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Author: James John Hissey

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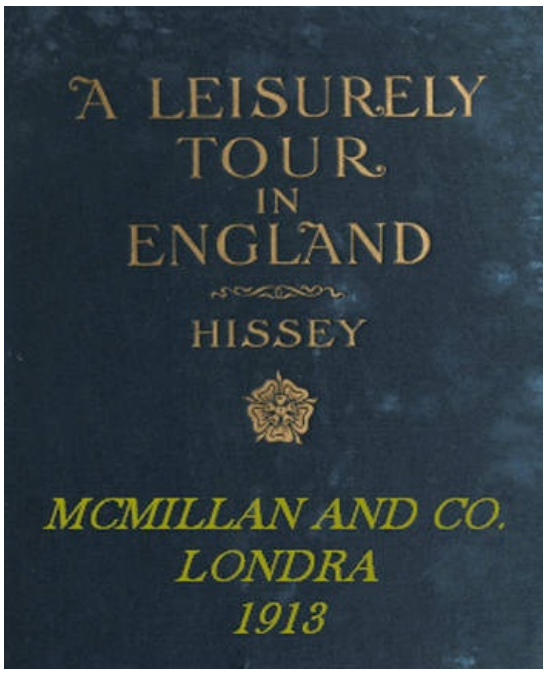
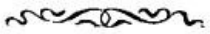


A LEISURELY TOUR IN ENGLAND



HISSEY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE CHARM OF THE ROAD.
England and Wales.

AN ENGLISH HOLIDAY.

UNTRAVELLED ENGLAND.

OVER FEN AND WOLD.
London to Lincolnshire and Back.

ON SOUTHERN ENGLISH ROADS.

THROUGH TEN ENGLISH COUNTIES.

ACROSS ENGLAND IN A DOG-CART.
London to St. Davids and Back.

A TOUR IN A PHAETON.
Through the Eastern Counties.

A HOLIDAY ON THE ROAD.
Kent, Sussex, and Surrey.

ON THE BOX SEAT.
London to Land's End and Back.

A DRIVE THROUGH ENGLAND.
London to Scotland and Back.

AN OLD-FASHIONED JOURNEY.

With T. HUSON, R.I., R.P.E.

ROUND ABOUT SNOWDON.

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A LEISURELY TOUR IN ENGLAND

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See page 312.

A MOATED MANOR-HOUSE.

"The place is silent and aware;
It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes,
But that is its own affair."

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A LEISURELY TOUR IN ENGLAND

BY

JAMES JOHN HISSEY

AUTHOR OF
'THE CHARM OF THE ROAD,' 'ON THE BOX SEAT,'
'AN ENGLISH HOLIDAY,' 'OVER FEN AND WOLD,' ETC.

WITH THIRTY FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS (AND FOUR SMALLER ONES) FROM DRAWINGS AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR
ALSO A MAP

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON
1913

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TO
MY DAUGHTER
MRS. HERBERT MALPAS

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PREFACE

Stevenson once took a journey with a donkey, which animal gave him much trouble. I took my journey in a reliable little motor-car that happily gave me none. Though I went by car I went leisurely, stopping often by the way, for full well I realise the reward of loitering, and, as all wise wanderers can testify, there is such a thing as profitably loitering, and a joy in it. Had they been of his day Carlyle would probably have declared that motor-cars "are mostly employed for the transport of fools best left at home," at least he said so of railways. With a car, however, you can control the pace, and can stop at your pleasure; it is an excellent servant, though in truth a bad master.

I went "in search of the picturesque" and I found it, also of the unfamiliar in a familiar land. If I came to an interesting place, or happened upon some curious character steeped in the traditions of the countryside, whose speech was perchance racy of the soil, the matter of time did not trouble me. Why should it? The day was mine and the promise of it, my object was not to cover so many miles and make them meaningless by undue haste, but to linger long enough in pleasant places, the more remote the more to my mind, so that they could make their appeal to me and I could gather something of the spirit of them—a something beyond what the eye merely sees.

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"Wise men," says Kingsley, "go a-fishing"; they also go a-travelling, and I can imagine no touring ground—I write this having wandered far and wide in foreign lands—more delightful than rural England, away from the ugliness of modern cities and all that has to do with them. By not confining myself to the high-road but by seeking the byway and the lane I got right into the heart of the real, unspoilt country, where pleasant pastoral scenery, time-honoured homes, quiet farmsteads, old coaching inns (I hope I have not talked too much of them), peaceful villages, each with their ancient churches, quaint little market-towns picturesquely unprogressive, and here and there a ruined abbey or crumbling castle, grey with [Pg ix] years, gladden the eye of the pilgrim. Places and scenes to be remembered.

Neither speed, by which we miss much, nor reliance on guide-books formed any part of my programme, for, as Sir Arthur Helps says, "in travel it is remarkable how much more pleasure we obtain from unexpected incidents than from deliberate sightseeing." I set forth for Anywhere by any roads, trusting to fortune for what I might see, content to know that I should arrive at a good many places.

One confession, perhaps, I may make. My book was mainly written at odd times and in varying moods during the journey, when the impressions of people I came across, of places and scenes, were fresh upon me. It is a first-hand, unvarnished record of experiences, but little altered or mended since, and I have been minded to leave it so, for the like reason that I generally prefer an artist's rough sketch and the spirit of it to his finished picture—for polish is not always an improvement, sometimes it is but mere gloss.

The route that eventually evolved itself is but roughly indicated in my Sketch Map, for I found it impossible, on a map of so small a scale, to trace all our devious wanderings, or to note more than a [Pg x] few of the many places visited. As to the illustrations, in a few cases where my photographs unfortunately proved failures I have ventured to replace them with my own drawings; for these—they are but mere brush notes—I crave a kind indulgence.

If I missed anything worth seeing on the way, I can only plead with Plato of old that "as it is the commendation of a good huntsman to find game in a wide wood, so it is no imputation if he hath not caught all."

J. J. HISSEY.

Trevin Towers,
Eastbourne.

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A LEISURELY TOUR IN ENGLAND

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Different methods of travel—The old coaching days—Maps *versus* guide-books—The fortune of the road—The South Downs—Hilly roads—The price of beauty—The sentimental traveller—A lonely farmstead—Oxen at work—A quaint old-world village.

There are many ways of exploring the country: one may walk, cycle, ride horseback, or drive a horse in some conveyance, go by crawling caravan or speedy motor-car—each to his fancy or opportunity. Perhaps there is no best way of travel. I say this after having sampled all the methods mentioned, excepting caravanning, for I have tramped it knapsack on back, and enjoyed the tramping, through Switzerland, Scotland, the Lake District, Wales, Cornwall, and Devon; I have taken long cycling tours; I have driven in a phaeton and dogcart from one end of our land to another; I have ridden about country on horseback with a pack; I have driven my own motor-car for more miles than I can remember, and without mishap—so I know, or ought to know, something about the subject, [Pg 2] but I will not venture to lay down any dictum, for "What's one man's meat is another man's poison." The thing is to see the country, but what is worth seeing cannot be seen in a hurry.

Walking enthusiasts declare that walking is the only way, and certainly the pace that binds the pedestrian permits of leisured observation, almost compels it indeed: therein much virtue lies. Still there are other ways, and the convenience of a conveyance is not to be despised, for there are born wanderers, like myself, who have grown old at the game, and have come to that time of life when they prefer to be comfortably carried than to carry a load. Then there is the further comfort of not being unduly stinted in the matter of luggage, for given a conveyance, even sundry luxuries such as a luncheon-basket, camera, rugs, sketching materials, fishing-tackle (should an opportunity for sport occur), a book or two to while away a possibly dull evening, and a plentiful supply of maps may be taken without inconvenience. To foot it does not enhance the scenic charms of the way.

Stevenson, who was a great walker, confesses: "It must not be imagined that a walking tour, as some would have us fancy, is merely a better or worse way of seeing the country. There are many ways of seeing landscape quite as good." I am glad to quote Stevenson in this respect, for I have had it so frequently dinned into me that the only way really to see the country is afoot. Now I went not afoot, but travelled in my reliable little motor-car, conveniently little for exploring narrow lanes and crooked byways; and though I [Pg 3] went by car I went leisurely.

Truly there is no poetry about a motor-car; it has not existed long enough to have gained the halo of romance, so to write of a motor tour makes any appeal to sentiment impossible. This is a handicap; for sentiment does count, even in this matter-of-fact world, let wiseacres say what they will.

Possibly our ancestors saw little romance in the stage-coach or postchaise; to them they were commonplace affairs; indeed they often complained bitterly about the former, the misery of the outside seats in stormy weather and in winter time; moreover, the inside passengers were generally sadly cramped for want of room; then the coaches sometimes overturned, and were frequently uncomfortably crowded. We view those days through rose-coloured spectacles—Time is the romancer. I wonder whether our descendants in the far future will ever look back longingly and lovingly to "the good old motoring days"? Granted that many motorists rush through the country gathering but "hurrygraphs" on the way—that is the fault of the man, not the car. It is unfortunate that at the very beginning of the chronicle of my tour I should feel a need, perhaps a fanciful one, to make excuse for the mode of taking it. The car was but a means to an end; let us forget all about it and consider only the journey wherein my pleasure lay.

I had no programme, no previously prepared plan of route to follow, so happily escaped the tiresomeness of keeping or [Pg 4] endeavouring to keep to one. All roads are good roads to me,

provided they lead through a pleasant country, and so to enjoyment begotten of contentment: "I travel not to go anywhere but to go." In a definite itinerary I find no attraction. Freedom is the essence of a real holiday, and I would be as free to veer about as a weather-vane that the wind plays on, free to change my course at the call of any inviting byway or lane, the beckoning of a beautiful distance, or at any other passing prompting, or even at the unaccountable mood of the moment; and this without any feeling of reproach. As to guide-book compulsion to see this or that, I would have none of it. I took a supply of Bartholomew's Reduced Ordnance Survey Maps with me on a scale of four miles to the inch, covering all England and Wales, and these were all the guides I troubled about: unlike some guides they were reliable, I could do my own romancing. Thus provided I wandered careless of direction or destination; these and the distance done each day were but trivial details unworthy of consideration—the joy of the journey was the thing.

I never knew when I started forth in the morning where the evening would find me, nor had I any concern so long as the needful inn for the night materialised; and if the first inn I came to was not to my liking, with a tireless car, being master of my Fate, I was enabled to drive on to another more to my mind. That is certainly one of the advantages of travelling by machine instead of by muscle.

[Pg 5] I trusted, as I travelled on, wholly to the fortune of the road, letting, so to say, the good things come to me, I did not go in search of them—a delightfully simple method of touring, but it served my purpose well and saved much map-consulting and asking of the way, and the vexation of sometimes losing it. My only care was, as far as possible, to find fresh roads to explore and taverns new wherein to take my ease.

Certain motorists there be to whom speed and long distances accomplished alone appeal; these need a whole continent to travel over, whilst a modest portion of old England, with a bit of wild Wales thrown in for the sake of varying the scenery, sufficed me. Humboldt once remarked of a great wanderer that he had "travelled further and seen less than any one he knew." Now I trust to make clear that though I did not travel far, I saw a great deal.

I was prepared for any adventures should Fortune so favour me, but adventures are hardly to be expected in settled lands, beyond, perhaps, the remote possibility of the motor breaking down at nightfall on some lonely moor far from human habitation; but nothing of the kind happened, for my car gave no sort of trouble—not even tyre trouble—from the start to the finish of the journey. But then it was driven at a moderate pace, and carefully. The journey was void of excitement: happily so, for though I have suffered sundry adventures in my life, I realise they are more enjoyable in the telling than in the experiencing.

[Pg 6] Says Hazlitt, "One of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey." There I am wholly with him, but not when he adds, "I like to go by myself." I am afraid Hazlitt was a selfish man. Then he continues: "I can enjoy society in a room, but out of doors Nature is company enough for me.... Instead of a friend in a postchaise, or in a Tilbury, to exchange good things with, and vary the same stale topics over again, for once let me have a truce with impertinence." As to going alone, surely a sympathetic companion by your side, even though not a word be said at times, only a presence felt, can in no way lessen the joys of a journey? A companion does away with any sense of loneliness that is apt at times to come over the solitary wanderer like a cloud over the bright sunshine; for after all, in spite of certain philosophers, man is a communicative being. A beautiful scene, or an interesting place, doubly appeals to me when I have some one near by to express and share my delight in it. But, in truth, a sympathetic companion is not always to be had. Now it happened that my wife was prevented from taking her place in the car—"Excepto quod non simul esses, caetera laetus," I could only say. No one else was at the moment available; so perforce I had to take my journey companionless or forgo it to an indefinite future. The latter alternative was unthinkable; a lost opportunity is not always recoverable; I trust no future. "Elapsum semel non ipse possit Jupiter reprehendere," said Phaedrus a long while ago, to quote the ancients again, and a truth is a truth for all time.

[Pg 7] After all I did not go alone, for I took my faithful fox-terrier with me. A dog is the best substitute for a human companion; indeed, I would prefer to travel with a dog of the right sort to venturing with an untried human companion any day—at least you cannot fall out

with a dog by the way. A dog never worries you with senseless prattle; he need never be entertained; he never complains of waiting; his patience is inexhaustible. On the other hand, he is ever ready and only too delighted to accompany you at any moment on a ramble afoot, or he will keep faithful guard over your car should you leave it alone by the wayside; and he will not grumble about his food or his quarters. I took dog-biscuits with me for my terrier in case of need, but generally the crumbs that fell from his master's table sufficed him. A dog is a most unselfish creature; a kind word or a pat perhaps now and then he craves, and how easily and gladly these are bestowed. One cannot ever be dull with a dog as companion; so with my dog I started on my journey. Now, to avoid the too frequent use of the personal and irritating "I," I crave permission at times to employ the less personal "we," even if I have to include the dog and the car to justify that term, or to do so forgetfully without.

It was early one sunshiny morning towards the end of May, with the pleasant month of June to follow and the promise of it, that I mounted my car and was off without more ado. I had carefully packed it overnight to avoid any possible delay, and that nothing needful should be forgotten in the haste of departure. With my [Pg 8] holiday only just begun, with the little world of all England before me, free to wander wherever I would, my mind full of anticipated pleasures, I fared forth in the most enviable of moods. From my home at the foot of the South Downs I climbed to their breezy summit, taking the old road that leads westwards over them, having the rolling green downs on one side, and the glittering sea visible, but a little way off, on the other. Here one breathes a lighter, purer air, so that the mere fact of breathing becomes a pleasure.

My journey had a good beginning! By climbing the downs I had raised my horizon and looked down upon the world, not with a sensation of superiority, but with a sensation of relief, being lifted for a time above all its tiresome trivialities and commonplace conventions. I found myself alone with earth, and sky, and sea, rejoicing in my loneliness, and I felt the sense of spaciousness of the wide, bright, overarching sky, of the boundless waters, and of the vast panorama of rounded hills reaching far away into the dim and dreamy distance, where the solid land looked as unsubstantial as a cloud.

> Broad and bare to the skies
> The great Down-country lies,
> Green in the glance of the sun,
> Fresh with the clean salt air.

My road led me a little inland, for I avoided the tourist-haunted one that winds over Beachy Head, that grand headland that rises so sheer, white, and commandingly above the sounding sea. Would one [Pg 9] could behold it in its ancient seclusion! Such spots demand solitude, or they cease to be impressive. "The fatal gift of fame" has been the headland's undoing, aided by its proximity to a fashionable watering-place, and the crowd it attracts from early morning till the sun is setting. They even sell picture post-cards there and bottled ginger-beer! Need more be said? Yet I recently read an article in a London paper upon "The Pleasant Solitude of Beachy Head." Was it written in Fleet Street, I wonder?

All the roads over the downs are hilly ones; they are for ever either ascending or descending; their gradients are generally fairly severe, and their surfaces none of the best. Now and then you come upon a comparatively level stretch, but not for long. So we soon began a long descent, only to climb steeply again and to find ourselves on a wind-swept height with a tiny flint-built church crowning the topmost ridge of it. Friston church it was marked on our map—an unpretending building, yet not wanting in dignity, and simple dignity is a rare quality, as delightful as it is rare. Even some city-surrounded cathedrals do not attain it. Doubtless its elevated and lonely position gave the humble little fane a certain poetic charm, for it is not only the building but its place in the prospect that affects the observer. Stonehenge in a farm field, away from the wild and open plain that surrounds it, would lose much of its impressiveness; it has lost some of it already by being railed in. A castle in a hollow, as many were built to secure the services of a [Pg 10] moat, is not the same to the eye as a castle boldly dominating the landscape from some overhanging crag. Bodiam's ruined Castle, set in a wooded valley, is beautiful but not impressive; on the other

hand, Carreg Cennin Castle in South Wales, though inferior in size and much poorer a ruin, is singularly impressive, standing as it does isolated on the top of a perpendicular precipice of rock. That is the sort of castle I pictured to myself and used to draw in fancy when I was a boy.

Facing the primitive church, with our road and a pond between, we noticed, what is fast becoming a thing of the past, an old wooden windmill, its sails hurtling round apace in the brisk breeze. The miller, white with flour dust, gazed lazily at us from out a window of his aged and picturesque mill: the wind was his willing slave doing his work for him and working hard that day, why therefore should he not laze and rejoice? The hum of his mill wheels grinding their best must have been as music to his ears. All winds that blow are good for the miller; the sailor is not so fortunate, but to the miller it matters not from what quarter the breezes come, so long as they come. I have been told by a meteorological authority that the wind average for England is eight hours out of the twenty-four. I should imagine that the winds upon the open downs greatly exceed that, and a good, refreshing, salt savour they bring with them, and so a sentiment of the sea and its mystery.

The wide and restful greenery of the downs appeals to and gratifies the eye. In a less moist climate than ours the downs would [Pg 11] be but parched and barren ground: blame our climate as we may, and the frequent rains that the prevailing west winds bring, it is these frequent rains that give our homeland its rich verdure and charming mellowness which so attracts the foreigner from sunnier climes. Beauty demands its price, and considering the wealth of beauty granted us I hardly think we ought greatly to begrudge the price of it.

On the downs the eye is free to rove unchecked over miles and miles of this greenery even to the most distant horizon; that is another delight of them. Their rolling masses, no height being much greater than another, might be likened to some gigantic ocean suddenly arrested in a mighty storm and converted, by some magic, into good dry land, and here and there the white chalk showing might serve for the foam of crested waves arrested also: at least such a fancy came to me as I looked over their sloping sides, their gentle rises and falls, billowy down beyond billowy down in an apparently endless succession. The very green of them, though not translucent, distantly reminded me of the green of the mid-Atlantic rollers raised by a gale that for some time had ceased to blow so that their surface is comparatively smooth and not fretted by wind-driven lines. There is an indescribable vacancy about the downs that suggests the impressive vacancy of the sea, the boundlessness of it. But each man sees things with his own eyes, and to some my fancies may seem far-fetched; they were, but still they pleased me, for I am [Pg 12] a sentimental traveller.

