



In Memoriam : Thomas Tutton Knyfton.

“ Friend after friend departs ;
Who has not lost a friend ?
There is no union here of hearts,
That finds not here an end :
Were this frail world our only rest,
Living or dying, none were blest.

There is a world above,
Where parting is unknown ;
A whole eternity of love,
Form'd for the good alone :
And faith beholds the dying here
Translated to that happier sphere.”

BY ROBERT ARTHUR KINGLAKE.

A RECORD of the proceedings of the Somerset Archæological Society of 1887 would be scarcely complete if it omitted to notice the death of Mr. Knyfton, a true Christian gentleman and faithful friend ; a man possessed of a highly cultured mind and most refined feelings ; who passed an unusually long life in his native county, where his deeds of usefulness and discriminating charities will be long remembered. Almost every useful and humane institution in Somerset that needed assistance received his warm and unostentatious support. To take part in the erection of churches, the restoration of old ones, and in relieving hospitals burdened by long-standing debts, was to him a source of pure delight. On the formation of our Archæological Society he became one of its members, and interested himself in its prosperity up to the period of his death.

In September, 1851, this Society held a meeting at Weston-super-Mare, under the presidency of Mr. Knyfton, on which occasion there was a very large attendance of Members, including one of the principal founders of the Society, the

Rev. Frank Warre, Mr. Freeman, Mr. Miles (afterwards Sir William Miles, Bart.); Mr. Crosse, of Broomfield (the celebrated electrician who predicted telegraphic communication and other wonders of electricity); Mr. Dickinson, Dr. Pring, and other well known Archæologists. In that year Mr. Knyfton was High Sheriff of the county, and there was a general desire on the part of his friends that he should be received at Weston-super-Mare with Somerset honours.

To adopt the language of the biographer of the late Lord Sommerville, one time President of the Board of Agriculture, my lamented friend was a sincere lover of justice, moderate in his political sentiments, affable to all, and void of all inclination towards self-assertion.

The late Sir Arthur Elton, of Clevedon Court, expressed to me a hope, more than once, that Mr. Knyfton would present himself as a candidate for the eastern division of the county of Somerset, as he was sure that his talents for business, and high character, would be appreciated by all parties.

Possessed of rare judgment, unbiassed rectitude, and a never failing desire to make all around him happy and hopeful, was one of his special attributes. Imagine, therefore, how great was his power of doing good by precept and example. Many seek to promote the welfare of their neighbours, but do not possess the power of accomplishing their benevolent desires, by reason of agricultural depression and diminished rent rolls. Now it is only the few who are favoured with the privilege of dispensing their wealth to their poorer brethren.

At an early period of Mr. Knyfton's life he laboured assiduously in the discharge of his magisterial duties, the magnitude of which would have astonished many a stipendiary; for in those days little provision was made for petty sessional meetings (Weston-super-Mare, now a large and flourishing town, was then only a small village, without any building for conducting the administration of justice), and magistrates' clerks were not always within reach. The poor curate, the farm labourer,

and the small village shop-keeper who had failed in business from some unexpected loss, found in Mr. Knyfton a guiding friend; and no deserving man or woman ever knocked at the door of Uphill Castle without receiving abundant relief and hearty sympathy. In him were centred all the pleasing virtues of the true English country gentleman. For nearly twenty years I sat on the same bench with him, and under the most trying circumstances never saw the serenity of his temper ruffled, or the slightest indication of annoyance. He seemed always, to me, to have made it a rule of his life never intentionally to give pain: where he could not conscientiously praise, he would not censure—believing with good Hannah Moore (a name ever dear to Somerset people), that “a small unkindness is a great offence.” One of the attractive features of his character on the Bench was his solicitude in seeking the opinion of his junior colleagues when acting as chairman, rather than of advocating his own views, and this was the outcome of his chivalrous and unselfish nature. “What an unutterable charm,” says Dean Stanley, in one of his letters, “a fine temper gives to a man who possesses it. How is it possible to avoid loving him whom we are certain always to find with serenity on his brow and a smile on his countenance.”

For many years Mr. Knyfton acted as Chairman of the Board of Guardians at Axbridge, and was remarkable for his constant and punctual attention to the duties devolving on that office, and for the lucidity with which he explained Acts of Parliament bearing on the Poor Law question—a question now of painful and absorbing interest, soon to be re-opened by Parliament, in the hope of permanently relieving the poverty of our paupers. In the Axbridge Board Room a pleasing portrait of the genial Chairman, the gift of farmers, tenants, ratepayers, friends, and neighbours, adorns its walls.

He also held the office of Recorder of the ancient borough of Axbridge for fifty-three years, until its extinction in 1886.

