



### THE SKEFFINGTONS OF TUNBRIDGE.

BY MR. ROBERT CHAPMAN.

At the north end of the ancient market town of Tunbridge there stood, until recently, an old house, on the right hand side of the street, as you wend your way in the direction of Sevenoaks, which has often attracted the attention of those who have a taste for the picturesque in street architecture, as a good specimen of the Tudor period; and one not unworthy of a notice in 'Archæologia Cantiana.'

This old building, latterly called Hanover House, presented to the street a long front with five gables. The northernmost gable was an addition to the original house, but as it was in the same style, it seemed but a slight defect; a modern Grecian door had, however, superseded the Tudor doorway, which was a matter to be regretted. Not only was the new door incongruous in itself, but with the old one had probably been swept away the date of erection, or the family arms, or initials, or perhaps all three, records often found on buildings of the period

in question. Nothing was known respecting the history of the house, and there seemed to be nothing whereby to trace it.

Upon examining the interior, however, I found on the wainscot above the chimney-piece in the dining-room, a shield of arms, which I was subsequently enabled to identify with those carved upon the Skeffington vault in Tunbridge Church. This clue leads us to presume that the old house was perhaps built, but certainly was inhabited by one of the Skeffington family. The four quarterings on the shield were as follows:—

1. (indistinct) but meant for three bulls' heads erased.
2. a Bend between 6 mullets (3 and 3).
3. Three Escallops.
4. Four birds of some kind.

The tinctures, of course, did not appear; and the charges on the first and fourth quarters were indistinct. By the kindness of Thos. W. King, Esq., York Herald, I am enabled to give the true heraldry, thus:—

1. Skeffington—*Arg.*, three bulls' heads erased *sa.*, armed *or.*
2. Oldbeife—*Azure*, a bend *or*, cotised *arg.*, between six mullets pierced of the 2nd.
3. Childe—*Ermine*, on a chief indented *gu.*, 3 escallops *or.*
4. Cambridge—*Arg.*, 3 Cornish choughs *sa.*, beaked and membered *gu.*

Skeffington is a Leicestershire village, ten miles from Leicester, and nine from Uppingham. It is mentioned in Domesday, and has been written as Skeffintone, Skeffington, Skeffington, and Skevington, from the Saxon *sceap*, a sheep, and *ton*, a town.\*

This village gave the name to a family which was located there from a period little subsequent to the Conquest. The Testa de Nevill shews that, in the time of Edward I., they held one carucate and a half by sergeancy, and likewise fifteen virgates, for which they were to serve forty days in England.

By an Escheat in 15 Henry III. it appears that Odo de Scevington held the manor of Dolce in Kent, A.D. 1231. Sir W. Farrell Skeffington, who inherited the estate (*jure uxoris*)

\* Nichols's 'History of Leicestershire,' vol. iii., part i., p. 429.

in the reign of George III., possessed the original grant of Dolce made by Henry III. The great seal attached to this grant is engraved in Nichols's Leicestershire, vol. iii., part i., p. 444.

The Leicestershire manor house, and the parish church at Skeffington, still bear testimony to the dignity of the family. In the window of the great hall was painted the symbol or rebus of their name, a skeav-in-ton (a sheaf in a tun) for Skeffington.

"In the breakfast room is an old carved chimney-piece, in the middle of which are the arms of the family with thirty quarterings."\* Nichols states that the arms of the Skeffingtons in the 2 Edward I. were *or* a lion rampant *vert.*† When the present coat was first used does not appear; but in the time of Edward II. Galfridus de Skeffington bore *argent*, 3 bulls' heads *sable*.

About A.D. 1435 John de Skeffington "added greatly to the family property by his marriage with Margaret, daughter and heiress of William Ouldbeif and Maud his wife, which Maud was daughter and heir of Brian Deane."‡ This lady brought into the family the Oldbeif coat, which appears upon the shields at Tunbridge.

Their son Thomas (living in 1460) was, with Mary his wife, buried at Skeffington. He had three sons: William; John, an alderman and sheriff of London; and Thomas.