From our elevated road, some distance on, the curious little village of West Dean was revealed to us, a huddle of roofs and a tiny fane hidden in a hollow of the hills—"a cup full of beauty." We looked right down upon it and over its grey church tower and over the lichen-laden uneven roofs of its few dwellings—roofs all covered with golden lichen, gloriously golden in the bright sunshine; I have never seen roofs so completely thus covered before, and then I realised what a beautifier, even on a large scale, the lowly lichen can be. The village had the rare look of remoteness, so detached was it from the outer world by the wide and folding downs, so far from rail and frequented road. We determined to visit it when we reached the valley by the long descent which followed and idle there a time.

At the foot of the descent we found a large and lone old-fashioned farmstead surrounded by a colony of flint-built barns and out-houses; the little slothful river Cuckmere seeking its way to the sea, with many windings, ran close by. The grey old farmstead with its weather-stained walls, the tranquil, reedy river below, the bare and silent downs beyond, struck a note of intense quietness. A peacefulness profound brooded over this out-of-the-world spot: it might have been a hundred miles from anywhere. A picture, too, it made, effective in its breadth and simplicity. There we rested for an hour or more, just because it pleased us so to do. We travelled in [Pg 13] search of peace and found it in a land

> Where little lost Down churches praise
> The God who made the hills.

Near to the old farm we noticed a yoke of black, long-horned, but meek-eyed oxen slowly drawing a waggon up the steep slope of the hillside.

> The slow, black oxen toiling through the day
> Tireless, impassive still,
> From dawning dusk and chill
> To twilight grey.

You seldom see such a sight nowadays, and only rarely on the South Downs or the lonely Cotswolds. Presently the oxen stopped for the waggon to be loaded, and we took the opportunity of having a chat with their driver, a sunburnt man clad in a faded grey suit, and having the soft speech and courteous manner that so often marks the Sussex folk. "Oxen," said he, "beat horses at work any day on these hills. I would not care to drive horses if I could drive oxen; they are a bit slow perhaps, but not lazy; they don't want so much urging as horses; I never has any trouble with them, I have just to give them a reminder with my stick now and then and that is all; you don't need a whip with oxen." I noticed that the stick he held was a long one of hazel, just a thin stick and nothing more, and I noticed that the yokes were fashioned of wood with a heavy cross-bar at the top, and these joined each pair of oxen together, being kept in position by a slight rounded wooden collar below.[1]

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Oxen, the driver explained to me, pull from the top of their necks and not by the collar as horses do; yet on lifting a yoke I saw no signs of worn hair, only a smoothness where the yoke touched. Oxen, I learnt, were broken in to draught work at two years old and kept at it from five to six years, after which they were fattened for the market. Their beef was somewhat tough, as might be expected, and chiefly bought by certain institutions. Oxen, I further learnt, were cheaper to keep than horses, as they were fed mainly on hay, chaff, and roots; whilst horses needed oats. So I travelled and picked up odd bits of information.

Then we sought out West Dean, prepared to tramp there if no road were available, for West Dean we were determined to see. Unexpectedly we discovered a narrow lane that led to it, the downs rising sheer above on either hand, leaving just room for the lane and a little clear-running stream which we followed up to the village.

A quaint village it proved to be, to use a term too often misapplied, one that surely has no counterpart in all the land. Picturesque it could hardly be called; but though I prize both the picturesque and quaint, the quaint pleases me the better because it is so much the rarer. Its tiny church has an uncommon tower—a strong structure, well suited to its purpose, but devoid of disturbing decoration that too often fails to decorate and serves but to vex the eye; otherwise, though ancient enough, the church is not noteworthy; still the simple shapely tower gives it a certain charm and character; and character, whether in man or building, is a thing to be desired.

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Facing the churchyard we discovered a most interesting relic of past times when religion was more to the fore than it is to-day. This was a pre-Reformation priest-house of the fourteenth century or thereabouts, an austere building of thick rough masonry, deep and narrow arched windows, and a great chimney-stack at one end, a building probably erected in this remote spot by the travelling monks who had not to live in it. I have, here and there, come upon an ancient fourteenth or fifteenth-century priest-house, for they have not all been improved away. There is one at Alfriston, another at West Hoathly—both in Sussex,—and another at Muchelney in Somerset, but these are all half-timbered buildings fairly lighted, and have not the solid, gloomy look of the prison-like structure at West Dean, the windows of which were originally probably of horn, or even possibly mere open spaces with shutters.

One would imagine, being so close to the sea with the river conveniently at hand, that West Dean must have its smuggling traditions: those free traders of old would hardly have overlooked so handy a spot; but if such traditions there be, we could glean nothing about them, for we saw not a soul in the place to speak to; the only living thing we observed was a chicken that apparently had lost itself. Never before have I been in a village with such a forgotten look; there the changeful centuries bring no change. Our car stood unnoticed by the side of a tall and broken flint wall that enclosed a weed-grown garden, wherein stood a great, round, and roofless

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pigeon-cote; not a face at a window did we see. West Dean took no note of our coming or our going. We drove into, and drove out of, a village asleep, and not even the hum of our engines or the sound of our horn awoke it. There brooded over all a sense of silence and solitude like that of the central sea.

CHAPTER II

A quiet valley—The importance of the unimportant—Moated and haunted houses—Romances in stone—A farmhouse holiday—A picture-book village—A matter of Fate—The tomb of Gibbon the historian—A gruesome happening—Upright burials—An interesting church—A curious epitaph.

Leaving West Dean we drove up the narrow and quiet Cuckmere valley, the smooth green hills rising steeply on either side and so preserving its seclusion to this present day. So quiet the valley seemed that the throbbing of our engines sounded reproachfully in our ears, as though a motor-car had no business to disturb its slumbrous tranquillity. We felt like trespassers! A snug and friendly little valley it is, through which the road and river run in close company. The Cuckmere is but a toy river; I should not have called it a river but that it is so marked on my map, and on its banks I saw a man with a gun shooting into the water. He was shooting fish, he said! I have never seen such sport before.

Passing the hamlet of Litlington we caught a glimpse, on the other side of the valley, of ancient Alfriston, a little village that calls itself "the capital of the downs," and its modest flint-built church "the cathedral of the downs." So, by title, the unimportant assumes [Pg 18] the rôle of the important. A village becomes a capital, a country church a cathedral, and a stream a river. One might imagine this was the land of Lilliput!

Of Alfriston a halting couplet runs:

> Poor parson, poor people,
> Sold their bells to repair their steeple.

But that, I take it, was a long while ago—if it ever was, for I have heard similar couplets of many other places; a few may possibly have some foundation in fact, but I doubt the rest, and in some, alas, the word "drunken" is substituted for "poor"! After the Alfriston people had sold their bells, tradition, that unreliable jade, avers that the bell of a ship, wrecked on the coast, was purchased to take the place of the lost peal, and by the side of the ancient pilgrims' hostel in the same village stands a ship's figure-head in the shape of a boldly carved lion, fierce of countenance, said to have come from the same ship that provided the bell; this, as long as the oldest inhabitant can remember—and what memories these oldest inhabitants have—has rejoiced in a coat of brilliant vermilion, hence the local saying, apropos of what I know not, "As red as the Alfriston lion." Such, at least, were the tales told to me, and many were the tales I heard as I travelled on.

Leaving the valley and the lonely downs regretfully behind, we entered upon a level country, and crossing the main Lewes road we proceeded straight forward into a tame land of flat fields. The scenery was featureless and void of interest, but I was in search of a [Pg 19] moated house, so the quality of the scenery was a detail. A friend had told me of this house just before I started on the journey, and had kindly given me a written introduction to its owner, who by happy chance I found at home. So, learning from my map that I was passing close to the place, I determined to see it, if possible. Even with the aid of my map I had some difficulty in discovering the object of my search. Claverham, to give the moated home its title, stands within a few hundred yards of the road, yet so hidden by trees that no casual passer-by would dream of its existence. Thus many good things, though close to his way, may be missed by even the keenest observer, unless he has some hint of them and their whereabouts. I had gone this stretch of road once before and with open eyes, and yet had not discovered Claverham.

A moated house is a graphic reminder of old times when every Englishman's house was in reality, not in words, his castle. Early in the seventeenth century Sir Edward Coke laid down the dictum that "the house of every one is to him as his castle and fortress," a dictum that passed into a law proverb, "Jura publica privata domus." In those benighted days there were no land taxers, or sanitary or other inspectors to demand entry into an Englishman's home. What, I wonder, in olden times would the master of his house have said to a sanitary inspector who demanded admission thereto? Perhaps it would not so much have mattered what he would have said as what [Pg 20] he would have done to him—with a deep moat so handy.

The very sound of the words "moated" or "haunted house" was as

romance to my ears when I was a youth, and the sound has lost little of its glamour and suggestion of mystery since that long ago, for over such ancient homes there always seems to brood an abiding air of mystery. In my search after moated and haunted houses, many a ballad in building, many a romance in stone, seeming more like an artist's or a poet's dream than a happy reality, and many a legended home in remote places have I discovered—for a romantic spot is the mother of legends. In the troublesome days gone by the dwellers in a moated house must have felt a delightful sense of security with the drawbridge up and the outer windows iron-barred. Even to-day, when staying in a moated house, have I felt the sense of security that a moat affords. So much for sentiment.

Claverham disappointed me, though the fault was mine in expecting too much. To cherish an ideal and trusting to find it is to court disillusion, and a seasoned traveller like myself should not have fallen into this error. The unexpected always charms, when it has the power to charm, more than the expected. "Oft expectation fails, and most oft there where most it promises," says Shakespeare, whom it is the privilege of all Englishmen to quote. The chief delight of travel lies in the surprise of the unforeseen, and the discoveries we make for ourselves of interesting places and beauty-spots: being unprepared beforehand for such revelations, no ideals have been formed. So the unknown attracts and becomes oftentimes memorable.

HAUNTED!

[Pg 21]

I always picture a moated house as a building grey with years, perhaps in parts a little ruinous and creeper overgrown, with ivied casements, a bent and mossy or lichen-laden roof, and with oftentimes a ghost thrown in. Such a house without its ghost seems incomplete to me. Now Claverham, excepting for one possibly original chimney and a lichen-laden roof, conformed in no way to my picture, for the house has been so altered and rebuilt that the greater part of it, though not of to-day, is comparatively of yesterday and not of centuries ago. The wide and weedy moat, enclosing nearly an acre of ground, is there as of yore, but the chief interest of the place is in its history. Still Claverham is picturesque: a pleasant, retired, and wholly delightful abode in the summer-time; in the winter—well, it was not winter-time then. Portions of the interior are quaint, especially the black oak-beamed and plastered hall that with its ingle-nook gives one a genuine old-world greeting. The beams of the hall are of the original building, and so, we were told, was the wide ingle-nook of the dining-room; the crane, fire-back, and andirons of this fireplace, though ancient, are doubtless of more recent date.

This is the history of Claverham in brief as told me by its present possessor. The house was originally built in 1307; according to Volume XIV. of the Sussex Archaeological Society, the manor of [Pg 22] Claverham "in 12 Edward II. was in the possession of Nicholas de la Beche. This personage appears to be identical with the Sir Nicholas de Beche who, according to a wardrobe account dated 27th March, 1311, participated with Sir Humphery de Littlebury and Sir Thomas le Latimer in the reward of twenty pounds for the singular service of *dragging the King out of bed on Easter Monday*." So at any rate my visit there unearthed a curious bit of ancient history. The manor shortly afterwards came into the possession of a member of the then famous Fiennes family, a descendant of one of the Norman warriors who had come over with the Conqueror. A successor of his afterwards built Hurstmonceux Castle and went to live there in 1422, but Claverham was retained by the Fiennes until about 1600.

My host told me that his father remembered when there was still a drawbridge over the moat; now where the bridge was is an embanked approach to the house, doubtless more convenient, but infinitely less romantic. So, here and there, these picturesque relics of the past disappear. A portion of the building was so old that it tumbled down some few years back. My host considered that the house was never really fortified in the sense of being able to resist a regular siege, but was rather intended to withstand a raid, or a sudden attack by the robber bands which infested the country; the moat, too, served the further useful purpose as a protection against wolves and other wild animals which at the time had free range over the unenclosed and wooded country around. To-day it serves as a fence to keep out straying sheep and cattle from the fields, so that [Pg 23] the tree-shaded and pleasant garden it encloses can be enjoyed in as much peace and privacy as though it were walled about; at the same time the moat does not interrupt what view there is.

Leaving Claverham we drove along a narrow lane that ended in a fair main road, and this took us for a space alongside of the wide Laughton Level, over which sea of waving grasses, once mere marshland, is to be had perhaps the best and most comprehensive panorama of the South Downs, ranging as it does almost from Beachy Head to close upon Lewes. There before us they stretched, bare and rounded to the sky, in their long and lordly array of golden greenery fading into grey: miles and miles of glorious greenery as beheld under the summer sunshine, only broken here and there below by the pale-blue shadows of their shallow recesses. From that distance and point of view, the downs that day looked almost mountainous; it was this view that caused Gilbert White to describe the South Downs as "that majestic chain of mountains"—perhaps a somewhat exaggerated description, but serving to show how impressive the downs may appear under certain conditions, for Gilbert White was not given to employ grandiloquent language. It is the impression that a scene makes upon the traveller that profits, not the vulgar record of mere height, for there is a grandeur of form and colour as well as of size, and for grandeur of rolling form I know nothing to compare with the South Downs seen from afar.

Then, rounding a spur of the hills, we descended into ancient and [Pg 24] homely Lewes, "sweetly environ'd by the daisied downs": a town, according to Cobbett, of "clean windows and pretty faces" (I am glad that Cobbett found something during his Rural Rides to admire in his own country, for he was generally on the grumble). We left Lewes by a main road leading northwards: hemmed in as the town is by the downs, there was no other road to take except the one to Brighton, and to Brighton we were not minded to go. Presently we struck a byway to our right which brought us to Barcombe, a village of no interest; after this we found ourselves in a tree-bordered lane of the delightful Devon type, and this we followed for several winding miles.

At one spot we dropped down to a sheltered and wooded hollow where we espied a lonely, half-timbered, and rambling farmstead, such as painters put in their pictures—pictures that the wealthy man of taste hangs on the walls of his mansion purely for the pleasure of looking at them, though I am afraid few men realise the subtle charm of such old buildings until an artist has translated it on paper or canvas. They see their beauties through other eyes, for there is an art in seeing and discovering beauty not cultivated by the many. I was tempted to take a photograph of this ancient farmhouse, but could only secure a poor end view owing to the slope of the ground and obstructing trees. It would have made a delightful water-colour sketch, only had I stopped to sketch every pleasing spot by the way, my journey might have been prolonged to the winter. I had no trouble in finding subjects for the brush or camera; I came upon them in endless succession. So does rural England abound in beauty. My trouble was what to select out of the profusion of good things presented to me. I felt like one going through a vast picture-gallery of lovely landscapes, only the landscapes were real and living, and so the more delightful.

A SUSSEX FARMSTEAD.

[Pg 25]

The old-fashioned, age-mellowed farmsteads built in the spacious days gone by, when every yard of ground and inch of space was not considered, what pleasantly familiar features they form in the landscape, with their suggestion of contentment, and you come upon them everywhere. Familiar, and essentially English, but how unobtrusive they are, they seem like a natural growth and truly to belong to the soil; remove them from the countryside, and the eye, perhaps hardly knowing why, would feel that there was something missing. Times of late years have not been prosperous for the agriculturist, and I noticed during the journey at more than one picturesque and pleasantly situated old farmhouse a board displayed with "Apartments to let" thereon. From a passing glance they appeared very desirable quarters for those who love retirement, quietude, and purely rural surroundings.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good." Probably in more prosperous times farmers would not dream of letting lodgings, but now here is an opportunity offering for hard-worked paterfamilias (whose purse is limited, and who is in search of pure air, change of [Pg 26] scene, and fresh surroundings for his youngsters) to spend his holiday in the real country far from crowds, where the children are free to wander over the fields, romp in the meadows, climb trees, play at haymaking, go a-blackberrying, a-bird-nesting, or whatever rural doing may at the moment take their fancy, when not intent upon watching the constant, interesting, and varied life about a farmstead.

A holiday in a farmhouse, how delightful and restful is the thought of it to the town-tired man; what a refreshing and complete change it spells from the usually dull and dear seaside apartments, with the everlasting pier, the noisy band, or the inevitable nigger minstrels on the beach by way of insistent entertainment! At a farmhouse of the right and good old-fashioned sort you may obtain fresh fruits and vegetables from the garden, milk direct from the cow, real thick country cream, butter that you may see churned, home-cured bacon and perchance hams, to say nothing of newly-laid eggs, such as are unobtainable in cities. This is no fancy statement; I write from actual experience. The thing is, of course, to find the right sort of farmhouse and the farmer willing to take in lodgers, for though existing they naturally require discovering, or recommending by those who know them. For the busy man this detail of discovery does present a difficulty; to me driving haphazard about the country it presented none, as such desirable quarters, situated in pleasant spots, discovered themselves from time to time as the journey progressed.

Once I tried the experiment of spending a month in a farmhouse [Pg 27] with my wife and child, and it proved an unqualified success. In the matter of cost it was the cheapest holiday I ever took, and no holiday has given me more real pleasure, or lingers more delightfully in my memory. The farmhouse in question (I came upon it during a driving tour, and there I stayed instead of touring further) was situated in wild Wales and surrounded by beautiful scenery; there were wide and open moors at the back of it to ramble over, and mountains on the other side to climb, and not far away was a playful, tumbling little river that provided me with trout fishing.

Much for my sport I cannot say,
Though, mind, I like the fun;

There have I been the livelong day
Without extracting one.

Still, it was ever an excuse for a delightful ramble alongside the companionable river, for in the plashing and gurgling of its waters it almost seemed a living thing. At any unoccupied moment I could sally forth with my rod by its rocky banks, just as readily as I could start for a stroll with my stick, though sketching from nature was my favourite pastime when in a less lazy mood. So time never hung heavily.

Still, perhaps a word of caution may be given: however otherwise desirable, farmhouse apartments in a purely agricultural country are apt to prove a disillusion to the elders if they have no resources in themselves, owing to the want of something more exciting to do than to watch the slow movements of farming operations. Pleasant [Pg 28] surroundings are an essential, so a hilly country is to be desired; then places of interest in the neighbourhood may be made the excuse for occasional excursions, and there are few neighbourhoods where these may not be found.

The farmer whose apartments I took let them every year, he told me; an artist and his family had taken them after my term was over, and from what I gathered the different lodgers practically paid the farmer's rent—a roundabout way of meeting agricultural depression. Though but a detail, the farmer sold us what little produce of his we consumed at full market value or over, yet this was considerably less than the usual tradesmen's charges, and every little helps. Besides fruit, vegetables, milk, butter, bacon, home-made jams, and countless eggs, we purchased fowls in quantities, and occasionally ducks. On fowls, indeed, we chiefly relied for the table, butcher's meat being difficult to obtain, and, truth to tell, tough when obtained. The fowls were not over-plump, not being especially fattened—or crammed, is it? Barn-door fowls, the farmer called them, as they picked up a good deal of their substance from the grain scattered about the outbuildings and ricks; so their food was varied, consequently their flesh, if there was not much of it, was tender and delicate of flavour.

