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JOHN KNILL.

1733—1811.

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NOTICE OF JOHN KNILL OF GRAY'S INN.
1733—1811.

ON a hill near St. Ives, on the north coast of Cornwall, stands a granite obelisk, which serves as a landmark to vessels at sea, and is familiarly known in that neighbourhood as *Knill's Mausoleum*, because it was erected by a gentleman of that name many years ago.

He was rather a remarkable man, and as no notice of him is to be found in any Cornish history, except that of Mr. Davies Gilbert, under the title of St. Ives, it has been thought that a fuller account, derived from authentic sources, might be interesting, at least to those who claim connection with him.

JOHN KNILL, who erected this obelisk, was born at Callington, in East Cornwall, on the 1st of January, 1733³/₄, and died at his chambers, in Gray's Inn Square, London, on the 29th of March, 1811, at the age of 77.

The family of Knill had been resident at Callington, and were landowners in the neighbourhood some years before his birth; and although it does not appear certain that they were descended from the old knight's family of that name at Knill in Herefordshire, some colour is given to the supposition from the reference which John Knill makes to that family in his papers. Amongst them is a certified copy of the pedigree of

Knill of Knill, a rough but imperfect pedigree of himself, and an account of his visit to the parish of Knill, in Hereford, during his tour in 1792.

Knill of Knill had failed in the male line about the year 1600, at which date a co-heiress, Barbara, had married John Walsham, whose grandchild, also an heiress, married a Garbett, whose family were in possession of the Knill estate in Hereford at the date of John Knill's visit in 1792.

The pedigree of the Hereford family was copied on parchment from that in the Herald's College for John Knill, in 1775, as certified on its face, and it traces them through eight generations from Sir John Knill, who must, therefore, have lived not later than the year 1400, reckoning at the usual rate of three generations to a century. No connection, however, of this pedigree with that of the Cornish family is attempted to be made in Knill's papers, nor does he positively state his belief of such a connection in his journal; but he appears, for some reason, to have declined Mr. Garbett's hospitalities, making this entry with respect to his offer of them. "Neither Mr. Garbett nor his daughters *knew who I was*, and I declined the invitation of the ladies, because, had I accepted them, I should have been obliged to have told who I was." If this phrase is to be read as evidence of relationship, his reserve in declining to reveal himself may have arisen from a disinclination to force himself on the representatives of an elder branch which had failed in the male line, and who might have looked on him as a possible aspirant to the family honours.

There was no necessity, however, for him to claim this relationship, because his own family connections were sufficiently respectable without it, for John Knill's mother was one of the seven daughters of Mr. Pike of Plympton, Devon, who married an Edgcumbe of Edgcumbe.

She was a woman of extraordinary powers of mind, and is said to have managed the borough of Callington for the patron for many years after the death of Mr. Jope, her second husband,

and was twice examined, as a witness before a committee of the House of Commons, on contested elections. She was a very handsome woman, and retained her beauty to a great age. It is said of her, that the last time she was before "the House" "a malapert young fellow," to use her own phrase, was examining her, as a witness, with less respect than she thought was due to her age and sex, when, instead of answering his question, she said, "Young man, have you a mother?" and on his replying, "No!" she said, "If you had, you would have known better how to behave to an old gentlewoman." After this, "Mr. Malapert" asked no more questions.

No record of John Knill's early years has been preserved, and nothing is known with certainty of his education or pursuits until he reached the age of 30, except that he was trained for the profession of the law, which, according to his relative, Mr. Robert Hichens, who knew him well at sixty, he did not follow as a profession; whilst Mr. Davies Gilbert, in his History of Cornwall, states that "he served his clerkship as an attorney in Penzance, and from thence removed to the office of a London attorney, where, having distinguished himself by application and intelligence, he was recommended to the Earl of Buckinghamshire, who, at that time, held the political interest of St. Ives, to be his local agent." In the year 1762, he accepted the office of Collector of Customs at St. Ives in Cornwall, and held it during 20 years, at the end of which he writes to Mr. William Praed, March 30, 1782, "I purpose to be in London in May, in order to resign my office of Collector, which I shall finally quit at the end of next Midsummer quarter."

He performed the duties of this office with zeal and assiduity, and the value of his services as Collector is shown by the fact of his being selected by the Board of Customs in 1773, for the special duty of inspecting all the ports of the island of Jamaica, and reporting upon them to the Home government. His own journal of that date shows that he left the Downs in H.M.S.

Portland, on the 15th of March, 1773, and resting a few days at Madeira, on the voyage, he reached Jamaica on the 5th of May; and, after spending more than 12 months in his tour of inspection, he reached England again on the 25th of May, 1774, in the mail packet Thynne, landing at Helford, because she was unable to beat into Falmouth that day.

