

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

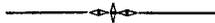
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

parties to it, or else by his having known *aliunde* that the Church at Antioch had in the first instance desired the opinion of the apostles and elders, and that the Gentile Churches treated the decree on receiving it as their opinion; and (c) the subsequent omission of *καὶ οἱ* in some MSS. must be ascribed to an accidental and pardonable error of a copyist, since no one could have deliberately altered an intelligible phrase into such an awkward and abnormal expression as *οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἀδελφοί*.

If, on the other hand, the original decree had *οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἀδελφοί*, then it follows that (a) St. Luke knew *aliunde* that the whole Church, though not named in the decree, had assented to it; and (b) *οἱ πρ. ἀ.* was, at the date of the Council, the accurate designation of the body of men who, by the time when St. Luke wrote the Acts (twelve or more years after the Council), had come to be called *οἱ πρεσβύτεροι*, and were then, or afterwards became, the second order in the Christian ministry; and (c) *καὶ οἱ* cannot afterwards have been inserted by accident, but must have been introduced deliberately, either to make the wording of the decree harmonize with the statement that the whole Church assented to it, or else to get rid of an expression which had become obsolete and unintelligible. If we accept the former hypothesis, the decree itself corroborates the conclusion which we draw from ver. 22, that at the date of the Council of Jerusalem the Church was considered as consisting, for legislative purposes, of three orders, and that the consent of the third order, that of the laity, was asked and given upon all subjects. If, on the other hand, we prefer the second hypothesis, the inference is forced upon us that, at the time when the Council was held, the presbyters had not crystallized into a separate order. But the statement in ver. 22 will remain unshaken, and will, of itself, prove that in the first recorded Council of the Church the opinion not only of the elder brethren, but of the whole body of the laity, was taken upon a solemn question of doctrine and discipline.

PHILIP VERNON SMITH.



ART. III.—MY OLD PARISH REGISTERS.

I ALMOST love my old registers, they seem to talk to one of such strange times and strange people. I often wonder how many sheep it has taken to make all the musty, fusty, greasy leaves of parchment which make up the aged books. And one wonders who dressed the old skins and tied

them all together in their thin, tattered, sheep-skin covers, with neat little knots of skin-strips, torn very narrow, and tied very tight, with small strings in between that might almost be sinews from their appearance.

The leaves are of many colours, with occasional round holes in them from defects in the skin; and the ink is of divers hues, from a slaty-grey to a deep-brown, while the handwriting varies from the neatest, most scholarly penmanship to the most illegible, sprawling, fly-away characters it is possible to imagine—some of the old writers evidently prided themselves on the clearness and carefulness of their entries, while others as plainly voted the whole thing “a nuisance,” and considered anything would do as long as it was done.

The books begin in 1539, and the writing of the Tudor period is clear and strong, like many old monastic MSS., with very straight lines, and the letters carefully formed with a sharp pen. Some of the writing is really beautiful, and would do credit to any scribe. But as the years creep on a certain slovenliness becomes visible: there is a sort of attempt to combine the rigid characters of the old days with the “running” letters of later times, an attempt fatal both to appearance and utility, until, from 1680 to 1690, a lunatic spider dipped in ink and set walking up and down the pages could scarcely have made a more hopeless confusion. But in 1691 a marvellous improvement suddenly takes place, probably owing to the advent of a new vicar, and the dates of births, marriages, and deaths, instead of being muddled up with the names or written in “letters,” are clearly put at the end of the line, and the names seem almost printed, they are of such startling distinctness. It is like coming out of a thick fog into a glorious sunshine.

Very different was the care bestowed in those times upon these important entries, and the rigid exactness required in these days of registrars of births, deaths, and marriages. Now, the ever lynx-eyed supervision of Somerset House detects the smallest inaccuracy, and calls the offending clergyman or registrar to instant account. Here there is no mention of parents' residence or occupation; no hint of age is given, the persons might be adults or infants, it is impossible to say. The very necessary precaution of inserting the officiating minister's name is entirely neglected, until in 1663 an apparently more business-like minister came to the parish, and he signed the registers of births and deaths at the end of each year—as a sort of guarantee, I suppose, that the statements were correct. But, strangely enough, what we should consider the most important entries of all—the marriages—are not signed at all, and no intimation is given as to

whether the parties spliced together were bachelors, spinsters, widowers or widows—nor whether they were of full age, or only foolish young lovers of tender years. In fact, there was evidently the most reprehensible carelessness in dealing with these momentous matters, for often the names are squeezed in between some others as an “after-thought,” or written at the side of the page, or scrawled lengthways on strips of parchment let in between the leaves.

