

**LANG  
ANDREW**

BOOKS AND  
BOOKMEN

Andrew Lang  
**Books and Bookmen**

«Public Domain»

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# Andrew Lang Books and Bookmen

To

THE VISCOUNTESS WOLSELEY

Madame, it is no modish thing,  
The bookman's tribute that I bring;  
A talk of antiquaries grey,  
Dust unto dust this many a day,  
Gossip of texts and bindings old,  
Of faded type, and tarnish'd gold!

*Can ladies care for this to-do  
With Payne, Derome, and Padeloup?  
Can they resign the rout, the ball,  
For lonely joys of shelf and stall?*

The critic thus, serenely wise;  
But you can read with other eyes,  
Whose books and bindings treasured are  
'Midst mingled spoils of peace and war;  
Shields from the fights the Mahdi lost,  
And trinkets from the Golden Coast,  
And many things divinely done  
By Chippendale and Sheraton,  
And trophies of Egyptian deeds,  
And fans, and plates, and Aggrey beads,  
Pomander boxes, assegais,  
And sword-hilts worn in Marlbro's days.

In this pell-mell of old and new,  
Of war and peace, my essays, too,  
For long in serials tempest-tost,  
Are landed now, and are not lost:  
Nay, on your shelf secure they lie,  
As in the amber sleeps the fly.  
'Tis true, they are not "rich nor rare;"  
Enough, for me, that they are – there!

A. L

## PREFACE

The essays in this volume have, for the most part, already appeared in an American edition (Combes, New York, 1886). The Essays on 'Old French Title-Pages' and 'Lady Book-Lovers' take the place of 'Book Binding' and 'Bookmen at Rome'; 'Elzevirs' and 'Some Japanese Bogie-Books' are reprinted, with permission of Messrs. Cassell, from the Magazine of Art; 'Curiosities of Parish Registers' from the Guardian; 'Literary Forgeries' from the Contemporary Review; 'Lady Book-Lovers' from the Fortnightly Review; 'A Bookman's Purgatory' and two of the pieces of verse from Longman's Magazine – with the courteous permission of the various editors. All the chapters have been revised, and I have to thank Mr. H. Tedder for his kind care in reading the proof sheets, and Mr. Charles Elton, M.P., for a similar service to the Essay on 'Parish Registers.'

## ELZEVIRS

*The Countryman.* “You know how much, for some time past, the editions of the Elzevirs have been in demand. The fancy for them has even penetrated into the country. I am acquainted with a man there who denies himself necessities, for the sake of collecting into a library (where other books are scarce enough) as many little Elzevirs as he can lay his hands upon. He is dying of hunger, and his consolation is to be able to say, ‘I have all the poets whom the Elzevirs printed. I have ten examples of each of them, all with red letters, and all of the right date.’ This, no doubt, is a craze, for, good as the books are, if he kept them to read them, one example of each would be enough.”

*The Parisian.* “If he had wanted to read them, I would not have advised him to buy Elzevirs. The editions of minor authors which these booksellers published, even editions ‘of the right date,’ as you say, are not too correct. Nothing is good in the books but the type and the paper. Your friend would have done better to use the editions of Gryphius or Estienne.”

This fragment of a literary dialogue I translate from ‘*Entretiens sur les Contes de Fées*,’ a book which contains more of old talk about books and booksellers than about fairies and folk-lore. The ‘*Entretiens*’ were published in 1699, about sixteen years after the Elzevirs ceased to be publishers. The fragment is valuable: first, because it shows us how early the taste for collecting Elzevirs was fully developed, and, secondly, because it contains very sound criticism of the mania. Already, in the seventeenth century, lovers of the tiny Elzevirian books waxed pathetic over dates, already they knew that a ‘*Cæsar*’ of 1635 was the right ‘*Cæsar*,’ already they were fond of the red-lettered passages, as in the first edition of the ‘*Virgil*’ of 1636. As early as 1699, too, the Parisian critic knew that the editions were not very correct, and that the paper, type, ornaments, and *format* were their main attractions. To these we must now add the rarity of really good Elzevirs.

Though Elzevirs have been more fashionable than at present, they are still regarded by novelists as the great prize of the book collector. You read in novels about “priceless little Elzevirs,” about books “as rare as an old Elzevir.” I have met, in the works of a lady novelist (but not elsewhere), with an Elzevir ‘*Theocritus*.’ The late Mr. Hepworth Dixon introduced into one of his romances a romantic Elzevir Greek Testament, “worth its weight in gold.” Casual remarks of this kind encourage a popular delusion that all Elzevirs are pearls of considerable price. When a man is first smitten with the pleasant fever of book-collecting, it is for Elzevirs that he searches. At first he thinks himself in amazing luck. In Booksellers’ Row and in Castle Street he “picks up,” for a shilling or two, Elzevirs, real or supposed. To the beginner, any book with a sphere on the title-page is an Elzevir. For the beginner’s instruction, two copies of spheres are printed here. The second is a sphere, an ill-cut, ill-drawn sphere, which is not Elzevirian at all. The mark was used in the seventeenth century by many other booksellers and printers. The first, on the other hand, is a true Elzevirian sphere, from a play of Molière’s, printed in 1675. Observe the comparatively neat drawing of the first sphere, and be not led away after spurious imitations.

