty incurred by overcrowding and the neglect of all sanitary laws.

PLAGUES.

It suffered severely from those plagues which periodically thinned the population, but did not leave the survivors more ready to reform the abuses

which had produced them. One effect of these plagues was to change the nature of the population rapidly: old family names disappeared and others took their places; the country still sent up its recruits; for two or three generations the name appears, and then, if not extirpated by the plague, the owners of it retired to the country to found a family more important than the original stock which, continuing on its ancestral acres, was dwindling into insignificance and poverty. Many peerages are held at the present day by men whose ancestors were younger sons of county squires of old lineage.* These often became successful London merchants and founders of houses of far more importance than the old line in the eyes of those who measure merit by money. We must not pick plums out of the pudding. We have therefore not quoted largely from these registers—the perusal of them will prove the more enjoyable when they possess the charm of novelty. We have told what other registers contain, and these do not come behind them. We have tried to show how full of interest such works may be when taken up with some previous knowledge of their purpose and contents. The reader will find matter for consideration as he compares the parish as it was then with it under its present aspect.

THE PARISH IN OLD DAYS.

The open ditch called Houndsditch, into which children fell and were drowned; the monastic walls of Bedlam; the busy colony of Petty France, full of strange sounds and strange trades; the fiery Welshmen, such as Shakespeare knew when he gave us the Welsh parson in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The reader will find that these men brought together from east and west did not always love each other in their common home, for there is a record of at least one bloody quarrel between a Welshman and a Dutchman where each killed his foe.

* e.g., Dukes of Newcastle (extinct), and Leeds; Earls of Coventry, Warwick, Holland (extinct), Clare, (extinct), Chichester, Ducie, Middlesex (extinct), Dartmouth, Wiltshire (extinct), Camden, Essex, Craven, Dudley, Radnor; Barons Leigh, Dormer; and many more.

STRANGE PHRASES.

Strange phrases will be met with—a “Chrisomer” denoting an infant buried within a month of baptism; a “marriage with basons,” which may signify that a collection was made to enable a poor couple to commence house-keeping, much as “penny weddings” were held in Scotland. In the days of the Commonwealth, the magistrate intruded on the sacred work of the ministry, and celebrated marriages according to a law which existed only as long as the Usurpation.

NOBLE AND GENTLE FAMILIES.

Then as now the neighbourhood was a busy one, and chiefly the home of the sons of toil, but others also were to be met whose descendants would feel themselves sadly out of their element so far east, the Earls of Argyl, Shrewsbury, Worcester, and of knightly and gentle families Cornwallis, Mildmay, Pawlet, Dashwood, Leventhorpe, Montague, and others. As register after register of London parishes is printed and published each will become a portion of a strange but most valuable “City of London Directory”—strange as showing the mixed condition of society, and the appearance and disappearance of various trades, valuable as a handbook to history opening many of its present secrets.

We trust that we have said enough to make our readers desirous of taking advantage of an opportunity which such as are parishioners should value above all others—an opportunity but rarely offered to the inhabitants of an important parish such as Bishopsgate.

In country parishes the parson very wisely often gives a portion of a full transcript of the church register in each monthly part of the parish magazine. This is always much valued by the people of the place and by the student beyond its bounds. It would be impossible to treat these registers in such a way, and to print and issue them all at once would be to repel the ordinary reader, who would shrink from the perusal of a thick volume, and from the price at which alone it could be sold without loss. By the kindness of the excellent Rector of the parish,

the public will be able to possess this work in a more convenient manner. The quarterly parts in which it will be issued will neither be cumbersome nor costly, and if kept with care will give a complete transcript of these most valuable parish records, together with full indexes.

This work is regarded with interest by men of letters, and it is not too much to expect that it will be specially welcomed by the parishioners, who are now carrying on the work of those whose names deserve some better record than an entry entombed in the volumes lying in the fire-proof safe of the Parish Church. In some cases it will be found that not only do they inherit their work, but that they inherit their name and have their blood in their veins. The coming transcript may be regarded as the memorial of the men who made the parish of St. Botolph, Bishopsgate, what it now is.



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