We had to rely upon ourselves for society, though we did get acquainted with one stranger, an artist, who had taken up his abode at a homely little inn some two miles away—an inn that had its uses in that it provided us with the bottled ale of Bass. We led a self- [Pg 29] contained life and gloried in it. Our bread was home-baked, and I still pleasantly remember how excellent that bread was, though it had not the white colour one is accustomed to in the town variety. We had only one baking a week, but the bread kept sweet and palatable for the whole of that time; it did not dry hard on the cut surface as bought bread does; it was made from home-grown wheat ground at a water-mill near by, whose wheel was turned by the little, useful river—there was the romance of it. Great long loaves they were, with a generous allowance of crisp, rocky crust to crumb —loaves to be remembered.

We stepped at once from the door of the house into the country, and that was the charm of it. Our water came direct from the lonely moors above, and was beyond suspicion pure and in superabundant supply; indeed at one end of the large kitchen there was a stone trough for washing purposes, and along this the water ran day and night; no tap was ever turned on—there was no tap to turn. Perhaps I was fortunate in finding such desirable quarters, but on comparing notes with an artist friend, who took farmhouse apartments in Cumberland, I found he fared as well as we did. A change in the method of taking a holiday lends an added zest to it, and those who are tired of expensive hotels, seaside lodgings, or constant travelling, with the everlasting packing and squeezing of the sponge, might do worse than try farmhouse apartments in some pleasant country. If rest be needed I cannot imagine a more restful form of holiday.

Besides being a good cook our farmer's wife was skilled in the [Pg 30] making of sundry jams, jellies, ginger-beer, and elderberry wine; of the last she was very proud, and mulled some for us to bring out its full flavour—I did not sample it a second time: such wine maketh the heart sad. One of her concoctions, however, commended itself to me, namely, a home-made kind of liquor that was fresh and pleasant to my palate which she called, curiously enough, "Job's Comforter." Who would have expected such a thing in a remote farmhouse? This is the recipe for the making of it as given to me: "Get a wide-

mouthed stone jar and put in it as many good lemons as you can; stick as many cloves as possible into the skin of the lemons, pressing them well in, then place the prepared lemons in the jar and fill up with unsweetened gin; let the lemons remain in the gin for two or three days, after this strain the liquid off, add honey and a little sugar-candy to sweeten according to taste and to give a smoothness to the liquor, then bottle it." I give the recipe exactly as given to me. I had some trouble to obtain it, and should prefer more precise details as to quantities, but these old housewives are jealous of giving their recipes away. I took a bottle of this "Job's Comforter" home with me and friends of mine pronounced it excellent—"as good as Chartreuse" they declared, but perhaps this estimate was owing to the novelty of the thing. Still, it was undoubtedly good.

Resuming our journey we followed the lonely lane for a long way without arriving anywhere, but "to travel hopefully is better than to [Pg 31] arrive," and we were in no hurry. Still, the longest lane has ending, and ours ended at a wide, open, elevated space marked Pit Down on the map; this spot, I afterwards discovered, earned its title from the fact that there in pits were hastily buried the victims of the plague that once devastated the villages around, and in one of these villages, Fletching by name, we shortly afterwards found ourselves. A pretty village it proved to be of the picture-book sort, as clean and neat as though it were a Kate Greenaway's drawing materialised. The ancient church stands in precisely the right spot, around which are grouped, as an artist might group them, the many gabled houses of the village; the one thing wanting to perfect the picture was the village green, but "fortune seldom comes with both hands full." Fletching lies well out of the beaten track and is only to be reached by winding lanes, so that I should imagine a motorist is seldom seen there, unless he has fortunately lost his way to the finding of the village. Even then some motorists might not realise their good fortune.

I stopped the car in the shade of one of its attractive houses, when a man approached me, evidently imagining I had come to see the church, and, desiring to be of service, exclaimed, "The rector will be delighted to show you over the church; there are a lot of curious old tombs inside that are well worth seeing. The rectory is just over the way"—pointing to it—"and I know the rector's at home." I explained that I had not come to see the church but had [Pg 32] merely driven into the village accidentally. "But you really ought to see it now you are here," he continued; "the rector takes a great interest in it, and is always so pleased to show it to any stranger." Fate had brought me to Fletching, and Fate appeared determined I should see the church. Fate was kinder than I knew. The man stood there watching me, and after his civility I felt it would seem ungracious to disappoint him. So to the rectory I went, though somewhat reluctantly, for it was a fine, out-of-door day, but I did not wish to hurt the man's feelings.

The grey-haired parson received me most cordially; I might have been a welcome guest instead of a stranger seeking a favour, but I have always found that in pleasant places you meet with pleasant people. Pleasant surroundings surely, to a certain extent, influence the temperament of man? They affect me, I know, and strongly. "Delighted to show you over our church," said the parson; "it possesses many features of interest that you might miss if you went alone." So I put myself under his guidance, for who should take a more intelligent interest in, or know more about, a church than its parson? He even appeared very desirous to show it. A parson's life in a village is often a dull one, and possibly the occasional meeting with a sympathetic stranger comes as a welcome relief to his round of monotonous days.

Before entering the building I noticed a little "low-side" or "leper window" on the left of the porch. The purport of these so-called "leper windows," so frequently to be found in country churches, has [Pg 33] perplexed many a learned archaeologist, and it seems passing strange to me why a window so usual should be a subject of such mystery. The once generally accepted theory was that they were provided for lepers, that those so unfortunately afflicted might view, from outside the church and safely apart from the congregation, the elevation of the Host, and thus participate, to some extent, in the service. But in the case of Fletching church, and many others, these peculiar windows are so placed that no one could possibly see the altar from them; moreover, as the rector remarked, lepers were never admitted into churchyards. So the leper theory fails. My

personal impression is that these windows were never intended for looking into, but for looking out of the building, and for this purpose such a small window sufficed. From the number of leper windows I have inspected, and writing from recollection, I should imagine that the majority of them are suitably placed for watching the congregation entering the church, and so might be of service to the bell-ringers; but that, I take it, would be a secondary consideration and not the main object of them.

On entering Fletching church my attention was called to the Norman arches under the tower showing that the building had been originally Norman. Now, owing to rebuildings and restorations, it is mainly Early English—the Early English of the Victorian era! On the west wall is a curious and well-preserved little brass, doubtless formerly on the floor. The inscription on this, beautifully cut, runs [Pg 34] briefly as follows:

> Hic jacet Petrus Denot, glover:
> Cujus aie ppicietur Deus. Amen.

The brass is manifestly an ancient one, and the absence of a date is notable; there is plenty of space for it. Two gloves, crossed, are shown below. The English word "glover" looks strangely out of place in the midst of the Latin. Presumably the carver of the inscription, though doubtless familiar from frequent usage with the usual Latin employed on the memorials to the dead, its *Hic jacets*, its *Obiits*, and the rest that goes between, was in a quandary how to render "glover" in the classic tongue; his limited learning failing him, he boldly inserted it in English. At least I arrived at that conclusion. Who was this Petrus Denot, I wondered? The rector knew his story in part and enlightened me. He was an inhabitant of Fletching, a glover by trade, and was one of the unfortunates who took a part in the Cade rebellion; he was captured and hanged, but his body was recovered by his relations and was buried in the church. I query if that is the whole of the story, for it seems strange that a tradesman of the period, to say nothing of his being hanged for treason, should have the much-sought-for privilege of being buried within the church's hallowed walls, and honoured with a brass besides. Does the brass being dateless point to anything? I fancy that there is more in the simple terse inscription than meets the eye. At one time [Pg 35] it appears Fletching was famous for its gloves made from hogs' skins imported from Holland, and it is supposed that the plague was conveyed to the village by these skins, and that brought the industry to an end, and the village nearly too.

During one of the restorations, when the flooring of the church was removed, many skeletons were discovered beneath, all in an upright position—"pointing to Saxon burial," I was told. It may, however, be remembered that Wordsworth in "The White Doe of Rylstone" alludes to bodies in after-Saxon days being so buried in a vault at Bolton Priory:

> Pass, pass who will yon chantry door,
> And through the chink in the fractured floor
> Look down and see a grisly sight:
> A vault where the bodies are buried upright!
> There, face by face, and hand by hand,
> The Claphams and Mauleverers stand.

"Possibly you are aware," exclaimed my parson guide, "that Gibbon the historian rests here in the Sheffield chapel amid the Sheffield family deceased, for the first earl was a great friend of his." I was not aware of the fact, but with Cicero I could say, "Non me pudet fateri nescire quod nesciam." The number of world-famous men is so large, and grows ever larger as the years roll on, that it is quite impossible to remember where but a scant few of the more famous of them were born, or died, or lie buried. What matters it? These details belong to Fate, not to genius; no genius can command them. [Pg 36] So we went to the Sheffield chapel, which is approached by a narrow passage; facing this is a plain marble wall impressively devoid of any ornament, but covered with epitaphs to members of the Sheffield family; in the centre of these is one, in Latin, to Gibbon. He alone has the honour of Latin, the rest being in plain English. "Now," said the rector, "I have a gruesome revelation to make. One evening when at her devotions in the church a nurse was startled by a loud report coming from the Sheffield chapel; she fled the building in terror: it afterwards turned out that the coffin in which Gibbon was laid to rest had burst and a new coffin had to be

made. But this is not a lively subject; let me call your attention to those stained-glass windows. The glass of these was removed and buried in the churchyard for preservation during the period of the Puritan fury; some years ago it was unearthed and now is in its old place again. So Time brings about its revenge; what one generation would destroy another would preserve, only the glass being much broken, the pieces have got sadly mixed so as to resemble a mosaic, but not an unpleasing mosaic, revealing little of the old design, yet sufficient to show that the windows were to a royal personage, presumably the Duke of Lancaster."

Next a well-preserved piscina was pointed out to me, having a bracket on the top presumably to support an image, "in which respect this piscina is almost, if not quite, unique in England." Then in turn we inspected some of the ancient monuments; reclining on the first altar tomb were two recumbent alabaster effigies side by [Pg 37] side, one of a beruffled man in armour and warlike of countenance, the other of his wife. The inscription below runs: "Here lyeth buried the body of Richard Lache. Coming out of his office of High Sheriff for the counties of Sussex and Surrey, having no issue of his body living, he gave all his lands in the county of Sussex unto Catherine his wife, and made her sole executoress of his last will. In regard whereof ... she of her own account caused this monument to be made, and herself living, to be pictured lying by him, as you see." Yet this disconsolate widow consoled herself the next year by marrying the Earl of Nottingham and lies buried elsewhere! Inconstant woman! Another fine altar tomb, though minus inscription, is supposed by the coat of arms remaining on it to be that of Sir Edward Dalyngruge, "who having amassed a large fortune by war, marriage, and court patronage, obtained the royal license to build upon the hereditary estate of his wife the castle of Bodiam." There were also other ancient tombs of lesser interest, one mutilated but apparently to a crusader and his wife; and a thirteenth-century slab with only the matrix of its brass remaining. In the transept I noticed, hung against the wall, two crested helmets, gilt and coloured, the gilding and colours being much age-dimmed, with rusty spurs and gauntlets suspended just below: the crests were those of the Abergavenny family. There were also other features of interest in the church—a penitent's window, a holy water stoup, and at a late restoration I learnt that one of the pillars by the [Pg 38] chancel was found to be hollow and to contain the old steps intact leading to the rood-loft, and at the top of the steps an ancient green chasuble was discovered, left there in some haste or for concealment, it may be imagined.

On leaving I asked the rector if he knew of any curious epitaph in the churchyard. Time, alas! has robbed us of many a one, and worse still, to my knowledge, certain men placed "in a little brief authority," not approving of such levity on sacred ground, have deliberately obliterated others. "But," said the rector, "if I cannot show you any quaint epitaph, I can tell you of a singular one I came upon some time ago in ancient St. Mary's churchyard at Eastbourne; it ran, 'A virtuous woman is 5/- to her husband.' This puzzled me at first, then I came to the conclusion that it should read, 'A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband.' Possibly the carver was an illiterate man, and, being apparently short of space, substituted 5/- for crown, deeming them synonymous. But whatever the explanation, that is how the epitaph read."

Fletching church was one of the happy discoveries of the journey; though much restored it is of more than ordinary interest. There are, indeed, but few churches of ancient date that have not something noteworthy to reveal to the traveller; truly they are chapters of history in stone, and some of them are, in a sense, museums. It is well worth a wanderer's while to step aside now and then to inspect carefully and leisurely a country church (carefully, or he may miss much), especially those in remote spots where a [Pg 39] want of pence has happily restrained the restorer's hand: blessed be their poverty, I say, for owing to it only needful reparation has been done, so ancient tombs and brasses have remained undisturbed, and the medieval craftsman's handiwork has not been improved away, to the joy of every lover of the never-returning and picturesque past.

[Pg 40]

CHAPTER III

An old coaching inn—The resurrection of the road—Far from anywhere—The charm of the unexpected—A historic milestone—"Mine host" of past days—Our port-wine drinking ancestors—The lure of the lane—Village life—Miniature effigy of a knight—The tomb of "the good Archbishop Leighton"—A church clerk's story.

Leaving Fletching by a leafy lane, we shortly came to a grass-margined highway, and where the lane and highway met, stood, somewhat back from the road, a lonely old inn—"The Sheffield Arms" to wit—a well-preserved example of a modest country hostelry of the easy-going Georgian era; one that externally shows no signs of alteration since it first was built, and few are the inns of the period that have not suffered some change during those changeful years. As our posting and coach-travelling forefathers saw "The Sheffield Arms" with its long range of stabling on one side, so it looks to-day, only a little more time-toned and weather-stained, with less life about it and, what life there is, less picturesque.

There was no other building in sight on the long, straight, but undulating stretch of tree-bordered road fronting the inn, excepting one or two lowly cottages half hidden in woods, so out of direct observation that they did not lessen the impression of loneliness and [Pg 41] the illusion of remoteness that the place gave. "Miles from Anywhere. No Hurry," is the legend displayed on the gable of another lonely inn at Upware in the Fens; it might as well be written on the signboard of "The Sheffield Arms."

An ancient coaching hostelry of some pretence, that has seen better days and other ways, that has not been modernised, standing forlorn by the roadside, but still appearing too proud to mourn its long-lost prosperity, always makes its appeal to me, for it strikes a pathetic note. I do not need the building to be picturesque, though I would prefer it thus, so long as it be not too much decayed, only that it possess the glamour of age, has entertained travellers of the long ago, and so made its little history. Then I humour my fancy. Many an old inn of this kind has a sort of magnetic attraction for the few who indulge in that despised article, sentiment: Stevenson confessed that he could never get over his hankering after a room in a wayside tavern in which to start his tale. There is romance about a lonely and once flourishing inn, however plain that inn may be—romance that clings to it as surely as ivy clings to a crumbling ruin. I feel that, in the days gone by, some eventful happening only waiting to be revealed must have taken place within the walls of such a one, some romance unrecorded yet. For real romance lingered long into the coaching age, but steam and electricity have killed it. Now

> Romance beside his unstrung lute,
> Lies stricken mute.

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Had "The Sheffield Arms" a tale to tell? To me it looked as though it had, but then it must be remembered the poetry of a place lies as much in the eyes of the beholder as in the place itself; what is a romance in building to one is but bricks and mortar to another. We do not all see alike; a Turner, a David Cox, a Constable would each render the same landscape differently. Once when admiring an old ivy-covered Tudor manor-house I ventured to remark to a native on the beauty of it; he scornfully rejoined, "I see nought in it, it wants pulling down." The eye is but a lens; it is the mind that really sees and interprets.

"The Sheffield Arms" is well retired from the highway by a wide space of grassy ground whereon grows a flourishing clump of trees; on the roadside of this clump stands a large, two-pillared, crossed-top signpost; from this depends a swinging sign, in the good old-fashioned way as an inn-sign should—a sign that boldly proclaims the business of the house, so that even the rushing motorist could hardly pass it unheeded by. Without the needful sign one would hardly guess that the shy building was an inn, so little otherwise does it assert its purpose—and modesty becomes even a building!

There I pulled up beneath the welcome shade of the trees, sought the cool interior of the hostel and called for a glass of ale, for the day was hot, and mortal man is sometimes thirsty. The ale was good, and brought to mind the poet's query:

> Say, for what were hop-yards meant,
> Or why was Burton built on Trent?

Why, to provide good ale, of course, such as I sampled there that day. Then I got a-chatting with the landlord in hopes of gleaning something of the old inn's past story. I found much civility, but to my disappointment the landlord (whose name of Weller, by the way, was a reminder of Dickens) had scant information of the kind I sought. Truly he said it once had been a coaching house: I could have told him that.

OLD COACHING HOSTELRY, SHEFFIELD PARK, SUSSEX.

AN ANGLER'S MODEST INN.

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The inn, I imagine, after the coming of the railway suffered from long neglect, left stranded high and dry, as it was, on a travel-forsaken road, its profitable posting and coaching custom gone, and with little else to depend upon: how it existed at all during that stagnant period is a wonder. Who would ever then have dreamt of the resurrection of the road that the motor-car has brought about? How the landlords of the half-forsaken country inns must have rubbed their hands with glee to find custom, and profitable custom too, come again their way. It was a miracle; so they refurbished their ancient houses and blessed the car that others cursed. In this respect, at any rate, the motor has done good service, for a quiet country inn is a boon to the traveller who does not always care to seek his rest in crowded noisy towns. There was a long time, after the coaches had disappeared, when it was the rarest thing to find a decent rural inn, and the best of these existed for the sake of fishermen; they were unfortunately few, but mostly excellent, for the fisherman loves good cheer—so does his fellow-sportsman the motorist.

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At the first glance the interior of the ancient hostelry did not appear inviting. I found my way into a large, cheerless apartment, erst, I imagined, the coffee-room; truly there were flowers on the table, and a door stood open wide on to a little garden where sweet-scented roses grew whose perfume was wafted into the chamber, but there was no carpet on the floor, and bare boards, though clean and stained a warm hue, are noisy to the tread and comfortless to the eye. I was not impressed, for though one despises luxury, one looks for comfort. Then I jokingly asked the maid, who put in a sudden appearance on the scene, if they ever had any visitors stopping there: thought I, it is a needless query. To my surprise she replied, "We often have motoring parties for the night, and

sometimes they stay a day or two; would you like to see our rooms?" I thought I would; I expected to find musty chambers, four-poster beds, and forbidding antiquated furniture, but I found bedrooms scrupulously clean, neat, and simply but sufficiently furnished; I have slept in rooms less comfortable and less clean at expensive town hotels. There was, too, a large but cosy sitting-room supplied with really easy chairs, and—who would have thought it?—a good bathroom! Upstairs the old inn was clean and comfortable, and the not-too-exacting traveller might take his ease there with much content: indeed I almost wished I had been belated and compelled to do so.