Beware, too, of the vulgar error of fancying that little duodecimos with the mark of the fox and the bee’s nest, and the motto “*Quaerendo*,” come from the press of the Elzevirs. The mark is that of Abraham Wolfgang, which name is not a pseudonym for Elzevir. There are three sorts of Elzevir pseudonyms. First, they occasionally reprinted the full title-page, publisher’s name and all, of the book they pirated. Secondly, when they printed books of a “dangerous” sort, Jansenist pamphlets and so forth, they used pseudonyms like “*Nic. Schouter*,” on the ‘*Lettres Provinciales*’ of Pascal. Thirdly, there are real pseudonyms employed by the Elzevirs. John and Daniel, printing at Leyden (1652–1655), used the false name “*Jean Sambix*.” The Elzevirs of Amsterdam often placed the name “*Jacques le Jeune*” on their title-pages. The collector who remembers these things must also see that his purchases have the right ornaments at the heads of chapters, the right tail-pieces at the ends. Two of the most frequently recurring ornaments are the so-called “*Tête de Buffle*” and the “*Sirène*.” More

or less clumsy copies of these and the other Elzevirian ornaments are common enough in books of the period, even among those printed out of the Low Countries; for example, in books published in Paris.

A brief sketch of the history of the Elzevirs may here be useful. The founder of the family, a Flemish bookbinder, Louis, left Louvain and settled in Leyden in 1580. He bought a house opposite the University, and opened a book-shop. Another shop, on college ground, was opened in 1587. Louis was a good bookseller, a very ordinary publisher. It was not till shortly before his death, in 1617, that his grandson Isaac bought a set of types and other material. Louis left six sons. Two of these, Matthew and Bonaventure, kept on the business, dating *ex officina Elzeviriana*. In 1625 Bonaventure and Abraham (son of Matthew) became partners. The “good dates” of Elzevirian books begin from 1626. The two Elzevirs chose excellent types, and after nine years’ endeavours turned out the beautiful ‘Cæsar’ of 1635.

Their classical series in *petit format* was opened with ‘Horace’ and ‘Ovid’ in 1629. In 1641 they began their elegant piracies of French plays and poetry with ‘Le Cid.’ It was worth while being pirated by the Elzevirs, who turned you out like a gentleman, with *fleurons* and red letters, and a pretty frontispiece. The modern pirate dresses you in rags, prints you murderously, and binds you, if he binds you at all, in some hideous example of “cloth extra,” all gilt, like archaic gingerbread. Bonaventure and Abraham both died in 1652. They did not depart before publishing (1628), in *grand format*, a desirable work on fencing, Thibault’s ‘Académie de l’Espée.’ This Tibbald also killed by the book. John and Daniel Elzevir came next. They brought out the ‘Imitation’ (Thomæ a Kempis canonici regularis ord. S. Augustini De Imitatione Christi, libri iv.); I wish by taking thought I could add eight millimetres to the stature of my copy. In 1655 Daniel joined a cousin, Louis, in Amsterdam, and John stayed in Leyden. John died in 1661; his widow struggled on, but her son Abraham (1681) let all fall into ruins. Abraham died 1712. The Elzevirs of Amsterdam lasted till 1680, when Daniel died, and the business was wound up. The type, by Christopher Van Dyck, was sold in 1681, by Daniel’s widow. *Sic transit gloria*.

After he has learned all these matters the amateur has still a great deal to acquire. He may now know a real Elzevir from a book which is not an Elzevir at all. But there are enormous differences of value, rarity, and excellence among the productions of the Elzevirian press. The bookstalls teem with small, “cropped,” dingy, dirty, battered Elzevirian editions of the classics, *not* “of the good date.” On these it is not worth while to expend a couple of shillings, especially as Elzevirian type is too small to be read with comfort by most modern eyes. No, let the collector save his money; avoid littering his shelves with what he will soon find to be rubbish, and let him wait the chance of acquiring a really beautiful and rare Elzevir.

Meantime, and before we come to describe Elzevirs of the first flight, let it be remembered that the “taller” the copy, the less harmed and nipped by the binder’s shears, the better. “Men scarcely know how beautiful fire is,” says Shelley; and we may say that most men hardly know how beautiful an Elzevir was in its uncut and original form. The Elzevirs we have may be “dear,” but they are certainly “dumpy twelves.” Their fair proportions have been docked by the binder. At the Beckford sale there was a pearl of a book, a ‘Marot;’ not an Elzevir, indeed, but a book published by Wetstein, a follower of the Elzevirs. This exquisite pair of volumes, bound in blue morocco, was absolutely unimpaired, and was a sight to bring happy tears into the eyes of the amateur of Elzevirs. There was a gracious *svelte* elegance about these tomes, an appealing and exquisite delicacy of proportion, that linger like sweet music in the memory. I have a copy of the Wetstein ‘Marot’ myself, not a bad copy, though murderously bound in that ecclesiastical sort of brown calf antique, which goes well with hymn books, and reminds one of cakes of chocolate. But my copy is only some 128 millimetres in height, whereas the uncut Beckford copy (it had belonged to the great Pixérécourt) was at least 130 millimetres high. Beside the uncut example mine looks like Cinderella’s plain sister beside the beauty of the family.