The eldest of these, William, emerges from the rank of rural worthies into political life; and for the second time connects the family with Kent. He was Sheriff of Warwickshire and Leicestershire in the 24 Henry VII., and also in 7 and 13 Henry VIII. He received the honour of knighthood from Henry VII., and in the 21st of the reign of Henry VIII., he held the office of Master of the Ordnance. Probably it was during his tenure of this office that he invented an instrument of torture, which is still to be seen in the Tower of London, and is called the "Scavenger's Daughter." This title is a corruption of the inventor's name. The machine doubled up its

\* Nichols's 'History of Leicestershire,' vol. iii., part i., p. 441.

† Nichols quotes Escheat, 2 Edward I., N<sup>o</sup> 20, Leicestershire.

‡ Nichols's Leicestershire, vol. iii., part i., p. 432.

victim's body until the head and feet were drawn together; hence the torture was called "the embrace of Skeffington's Daughter." In 1529 Sir William was appointed King's Commissioner to Ireland, "with instructions to restrain the exactions of the soldiers, to call a Parliament, and to provide that the possessions of the clergy might bear their part of the public charge." In 1530 he was appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland; the King's natural son, Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond, being Lord Lieutenant. From his office of Master of the Ordnance the Irish called Sir William "the Gunner."\*

After the attainder and execution of Edward Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, in 1521, had occasioned the forfeiture of his estates, his demesne lands in the manor of Datchurst, *alias* Hildenboro', were granted, in 1523, to Sir William Skeffington.†

It is not likely that he lived at Datchurst, for his time was chiefly spent in Ireland, whence, however, he was recalled, about Easter 1532, at the instance of the Earl of Kildare, chief of the powerful sept of the Geraldines, between whom and Sir William a feud had for some time existed. The Earl of Kildare took the government of Ireland, but for a short time only, as Skeffington soon returned to his post. The Earl died in the Tower from grief, Dec. 12, 1534.‡

Sir William Skeffington, like most other Governors of Ireland, in his time, made hay while the sun shone. He obtained considerable grants of land in the counties of Antrim and Louth, which afford, to this day, an ample support to the dignity of an Irish peerage. The greater part of the estates of the rebels O'Moore and O'Connor, who were subdued during his tenure of office, fell to his share. One of his descendants succeeded to the Irish Viscounty of Massereene on the death of his father-in-law in 1665, pursuant to the terms of the patent of creation, which was dated 21 Nov., 1660. Sir William Skeffington died whilst Lord Deputy of Ireland in 1535, and was buried in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin.§ He was twice married—1st, to Margaret, daughter of Sir Everard Digby of

\* Nichols's Leicestershire, vol. iii., part i., p. 433. 'History of Ireland,' Leland, vol. i., p. 137.

† Letters patent, 7th March, 13 Henry VIII.

‡ Lodge's 'Peerage of Ireland,' under 'Earldom of Massarene.'

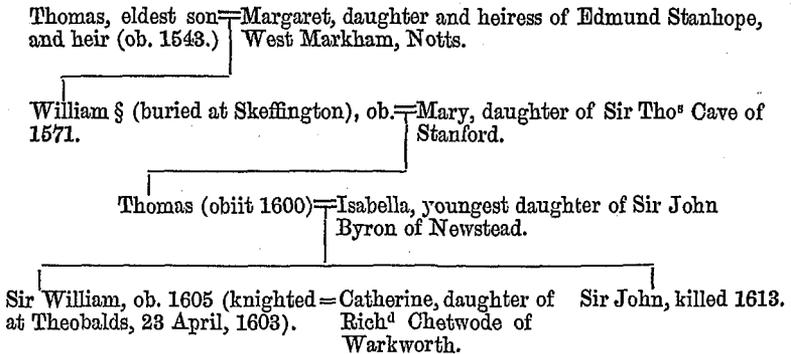
§ 'Peerage of Ireland,' iii., 57.

