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Title: The Dukeries

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Release date: August 30, 2008 [eBook #26486]
Most recently updated: January 4, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by The Online Distributed Proofreading Team at https://www.pgdp.net (This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive/American Libraries.)

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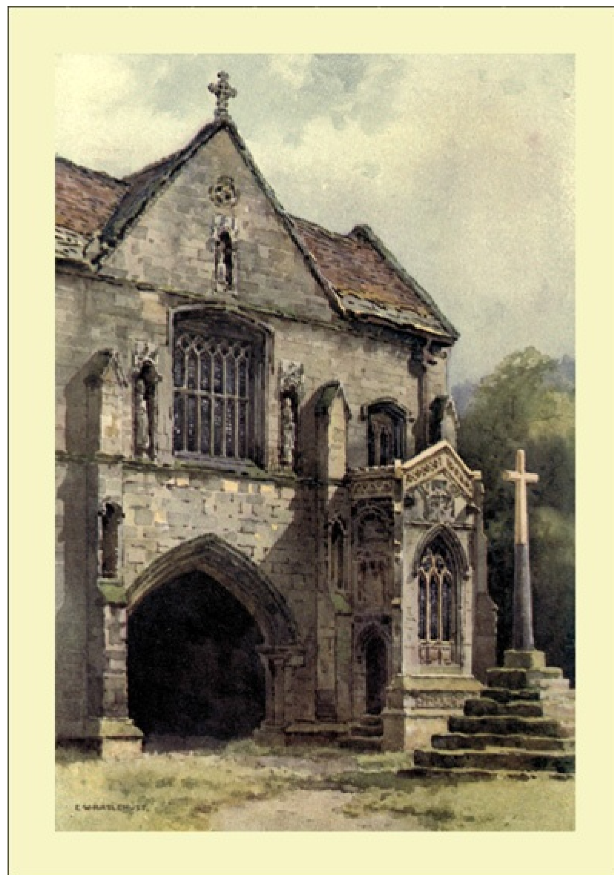
THE DUKERIES



THE PRIORY GATEWAY, WORKSOP

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THE
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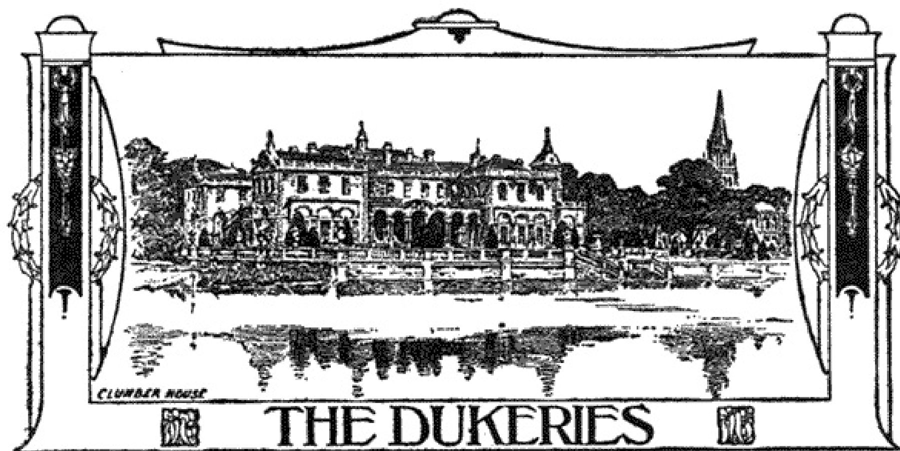

WORKSOP AND THE MANOR

Although within the last twenty-five years Worksop has suffered many changes, unfortunate enough from an æsthetic point of view, the Dukeries end of the principal street still suggests the comfortable market town in the neighbourhood of folk of quality. The only relic of notable antiquity is the quaint inn, known as the Old Ship—a building with projecting upper story and carved oaken beams that might have been transported from Chester.

The twin-towered Priory Church, a gatehouse of singular interest, and some slight, gracefully proportioned ecclesiastical ruins are the main features of interest. The Priory was founded by William de Lovetot, and used by the canons of the order of St. Augustine. Great men were buried there, notably several chiefs of the Furnival family, who had for town residence Furnival's Inn in [6] Holborn. The interior of the church contains some excellent round and octagonal pillars, and one or two ancient effigies. The walls are coated with stucco, which detracts considerably from the beauty of this handsomely proportioned building. One of the most interesting things to be seen is a piece of a human skull, pierced with an arrowhead. This hangs to the left of the doorway by which the vestry is reached. There is a weird superstition concerning the moving of this relic.

Near by is the ruined chapel, erected about the middle of the thirteenth century. It was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and in olden times must have blazed with gorgeous colours. The roof has fallen; little remains of its former beauty save the lancet windows. The double piscina and the sedilia are still in fair preservation, and we are shown the round holes in the stonework once filled with the pegs of the canons' oaken seats.

In the churchyard are a few quaint epitaphs for such as delight to dwell upon the virtues of the forgotten dead. The Priory Gatehouse at the farther end is perhaps one of the most interesting buildings of its kind in existence. The stonework is of soft grey, and the roof chiefly of well-coloured tiles. A roadway about fifteen yards in length passes through the building; the [7] original ceiling of oaken beams with graceful braces is still in good condition. Above this was the Hospitium, or guest chamber, where may be seen the hooded chimney-piece and the hearth before which old-time travellers rested o' nights and told tales that Chaucer might have loved, before retiring to the smaller chambers, to sleep heavily after the good cheer provided by their priestly hosts. In front of this relic stands the old market cross; and near by, until within the nineteenth century, were the stocks for vagrants and refractory townsmen.

Camden tells us that in his time Worksop was "noted for its great produce of liquorice, and famous for the Earl of Shrewsbury's house, built in our memory by George Talbot, with the magnificence becoming so great an Earl, and yet below envy". In Park Street, not far from the Priory Gateway, is one of the entrances to the Manor Park. The trees still remaining are not noteworthy in the matter of size, with the exception of a few cedars and beeches near the terrace of the house. As one approaches, the Manor Hills, gently sloping and well wooded, with heather-covered clearings, may be seen to the left. As for the house itself, the garden front of to-day, without being of great architectural interest, has a very pleasant air of unpretentious comfort and brightness. There is a flower garden whose beds are edged with box and yew. The chief object of [8] note is a long and high wall, probably a portion of the ancient house; this is somewhat dignified with its worn coping, whereon stand various urns the carving of which time has softened. From the terrace one looks down on the sloping park with its mere, and scattered trees, and graceful groups of young horses.

Passing round the house, and entering a vast gateway surmounted by a lion, one sees, to the right, part of the manor built after 1761, when the house which replaced the Elizabethan palace built by the Earl of Shrewsbury and his Countess Bess, with its pictures and furniture and some of the Arundelian marbles, was destroyed by fire. To my thinking, the most suggestive view of the present edifice is gained from the Mansfield road, within a few minutes' walk of the town.

From an ancient engraving we find that the first house bore some resemblance to Hardwick Hall, the great Bess's most successful building. It contained five hundred rooms; in front was a

fine courtyard, with a central octagonal green plot surrounding a basin with a fountain. The artist gave to this a touch of life by drawing a coach and six proudly curving towards the outlet; on the lawns beyond are ladies with fan-shaped hoops, and thin-legged gentlemen with puffed coat skirts.

WORKSOP MANOR

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Of this house Horace Walpole writes, in 1756: "Lord Stafford carried us to Worksop, where we passed two days. The house is huge and one of the magnificent works of Old Bess of Hardwick, who guarded the Queen of Scots here for some time in a wretched little bedchamber within her own lofty one:—there is a tolerable little picture ('The story of Bathsheba, finely drawn and shaded, in faint colours') of Mary's needlework. The great apartment is vast and *triste*, the whole leanly furnished: the great gallery, of about two hundred feet, at the top of the house, is divided into a library and into nothing. The chapel is decent. There is no prospect, and the barren face of the country is richly furred with evergreen plantations." In 1761 he records that "Worksop—the new house—is burned down; I don't know the circumstances, it has not been finished a month; the last furniture was brought in for the Duke of York: I have some comfort that I had seen it; except the bare chamber in which the Queen of Scots lodged, nothing remained of ancient time".

Not only was Mary Stuart well acquainted with Worksop Manor, but later, her son, James the First, on his first progress to London, became the guest of Gilbert, Earl of Shrewsbury, her jailer's successor. In a letter to his agent, John Harpur, this nobleman writes forewarning him of the expected honour, and, after bidding him see to horses being in readiness, adds, as postcript: "I will not refuse anie fatt capons and hennes, partridges, or the like, yf the King come to me". We find that James left Edinburgh on the fifth of April, 1603, and reached Worksop on the twentieth, after leaving the High Sheriff of Yorkshire at Bawtry, and being met and escorted by his brother of Nottinghamshire. It is matter for surprise that the king accepted the Talbot hospitality, considering their melancholy connection with his mother's tragedy, but it is true that he never made parade of filial piety. At Worksop Park appeared a number of huntsmen, clad in Lincoln green, whose chief, "with a woodman's speech, did welcome him, offering His Majesty to show him some game, which he gladly consented to see, and, with a traine set, he hunted a good space, very much delighted: at last he went into the house, where he was so nobly received, with superfluitie of all things, that still every entertainment seemed to exceed other. In this place, besides the abundance of all provision and delicacies, there was most excellent soul-ravishing musique, wherewith His Highness was not a little delighted." One wonders if he was shown the royal prisoner's miserable little room. At Worksop he spent a night, and in the morning stayed for breakfast, which ended, "there was such store of provision left, of fowls, fish, and almost everything, besides bread, beere and wines, that it was left open for any man that would, to come and take".