Now the moral is that only tall Elzevirs are beautiful, only tall Elzevirs preserve their ancient proportions, only tall Elzevirs are worth collecting. Dr. Lemuel Gulliver remarks that the King of

Lilliput was taller than any of his court by almost the breadth of a nail, and that his altitude filled the minds of all with awe. Well, the Philistine may think a few millimetres, more or less, in the height of an Elzevir are of little importance. When he comes to sell, he will discover the difference. An uncut, or almost uncut, copy of a good Elzevir may be worth fifty or sixty pounds or more; an ordinary copy may bring fewer pence. The binders usually pare down the top and bottom more than the sides. I have a 'Rabelais' of the good date, with the red title (1663), and some of the pages have never been opened, at the sides. But the height is only some 122 millimetres, a mere dwarf. Anything over 130 millimetres is very rare. Therefore the collector of Elzevirs should have one of those useful ivory-handled knives on which the French measures are marked, and thus he will at once be able to satisfy himself as to the exact height of any example which he encounters.

Let us now assume that the amateur quite understands what a proper Elzevir should be: tall, clean, well bound if possible, and of the good date. But we have still to learn what the good dates are, and this is matter for the study and practice of a well-spent life. We may gossip about a few of the more famous Elzevirs, those without which no collection is complete. Of all Elzevirs the most famous and the most expensive is an old cookery book, "Le Pastissier François.' Wherein is taught the way to make all sorts of pastry, useful to all sorts of persons. Also the manner of preparing all manner of eggs, for fast-days, and other days, in more than sixty fashions. Amsterdam, Louys, and Daniel Elsevier. 1665." The mark is not the old "Sage," but the "Minerva" with her owl. Now this book has no intrinsic value any more than a Tauchnitz reprint of any modern volume on cooking. The 'Pastissier' is cherished because it is so very rare. The tract passed into the hands of cooks, and the hands of cooks are detrimental to literature. Just as nursery books, fairy tales, and the like are destroyed from generation to generation, so it happens with books used in the kitchen. The 'Pastissier,' to be sure, has a good frontispiece, a scene in a Low Country kitchen, among the dead game and the dainties. The buxom cook is making a game pie; a pheasant pie, decorated with the bird's head and tail-feathers, is already made.

Not for these charms, but for its rarity, is the 'Pastissier' coveted. In an early edition of the 'Manuel' (1821) Brunet says, with a feigned brutality (for he dearly loved an Elzevir), "Till now I have disdained to admit this book into my work, but I have yielded to the prayers of amateurs. Besides, how could I keep out a volume which was sold for one hundred and one francs in 1819?" One hundred and one francs! If I could only get a 'Pastissier' for one hundred and one francs! But our grandfathers lived in the Bookman's Paradise. "Il n'est pas jusqu'aux Anglais," adds Brunet – "the very English themselves – have a taste for the 'Pastissier.'" The Duke of Marlborough's copy was actually sold for £1 4s. It would have been money in the ducal pockets of the house of Marlborough to have kept this volume till the general sale of all their portable property at which our generation is privileged to assist. No wonder the 'Pastissier' was thought rare. Bérard only knew two copies. Pieters, writing on the Elzevirs in 1843, could cite only five 'Pastissiers,' and in his 'Annales' he had found out but five more. Willems, on the other hand, enumerates some thirty, not including Motteley's. Motteley was an uncultivated, untaught enthusiast. He knew no Latin, but he had a *flair* for uncut Elzevirs. "Incomptis capillis," he would cry (it was all his lore) as he gloated over his treasures. They were all burnt by the Commune in the Louvre Library.

A few examples may be given of the prices brought by 'Le Pastissier' in later days. Sensier's copy was but 128 millimetres in height, and had the old ordinary vellum binding, – in fact, it closely resembled a copy which Messrs. Ellis and White had for sale in Bond Street in 1883. The English booksellers asked, I think, about 1,500 francs for their copy. Sensier's was sold for 128 francs in April, 1828; for 201 francs in 1837. Then the book was gloriously bound by Trautz-Bauzonnet, and was sold with Potier's books in 1870, when it fetched 2,910 francs. At the Benzon sale (1875) it fetched 3,255 francs, and, falling dreadfully in price, was sold again in 1877 for 2,200 francs. M. Dutuit, at Rouen, has a taller copy, bound by Bauzonnet. Last time it was sold (1851) it brought 251 francs. The Duc de Chartres has now the copy of Pieters, the historian of the Elzevirs, valued at 3,000 francs.

About thirty years ago no fewer than three copies were sold at Brighton, of all places. M. Quentin Bauchart had a copy only 127 millimetres in height, which he swopped to M. Paillet. M. Chartener, of Metz, had a copy now bound by Bauzonnet which was sold for four francs in 1780. We call this the age of cheap books, but before the Revolution books were cheaper. It is fair to say, however, that this example of the 'Pastissier' was then bound up with another book, Vlacq's edition of 'Le Cuisinier François,' and so went cheaper than it would otherwise have done. M. de Fontaine de Resbecq declares that a friend of his bought six original pieces of Molière's bound up with an old French translation of Garth's 'Dispensary.' The one faint hope left to the poor book collector is that he may find a valuable tract lurking in the leaves of some bound collection of trash. I have an original copy of Molière's 'Les Fâcheux' bound up with a treatise on precious stones, but the bookseller from whom I bought it knew it was there! That made all the difference.