Provided with letters from Lord Dartmouth, who was then at the head of the Board of Trade, and other influential persons, he was most hospitably received in all parts of the island, especially by the governor, Sir Basil Keith, the *custos rotularum*, General French, and his own old friend, the attorney general; and, in a letter to his mother, he thus sums up the result of his official tour.

“I have the greatest satisfaction in having been able to get through the very important business which was intrusted to my management, with a degree of pleasure to myself and to all those with whom I have transacted business, excepting one man whom I was under an absolute necessity of suspending from his office. I have further the very great pleasure of being conscious that I have been able to render essential services in the way of my duty, whilst I have no doubt but that they will be approved by my honourable masters. For these reasons, I feel myself extremely happy in having come upon this expedition, which I will confess I could have wished, with all my heart, to have avoided, but I thought myself bound in honour not to decline a piece of duty because it was difficult and dangerous. Adieu. I pray God to bless you all, and am, Madam, your obedient son, JOHN KNILL. Kingston, Jamaica, March 15, 1774.”

From another letter to his mother, who, after widowhood, had married Mr. Jope, and was living at Callington, it appears that Knill's intention was to visit North America on his return to England, with his friend and companion Mr. Edwards, but this intention was abandoned in consequence of Mr. Edwards changing his mind about the voyage.

This gentleman was the well known Mr. Bryan Edwards, who subsequently, in 1793, published a History of Jamaica and the West Indies, and several other accurate works on those colonies, and to whom Knill appears to have communicated in 1779 a notice of the religious belief of the Coromantee negroes, which is to be found incorporated in his history. This was procured by Knill, from his friend Mr. Alexander Campbell, of Montego Bay, Jamaica, whom Knill mentions as having mastered the native language of that wild and hardy race from the African Gold Coast, whose energy and endurance made their labour so valuable in the British plantations, before the abolition of the slave trade.

Whilst in Jamaica, he took opportunities, in the intervals of duty, to visit some of the principal sugar plantations and factories, discussed the condition of the island with the Governor, and received a deputation of coffee planters to consult upon a plan to prevent smuggling of coffee into the island, which Knill had proposed to them, and assisted them in memorializing Lord Dartmouth on the subject.

During his year in the island he seems to have been only once hindered by illness, when, in November, he caught a fever, from which, through the affectionate attention of his friends, of which he speaks most warmly, and by the aid of skilled medical advice, he soon recovered. Before leaving, he did not omit to return some of the hospitality which he had experienced, and on reaching London he appears to have been able to pay over to his bankers, Messrs. Gosling, the sum of £1500, as the nett result of his Jamaica tour, besides receiving the warm thanks of the Board of Customs.

The exact extent of his powers under this Jamaica Commission does not appear in his own papers, but Mr. D. Gilbert speaks of it as one which was "highly honourable to his abilities and to his character, with an authority to inspect all the custom houses and their establishments, and, if sufficient cause should appear, with power to suspend any one, however

“high, from his office.” The official position in which it placed him in the island, is indicated in his journal, where, in speaking of a public entertainment given to the Governor, Sir Basil Keith, he mentions, that a seat was assigned to him next but one to that of the Governor, “because he was considered as a member of the council, tho’ he had declined to take his seat at the board.”

He mentions in another place, in the Jamaica Journal, that the King had mentioned him to Sir Basil Keith, in strong terms of approbation.

Returning to St. Ives in 1774, he resumed his duties as collector of customs there, residing in a house of his own in the Fore street.

On the 1st of November, 1767, he was elected mayor of that borough, and in 1781 he commanded a corps of volunteers there, continuing to reside there, in his office of collector, until the summer of 1782, when, as has been already stated, he resigned it and removed to London. He continued, however, in the service of the customs for two or three years as inspector of some of the western ports, making occasional tours of inspection from London, as appears from the journals and pocket books.

In 1777, whilst still collector at St. Ives, Knill became private secretary to the Earl of Buckinghamshire, upon his being made Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and accompanied the Earl from London to Dublin, where he had rooms in the castle; but, as Mr. Davies Gilbert, who knew him well, suggests in his County History (vol. ii. p. 268, under St. Ives), “not liking the castle, nor, perhaps, the responsibility of this situation, he returned to St. Ives” at the end of six months’ service in that capacity. Lord Buckinghamshire, however, honoured him with his friendship until his death, in 1793, when he made Knill one of the trustees of all his estates. Knill’s private papers and pocket books contain abundant proofs of the intimacy of this friendship, and the zeal with which he

executed the duties of his trust; and his large experience, ready wit, and unswerving integrity, secured to him, after the Earl's death, the regard of the Countess and her four daughters.*

Mr. Davies Gilbert relates (vol. ii. 267), that after Knill's return to St. Ives from Jamaica, he "engaged in a very "anomalous undertaking, at that time sanctioned and encouraged by the government, which consisted in equipping small "vessels to act as privateers against smugglers;" that "he "was hurried, by the force of circumstances, contrary to his "inclinations and habits, and to his deep and frequent regret, "into doing what others did, and participating in the un- "hallowed gains" which arose from the system of plundering vessels laden with private property upon the outbreak of the Dutch war with America. Mr. Gilbert proceeds to say, that Knill "showed every kindness in his power to some of the "objects of compassion who were made prisoners, and that "he restored several articles of their more valued property at "his own individual loss."

