

**REMARKS ON THE SEPULCHRAL
MEMORIALS OF PAST AND PRESENT
TIMES, WITH SOME SUGGESTIONS
FOR IMPROVING THE CONDITION
OF OUR CHURCHES**

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Remarks on the sepulchral memorials of past and present times, with some suggestions for improving the condition of our churches by J. H. Markland

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SEPULCHRAL MEMORIALS
OF
PAST AND PRESENT TIMES,
WITH
SOME SUGGESTIONS
FOR IMPROVING THE CONDITION OF OUR
CHURCHES,

IN A LETTER ADDRESSED TO
THE REVEREND THE PRESIDENT, AND THE MEMBERS OF THE
OXFORD SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE STUDY OF GOTHIC
ARCHITECTURE.

BY J. H. MARKLAND, F.R.S. S.A.

“Man is a noble animal, splendid in ashes, and pompous in the grave,
solemnizing natiivities and deaths with equal lustre.”—*Sir T. Brown,*
Hydriotaphia, chap. v.

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A LETTER,

ſc.

GENTLEMEN,

As the Oxford Society for Promoting the Study of Gothic Architecture, devotes so large a portion of its attention to the existing state of our Ecclesiastical buildings, and may, by its influence, diffuse not only a pure taste in the erection of new Churches, but a strong desire for the restoration of our ancient and more beautiful fabrics; I beg leave to address the following remarks to you, in the hope that my suggestions may receive your sanction, and that a degree of weight and authority may thus, eventually, be given to them, which the recommendation of an individual cannot impart.

I am certainly not among the number of those, who would banish sepulchral monuments altogether from our Churches, deeply reverencing, as I do, the antiquity of the custom, and the feeling of love and respect for the dead, which, in many instances, prompts their erection; and also

believing, that they have often been the means of producing a salutary impression upon the living. "The sensations of pious cheerfulness, which attend the celebration of Sunday, are," says Wordsworth, "profitably chastised by the sight of the graves of kindred and friends, gathered together in that general home, towards which the thoughtful yet happy spectators themselves are journeying." It cannot however be denied, that common-place monuments and tablets have been, and continue to be, most needlessly multiplied, and that this excess might be wisely restrained. On the walls of many Churches, instead of contributing to the beauty of the fabric, they are unsightly excrescences. Not only has every vacant place been seized upon, but portions of the original structure have been shamefully mutilated to receive them. For example: Mr. Rickman, speaking of the ancient altar-screen at Beverley, "unrivalled in its description of work," observes, "that some remarkably fine and intricate tracery has been *cut away*, to put in some poor modern monumental tablets^a. Instances of this carelessness, and depravity of taste, meet us perpetually.

In the majority of cases, why is not the simple gravestone allowed to suffice^b? Perhaps the very

^a On the Styles of Architecture in England, fourth edition, p. 268. (Appendix, A.)

^b "It is my will, that no costly monument be erected for

individual, whose name is to be conspicuously engraved on a costly monument, was so averse to notoriety, that the distinctive excellency of his character, consisted in those retiring qualities which never desired to travel out of the domestic circle.

Again; how frequently does it happen, that on such memorials all that is mentioned is nothing more than what the parish-register could tell us. "Most inscriptions record nothing else of the buried person, but that he was born upon one day, and died upon another: the whole history of his life being comprehended in those two circumstances that are common to all mankind. I could not but look upon these registers of existence, whether of brass or marble, as a kind of satire upon the departed persons, who had left no other memorial of them, but that they were born and that they died."

my memory, but only a fair flat marble stone to be laid over me.—And I do very much desire my will may be carefully observed herein, hoping it may become exemplary to some or other: at least however testifying at my death—what I have so often earnestly professed in my lifetime—my utter dislike of the vast expences laid out in funeral solemnities, with very little benefit to any; which, if bestowed in pious and charitable works, might redound to the public or private benefit of many persons." Extract from Bishop Sanderson's Will—Walton's Lives.

^a Spectator, 26.

To treat of inscriptions generally, forms no part of my present object; but, in alluding to them, may it not be asked, whether there are not too many instances where they breathe the language of *assurance*, rather than that of *hope*? forgetting that the Church ventures only thus to express herself even of the most excellent of the earth. How seldom is it that they realize, what has been considered the perfection of an epitaph, "the epitome of a sermon, teaching the most useful truths in the most comprehensive form." Of the various classes into which they are divisible, is not the *complimentary* the most common, where "the dead are more indebted for their praise to invention than to merit⁴?"

If a monument is to be regarded *solely* as an abiding tribute of affection, which it is fair to presume is the chief intention in erecting it; there are frequent instances, where a work, involving a large outlay of money, is in effect useless for such a purpose, and must be considered as a sacrifice of

⁴ Olla Podrida, No. 39. To the last class, the satire of Fielding is justly applicable. The selfish and unamiable Captain Bliffl, is eulogized on his monument as having faithfully discharged all the charities of life. This Fielding describes to be an epitaph "in the true style," and to have been written "by a man of as great genius as integrity; one who perfectly well knew the captain!"

expense well intended, but altogether misapplied. The object, however distinguished or valued in his private circle, or in his own immediate neighbourhood, by the excellency of his life and character, may have died remote from his residence, *a stranger in a strange land*^e. Now, where no sentiments of love, respect, and attachment, arising from intimacy, can exist; where no acts of charity and usefulness can be remembered, which would be associated with his tomb; in such a case *that* memorial is utterly valueless: neither engaging the attention of the inhabitants of the place of burial, nor attracting even the criticisms of an accidental visitor, unless its merit be of a high order as a work of art.

Besides, in the course of no long period of time, these melancholy relics themselves, if they do not altogether disappear from injury, become as much neglected and forgotten, as do the names of those recorded upon them^f.—*Their memorial is perished with them*^g.

^e Exodus ii. 22.

^f "Our fathers find their graves in our short memories, and sadly tell us how we may be buried in our survivors.—Gravestones tell truth scarce forty years.—To be content that times to come should only know there was such a man, not caring whether they knew more of him, was a frigid ambition," &c. Sir T. Brown, *Hydriotaphia*, b. v.

^g Psalm ix. 6.