But, to return to our 'Pastissier,' here is M. de Fontaine de Resbecq's account of how he wooed and won his own copy of this illustrious Elzevir. "I began my walk to-day," says this hunter of ancient stalls, "by the Pont Marie and the Quai de la Grève, the pillars of Hercules of the book-hunting world. After having viewed and reviewed these remote books, I was going away, when my attention was caught by a small naked volume, without a stitch of binding. I seized it, and what was my delight when I recognised one of the rarest of that famed Elzevir collection whose height is measured as minutely as the carats of the diamond. There was no indication of price on the box where this jewel was lying; the book, though unbound, was perfectly clean within. 'How much?' said I to the bookseller. 'You can have it for six sous,' he answered; 'is it too much?' 'No,' said I, and, trembling a little, I handed him the thirty centimes he asked for the 'Pastissier François.' You may believe, my friend, that after such a piece of luck at the start, one goes home fondly embracing the beloved object of one's search. That is exactly what I did."

Can this tale be true? Is such luck given by the jealous fates *mortalibus ægris*? M. de Resbecq's find was made apparently in 1856, when trout were plenty in the streams, and rare books not so very rare. To my own knowledge an English collector has bought an original play of Molière's, in the original vellum, for eighteenpence. But no one has such luck any longer. Not, at least, in London. A more expensive 'Pastissier' than that which brought six sous was priced in Bachelin-Deflorenne's catalogue at £240. A curious thing occurred when two uncut 'Pastissiers' turned up simultaneously in Paris. One of them Morgand and Fatout sold for £400. Clever people argued that one of the twin uncut 'Pastissiers' must be an imitation, a facsimile by means of photogravure, or some other process. But it was triumphantly established that both were genuine; they had minute points of difference in the ornaments.

M. Willems, the learned historian of the Elzevirs, is indignant at the successes of a book which, as Brunet declares, is badly printed. There must be at least forty known 'Pastissiers' in the world. Yes; but there are at least 4,000 people who would greatly rejoice to possess a 'Pastissier,' and some of these desirous ones are very wealthy. While this state of the market endures, the 'Pastissier' will fetch higher prices than the other varieties. Another extremely rare Elzevir is 'L'Illustre Théâtre de Mons. Corneille' (Leyden, 1644). This contains 'Le Cid,' 'Les Horaces,' 'Le Cinna,' 'La Mort de Pompée,' 'Le Polyeucte.' The name, 'L'Illustre Théâtre,' appearing at that date has an interest of its own. In 1643–44, Molière and Madeleine Béjart had just started the company which they called 'L'Illustre Théâtre.' Only six or seven copies of the book are actually known, though three or four are believed to exist in England, probably all covered with dust in the library of some lord. "He has a very good library," I once heard some one say to a noble earl, whose own library was famous. "And what can a fellow do with a very good library?" answered the descendant of the Crusaders, who probably (being a youth light-hearted and content) was ignorant of his own great possessions. An expensive copy of 'L'Illustre Théâtre,' bound by Trautz-Bauzonnet, was sold for £300.

Among Elzevirs desirable, yet not hopelessly rare, is the 'Virgil' of 1636. Heinsius was the editor of this beautiful volume, prettily printed, but incorrect. Probably it is hard to correct with absolute

accuracy works in the clear but minute type which the Elzevirs affected. They have won fame by the elegance of their books, but their intention was to sell good books cheap, like Michel Lévy. The small type was required to get plenty of “copy” into little bulk. Nicholas Heinsius, the son of the editor of the ‘Virgil,’ when he came to correct his father’s edition, found that it contained so many coquilles, or misprints, as to be nearly the most incorrect copy in the world. Heyne says, “Let the ‘Virgil’ be one of the rare Elzevirs, if you please, but within it has scarcely a trace of any good quality.” Yet the first edition of this beautiful little book, with its two passages of red letters, is so desirable that, till he could possess it, Charles Nodier would not profane his shelves by any ‘Virgil’ at all.

Equally fine is the ‘Cæsar’ of 1635, which, with the ‘Virgil’ of 1636 and the ‘Imitation’ without date, M. Willems thinks the most successful works of the Elzevirs, “one of the most enviable jewels in the casket of the bibliophile.” It may be recognised by the page 238, which is erroneously printed 248. A good average height is from 125 to 128 millimetres. The highest known is 130 millimetres. This book, like the ‘Imitation,’ has one of the pretty and ingenious frontispieces which the Elzevirs prefixed to their books. So farewell, and good speed in your sport, ye hunters of Elzevirs, and may you find perhaps the rarest Elzevir of all, ‘L’Aimable Mère de Jésus.’

## BALLADE OF THE REAL AND IDEAL

### (DOUBLE REFRAIN.)

O visions of salmon tremendous,  
Of trout of unusual weight,  
Of waters that wander as Ken does,  
Ye come through the Ivory Gate!  
But the skies that bring never a “spate,”  
But the flies that catch up in a thorn,  
But the creel that is barren of freight,  
Through the portals of horn!

O dreams of the Fates that attend us  
With prints in the earliest state,  
O bargains in books that they send us,  
Ye come through the Ivory Gate!  
But the tome that has never a mate,  
But the quarto that’s tattered and torn,  
And bereft of a title and date,  
Through the portals of horn!