As we turn over the faded pages, we see some curious side-lights of English country life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There is nothing very special in the notices of births and marriages; very prosaic, cursory, and commonplace are the entries regarding them; “the tale” of their years was not yet told: it was still a matter of uncertainty what the end of life’s journey would see. But when the last step of the earthly pilgrimage has been taken, and the last tokens of respect and affection have been paid, then there comes the short but pregnant tribute of esteem to the friend and neighbour who has gone, and the character is immortalized in the parish records. At other times we have the monotonous statement over and over again that some dreadful disease is devastating the district, and claiming its victims on all hands, from all classes. Small-pox must have been really terrible in those days. It is not till we look into old registers of this sort that we begin to realize what a frightful scourge it was, and what an inestimable blessing to the community at large has been vaccination. The dismal notice comes before us many times: “Small-pox not out yet.” Ah! how many was small-pox going to put out before it went out itself? The population of the parish then cannot have been many hundreds, yet small-pox broke out seemingly in the spring of 1712. It is first recorded under date February 18, and between then and November 10 in the same year out of 32 burials (a fearful mortality!) 24 are attributed to small-pox. What the condition of the village during these nine months was we can barely conjecture; with this proportion of deaths, what must have been the number of sick? A veritable plague, “a reign of terror,” must have taken possession of the place. We may sometimes grumble at the inconveniences or occasional mishaps attendant on vaccination, but, thank God, we know nothing now of such dark and dreadful times.

But even when, in the older periods of the seventeenth century, there is no definite statement of the prevalence of any epidemic, we cannot escape the conclusion that such visitations were frequent and terrible; for while one year will record about half a dozen deaths, the next will chronicle 30 or 40. For instance, the year 1659 tells of 35 deaths, but

1660 speaks only of 5, 1661 of 3, and 1662 of 9; but 1663 runs up the record to 25 burials; so that probably some deadly pestilence swept over the place, and claimed as its victims the weakly, aged, and infirm, and then for a few years a more cheerful and healthful period succeeded.

But let us now look into the old books for some entries that throw light upon old times and ways. And thinking of this, it is strange that the first notice of the *occupation* of the deceased comes in 1679 with the curt announcement, "John Knowles, a souldier, was buried March 30th." This is all; and no further note of a person's employment appears again for years; but the national admiration for the military shines out of the page. One of the country's defenders is not to be forgotten; it is a more lasting tribute than the rattle of musketry or the roll of drums.

The next person whose laudable employment is thought worthy of remembrance is John Took, parish clerk, who died July, 1711. Ah, how much solemn grandeur and lofty dignity abode (and abides) in the country parish clerk! How useful was he in setting the tunes for the musical portions of Divine service, and reading out, correctly or incorrectly—probably very frequently the latter—the parish notices, and reminding the minister of *his* duty, if he forgot it! By the way, it is a strange thing, but parish clerks never seem to imagine they can fail in *their* duty; there is apparently no class which more strongly believes in its own infallibility. The children doubtless thought as they saw old Took lowered into his grave of the many times he had rapped their skulls for inattention and chattering in church; and the worthy minister who makes the entry in the register would recall to mind with real regret the many times he and old Took had jogged each other's memories in parish matters and helped one another in mutual difficulties; while he would also remember the unpleasant fact that it now devolved on him to find a successor to the deceased clerk, and what a very worrying and unthankful office it would be to choose amongst the many applicants for the honourable and remunerative post.

But as we leave good old Took to his last long sleep, and turn over the crackling, crinkling parchment-leaves, this notice attracts our attention, under date February 10, 1726: "Samuel Walker, Apothecary, an usefull, kind, charitable man, was buried." What a vista of reflections does this open up! The apothecary of those days was very different from the "chemist and druggist" of our day. He was the *Æsculapius* of the place. He was surgeon, physician, chemist, and druggist, absorbed into one imposing personality. At that time, in country places, the clergyman, the

village schoolmaster, and the apothecary formed the local triumvirate of learning. They embodied to the rural mind the theology, morality, literature, and science of the age. And how much warm and genial light does this short, yet eloquent, epitaph shed upon the past life of Mr. Samuel Walker! "Useful"—unquestionably, ready to extract a tooth or bind up an injured limb, his head and shop full of simple, yet probably *powerful*, remedies for all fleshly ills; to whom the domestic troubles of many families were retailed, with a hearty confidence, because it was felt they were securely locked up in his kind and manly heart, as safe from public inspection as the many secrets of noble families that Mr. Tulkinghorn kept buried in his bosom, as we read in "Bleak House." But the old apothecary was also "kind"—did things, I imagine, in a gentle way; knew not only how to do his duty—sometimes, doubtless, a very painful duty—but how to do it nicely, a secret not in the possession of many people. While he was attending to the maimed and injured body, he would pour the balm of sympathy into the wounded spirit. He could have said, in the words of Shakespeare: "I must be cruel, only to be kind."