Mr. Knyfton was called to the Bar by the Honorable Society of

Lincoln's Inn in 1825, and for a short time travelled the Western Circuit. There he found himself surrounded by a galaxy of members of the legal profession, with whom he was intimately associated, the like of whom we are not likely to see again. At this time Serjeant Wilde (afterwards Lord Chancellor Truro) was in his glory; Mr. Follett (better known as Sir William Follett, Attorney-General), the model advocate whom Sir Robert Peel had hoped some day to have made "his Chancellor"; the late Lord Chief Justice Cockburn (the magic influence of whose silvery voice few juries could resist), the late Sir William Erle, Serjeant Manning (the Queen's ancient Serjeant), Mr. Merewether, Sir Frederick Slade, Abraham Hayward, q.c. (the brilliant essayist), Sir Richard Budden Crowder, Serjeant Bompas, Sir Robert Collier (Solicitor-General and amateur artist), Montague Smith and Montague Bere, Serjeant Kinglake (the latter popularly styled "the Prisoner's Friend," as by his ingenuity he persuaded Somersetshire juries to acquit well known criminals), *Christr.* Rawlinson, G. M. Butt (whose skill as a special pleader obtained for him a retainer in the celebrated trial affecting the validity of the will of Mr. Wood, the eccentric Gloucester banker); and last and *least*, little Frederick Williams (afterwards Sir Frederick, the smallest barrister that ever wore wig and gown—for his height was little more than five feet), were all striving for the mastery. This little advocate—a sort of epitome of man—and Serjeant Wilde had been engaged as counsel in Queen Caroline's trial, in 1820.¹

This band of learned friends and learned brothers, all of whom I personally knew, and some were guests at my father's house, have long since passed away, with the exception of Sir

(1). The former, though short in stature, was not deficient in courage. When on the circuit he fought a duel. The ball of his adversary pierced his waistcoat, but not his heart, and often when dining with the Somersetshire gentry, he would quietly slip away, after the cloth was removed, and return in a few minutes with the famous waistcoat, and show it to the host, hostess, and the party, hoping to receive from them high commendation for his bravery.

Montague Smith, one of the judges on the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, and Sir Christopher Rawlinson.¹

I forgot to mention the name of my old friend Ambrose Lethbridge. He, too, for a short time wore the wig and gown, and was considered by the ladies of Somerset the Adonis of the Western Circuit. He was possessed of a sound judgment, with kind heart, and was a favourite with Sir William Follett, in whose chambers he passed some considerable time; but wisely exchanging forensic pursuits for banking, he was selected to fulfil the honourable and responsible position of Chairman of the well known Somersetshire banking company.

Mr. Knyfton, happily for his county and his neighbours, confined his ambition to county duties, *satis beatus ruris honoribus*, and in exercising hospitality to rich and poor in a spirit not unworthy of a former owner of Montacute—

“Thro’ this wide opening gate
None come too early; none return too late.”

One anecdote characteristic of Mr. Knyfton’s courage and presence of mind in a trying moment I will recall. Few, if any, are now living who witnessed the following scene. When Mr. Brunel, the celebrated engineer (who nearly lost his life from swallowing half-a-sovereign, when playing with his children), was engaged in cutting through the solid rock at Bleadon, near Weston-super-Mare, on the Bristol and Exeter line of railway—a work of gigantic difficulty, requiring some two or three hundred navvies (not the most tractable of English labourers)—a disturbance arose between the contractors and the navvies on the subject of an increase of wages. In vain did Mr. Brunel reason with the men on the injustice of their claims. Suddenly a happy thought entered the fertile brain of the engineer, and he resolved to send one of his officials to Uphill Castle for the Magistrate’s assistance and advice. Without loss of time, Mr. Knyfton started for the

(1). Sir Christopher Rawlinson, formerly Chief Justice of Madras, died a few days since, in his 80th year.

scene of action, and taking the Riot Act in his hand, passed into the thick of the crowd, where he was greeted with menacing language and uplifted pickaxes. With calmness he talked to the men, telling them that law was stronger than force, and that all would be well if they acted in the spirit of their contract; if otherwise, a troop of cavalry from Horfield Barracks would probably be marching on Uphill. The navvies grew calmer, and by the tact, good temper, and resolution on the part of this ruler of the district, peace prevailed, and the frightened village shop-keepers were re-assured.

Lady John Manners, now the Duchess of Rutland, who in her stately hall never forgets the cry of the poor and needy, in a very interesting article in the *National Review* for February, under the title "Are our rich land-owners idle," speaks favourably of their public services, and commends hospitality as a great power in cementing the bonds of friendship that should exist between neighbours.