O dreams of the tongues that commend us,  
Of crowns for the laureate pate,  
Of a public to buy and befriend us,  
Ye come through the Ivory Gate!  
But the critics that slash us and slate,<sup>1</sup>  
But the people that hold us in scorn,  
But the sorrow, the scathe, and the hate,  
Through the portals of horn!

### ENVOY

Fair dreams of things golden and great,  
Ye come through the Ivory Gate;  
But the facts that are bleak and forlorn,  
Through the portals of horn!

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<sup>1</sup> “Slate” is a professional term for a severe criticism. Clearly the word is originally “slat,” a narrow board of wood, with which a person might be beaten.

## CURIOSITIES OF PARISH REGISTERS

There are three classes of persons who are deeply concerned with parish registers – namely, villains, antiquaries, and the sedulous readers, “parish clerks and others,” of the second or “agony” column of the Times. Villains are probably the most numerous of these three classes. The villain of fiction dearly loves a parish register: he cuts out pages, inserts others, intercalates remarks in a different coloured ink, and generally manipulates the register as a Greek manages his hand at *écarté*, or as a Hebrew dealer in Moabite bric-à-brac treats a synagogue roll. We well remember one villain who had locked himself into the vestry (he was disguised as an archaeologist), and who was enjoying his wicked pleasure with the register, when the vestry somehow caught fire, the rusty key would not turn in the door, and the villain was roasted alive, in spite of the disinterested efforts to save him made by all the virtuous characters in the story. Let the fate of this bold, bad man be a warning to wicked earls, baronets, and all others who attempt to destroy the record of the marriage of a hero’s parents. Fate will be too strong for them in the long run, though they bribe the parish clerk, or carry off in white wax an impression of the keys of the vestry and of the iron chest in which a register should repose.

There is another and more prosaic danger in the way of villains, if the new bill, entitled “The Parish Registers Preservation Act,” ever becomes law. The bill provides that every register earlier than 1837 shall be committed to the care of the Master of the Rolls, and removed to the Record Office. Now the common villain of fiction would feel sadly out of place in the Register Office, where a more watchful eye than that of a comic parish clerk would be kept on his proceedings. Villains and local antiquaries will, therefore, use all their parliamentary influence to oppose and delay this bill, which is certainly hard on the parish archaeologist. The men who grub in their local registers, and slowly compile parish or county history, deserve to be encouraged rather than depressed. Mr. Chester Waters, therefore, has suggested that copies of registers should be made, and the comparatively legible copy left in the parish, while the crabbed original is conveyed to the Record Office in London. Thus the local antiquary would really have his work made more easy for him (though it may be doubted whether he would quite enjoy that condescension), while the villain of romance would be foiled; for it is useless (as a novel of Mr. Christie Murray’s proves) to alter the register in the keeping of the parish when the original document is safe in the Record Office. But previous examples of enforced transcription (as in 1603) do not encourage us to suppose that the copies would be very scrupulously made. Thus, after the Reformation, the prayers for the dead in the old registers were omitted by the copyist, who seemed to think (as the contractor for “sandwich men” said to the poor fellows who carried the letter H), “I don’t want you, and the public don’t want you, and you’re no use to nobody.” Again, when Laurence Fletcher was buried in St. Saviour’s, Southwark, in 1608, the old register described him as “a player, the King’s servant.” But the clerk, keeping a note-book, simply called Laurence Fletcher “a man,” and (in 1625) he also styled Mr. John Fletcher “a man.” Now, the old register calls Mr. John Fletcher “a poet.” To copy all the parish registers in England would be a very serious task, and would probably be but slovenly performed. If they were reproduced, again, by any process of photography, the old difficult court hand would remain as hard as ever. But this is a minor objection, for the local antiquary revels in the old court hand.

From the little volume by Mr. Chester Waters, already referred to (‘Parish Registers in England,’ printed for the author by F. J. Roberts, Little Britain, E.C.), we proceed to appropriate such matters of curiosity as may interest minds neither parochial nor doggedly antiquarian. Parish registers among the civilised peoples of antiquity do not greatly concern us. It seems certain that many Polynesian races have managed to record (in verse, or by some rude marks) the genealogies of their chiefs through many hundreds of years. These oral registers are accepted as fairly truthful by some students, yet we must remember that Pindar supposed himself to possess knowledge of at least twenty-five generations

before his own time, and that only brought him up to the birth of Jason. Nobody believes in Jason and Medea, and possibly the genealogical records of Maoris and Fijians are as little trustworthy as those of Pindaric Greece. However, to consider thus is to consider too curiously. We only know for certain that genealogy very soon becomes important, and, therefore, that records are early kept, in a growing civilisation. “After Nehemiah’s return from the captivity in Babylon, the priests at Jerusalem whose register was not found were as polluted put from the priesthood.” Rome had her parish registers, which were kept in the temple of Saturn. But modern parish registers were “discovered” (like America) in 1497, when Cardinal Ximenes found it desirable to put on record the names of the godfathers and godmothers of baptised children. When these relations of “gossip,” or God’s kin (as the word literally means), were not certainly known, married persons could easily obtain divorces, by pretending previous spiritual relationship.