And to these other virtues the departed friend of the village added that "charity" which is "the very bond of peace and of all virtues." Not, we may be sure, simply that he was "charitable" inasmuch as he was liberal; but from what goes before we may be certain the grace of charity was manifested in him in all the fullest, broadest, most catholic sense of the good old English word. Yet that he was liberal we may rest assured, and the needy sufferer and the weary wayfarer left his door oftentimes happier both in body and mind than when they came to it.

Now, as I see that the good old man had lost his worthy wife Bridget some fourteen years before (in 1712), I suspect many to whom he had shown kindly sympathy loved to return it, and his closing days were doubtless comfortable and peaceful ones, cheered by the sincere respect and genuine affection of his humble neighbours and friends.

It is almost with a sigh that we remember that the apothecary of the last century is absolutely extinct as a representative of the medical profession—that he is now just as much an object of antiquarian interest as the "dodo." The Medical Acts of 1858 and 1874 for ever consigned to oblivion the old-time apothecary, and called into being, under wise restrictions, the new and more cultured exponents of the healing art.

But kindness and goodness were not confined to the race of apothecaries. The gentry of the place evidently delighted

in making a worthy use of their responsibilities and opportunities. For, allowing a large discount on the catalogue of virtues credited to them, as we must do, considering the fulsome adulation which is engraven on many tablets and tombs of that period, yet a solid substratum of truth must remain.

On August 24, 1713, was buried "Deborah, y^e wife of Thomas Scot, Gent., who for her extraordinary Piety and most extensive charity was universally lamented." From this we gather she was an excellent example of that noble type of generous, godly, strict, yet kind old country ladies which were the glory and blessing of many rural districts, from the time of the Commonwealth down to the last century—some-what Puritanical, rigidly orthodox, inflexibly just. And the partner of her life seems to have been as excellent a pattern of "My Lord" as she was of "My Lady," for when he is laid to rest under the trees of the old churchyard it is recorded of him in writing that seems to indicate real emotion: "May 13, 1729. Thomas Scot, Gentleman, an honest, just, good, charitable man, a great Benefactor both to y^e church and Poor, to y^e great loss and inexpressible lamentation, particularly of y^e minister of y^e parish and all y^e Inhabitants, was buried." Those who look over the pages of the old "Town Book" can truly say "Amen" to this; for many, many years had Mr. Scott served the parish as churchwarden, and from his wise and judicious handling of parish matters endless benefits had resulted to the parish.

There rises before our minds the portrait of the real old country squire, magistrate and landowner, to whom his fellow-men looked up with respect and affection, and who looked down on his fellow-men with genuine regard. As we gaze on the broad tombstone on the church-floor by the font, and think of the words in the old register, we comfort ourselves anew with the reflection that "the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance."

But as we continue our researches amongst the aged pages, we become conscious, not only that the life-work of some of these old country folk was of more than passing interest, but that we are brought into contact with a phase of English life when coroners and Poor Law Guardians were (according to our ideas) unknown. Very often does the sad announcement meet our eye, after the name of the deceased, "a stranger." How much is comprised in that simple expression! A wanderer on life's highway, wearied with the toils and misfortunes of humanity, had at last found a resting-place amongst strangers; yet, by that very fact, perhaps, calling forth some of the noblest and tenderest traits of the human

heart, winning for someone an "Inasmuch"; affording, maybe, some poor heart the blessed opportunity of "entertaining angels unawares"; carrying to the village community the possibility of claiming the Divine blessing, "I was a stranger, and ye took Me in."

Yet, besides the sentimental, we have instances of the tragic and the terrible—short but pithy notices of events which must have stirred by their awful suddenness and sadness the parish to its depth. On January 4, 1696, was buried "Peter Strangway, who lost his life by falling into a copper of boiling water at the Swan." We can only speculate in our own minds on the "whys" and "wherefores" of the tragedy; yet what a field for speculation!—his age, condition, occupation, all are matters for conjecture. Next, we read

"*Feb. 19, 1697.*—Francis Butcher, who dyed mad after two months being bit by a mad dog, was buried."

"*June, 1708.*—Mary Halsy, who having lost her sight in Jamaica, was sent from thence to this parish to be maintained, as she was between 20 and 30 years, was buried."

(N.B.—What an enormous way to send a pauper home, and how careful they were that each parish should maintain its own poor!)

"*July 25, 1711.*—Edmund Barker, a stranger who was killed by a cart, was buried."

And in 1720 we have the touching entry of a young mother buried in the same coffin with her little one.

These events would be the "nine-day wonders" of the place, and would naturally at that time be recorded in the parish annals.

Among the last but not least interesting features of these old registers is the witness they give to the strange old customs of burying the dead.