In the State papers relating to the Rebellion of '45 may be found a curious and interesting account of a secret hiding-place, reached by lifting a sheet of lead on the roof. A tattling young woman told the story upon oath, describing a staircase that descended to a little room with a fireplace, a bed, and a few chairs, with a door in the wainscot that opened to a place full of arms. Unfortunately, both history and tradition are silent concerning any shelter offered by Worksop Manor to proscribed folk.

After the burning of the new house, in 1761, the Duke of Norfolk, Lord Shrewsbury's descendant, laid the foundation stone of another in 1763. We learn that this was to have been one

of the largest in England; but that only one side of the proposed quadrangle was completed, although five hundred workmen were employed, and closely supervised by the duchess in person. This stood for three-quarters of a century; then, the estate being sold to the Duke of Newcastle, the greater part of the house was pulled down and the present place built.

Of the original park, which Evelyn mentions as "sweet and delectable", nowadays there is but little to be seen. There still remains, however, a beech grove called the "Druid's Temple", a "Lover's Walk" for sentimental youth, and a wood of acacias and cedars, yews and tulip trees—once known as the "Wilderness", but since the eighteenth century called the "Menagerie", because of a Duchess of Norfolk who kept an aviary within its precincts. Mrs. Delany, in 1756, thus alludes to this place: "We went there on Sunday evening; but I only saw a crown bird and a most delightful cockatoo, with yellow breast and topping". There is an air of pleasing disorder about the drives, and one is occasionally reminded of Irish demesnes. [12]

Within a mile of the house once stood the celebrated "Shire oak"—a gigantic tree whose branches overshadowed a portion of Nottinghamshire, of Derbyshire, and of Yorkshire. Evelyn tells us that the distance from bough-end to bough-end was ninety feet, and that two hundred and thirty-five horses might have sheltered beneath its foliage. This tree disappeared entirely in the eighteenth century, and the exact site is now a matter of some uncertainty.

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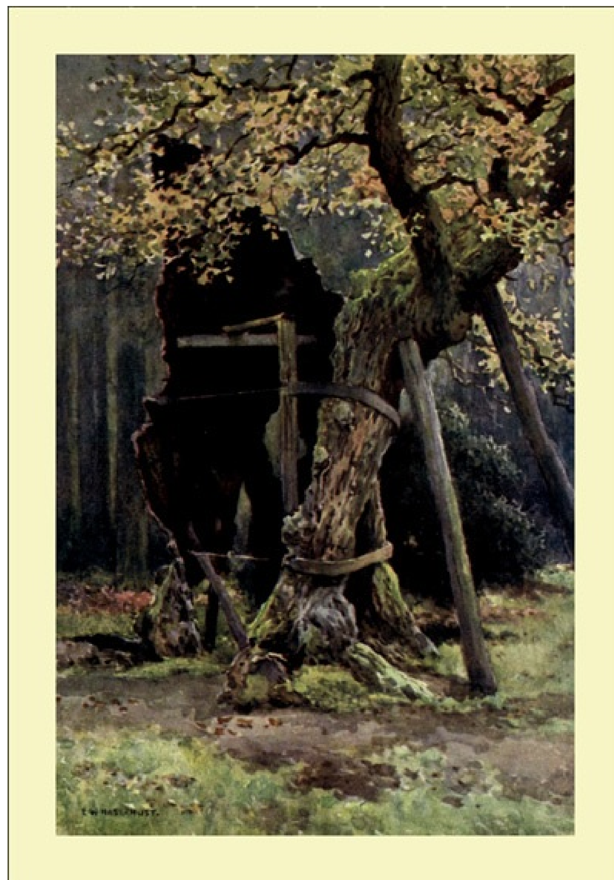
SHERWOOD FOREST AND ROBIN HOOD [13]

To savour the full charm of Sherwood Forest one must stray from the highroad, lose one's path, and wander in happy patience until a broad avenue is reached, or above the treetops one sees the slender and graceful spire of some stately church. The formal beauty of the frequented ways—trimly kept and splendidly coloured—precludes all illusion: only in the remote solitudes with their monstrous old trees is it possible to evoke a mind picture of Robin Hood and his devoted followers. And even in the most secluded places the imagined pageant of these folk suggests the theatre. The loveliness seems unreal—a background devised by some scene-painter of genius.

But Sherwood is always beautiful and always tranquil; to those who know aught of wood magic it is as fair in cold midwinter as in autumn, when the leaves are no longer green leaves, but a rich mosaic of russet and orange and sullen red. My most wonderful memory is of a November day when a fine snow was falling, and the leaves drifted downward in a continuous murmuring veil. Then, no rabbits played upon the grassy wayside or crossed the track, and the pheasants shivered in their hidden shelters. In early springtime one best realizes the antiquity; [14] the first opening leaves call to mind pale lichen growing upon damp castle walls: in summer the air is languorous, bringing a desire for rest and contemplation. Storms are impious there: the ancient oaks and birches and chestnuts must wail and protest, like dotards wakened from senility to cruel hours of actual life.

Of the old forest naught remains in perfection save the southern parts known as Birkland and Bilhagh, in the neighbourhood of Edwinstowe and Ollerton. Near the former village may be seen the famous "Major Oak" and "Robin Hood's Larder". The full glory departed several centuries ago; Camden himself writes of "Sherewood, which some interpret as *clear Wood*, others as *famous Wood*, formerly one close continu'd shade with the boughs of trees so entangled in one another, that one could hardly walk single in the paths," that "at present it is much thinner, and feeds an infinite number of Deer and Stags".

In British times the district was occupied by the tribe of the Coritani, and later the Romans built several camps here, various relics of which were discovered in the eighteenth century. Not far away, Edwin, the Saxon King of Northumbria, was slain in battle—fighting against Penda, King of Mercia, and Cadwallader, King of Wales; and in all probability his body was buried at the village of Edwinstowe.



ROBIN HOOD'S LARDER

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The earliest definite notice of Sherwood dates from the days of Henry the Second, when William Peverel had control and profit of the district under the Crown. After his dispossession, a lady named Matilda de Caux and her husband held the office of Chief Foresters. In Edward the First's time this office was seized by the Crown, and granted, as a special mark of favour, to persons of high station.

The *Charta de Foresta*, constructed in Henry the Third's reign, contains some curious information about woodland customs. We learn that "any archbishop, bishop, earl, or baron, coming to the King at his command, and passing through the forests, might take and kill one or two of the King's deer, by view of the forester if he were present; if not, then he might do it upon the blowing of a horn, that it might not look like a theft. The same might be done when they returned."[1] Courts called Swainmotes were held thrice yearly—one fifteen days before Michaelmas, a second about the Feast of St. Martin, and a third fifteen days before St. John Baptist's Day. At the same time the cruel punishments for offences against the forest laws were lessened in rigour. Thenceforth no man was punished with death or mutilation for illegally hunting, but if found taking venison was fined heavily. If he were unable to pay, he was imprisoned for a year and a day, and then discharged upon pledges; but if unable to find any surety, was exiled.

[1] Reeves's *English Law*.

The chief officers were known as foresters, verderors, woodwards, and agisters. Each verderor had the liberty of taking a tree out of Birkland or Bilhagh; but this privilege seems to have been abused, since in later years the officers were found to choose the best timber available, and in William the Third's reign the favour was withdrawn.

Until the sixteenth century the forest seems to have been infested with wolves: we read that one, Sir Robert Plumpton, in Henry the Sixth's time, held land called "wolf-hunt land" at Mansfield Woodhouse, seven or eight miles away, by service of horn-blowing to chase or frighten away these creatures. In 1635, from a survey taken by royal command, it was discovered that the forests contained 1367 red deer, 987 of these being "rascalds", or ill-conditioned. A few years before, the district had been ravaged by fire, and a contemporary writer describes the conflagration as one such as was "never knowne in menes memory; beinge four mille longe and a mille and a halfe over all at once". Later the gentleman tells how "ridinge on his way through the forest homeward, he saw a greate herde of faire red deere, and amonst them 2 extreordanory greet stages, the which he never saw the like".

Much of the forest oak was used for the royal navy, but more was allowed to decay. Folk of good birth but fallen fortunes frequently begged a grant of these trees from the Crown. In 1677 Thoroton writes that so many claims were granted that there would soon not be wood enough left to cover the bilberries! As time went on, the cleared portions, being of no further use for kingly

sport, were sold to various noblemen. In 1683, 1270 acres were bought by the Duke of Kingston, to add to Thoresby Park; while early in the eighteenth century 3000 acres were enclosed for the making of Clumber Park. The last portions of the forest remaining were the hays, or enclosures, of Birkland and Bilhagh, which were granted to the Duke of Portland about 1827, in exchange for the perpetual advowson of St. Mary-le-Bone. Bilhagh later became the property of the late Earl Manvers, its price being the manors of Holbeck and Bonbusk, near Welbeck. After the resignation of the Crown lands the waning historical interest of Sherwood ceased. Birkland and Bilhagh are still beautiful as in their prime, but the rest of the neighbourhood is nowadays naught but a wonderful pleasaunce, where drowsy pheasants wander unafraid, and where the chief signs [18] of life are on holidays, when happy folk crowd from the neighbouring towns to view, awestricken, the wonders and the riches of the great houses, and the artificial beauties of perhaps the finest parks in England.