But it was only during the reign of Mary, (called the Bloody) that this rule of registering godfathers and godmothers prevailed in England. Henry VIII. introduced the custom of parish registers when in a Protestant humour. By the way, how curiously has Madame de Flamareil (la femme de quarante ans, in Charles de Bernard’s novel) anticipated the verdict of Mr. Froude on Henry VIII.! ‘On accuse Henri VIII.,’ dit Madame de Flamareil, “moi je le comprends, et je l’absous; c’était un cœur généreux, lorsqu’il ne les aimait plus, il les tuait.” The public of England mistrusted, in the matter of parish registers, the generous heart of Henry VIII. It is the fixed conviction of the public that all novelties in administration mean new taxes. Thus the Croatian peasantry were once on the point of revolting because they imagined that they were to be taxed in proportion to the length of their moustaches. The English believed, and the insurgents of the famous Pilgrimage of Grace declared, that baptism was to be refused to all children who did not pay a “trybette” (tribute) to the king. But Henry, or rather his minister, Cromwell, stuck to his plan, and (September 29, 1538) issued an injunction that a weekly register of weddings, christenings, and burials should be kept by the curate of every parish. The cost of the book (twopence in the case of St. Margaret’s, Westminster) was defrayed by the parishioners. The oldest extant register books are those thus acquired in 1597 or 1603. These volumes were of parchment, and entries were copied into them out of the old books on paper. The copyists, as we have seen, were indolent, and omitted characteristic points in the more ancient records.

In the civil war parish registers fell into some confusion, and when the clergy did make entries they commonly expressed their political feelings in a mixture of Latin and English. Latin, by the way, went out as Protestantism came in, but the curate of Rotherby, in Leicestershire, writes, “Bellum, Bellum, interruption! persecution!” At St. Bridget’s, in Chester, is the quaint entry, “1643. Here the register is defective till 1653. The tymes were *such!*” At Hilton, in Dorset, William Snoke, minister, entered his opinion that persons whose baptism and marriage were not registered “will be made incapable of any earthly inheritance if they live. This I note for the satisfaction of any that do:” though we may doubt whether these parishioners found the information thus conveyed highly satisfactory.

The register of Maid’s Moreton, Bucks, tells how the reading-desk (a spread eagle, gilt) was “doomed to perish as an abominable idoll;” and how the cross on the steeple nearly (but not quite) knocked out the brains of the Puritan who removed it. The Puritans had their way with the registers as well as with the eagle (“the vowl,” as the old country people call it), and laymen took the place of parsons as registrars in 1653. The books from 1653 to 1660, while this *régime* lasted, “were kept exceptionally well,” new brooms sweeping clean. The books of the period contain fewer of the old Puritan Christian names than we might have expected. We find, “*Repente Kytchens,*” so styled before the poor little thing had anything but original sin to repent of. “*Faint not Kennard*” is also registered, and “*Freegift Mabbe.*”

A novelty was introduced into registers in 1678. The law required (for purposes of protecting trade) that all the dead should be buried in woollen winding-sheets. The price of the wool was the

obolus paid to the Charon of the Revenue. After March 25, 1667, no person was to be “buried in any shirt, shift, or sheet other that should be made of woole only.” Thus when the children in a little Oxfordshire village lately beheld a ghost, “dressed in a long narrow gown of woollen, with bandages round the head and chin,” it is clear that the ghost was much more than a hundred years old, for the act “had fallen into disuse long before it was repealed in 1814.” But this has little to do with parish registers. The addition made to the duties of the keeper of the register in 1678 was this – he had to take and record the affidavit of a kinsman of the dead, to the effect that the corpse was actually buried in woollen fabric. The upper classes, however, preferred to bury in linen, and to pay the fine of 5*l*. When Mistress Oldfield, the famous actress, was interred in 1730, her body was arrayed “in a very fine Brussels lace headdress, a holland shift with a tucker and double ruffles of the same lace, and a pair of new kid gloves.”

In 1694 an empty exchequer was replenished by a tax on marriages, births, and burials, the very extortion which had been feared by the insurgents in the Pilgrimage of Grace. The tax collectors had access without payment of fee to the registers. The registration of births was discontinued when the Taxation Acts expired. An attempt to introduce the registration of births was made in 1753, but unsuccessfully. The public had the old superstitious dread of anything like a census. Moreover, the custom was denounced as “French,” and therefore abominable. In the same way it was thought telling to call the *clôture* “the French gag” during some recent discussions of parliamentary rules. In 1783 the parish register was again made the instrument of taxation, and threepence was charged on every entry. Thus “the clergyman was placed in the invidious light of a tax collector, and as the poor were often unable or unwilling to pay the tax, the clergy had a direct inducement to retain their good-will by keeping the registers defective.”

It is easy to imagine the indignation in Scotland when “bang went saxpence” every time a poor man had twins! Of course the Scotch rose up against this unparalleled extortion. At last, in 1812, “Rose’s Act” was passed. It is styled “an Act for the better regulating and preserving registers of births,” but the registration of births is altogether omitted from its provisions. By a stroke of the wildest wit the penalty of transportation for fourteen years, for making a false entry, “is to be divided equally between the informer and the poor of the parish.” A more casual Act has rarely been drafted.