It is always a delight to me to stay at a real old-fashioned country inn, far from anywhere: I love the peace of it. The country is as [Pg 45] tranquil as ever, but the towns are, alas! more noisy. Would Dr. Johnson care to "walk down" his beloved Fleet Street to-day, I wonder, with all the twentieth-century bustle of it? De Quincey, too, dearly loved the quiet country inn; writing in 1802, of a walking tour he took, he remarks, "Happier life I cannot imagine than this vagrancy ... and towards evening a courteous welcome in a rustic inn. It has often struck me that a world-wearied man, who sought for the peace of monasteries separated from their gloomy captivity —peace and silence such as theirs combined with the large liberty of nature—could not do better than revolve amongst these modest inns."

At the rear of "The Sheffield Arms" the country looked inviting with its green meadows and big branching trees, and noticing a footpath I was tempted to take a stroll. I had not wandered far when to my surprise I came upon a deep, rock-girt, and shady glen of much charm; at the head of this I caught a glimpse of a large still sheet of silvery water, a lake in miniature, for it was perhaps a quarter of a mile in length or more, of generous width also, and from its sides rose, steeply and abruptly, hills, wooded to the skyline —wooded hills that doubled themselves on its mirror-like surface. I have seldom come so suddenly upon so lovely a spot without a hint of what was to be revealed; in truth the scenery gave no suggestion of this, and, as a rule, Sussex lacks the enlivening presence of water. There was a joy in the discovery of that beauty-spot; nothing [Pg 46] more delicious of the kind have I ever seen.

> Good things that come of course far less do please
> Than those that come by sweet contingencies.

Possibly this sheet of water was artificial, though it had purely a natural look, for it may have been one of the numerous "hammer-ponds" constructed long ago for the service of an iron mill or mills in the now almost forgotten days when Sussex was the Black Country of England, when the present peaceful and pastoral land, as Camden says, "resounded with the noise of busy hammer-mills beating upon the iron," and its pure air was polluted with the smoke of many furnaces and forges of which Sheffield possessed its share. Sussex wood-smelted iron was reckoned the toughest in the world, and iron ore still abounds in the county; it was the failure of fuel for smelting, owing to the exhaustion of the forests and the near proximity of iron and coal in the North, that caused the decay of the extensive Sussex iron industry, not the lack of ore—a fortunate happening as far as the beauty of the land is concerned. Reminders of the period may be found in the many place-names on the map, such as "Steelforgeland," "Furnace Farm," "Cinder Hill," "Hammerfield," and numerous others of a similar nature. Those ancient iron-masters have left their gracious mark in the land by the many beautiful homes, standing yet, that they built for their convenience and enjoyment in the days of their prosperity: they built not only houses, they built pictures in stone, in brick, in half- [Pg 47] timber, delightful to look upon; perhaps "they built better than they knew." Amongst the many in half-timber Middle House at Mayfield is a good example, and of those in stone Batemans, near Burwash, the home of Rudyard Kipling, is another.

At the end of the lakelet I discovered a picturesque water-mill—grey and old, with a weatherboard upper story, and a red-tiled, lichen-laden, uneven roof, silvery and golden—its dark green wheel revolving round in a leisurely fashion to the droning of the ancient machinery within, and the quiet splash of water without. A ready-made picture awaiting the artist to paint it, if he has not already done so. Somehow the sounds of water and wind-driven machinery seem to me to be different in quality to that of steam-driven

machinery with its insistent noise: water and wind are natural powers, and both water-mills and windmills with their adjuncts are picturesque objects to the eye, but I know no steam-mill that is not ugly. In the days before steam became the almost universal power, and the modern builder and engineer had not disfigured the country with their assertive erections, how doubly beautiful England must have been! Would that photography had been invented ages ago, then we might possibly have had photographs of Elizabethan England preserved to us, so that we might better judge of its picturesqueness than by descriptions and drawings not always to be trusted.

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I know of no other pleasanter stretch of highway in all England than those few miles on either hand of "The Sheffield Arms"; on both sides of it are spacious grassy margins left to nature, and they extend as far as the eye can see, and the sum of them would come to a considerable acreage. On these wide wastes grow big oaks and other trees; especially noticeable are numerous clumps of Scotch firs that, with their tall red trunks and twisted branches high above, give quite a character to the roadscape, if I may employ so odd a term; besides which brambles, heather, bracken, gorse, and other wild growing things flourish on them at their own sweet will. An ideal spot for a wayside picnic, where one might choose a secluded nook near to the road, yet hidden from it. Here at least no "hungry nobility have swallowed up all the land except the King's Highway." There was not a soul in sight; the vacant road impressed me with the same sense of loneliness as does a house deserted, for I looked for life and found none.

On a slight rise, a little away from the road and not far from the inn, I espied a tall, shapely, solitary stone pillar, weather-stained and worn, backed by a tangle of greenery. This aroused my curiosity, so off I set to solve its purport—and discovered a glorified milestone, manifestly erected in days somewhat remote; the lettering on it was, in parts, wasted away and so difficult to decipher, but I managed to make out certain of the names and figures, and this is what I noted:

[Pg 49]

	Miles.
Westminster Bridge	39
East Grinstead	10
Lewes	10
Brighthelmstone	17

There were further inscriptions, but these were all I copied. Brighton being given as Brighthelmstone shows how far back the stone was placed there—those were the days when people directed their letters "Brighthelmstone, near Lewes." I learnt afterwards that this milestone was erected by a former Earl Sheffield in order to settle the frequent disputes that arose with the postboys as to distances to his park and the inn. "Private travellers," as those who posted about country were called, had need of well-filled purses, for in addition to the charge for posting that ranged, according to Leigh's *Road Book* (sixth edition of 1837), from 1s. to 1s. 9d. per mile, the postillion expected and demanded a further 3d. a mile for himself, and more if he could extort it; besides which the traveller frequently felt under the moral compunction "to take something for the good of the house" during the delay of changing horses.

On the arrival and departure of the postchaise the old-fashioned landlord was always in polite evidence, willing to drink the traveller's health at the traveller's expense—it was the custom of the age. What constitutions the men of those days must have had, whether of high or low degree! Men then there were who could drink their two, or even three, bottles of port at night, and rise the next morning apparently none the worse for it. When I was a youth I visited a country squire, one of the last of the old race, and I well remember that after dinner he drank his two bottles of port, excepting a glass that was given to me; at the finish he was "as sober as a judge," and the next morning, early, he was out with the hounds.

[Pg 50]

Leaving the old inn we took a narrow lane opposite to it, for it had a pleasant look; the highway too was pleasant enough, but we thought the lane the more likely to lead to some out-of-the-way spot and have more picturesque possibilities: the highways serve the towns, the byways the villages and the countryside, so always take to a lane when you can if you desire to discover the secreted beauty

of the land. Our lane led us through a green and old-world country with no hint of modern ugliness or aught but tranquillity about it, a tranquillity that hardly seemed of our bustling day. The lane was long, but not too long for us, and very winding; possibly our lanes follow the old primitive tracks of past days when the early inhabitants, to avoid a swamp, soft ground, or a wood, simply deviated this way and that in search of firmer footing; even, it may be, these early inhabitants followed on the earlier track of wild animals. Small wonder our lanes are often so wandering—delightfully wandering, for therein lies their special charm: who can tell what a lane may do, or what surprise each bend of it may have in store for the traveller? Then a crooked lane controls the pace, you cannot go fast on it, so time is compulsorily afforded to see and absorb all that is worth seeing; the lane is for the loiterer, though [Pg 51] few there be who care to loiter nowadays, so the lane is almost forsaken except by country folk and rural lovers. Some one somewhere says, who or where I cannot now remember, nor am I sure if I have the quotation right, but this is the drift of it, "The lane is a work of genius, the highway that of the engineer." The lane is to the highway as old wine is to new; there is a finer flavour about it, a rarer charm; it leads to half-forgotten places and quiet scenes—

> Where the wheels of Life swing slow,
> And over all there broods the peace
> Of centuries ago.

At last, after many windings and some climbings, our lane brought us to the remote and pleasant village of Horsted Keynes, set on a hill and surrounded by woods. If one goes in search of these out-of-the-way spots they are apt to escape one; it is the good fortune of the true wanderer to discover them—that is the reward of desultory travel. Stopping the car in the wide village street, a goodly portion of the youthful population promptly surrounded it. "A motor-car, a motor-car," I heard them call out to each other, as though the sight of one was somewhat rare; perhaps but few motorists find, or lose, their way there. To travel and escape other cars and the morning paper is a feat even in rural England. Then apropos of nothing one of the boys explained, "That's the way to the church, down that narrow road." "I did not ask the way to the church," I responded; "why did you point it out?" "Well, I thought as how you [Pg 52] came to see it; there's nothing else to see here." There was not, except one or two rather pretty cottages.

There before us, a little down a narrow road, stood the ancient church with its tall shingle steeple, curiously slight. I strolled up to the silent fane of Sunday devotion for the sake of a walk and to get a better glimpse of the old-fashioned cottages on the way, each with its little garden gay with flowers. Then I glanced inside the church. I had not been there more than a minute or two before the clerk made his appearance, somewhat out of breath in his haste to discover me before I departed. "I saw as how you were a stranger," said he, "and thought perhaps you would like me to show you over the church." So are strangers' movements noted in quiet places. In many an out-of-the-world village the coming of a stranger arouses an astonishing amount of interest; his coming, his movements, his business, his going, are subjects of discussion and watching. How uneventful and unexciting must the lives of the sleepy villagers be that so small a matter should claim their special attention; little wonder that the younger generation among them seeks the town as a relief from the dull monotony of its existence. How to make village life attractive is the problem, and a pretty stiff problem too. Village halls and reading-rooms do not solve it—the average villager scorns them; he, or she, much prefers to idle out-of-doors doing nothing, contentedly or discontentedly, varied by an occasional visit to the public-house. It is not an ideal existence. What the villager needs is [Pg 53] a wider interest in life. "Back to the land" is a vain cry till country life is made less dull and more desirable; but if the country in the winter-time is dull to some, is not the town also dreary to others with its yellow fogs and muddy streets? I am writing of the poor man who throngs the town where labour is over-supplied and leaves the country where it is required. So the shires are deserted and the slums crowded. I am no politician, I detest politics as I do the devil—if they are not one and the same thing—but from what I have seen and heard, from the many talks I have had with the countryman lowest down in the social scale, I do feel that only the pride of possession of his freehold cottage with a little garden attached, or

some small holding, will ever attract him back from the town to the land. A garden to tend keeps a man's idle hours pleasantly employed, and keeps him too away from the public-house. In the same way I still more strongly feel that the loss of the sturdy yeoman farmer, tilling his own little freehold, on which son succeeded father in the good old days, is a disaster to the country. To do "yeoman's service" had a pregnant meaning once; now it has none, for the yeoman has gone, gone to other lands to forward their prosperity. He was foremost in the fight on many a hard-fought field: he it was who helped to turn the scale at Crecy and Agincourt, and his reward has been to be improved (!) out of existence.

But I have forgotten I was with the clerk in the church. I am afraid that at first I rather resented his intrusion, but after all he [Pg 54] turned out an obliging fellow, amusing too without the thought of such a thing, so I forgave him. "It's an interesting old church," he exclaimed. How familiar I am with that phrase, so often have I heard it; it is the stock phrase of most clerks by which he introduces himself to you, with the inevitable tip in view. But there he was, not to be disregarded, and with a smile on his face; he might have looked more serious, I thought, for I fancy he was sexton too. I don't know why, but his smile annoyed me; however, I let him have his way. "It's a very old church," he went on, "but it has been restored." "Do you know, I've already discovered that," I retorted. "'Deed, sir, then I suppose you be one of those learned antiquated gentlemen who understands architecture. Now I think I can show you something that will interest you. I likes to meet learned antiquities; I'm a bit of an antiquity myself." He was!

Then he led the way to the chancel, and there he pointed out to me on the north wall under a small canopied recess the miniature effigy of a cross-legged Knight-Templar, with his foot resting on the usual lion in miniature too—a very curious and interesting monument, the like of which I have not seen before; the recumbent figure is beautifully carved and in a good state of preservation. But why so brave and bold a knight—it is a matter of faith with me that those knights of old were all both brave and bold—should have such a miniature monument I could not conceive. It perplexed even the [Pg 55] learned clerk to account for this strange departure from the usual life-sized effigies of warriors who are supposed to sleep peacefully below their "stone pictures." It could not have been want of pence, for the carving was too well done; it could hardly have been want of space. Why, then? There was, unfortunately, no inscription on the monument, so what the knight's name was, or what daring deeds he may have done, or when he died, I cannot say, but I guessed that the tomb was of about the time of Edward I. Then the clerk told me the tale of a learned "antiquity" who had come from afar especially to inspect this monument (so the fame of it has spread abroad, though I had never heard of it before), and this learned authority had declared, after carefully examining the belt of the effigy, that the date of the monument was 1227. How he could arrive at so exact a date I could not imagine, for after hearing this statement I critically examined the belt but could discover no figures thereon; and the carving in itself is surely not enough to go by. Still my guide stuck to his story.

There were other things of minor interest the clerk pointed out to me—the headless brass to a woman, once on the floor but now on the wall; an old stone slab with a finely carved and raised cross, without inscription, also built into the wall; and a number of nail holes in the fine oak roof, showing where laths had at one period been nailed to it to support a plaster ceiling! But I discovered for myself a mural tablet on the chancel wall to a Mrs. Sapphira Lightmaker, "a devout woman and a mother in Israel, widow indeed, [Pg 56] who notwithstanding sollicitations to a 2nd marriage, lived to 44 years." What was the import of this? Are unsought-for "sollicitations to a 2nd marriage" likely to shorten life?

Then the clerk asked if I knew that "the good Archbishop Leighton is buried here?" I was not aware of it; the clerk knew more than I did, and the fact appeared to please him. "I thought perhaps I could tell you something you didn't know," said he. I felt complimented, for his remark showed that in his opinion I possibly was not wholly ignorant about other things. "Where is his tomb?" I asked. "Out in the churchyard," was the reply; "but it was not always out in the cold; at one time the ground was covered by a chapel, but the chapel either fell or was pulled down." Wherever you go in England you come upon history: at Fletching I came upon the

tomb of Gibbon; here, on that of Archbishop Leighton, and both in remote out-of-the-world villages reached only by devious lanes.

We went without to see the tomb, a portion of the epitaph on which runs, "In an age of religious strife he adorned the doctrine of God." But the saintly Archbishop has a second, and an older, monument (it is not often, indeed I do not remember such a thing before, that one finds two monuments of different ages close together to the same person). The older monument is in the shape of a slab set against the chancel wall, and bears the following Latin inscription:

[Pg 57]

Depositum
Roberti Leightvn
Archiepiscopi Glasguensis
Apud Scotas
Qui Obij xxv. die Junij
Anno Dmi 1684.
Aetatis suae 74.

"Do you know," exclaimed the clerk, "I was showing this monument to an old lady one day who appeared to take a great interest in it, for she told me she had been recently reading about the Archbishop; then suddenly she said, 'I suppose you knew him well, being the clerk here. Do tell me exactly what he was like.' Now that's a true story." "What reply did you make?" queried I. "'Madam,' I said, 'do I really look over two hundred years old?'"

It may be remembered that the Archbishop used often to say that he thought "an inn the fittest place to die in, it looking like a pilgrim going home, to whom the whole world was an inn, and who was weary of the noise and the confusion of it." And he had his wish, for he died at the Bell Inn, Warwick Lane, London. Curiously enough, Cicero, centuries before, expressed himself much in the same way, for thus he wrote: "Ex vita discedo, tanquam ex hospitio, non tanquam ex domo."

As I was leaving, the clerk told me that about a mile away, in a wild and wooded country, was Broadhurst, where the good Archbishop spent the last years of his life. "It's a funny tumble-down old building," he said, "and it used to have a moat right round it, but that's filled up; the road to it is very rough and rutty; a farmer has it now." I know not how it was, but though an ancient and picturesque home has an unfailing attraction for me, yet in this case I somehow neglected going just that little out of my way to see what I understood to be one. Truly "a very rough and rutty road" is not good for tyres, or car, but I could have walked it: why this did not occur to me at the time now passes my comprehension; it must have been a temporary lapse of sanity. Even geniuses have such lapses, for it is recorded of Sir Isaac Newton that he cut two holes in his study door, a large and a small one, for a favourite cat and her kitten to enter by! As to Broadhurst, I can only console myself that possibly (as Dr. Johnson once remarked of a place) "it is worth seeing, but not going to see."

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CHAPTER IV

Dane Hill—Epitaphs—A wild bit of country—Ashdown Forest—Exploring—The use of maps—Curious inn signs—A Tudor home—The Devil's door—A medieval priest and guest house—Old-fashioned flowers—An ancient interior—Curious carvings—Roads in the old times—The window and hearth tax.

Out of Horsted Keynes we followed a friendly lane that quickly dipped down into a deep and wooded valley and then rose steeply to Dane Hill, an elevated spot that probably derives its name from an early Danish camp, or from some forgotten battle taking place there during the Danish occupation; its commanding situation suggests it may have been a fortified post. Place-names, preserved through generations, often mark spots where some far-off and unrecorded event has taken place, and I am inclined to think Dane Hill is one of these. I hunted through several volumes of general and local history, but failed to find any mention of a battle there; sometimes, however, tradition is founded on fact, though one cannot accept any tradition as trustworthy; still, where probability and tradition go hand in hand, I am inclined to give ear to tradition. Some day perhaps some Archaeological Society may go digging about Dane Hill and make discoveries.

Dane Hill is crowned by a fine, large church, not ancient, nor yet quite of recent days, for its stones have grown grey with years, however many or few those years may be. Access is afforded to the churchyard by some steps, and at the side of these stands a modern, tall-pillared, canopied cross; the carving and shaft of this are beautifully neat, a careful copy of old work, yet without even a hint of its spirit or vigour, it being all scraped and smoothed to a meaningless finish, as though any mark of handiwork was a thing to be ashamed of; the old monkish craftsmen knew their art better, for it is the human touch revealed upon it that gives meaning to the meaningless stone. There is no soul behind the modern workman's tool: how can we expect it when for long years we have been making a human machine of him? Look at his lifeless productions, however painstakingly carved, and compare them with the grotesque gargoyles that verily seem to breathe and to struggle of the medieval sculptor, or any other like work of his hands; the latter too was a creator, not a mere copyist. His creatures resemble nothing on earth or in water that has been as far as I know, yet they look like things that could live. [Pg 60]

Somehow the large churchyard looked strange to me, and for the moment I could not reason why; then suddenly I realised it was because there was not a gravestone in it, not even a grass-grown mound: did the people of the small hamlet never die? The harvest gathered in God's acre is generally so plentiful. Then I solved the mystery; on the opposite side of the road I discovered a little cemetery hidden by trees and where the gravestones were many, each with its loving tribute to the underlying dead. To judge by the tombstone inscriptions in our churchyards, what paragons of perfection lie sleeping there, what saintly virtues they possessed! Would that I had met them in the flesh! Why always of yesterday and not of to-day? Small wonder that a little girl who had been reading similar eulogies asked her father, "Where are all the bad people buried?" Only once have I come upon an epitaph that might possibly bear an unkind interpretation, and this read, "He was ...," leaving the rest to be filled in by the imagination. Solon, the great Athenian ruler, according to Plutarch, "laid down a justly commended law that no man must speak ill of the dead," and wisely ordered, for the dead cannot defend themselves nor can have any say upon what is inscribed above their dust, excepting in those few instances when the living have written their own epitaphs, not always laudatory by the way, and one cannot but admire their candour. For example, there is the much-quoted one that Dr. Lloyd, a dean of St. Asaph (deceased 1663), wrote for himself, and it will bear quoting again: [Pg 61]

> This is the epitaph
> Of the Dean of St. Asaph,
> Who, by keeping a table
> Better than he was able,
> Ran much into debt
> Which is not paid yet.

