

THE
LIVES OF THE SPEAKERS

OF THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS.

BY
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Of the Inner Temple.

LONDON:
E. CHURTON, 26 HOLLES STREET.
1850.

Arms of Sawyer.—Or. two bars, azure, each charged with a barrulet, dancettée, argent, a chief, indented, of the second.

Crest.—A demi lion, az. holding in the paws a saw, erect, or.

SIR WILLIAM GREGORY.

A branch of the ancient family of Gregory, of Stivichall, in Warwickshire, settled at Cattys Court, in the Parish of Fawnhope, in Herefordshire, in the sixteenth century, from whom descended the Rev. Robert Gregory, a Fellow of All Souls, Vicar of Fawnhope, and Rector of Sutton St. Nicholas, in the same county. He married Anne, daughter of John Harvey, of Bradestone, co. Gloucester, by whom he had issue two sons, of whom the eldest died in his minority. William, the survivor, and the subject of this memoir, was born 1st March, 1624, and was afterwards admitted a Fellow of All Souls, Oxford. Having adopted the profession of the law, he was, in due time, called to the bar, obtained an extensive practice, and rose to considerable eminence, although it was not till 1677 that he was created a Serjeant-at-Law. In this year we find that the election of Sir Thomas Williams, for the borough of Weobly, having been petitioned against, and declared void, Mr. Serjeant Gregory offered himself as a candidate for its representation, and was returned without opposition, on the 9th March. There can be no doubt, that at this time, he had acquired the reputation of a sound lawyer, and we find him taking part in the debates upon questions of the deepest importance at that eventful period. We may also presume, in the absence of any positive information upon the point, that his knowledge of Parliamentary usages was considerable, or he would not, as so young a member of the House (having been but one year in Parliament), have been called upon on an emergency to preside over their deliberations.

In the life of a preceding Speaker we have slightly referred to the manner of Serjeant Gregory's election to the chair, in consequence of the King's aversion to Sir Edward Seymour, upon whom the choice of the Commons had fallen. This question was sharply debated for several days, indeed during the continuance of the first session of this Parliament, which met on the 5th day of March, 1678-9, and was prorogued on the 12th of the month for two days. The right of the King to exercise his veto was strongly contested, while the law officers of the Crown, setting aside all question of the policy of

the act, fairly argued that if the consent of the Sovereign were necessary to confirm the Speaker's election, his refusal must necessarily render the choice inoperative. The matter was, however, arranged amicably, although the Journals of the House give no very clear or precise reasons for their submission. Mr. Serjeant Gregory was elected, a sort of compromise being effected between the King and the Parliament. His speech on the occasion was very short: he said—"I humbly thank you for your good opinion of me; but when I consider the weight of your debates, which require a person of the greatest experience and parts, my time of sitting here has not been above a year, and my experience so little, that you may suffer in your affairs; and I come with the greatest disadvantage imaginable to succeed a person of so much experience. Pray, consider of it, and chuse a more experienced person."

The Parliamentary History says, "Then Lord Russell and Lord Cavendish took him by the arms, and led him to the chair, which he did not in the least resist, and on the 17th of March he was presented to the King, who, without hesitation, approved the choice."

Many questions mooted in this session of Parliament were of a highly interesting character; but only one is recorded in which our Speaker took a prominent part. We allude to the examination of the witnesses in the debate concerning monies paid to members, a venal system long practised by the ministry, to the beggary of the exchequer, in which some of the proudest names were deeply implicated. It would be unfair in us, were we to refuse to do Mr. Serjeant Gregory the justice which his conduct on this occasion appears to merit; for he was firm, yet temperate, and acted altogether with impartiality. One great measure was happily carried through its last stage in this session, which put the seal upon arbitrary imprisonment, and insured a large amount of liberty to the subject, and a considerable degree of honour to the Speaker who presented the Bill to his Majesty for the royal assent—this was the *Habeas Corpus* Act, which passed immediately before the dissolution of Parliament. The honour of knighthood was subsequently conferred upon our Speaker, and he was elevated to the bench as one of the Barons of the Exchequer, and afterwards removed to the Common Pleas, where he enjoyed the reputation of a sound lawyer and an excellent magistrate.