In some of the village communities in our Indian Empire Courts of Reconciliation exist, to the great benefit of the labouring classes. Disputes are left to the decision of some "wise man," who kindly undertakes to hear and decide on the merits of the case, without any fees. If some county gentleman in every rural parish in England would do the like, thousands of pounds spent in litigation, and consequent family quarrels, would be saved. This suggested local tribunal is almost a matter of national importance. Truly, law is an expensive luxury. In a recent suit at the Bristol Assizes, which was ultimately withdrawn, £500 was expended soon after the case was opened.

Mr. Knyfton held strong opinions on the advantages of country gentlemen living on their own estates, believing—and few will dispute the soundness of his judgment in this respect—that absenteeism in England, as in Ireland, is injurious to the landed interest, and retards the progress of civilization in our rural districts. Statistics clearly demonstrate that a

resident country gentry, combined with a hearty and effective administration of the Church of England parochial system, tend materially to diminish crime and poverty, and pave the way for establishing village industries, which will give work to our labouring classes, now suffering from the effects of agricultural depression. And here I cordially adopt the sentiments of Mr. Ritchie,¹ who in addressing a public meeting a short time since, spoke in the spirit of the following words:—"Whatever changes may take place in our English institutions, he hoped the country gentlemen of Great Britain would never be unmindful of county duties, and rise superior to party politics. To lose their valued services would be nothing less than a national misfortune." The wise Addison, whom Lord Macaulay so much admired for the purity of his life and writings, has drawn an interesting portrait of the country gentleman. "There is no character," observes this charming essayist, "more deservedly esteemed than that of a country gentleman who understands the station in which Heaven and Nature have placed him. He is a father to his tenants, a patron to his neighbours, and is superior to those of lower fortune more by his benevolence than his possessions. He justly divides his time between solitude and company, so as to use the one for the other. His life is employed in the good offices of an advocate, a referee, a companion, a mediator, and a friend."

Among the many acts of munificence recorded of Mr. Knyfton, I may mention two which were brought to my own knowledge from professional sources. On hearing that the Rev. Dr. Cottle, a former Vicar of Saint Mary Magdalene, Taunton, had suffered pecuniary losses in his noble efforts to restore the church of Saint Mary Magdalene, Mr. Knyfton, although personally unknown to Dr. Cottle, without any solicitation, sent him a cheque for £500. The other instance is still more remarkable. A distant relative of the subject of this memoir expressed a desire to leave him all her property,

(1). President of the Local Government Board.

which offer he gratefully but courteously declined, inasmuch as she had another relative of an equal degree of relationship with limited means, and therefore a fitting object for her bounty. A few months after this interview the testatrix died, leaving the whole of her property, amounting to £20,000 to Mr. Knyfton. On being informed of this fact, he lost no time in proceeding to the office of his solicitor, and there executed a deed of gift to the extent of £10,000 in favour of the forgotten relative. What a noble act of beneficence, in an age where

“Wealth accumulates,
And men decay.”

Though Somerset was Mr. Knyfton's native county, his lineage was of ancient Derbyshire origin, as will be seen by an extract from the *Proceedings of the Royal Archæological Insitute*, held in 1874, at Ripon, Lord Talbot de Malahide in the chair; on which occasion Mr. Greaves remarked:—“A year ago we visited Muggington, seven miles from Derby, and were so much interested with the brasses on a tomb, that we visited it again, lately, and took the rubbings now produced. I became acquainted with Mr. Knyfton, of Uphill, Somerset, who possesses a suit of armour, which he supposes belonged to this very man. The suit is, I believe, extremely curious, and of great value, and has been recently cleaned in Bond Street. Unfortunately it had been sent back into the country before I saw Mr. Knyfton, and I regret much that I cannot produce it. It had no crest on the helmet. The family of Kniveton is of great antiquity in the county of Derby, and its earliest abode was at Kniveton, three miles from Ashbourne, from which they took their name. As early as the time of Edward I, they possessed Bradley, and then estates in Muggington and Mercaston. The family may well be called a knightly family, for an ancient manuscript says that ‘many and most of his family were knights.’ Thomas Kniveton married Joan, the eldest daughter and heiress of Ralph Leech,

of Chatsworth, and their eldest son, William, was created a baronet in 1611, by James I. He married the heiress of Rowsley of Rowsley, near Chatsworth, by whom he had a son, Gilbert, who had a son, Andrew, who was a very strenuous supporter of Charles I, for whom he spent the whole of his large fortune, and having sold all his estates, died a pauper at Rolleston, Staffordshire, and is buried there (MSS. *penes* C. S. G.) His brother, Thomas, was one of the Gentlemen Pensioners to Charles II and James II, and Collins says that he was *informed* that in him the title became extinct, but Mr. Knyfton informs me that this is erroneous, and that the heir to the baronetcy being in low circumstances, settled in Anglesea, and his descendants continued there till the last generation, when the male representative went to America. Mr. Knyfton is himself descended from the Bradley branch through a female, and from the Mercaston branch through males. I have seen deeds, which show that there were two other sons of Sir Gilbert, viz., Gilbert and Peter, but I have no knowledge of what became of them."