No trace can be found in Mr. Knill's papers of any such transactions; but in 1779 this fondness for adventure, which they indicate, exhibited itself in another form, in a search which he then commenced and continued for two years, for a valuable deposit of treasure supposed to have been left near the Lizard Point, (not at Gunwalloe, as stated by Davies Gilbert, ii. 128,) by a notorious pirate called Avery.

The story of this treasure is curious. Avery, a native of Devon, is stated in one of Knill's papers, to have been the captain of a band of pirates, who, in the year 1699, infested

* This appears from letters to Knill, both from the Countess and from each of her four daughters, as well as from other sources.

The Earl died without male issue; his three elder daughters had married before his death in 1793, and the youngest married in the following year.

Harriet became Marchioness of Lothian.

Caroline became Lady Suffield.

Sophia became Countess of Mount Edgcumbe.

Emily Anne became Marchioness of Londonderry.

the Island of Madagascar, and established themselves there in such force as to resist successfully the attack made upon them at that date by Commodore Warren, and a squadron of five vessels of war, which were sent from England in order to dispossess the pirates. Warren failed to make any impression on them, either by threats, bribes, or entreaties, and is said to have returned home without effecting the object of his mission. Avery amassed a vast amount of treasure, and on one occasion was reported to have concealed in a cave, east of the Lizard point, certain chests of treasure, containing jewels, gold ornaments, diamonds, ingots, bars and coins of gold, of untold value; but of which, a rough catalogue, supposed to have been from the hand of Captain Avery, was in the possession of one Cornelius Ffurssen, who, in the year 1702, obtained a grant from George, Prince of Denmark, to search for the treasure at any point between Helford haven and the Loe Pool.

The search was, however, not carried out by Ffurssen, but the license or grant was duly assigned by him to others in succession for many years, until in 1779, two Cornishmen, resident at St. Michael's Mount, possessed themselves of the original grant, and induced Mr. Knill to embark with them in a vigorous search. Very precise articles of agreement were drawn up by Knill, as was his habit in all matters of business, the coast carefully examined, and a fresh license applied for by petition to Lord North, who was Chancellor of the Exchequer. Several expeditions to the Lizard were made, and meetings of the co-adventurers were held, until in October, 1781, a descendant of the pirate Avery, was found, and was induced to attend a meeting at St. Ives, at which he related that his father had told him that Captain Avery, after wandering about in great poverty and distress, had died at Barnstaple, and was buried as a pauper, and that it could not therefore be supposed that any such treasure existed, for that if it had, Avery would certainly have disclosed it and rescued himself from penury.

This statement appears to have satisfied Knill and the rest that their bubble had burst, and after due consideration, it was resolved, on the 31st of January, 1782, to abandon the search.

Avery will scarcely be considered to have deserved a better fate; but it may be doubted whether his fate need be taken as decisive against the existence of such treasure, for Avery could not have made good a claim against the crown, without giving evidence of his property in it, which would have risked his life.

When Knill left St. Ives for London, in 1782, he resided as a bachelor, in Arundel street, in the Strand, which was, at that date, a respectable "West End" street. He had made arrangements for being called to the Bar before coming to London to reside.

On the 18th of September, 1778, he was admitted a member of Gray's Inn; in November, 1781, he purchased a set of chambers in Gray's Inn Square, known at that time as Coney Court, but did not take up his residence there until after 1784; in 1787 he was called to the bar, and at a later date, in 1804, he was called to the Bench of the Inn, filling the office of treasurer in 1806, and signaling his tenure of that office by presenting a silver coffee pot, duly inscribed in Latin, to the bench.

It was in the year in which he ceased to act as Collector at St. Ives, 1782, that Knill erected the mausoleum on a neighbouring hill; and, as this act has often been ridiculed as a piece of folly, it is interesting to examine the motives which led to this freak of humour, for such it will continue to be considered as long as the monument lasts, unless a reasonable explanation can be found.

His own papers throw much light upon this subject; but it is necessary, first, to describe briefly what the mausoleum is.

In figure it is a triangular pyramid of granite, 50 feet high, containing within its base a cavity sufficient for a single interment, and rising in courses of hewn stone, diminishing to a point, which is capped with metal and provided with a lightning conductor.