One or two literary men of some distinction have rhapsodized over the charms of Sherwood, notably William Howitt and Washington Irving. Lord Byron, whose house of Newstead lies not far away, displayed but little interest in the district. The only modern writer to whom the secret of the real Sherwood has been fully divulged is Mr. James Prior, whose books, inspired by the spirit of the woodlands, should delight all who love fresh and wholesome pictures of unspoiled country life.

Sherwood, as everybody knows, was Robin Hood's kingdom. Learned men have racked their brains concerning the great outlaw's existence. Joseph Hunter, the historian of Hallamshire, published in 1852 an ingenious tract concerning his period and his real character, which in short gives plausible enough details of his adventures. There is a well known by his name not far from Doncaster, another near Hathersage, in the Peak Country; and more than one village prides itself upon the site of his "Shooting Butts". A cave, by legend ascribed to him, may be found on an "edge" overhanging the Derwent valley, whilst within an easy walk of Haddon Hall one may see [19] two rocks known as his "Stride".

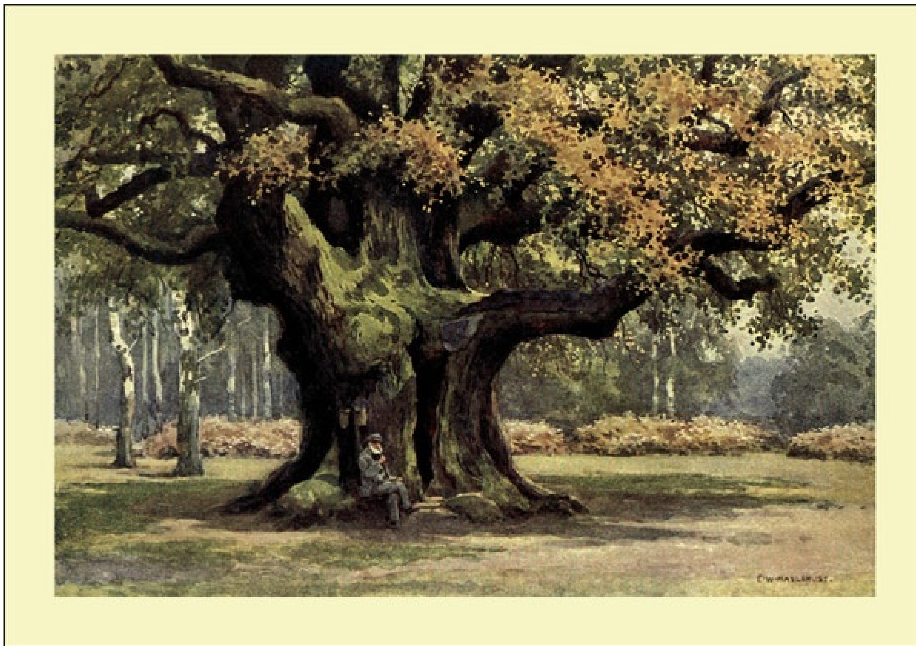
Langland, in the *Vision of Piers Plowman*, makes the first mention of his popularity:—

"I kan not parfitly my paternoster, as the priest sayeth,
But I kan rymes of Robyn Hode and Randolf, Earl of
Chester".

Again, in John Fordun's *Scottish Chronicle*, written about 1360, we find him described not only as a notorious robber, but as a man of great charity. In 1493 Wynkyn de Worde printed a sequence of old ballads treating of his adventures. This book, known as *The Lytel Geste of Robyn Hood*, became very popular, and brought into vogue the rustic pageants known as the Robin Hood Games, in which the adventures of the outlaw and his companions, Maid Marion, Little John, Will Scarlet, and Friar Tuck, were depicted for the admiration of the multitude.

In the public library of the University of Cambridge is preserved the manuscript of the finest and most ancient ballad. This, which is known as "A Tale of Robin Hood", may be cited in its quaint and dramatic picturesqueness as the most perfect and complete example of song literature extant. It begins with Robin's desire to attend church at Nottingham, since "It is a fortnight and more sin' I my Saviour saw". Little John accompanies him, but on the way they quarrel about a wager, and Robin strikes him, upon which the faithful servant departs in high [20] dudgeon. At Nottingham a hooded monk recognizes our hero and gives the alarm. He is surrounded by the sheriff and his followers, and, although he slays twelve men, is at last captured, and held in durance until Little John, who has quite forgiven him, accomplishes his release by a clever stratagem.

The chap-book entitled *Robin Hood's Garland*, which was published at York, contains the generally believed account of his death and burial. In it we read how he visited his cousin, the Prioress of Kirklees Nunnery, for the purpose of being bled. She, who must have been soul-sister of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, took advantage of his defencelessness, and, after opening a vein, locked up the room and left him for a day. Before dying, he blew his horn, and Little John, who was outside, burst open the doors just in time to hear his last words. The *Garland* is full of instances of Robin's nobility, and for delightful, invigorating reading may even be commended to the youth of to-day. It is a concise little history, beginning with the first day of his outlawry, and ending with the fatal scene at Kirklees. As a vivid series of woodland sketches it is without parallel of its kind, and reading, one may almost journey through the greater Sherwood in the company of the goodly archers clothed in Lincoln green.



THE MAJOR OAK, THORESBY PARK

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The humour is bucolic and breezy. The song of "Robin Hood and the Bishop", which the black-letter copy describes as "Shewing how Robin Hood went to an old woman's house, and changed cloathes with her to escape from the bishop, and how he robbed the bishop of all his gold and made him sing a mass", contains about the best specimen of this country wit. Again, in *Robin Hood and the Tanner of Nottingham* is a most ludicrous account of the manner in which, after being threatened with a "knop upon his bare scop", Robin receives as sound a drubbing as ever he himself inflicted. But this punishment, and his philosophical manner of bearing it, only earned him another follower, since the victorious tanner became at once enamoured of the free forest life, and swore there and then to join the band.

The Elizabethan dramatists made good use of our hero, knowing well that when he was presented on the stage the hearts of the people were moved. In "a Pleasant Commedie called Looke About You", he appears as a fresh-faced and pretty young nobleman, ever ready to do a good turn to his friends, to whom everybody defers, and who passes through the play laughing and merry as his namesake, the Goodfellow of Ben Jonson. So rosy are his cheeks and so bright his eyes that he personates the heroine, Lady Fauconbridge, at some unwelcome visits that she dreads. *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon*, by Anthony Munday, who wrote at the end of the sixteenth century, gives the next dramatic information. This shows him living in full state, but still young, and on the eve of marriage with Matilda Fitzwater, Lord Lacy's child. His steward, Warman, instigated by the Prior of York, betrays him in Judas-like fashion (for what real reason we are not told, if it be not for the wasting of his lands), and as an outlaw he flies to the greenwood, where he is joined by Matilda, who renounces her fine name and calls herself Maid Marion. Prince John has fallen in love with her, and she is in mortal fear of his pursuit. In this play Little John and Friar Tuck converse prettily in an aside:—

Little John. Methinks I see no jest of Robin Hood,
No merry morrices of Friar Tuck,
No pleasant skippings up and down the wood,
No hunting songs, no coursings of the buck.

Friar Tuck. For merry jests they have been shown before,
As how the friar fell into the well
For love of Jenny, that fair bonny belle;
How Greenleaf robbed the Shrieve of Nottingham,
And other mirthful matters full of game.

These passages obviously refer to the antecedent plays. After this comes *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon*, collaborated by the same author with Henry Chettle, another successful playwright. This, differing from the ballad account, shows how he was poisoned by his uncle, the wicked prior. His obsequies are solemnized with a plaintive little dirge:—

"Weep, weep, ye woodmen, wail,
Your hands with sorrow wring,
Your master Robin Hood lies
dead,
Therefore sigh as you sing.

"Here lie his primer and his beads,
His bent bow and his arrows keen,
His good sword and his holy cross:
Now cast on flowers fresh and green;

"And as they fall, shed tears and say,
Wella, wella-day! wella, wella-day:
Thus cast ye flowers and sing,
And on to Wakefield take your way."

After his demise poor Marion is so tormented by her royal persecutor that she seeks refuge in Dunmow Abbey, where she is poisoned by the king's order. In each play the outlaw is extolled so highly, and made so admirable in every way, that in spite of the quaintness one is moved to honest admiration. His dying scene is most pathetic, and there is no doubt that the simple country audience would weep as though for a dearly loved friend.

The airs pertaining to the Robin Hood literature are merry in the extreme—delicious, sparkling waves of melody, to which thousands of country dances have been performed. They sprang from the heart, and even to-day, if offered to the public, might win popular success. All are "lusty fellows with good backbones", such as Shakespeare in his salad days must have listened to and admired. Gay, in his pastoral *The Flights*, gives a charming picture of Bowzybeus delighting the reapers with one of these ballads, ere falling asleep midst happy laughter. [24]

In folklore are still preserved a few relics. "To go round by Robin Hood's barn" is to travel in a roundabout fashion, and "to sell Robin Hood's pennyworths", to sell much below value, as a generous robber might. His "feather" is the Traveller's Joy, his "hatband" the club-moss. His "men" or his "sheep" are the bracken, and his "wind" a wind that brings on a thaw. We are told that Robin could stand anything but a "tho wind". The Red Campion, the Ragged Robin, and the Herb Robert are known in several counties by his name. His greatest claim to popularity was that he took away the goods of none save rich men, never killed any person except in self-defence, charitably fed the poor, and was in short, as an old writer tells us, "the most humane and the prince of robbers".

