

A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY KENTISH  
PROVERB.

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THE collection of Kentish proverbs contributed by the Rev. W. W. Skeat to Vol. IX. of *Archæologia Cantiana* includes the following (p. 142):—

*At Betshanger a Gentleman, at Fredvile a Squire,  
At Bonnington a Noble Knight, at . . . a Lawyer.*

To which the Rev. Samuel Pegge, from whose original MS. dated 1735 the collection was compiled,\* added the following note: "Lawyer is to be pronounced *Lyer* as is common now in some counties. This relates to the worshipful family of Bois's, of which four several branches were flourishing at once at those seats here mentioned." The Duchess of Cleveland, in *The Battle Abbey Roll, with some account of the Norman Lineages*,† quotes this proverb, and adds "that *liar* is the word intended is quite clear from the significant omission in the last line." The following notes are an attempt to assign a date to the proverb and to locate the significant omission.

Bonnington, a manor and seat in the parish of Goodnestone next Wingham, was, to quote Philipot,‡ "the ancient seat from whence the numerous and knightly family of Bois did as from their originall fountain issue out into Fredville, Betteshanger, Haukherst, and other parts of this countie; and do derive themselves from John de Bosco, who is mentioned in the Battle-Abby roll, of those who entered

\* Dr. Pegge accumulated his collection from the works of Fuller and Ray and "from private sources." The proverb here quoted is evidently of the latter category, for it is not mentioned by either of the authors cited.

† Vol. i., p. 89.

‡ *Villare Cantianum* (1659), p. 170.

this nation with William, the conquerour; and certainly they have not been much lesse at this place then seventeen descents, as the datelesse deeds of several of this family who writ themselves of Bonnington, do easily manifest. Nor hath it yet deserted the name, or departed from the possession of Bois, being at this present, part of the patrimony of Sir John Bois, to whose paternal arms, the late king, for his eminent and loyall service performed by him at Donnington-castle, added as an augmentation, upon a canton, azure, a crown imperial, or.”

There can be no doubt that this Sir John Boys is the “noble knight” referred to in the proverb.\* He was knighted by Charles I. on 22 October 1644 after his gallant defence of Donnington Castle, Berkshire, an account of which was contributed by the late Rev. L. B. Larking to Vol. III. of *Archæologia Cantiana*. Nor was this by any means his only eminent service to the royalist cause. Amongst other exploits he was a prime mover in the Kentish rising of 1648, and later took an important part in the negotiations for the return of Charles II. He died in Ireland† on 8 October 1664, being at the time Deputy-Governor of Duncannon Fort, co. Wexford, under the Duke of Ormond. He is buried in Goodnestone Church, Kent, where a memorial to him still remains with many others of the Boys family.

This places the date of the proverb as between 1644 and 1664. During that period the manor and mansion of Betteshanger was owned successively by Edward Boys, gent., who died in 1649, and by his son John Boys, gent., a member of the Long Parliament, who died in 1678; while Fredville, a

\* Several members of the family have received the honour of knighthood at various periods, but none, I believe, of Bonnington except Sir John Boys, the cavalier. Hasted (*History of Kent*, 1790, vol. ii., p. 637) states that the second wife of Lewis Clifford, Bennet, daughter of Sir John Guldeford, Knt., remarried Sir William Boys of Bonnington, *Knt.* I can find no other evidence of this William Boys (Sir John's great-great-grandfather) having been knighted. In any case the proverb cannot refer to him, as he died prior to Betteshanger becoming a seat of the family.

† It is often stated, incorrectly, that he died at Goodnestone. This error originated in Hasted.

manor and seat in the parish of Nonington, was inherited by John Boys, Esquire, lieutenant of Dover Castle, and twice knight of the shire,\* on the death of his father Sir Edward Boys in 1646.

By the date arrived at, one might be apt to assume that the proverb owed its origin to the Civil War. But the "gentleman of Betteshanger" and the "squire of Fredville" being both staunch Parliamentarians, whilst the "noble knight at Bonnington" was an ardent royalist, it is not likely that it emanated from either of those predominant factions. Rather would it seem that the probable date is subsequent to the Restoration, and the fact that Sir John Boys did not succeed to the Bonnington property until after his father's death in 1661 somewhat strengthens this view.

Other Kentish branches of the family were, at that time, seated in the following parishes:—

Willesborough, Boys Hall.

Thomas Boys, gent., formerly of Sevington, built this seat in 1632. He died 25 January 1659-60, leaving his eldest son, John Boys, gent., æt. 33, his heir.

Mersham, Boys House.

Thomas Boys, gent., son of Thomas Boys of Boys Hall, Willesborough, probably resided here till his death, 13 July 1694.

Goodnestone, Uffington Manor.

Edward Boys, gent., died possessed of this seat in 1664.

Sandwich.

John Boys, gent., living in 1664.

Hawkhurst.

William Boys, Justice of the Peace, died about 1665.

Ashford.

Edward Boys, gent., living in 1663.†

\* See *Arch. Cant.*, XXI., 234, 236. † *Visitation of Kent*, 1663—8.