An arch constructed in the base gave admission to the cavity, but has always been, from its erection, walled up. A low guard wall of granite was added in 1829, to prevent injury to the foundations by removal of the surrounding stones.

Worvas hill, on which it stands, is some hundreds of feet above the sea, and this makes the pyramid a prominent object to vessels off the coast, which use it as a landmark. On one face of the pyramid the word "Resurgam" is carved high up, in bold relief, upon the granite blocks of which it is built; on a second face, "I know that my Redeemer liveth;" and on the third, the arms and motto of the Knill family, viz.: gules, a lion rampant, surrounded by eleven crossed crosslets fitchy, or; motto, "Nil desperandum."

Knill procured the design in 1779, from Mr. John Wood, architect, of Batheaston, who furnished him with the most minutely detailed drawings, which enabled him without difficulty to complete it by the hands of John Dennis, "a joiner of Penzance." The total cost of the monument, including the purchase of the land from Henry, Lord Arundell, for five guineas, was £226 1s. 6*d.*. An acknowledgment of six-pence is paid annually to Mr. Stephens of Tregenna (formerly to Mr. Davies Gilbert), for a right of way to the mausoleum.

The fullest statement made by Knill himself with reference to his motive in erecting it occurs in his will of 1809, a very elaborate document, contained in five skins of parchment, which, in order to save trouble to his executors, he made in duplicate.

He begins by referring to the motive of vanity, which he thinks mankind would probably charge against him, for building a "mausoleum," and then proceeds, "During a residence of upwards of 20 years at St Ives, where I was Collector of the Customs, and served all offices within the borough, from constable to mayor, it was my unremitting endeavour to render all possible service to the town in general, and to every individual inhabitant, and I was so fortunate as to succeed in almost every endeavour I used for

“that purpose, particularly in respect to the building of their
 “wall or pier, and in some other beneficial undertakings; and
 “it was my wish to have further served the place by effecting
 “other public works, which I proposed, and which will, I dare
 “say, in time be carried into execution. It is natural to love
 “those whom you have had opportunities of serving, and I
 “confess I have real affection for St. Ives and its inhabitants,
 “in whose memory I have an ardent desire to continue a little
 “longer than the usual time those do of whom there is no
 “ostensible memorial. To that end, my vanity prompted me
 “to erect a mausoleum, and to institute certain periodical
 “returns of a ceremony which will be found in a deed bearing
 “date 29th May, 1797, which hath been duly enrolled in his
 “Majesty’s High Court of Chancery, and now remains in a
 “strong oaken box, placed in the Custom House at St. Ives,
 “and an attested copy of which deed I shall leave for my
 “executors hereinafter named.”

It is singular, that neither in the will, nor in the deed to which it refers, is any allusion made to the original idea from which this fancy sprung, but it appears clearly enough to admit of no doubt as to that origin, in a letter written by Knill to Mr. W. Praed, jun., March 30, 1782, in which he states that his reason for first thinking of erecting a mausoleum, was that he abhorred the practice of burial within the body of the church, which was then prevalent at St. Ives, and that the churchyard was already too small for the people.

It is clear, therefore, that his original intention was to erect a mausoleum in which, at the date of its erection, he desired to be buried; and the original design by Mr. Wood, which is still extant, shows the central chamber which was designed for the tomb. It is equally clear, also, that long before his death he had, in consequence of difficulties which stood in the way of consecration, abandoned that intention, and subsequently, by his will, gave directions for his burial at St. Andrew’s, Holborn.

It was in 1797, fifteen years after its erection, that Knill, by

the deed already mentioned in the clause cited from his will, charged his estate of Glivian, in the parish of Mawgan in Pydar, with the rent-charge of £10 in order to secure the repair of the mausoleum, with very precise directions as to the disposal of the surplus, from time to time, in charitable objects in St. Ives. His letter of April, 1797, to Mr. J. Stephens, then mayor, in which he desires him to accept the trust, speaks only of the charitable objects, and makes no allusion to the ceremonies.

The deed was drawn by Mr. Ritson, a barrister of Gray's Inn, and is curious for the minute precision of its injunctions, which are so complete that it is difficult to imagine any possibility of doubt arising, under any conceivable circumstances, in the execution of the trusts. As these trusts have often been quoted in print, but always incorrectly, even in the report of the first performance of the quinquennial ceremony, which appeared in the Morning Chronicle of August 14th, 1801, it may be as well to state that the trusts of the deed of 1797 are briefly, as follows. A rent-charge of £10 annually to be paid to the mayor, collector, and lecturer (as the officiating minister was then called) of St. Ives, to be thus expended: £5 yearly for repairs if needed, the other £5 to accumulate and to be used as follows, at the end of every five years, viz.: £10 for a dinner for the trustees and six guests; £5 equally amongst ten maidens, of ten years old at most, children of seamen, fishermen, or tanners, who dance once round the mausoleum; £1 for the musician; £2 to two widows chosen from the same classes as the children, to accompany them; £1 for white ribbons, &c.; £1 for clerk, and a new account book when needed; the remaining £5 to the married parents, of the like classes, who have brought up the largest family to the age of ten, without aid from the poor rate or from property.