At Dane Hill we came upon a good main road that led us to a [Pg 62]
wild, open upland reaching far on either hand, a delightful bit of unsophisticated nature where the land is poor as land well can be, so poor that according to a local expression "it would make a crow cry to fly over it," yet beautiful in colour to look upon. A glorious stretch of wide and wild country bare to the sky and swept by all the winds that blow, and the absence of any bounding hedges or fences left the eye at liberty to rove over it unchecked to the furthermost horizon of distant hills "rolling in the blue," and to the fir-fringed heights ahead of Ashdown Forest darkly outlined against the sky. Glorious in colour with its masses of purple heather and golden gorse, and sweet was the odour of the gorse that came wafted to us on the soft west wind. All England is not tamed or cultivated, and I am thankful, in a scenic sense, that some portions of it, such as the moors and heaths, still resist the dominion of man, as they have done for ages past. Not so Cobbett, for thus he writes apparently of this very spot in his *Rural Rides*: "You cross Ashdown Forest ... verily the most villainously ugly spot I ever saw in England ... getting, if possible, uglier and uglier all the way, till at last you see some rising spots which instead of trees present you with some ragged, hideous rocks." But no land was beautiful in Cobbett's view, I take it, unless it would grow good wheat; he notices the rocks, "hideous" in his eyes, though romantic in others, but has not a word for the glowing gorse or purple heather that I presumed flourished there in his day, as now. What was gorse or heather or their rich [Pg 63]
colours to him? You cannot eat gorse or heather; mere beauty he considered not, but a well-grown field of turnips sent him into raptures. Ashdown Forest climbing the hillside, though it only grows trees, is to me with its green glades, its groves of pine and their dim pillared recesses, as delightfully shady and as silent a retreat as the heart of man could desire, yet Cobbett deems it a "most villainously ugly spot." Let no one trust Cobbett's *Rural Rides* as a touring guide. Nor by his own showing does he appear to have been a very gracious traveller, for thus he writes of one inn where he stopped the night and left the next morning early: "By making a great stir in rousing waiters and boots and maids, and leaving behind me the name of a 'noisy troublesome fellow,' I got clear." I read Cobbett's *Rural Rides* in the hopes of gaining some information about scenery —and the only information I could gain was about the qualities, good or bad, of agricultural land. Now the title *Rural Rides* suggests pleasant rovings, not lectures upon land and upon politics.

We drove on to a spot right on the top of a hill overlooking Ashdown Forest, and there the road began a long and gradual descent, out of the sunshine into the green gloom of the woods. This descent we should have taken had we not espied a lonely byway to our left that appeared to keep on the high and open ground, so we chose the sunshine, the breezy upland, and the byway: a solitary signpost pointed down this with "West Hoathly" boldly displayed on its extended arm. Now West Hoathly was but a name to us, but to [Pg 64]
West Hoathly we would go; we might make discoveries there— which we did.

Writing of signposts reminds me that when touring in Somerset some years ago I asked my way of a man by the roadside, and he said to me, "Go straight on to the next parson; he will direct you." "The next parson," I exclaimed in astonishment; "whatever do you mean? I may not meet a parson for miles, or at all." "I see you don't understand," was the reply, "but us calls direction-posts parsons in these parts." "How is that?" I queried. "Well, I don't exactly know why, but us do." As I could glean nothing further I sought information elsewhere, and was fortunate enough to find a man who explained to me that "Some folks hereabouts calls direction-posts parsons, because they point the right way but don't go it. It's quite an old joke in these parts;" and he grinned as he repeated the joke to me. Old though it was I had not heard it before, though a Somerset clergyman to whom I told the story often had.

A glance at our map showed that the byway would probably take us into a remote corner of the land, far from travelled ways and into a country of woods and wildness, for beyond West Hoathly, marked on the map, were Worth, Tilgate, and St. Leonard's forests, close upon each other and altogether of considerable extent, with narrow lanes winding through and round about them. There surely we should be well out of the beaten track. That is one profitable use and pleasure of a map, to trace, now and then, a rough course upon it remote from town or rail. Many a delightful hour have I spent with [Pg 65]

a map before me, travelling in imagination by its aid when the winter storms and snow forbade road wandering for pleasure: so I would go up hill and down dale, now following the course of a river for miles, now coming to a ferry across it, now to a ford, now to a mill, now to a bridge by which I reached the other side and climbed up to a wild moorland solitude; then I would descend to the lowlands and make my way by somnolent villages, by shady woods and pleasant parks; then I would come to a ruined abbey, anon to an ancient castle, then to an old battlefield, a prehistoric camp, and occasionally to a Druids' circle, and all this whilst seated comfortably in my arm-chair before a blazing log fire. I think it was Sir Thomas Browne who said, though I am not quite sure of my authority, that to travel with a book was "the pleasantest way of all of travelling"; but I prefer a map, then in fancy I can go where I like, not where others take me. To show how useful a map may be to the discovering of interesting places that have not, generally, found their way into a guide-book, and to specialise in moated houses, I have now before me the Ordnance Survey Sheet of Stratford-on-Avon, No. 200, covering no great breadth of country, and I have just counted nine moated houses marked upon it, or "moats" at any rate; and these are they, being at, or close to, Inkberrow, Rose Lench, Wickhamford, Broom, Broad Marston, Clifford Chambers, and three around Throgmorton.

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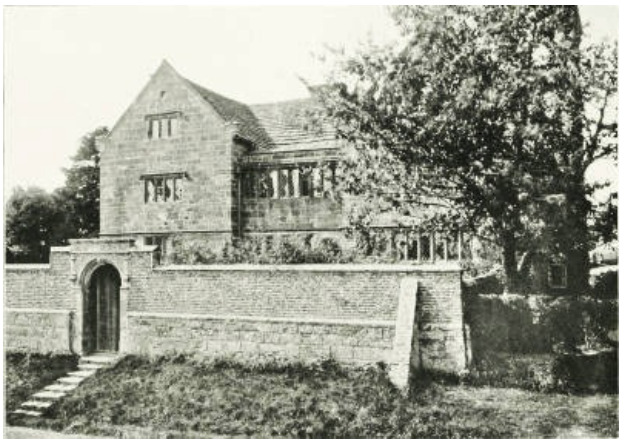
Proceeding along the byway, at first we crossed a wild heath, a perfect sea of heather, gorse, brambles, and bracken, islanded here and there by dark clumps of pines, their tops being tossed about by the brisk breeze, a breeze that bent the bracken below and harassed and hurried along the white clouds above. There was movement everywhere; great gleams of golden sunshine and patches of grey shadow chased one another over the land and raked the distant hills, then, as our eyes followed them, lost themselves in space. We rejoiced in the open-air confusion and in the clearness of the wind-swept atmosphere that caused all objects in the view to be free from any obstructing haze or mist, and, to the vision, brought the distance so near.

So, keeping still on the ridge of the hill, we came to West Hoathly standing high above the country around. Here we pulled up under the shelter of a yew-tree overhanging the churchyard, and opposite to a clean and creeper-covered little inn curiously entitled "The Cat"; and this reminds me that we observed some singular inn signs during the journey, and here are samples of a few of them: "The World turned upside Down," but unfortunately there were only those words on the signboard; I should have liked to see a pictured representation of the world shown thus. Then there was "The Devil's Elbow"—how did that originate, I wonder?—and "The Merry Mouth," showing a big mouth smiling a welcome on the sign; "The Labour in Vain" had pictured two white men endeavouring to scrub a black man white, truly a quaint idea. In Wales I noticed "The Aleppo Merchant," a sign I had not seen before, and of its significance I know nothing. "The End of the World" was realised by the world in flames; and there were others.



AN OLD TUDOR HOME, WEST HOATHLY.

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Strolling about the ancient village, I espied, on the further side of the churchyard, a grey old home of the Tudor time, so substantially built those long years ago that to-day it looks, but for the time-toning of its stones and the slight crumbling of one here and there, almost as perfect as when first finished. Its mullion windows are

without the usual transomes, and do not seem to need them; their leaden lattice-panes gleamed, just then, cheerfully in the light. Windows are the eyes of a house, in their way as expressive as those of a human being. I like to see a clear eye and a bright window. The old home was retired behind a high and buttressed wall, and in the centre of the wall was an arched outer doorway.

> Somewhat back from the village street
> Stands the old-fashioned country seat.

Its roof is of stone slates, the most lasting and the most lovely kind of roof imaginable, beautiful when new, and yet more beautiful when old; the stone slates in this case, as in every other I know, being carefully "sized down, the smaller ones to the top and the bigger towards the eaves, which gives one the same sort of pleasure in their orderly beauty as a fish's scales or a bird's feathers." There is no ornamentation at all about the building except some restrained carving at the top of the arched doorway in the garden wall; the charm of the building lies in its simplicity and goodly proportions, [Pg 68] perhaps also in the feeling of lastingness in that it seems fitted to still stand unhurt, as in the past, all the winds and storms of heaven for years uncounted, without a thought of repairs. A modern builder's "desirable residence" never gives me such an impression—indeed, it does not appear to me even "desirable." We seem to have lost all love of building simply, let alone honestly. We too often seek after striking effect and even quaintness, so as to challenge attention, if not admiration, to the loss of all repose and the sentiment of home; for a man's dwelling-place should be first of all to him a home.

Once I knew a country squire who desired to build himself a house on a fresh and more healthy site than that in which he lived, so he employed an up-to-date architect, full of ideas, to design him one. In due course the architect placed the elevation of the proposed house before the squire. It was a most unrestful production of needless gables for the sake of gables, tortured stone, and meaningless carvings, in all styles and no style at all, but intended to be impressive and to please. The architect said he thought it original and that it would "look well in stone." "Good gracious," exclaimed the squire, "do you think I am going to take a chair and sit out-of-doors and look at my house? I want one to live in." "Those are the very words I said to him," the squire told me, adding, "I asked for a home, and he produced a nightmare!"

Modest in size though that old Tudor home at West Hoathly is, [Pg 69] yet it suggests a certain sense of importance, just because it is so well built, with no pretence about it; and what a charm those two words, "no pretence," in an age of pretence and shams, convey. Pretence is an undesirable quality that threatens to submerge us all some day unless we cast it off, realising the utter nonsense and snobbishness of it. Modesty is a thing above most others to be desired, though a famous American once declared that "in our free country a man can get on very well without it." I quite believe that. But you cannot, architecturally speaking, in an ancient land "put new wine into old wine skins" successfully, or with any sense of artistic fitness—the new wine of novelty, I mean; that is best left for fresh lands that have no traditions.

I took a photograph of the old Tudor house from the churchyard, and there I got a-chatting with a man in a faded tweed suit who had watched my proceedings with apparent interest. I took him to be a local inhabitant, but to use an antiquary's favourite expression, "I could not quite sum him up," nor did he enlighten me as to who or what he was; but, after all, it was no affair of mine. At first he talked about the weather, by way of introduction, I presume, for it is a topic that never fails amongst country folk. I really do not know what they would do in dull places without the weather to praise or abuse; even the tramp, whose sole object is to beg, invariably first starts upon the weather, and so he feels his way.

"If you are interested in old places," said the stranger, "you [Pg 70] should see the ancient priest-house a little lower down the road," pointing indefinitely into space. "It's well worth seeing; and you might like to take a glance at the church, it's very old too." I thanked him for the information. Then he led me to the porch and pointed out the oak door there that was grey, not dark, with age, begging me to notice the date upon it, marked in big studded nails, "March 31, 1626." "There's a Devil's door in the north wall; you

might take a look at that now you're here, but it's built up," remarked my companion. "The Devil's door!" I exclaimed. "I never heard of such a thing. Surely the Devil does not go to church?" I was puzzled; I asked for enlightenment. "Well, you see," came the reply, "it's certainly not everybody nowadays who is aware of the fact, but in past times there used to be a small doorway on the north side of churches to let the Devil out when a child was baptized, and it was always kept open on such an occasion; but that's an ancient superstition." I was anxious to learn more about it. The stranger had become interesting, and I wished to chat longer with him; but he suddenly exclaimed, "I must be really getting home or the missus will wonder whatever has become of me. I promised to be home ten minutes ago; it don't do to offend my missus"—and I thought he laid a special and meaning emphasis on "my"; so he bade me a polite good-day and hurried off. He was a meek-looking man. I hope he did not get a scolding for the time he took talking to me. I wished his [Pg 71] missus had been away from home that day, for I was anxious to learn more about the Devil's door; my curiosity was aroused. That call of the missus was most provoking. I nearly followed the stranger home to glean what further information on the way I could, but I thought he might not care for my company under the circumstances. Thus the traveller in out-of-the-way places picks up forgotten facts or fables, surprising traditions, and odd bits of local lore; but the chaff has to be winnowed from the corn.

On my return home I hunted in every likely book for any information upon the Devil's doorway, but found no allusion to the subject. I sought out several parsons, presuming that one of them would surely be able to throw some light on the matter; but they all declared that they had never heard of such a thing, so I began to think that the stranger had made a fool of me, and that I was myself a fool to be so easily taken in. Yet when I recalled the stranger's face, it had an honest look; he seemed hardly a man to invent so poor a joke, and, provided it was a joke, I failed to see the humour of it. Then one day afterwards, when chatting with a learned antiquary, I suddenly remembered about the Devil's door; so I mentioned the tale about it I had been told, and he confirmed the truth of it. "Such doors in churches were quite common, if not universal, long ago," he said; "they were always on the north or Devil's side of the church, and may still be found in many churches, though their purport has long been forgotten. I even remember a certain parson who, only twenty odd years past, insisted on having [Pg 72] this door kept wide open during a christening, so as to afford a ready escape for the Devil, who was supposed to be driven out of the child." Curiously enough, after making so many vain inquiries on the subject, I found friends to whom the former existence and use of the Devil's door was quite well known.

Leaving the church I went down the village street to inspect the ancient priest-house. This proved to be a long, low, half-timber building; its roof was of stone slates, as most roofs of the period were; the house has manifestly been restored at some recent time, though carefully restored backwards, as far as I could judge, to the intention of the original builder. Unfortunately my photograph, here reproduced, gives no hint of the bloom of age that is upon it, or of the subtle curves of the weather-bleached timber caused by the stress of time. I have found in photographing many an ancient building, unless its walls are actually broken and decayed away, how little the photograph realises its antiquity. In my photograph of Boarstall Tower (that we shall come to later on), in spite of the years the tower has stood, and in spite of the battering of two sieges it has undergone, the ancient structure, hoary with the antiquity of over five centuries, looks almost as though the builder had but lately completed his work.

The approach to the priest-house was by a stone-flagged footway across a garden gay and sweet-scented with old-fashioned flowers. "Scents are the souls of flowers," says an old writer whose name I have forgotten: if only these hardy, old-fashioned flowers were rare and difficult to grow, how we should prize them for their charm of colour and their sweetness, both so happily combined! But the modern highly-paid gardener despises them as common: well, the uncultivated foxglove is common enough flourishing in neglected spots, yet no pampered hothouse flower seems half so graceful, stately, or pleasing to my eye.

A PRE-REFORMATION PRIEST-HOUSE, WEST HOATHLY.

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The door of the house was of oak and nail-studded, and there was a quaintly-shaped iron knocker on it of some antiquity; a gentle tap or two of this brought an old woman to me. "Could I see the house?" I queried. "Why, certainly," she replied; "that's what I be here for, to show it to any one, and to take care of it. I'm only too pleased to see a visitor, I don't see many; it be a bit dull living here alone, it makes me feel almost silly like at times. Come in, please." Fortune was kind; I hardly expected to see over the place, and I found not only ready admission but a guide at my service. The old body proved intelligent but talkative; she told me one thing after another about the place and its history in such breathless succession that I scarce could follow her; I begged for a little time just to jot down a note or two, but as soon as I started to do this she recommenced prattling harder than ever. I think I never before met a woman capable of getting in so many words to the minute, though I have met many very capable ones in that respect. The worst of it was, she had really much of interest to relate, but so eager and in so much haste was she to relate it that I could only secure stray items out of her hurricane of abundance. She had the history of the old place by heart, and was learnedly—would only that she had been leisurely—informative about its contents.

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First I was shown the living-room, or ancient kitchen, a picturesquely antique apartment with its low black-beamed ceiling, its red brick floor, its recessed lattice window, its door that opened with a wooden latch, its wide stone hearth fireplace, with andirons in position and logs of wood laid between them ready for the burning, not to forget the chimney crane with an iron pot suspended from it, nor the brick oven by the side for the baking of bread—and what superlatively excellent bread those old brick ovens produced! In some things we have progressed backwards, and one of these is the making and baking of bread. The iron fire-back, I noticed, had the royal arms cast in bold relief upon it, but in place of the unicorn was the Elizabethan griffin, and on the quarterings of the shield (I believe that is the correct heraldic expression) were only the three lions of England and the fleurs-de-lis of France, each repeated diagonally. On the big oak beam above the fireplace were carved sundry curious devices; they were but meaningless hieroglyphics to me, and the old body confessed that no one had been able to make anything of them; possibly they were "invented out of the carver's brain," with no other thought than to while away a dull hour or two.

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A good deal of what the old body told me might have been told to the winds for aught I could remember or make note of; even an American tourist devoting ten whole days "to do" England in somehow, and allowing out of this twenty minutes for Westminster Abbey, could not have complained of such a guide delaying him. Not that all, or even the majority of Americans are like this, for I have met many cultured Americans seeing the old country every whit as leisurely as I. Indeed, I knew an American party who came over to take a motoring tour through England, and were so fascinated by a remote English village they chanced upon, besides finding there a really comfortable, old-fashioned inn, that the party, with one consent, stopped a whole week in that village, contentedly exploring the country around; and one of the party wrote me afterwards that she had never spent such a pleasant or a profitable week in her life, and she thought she might safely say the same of the rest.