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WELBECK ABBEY

[25]

The present house of Welbeck was built upon the site of an abbey for Premonstratensian canons, which was begun in 1140. Nothing, however, remains of the old place save some stonework in the cellars and a few inner walls. A portion of the house dates from 1604; in an engraving from the great Duke of Newcastle's book on Horsemanship we find that it originally bore some resemblance to a French château. Charles the First and Henrietta Maria were entertained here—the house being placed at their disposal whilst their host occupied Bolsover Castle, some miles distant. Ben Jonson devised a masque entitled "Love's Welcome" for the royal amusement, and there was such feasting and show that it cost between fourteen and fifteen thousand pounds.

The Abbey is richly furnished, and contains one of the finest collections of pictures and miniatures in Europe, and a wealth of ancient manuscripts. The miniatures were gathered together in the early part of the eighteenth century by Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford. Of these treasures Mrs. Delany writes in 1756: "I have undertaken to set the miniatures of the Duchess of Portland [Lord Oxford's daughter and heiress] in order, as she does not like to trust them to anybody else, and for want of proper airing they are in danger of being spoiled. Such Petitots! such Olivers! such Coopers!" About that time the good lady describes an evening walk in park and gardens: "By the time we came in, the moon was risen to a great height, and we sat down in the great dining-room to contemplate its glory, and to talk of our friends, who in all likelihood were at that moment admiring its splendour as well as we". Later she confesses that Welbeck has a *glare of grandeur*, and that although she admires her Duchess when receiving princely honours and acquitting herself with dignity, she loves her best in her own private dressing-room! [26]

The miniatures were wellnigh lost in the middle of the nineteenth century. The late duke had lent the collection to the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857, and a certain well-known

literary man, who was in the owner's confidence, arranged for all to be sent to London, so that, like Mrs. Delany, he might arrange them in suitable order. There he pawned the whole lot for trifling sums, with seven different pawnbrokers; but, thanks chiefly to a well-known inhabitant of Worksop, all, with the exception of five, were recovered.

THE BEECH AVENUE, THORESBY

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Here are two famous Riding Houses, one the pride of the author of the great work on Horsemanship in Stuart times. This is used nowadays as a picture gallery, the late Duke of Portland having built another of dimensions almost double. To my thinking, one of the chief beauties of Welbeck is the gilded gateway opening to the avenue on the road from Worksop to Ollerton—surely one of the most graceful and yet imposing structures of its kind in the country. Another and more singular attraction consists of the subterranean roadways—gigantic mole runs the cause of whose creation is, and probably always will be, a mystery to the world in general. The pleasure gardens are stocked with rare trees, and the vast lake has so natural an appearance that one forgets that it was made by human folk. The kitchen garden is notably fine: we are told that it covers thirty acres, and that the houses for peaches and other luscious fruits extend over a quarter of a mile. There is a story of a monstrous bunch of Syrian grapes having, some generations ago, been grown there, and sent by the duke of that time across country to Wentworth House. It weighed nineteen and a half pounds, and was carried—as was the trophy taken by the spies from Canaan—attached to a pole.

Finest of the Welbeck trees is the "Greendale Oak", which in 1724 was transformed, by cutting, into an archway, the aperture being 10 feet 3 inches high and 6 feet 3 inches wide, so that a carriage, or three horsemen riding abreast, could pass through. From the branches cut off at that time a cabinet was made for the Countess of Oxford—a fine piece of furniture, inlaid with a representation of her spouse driving his chariot and six through the opening.

Horace Walpole, in 1756, writes in his usual acid style: "I went to Welbeck. It is impossible to describe the bales of Cavendishes, Harleys, Holleses, Veres, and Ogles: every chamber is tapestried with them; nay, and with two thousand other morsels; all their histories inscribed; all their arms, crests, services, sculptured on chimneys of various English marbles in ancient forms (and to say truth) most of them ugly. Then such a Gothic hall, with pendent fretwork in imitation of the old, and with a chimney-piece like mine in the library. Such water-colour pictures! such historic fragments! There is Prior's portrait and the Column and Verelst's flower on which he wrote; and the authoress Duchess of Newcastle in a theatric habit, which she generally wore, and, consequently, looking as mad as the present Duchess; and dukes of the same name, looking as foolish as the present Duke; and Lady Mary Wortley, drawn as an authoress, with rather better pretensions; and cabinets and glasses wainscoted with the Greendale Oak, which was so large that an old steward wisely cut a way through it to make a triumphal passage for his lord and lady on their wedding! What treasures to revel over! The horseman Duke's manège is converted into a lofty stable, and there is still a grove or two of magnificent oaks that have escaped all these great families, though the last Lord Oxford cut down above an hundred thousand pounds' worth. The place is little pretty, distinct from all these reverend circumstances." Twenty-one years later he writes: "Welbeck is a devastation. The house is a delight of my eyes, for it is a hospital of old portraits." One is inclined to believe that something in the order of his reception had stung him into lasting pique.

The great ancestress of the owner of Welbeck, and of the other nobility in the Dukeries, was Bess of Hardwick, who built a magnificent country house on the "edge" overlooking the Vale of

Scarsdale, some miles distant from the border of Sherwood Forest. This singular woman, as striking a personality as her contemporary and sometime friend Queen Elizabeth, occasionally passed in state along the "ridings".

Her life-story is a marvellous instance of genius devoted to the attainment of a high position. The daughter of a well-to-do squire, she was married at fifteen to a wealthy young gentleman whose estate lay ten miles away, and who, dying very soon, left her mistress of the greater part of his fortune. Her first house at Barlow, near Chesterfield, has entirely disappeared, save for a piece of old wall. She remained a widow for many years, then married Sir William Cavendish, by whom she had six children. After his death she chose Sir William St. Loe, inherited his extensive estates, then, well past her prime, accepted the offer of the widowed George, Earl of Shrewsbury; but before the marriage insisted that two of her young Cavendishes should be married to two of his young Talbots. For a few years her fourth venture proved satisfactory enough; but the custody of Mary Queen of Scots apparently became too much of a nerve-strain for both man and wife; and their wrangles finally became common property in high circles. She embroiled herself with Queen Elizabeth; she persecuted her husband for his so-called meanness—although she was exceedingly rich in her own right; and, worst of all, she sowed dissension between him and his own offspring. The poor earl's condition was melancholy enough; one has no doubt that he was thankful to the heart when they separated for the last time. [30]

In the portrait at Hardwick Hall she is represented as a comely, roguish-looking matron in full maturity: a better idea of her character may be won from the effigy lying on the tomb she erected for herself in All Saints' Church at Derby. There one sees a face not unbeautiful, but cold and masterful in the extreme. [31]

It was her grandson, William, first Duke of Newcastle, who first gave lustre to Welbeck, and perhaps, after all, he owed most of his celebrity to an intellectual wife, known in Restoration days as "Mad Madge of Newcastle". Few pictures of domestic life in the seventeenth century are more pleasing than that given by this lady in the short account of her girlhood, which opens her fantastical autobiography. Born the youngest of Sir Thomas Lucas's eight children, in a large country house near Colchester, she was trained under a system of education originated by her mother. The daughters, of whom there were five, were not kept strictly to their schoolbooks, but rather taught "for formality than benefit". Singing, dancing, music, reading, writing, and embroidery were their accomplishments; but Mistress Lucas, who was left a widow soon after the birth of Margaret, cared not so much for dancing and fiddling and conversing in foreign languages as that they should be bred modestly and on honest principles. In London, where they migrated for the season, they would visit Spring Gardens, Hyde Park, and similar places, and sometimes attended concerts, or supped in barges on the river.

[32] As she grew to womanhood Margaret became filled with the desire to play maid of honour to Queen Henrietta Maria, chiefly because she had heard that the queen in her poverty had not the same number of ladies as in her prosperity. After much persuasion her mother allowed her to leave home, and she joined the Court at Oxford, and soon afterwards met William Cavendish, who was her senior by nearly thirty years. They married, and the battle of Marston Moor forced them into exile. Obliged to return to England, so that she might raise funds, she wrote one or two volumes of *Poems* and *Philosophical Fancies*, successors to another grotesque work entitled *The World's Olio*. These were the first three of ten immense folios, treating of every imaginable subject, and most slipshod in grammar and style, that she gave to the world, tenderly regarding them, in the absence of any other offspring, as her children.

WELBECK ABBEY

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The Lives of the duke and of herself are, however, the only productions remembered nowadays. Of the first, Charles Lamb says: "There is no casket rich enough, no casing sufficiently durable, to honour and keep safe such a jewel"; but Pepys, who lived at the same time as the noble authoress, described it as "the ridiculous History of the Duke, which shows her to be a mad, conceited, rediculous woman, and he an asse to suffer her to write what she does to and of him". Her own memoir is charmingly and unaffectedly egotistical. She tells us: "I fear my ambition inclines to vainglory, for I am very ambitious, yet 'tis neither for beauty, wit, title, wealth, or power, but as they are Steps to raise me to Fancies Tower, which is to live by remembrance in all ages.... My Disposition is more inclined to Melancholy than Merry, but not crabbed or peevish Melancholy, but soft, melting, and contemplating Melancholy, and I am apt rather to weep than to laugh." Always fearing that she might be mistaken by posterity for her husband's first wife, she gives an elaborate explanation at the end of the book, so that all in after years might accredit her with intellectual magnificence.