If less than £5 be required yearly for repairs, the surplus to accumulate till it reaches a fixed sum, a moiety of which to be left for repairs, the rest to be divided, in stated proportions,

amongst deserving women and boys of the classes above named who have distinguished themselves in their different pursuits, or amongst the Friendly Societies of St. Ives, &c. A schedule contains forms of account, vouchers, and other entries to be made in books to be provided from time to time.

The first performance of the public ceremony took place in Knill's lifetime, on St. James's day, July 25th, 1801, *i. e.*, in the fourth year from the execution of the deed; and continues to be repeated, according to the trusts of the deed, at the present date.

With such cumbrous care is this useful landmark, on a rugged coast, preserved for the fishermen of St. Ives; and thus it will continue until the feeling of the age may induce the Charity Commissioners to intervene, in case they should deem it desirable to undertake the trusts of so small a sum.

It has been already stated, that after Knill's resignation of the office of Collector, at St. Ives, in 1782, he resided in London until his death, in 1811. For a short time he lived in Arundel street, but soon removed to his own chambers, at 8, Coney Court, now Gray's Inn Square. He mixed much in good society, where his ready wit and the genial humour of his well-stored mind made him a welcome guest. He cultivated the friendship of men of letters and wits of the day, whom he often entertained at Gray's Inn.

For many years he was in the habit of recording daily some of his occupations and engagements, with the minute care which characterizes every document which has survived him. Seven complete pocket books and journals of these entries remain, and contain abundant evidence of his industry, his patriotism, his habit of inquiring closely into everything that concerned the history, arts, and manufacturers of his country. He was a member of the Society of Arts and of the Cornish Club, which, in 1800, held its meetings at the "Shakespeare;" and in that year he qualified as a magistrate for Middlesex, and often sat at the Sessions House, and at the Police Court in

Hatton Garden. In 1784 he attended the first festival commemorative of the birth of Handel, when a most successful performance was witnessed in Westminster Abbey, and £6000, realized by the Committee, was presented to the society of musicians. The tickets were a guinea each. The next commemoration was in 1834, at the close of the third half-century from Handel's birth in 1684.

Knill loved art as well as music, and when, at the close of the last century, Alderman Boydell issued his sumptuous edition of the text of Shakspeare's plays, Knill was one of the subscribers to that great illustrated work, and also to the larger set of engravings from the paintings which formed the Shakspeare gallery. There never was a period when art needed more encouragement in England than at that warlike and revolutionary date, and Boydell's liberal and judicious efforts to elevate the character both of historical painting and of the sister art of the engraver deserve the highest praise.

His success, in attracting to them the patronage of the crowned heads of Europe as well as that of the wealthier classes at home gave, undoubtedly, a fresh stimulus to those civilizing arts, from which the country has not yet ceased to benefit.

Amongst the Knill papers are also journals of tours, which he seems to have taken on horseback, in the years 1784, '89, '90, '91, '92, and 1800. He was 50 years old when he made the first of these, which appears to have been partly a tour of official inspection of custom houses, and partly for pleasure, lasting from August to December. He usually rode the whole distance on horseback, accompanied by a trusty man-servant, and was absent from London from two to four months, visiting different parts of England; at one time commencing with a visit to the Earl of Buckinghamshire in Norfolk, and riding across to Worcestershire, skirting the borders of Wales, turning south through Bristol and Bath to his beloved St. Ives, and after resting there, working his way back to London through

the southern counties. Once, in 1789, he left London for Greenwich and Canterbury, and visited almost every port and harbour between Ramsgate and Plymouth, taking notes of all that concerned their commerce and the security of their harbours, throwing himself in the way of those who could best inform him upon all points of historical interest; and calling, as he passed, at the houses of any influential persons with whom he had mixed in London society. The greatest amount of mileage covered on horseback during these tours, is in the year 1790, when he rode 630 miles through the midland counties to Liverpool, and thence across south Yorkshire and Lincoln to Norfolk, where he visited Lord Buckinghamshire for a few days, before returning to London.

His notes abound in curious details of his expenses and mode of living, which it would be tedious to give; but it may be interesting to state, that he paid seven shillings a day for the hire of his two saddle-horses, and that the total cost of his tours averaged from £1 8s. to £1 12s. daily, including every expense of himself and his servant.