Tilton; 2nd, to Ann, daughter of Sir John Digby of Kettleby; and he left issue by both.\*

The estate of Datchurst, with its appurtenances in Kent, having been entailed in fee on heirs male by letters patent, dated 7th March, 13 Henry VIII., passed to his eldest son Thomas, with the other estates, and continued in possession of the elder branch for five generations, when it passed to the junior branch on the death of John by violence, on the 4th November, 1613.†

That there was a mansion at Datchurst scarcely admits of doubt. Hasted says, "At a small distance south of Hilden Green the foundations of a large house are yet visible, which are supposed by many to be those of Datchurst Place."‡ It is probable, however, that as long as the estate in Kent was held with the original property in Leicestershire, the latter would be the abode of the family. The name of Skeffington does not appear among those of the sheriffs or members of Parliament for Kent.

Of Sir William's family by his first wife—



The separation of the elder family from Datchurst was tragical. Catherine, widow of the last-mentioned Sir William, married Michael Bray, a groom, between whom and John, her

\* Pedigree in Nichols's 'History of Leicestershire,' vol. iii., p. 448.

† Inq. p.m. taken on the death of John Skeffington, 1613.

‡ Hasted's Kent, folio edition, vol. ii., p. 334, note.

§ On his tomb is a shield with sixteen quarterings: 1 and 6, Skeffington; 2, Ouldbeif; 3 and 8, Stanhope; 4 and 7, Maulovell; 5, Deane; 9, Rochford; 10, Lisle; 11, Jenney; 12, Doyle; 13, Cambridge; 14, Deane; 15, Child; 16, Colshell.

first husband's brother and heir, a dispute arose, which led to a suit in Chancery. With a view to a compromise, they had a meeting at a house in London on the 4th November, 1613. As they came out, when in the hall, Bray and John Skeffington each passed his sword through the body of the other, and both fell dead on the spot.\*

Pursuant to the limitation of Henry VIII., Datchurst passed to the heir at law, John of Tunbridge, grandson of Sir William, the grantee, by Anne his second wife; the other estates went by entail to the four sisters and co-heiresses of Sir William.†

This John Skeffington, who was born 1574, married Ann, daughter of Thomas Galland,‡ and, dying in December, 1645, left a numerous family. His eldest son, John, inherited the Kentish estate, but died unmarried in 1661 at the early age of 24, and was buried near his father in Tunbridge Church. His estate passed to his uncle Francis, who had been a captain in the army of Charles I., and was taken prisoner on the surrender of Colchester Castle. He died 30th April, 1684, and was buried in the chancel of Tunbridge Church. Francis Skeffington was a benefactor to the poor of Tunbridge and Hildenboro', to whom he bequeathed the interest of £200, to be distributed in bread.§ William, a younger son of John Skeffington by his wife Anne Galland, survived his brother Francis. He was only eight years old when his father, John Skeffington, died. In 1682 this William, who is described as "of Skeffington and Tunbridge," caused his pedigree to be exhibited to the officers of arms at Leicester, on the 8th of September, during their Visitation.|| He died in 1692, without issue. John Skeffington's ultimate heiress was a niece or grandniece, Mrs. Elizabeth Leming; she married Matthias Hickeringill, who died 10th November, 1743, and was buried at Tunbridge.¶

\* Nichols's Leicestershire, vol. iii., part i.

† Inq. p.m. taken at the death of John.

‡ 'Visitation of Kent,' 1619, folio 350. Hasted's copy in Brit. Mus., Add. MS., 5507.

§ Thorpe's Registrum Roff., p. 859. Inscription in Tunbridge Church.

|| Nichols's Leicestershire, vol. iii., p. 437.

¶ Thorpe's Registrum Roff., p. 858.

The estate was so divided at the death of Francis, that Hasted found it impossible to trace the portions into which it had dwindled after one or more law-suits; but the greater part appears to have been purchased by the families of Children, Weller, and Harvey; names still extant in the parish of Tunbridge.

The Irish branch of the family still keeps its place in the peerage as Viscount Massereene.

When the old Skeffington mansion in Tunbridge was taken down, two iron fire-backs were among the débris—one bearing the arms and coronet of Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon; the other the letters N.P. 1659. There have been families of the name of Hyde in Kent,\* but I cannot trace any relationship between them and the well-known historical house I have named.

\* See several in Hasted's Kent.