

## CURIOUS EPITAPHS.

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EVERY one is familiar with the old Latin proverb, "*De mortuis nio nisi bonum*,"—of the dead (say) nothing unless it is good. Possibly the proverbial untruthfulness of epitaphs arises in great measure from a somewhat too liberal interpretation of the maxim just quoted: in the amiable desire on the part of survivors to say nothing but what is flattering or to the credit of those who, having departed this life, can no longer work either good or evil to their fellow men.

But there are many kinds of epitaphs other than those which are simply adulatory of the deceased, and which sometimes describe them not as they were but as their friends would have wished them to be, and it is this class of what may be termed "post mortem" literature that has given rise to the biting proverb, "To lie like an epitaph."

There are epitaphs which are simply ludicrously unmeaning: there are those which are unmeaning without being ludicrous, and there are those which are ridiculous and nothing else.

Besides these, there are some which are quaint yet beautiful, which tell in a few words all that is necessary to know respecting the departed, and yet tell it in such a manner that the reader is interested and possibly instructed. In addition to these, there are epitaphs which are pompously fulsome in their wording, which describe the dead man's or woman's life and actions in such inflated language that the passers-by read and turn away with a shudder, possibly, also, with the reflection of being thankful that it had not been their luck to meet these superlatively superior people in the flesh.

Then there are many other kinds, contradictory, eccentric, punning and

anagrammatic, besides many of a miscellaneous character, and in this paper we propose to give examples of as many of the different descriptions as space will permit.

We will begin with royal epitaphs, and quote the one upon Ethelbert, who was the first Christian King of Kent, and the builder also of the first cathedral of St. Paul's:—

*"Rec Ethelbertus hic clauditur in polyandro,  
Fana pians certus Christo meat absque me-  
andro."*

which being translated runs thus:—

King Ethelbert lieth here,  
Closed in this polyander,  
For building churches sure he goes  
To Christ without meander.

When Harold, the last of the Saxons met his death on the field of Hastings, his body was taken, so it is said, to Waltham Abbey in Hertfordshire, and there interred. No stone marked his grave, and no high-sounding phrases were engraved over his last resting-place. Lord Byron, when he was at Athens early in the present century, wrote the following lines in substitution of an epitaph for Harold:—

"Kind reader! take your choice to cry or  
laugh:  
Here Harold lies, but where's his epitaph?  
If such you seek, try Westminster, and  
view  
Ten thousand just as fit for him as you."

The epitaph upon King Henry II. of England, who died in 1189, says much in a few words:—

"Here lies King Henry II., who many realms  
Did erst subdue, and was both count and  
king,  
Though all the regions of the earth could  
not  
Suffice me once, eight feet of ground are  
now  
Sufficient for me. Reader, think of death,