It is quite refreshing to see the lively interest with which he notes everything which comes under his observation. At Birmingham, Wolverhampton, and Liverpool, he visits the local manufactories and docks; has interviews with Boulton, Wedgwood, Wilkinson, and other celebrities of the day, who have stamped their names deeply upon the records of our national progress in arts, science, and manufacture. At Stratford, he revels in the memories of Shakspeare; he visits every historical ruin within reach of his line of march, enters fully into the enjoyments of works of art in the mansions of the wealthy, and sets down with the minuteness of Mr. Murray himself, the vices and the merits of the homely inns at which he rests. On one occasion, in 1790, he seems much shocked at the state of dilapidation into which the mausoleum and monuments of an historical family had been allowed to fall from mere neglect; and he moralizes so feelingly upon the

necessity for making some provision for the preservation of such relics, that it is very probable that his own plan for securing the repair of his mausoleum at St. Ives, may have originated here.

When, in these riding tours, he reaches Cornwall, we find him a welcome guest at many of the best houses in his native county, of which, as well as of Middlesex, he was a magistrate. He visits Mount Edgecumbe, Whiteford, Treburse, (then Mr. Eliot's,) Restormel, (then called Trinity,) Tregothnan, Trevethoe, Tehidy, Chiverton, (at that time the residence of Vice-Warden Thomas,) Trevayler, Poltair, Trewithen, besides visits paid to his relations at St. Clerc, Callington, and Tavistock. At the latter place, he notes, August 29, 1789, "breakfasted with my cousin, Dolly Edgecumbe, who is as lovely as she was 38 years since." This was Mrs. Dorothy Edgecumbe of Chilliton, mentioned in his will.

Occasionally, amusing anecdotes are set down, for Knill had a keen appreciation of humour, in whatever shape it presented itself.

Here is a droll epitaph from a churchyard in Norfolk, on a poor man's tomb.

"Life is a city, full of crooked streets,
 "Death is the market-place where all do meet:
 "Were life a merchandise that men could buy,
 "The rich alone would live, the poor must die."

Collectors of sun-dial mottoes may prefer the following, as certainly more classical. They are copied from the four dials of the handsome market cross, at King's Lynn in the same county.

"Moneo dum moveo.
 "Dum spectas fugio
 "Sapientis est numerare,
 "Sic præterit ætas."

Modern improvements have occasioned the removal of this ornament of the town.

During another of these tours in 1795, he visited three endowed schools at Exeter, Plympton, and Plymouth, for the purpose of drawing up a report upon them, by desire of the four daughters of the Earl of Buckinghamshire, for their guidance in the administration of the charity funds which had been left at their disposal by their father.

The report is amongst his papers, and shows that he examined thoroughly into the matter; visiting the school-rooms and dormitories, learning how the boys were fed and clothed as well as taught, noting defects in the premises, inquiring into the management of the trust property, and in one case, submitting a fresh scheme for approval of the ladies.

In his native county he took an active part in public affairs; helping to raise a Cornish regiment in 1779, when war had been declared against England by Spain as well as France, and serving as a volunteer at St. Ives, in 1781, as he did afterwards in London; and when the abominable habit of plundering wrecks had become notoriously prevalent, and had given a bad name to his native county, Knill is found in 1792, drawing up an elaborate scheme for its suppression by arming the civil power with fresh authority for dealing with wreckers and protecting the coast. This scheme, originating as it seems entirely with him, was first submitted to Henry Dundas, then Home Secretary of State, through Lord Eliot, in April, 1792, was printed* in June, for circulation by post and otherwise, and submitted to the consideration of a county meeting, held at Bodmin, during the Summer Assizes in that year, under the presidency of Mr. Davies Giddy, afterwards Davies Gilbert, then High Sheriff.

At that meeting, a committee was formed for the purpose of framing a bill embodying Mr. Knill's suggestions, with the view of passing it into a law. The committee consisted of the

* Pocket Book of 1792 has this entry: "Jan. 25, Paid for 500 plans for amending the laws respecting ships wrecked, &c., £2 7s. 0d."

county and borough members, together with the acting magistrates in the county, with Lord Falmouth as chairman; and the thanks of the meeting were conveyed by the Sheriff "to Mr. Knill, for his zealous exertions to prevent the plundering of wrecks on the coasts of the kingdom, and for the plan communicated by him for effecting that desirable purpose, &c."