It is not generally known that in 1666 was passed a curious sumptuary law, by which all corpses were ordered to be buried in woollen. This Act of Parliament was re-enacted in 1667, and every clergyman was ordered to get a certificate that the law had been complied with, and anyone evading the law was to pay a penalty of "Five Pounds," of which sum half was to go to the informer and half to the poor. The law was, however, very negligently enforced, and although it fell more and more into desuetude, it was not finally repealed till 1814. The only bodies which were freed from this extraordinary statute were of those who died of the plague.

Pope has immortalized this remarkable legislative interference with the liberty of the subject in his lines on the death of Mrs. Oldfield, the distinguished actress—an awful example of how the spiritual nature seems to shrink and shrivel under

the influence of constant contact with worldliness. Let us beware!

Odious! in woollen! 'Twould a saint provoke
(Were the last words that poor Narcessa spoke).
No, let a charming chintz and Brussels lace
Wrap my cold limbs and shade my lifeless face;
One would not, sure, be frightful when one's dead,
And, Betty, give the cheek a little red.

Now, my registers fully bear out all that is said elsewhere regarding this curious custom. In fact, the second register goes back and records over again the burials from 1678 to 1680 in order to add the words "buried in woollen" and "certificate received." It is evident the custom only slowly gained ground or was enforced, for it is not till 1678 (twelve years after the Act was passed) that we find it first noticed: "Register of the Buryalls of Watton, made the first of August, 1678, after Burying in Woollen." Then follows: "Eliz. Bowgen, buried 1st August, and certificate rec^d for her buryal in woollen." The expression "in woollen" is not always, or even generally, added after this, though it is occasionally; but the "certificate rec^d" is never omitted till 1686, when it is discontinued.

The success of the woollen manufacturer was the avowed object of this Act of Parliament; but there were probably other reasons as well, just as in the "Homilies" the only express reason given for the practice of fasting was the prosperity of the seafaring population, yet there were unquestionably some secondary ideas in connection with it.

As is usually the case, there were some people who deliberately ignored or defied the Parliamentary commands, and therefore they had to pay the parish for the gratification of their personal whims. Under date August 26, 1726, I find "Hannah Jarvis, who dyed of the small-pox at Griston, was buried in this church [horrible idea!] she was buried in linnen, £5 [or 50s., it is very illegible] was payd to y^e parish." And, by the way, just below this entry my eye catches sight of a most ominously suggestive remark, "M^{rs} Ann Fleming, Patroness of the Living," is buried, and the marvellous comment is added, "when single, a very good lady." It may mean that the living was hers when single; but it may also mean that matrimony in her case had not exercised its mellowing and hallowing functions, that, in fact, "single blessedness" was the greatest blessedness to her!

But we must close, and fold up the old books (for they *do* fold up!) and replace them in their usual dark abode, wondering how many glad faces and sad faces have looked over them; how often old vicars and parish clerks have chatted together, and concocted the various strange notices;

and yet, again, we can but conjecture, with a certain reverent awe, what will be the verdict of the last Great Day on those departed brothers and sisters of ours. Will the Divine judgments coincide with the human? How many of those inscribed in these earthly registers are written down in "the Lamb's Book of Life"?

W. B. RUSSELL-CALEY.



ART. IV.—THE REFORMATION ILLUSTRATED BY THE PRAYER-BOOK.

THE student of the Reformation period of the Church of England will find himself grievously misled if he forms the conclusion that each step in that momentous change which came over the spirit of Church and State in this land was the result of a peaceful, deliberate policy, carried out after calm consideration. Had these been the conditions under which the Church freed herself from the errors of Rome, the ritual and doctrinal controversies of the present century would probably never have arisen.

Our Reformers, such, *e.g.*, as Archbishops Warham, Cranmer, and Parker, and Bishops Latimer, Ridley, etc., were men who retained a devoted attachment to the catholicity of the Church, and merely desired the repudiation of the Bishop of Rome's jurisdiction, and the return to primitive faith and practice. They were as strongly opposed to the revolutionary and destructive tendencies of the foreign Protestants as they were to the maintenance of the subservience to Rome. The idea of breaking away from the Apostolic continuity of the Anglican Church never entered their minds. At the same time, they needed all the support they could obtain in resisting the onslaught of the Papal See.

The result was that a compromise had to be arrived at, and, like most compromises, it pleased neither side. From the Anglican point of view, the independence and freedom which she secured were a sufficient compensation for the ritual and practices that, unfortunately, fell into temporary abeyance. The gain was in matters of principle and doctrine; the loss included a vast variety of questions, but none of them were vital to her position as a branch of the Catholic Church, being of the nature of details. She secured the universal opportunity of the study of Holy Scripture for all her members, and the privilege of common and public worship in the vernacular; she retained the threefold order of the Apostolic ministry, and the primitive administration of the two great