Blean, Hode Court.

This seat, like those of Fredville and Betteshanger, was formerly owned by Sir John Boys of St. Gregory's, Canterbury, first recorder of that city, from whom it descended to John Boys, the poet and translator of Virgil. He is generally stated to have died on 18 March 1660-1, but according to the *Visitation of Kent*\* he was living in 1663, and further his work on Virgil, published May 1661, contains no intimation that it was a posthumous publication.

Of the above seven there are three to whom the designation *lawyer* might possibly apply, viz., Thomas Boys of Willesborough, William Boys of Hawkhurst, whose names are on the Registers of Gray's Inn, and John Boys of Hode Court, who was admitted as a student at the Inner Temple in November 1640. None of these, however, appears to have followed the law as a profession, so that the surmise that the last word of the proverb was intended not to denote the calling of the person indicated, but as a thinly-veiled reflection on his veracity, is probably correct. The last-named John Boys of Hode Court alone seems to have moved outside the placid sphere of a country gentleman; from his published works we can gather that he combined politics with literature—a combination not incompatible with “the gentle art of making enemies,” and, without associating oneself with the sentiment implied, according to the Duchess of Cleveland, in the last line, there is not much room for doubt that he is the person against whom the proverb was written.

The principal work of John Boys of Hode, published in 1660, is a translation of the sixth *Æneid* of Virgil, to which he added “certaine pieces relating to the publick.” These latter deal with political affairs concerning the county of Kent, which at the time were highly controversial. Amongst other matters he relates how, “by retiring to a hiding place,” he escaped imprisonment for his share in the

\* *Harl. Soc.*, vol. 54.

“Declaration of the Nobility, Gentry, Ministry, and Commonalty of the County of Kent” for a full and free Parliament, which he had drawn up and presented on 24 January 1659-60 at Canterbury. But, as shewn above, the proverb had in all probability no political significance; and certainly it could not have arisen from this incident, for he was acting in concert with Sir John Boys of Bonnington, who, less fortunate, was imprisoned in Dover Castle.

John Boys of Hode also wrote a long description and history of Canterbury Cathedral in hexameter verse, entitled *Fasti Cantuarensis*.<sup>\*</sup> His literary ability was considerable, and he was on intimate terms with many Kentish *literati* of his day, including William Somner and Thomas Philipot. To the latter he penned a congratulatory ode “on his diligent survey” prefixed to *Villare Cantianum*, published 1659 (some copies are dated 1664), in which the following verses occur :—

This I affirm, that of his countrey none  
 Have better merited than hee alone.  
 Lambert† submit, and Weever too give place;  
 Nay, thou great Cambden stand aside: Alas!  
 You have but posted through our countrey, and  
 As if pursued, have fear'd to make a stand:  
 Whereas amongst us he both born and bred,  
 In every hundred, parish, house t'have led  
 His whole age seems.

It is interesting to note that Philipot, when he comes to describe the manor of Hode, is, on his part, equally enthusiastic on Boys's attainments, referring to him as “a person who, for his ingenious and candid love to literature, may be justly said to be worthy of better times, but fit for these; that is, though his merit should have been calculated for the best of days, yet it is made more eminent by his support

<sup>\*</sup> The MS. of this poem is in the Cathedral Library, and is said to have been written about 1672 (see *Bibliotheca Cantiana*, p. 140). If this date be correct, he lived to a much later date than generally stated. It is possible, however, though hardly probable, that this poem was the work of his son, John Boys of Hode, born 1652.

† *i.e.*, Lambard.

of learning in the worst." There is also a congratulatory ode by Philipot published in Boys's work. These exchanges of compliments are instructive; for it is asserted that *Villare Cantianum*, though published as the work of Thomas Philipot, was, in fact, almost entirely written by his father, John Philipot, the Somerset Herald of Arms.\*

Whatever the merits of the case, there was evidently considerable controversy as to the authorship of the work, and, in view of the highly flattering lines appearing over the signature of John Boys of Hode, it is possible that the proverb arose in this connection. Bishop White Kennet, in his *Life of William Somner*,† referring to the matter, says of Philipot—"there is no dependence on a man who could afford to rob his own father of that book." The same author concludes the biography‡ with a list of Somner's friends in the county, and of the Boys family he mentions four, viz. :—

John Boys of Betteshanger.  
 John Boys of Fredfield (Fredville).  
 Sir John Boys of Bonnington.  
 John Boys of Hode Court.

If the suggested date (1660—1664) be correct, and the "significant omission" (Hode Court) has been correctly supplied, then these four are the persons referred to in the proverb; and the fact that they not only represent four distinct branches of the family, but also bear the same Christian name, is probably intended as the chief point to be emphasized.

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\* "Though the son takes the credit, there can be little doubt that much of it was written by the father."—J. R. Smith, *Bibliotheca Cantiana*, p. 6.

† Prefixed to Somner's *Treatise of the Roman Ports and Forts of Kent* (1693), p. 37.

‡ *Ibid.*, 117.