And so it has come to pass that my honoured friend, like a stately cedar tree that towered above its fellows, has fallen, and all who enjoyed his friendship must long lament his loss. There is solace, however, in the reflection that his days, which were many, were singularly free from pain, anxiety, and sorrow; and that his home was to him one of the sunniest and happiest spots in the world—for there sweet sympathy (sweet music, one of God's magnificent gifts to man) and unflinching devotion reigned supreme. His life was a Gospel; for has he not written his name in acts of loving-kindness for the last fifty years on the hearts of hundreds of persons with whom he came in contact. There is an immortality of goodness. Good deeds shine, we are told, as the stars in Heaven, and for the righteous man there is great reward.

Mr. Knyfton was a singularly handsome man, of commanding presence, possessing features of a type fully sup-

porting "claims of long descent." A well executed bust of white Italian marble, by Mr. Summers, a Somersetshire sculptor, which adorns Uphill Castle, will often recall to his neighbours his once familiar form.

Time is pressing, and I must no longer trespass on editorial indulgence, and I will therefore end this short sketch of a good man's life, by reproducing the inscription on his tomb, and also some beautiful lines, written by Mr. R. Crawley, of Worcester College, Oxford, on hearing of his death :—

To the glory of God
 And to the loved & honoured memory of
 THOMAS TUTTON KNYFTON ESQRE., M.A.,
 Of Uphill Castle,
 J.P. and D.L. for Somerset;
 Only son of
 THOMAS TUTTON KNYFTON, Esqre., and BETTY, his Wife;
 Born at Westbury, Oct. 29th, 1798;
 Died at Uphill, Feb. 2nd, 1887;
 Buried in the old Church at Uphill.

The Tower of this Church
 (Together with Peal of Six Bells),
 Was erected Anno Domini, 1887,
 By GEORGIANA SOPHIA KNYFTON,
 His Widow,
 Daughter of the late
 WILLIAM HUNGERFORD COLSTON, D.D.,
 J.P. and D.L. for Somerset,
 Rector of West Lydford in the same County.

THOMAS TUTTON KNYFTON, M.A.,

Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant for Somerset.

Born at Westbury, Somerset,
October 29th, 1798.

Died at Uphill Castle, Somerset,
February 2nd, 1887.

Buried in the Vault under the Tower of the Old Church
at Uphill, February 10th, 1887.

TO THE MEMORY OF A SOMERSETSHIRE 'SQUIRE.

The stateliest oak must one day fall,
And leave the spot whereon it stood
A barren waste, to show to all
The place it filled within the wood.
We never knew how vast it spread
Till prone we saw its giant form;
Yet we had often sought its shade
For shelter from the sun and storm.

A hundred of the saplings round
Might in a night in dust be laid;
A single spring would clothe the ground,
And branching hide the gap they
made.
But many a June will come and go,
And autumn wither many a spring,
And children yet unborn will know
The place where reigned the forest
king.

And such a royal tree wert thou,
And stoodst among thy fellows so,
A frame not ninety years could bow;
And now, alas! thou liest as low.
The rich were welcome at thy door,
The poor ne'er empty went away;
For heaven had largely blest thy store;
And all alike will mourn to-day.

Thy spirit to that God has flown
Whom, hoping still that thou
hadst found,

Thou still didst think might best be
known
By doing that to all around
Which each would have by others
done:
A nobler heart, a juster mind,
There was not underneath the sun;
And thou hast left thy works
behind.

They follow thee: thy mortal mould
Is laid within the ruined fane
Set up by pious hands of old,
A landmark to the western main,
The which thy care did late restore;
A beacon, like thy life, it stands
To guide when waves and tempests
roar,
The sailor home from distant lands.

Thy virtues these: but how to paint
The man, the friend whom we
deplora!
Affection's colours seem too faint;
And pen and fancy aid no more.
And all we saw was but a part;
The beauteous whole is written fair,
Upon one proud and loyal heart
That broken waits to join thee
there.

From *St. James's Gazette*, February 10th, 1887.

R.C.