Although she met with much ridicule at the Court of Charles the Second, being satirized particularly by the libertine poets Etherege and Sedley, the fulsome praise of men of considerable intellect was lavished upon her, and even the sedate and usually truthful Evelyn, after a lengthy enumeration of the great women of history, flattered her with the assurance that all of those summed up together only divided between them what she retained in one! A curious story is told of her appearance with a train-bearer in the chamber of Catherine of Portugal. As this was a breach of Court etiquette, she was forbidden to repeat it, and resented the reproof by wearing at her next appearance a train of satin and silver thirty yards long, with the end supported by four waiting-ladies in the ante-room. [34]

She wrote several plays, concerning one of which, *The Humorous Lovers*, Pepys tells us that although he would rather not have seen it, since it was so sickeningly silly, yet he was glad, because he could understand her better afterwards. At the end of the first performance, as a queen of breeding, she stood up in her box and made her respects to the actors.

In those days of better fortunes the quaintly assorted couple spent much time in the country houses of Welbeck and Bolsover. The duke's income was very large, being equal to at least £200,000 of our money, and, since both had rural tastes, it is probable that they were far happier in Nottinghamshire than in their fine town mansion in Clerkenwell Close. Welbeck she admired most, since it was seated "in the bottom of a park environed with woods, and noble, yet melancholy". One wonders if the ghost of this "wise, wittie and learned lady" wanders in those beautiful and amazing precincts, a little bewildered and more than a little angry that any of her beloved spouse's descendants should have dared to enlarge and embellish the comfortable temple of their conjugal felicity. If she could have had her will, his works in architecture, like hers in the realms of smoky fancy, would have lasted until the end of time.

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CLUMBER

[35]

The most impressive approach to Clumber is by way of Normanton Inn, a red-brick hostelry draped luxuriantly with virginia creeper. At some slight distance is a magnificent glade of varied greens, with great patches of blood-coloured bent-grass. In the neighbourhood grow many fine Spanish chestnuts; when I was last there the ground was littered with the fallen flowers. A vast, festooned cloud, grey as the smoke of some monstrous fire, drifted from the east; then lightning sported wickedly amongst the trees, and the rain fell in torrents. Beside the balustraded bridge the water seemed covered with an army of white puppets. But it was at the entrance to the Lime Tree Avenue that I looked upon the greatest wonder of the day. Behind the shifting veil the view of that curving road seemed as fantastically unreal as the background of some ancient Italian masterpiece.

This avenue, three miles in length, has on either side two rows of limes, and on a hot July midday the fragrance is overpoweringly sweet. From this the house is not visible—to reach it one must pass down a private drive to the left. Whilst the present house was being built, Sir Harbottle Grimston writes on a tour enjoyed in 1768: "From Worksop Manor to Clumber, Lord Lincoln's, over the heath. The house is situated rather low in a very extensive park, near a noble piece of water, over which is a very handsome bridge on 'cycloidal' arches. The house is not yet finished, but by its present appearance seems as if it would be magnificent. There are nineteen windows in front, the middle one a bow, with two wings projecting forwards." About this time Walpole speaks of Clumber being "still in leading-strings". The building was finished about 1770, and is of white freestone, pleasantly age-coloured, with a south front that opens to a formal and beautiful Italian garden with terraced walks and graceful marble fountains. Beyond, reached by stone staircases, spreads the great lake, which covers eighty-seven acres. On this may be seen a [36]

gay full-masted frigate, the aspect of which in this tranquil and richly wooded country strikes a somewhat bizarre note. The park contains four thousand acres, and in the neighbourhood of the house may be seen many handsome cedars and yews. The finest view is obtainable from the opposite bank of the lake, or from near the head, where stands the home farmstead of Hardwick.

CLUMBER

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The house, though not one of the most impressive in its exterior aspect, contains treasures of priceless worth. The pillared entrance hall has several fine statues, notably one of Napoleon and another of the author of *The Seasons*. All the state chambers are extremely handsome, and in the large drawing-room may be seen five ebony cabinets and four pedestals surmounted with crystal chandeliers, which were brought from the Doge's Palace. Perhaps the most notable is the dining-room, 60 feet long, 34 feet wide, and 30 feet high. We are told that it can easily accommodate one hundred and fifty guests at dinner. The library, a fine room panelled with mahogany, contains many treasures, notably three Caxtons—*The History of Reynard the Fox*, 1481; *The Chronicles of England*, 1482; and *The Golden Legend*, 1493: the first and second folios of Shakespeare: and many examples—one printed on vellum—of Froissart's *Chronicles*. There is also a fifteenth-century manuscript of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. In the smoking-room is to be seen a remarkable chimney-piece of carved marble, which once stood in Fonthill Abbey, the house of the author of *Vathek*. To the antiquarian, perhaps the most interesting objects are four funeral cysts, dating from two thousand years ago. There is a fine collection of pictures, chiefly of old masters of distinction, amongst which may be found portraits by Holbein, Vandyke, Lely, and Hogarth, of folk intimately associated with the history of our country.

Near by stands the Church of the Holy Virgin, built by the present Duke of Newcastle. Its walls and spire are of rich red and yellowish sandstone, in the fourteenth-century style. This is probably one of the most ornately beautiful churches in the kingdom, and the view from the open doorway is surpassingly rich in colour. The interior contains much fine carving—the altar-piece is of alabaster, with the Virgin and child for central figures. The windows are delicately tinted: in spite of the excess of splendour naught can offend the artistic taste.

The Clinton family, of which the Duke of Newcastle is head, is one of the oldest and most celebrated in our annals. Geoffrey de Clinton, a distinguished forbear, Chamberlain and Treasurer to Henry the First, was the builder of Warwick Castle, and after his day his collateral descendants devoted their lives to serving the Crown faithfully. Edward the First called one his "beloved squire"; others fought with glory in the French battles. A Clinton was in the deputation that received Anne of Cleves when she journeyed to meet her spouse. Another assisted in the suppression of Sir Thomas Wyatt's rebellion, and was afterwards one of Queen Elizabeth's Privy Council, being employed in various matters of high import, notably in the projected marriage of his royal mistress and the Duke of Anjou. He died in the fullness of honour, and was buried in St. George's Chapel, Windsor. His son was one of the peers at the trial of Mary Queen of Scots. In the time of George the First another of the family filled the highest office of state, and died Lord Privy Seal; whilst the present duke's grandfather, as illustrious as any of his predecessors, was a celebrated politician of Early Victorian days, and was, moreover, honoured with the friendship and admiration of the young Gladstone.

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THORESBY

The village of Budby, beyond the confines of Thoresby Park, is one of the most placid and sleepy places I know. The stuccoed houses are perhaps devoid of picturesqueness, but the shallow Meden, which runs quietly beside the roadway, is crystal-clear, and from the wilderness on the farther bank one often sees pert black water hens slip gently from the shelter of the long grass, and glide to and fro like tiny boats. Beyond the bridge swans swim very proudly, with the austere dignity that has naught in common with the familiar bearing of petted birds in town parks. The Meden is a beautiful and melancholy stream, at whose side an exile from the hill country might sit down and weep. The rough woodland from which we are barred has a [40] refreshingly cool aspect: in summer the wilder foliage contrasts strikingly with the rich purple of rhododendrons.

The present house of Thoresby, which stands about a quarter of a mile from the site of its cold and damp predecessor, was built between 1864 and 1874. It is in the modern Elizabethan style, its walls of stone quarried at Steetley, some miles away, and is surrounded by a rich and beautiful park where may be seen many magnificent beeches and firs and oaks. The mansion is rich in art treasures, and may be counted amongst the most luxuriously furnished in the country; and the pleasure gardens are stately and beautiful.

Fine herds of deer wander among the bracken and heath, and the trees are haunted with happy squirrels. The park is thirteen miles in circumference, and near the house the little River Meden spreads out into a singularly picturesque lake, diversified with toy islands. The Thoresby of to-day possesses an atmosphere of tranquil splendour: in its neighbourhood one has some difficulty in evoking lively pictures of the celebrated folk who inhabited its predecessors.

The great woman of Thoresby was Lady Mary Wortley Montague, who spent there the greater part of her youth. The house in her time was a plain and uninteresting building of red brick. This was destroyed by fire in 1745. From the record by Sir Harbottle Grimston of his tour [41] in the autumn of 1768, we find that—more than twenty years afterwards—the new hall was not completed. Sir Harbottle writes: "This parke excels the others much in beauty, having a very good turf, which in this country is very much wanting. The house, which is not nearly finished, is rather adapted for convenience than magnificence. It is fronted by a rising lawn, on the top of which is a very fine wood. On one side a noble piece of water, which supplies a cascade behind the house: the other side of this house is beautified by plantations." Horace Walpole found this hall dull, since he declared that "Merry Sherwood is a *triste* region, and wants a race of outlaws to enliven it, and as Duchess Robin Hood has left her country, it has little chance of recovering its ancient glory". This was obviously written after the famous Duchess of Kingston had departed on her Continental tour.

Before me lie a pair of tiny shoes of sea-green silk, shot with an undertone of flesh colour. For at least a century these were in the possession of a yeoman family in the neighbourhood of Wortley village. The toes are pointed, the heels high, and on the lappets are frayed marks where the pins of the jewelled buckles pierced the fabric. The insteps do not belie the tradition that a kitten could lie beneath the arch of the wearer's naked foot, for they are so high that it seems as [42] if the blue blood of the Pierreponts were accompanied with physical deformity.

These are relics of Lady Mary, and were probably left at her husband's heritage of Wharncliffe, in Yorkshire, when the first happiness of her married life had come to an end, and before she became engaged in those famous travels which, by their result—the introduction of inoculation for the smallpox—raised her even to a greater eminence than that given by her intellectual ability.