Of the hurried notes I managed to make about the priest-house at the time, and those I set down from memory afterwards, I gathered

that it was built not later than 1350, possibly earlier. Originally there was a large hall heated by a fire on a raised stone set in the centre, the smoke of which escaped through a hole in the roof, and the old plaster of the roof still shows the blackening caused by the smoke. At either end of the hall were doors leading to offices, the sleeping-rooms being above these. Such was its simple plan. About 1522 the present chimney was built on the site of the ancient open fire, and the hall divided into two compartments "as you now see it." "And how do you know all this?" queried I, when I could get a word [Pg 76] in. "Well, you see, sir, at different times members of Archaeological Societies have been over to examine the building, and I always went over with them, and so I learnt a lot about it. The house was originally built by the Prior of Lewes as a hospital for invalid priests, and it also served the purpose of a guest-house for stray travellers; the roads in these parts were then but rough tracks through wild forests, full of wild beasts, they tell me. In the chimney a hiding hole was discovered, but it was only three feet square, and as a man could not get into it, it is supposed it was for hiding treasures, or perhaps books."

The old house was full of ancient furniture and of odds and ends of curious things that served our ancestors. I remember there was a steel striker and a flint with a tinder-box; I tried my prentice hand with these, and after several attempts at last obtained a light, but with difficulty; it must have been trying and tedious work using this steel, flint, and tinder-box on a cold winter's morning. Little wonder so many houses in past times had their fires piled up at night so that they might keep in till the morning, when the smouldering ashes readily caused the fresh fuel put on them to become ignited. At one old manor-house I went over some years back, I was informed that the fire in the hall had not been out for two centuries; even in summer it was kept alight, day and night, for the walls of that house were thick, and the hall was only pleasantly warm on the fine August noon when I was there. A friend of mine told me that in 1908 [Pg 77] he discovered a cottage at Huckaback, Castleton, Yorkshire, where the turf fire had not been out for sixty-eight years.

Upstairs in the priest-house we noticed that the internal partitions were of wattle and daub; the daub, the old body said, consisting of pond slime combined with cow hair and chipped straw: pond slime does not sound nice, but the daub was lasting, to which fact my eye and the touch of my hand bore testimony. Then hanging on the walls we observed two parchment deeds framed, one being the original lease from "The Pryor of Lewes to T. Browne of Westhotheleigh, of the Parsonage House and barn." This was dated "9th yeare of Henry VIII." It did not escape my notice that, even so far back, this Brown rejoiced in an added "e." The other had two red seals attached, and related to the conveying of "the Rectory and Church of Westhotheley lately granted by Henry VIII. for her lyfe to Lady Anne Cleve." This was dated "Jan. 21st. 2nd of Elizabeth, 1560." The lettering of both of these documents was as clear and as black as the day they were written, and so quite easy to read, more so than many a modern letter I receive. The world has revolved countless times on its axis since the date of those deeds; but the writing of to-day is not so good as it was then, not even typewriting.

On the ceiling of one of the top rooms is a Dedication Cross, deeply cut, showing the religious nature of the house; also we noticed there, put on one side, some fine oak carving which I learnt [Pg 78] formerly formed part of the chancel screen of the village church, it being torn down by the Puritans, who destroyed, or made a clearance of, "all carvings, images, and decorations" they found in the sacred edifice; and a rare clearance they appear to have made at West Hoathly. Besides this there was a large board showing signs of weathering, and plainly painted on it was "Cheese Room." "That," explained the guide, "did not belong to this place, but to a farmhouse near by. It is a relic of the window-tax days, when a window, used purely for trade purposes, was free of the tax, provided a notice of its use was placed above it. That is one of those notices. Possibly you may not have seen such a thing before." I had not. Indeed, I had almost forgotten that there had ever been such an iniquitous tax (and that there was a hearth-tax also), and was quite unaware of any such an exemption from it. I was always learning something on the road.

Very interesting is the old priest-house at West Hoathly, the more so because it is not bare, but supplied with ancient, though not the original, furniture in keeping with the place, and with domestic

appliances that were used in days remote. On my return home I sought for particulars of this house in two or three modern guide-books to the county, but could find no mention of it, although the church was briefly noticed, which shows that guide-book compilers miss many interesting features by the way, to the discovery of which the traveller must trust to his own devices; and do we not take a special personal pride and a greater delight in the good things that we discover for ourselves, than in those we first read of, or are told about? Much of the charm of a journey lies in making these discoveries, and in the delightful state of expectancy of mind knowing not what each day, or even hour, may reveal.

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CHAPTER V

"Great-upon-Little"—The woods of Sussex—A maze of lanes—Frensham Pond—A holiday haunt—The legend of the shivering reeds—Rural inns—Roughing it (?)—Waverley Abbey—The monks of old—The sites of abbeys—Quiet country towns—Stocks and whipping-post—A curious font—"A haven of rest."

About a mile from West Hoathly, on the way we took, we were told of a local "lion" in the shape of a huge rock, firmly balanced on a very small one, which together have earned the title of "Great-upon-Little." The great top rock looks insecure enough, and as though a push of the hand would almost send it over. This curious rock stands in a romantic and deeply wooded glen some half a mile or so from the main road, and many other strangely shaped rocks are to be found there; shapes manifestly due to the erosion of the softer stone leaving the harder portions to stand out more or less prominently. To one who has beheld the wonderful rock formations of the Yellowstone Valley in America, this "Great-upon-Little" may appear but a trivial thing; still, in its way it is striking. But it was the rock-girt glen with its green woods, a glen steeply winding down the rough hillside, that charmed me infinitely more than this natural freak—a veritable fairies' glen that would have made the fortune of [Pg 81] any watering-place were it only near to it. Cobbett in his *Rural Rides* thus discourses about this rock in his own peculiar way: "At this place there is a rock which they call 'Big-upon-Little,' that is to say, a rock upon another, the top one being longer and wider than the top of the one it lies on. This big rock is no trifling concern, being as big, perhaps, as a not very small house. How, then, came this big upon little? What lifted up the big? It balances itself naturally enough, but what tossed it up? I do not like to pay a parson for teaching me while I have God's own Word to teach me; but if any parson will tell me how big came upon little, I do not know that I shall grudge him a trifle. And if he cannot tell me this; if he say, 'All that we have to do is to admire and adore,' then I tell him that I can admire and adore without his aid, and that I will keep my money in my pocket." Which shows, however clever an agriculturist he may have been, Cobbett was woefully ignorant of geology, whilst little he cared for scenery. The reading of his *Rides*, allowing for much skipping, was a wearisome task to me, and glad was I when I came to the end of the book. After this dose of Cobbett and his grumblings, I had to take a course of genial Charles Lamb to put me in good humour again.

Our road now took us by shadowy forests, which afforded us some shelter from the quiet rain which began to fall, and here and there we glimpsed, half drowned in foliage, a lowly cottage, with its film of ascending smoke, and now and then we caught a warm and [Pg 82] fragrant whiff of burning wood that contrasted pleasantly with the cool scent of the many trees, their leaves rain-washed and shining. So we drove on through woods and woods again, with here and there a bit of wild waste, a patch of pasture, or a furrowed field, and here and there the gleam of water—driving first this way, then that, as it took our fancy. Some ways were wide and good, and some were narrow and bad, but the country had a remote and pleasant look; so with the roads I had no quarrel. The scenery concerns me more than the road. I never hesitate to desert the smooth highway for the rough and winding lane if the latter appear the more attractive. My mind is set on exploring, on seeking out odd nooks and corners, not on rushing from one town to another, though, when the highway suits my humour, along it I go contentedly enough.

So we drove on till we came to a more open country of meadows and tilled fields and stray farmsteads, but with woods beyond again, and over these a peep of distant hills with misty clouds upon them. A mellow, home-like land it was, where wandering streams kept fresh the greenery of the fields, and ancient footpaths wound in and out, and tangled hedges that so beautify the land, though they show poor husbandry, bordered the roadside on either hand. Then we struck upon a fair main road, though there was little traffic on it; in time the road forked in two, and at the fork a signpost pointed with one arm the way "To Guildford," and with the other arm the way "To [Pg 83] Godalming." We chose the road to Godalming because it looked the more inviting. Now we passed other woods that climbed the low hills to our right, then we began to climb the hills ourselves, to descend again into the valley on the other side; so on through a

rough country, dotted with pleasant homes, both old and new, we reached the long-streeted town of Godalming. I had an idea—how I came by it I cannot say—that Godalming was a pleasant and a picturesque town; my drive through it effectually got rid of that idea. I saw nothing pleasant or picturesque about it, even allowing for the determined and depressing drizzle that dulled the outlook. Perhaps I saw things crookedly that day, but to me, certainly, Godalming looked a one-streeted affair of commonplace houses and shops, with not a feature amongst the lot worth noticing, not even its old market-house.

The road we took out of the town chanced to be the famous Portsmouth road, much favoured by motorists and other vehicular traffic, and not caring for so much company, in due course we took a by-road to our right without a thought as to where it might lead. We soon got into a tangle of narrow, signpostless lanes; so narrow in one part, indeed, became our way that our hood actually at times brushed the hedges on either side, a lane where almost "two barrows might tremble when they meet." Indeed, had we met any cart, conveyance, or another motor I cannot imagine what we should have done, but we met nothing; for miles the tangle of lanes appeared to be endless, one as narrow as the other; then at last I [Pg 84] espied a cottage and got down to ask where the lane led, for I felt like a man in a maze. Thrice I rapped loudly at the cottage door before I got an answer; then at the third emphatic rap an old woman appeared. "I be hard o' hearing," she remarked, by way of apology for her long coming. "The lane do lead to the pond. It's only about a mile farther on." "To the pond!" I exclaimed in astonishment. "What pond? We don't want to go to a pond!" "Why, *the* pond, to be sure," responded she; "but I've left my baking." And that was all I could get out of her, for, doubtless anxious about her baking, she rushed incontinently indoors and left me wondering. I could only presume that we were driving to a village pond, with the uncomfortable idea that there the narrow lane might end. There was nothing to do but to drive on—there was no space to turn; for miles we had not seen a soul, so unfrequented are some of the byways of populous England, but at last a man actually appeared trudging along the road. To him I repeated my query, and got the same reply!—"To the pond"—adding, "It be only a bit farther on." I was more puzzled than ever. "What pond?" asked I. "Why, Frensham Pond, to be sure." Then it dawned upon me that a friend of mine had spoken of Frensham Pond, to which he frequently went a-fishing, and where he told me was a good inn—"the very place for a quiet holiday," and he was an artist not likely to speak favourably of a spot that had no scenic attractions.

Right glad were we to escape from the narrow lane and to find [Pg 85] ourselves at Frensham Pond, where the road widened out beside the still water, and where the little balconied inn my friend had told me about stood facing it. Now Frensham Pond is a large and beautiful sheet of water over a hundred acres in extent, and to go round it means a good three miles' walk, so the term pond is somewhat of a misnomer; "mere," I think, would be a better and less misleading title, more picturesque besides. A good deal depends on a name; at least one does expect a pleasant spot to bear a pleasant name: now "pond" is not one to conjure with.

It was raining again, so we pulled up under the shelter of a spreading tree opposite the hotel, whereupon the landlord appeared at the door and invited me within; but I explained that I was only halting there, as I thought the shower would soon be over, and I wished to admire the view. I was neither hungry nor thirsty, so what need had I of an inn? "It's a lovely spot," the landlord remarked, and as I looked over the little lonely lake with its near background of pines, of heathery hills beyond these, and nothing else in view, I fully agreed with him. Even in the rain the prospect pleased me; there was an individuality about it, it was fresh to my eye, nothing quite like it had I seen before. "You really should make up your mind to stop here," the landlord continued, doubtless with an eye to business. "There's fine fishing in the pond, and a boat at your service; there's plenty of big pike and perch that are willing to be caught"—which was very kind of the fish; I have not found them so obliging in other parts. There was a man in a boat on the water [Pg 86] getting wet, but catching nothing, as far as I could make out, unless it were a cold. It seemed poor sport to me to sit thus patiently in a boat with the rain coming down, watching for the bob of a float on the chance of catching a fish not worth eating. Fly-fishing is quite

another story. When you wander along the banks of some fair mountain river or stream, even if you have poor sport, you have a pleasant ramble over rock and boulder and amongst pleasant scenes; moreover, your time is ever agreeably occupied in casting your flies and watching them dance on the running water till comes a splash, a tug, and a tasteful trout good to look at, good to eat, and worth the basketing!

Suddenly the rain stopped, the grey clouds vanished, the sun shone forth again out of a sky as blue as the summer sea; the erst leaden lake looked like molten gold, the hills became a burning purple, but the dark pines seemed darker still by the contrast with the brightness around. What wind there was had dropped, but all the reeds were quivering, and I thought of the legend of the shivering reeds.

Leaving Frensham—where, by the way, in the tower of its church is preserved an ancient copper cauldron that tradition asserts once belonged to Mother Ludlam, a reputed local witch—we drove by devious roads through a sandy and heathery land, and into pine woods, the resinous odours of which filled pleasantly the air. We passed one or two lonely little inns on our way. To me a picturesque, though little regarded, feature of the roadside is the cosy country inn of the class that rises superior to the public-house but is less pretentious than an hotel, where I have found, during my old tramping days, humble doubtless, but sufficiently comfortable quarters, and where I got in touch with the simple and friendly country folk, and so could learn how the world treated them, and what they thought of it, and their ideas in general. The only way to do this is to mix with the country folk on their own ground, and clad in a suit of homely tweed, with often muddy boots, I was not looked upon as a superior person, so the talk I listened to was not curbed; only perhaps at times my speech, I feared, might betray me, for I could in no way manage the country accent, but I spoke little, whilst my ears did me silent service.

> Imagination fondly stoops to trace
> The parlour splendours of that festive place;
> The whitewash'd wall, the nicely sanded floor,
> The varnish'd clock that click'd behind the door.

"A GOOD HONEST ALEHOUSE."

[Pg 87]

Dear old Izaak Walton called such an inn "a good honest ale-house," and that title takes my fancy. "I'll now lead you to a good honest ale-house," says that rare old angler, "where we shall find a cleanly room, lavender in the windows, and twenty ballads stuck upon the walls.... Come, hostess, where are you? Is supper ready?... Be as quick as you can, for I believe we are all very hungry." That is the sort of inn for me; I do not desire luxury when I go a-touring. The more homely my hostelry the more to my taste, so long as I find cleanliness, civility, and reasonable comfort thereat. I even enjoy what some people might term "roughing it" at times; in truth I have spent many delightful red-letter days (some of the most healthful and enjoyable I have ever spent) "roughing it" in a log-hut on the wild far-off Californian mountains, and there I found a wealthy and a titled Englishman doing the same thing, purely for the pleasure of it. If in some remote parts and on rare occasions I was doubtful as to the cleanliness of my inn, I made a point of not unpacking the car before I had sampled the landlord and the accommodation offered. I am glad to say that never once, on this journey, did I find the inn I selected fail to satisfy my modest requirements.

[Pg 88]

Loitering along we came at the foot of a long hill, passing first through gloomy woods, to a spot low down where the indolent winding Wey widened out into a quiet, clear-watered pool, and all around were pine-clad hills; an old water-mill and one or two ancient cottages completed the scene, just serving to humanise it and nothing more. It was a lovely spot, and there we pulled up to enjoy its beauties at our leisure. I know no other country in the wide world with spots so peace-bestowing as, here and there, one finds in England, and to come upon them unawares intensifies the charm of them; I cannot think of a word that precisely defines their special character, but "benign" is not far out.

Then I consulted the map and traced on it the river's course, and so made out, roughly, where we were, and it chanced I noticed on the map "Waverley Abbey" marked apparently near by. Now I had a [Pg 89] dim recollection, but nothing more, that there was such an abbey, ruined of course, somewhere in England, but as to where it stood I had not given a thought up till that moment; if I had to hazard a guess as to its location, I am afraid I should have guessed Yorkshire, though the fact came back to me that Waverley Abbey suggested to Scott the title of one of his famous novels. Ivinghoe in Bucks is also credited with having given him the slightly altered title of *Ivanhoe*. Rumour asserts that his attention was called to the uncommon name by the local rhyme:

> Tring, Wing, and Ivinghoe,
> Hampden of Hampden did forego,
> For striking ye Prynce a blow,
> Glad that he might escape it so.

"Ye Prynce" was the Black Prince, and Hampden an ancestor of John Hampden, so tradition says, and the blow was given over a dispute about a game of racquets that Hampden lost. I love these old local rhymes and sayings that the inquiring traveller so often comes upon, for they frequently relate to past historical or traditional happenings that have been wholly or half forgotten, and are only otherwise to be found in odd musty volumes that no one cares to read.

We stopped the car in a sheltered corner not far from the lodge entrance to a pleasant park, and seeing no one around I ventured to ask at the lodge the whereabouts of the abbey. "You're close to it," responded the young woman, who promptly and civilly came at my [Pg 90] call; "it's only a short walk across the fields." Moreover, she came outside and pointed me out the way, bidding me keep to the path by the river till I came to a bridge, "then to your left you will see the ruins." Clearer instructions could no one give, and so I found the abbey. Pleasant indeed was the short stroll to it by the side of the lazy river, with the greenest of green meadows on one hand so soft to the tread, and wide spreading trees on the other that threw "tangles of light and shadow below." So listlessly the water flowed it hardly seemed to flow at all; manifestly the river was loth to leave so fair a spot to join the stormy sea, and fain would linger there in peace. I think it was Wordsworth who first endowed Nature with a living personality.

Of Waverley's once stately pile little now is left but crumbling walls and vacant archways; still, its low, roofless remains cover much ground, a fact that attests its former size and glory. The quiet country around, I imagine, has not changed noticeably, if at all, since the abbey stood proudly there in its prime—to stand, as the early builders doubtless thought, till the Day of Doom; but the future was not at their command. As in the past the placid river flows by it without a murmur, the hills beyond rise boldly to the sky, the luscious meadows round about are the same luscious meadows that the old monks trod; but their erst lordly edifice is mostly dust, its stones having been basely used for other buildings, and for a long while to make and mend the roads; still, the country looks as green and fresh as ever, its youth renewed by every recurring [Pg 91] summer. I can recall no spot of which so poignantly and so pregnantly may be said, "Sic transit gloria mundi."

An almost saintly silence brooded there; I heard neither stir of leaf nor song of bird, nor caught I sight of any living thing to break the solitude. It was as though the monks had laid a spell of profound peace over all, a spell unbroken yet—and may it never be!

> A region of repose it seems,
> A place of slumber and of dreams,

The peace-bestowing silence and restful solitude of the spot will linger with me as long as my memory lasts. Great must have been the temptation, in a troublous age, to be a monk, so to escape from all the turmoil of it, and to live at peace and at ease in some such earthly paradise. Many a world-weary man to-day well might sigh for such a harbour of rest.