Without entering into the modern history of parish registers, we may borrow a few of the ancient curiosities to be found therein, the blunders and the waggeries of forgotten priests, and curates, and parish clerks. In quite recent times (1832) it was thought worth while to record that Charity Morrell at her wedding had signed her name in the register with her right foot, and that the ring had been placed on the fourth toe of her left foot; for poor Charity was born without arms. Sometimes the time of a birth was recorded with much minuteness, that the astrologers might draw a more accurate horoscope. Unlucky children, with no acknowledged fathers, were entered in a variety of odd ways. In Lambeth (1685), George Speedwell is put down as “a merry begot;” Anne Twine is “*filia uniuscujusque*.” At Croydon, a certain William is “*terraefilius*” (1582), an autochthonous infant. Among the queer names of foundlings are “Nameless,” “Godsend,” “Subpoena,” and “Moyses and Aaron, two children found,” not in the bulrushes, but “in the street.”

The rule was to give the foundling for surname the name of the parish, and from the Temple Church came no fewer than one hundred and four foundlings named “Temple,” between 1728 and 1755. These Temples are the plebeian *gens* of the patrician house which claims descent from Godiva. The use of surnames as Christian names is later than the Reformation, and is the result of a reaction against the exclusive use of saints’ names from the calendar. Another example of the same reaction is the use of Old Testament names, and “Ananias and Sapphira were favourite names with the Presbyterians.” It is only fair to add that these names are no longer popular with Presbyterians, at any rate in the Kirk of Scotland. The old Puritan argument was that you would hardly select the name of too notorious a scriptural sinner, “as bearing testimony to the triumph of grace over original sin.” But in America a clergyman has been known to decline to christen a child “Pontius Pilate,” and no wonder.

Entries of burials in ancient times often contained some biographical information about the deceased. But nothing could possibly be vaguer than this: “1615, February 28, St. Martin’s, Ludgate, was buried an anatomy from the College of Physicians.” Man, woman, or child, sinner or saint, we know not, only that “an anatomy” found Christian burial in St. Martin’s, Ludgate. How much more full and characteristic is this, from St. Peter’s-in-the-East, Oxford (1568): ‘There was buried Alyce, the wiff of a naughty fellow whose name is Matthew Manne.’ There is immortality for Matthew Manne, and there is, in short-hand, the tragedy of “Alyce his wiff.” The reader of this record knows more of Matthew than in two hundred years any one is likely to know of us who moralise over Matthew! At Kyloe, in Northumberland, the intellectual defects of Henry Watson have, like the naughtiness of Manne, secured him a measure of fame. (1696.) “Henry was so great a fooll, that he never could put on his own close, nor never went a quarter of a mile off the house,” as Voltaire’s Memnon resolved never to do, and as Pascal partly recommends.

What had Mary Woodfield done to deserve the alias which the Croydon register gives her of “Queen of Hell”? (1788.) Distinguished people were buried in effigy, in all the different churches with which they were connected, and each sham burial service was entered in the parish registers, a snare and stumbling-block to the historian. This curious custom is very ancient. Thus we read in the Odyssey that when Menelaus heard in Egypt of the death of Agamemnon he reared for him a cenotaph, and piled an empty barrow “that the fame of the dead man might never be quenched.” Probably this old usage gave rise to the claims of several Greek cities to possess the tomb of this or that ancient hero. A heroic tomb, as of Cassandra for example, several towns had to show, but which was the true grave, which were the cenotaphs? Queen Elizabeth was buried in all the London churches, and poor Cassandra had her barrow in Argos, Mycenæ, and Amyclæ.

“A drynkyng for the soul” of the dead, a τάφος or funeral feast, was as common in England before the Reformation as in ancient Greece. James Cooke, of Sporle, in Norfolk (1528), left six shillings and eightpence to pay for this “drynkyng for his soul;” and the funeral feast, which long survived in the distribution of wine, wafers, and rosemary, still endures as a slight collation of wine and cake in Scotland. What a funeral could be, as late as 1731, Mr. Chester Waters proves by the bill for the burial of Andrew Card, senior bencher of Gray’s Inn. The deceased was brave in a “superfine pinked shroud” (cheap at *1l. 5s. 6d.*), and there were eight large plate candle-sticks on stands round the daïs, and ninety-six buckram escutcheons. The pall-bearers wore Alamode hatbands covered with frizances, and so did the divines who were present at the melancholy but gorgeous function. A hundred men in mourning carried a hundred white wax branch lights, and the gloves of the porters in Gray’s Inn were ash-coloured with black points. Yet the wine cost no more than *1l. 19s. 6d.*; a “deal of sack,” by no means “intolerable.”

Leaving the funerals, we find that the parish register sometimes records ancient and obsolete modes of death. Thus, martyrs are scarce now, but the register of All Saints’, Derby, 1556, mentions “a poor blinde woman called Joan Waste, of this parish, a martyr, burned in Windmill pit.” She was condemned by Ralph Baynes, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield. In 1558, at Richmond, in Yorkshire, we find “Richard Snell, b’rnt, bur. 9 Sept.” At Croydon, in 1585, Roger Shepherd probably never expected to be eaten by a lioness. Roger was not, like Wyllyam Barker, “a common drunkard and blasphemer,” and we cannot regard the Croydon lioness, like the Nemean lion, as a miraculous monster sent against the county of Surrey for the sins of the people. The lioness “was brought into the town to be seen of such as would give money to see her. He” (Roger) “was sore wounded in sundry places, and was buried the 26th Aug.”

