

We fall into the sin of imitation almost unconsciously. This is true of our age as it has been of no other. We are prone to accept the thoughts and dicta of others as indisputable. In this age of editorials, pamphlets, books and reviews, we easily acquire the habit of placing implicit confidence in the utterances of prominent men and great thinkers. It is far easier than thinking out everything ourselves. But what is the result? Our minds become indolent. We are influenced by every wave of thought. We are not ourselves. We become an unthinking multitude. This must not be. Life is too short, and there is too much to be accomplished. Let us learn of others, ascertain wherein they have failed, and acquire from them all that will assist us in our development. Then, avoiding what may be harmful, and profiting by what may be helpful, we must, in our own way, and guided by the spirit implanted within us, press forward to the perfecting of ourselves, and by that means to the elevation and improvement of the world at large. For, as Emerson says in another place, if we but do what is assigned us, we cannot hope too much or dare too much.

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EPITAPHIAL INSCRIPTIONS

The practice of placing inscriptions on tombs is a very ancient one, and is said to have originated with the scholars of Linus, the Theban poet, who, first "bewayled their master, when he was slayne, in doleful verse, called of him *Elinum*, and afterwards *Epitaphia*, for that they were first sung at buryals, and after engraved upon the sepulchres." They were doubtless suggested by a sense of immortality, and served to recount the virtues and glorious actions of the deceased, and hold them up for our instruction. They were thus first brought into use in connection with persons of distinction, and among the ancients it was forbidden to employ them for any but those of rank. Later, however, this restriction fell into disuse, until at the present day it is to be observed that epitaphs proper are not very largely employed by the better educated, the cultured and refined, with whom monumental inscriptions partake more of the nature of simple records. A very notable case illustrative of this is to be found in a recent collection of the epitaphs found at Bring Hill Plymouth, Massachusetts, where, out of more than two thousand, an extremely small percentage consist of verse or prose epitaphs. Among the middle and lower classes, the use of epitaphs is now very common, and it is among those that one may look for all that is grotesque and ungrammatical.

Epitaphs, as the term is now employed in the broad sense, include any monumental inscription. Originally, and now in the more strict sense of the word, they were inscriptions in prose or verse designed to narrate the descent of the deceased and mourn his loss. They also often served as the means of recording religious views; views concerning the present social state and hopes for better days; they often record real or imagin-

ary wrongs which are thus exposed as the most effective mode of public vindication. All that is expressive of love, sorrow, faith, hope, resignation and piety should characterize an epitaph.

The importance of monuments and inscriptions in the illustration of local history cannot be too strongly maintained, since the object to be attained in the erection of monumental buildings and inscribed tablets are twofold, being not only to record the character of the deceased, but also to offer to us a lesson in the remembrance of our mortality. More than that, if epitaphs are read aright, they give us an important insight into the manner of thought, the station and the intellectual atmosphere in which the people of the time lived. The relation of the whole subject,—which is one full of interest and offering important lines of comparative study—to anthropology, has been very fully treated of by Pettigrew. The object of the present paper is to draw attention to the importance of the subject and enlist others in working it out more fully, for, strange as it may seem, there are very few works on epitaphs in the English language. Five have been published in England, and one, bearing the date of 1892, in America. Many records of a valuable nature relating to the early history of this continent have been lost through neglect to gather such inscriptions before the stones bearing them were destroyed.

Of the English publications, that by James Brown on the "Epitaphs and Monumental Inscriptions in the Greyfriars Churchyard at Edinburgh" is one of the most interesting. It is essentially a much extended work on epitaphs from the same locality published at a very much earlier date by Monteith, and one of its most valuable features is an historical account of this ancient burial place.

Classification of epitaphs is not a very easy matter, as they include so many subjects of diverse character. Pettigrew makes eighteen classes, while Lowing reduces them all to four which he designates as (a) elegant, (b) professional, (c) witty and grotesque, (d) miscellaneous. In my own studies, I have found that they may also be classed, according to the social strata from which they emanate, in three groups, those of (a) the upper or educated and wealthy class, (b) the middle and lower middle, and (c) those which emanate from the uneducated whose lives lie in hard places. The epitaph then often reflects, as also in the other cases, the manner of lives the people to whom they relate have led.

Accepting Lowing's classifications, a few illustrations of some of his groups will serve to acquaint us with the style of writings one is likely to meet with in some of the old English churchyards. Of professional epitaphs, probably no better example could be given than one by Soame Jenyns on Dr. Johnson. As a condensed biography, it certainly could not be surpassed.

"Here lies poor Johnson. Reader! have a care,
Tread lightly, lest you rouse a sleeping bear,
Religious, moral, genius and humane,
He was, but self-conceited, rude and vain;
Ill-bred, and overbearing in dispute,
A scholar and a Christian, yet a brute.