Truly those monks of old had an eye for pleasant places; they built "in fair grounds," as the sites of their many abbeys prove. Father Gonzague, Prior of Storrington, puts it: "Some were built in the valley by the running stream, or on the jutting hill, overhanging the river bank, like St. Agatha's and Eggleston in Yorkshire; others close on the seashore, within hearing of the perpetual cadence of the waves, like Torre, the wealthiest of the English houses in Devonshire, on a spot the charm of which is not easily surpassed, backed by hills and uplands, with just room enough on the plain for the noble church, the monastery and its outbuildings, its gardens, [Pg 92] its fish ponds, and its mill; or again among the deep and narrow dales of Derbyshire; or the gentle swell of the Kentish hills; in the forest land of Nottinghamshire, like Welbeck; or else in remote and wild retreats, speaking of penance and detachment, like the Abbey of Magdalen's Vale at Shap, in Westmoreland." Then there are others in situations quite as romantic and as gracious: there is Tintern by the winding Wye, Bolton by the tumbling Wharfe, Fountains sheltered amongst the woods, Rievaulx amongst the hills, Llanthony lone amongst the mountains, Cleeve secluded in the "Vale of Flowers," and many another—all in well-favoured spots and tranquil ones in ancient days, and some, like Waverley, as tranquil now.

A better judge of scenery than the monk of old there could not be; where stood his abbey there was a pleasant land, well watered, overflowing with beauty, and not seldom "overflowing with milk and honey" too. If one could trust that rare romancer Time, the monks were a jovial lot—"peace to their ashes"—reaping where they had not sown, and garnering where they had not toiled; making sure of heaven above whilst also making sure of the good things of the world below, ay, and enjoying them to the full as much as any sinner. To make the best of both worlds, especially this one, that was their motto, and they lived up to it. Of the modern monks that I have seen, one half look fat and lazy, the other half lean and sour, with an aspect of piety that would not have disgraced the strictest Puritan. But I know not if one can fairly judge of the old by the new. [Pg 93] "Tempora mutantur," and possibly monks with them, and this is all that need be said.

Of the scant abbey ruins the only portion not wholly exposed to the weather is what looks like the crypt, with its fine and delicate Early English pillars and groined roof; but it has a fireplace, and from a label attached to its walls I learned it was the "Layman's Refectory." The rest of the ruins are roofless, and it is difficult to make out, with any certainty, even the site of the church—at least I found it so. On the greensward I noticed, level with the ground surface, a stone coffin vacant and exposed to the sky, presumably discovered there and left undisturbed save for the removal of its covering; this was hollowed out to the shape of a body, with a place for the head; probably it belonged to one of the stately abbots' dust and ashes long years ago, but the interior of the stone still preserves the chisel marks of the ancient mason, as sharp almost to-day as when first made. Somehow those marks so old, yet so clear, that but for the time-stains upon them might be of recent date, bridged over the centuries and brought the past quite close to me.

Leaving the old abbey to its peaceful seclusion, we once more resumed our way and soon found ourselves at Farnham, far famed for its castle and its ancient coaching hostelry—"The Bush," to wit—and possibly also for hops and ale, but of these I am not so sure. "The Bush," says Thackeray in his *Virginians*, "is a famous inn which has stood in Farnham town for these three hundred years." But why [Pg 94] I refer to this old house, in passing, is that its sign is the oldest of signs, which, in ancient days, consisted simply of a bush hung out at the end of a pole to show that wine, or ale, was sold there. Hence doubtless the saying of Shakespeare, "Good wine needs no bush."

After Farnham we struck the Winchester highway, dusty with much traffic at the time, so to escape both the traffic and the dust we took the first lane we came to—a lane that led past hop-gardens,

up hill and down again; next winding round a well-wooded park it brought us to the little out-of-the-world village of Crondall, where I noticed one or two quaint half-timber houses of sufficient charm to cause me to stop and sketch them. Then after a short stretch of tree-bordered road we arrived at Odiham, a sleepy, sunny, wide-streeted town to which "no noisy railway speeds"; perhaps because of this it retains unhurt so much of its past-time naturalness. On a previous journey we had driven through Odiham, without however stopping, even though it pleased us, but we reached it by a different way. There is often a great deal in the first impression of a place, and this frequently depends upon how you approach it. No doubt there is a certain charm in the first view of fresh places, when such places possess the power to please and present themselves under favourable aspects, but it is wisdom not to linger in them overlong lest the eye should discover imperfections, so their poetry lose much of its glamour, or wholly vanish like a dream that has passed.

Before, when at Odiham, the "George" inn there, facing the [Pg 95] roadway with its cheerful front and projecting sign, attracted my attention: a typical old coaching hostelry that looks as though it had seen more prosperous days, yet it had not retired from business but kept open wide its doors, bravely facing changed circumstances. "Posting House" in letters large is still boldly displayed on its front, but its posting is done to-day by the landlord's motor-car! *Paterson's Roads*, the Bradshaw of our ancestors, mentions the "George" as the inn of the place, and nearly every old roadside inn one comes across still retains the very title given to it in that rare eighteenth and early nineteenth-century road-book, according to which of its many editions one consults.

Now being, by chance, at Odiham again, I thought I would put up at the "George" and sample its entertainment. Quarters in the real country best please me, but they do not always materialise; next I prefer a modest hostelry in some quiet little town, and here I had my desire. So beneath the sign of the "George" I slept that night, and there I found a pleasant garden in the rear, good fare of the simple sort, much civility, and a most moderate bill; so, when next morning I departed, I left it with my blessing. I discovered that the inn was, unfortunately, for sale; it may have been sold by now. I can only trust that the old house may fall into the hands of worthy successors, and that it will, for as long as it stands, and long may that be, retain its good old name; for it must be remembered it is [Pg 96] the landlord makes the inn.

Does not Alonzo of Aragon say that the recommendations of age are "old wood to burn, old wine to drink, old friends to trust, and old authors to read"? and I should like to add old inns to rest at, and by preference those inns of the candle or lamp, mahogany or oak furniture, and wood-fire-on-the-hearth period, and these, the Fates be praised, are still to be found by the diligent searcher, and when found the wise traveller will not tell everybody about them. In this respect selfishness is a virtue, a moral obligation for the benefit of other quiet-loving travellers; for it is so easy to convert the old into the new, but the new cannot be converted into the old. I was tempted to photograph one of these ancient little inns I chanced upon, on account of its artistic signboard, for it is rare to meet with such artistic creations, though a few may be found to delight the eye of the wayfarer. My photograph, here reproduced, will show the skilful and effective painting of this signboard.

Having still an hour or two of daylight left, I took a stroll round the little town; it did not take me long; then I came to the church, and in the roadway before it I discovered, carefully roofed over, its ancient stocks and whipping-post; evidently the Odiham people prize these relics of "the good" or bad "old days." Then I took a glance within the church, where I found much to interest me; there I noticed seven old brasses in an excellent state of preservation—for old brasses—and these were kept both bright and clean; they were fixed against the south wall all in close order, being doubtless removed from the floor at some former restoration. Though removed thus from their proper place over the dust they commemorate, and where they should rightly be, they certainly are seen to better advantage where they are—and their dead owners are not far off. All the brasses but two happily retain their inscriptions; the earliest bears date of 1400; one to a priest in his vestments that of 1498; and there is one to a man in armour, roughly but effectively engraved. The piscina, I noticed, had an ornamented pillar support; I do not remember having seen such an arrangement before. I

noticed also the finely carved Elizabethan or Jacobean pulpit, and besides, a thing you seldom nowadays see in churches, an oak gallery, of considerable antiquity, upheld by stout oak posts. Then I became aware that I was not alone in the building, for I heard quiet footsteps, and looking round observed a man at the font, apparently examining it with considerable interest, so too I needs must go and examine it. Said the stranger to me, "This is a curious font and a very ancient one." "It certainly looks it," I replied. "Perhaps you may not know," he continued, "but it possesses a peculiar feature only to be found in one other font in England, and that is at Youlgrave in Derbyshire. Permit me to point out to you the cup-like projection on the top; this is provided to drain back into the basin any drops of water that might be accidentally spilt at a christening." Some people delight to be informing, but the information they impart depends for its value on their special knowledge of special subjects. I observed that the stranger was carefully consulting a handbook when I approached him, which he put away in his pocket, and I thought to myself possibly the stranger has just read up about the font in that book, and is merely imparting to me second-hand information gleaned from it just for the self-importance of imparting it, and to show his cleverness. I might have done him an injustice, but he spoke in a manner so authoritative as to challenge criticism. Anyway I have not the implicit faith in handbooks most people have, for more than once I have found them wrong in facts beyond dispute. So I have examined for myself the "curious" projection, being a bit of an archaeologist, though not a learned one, and came to the conclusion that there was nothing curious about it, and that it had merely been intended to receive a hinge for a font cover. But such an explanation is perhaps too simple to be satisfactory to certain minds to which only the singular or mysterious appeals.

AT "THE QUEEN'S HEAD."

[Pg 97]

Round the top of the font runs a much-worn inscription in long Lombardic, or other early lettering, of which I could make nothing; no more could the stranger, but he made excuse that the light was very poor; so it was. "If we only had a guide-book," I said suggestively, but he failed to take the hint. [Pg 98]

Leaving the church I noticed some picturesque alms-houses adjoining its quiet "God's Acre," built of brick but grey with age, of one story, uneven-roofed, with shapely chimney-stacks, which houses with their enclosed garden, full of flowers—and weeds—reminded me of Walker's famous picture "A Haven of Rest," though they were not the original of it. Then as the sun was setting I sought [Pg 99]

"mine inn."

CHAPTER VI

"Mine ease in mine inn"—King John's Castle—Greywell—Country odours—Hidden beauty-spots—The valley of the Kennett—A remote spot—Our picturesque villages—The charm of ancientness—Solitude and genius—Coate—Richard Jefferies' birthplace.

That evening in the coffee-room of the "George" there was only one other guest besides myself, and we sat apart at either end of a long table taking our meals in unfriendly silence. It was very stupid and very English. The other guest was an austere-looking, clean-shaven man neatly dressed in a tweed of grey; he might have been a lord (though it was hardly an inn that lords would patronise), or a commercial traveller of a superior type in his own opinion: I inclined to the latter view. However, what he was did not trouble me, but the silence did, so I ventured some ordinary remark about the weather, that being, as the chess handbooks have it, "a common, but a safe opening." The stranger agreed that it was a warm day, then relapsed into silence. Thought I, everybody golfs now; I will try him on that. His reply was brief and sarcastic: "I'm no golfer. I think, as a game, it's inferior to marbles." Then silence again. After that I mentioned motoring as a possible subject of interest, for so many [Pg 101] people motor nowadays, either on their own, their friends', or on hired cars. "No, I don't motor," responded he; "only went on a motor once, and I don't want to go on one again." At this point I fancy most people would have given up the game, for when every card you play is promptly trumped it hardly seems worth going on, but I determined to try one last card. I played fishing. That was a failure too. "No, I'm no fisherman," said he; "never fished since I was a boy. I think it poor sport. A worm or a fly at one end of a line and a fool at the other, as the saying is." I never came upon so pronounced a specimen of a pessimist, and pessimism with the added acid of sarcasm is the devil's own special combination. Perhaps he did not like being disturbed at his meal; perhaps he was not well; perhaps his thoughts were occupied on some important matter. Even Carlyle, we are told, had his "bad days," when he would hardly speak to a soul, and only sharply and bluntly to one when he did. Now if a philosopher can act so, how is an ordinary mortal to be blamed for the same failing to be responsive? Writing of Carlyle reminds me of a story I was told the other day of a visitor who went to Ecclefechan to see the room in which the genial author of *Sartor Resartus* "first saw the light of day," as the newspaper reporters have it, when the woman who acted as guide as he was inspecting the room exclaimed, "And our Mary was born here too"!

The atmosphere of the coffee-room being too freezing for my [Pg 102] pleasure, I sought the smoke-room in search of more genial society, or the restfulness of none at all. Better an empty room than to feast with a pessimist. The smoke-room proved to be no ordinary apartment, for it was panelled, or partially so; and there my eye rested on a finely carved old oak fireplace, distinguished enough for a nobleman's mansion, and by the side of it was a cupboard, with shapely old-fashioned outside hinges, for the tidy holding of wood. How came so modest an inn to possess such a beautiful specimen of ancient carving? I wondered, for it was truly a work of art worthy of a museum, but better where it was. I had not to wonder long, for presently a man entered the room and seated himself opposite to me, first lighting his pipe and calling for a drink, and his manner showed he was quite at home there. In marked contrast with my coffee-room companion he was smiling sociability itself. "Fine old fireplace that," exclaimed he, in a right jovial voice, pointing to it with his pipe. "I'm never tired of admiring it." "I was admiring it too," I said; "do you know anything about it and how it came there?" "Well, I heard it came from Basing House when the place was sacked; they say that nearly every one round about on that occasion helped themselves to something from it, and so I suppose the owner of this house, at the time, appropriated that fireplace. He did not do so badly. I've heard that the freeholder has been offered £1300 for it and refused the offer, but I'm always expecting that some day some one will surely come along and buy it. It will be a great pity if they [Pg 103] do, for it's a great attraction to the house. You are a stranger here, I expect?" I confessed I was. "Be you on business or pleasure, I wonder?" I felt at first inclined to reply that was my own affair; then, thought I, the man does not intend to be rude, but is only seeking to keep up the conversation by the first remark that comes

handy. He explained himself: "If you be pleasure-touring I thought I might tell you that there is an old castle about a mile from the garden at the back of the hotel; it's a bit ruinous, but it's worth seeing. They call it King John's Castle, but I don't know much of its history; they say there's an underground passage from it to the town." How familiar I am with that underground passage, I meet it somewhere on every journey; but I was glad to hear of the old castle, for I had no idea there was one in the locality. Then jumping from one subject to another he went on: "Talking about fireplaces"—which we were not at the moment—"there's a lot of curious chimney corners in the cottages around," and so he gaily chatted on about this thing and that, much to his own pleasure, and would, I believe, have gone on chatting for an hour or more, had not some persons entered the room, townsfolk I took them to be, for they all seemed well acquainted; then others dropped in, so that soon there was a goodly company assembled there—mostly, if not all, tradesmen of the place, I gathered from their talk. After that I became a silent spectator, but I got plenty of entertainment out of the company by studying their various characters, and from their conversation I [Pg 104] ascertained how the town was served; I even learned from one or two of them how the kingdom could be better governed if they only had the governing of it. Somehow it amused me to hear all this, and the pride of it. I think one of the speakers had missed his vocation; he should surely have been in Parliament; he spoke quite as wisely and more to the point than many of its paid members do. "It's as good as a play," remarked Charles II. once when listening to a long debate, and I thought the same that night of what I saw and heard; then how unconscious the actors were, and how well they performed their parts all unprepared!

"It's a deep tankard that never requires refilling," and I noticed that the glasses were fairly frequently replenished (for beer in the cellar quenches no man's thirst) and pipes recharged, whilst the conversation never flagged, not for a moment, but I liked the hum of it. Towards the end of the evening there was much laughter and merriment; many a joke was cracked; some were good, some were poor, and one or two were fresh to me, and one or two even good enough for *Punch*, I thought. So the hours passed in an atmosphere of good-fellowship and tobacco smoke. A merrier company never have I met, and little did that company know, I ween, how their merriment served to enliven my evening. Then, talking still, the guests departed by ones, and twos, and threes—and I was left alone.

Next morning early I took leave of "mine hostess," who in the good old-fashioned manner of an earlier day, possibly a tradition of [Pg 105] the house, came to the door to see me off, thanked me for my small custom, and wished me a pleasant journey—moreover, wished me it in a manner so hearty that showed she meant it. How pleasant these little civilities are; how they cheer the traveller on his way; how they oil the wheels of life so that they run smoothly, and yet they cost the bestower nothing! Alas, people nowadays do not seem to appreciate an article that can be had—for nothing! I like a smile of welcome when I arrive a stranger at a strange inn, though in truth I do not always get it—I expect I have to pay the penalty of many a grumpy traveller (how I despise him)—but this I will say, I seldom leave "mine inn" without the landlord or landlady, as the case may be, coming to see me off, and that with some gracious added remark or another; it is pleasant to part thus. I pay my reckonings, of course—I could not do otherwise—still, there was hardly an inn on the road, not one, in fact, but somehow I felt, on leaving it, I had received something more, and more valued, in the shape of thoughtful attentions and kind words, than what was set down on the bill. In truth, my bill mostly seemed to me more an accidental incident of my stay than a charge for accommodation and services rendered, and I fancy—it may be even more than fancy—that a gracious guest most times finds his reckoning on a modest scale. So, take it on the lowest, meanest standard, civility pays.

I well remember when at an old country coaching inn—where I stayed for over a week, so pleasant a resting-place I found it, so [Pg 106] pleased was I with mine host, mine hostess, and my surroundings—one day a coaching party on a hired coach arrived there, who blustered and fumed and gave themselves so many airs, and ordered the landlord about in so would-be a lordly manner as to make me ashamed of them, so much so that on their departure I went up to the landlord, a good sort if ever there was one, and heartily sympathised with him. I thought to ease his mind. "Bless you, sir,"

said he, "they didn't trouble me one bit; I saw they weren't gentlefolks; I charged them in the bill for their incivility."

At first, for a mile or more, we followed a smooth highway, then we took to a little lonely lane to our left; a signpost at the corner of the roads told us it led to Greywell. Now Greywell had a pleasant sound; we soon came to it, and it proved to be a pleasant village in keeping with its name; some of the cottages there are old and of half timber, and no more picturesque or comfortable a cottage was ever built than in that style, with its projecting upper story that gives more room above than below, where room is mostly wanted, besides keeping the lower walls dry and causing an agreeable effect of light and shade. How I dislike the modern cottage built on the square and strictly economical pattern, a mere slate-roofed brick box with holes for windows in it. Sometimes you meet with rows of them as like one another as peas in a pod, only even perhaps more so. They ruin the prospect wherever they are.

A footpath led from the entrance of the village to its tiny church, [Pg 107] which, though restored, has not had all its interest restored away, for it can show some pre-Norman work, a curious old carved screen, and, what is rarer, a rood-loft; externally a simple wooden bell-turret gives a touch of character to the building.

Beyond Greywell we entered upon a low-lying land of lazy willow-bordered streams, a green and quiet land of luscious meadows loved of cattle, a land of lanes

> where under the same wheel
> The same old rut would deepen year by year.

Now and then we caught the scent of new-mown hay, sweetening the air as we drove along under the shadow of leafy trees, and anon in the sunshine. The scent of new-mown hay or of a fragrant beanfield in blossom, how delightful a thing it is; shop-purchased perfumery is poor stuff indeed compared with it. For once we looked above rather than around for beauty, above to the windy, wide, white-clouded sky, with its ever-varying incident of passing and changeful form; for the skyscape has interests as well as the landscape, and there are times when it is the more interesting of the two.