In 1590, the register of St. Oswald’s, Durham, informs us that “Duke, Hyll, Hogge, and Holiday” were hanged and burned for “there horrible offences.” The arm of one of these horrible offenders was preserved at St. Omer as the relic of a martyr, “a most precious treasure,” in 1686. But no one knew whether the arm belonged originally to Holiday, Hyll, Duke, or Hogge. The coals, when

these unfortunate men were burned, cost sixpence; the other items in the account of the abominable execution are, perhaps, too repulsive to be quoted.

According to some critics of the British government, we do not treat the Egyptians well. But our conduct towards the Fellahs has certainly improved since this entry was made in the register of St. Nicholas, Durham (1592, August 8th): ‘Simson, Arington, Featherston, Fenwick, and Lancaster, were hanged for being Egyptians.’ They were, in fact, gypsies, or had been consorting with gypsies, and they suffered under 5 Eliz. c. 20. In 1783 this statute was abolished, and was even considered “a law of excessive severity.” For even a hundred years ago “the puling cant of sickly humanitarianism” was making itself heard to the injury of our sturdy old English legislation. To be killed by a poet is now an unusual fate, but the St. Leonard’s, Shoreditch, register (1598) mentions how “Gabriel Spencer, being slayne, was buried.” Gabriel was “slayne” by Rare Ben Jonson, in Hoxton Fields.

The burning of witches is, naturally, not an uncommon item in parish registers, and is set forth in a bold, business-like manner. On August 21 (1650) fifteen women and one man were executed for the imaginary crime of witchcraft. “A grave, for a witch, sixpence,” is an item in the municipal accounts. And the grave was a cheap haven for the poor woman who had been committed to the tender mercies of a Scotch witch-trier. Cetewayo’s medicine-men, who “smelt out” witches, were only some two centuries in the rear of our civilisation. Three hundred years ago Bishop Jewell, preaching before Elizabeth, was quite of the mind of Cetewayo and Saul, as to the wickedness of suffering a witch to live. As late as 1691, the register of Holy Island, Northumberland, mentions “William Cleugh, bewitched to death,” and the superstition is almost as powerful as ever among the rural people. Between July 13 and July 24 (1699) the widow Comon, in Essex, was thrice swum for a witch. She was not drowned, but survived her immersion for only five months. A singular homicide is recorded at Newington Butts, 1689. “John Arris and Derwick Farlin in one grave, being both Dutch soldiers; one killed the other drinking brandy.” But who slew the slayer? The register is silent; but “often eating a shoulder of mutton or a peck of hasty pudding at a time caused the death of James Parsons,” at Teddington, in Middlesex, 1743. Parsons had resisted the effects of shoulders of mutton and hasty pudding till the age of thirty-six.

And so the registers run on. Sometimes they tell of the death of a glutton, sometimes of a *Grace wyfe* (grosse femme). Now the bell tolls for the decease of a duke, now of a “dog-whipper.” “Lutenists” and “Saltpetremen” – the skeleton of the old German allegory whispers to each and twitches him by the sleeve. “Ellis Thompson, *insipiens*,” leaves Chester-le-Street, where he had gabbled and scrabbled on the doors, and follows “William, foole to my Lady Jerningham,” and “Edward Errington, the Towne’s Fooll” (Newcastle-on-Tyne) down the way to dusty death. Edward Errington died “of the pest,” and another idiot took his place and office, for Newcastle had her regular town fools before she acquired her singularly advanced modern representatives. The “aquavity man” dies (in Cripplegate), and the “dumb-man who was a fortune-teller” (Stepney, 1628), and the “King’s Falkner,” and Mr. Gregory Isham, who combined the professions, not frequently united, of “attorney and husbandman,” in Barwell, Leicestershire (1655). “The lame chimney-sweeper,” and the “King of the gypsies,” and Alexander Willis, “qui calographiam docuit,” the linguist, and the Tom o’ Bedlam, the comfit-maker, and the panyer-man, and the tack-maker, and the suicide, they all found death; or, if they sought him, the churchyard where they were “hurled into a grave” was interdicted, and purified, after a fortnight, with “frankincense and sweet perfumes, and herbs.”

Sometimes people died wholesale of pestilence, and the Longborough register mentions a fresh way of death, “the swat called New Acquaintance, alias Stoupe Knave, and know thy master.” Another malady was ‘the posting swet, that posted from towne to towne through England.’ The plague of 1591 was imported in bales of cloth from the Levant, just as British commerce still patriotically tries to introduce cholera in cargoes of Egyptian rags. The register of Malpas, in Cheshire (Aug. 24, 1625), has this strange story of the plague: —

“Richard Dawson being sicke of the plague, and perceiving he must die at yt time, arose out of his bed, and made his grave, and caused his nefew, John Dawson, to cast strawe into the grave which was not farre from the house, and went and lay’d him down in the say’d grave, and caused clothes to be lay’d uppon and so dep’ted out of this world; this he did because he was a strong man, and heavier than his said nefew and another wench were able to bury.”

And John Dawson died, and Rose Smyth, the “wench” already spoken of, died, the last of the household.

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