About the year 1677, Sir William Gregory purchased the manor and estate of How Caple, in his native county, from Edward Capel, Esq., whose ancestors had possessed it as early as A.D. 1289, and from which that noble family derived its name. Sir William subsequently added considerably to his estate by the purchase of other lands and woods in Woolhope and Fawnhope, and the manors of Fawnhope and Sellershope, and spent at the Mansion-house of How

Caple, to the close of his life, whatever time could be spared from his circuits and his professional avocations as a judge.

He married Katharine, only daughter and heiress of James Smith, Esq., of Tillington, by whom he had an only son. In the latter part of his life Sir William Gregory was afflicted with stone, the pain of which he bore with exemplary resignation and cheerfulness. In a letter to Sir Edward Harley, dated How Caple, March 16, 1694-5, he says—"My distemper hath been very sharp upon me this winter, and I have not been out of my chamber this three months. My trust is that God, who hath hitherto of his goodness supported me under it, will sanctifie it unto me."

He was a considerable benefactor to his parish, having most munificently rebuilt all the Church of How Caple, with the exception of the chancel and tower, for which he left by his will, made in 1694, adequate funds, and his wishes upon this head were carried out by his executor. The building is greatly admired for its architectural beauty, and remains as a lasting monument of his good taste, although built at a period when architecture was at the lowest ebb. We find also that he gave a garden in Bowsey Lane, Hereford, to the Lazarus Hospital, in 1694. On the floor of the chancel of How Caple Church, amongst other inscriptions to various members of his family, is the following epitaph to the memory of our Speaker:—

M. S.

Gulielmi Gregorie, Equ aurai
 Totius Angliæ Senatus E. Cathedra Audivit
 Prolocutorem,
 Erudita Juris Consultorum Subsella
 Nunc In Ærario Baronem,
 Deinde In regio Tribunali Justitiarum
 Suspexerunt ;
 Qui In Salermi comitiorum circuitu jure ferente
 Incorrupta semper comes assidit justitia,
 Eodemque apud suos argenti
 Amicum ad omnia magis paratum
 Tota non undique experta est vicinia,
 Nec Patronum ecclesia generosiozem ;
 Hujus gravi disuria pereuntis exuvias
 Templum hoc pia ejusdem munificentia extractum
 Dignumque tam sacro deposito conditorium,
 Ad Beatorum conservat resurrectionem ;
 Qua supremevi judicis adventum
 Divinæ fiducia petus clementiæ
 Ipse mitissimus in terris judex
 Securus præstolatur
 Obt. An : Salut : MDCXCVI
 ÆTAT. LXXII.

James, the only son of our Speaker, followed the profession in which his father had so eminently distinguished himself, and became a bencher of Gray's Inn. He married Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Rodd, Esq., of Moreton Jeffrey, co. Hereford, and died at the early age of thirty-eight, leaving a widow with three sons and daughters. The two elder sons of this gentleman dying without issue, William, the survivor, married Elizabeth Geers, daughter and sole heiress to her mother, and grandmother, Lady Elizabeth Cope, daughter of the Earl of Westmoreland, a lady of illustrious birth, descending through the marriage of her ancestor with the heiress of Nevil, Lord Bergavenny, from FitzAlan, Earl of Arundel, Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Northampton, and the Princess Elizabeth Plantagenet, daughter of Edward I. William Gregory, Esq., the only son of the above-named William, was a Serjeant-at-law. He married Susan, eldest daughter and co-heir of William Brydges, Esq., and left issue, with a daughter Anne, a son, William Cope Gregory, Esq., who was twice married, but dying without issue in 1789, devised his estates to Thomas Pendarves Stackhouse, Esq. (who afterwards assumed the name of Acton), the second son of his niece, Susannah, daughter and heiress of Edward Acton, Esq. of Acton Scott, co. Salop, by the before-named Anne, the only sister of Mr. Gregory. On the death of Thomas Pendarves Stackhouse Acton, Esq., in 1838, his brother Edward William Wynne Pendarves, Esq. of Pendarves, co. Cornwall, who has sat in Parliament for his native county for a quarter of a century, succeeded to the Herefordshire and Shropshire estates, and is the lineal descendant and representative of our Speaker, and, as we have before shewn, has a Plantagenet descent through the Lady Elizabeth Cope, his great-great-grandmother. The widow of Mr. T. P. S. Acton survives, and resides at Acton Scott, near Shrewsbury, where there is a portrait of Sir William Gregory.

Arms.—Or. two bars, az. in chief, a lion passant of the second.

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