She was born of a family that had already produced two men of splendid genius, whose names are written in golden letters in the annals of literature: Beaumont, the dramatist, who wrote, in collaboration with his friend Fletcher, some plays that are considered by our best critics as inferior only to Shakespeare's, was related by his mother to the Pierreponts of the Elizabethan age; and Henry Fielding, the novelist, was Lady Mary's second cousin. She is said to have written in her copy of *Tom Jones* as fine a tribute to an author's power as could be desired—simply the words *Ne plus ultra*. Villiers, the notorious Duke of Buckingham, whose end served Pope for some of his best satirical verse, was also of the same stock.

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It was at Thoresby that Lady Mary's strange love affair with the handsome Mr. Edward Wortley, of Wharncliffe Chase—the abode of the Dragon of Wantley—began, and after many difficulties ended in one of the most mysterious marriages that ever puzzled literary students. When a girl of fourteen she met the gentleman at a party, and was delighted with the attraction which he found in her conversation. She became a particular friend of his sister, with whom she commenced a sentimental correspondence—most of the letters, it may be said, being written by Wortley himself. He became, through the vehicle of the complacent Miss Anne, her guide and philosopher, and soon we find him answering certain precocious queries about Latin. Then jealousy appeared—somebody had escorted Lady Mary to Nottingham Races! The flattered young beauty begs to know the name of the man she loves, "that I may (according to the laudable custom of lovers) sigh to the woods and groves hereabouts, and teach it to the echoes". Thereupon Wortley's inclinations were made known, and she replied: "To be capable of preferring the despicable wretch you mention to Mr. Wortley, is as ridiculous, if not as criminal, as forsaking the Deity to worship a calf; ... my tenderness is always built upon my esteem and when the foundation perishes, it falls".

Wortley, not only in the courtship, but throughout their long wedded life, appears to have been singularly calm and unimpassioned. He was an admirable scholar, and counted among his intimate friends Addison and Steele. The second volume of the *Tatler* was dedicated to him in an epistle probably composed by the latter writer.

The easy-going sister Anne died, without Lady Mary displaying an excess of grief, and thenceforth the lovers corresponded directly. She alarmed Wortley with her society successes, and he charged her with a growing levity and love of pleasure. Thereupon she became wise and steady, and his fears increased, since the sense she displayed was more suited to a grave matron than to a fashionable belle. Time went on: Wortley made his desires known to the maiden's father, but a disagreement arose concerning the marriage settlement, and the Marquis of Dorchester—he was not created Duke of Kingston until 1715—set about looking for another son-in-law. A gentleman was found whom Lady Mary professed to hate, and in August, 1712, Wortley carried her off in a coach and they were made man and wife. As the father was implacable, she entered wedlock without any portion. Probably the marquis was not sorry to be rid of his worthy daughter, since one cannot doubt that his opposition to her happiness must have whetted the tongue that stung so keenly in later years.

Of Lady Mary's life at Thoresby we find interesting pictures in her descendant, Lady Louisa Stuart's, "Introductory Anecdotes to her Letters". "Lord Dorchester, having no wife to do the honours of his table at Thoresby, imposed that task upon his eldest daughter, as soon as she had bodily strength for the office; which in those days required no small share. For the mistress was not only to invite—that is, urge and tease—her company to eat more than human throats could conveniently swallow, but to carve every dish, when chosen, with her own hands.... There were then professed carving-masters, who taught young ladies the art scientifically: from one of these Lady Mary said she took lessons thrice a week, that she might be perfect on her father's public days, when in order to perform her functions without interruption she was forced to eat her own dinner an hour or two beforehand."

In his lordship's resentment against her stolen marriage, he refused to allow her to have much intercourse with the rest of her family. Lady Louisa Stuart tells us that her mother, Lady Bute, "remembered having only seen him once, but that in a manner likely to leave some impression on the mind of a child. Lady Mary (Lady Bute's mother) was dressing, and she playing

about the room, when there entered an elderly stranger (of dignified appearance and still handsome) with the authoritative air of a person entitled to admission at all times; upon which, to her great surprise, Lady Mary, instantly starting up from the toilet-table, dishevelled as she was, fell on her knees to ask his blessing. A proof that even in the great and gay world this primitive custom was still universal." [46]

The most agreeable memory Lady Mary preserved of this formal and cold-blooded sire was that when a member of the Kit-Cat Club he nominated her, then seven years old, as one of the toasts of the year. The child was sent for, and, adorned with her very finest attire, presented to the members. Her health was drunk, and her name engraved, according to custom, on a drinking glass. Probably this hour of triumph was the happiest in all her life, and, moreover, may have stimulated her with the desire to shine always among the foremost. Her after life was strangely assorted—she saw much of the world, and she was accounted the brightest female wit of her time. She christened Pope the "wicked wasp of Twickenham", and did not escape scatheless either from his attacks or from those of Horace Walpole. She loved great prospects—loved rocks and heights. It is possible that her recollections of the Sherwood country were not agreeable, since she showed herself averse from any allusion in her marvellous letters; but in spite of the artificiality of her period one may be certain that her adventurous spirit prompted her to leave [47] unexplored no portion of the ancient forest. The ruggedness of Wharncliffe Chase was more to her fancy: in her old age, writing from Avignon, she declared this the finest prospect she had ever seen.

Her nephew Evelyn, second Duke of Kingston, chose for wife the notorious lady whom Walpole nicknamed "Duchess Robin Hood", and from whose romantic adventures resulted one of the most celebrated trials of the eighteenth century. After his death, in 1773, the title became extinct. He left his widow handsomely provided for, and she in her turn returned a magnificent collection of family treasures to his nephew, Charles Meadows, who in 1806 was created first Earl Manvers. An extract from her will is interesting reading:—

> "And I also give and bequeath unto said Charles Meadows all the Communion Plate which belonged to the chapel of Thoresby, and which was taken away with the other vessels and sent by mistake to St. Petersburgh in Russia, and my gold desert plate with the case of knives forks and spoons of gold and four golden salt cellars all engraved with the arms of Kingston and also one large salt cellar called Queen Elizabeth's salt cellar together with all my other gold and gilt plate whatsoever, either for use or ornament."

Then, after a long list of other riches, one reads:—

> "And I also give him my nine doz. of Moco handle knives and forks mounted in gold which I bought at Rome, and likewise the whole length portraits of the late Duke of Kingston and of the present Duchess of Kingston, to be put up at Thoresby which as well as all the plates shall be reputed as an [48] heirloom to the said house; and I also give him the several pieces of cannon and the Ships and vessel on Thoresby Lake".

In the eighteenth century several quaint ships embellished the lake. The last, we learn, was broken up more than half a century ago; and, as they must have seemed singularly out of place, one is not disposed to regret their disappearance.

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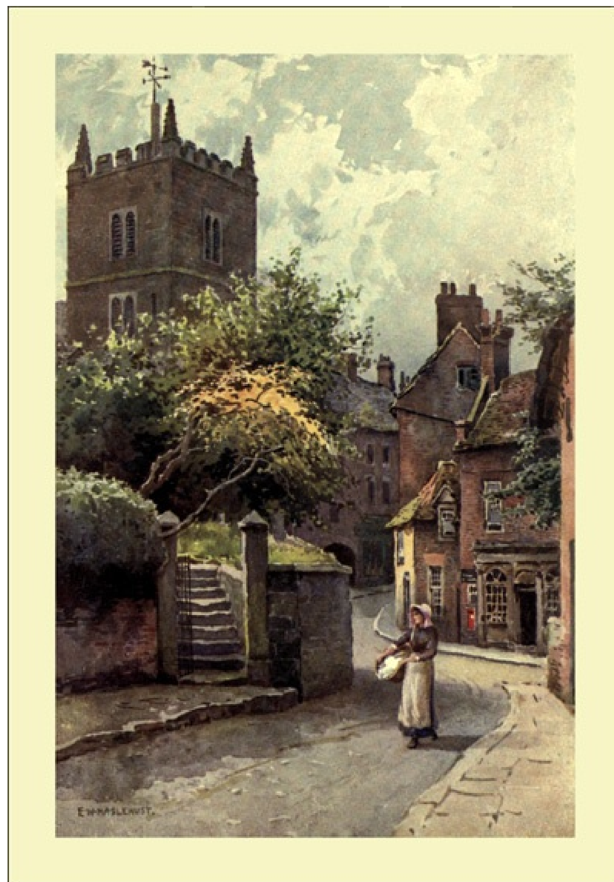
OLLERTON

There is one splendid approach to Thoresby, now, unfortunately enough, barred from the public. To reach this from Ollerton one crosses the bridge, turns to the right for a few yards, then on the left sees beyond a stout palisading the celebrated Beech Avenue. The first time I visited this place was on a stormy evening in August, about sunset-time. The western sky was overcast with grey low-hanging clouds; at intervals rain fell in brief showers. Once breathing the atmosphere of this strange seclusion one forgot the quaintness of Ollerton and the pleasing wildness of the forest: here the formality brought a suggestion of some old French colour print—the avenue might have been the state road to some royal château.



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[49] Four rows of gigantic beeches stretched for almost half a mile from the roadway; between the second and third might still be seen the old pebble and gravel drive. The monstrous boles, strangely curved and divided, were coloured like green-rusted bronze; overhead the branches mingled like the upper tracery of some ancient cathedral window. There were no grass or flowers underfoot: the ground was covered thick with last year's mast and withered leaves—"yellow and black and pale and hectic red"; sometimes I saw a strange black and grey fungus, large as a fine lady's fan.