The original draft of this scheme, in Knill's handwriting, is extant, together with copies of the printed statement and reports of committee meetings, and correspondence with Lord Falmouth, Lord Eliot, Mr. Gregor, M.P., Sir Francis Basset, and others, who took a leading part in the matter. It appears that Knill's scheme was adopted with very few alterations; and that upon Lord Adam Gordon desiring that it should be extended to Scotland, that question was referred by Mr. Dundas to the Lord Advocate; but for reasons which do not appear, possibly the outbreak in that year of the terrible revolution in France, the bill was not carried through Parliament, and the question was allowed to sleep once more, until 1818, when the late Mr. Tremayne made a fresh attempt to alter the law by a modification of Knill's plan, which he placed in the hands of Lord Sidmouth, then Home Secretary, in the hope that the Government would introduce it. This expectation, however, was disappointed, and the law remained for many years unaltered.

Happily, in our day, although the annual number of wrecks has frightfully increased, a better feeling prevails on the shores of our maritime counties, and whilst every encouragement is given to the preservation of life, depredations of wrecked vessels are more vigilantly prevented.

Previously to the date of his wreck scheme, Knill had shown the readiness as well as the skill with which he could throw himself into the preparation of a plan, by framing, on the very day on which Lord George Gordon's riots reached their alarming crisis, a detailed plan for quelling the riots and placing London in a position of safety, in a long letter

addressed anonymously to Sir Grey Cooper, Secretary of the Treasury. This was on the 7th June, 1780, when Knill's indignation was very naturally roused by the reckless conduct of the mob in burning Lord Mansfield's house. It would be tedious to quote this letter. Enough to say of it, that it was composed in the spirit of a true patriot, without the least token of a vindictive feeling against the rioters, but with a cautious regard for the safety of peaceable citizens.

It is to be regretted that no trace can be found in any of Knill's papers of any professional engagements at the bar, but it is believed that during Mr. Pitt's administration, he was employed in preparing Parliamentary bills for the government, and it was asserted by his near relation, the late Mr. Robert Hichens, that he drew the Income Tax Act for Pitt. Once only, is any reference made to that statesman's name in his pocket book, viz. : "Dined at Dolley's with Mr. Smith, Secretary to Mr. Pitt," (Jany. 12, 1792 ;) but in this year, and in 1800, the next year of which there is a pocket book, he makes frequent entries of calls upon Mr. Long,* "at the Treasury." Some of these calls are specified to have been on business on behalf of other persons, *e.g.*, for Col. Des Barres who was Governor of Prince Edward's Isle, and apparently on intimate terms with Knill, and others ; but some may possibly have been on business for the government.

Entries also occur in 1792, of several attendances at the House of Commons "on Plymouth Dock Committee," which was eventually "deferred till next year," but he may have attended as a witness and not as counsel.

Thus, in 1800, he enters "attended the hearing of Lady "Buckingham's cause in Chancery," which he attended as a Trustee, under the Earl's will.

Some entries in the pocket books, scattered through the different years were for some time a hidden mystery, until it was found that they were entries of a more private nature,

* This was Charles Long, afterwards Lord Farnborough.

such as he might desire to conceal from his servant, and written in a cursive Greek character, but English language; such as "made my will, &c."

Some of the letters which have been preserved contain expressions of the warmest gratitude for valuable acts of kindness done to friends, of which no trace appears in his own memoranda. One friend testified his sense of Knill's disinterested friendship by inscribing a gold snuff box, which he did not live to present, but which Knill received, as he himself has recorded in Latin on the box, from the widow of the donor.

The inscription is curious and creditable to both donor and recipient.

"The gift of John Moore Knighton, of Greenofen, in the county of Devon, Esquire, and Mary his wife, to John Knill of Gray's Inn, in the county of Middlesex, Esquire, in grateful acknowledgment for his successful exertions (without charge) in the years 1800, '1, '2, '3, and '4, whereby a beneficial lease of certain lead mines at Grinton, in the county of York, from the Crown to Mr. Knighton, was obtained. And also, for that through Mr. Knill's friendly mediation, a law suit which must have proved tedious, expensive, and perplexing, between Josias Readshaw Morley, Esquire, (who claimed the lease,) and Mr Knighton, was prevented."

Underneath these words, Mr. Knill has engraved in Latin. "*Receptum a Mariâ Knighton, Viduâ, 21 Janrii, 1806.*"

Mr. Knill died a bachelor in 1811. His last will is dated two years previously; it is of unusual length, and after making his half-brother, Rev. John Jope of St. Clere, his sole executor, the remainder of the five skins of parchment upon which it was engrossed, is occupied by an immense variety of bequests to friends and relations, some of them of substantial character, but the majority being mementoes only.

One of these is curious as showing a trait of the donor's character, viz.: "To James Edge, of 8, King's Bench Walk, Temple, Attorney, my silver stewpan, cover, and stand, silver

“smoking candlestick, with Chinese and Turkish tobacco pipes, which I request him to accept as marks of my esteem and acknowledgment for the trouble he has kindly and generously been at in transacting the business of several poor people whom I recommended to him, in whose behalf he acted with as much diligence and zeal, gratuitously, as if he had been paid ample fees.”

