

CHARLES KERRY OF SMALLEY

By Rosemary Meynell

THE Rev. Charles Kerry died nearly 50 years ago; but his name is still remembered in Smalley, the village to which he gave so much; and no one researching into the history of Derbyshire can fail to find the tracks of his patient scholarship.

He was never Vicar of Smalley, but he was born there and the roots of his family history go deep into its soil.

When he died he left everything he possessed to enrich the church. Just before his death, in December, 1907, he wrote to my grandfather, *the whole God has lent me I have devoted to His glory and I have bequeathed it to Smalley.* With his letter he enclosed the last of the two beautifully Bemrose-Printed red volumes of the History of Smalley that was in itself a memorial to his devotion to his native village.

Charles Kerry was born in 1833, at the Old Green Farm, Smalley. His father, Samuel, tried to give him all the advantages that he himself had been denied.

Samuel must have been a remarkable man on his own account. As well as being a farmer, he was a painter, sculptor and what was known in Victorian times as a *mechanist*.

Charles studied architecture for a while, then, before taking Holy Orders, at the age of thirty, he was a schoolmaster.

All his leisure he spent in the study of art and archaeology and, in every parish where he served, he spent his time collecting local history. *Gather up the fragments . . . that nothing be lost* was his motto in life.

Always he was hampered by his lack of private means, for clergymen were expected to be men of substance. When he enquired about the cost of putting up a stained glass window at Smalley in memory of his parents he found that it would be far too much, so he

The debt that Smalley owes to the Rev. Charles Kerry, who died nearly half-a-century ago, is one that can never be repaid, nor over-acknowledged. This tribute to his work and his scholarship is of interest far beyond the confines of the parish and ends, fittingly, on a note of achievement and thankfulness.

decided to do the work himself.

A friend lent him a kiln and he made an oven for annealing and did all the painting, firing and glazing himself. He made three other windows, one of which is in South Wingfield Church (in memory of Dr. Robert Fielding).

For the Smalley one he made one extra pane which he gave to his cousin telling her to keep it carefully in case it was needed for a repair. (Her daughter, Mrs. S. A. Blakey, has it safely to this day).

In 1892, Mr. Kerry succeeded the Rev. Dr. Cox as Editor of the Derbyshire Archaeological Journal and the last years of his life were spent in Derbyshire.

All his life he had collected *scrapbooks* of local history and, as he was very much preoccupied with the thought of death and the importance of his work being carefully preserved, he decided to sell 25 volumes of his MSS to Sir Henry Bemrose.

These included transcripts of about 40 local parish registers. But one huge folio he kept, the result of fifty years' research into the pedigrees of the old families of Smalley and its neighbourhood: *families both gentle and simple*, to quote his own words, including that of the Kerrys which went back to Tudor times.

Within his own memory, Charles Kerry had seen the decline of real village life. When he was a boy there were no less than twenty different trades and occupations in the village. When he returned, as an old man, there were only seven.

Once, he wrote in 1905, *it was difficult to get out of the sound of the stocking frame, now only one or two silk looms are left. There is no*

inducement for an enterprising youth to remain in Smalley.

Roads and railways had killed the trade of local shops, for the villagers *more for the love of excitement and change than for economy*, carried their custom from home and the import of foreign flour had silenced the murmur of the mills. The old structure of village life had passed away for ever, but Charles Kerry was just in time to collect the reminiscences of those who could remember it and who could even remember Smalley old church, which was pulled down in 1793.

Few realised the importance of collecting eye-witness accounts and many people thought Mr. Kerry was wasting his time interviewing old and illiterate people with nothing but their memories to give. But some saw the value of his work and helped him to get it published, among them Sir Alfred Seale Haslam, of Breadsall; members of the Radford, Degge Sitwell and Boden families; Mrs. Sacheverell Bateman, Mr. Alfred Swingler and Sir Henry Bemrose, whose firm undertook the publishing.

Charles Kerry produced other books besides his Smalley History, including a study of stained glass at Ault Hucknall and at Haddon Hall and a Life of Leonard Wheatcroft of Ashover. He had planned to produce a book on *Derbyshire Tapestry* and when my grandfather went to visit him, on his deathbed at Belper in 1907, the old man gave him his MSS and notes on the subject.

We have the book still. It is finely bound, possibly by William Morris and inside are letters in Morris's own hand.

In his last letter to my grandfather, from his bachelor rooms at Claremont, Belper, old Kerry wrote:—*I am daily*

expecting my call home to be with Xt which is far better. I am now in the last stage of heart disease and dropsy.

He had been ill for seven years, but all that time he had worked on his precious mss. When death came they brought him by way of Horsley Church and Smalley Mill, halting the coffin at Yew Tree Farm, his family home. Then by the old black gate against the culverts that led to the old farm in Kerry's Pasture; and on to the Church where he was laid to rest under the old yew tree, where he wished to be.

When the will was read, it was found that he had left all his money to the church, for the building of a West Tower and the purchase of five bells, which, he stipulated, should be the best obtainable. He left minute directions for the casting and for the inscriptions to be put on each bell and asked that Mr. Percy Currey should prepare plans for the tower (a wise choice, as the pretty little tower we see to-day indicates).

Because he loved the old bell that he had so often heard as a boy, he asked that it should be kept as a Sermon or Tolling Bell and that it should toll for him as it had for his forebears.

With the meticulous care he had given to his researches, Mr. Kerry planned his own funeral. He even had the cards printed, with everything except the date, and addressed the envelopes himself! All his wishes were carried out, for he had chosen his executors with care, one of them being John Taylor — the Loughborough Bell Founder.

When the bells came, on two flower decorated drays, they were met at the Rose and Crown and played into the village by Mapperley Ambulance Band. Charles Kerry would have been pleased and proud, I think, at this welcome; and prouder still to hear the splendid chimes ring out down the years to our own time.