The colouring was magnificent, and yet, looking from the palings at the farther end (beyond which one sees a green and cheerful vignette) one realized that something was lacking. The handsome coach-and-six with white horses and postilions in scarlet coats and white breeches—an equipage such as is depicted in the engraving of old Worksop Manor—should always be present in this suggestive place; and even a wheeled and curtained sedan of the kind fashionable at Marie Antoinette's Court would not appear incongruous, drawn by one officious purple-liveried lackey and pushed by another along the side paths. The Beech Avenue is the only spot in the Dukeries that permits one to recreate mentally the life of the eighteenth century. It should not [50] terminate in a roadway of comparatively slight interest, but should instead reach a water-theatre with a hornbeam hedge, with rockwork basins, and with tall silver fountains. There is something nobly pathetic in this deserted avenue—even the trees themselves have a mournful look, as though they repined because of the loneliness of to-day. No living thing moves here—it might be a sacred grove, never to be frequented by creatures of the woodland.

The village, or—not to wound local susceptibilities—the town of Ollerton is quaint and richly coloured; even in the depth of winter it has a warm and inviting aspect. Being situated on a loop of the Great North Road, it possesses two fine old inns, the more conspicuous being the "Hop Pole", a handsome formal place that might have been depicted in an ancient sampler. This faces the open forest, separated only from it by a small green, the placidly flowing Maun, and a few fields.

Near at hand is the brown, square-towered church, contrasting strangely with the houses of ripe-hued brick and tile. The churchyard has an air of sleepy comfort, but the interior of the building contains little of any interest to the antiquarian. All the armorial glass has disappeared; naught is left to carry one's mind back to ancient days. To my thinking the finest feature of [51] Ollerton is the old Hall, within a stone's throw of the "Hop Pole". This was probably erected upon the site of a former house in the beginning of the eighteenth century. The walls are admirably mellowed, and many of the windows have been blocked up—probably in the days of the window tax. The principal front has been disfigured with various domestic offshoots; none the less the house still presents an aspect of austere dignity, and one regrets that to-day it should not still be used as a residence of note instead of an estate office. Inside, one of the principal features is a singularly handsome staircase. The garden is formal and pretty—a pleasant nook for an idle afternoon.

The Markhams, original owners of this property, were people of considerable note in our history, many of them holding high offices. One was dubbed by the Virgin Queen "Markham the Lion", another championed the cause of Arabella Stuart, and was condemned to death, but reprieved at the last moment after a ghastly little performance beside the execution block. A daughter of this house married Sir John Harrington, and enjoyed through her lifetime the friendship of Elizabeth.

Within easy walking distance, not far from the tantalizing glimpse of the Rufford Avenue, a road turns eastward, passes a small wayside inn dignified with the name of Robin Hood, and soon reaches what was known as the King's House at Clipstone—to-day a lamentable ruin with no trace of its former magnificence. Here the Plantagenet kings held their Courts and rested after their days of hunting, and the rising ground about the house, nowadays devoted to the growing of oats, must once have blazed with all the colours of pageantry. What remains of the palace might be naught but the broken wall of an old kiln, or the fragment of some burned-out factory. The most fatal blow was dealt to this relic by a Duke of Portland, who, in 1812, had the foundations dug up and used for the drainage of the surrounding country. Clipstone Park, which Mad Madge of Newcastle described as a chase in which her lord took great delight (it being richly wooded, and watered with a stream full of fish and otters—in short, an ideal place for hunting, hawking, coursing and fishing), is now a placid pastoral district without distinction, such as may be found in any gently undulating country.

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RUFFORD

Rufford Abbey, which is within easy walking distance of Ollerton, surpasses in interest and beauty the other great houses of the neighbourhood. The view from the pelican-crowned gateway, with its avenue of limes (some of which are considered the finest in all England) and beeches and elms, terminating in a glimpse of the façade of reddish stone, reminds one of the palace of the Sleeping Beauty in the days before briers and brambles barred the way. Separated from this avenue by a gravelled space, where in summer great hydrangeas blossom in green tubs, a fine staircase leads to the main entrance.

RUFFORD ABBEY

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 The house, which is not open to the public, and which for several centuries has been a favourite resting-place of kings, possesses a singular atmosphere of beauty and charm. The walls are hung with priceless old tapestry and marvellous portraits by the great English masters. There is much wonderful needlework—an eighteenth-century lady of the Savile family was as devoted to her embroidery frame as Mary Stuart herself. On screens and quaint chairs are seen her masterly copies of Hogarth's pictures.

No brief description could do justice to the wonders of a house so rich in objects connected

with our history. The whole is remarkable and strange: in no place have I felt so deeply the influence left by the famous dead. Weird legends are connected with certain rooms: if the history of Rufford were written in full it would be remarkable beyond imagination. One of the most fascinating places is the chapel, erected in the time of Charles the Second, and surely the most comfortable sanctuary in any nobleman's house. At the west end is a gallery, its walls lined with ancient embossed leather, its Prayer Books dating from the Restoration, its faded and antique chairs suggesting all manner of pleasant reveries during service. [54]

The state rooms are admirable in so far as restfulness and quiet beauty take the place of excessive pomp. Each piece of furniture is storied and of great value. Nothing startles the eye; the colouring is always subdued and pleasing; in short, Rufford combines in perfection the palace and the home.

The outward appearance suggests harmony without extravagance. The pleasure grounds, although not on as large a scale as those of the other houses, are exceedingly beautiful—the Japanese Garden being a wonderful pleasaunce in miniature, with paved walks and toy lake and waterfall. Not far away the River Maun, with rich flowers and shrubs on its banks, glides calmly to a tranquil mere, where grey herons perch like birds of stone on the boughs of the island trees. In front of an older entrance to the house stretches a grass-grown avenue, by which is the "Wilderness" of Elizabethan days. There lie the remains of famous racehorses, reared on the estate. The park itself has not been submitted to the attentions of the landscape gardener: it is natural and unspoiled as in monkish times.

[55] Of the original Cistercian abbey, built in 1148 and peopled with monks brought from Rievaulx in Yorkshire, little remains save a groined and pillared chamber, supposed to have been the refectory, and used nowadays as a servants' hall. There is a singular hooded fireplace with a fine old dog-grate, and against the end wall stands a long oaken table—a relic of ancient feasting.

Rufford Abbey owed its existence to the filial piety of a collateral descendant of William the Conqueror. The sixteenth-century translation of the Foundation reads thus:—

> "Gilbert Gaunte Earle of Lincolne to all his men and all the Children of our Holy Mother the church sends greeting willing you to know that I have given and granted in pure alms to the monks of Ryvalls for my Father's and Mother's souls And for ye remission of my sinns the Manor of the town of Rughfforde And all that I have there in demesne to build an Abbey of the order of Cistercians in the honour of St. Mary the Virgin—Therefore I will and Command that they freely and quietly from all secular service and all customes shall hold the said land with All that to the dominion of the said Town doth belong in woods plains meadowes pastures mylnes waters ways and paths."

A striking contrast may be found in the Domestic State Papers of 10 December, 1533:—

> "Thomas Legh to Cromwell. On St. Nicholas Day the quondam Abbot of Rufforth was installed at Ryvax, and the late abbot of Ryvax sang *Te deum* at his installation, and exhibited his resignation the same day. The assignation of his pension is left to my Lord of Rutland, in which I moved him to follow your advice. Though pity is always good, it is most necessary in time of need. I would, therefore, that he had an honest living, though he has not deserved it, either to my lord or me." [56]

After the Dissolution, Henry the Eighth leased the estate for twenty-one years to Sir John Markham, and afterwards exchanged it for some Irish property belonging to George, Earl of Shrewsbury. Bess of Hardwick was here often, and it was at Rufford that, in 1575, she arranged the marriage of her daughter, Elizabeth Cavendish, with Darnley's brother, from which union issued the ill-fated Arabella Stuart. Queen Elizabeth was greatly offended by what she justly regarded as an encroachment upon royal prerogative, and both mothers-in-law were sent for a time to the Tower. The Earl of Shrewsbury wrote in explanation to Lord Burghley:—

> "The Lady Lennox being, as I heard, sickly, rested her at Rufford five days and kept most her bedchamber, and in that time the young man her son fell into liking with my wife's daughter before intended, and such liking was between them as my wife tells me she makes no doubt of a match, and hath so tied themselves upon their own liking as cannot part. My wife hath sent him to my lady, and the young man is so far in love that belike he is sick without her."

Then, giving a slight hint of his countess's ambitions, he adds:—

> "This taking effect, I shall be well at quiet, for there is few noblemen's sons in England that she hath not prayed me to deal for at one time or other, and now this comes unlooked for without thanks to me."

THE JAPANESE GARDEN, RUFFORD ABBEY

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Arabella Stuart was born at Chatsworth, and thenceforth all Lady Shrewsbury's pride was fixed upon this granddaughter who might possibly become a queen. At Rufford there are two curiously touching portraits of this dreamy child, in whose sad little face one reads the promise of untoward fortunes. In 1576 the Earl of Lennox died, and two years later Queen Elizabeth took "oure lyttl Arbella" under her protection. When she was seven years old, this "very proper child" sent a specimen of her handwriting to her royal kinswoman, desiring the bearer to present her "humble duty to her Majesty, with daily prayers for her". The Queen of Scots in the following year maliciously informs her sister of England that "nothing has alienated the Countess of Shrewsbury from me but the vain hope, which she has conceived, of setting the crown of England on the head of her little girl, Arabella, and this by marrying her to a son of the Earl of Leicester. These children are also educated in this idea; and their portraits have been sent to each other."