Amongst the other bequests are no less than fifty-six gold rings, of five guineas each, distributed in nearly equal numbers to friends and relations. Those intended for the ladies are mounted with a small plait of hair surrounded by twelve pearls, whilst those for gentlemen had a similar device surrounded by twelve small diamonds. A handsome annuity was also settled on the faithful servant who kept his chambers.

Thus has John Knill's path through life been traced so far as authentic materials permit, and they afford means for judging very fairly of his character also.

Endowed with abilities and energy of more than an average order, with a ready wit and genial humour, he seems to have availed himself of a liberal education to gain a position of credit and honour in the different duties which he performed, both in a public and a private capacity. As he was employed during twenty years in a fiscal department of the state he was familiar with accounts, and this, combined with his legal knowledge gave value to his services as a trustee for others. His cultivated taste and vigorous intellect secured him the society and friendship of many literary and public men of his day, whilst his polished manners, genial humour, and general kindness and consideration for those who came to him for advice or help, made him a welcome guest wherever he was known.

Amongst many whom he had opportunities of serving after he came to London in 1782, was a Dr. Brooke, of Bath, who was sent to Italy in 1785, by the Duke of Leeds, then Foreign Secretary, on a mission connected with British Trade with

that country, and who was accompanied to Downing street by Knill, to receive his final instructions. This gentleman, who seems, after the death of the Duke, to have been very shabbily treated by the government after several years of service for them, thus speaks of Knill in a printed statement of his claims.

“Mr. Knill, a gentleman of honour, independent fortune, and of well known integrity to government, most kindly engaged to receive my despatches from Italy and officially deliver them.”

This was during Mr. Pitt's administration, and is another proof of the access which Knill had to more than one department of his government.

Knill's kindness of heart was further shown in his fondness for children, whom, though a bachelor, he delighted to please. He was fond of taking presents into the country for them, and would amuse them by his playful way of opening the package of toys with great ceremony, and only allowing access to the contents by a series of peeps and hidings, until at last the full beauty of the present was displayed to the eager eyes of his little friends.

This amiable trait peeps out also through passages in the school reports which he drew up in 1795, where he seems much interested in the welfare and happiness of the children ; and in his pocket book of 1800 he notes the pleasure he had derived from attending the festival of charity children at St. Paul's Cathedral, adding, “the best meeting of children and company that ever was, on this occasion.”

During the few years of which there are pocket books, he seems to have been most punctual in his observance of Sunday, generally attending Divine service twice in the day, once at the chapel of Gray's Inn, and once elsewhere, as he did also on thanksgiving days and the great festivals of the church. Sometimes a brief entry occurs of the sermon, and in more than one instance an entry is made here again in Greek

characters. Passages from Scripture are frequently quoted as appropriate to particular days and events of his own life, and sometimes moral sentences from Latin classical authors are interspersed with them. The references are often obscure from want of the clue to their application, but never from inaccuracy in quoting them.

A kitcat portrait by Opie, painted in 1779, represents Knill very pleasingly. A bright smiling hazel eye, well arched eye-brow, and full but not lofty forehead, a resolute lip, dark unpowdered hair, and close-shaven chin and cheek, in a plain suit of blue with frilled shirt and ruffles, sitting in an easy attitude at table, give you the thorough gentleman, as he was when Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant. He was then in the prime of life, at the age of 43, and this is his only portrait.

He was a man of unswerving integrity, nice sense of honour, and generous patriotism; devotedly fond of his native county, affectionate and liberal in his domestic relations, and exhibiting zeal and assiduity in the performance of public duties and of private trusts. His tastes were elegant and refined, whilst his manners possessed the finished courtesy of the times in which he lived; and whilst he always was deferential to those who were above him in station, he had too much pride to bear rebuke or disdain, and expected to be treated as a gentleman by those with whom he mixed. It has been charged against him that he was eccentric, and it cannot be denied that his fancy of a mausoleum and its ceremonies supports the charge, though the intention of burial there was soon abandoned; the vein of humour which he possessed, may also, have sometimes betrayed him into drolleries inconsistent with the gravity of mature age. But it is fair to say, in his excuse, that he was by no means singular in that failing at the time in which he lived; and he never allowed his fondness for fun (which was always harmless), to interfere with business or duty.

And if the present age is less tolerant of what it calls eccentricities of the past, may not faults of character be found amongst us now, which are, at least, as inexcusable?

“*De mortuis nil nisi bonum.*” Let us forget the foibles of his character, if indeed they deserve the name, and rather dwell in memory on the sterling worth and energy which so far outshone them.

J. J. R.

Penrose,

July, 1871.

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