Bess of Hardwick died in 1608, and in her will, which must have been made many years before, left £200 to purchase a golden cup for the Queen, "as a remembrance from her that has always been a dutiful and faithful heart to her highness". She craves, moreover, that Elizabeth may have compassion upon and be gracious to her poor grandchild Arabella Stuart. After the old lady's death, Arabella's connection with Rufford soon ceased.

Mary, Bess of Hardwick's daughter, who had married Earl Gilbert, lived at Rufford in her widowhood. This lady inherited a considerable share of her mother's ambition and lack of scruple. In a quarrel with Sir Thomas Stanhope, a Nottinghamshire knight from whom are descended three earldoms, she dispatched a servant with the following unpleasing message:—

> "My lady hath commanded me to say thus much to you. That though you be more wretched, vile, and miserable than any creature living; and, for your wickedness, become more ugly in shape than any living creature in the world; and one to whom none of reputation would vouchsafe to send any message; yet she hath thought good to send thus much to you:—That she be contented you should live, and doth in no ways wish you death; but to this end, that all the plagues and miseries that may befal any man may light upon such a caitiff as you are, and that you should live to have all your friends forsake you; and without your great repentances, which she looketh not for, because your life hath been so bad, you will be damned perpetually in hell-fire."

From this beginning ensued one of the most noted and romantic feuds of the seventeenth century.

After the death of this outspoken lady—her husband's father had accused the great Bess of occasionally using the language of Billingsgate—the Rufford estate passed to the Savile family, her sister-in-law, Lady Mary Talbot, having married a Lincolnshire baronet of that name. Later, one of the Savile ladies, wife of Sir William, and daughter of Thomas, Lord Keeper Coventry, earned lasting fame by her bravery at the siege of Sheffield Castle. The Saviles were Royalists: in the Bodleian Library may be seen a letter to Cromwell from a certain unknown person who had been instructed to take into custody young Sir George and such friends as might be found at Rufford:—

> "Sir George Savill is not at home. We have detained one Mr. Coventry, who is the Lady Savill's brother, until Sir George shall appear to yr. highness. He is said to be in London at his house in Lincolns in field, at the corner of queene streete, called Carlisle house or Savill house. We can find nobody in

> his house, that gives any light, onely we heare that one of his family, Mr. Davison, who is Tutor to Sir George, was at the meeting, and stayed in the house till after dinner on fryday (a supposed gathering of Royalists) and then went away. We cannot yett get him."

This Sir George was created Earl and finally Marquis of Halifax by Charles the Second, and became one of the leading statesmen of the seventeenth century. One of his grandsons was the witty Earl of Chesterfield; another descendant was Henry Carey, the writer and composer of "Sally in our Alley". On the death of the second marquis, without male issue, the title became extinct, and the estate with the Savile baronetcy passed to a somewhat distant kinsman, whose collateral descendant is present owner of this fine estate, the traditions of which are almost without parallel in the matter of interest and romantic colouring.

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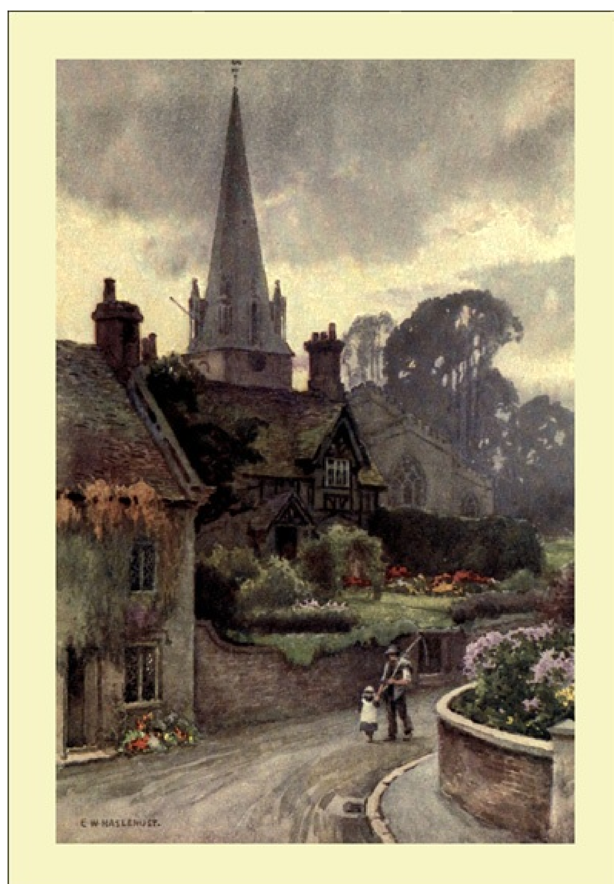
EDWINSTOWE AND THE OAKS

Of the few trees of distinction pertaining to old Sherwood, perhaps the most famous, and certainly the least picturesque, is the "Parliament Oak", which may be seen to the right of the Mansfield road as it approaches Edwinstowe. To this venerable ruin, which an iron palisading protects from wanton hands, clings the tradition that Parliaments of King John and Edward the First met under its shade, the last in October, 1290. Queen Eleanor was ill—she died in the following month at Harby near Lincoln—and thence was made the most notable funeral progress in English history.

The country around is tranquil and pleasing; not far away stands the quaintest of windmills, which must certainly tumble from very weariness before many years have passed. Above the tops of the closely-planted trees to the right are to be seen the chimneys of a deserted-looking building, raised in the early nineteenth century by a Duke of Portland, in imitation of the Priory Gatehouse at Worksop. This stands at the end of a fine undulating glade. On the north side are statues of Richard the First, Allan-a-Dale, and Friar Tuck; on the south, others of Robin Hood, Maid Marion, and Little John.



EDWINSTOWE

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To the left, one passes through a wicket, and coasts a great wood for some hundred yards, then turns sharply and soon reaches the "Russian Cottage", a chalet "put together without nails", near by which is the well-known "Shambles Oak" or "Robin Hood's Larder", so called because in its hollow interior once were hooks for the storing of stolen venison. Unfortunately this fine tree was fired by some holiday-makers years ago, and to-day there is something pathetic in the valiant greenness of its scanty leaves. It is like an old, old man who will be brave to the end.

Thence, by passing along the glades of Birkland and following paths faintly worn—with a chance of straying into strange solitudes—one comes before long to the "Major Oak"—the most virile of all the ancient trees. In spite of its iron stays—possibly because of them—it is still vigorous and hearty, although its age has been estimated at considerably more than a thousand years. There is something monstrous and uncanny about this veteran; in its vicinity folk of to-day seem strangely out of place.

A pleasant old keeper watches it vigilantly, careful that none shall harm his treasure. He has a curious enough favourite: a fine cock pheasant which comes to his call—has done so indeed for the last four years—and daintily accepts plumcake from his hand. Once this bird had a mate; now he remains a contented widower. The quaintness of the good-fellowship of man and bird is very pleasant to observe.

The circumference of the "Major Oak" at the height of five feet from the ground is over thirty feet, and the circumference of its branches is about two hundred and seventy yards. It was formerly called the "Queen's Oak", or the "Cockpen", the latter because of a fine breed of gamecocks that roosted there in the days of a Major Rooke, to whom it owes its present name. The tree is hollow, and, entering by a narrow opening—difficult enough for a stout person to negotiate—seventeen or eighteen may crowd together in the interior. Not far away is another magnificent tree, less known but almost equally worthy of admiration. It is called the "Simon Foster Oak", from the fact that a century ago a person of that name kept his pigs in acorn-time nightly under its shelter.

Thence Edwinstowe may easily be reached by a path across the green. Historically the village is of some importance, since, according to general belief, Edwin, the first Christian King of Northumbria, was buried there. It is a sleepy, comely place; in winter the warm colouring of old brick and tile is very pleasant to the wayfarer, whilst throughout the other seasons the rich little gardens are all gay with old-fashioned flowers. The church is admirably situated, and has a tall and graceful spire with grotesque ornaments at the base, which from a distance bear a fantastical resemblance to roosting birds. In 1679 the folk of Edwinstowe humbly petitioned for permission to take two hundred oaks for the repair of the building, and one reads that, seven years before, the steeple had been beaten down by thunder, and the old body shaken, and in a very ruinous condition; also that without the king's charitable help the whole church must absolutely perish. After the resultory survey, the Surveyors General of the Woods wrote that most of the trees of Birkland and Bilhagh were decayed, very few of use to the navy being left. Finally it was decided that such trees might be taken as were not fit for Government purposes. Strangely enough, neither in this church nor in its sister of Ollerton are any ancient monuments, such as one might expect to find in so interesting a neighbourhood. At the vicarage here lived for some years Dr. E. Cobham Brewer, best known for his *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*; whilst in a house that stood beside the stream lived William—afterwards Sir William—Boothby, the uncle of pretty Penelope, whose white marble tomb is one of the wonders of Ashbourne in Peakland.

The birches from which Birkland takes its name are accounted amongst the finest in the kingdom, and at no time look better than on a sunny winter's morning, when they present a wonderful symphony of brown and silver. After crossing Edwinstowe, in a sufficiently dangerous way, the road continues, with Bilhagh in sight, to Ollerton, where it bridges the placid Maun. Not far away is a small red quarry, its toy precipice pierced with the retreats of sand-martins. To the left is Cockglode, the only large house left in the forest proper—a Georgian place with a fine avenue of Scots pines. This was the residence of the late Earl of Liverpool, who, like all his noble neighbours, counted the great Bess of Hardwick amongst his forbears.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
At the Villafield Press, Glasgow, Scotland

Transcriber's Note:

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