Even when you pass through a land of scant scenic attractions, you may often, by searching, discover unexpected and secluded beauty-spots, the charms of which, in a small way, are not readily outrivalled; but they need finding, for many lie unannounced though near the roadside. One day I was driving through an open country of flat fields and low bounding hedges, with only one little hill in all the [Pg 108] prospect to break the level horizon of circling blue; a country not without its pleasantness, but tame and somewhat monotonous withal, though there was a fine fresh-air feeling about it, such as one finds on the far-reaching Fens. I was hungry, and so looking out for a likely spot in which to picnic, but it was some time before I could find one to my fancy; then it was not so retired as I could wish, and passing traffic robbed me of the privacy I desired. There were no grassy margins by the roadside to enjoy, and the fields did not look inviting. Having stopped the car I thought I heard the sound of falling water; it came from the direction of a little wood that had escaped my notice and to which a footpath went. Thereupon I determined to go exploring in the hope that I might find a secluded spot by some stream side for my midday halt and refreshment. The sound of running or falling water has always a fascination for me, it is as music to my ears, and who could be dull in the company of a gurgling or tumbling stream that almost seems to talk to you in the oldest language of the world?—"I chatter, chatter, as I flow," sings Tennyson of a brook. I was unexpectedly rewarded, for a few minutes' walk brought me to a little winding river that managed to conceal itself from the road, and by the river backed by trees stood an ancient water-mill with mossy roof and weather-stained walls, its great and somewhat broken, dripping, wooden wheel revolving round in so leisurely a fashion that its very movement suggested rest. The ancient mill, wood, and tumbling water, what a perfect picture they made! There on a grassy bank opposite I found an ideal place for my purpose, with the song of the mill-wheel, the swish and splash of the weir, the twittering of birds and the soothing cooing of pigeons to enliven that peace-bestowing solitude, a retired nook where one might "dream down hours to moments." Yet there was no hint from the roadway of mill or river,

of anything else than a little wood. How much of quiet beauty that little wood conceals from the vulgar public gaze! How many of those who pass daily close by have discovered that charmed spot, I wonder?

AN OLD MILL.

[Pg 109]

Again on the road, after a time we sighted a signpost pointing the way to Basingstoke, then in a short distance another with the same legend; indeed, all the signposts we came to had "Basingstoke" writ large on their arms, as though there were a conspiracy amongst them to force the traveller to that town. Cobbett on one of his rides wanted to go from somewhere to Hindhead, and he was told he had better go through Liphook; but for some reason known to himself that obstinate farmer declared, "I won't go to Liphook." And he didn't. Just then a fit of like obstinacy came over me; I would not be dictated to by signposts, I would not go to Basingstoke. Basingstoke was a town; I would keep in the country. So whenever I came to a signpost with "To Basingstoke" upon it I went another way. It would have been better had I gone to Basingstoke, for the lanes I got on were tortuous, narrow, and rough, without any compensating virtues in the matter of scenery. However, I had a fit of travel temper strong on me, so I stuck to my whim and eventually discovered a decent road that led across a rolling open country, and from every height of our up-and-down progress we had extended views to distant hills, blue and undulating. The distances were glorious, the near scenery featureless, so our eyes feasted on the distances.

[Pg 110]

So we arrived at Kingsclere, like Odiham a pleasant and a clean little town remote from rail, and it seems to get along, in a quiet way, exceedingly well without it. The place pleased me, not because it was specially agreeable, but owing to the absence of any aggressive modern ugliness. Its virtues are of the negative order, but even that negative quality counts for much. I noticed its large and fine old church—it was so large and close to the road I could not help but notice it; all the same I did not dally to go a clerk-hunting, so failed to inspect the interior: on that sunshiny day my antiquarian zeal did not run to church interiors, though I did not miss observing a rather good example of a Norman doorway unfortunately built up on its south wall. I noted, too, opposite the church, and pleasantly retired from the street, another of those clean little unpretentious inns I had so frequently come across—an inn that from a passing glance of it almost made me wish the day's journey ended there.

After Kingsclere the country grew wilder, and presently crossing an extensive heath we dropped down into Newbury. I think it must have been market day there, for the streets of that pleasant town were thronged with carts and horses, to say nothing of pedestrians who would provokingly walk all over the roadway and not on the pavements. Some shouted to us, "Why don't you blow your horn?" and when we did others shouted, "Why do you keep blowing your horn; do you want all the road to yourself?" so we pleased no one, and made what haste we could to get out of the bustle, and to the London and Bath old mail road, smooth travelling and pleasant enough as far as Hungerford.

OLD TOLL-HOUSE ON BATH ROAD.

[Pg 111]

A little before Hungerford my curiosity was aroused by the sight of a lonely castellated building by the roadside which I stopped to photograph. Then a man appeared upon the scene: somehow whenever you start to take a photograph, even in apparently deserted places—and the highway there just then seemed deserted—some one is almost sure to put in an appearance. I asked the man about the building. "That were an old tollhouse," answered he; "it used to mark the half-way between London and Bath." "Does it not to-day?" I queried. The man made no reply. I have frequently found that certain country-folk are curiously averse to jokes, however mild or innocent those jokes may be; they seem afraid lest you are poking fun at them. Taking no heed of my query he continued, for your true-born countryman loves to talk: "Travelling by motor-car, I sees; wonderful things them motor-cars be, to be sure, and they do put on the pace on this bit of road, I reckon; make a regular railway of it, [Pg 112] that's what us say; fortunately there baint many housen on it," and so forth for a good five minutes, whilst I packed up my camera, and was therefore a perforced listener. I was somewhat surprised to hear, preserved to this day, the old Saxon plural of "en" in the word "housen" (though we still retain it in men, women, children, and oxen); the so-termed Yankee "I reckon" did not surprise me much, as I have frequently heard it thus employed in country districts, in Sussex especially.

At Hungerford I noticed the ancient "Bear Inn" as we passed, and that is the only thing about the town that I can now remember: a comfortable-looking, time-mellowed, two-storied, old-fashioned building, a pleasing picture of a past-time coaching hostelry; now I believe its patrons are mostly motorists and anglers; for the latter there is a troutful river at hand, and troutful streams around. I noted two anglers with their rods leaning listlessly against the inn door, who looked as though they were on a lazy holiday bent, and that the wily trout must wait their turn. The town authorities still preserve an ancient horn inscribed as follows—by which horn they hold the right of fishing in the rivers and streams around—"I John a Gaunt doe giue and grant the riall of fishing to Hungerford toune, from Eldren Stub to Stil, excepting som seueral mil pond. Jehosphat Lucas, Constabl." A curious form of a deed of gift, that reminds one of the more famous Pusey horn, an even more ancient charter of rights. I fancy that name of "Jehosphat" for a constable; it has a [Pg 113] genuinely ancient ring about it. Not being learned in old English script, I am not sure whether "riall" should read "right" or "royalty," but the intention of the sentence is clear.

A curious old-world custom, dating from about 1370, still prevails at Hungerford. I came upon an account of this in my morning paper, which I think of sufficient interest to quote here in full:

> Hungerford was yesterday the scene of incidents reminiscent of the remote past. It was Hock-day, a day when Hungerford slips back into past centuries and revels in customs and privileges granted by John of Gaunt. One feature of the proceedings is the perambulation of the town by two "Tuttimen," represented on this occasion by Mr. F. Barnard and Mr. J. Tyler, whose interesting mission it is to kiss all women-folk and exact head-pence from men. Nor is the custom honoured only in the breach, with the result that the "Tuttimen" had a busy day. In exchange for kisses they give oranges.
>
> Particularly busy were the "Tuttimen" at the workhouse, where they found the women-folk insistent on the due observation of their privilege. Another interesting scene occurred at the laundry, where the female employés, their hair gaily decked with primroses, paraded before the kissing men, who, by special charter, were instructed to be discreet in their choice, and selected two of each as the recipients of their salute.
>
> While the "Tuttimen" were engaged in this mission the borough dignitaries, who form the Hocktide jury, were assembled in solemn conclave at the Court-house, whither they had been summoned in the early morning by blasts on John of Gaunt's historic horn. The ancient rules, regulations, and privileges were recited with due solemnity.
>
> The labours of the deliberate assembly being at an end, the members of the jury adjourned for the Hocktide luncheon, while pence and oranges were thrown from the window to the crowds of children who were granted a holiday in honour of the event. When the company separated the "Tuttimen" continued their mission.

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It is astonishing how many of these quaint old customs are still preserved in various parts of the country, such as the curious horn-dance at Abbot's Bromley we came upon a little later in the journey. How few people seem to be aware of them or their surprising number.

A little beyond Hungerford we bade good-bye to the Bath road, for espying a promising byway we followed it up the narrow Kennett valley. The quiet beauty of the scenery took us by surprise. As long as the river kept us welcome company the valley was as fair as a valley may be; truly we saw it under the inspiriting effect of the cheerful sunshine, but that only enhanced and did not cause its charms; the clouds had rolled away and the sky above was serenely blue, and all the land was bathed in golden light. When the English weather is really in a good humour, truly it can make things very pleasant. From one point of the road we had a delightful vision of the shallow river where it widened out and ran rippling merrily over its pebbly bed, silvery and sparkling and gold in the sunshine, with dark green woods rising above, low hills rising beyond these again; and the river sang its song as it ran to the music of the wind-stirred trees. So both eye and ear shared in the charm of the spot. When next I go a-fishing I should like to go a-fishing there, then, sport or no sport, it would be joy enough to be amongst such pleasant scenery, for I have an eye for a pretty river-side, an ear for rural sounds, as well as for that crowning delight—the exciting plash of a trout. Then we drove on between wooded hills that rose gently on either hand, passing near by to our left Littlecote House, that lonely, grey, ancient, and some people have it haunted, home, overshadowed by the gruesome story of "Wild" Darell, a tragedy too well known to need repeating here—an almost incredible tragedy, only that time has shown it to be true, and "truth is stranger than fiction," though some modern fiction is running truth uncommonly hard in this respect.

[Pg 115]

Aldbourne, the first village we came to, with its fine old stately-towered church, its big round pond, and its antique houses grouped around it, pleased us vastly, for the village had such a remote and an unmistakable old-time air—a spot where we really seemed to have left the modern world wholly behind. For a moment we gave ourselves up to the illusion of the place, and were back in the seventeenth century. We pay the novelist to romance for us; why should not we do our own romancing at times? Therein lies the charm of old-fashioned places; they spur the imagination. As Laurence Sterne showed us, sentiment, after all, is not a bad thing.

It may have been wholly imagination on my part, but I thought that the people there had a contented look and a quiet eye, as though they had no part in the stress of modern life and the wearisome struggle of it. For where striving ceases, there life runs

smoothly; and where life runs smoothly, there contentment reigns. [Pg 116] Truly, my impressions were purely those of a passer-by, who had no part in the life of the place. Perhaps the traveller chiefly sees what he desires to see. Now I set out to see the bright side of life—who would blame me for that?—and I happily found what I sought; at some places more than others, still, always the bright side. It is a mere matter of eye-training, the seeking the gold and leaving the dross.

There is a Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings; I would there were a Society for the Preservation of Picturesque Villages, for many still there are, more than people imagine, that remain unspoilt, or almost so—villages that have not known the hand of the modern builder, bits of old England surviving in the midst of the new, and a gulf of centuries separates the two. Their churches stand on the same sites they did in the thirteenth or other early century; some of the Saxon times are of much earlier date; the continuity of the village and its life is astonishing. As in the days of old, there stands the snug rectory where it has stood for generations past; the humble inn with its swinging sign of "The Red Lion" as likely as not, though it may have suffered alteration, occupies the same spot where an inn has been "time out of memory." So with the cottages, one of which is generally the Post Office; and even in these democratic days the inhabitants are still divided into three classes—the squirearchy, the tradesfolk, and the labourers—and they seem to get along thus very well and contentedly, till the Socialist comes and scatters his tares.

THE VILLAGE POST OFFICE.

[Pg 117]

After Aldbourne the country had a wild and a deserted look, for we found ourselves traversing the open downs where the landmarks are few, our grey road winding before us miles away, with nothing else visible but bare, green, sun-flushed hills around. It was a glorious drive over those billowy downs, and bracing was the air of them, delightful too in its purity and in the delicate scent of the thymy turf that the breezes gathered on their way and brought to us. There one might indulge in

> The pleasure of believing what we see
> Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be.

The downs, bare to the skyline, looked lonely enough to satisfy an anchorite. It is refreshing now and again in this crowded England to come upon such silent yet friendly solitudes, for there is nothing frowning or austere about them; hardly does the sunshine cast a shadow upon their spacious slopes of greenery. The charm of English scenery generally lies in its rich detail and finish, the result of the tireless toil of centuries; but the downs afford us broad effects, and broadness of outlook begets broadness of thinking. Fortunately the downs are unblest with mineral deposits, so they will probably remain unspoilt for ages yet; they have no attraction for the tourist crowd, nor are they likely to be vulgarised by too ready railway accessibility, for their population is too scanty for that.

Our solitary road ended its solitude in the small but straggling [Pg 118] village of Coate, that, like Stratford-on-Avon, has a certain, though lesser, fame cast on it by being the birthplace and early home of Richard Jefferies; and there amongst the fields around and sequestered downs beyond he used to roam alone, neglecting, I am afraid, his father's farm, considered by the local people—and

perhaps not without excuse according to their lights—a lazy, loafing, unsociable fellow, "with never a pipe in his mouth nor a glass in his hand." To be a genius is not always to reap a reward, for fame, as in poor Jefferies' case, frequently comes too late—for what profit is fame to the dead?

Some years ago, when touring in Lincolnshire, I met an aged man, a Mr. Baker of Horncastle, now gone to his forefathers, who when a boy knew of Tennyson, for Somersby is near to Horncastle, and Mr. Baker told me "people around used to think Tennyson a wild sort of fellow, for ever wandering alone over the wolds a-muttering to himself"; and I believe much the same was said of Wordsworth, "a-booing to hisself" during his solitary rambles over the Cumberland Fells. Solitude is company enough for the majority of geniuses, it seems. Byron says, "In solitude I am least alone"; and Thoreau remarks, "I never found a companion that was half so companionable as solitude." Once when an acquaintance offered to go a walk with him, Thoreau ungraciously declined. "I have no walks to throw away on company," said he. At any rate, there are worse companions than solitude; yet, in spite of poets and philosophers, I am wholly with genial Charles Lamb in my love of sympathetic [Pg 119] human company, but the sympathetic quality is not always to be discovered. Doubtless Richard Jefferies failed to find amongst the farmers around a suitable companion; their thoughts were not his thoughts, so he roamed the downs alone in close communion with the nature he loved so dearly and understood so well. It is said, and with some truth, of Thoreau that he found the freedom of the wilderness within the sound of Emerson's dinner-bell; so too Richard Jefferies found his freedom within a walk, if not within actual sight, of his home. Now solitude for the day, with a home, friends, fireside, and a welcome to come to at evening time, is solitude with the keen edge of it considerably blunted.

Coate is a quiet village, not noteworthy in any way of itself. It is neither picturesque nor ugly, merely commonplace; like some worthy people in the world, it lacks character. Had it not been the birthplace of Richard Jefferies, I should have passed it unregarded by; but authors, poets, and other men who have earned fame for themselves in this world have no command over their birthplaces: that is the chance of circumstance. In the village I pulled up and asked the first man I met, a man apparently of average intelligence and as well clad as I, if he could point out Richard Jefferies' house. "Richard Jefferies," replied he thoughtfully; "I never heard of him. There's no one lives here of that name." Then after a moment's hesitation he exclaimed, "Maybe it's Mr. Dash the auctioneer you wants. He lives at yonder house to the left; it's the best house in the [Pg 120] place." Why he imagined I wanted Mr. Dash the auctioneer, whose name was quite different, I could not understand. I asked the man if he lived there. "I do," responded he; "I've lived here some time." And yet he declared he had never heard of Richard Jefferies! "Perhaps he lives at Swindon," he suggested as I left; now Swindon is not far off Coate. Poor Richard Jefferies!

Then I made my way to the house indicated. It seemed to be the most important house of the few unimportant houses there, a pleasant, long rather than square, two-storied dwelling, retired behind a bit of garden and walled in from the road; and there on the wall by the entrance gateway I espied a stone slab, plainly inscribed —

Birthplace
of
Richard Jefferies.
Born
November 6th, 1848.

Yet even that tablet means nothing to the villager!

[Pg 121]

CHAPTER VII

Wootton Bassett—A quaint market-hall—Old towns—A Roman road—The spirit of the past—A pre-Elizabethan gate-house—The Royal Agricultural College—Chat with an antiquary—Norman doorways—Second-hand book catalogues—Syde—Cotswold houses—Over the Cotswolds—At a Jacobean inn.

Leaving Coate we soon reached the erst quiet little town of Swindon; it is no longer quiet or little, but looms large and ugly—seen from afar a blot on the fair landscape; the railway has made it prosperous and its name, once unknown to the outer world, "as familiar as a household word." Swindon does not appeal to the traveller who, like the famous Dr. Syntax, fares forth "in search of the picturesque." Of old, I have been told, it was a pleasant spot. We were fortunate enough to simply touch the edge of the bustling town and to get again on to an open country road, careless as to where it might lead; it might go to anywhere so long as we escaped smoky Swindon with its big works, tram-lines, and rows of mean buildings over which the smoke, in the still air, hung like a pall. That is the price it has to pay for its prosperity.

Our road took us in a few miles to Wootton Bassett, a small, sleepy, clean market-town set high up on a hill, unprogressive yet not dull, and it greeted us with an air of restfulness and ancientness. [Pg 122] It is a good road that takes you to a pleasant place. I was glad to discover Wootton Bassett, a long one-streeted town, and in the centre of its broad sunny street stands its quaint half-timber market-hall upheld by stone pillars, with its ancient stocks preserved in the covered space below. Why will they not build such useful and eye-pleasing structures to-day? This quaint old market-hall, so picturesquely prominent, gives a character to the whole place. I could not imagine Wootton Bassett without its market-hall any more than I could imagine a cathedral city without its cathedral. It seemed the centre of attraction of the little town, for around it were gathered many of its inhabitants, lazing, smoking, and gossiping; the wonder was how they could afford to idle time so, they hardly looked like men of independent means! Now when I desired to take a photograph of the building they, of one accord, stood up all in a formal row, like soldiers on parade, so as to effectually spoil my proposed photograph as a picture. If the good people had only been content not to have minded me, and stayed as they were naturally grouped, they would even have been of pictorial service; but standing each one stiffly facing the camera, the case was hopeless. Why will people always pose so "to be took," with no expectation of seeing "their pictures"? They provoked me almost into being angry, for I so desired to obtain a pleasing photograph of the quaint old structure. Still, I made a sketch of it, conveniently ignoring the figures; but it took me a good half-hour or more to make the sketch, [Pg 123] and the photograph would only have needed a minute to take and been faithful to the minutest detail. Now it chanced that I was hungry, and a hungry man is not a good workman. I made a mistake; I ought to have satisfied my hunger and then made my sketch, but somehow at the moment I did not think of so simple a thing. Then I sought an inn, for I had forgotten to replenish my luncheon basket that morning.

The first inn I saw looked clean and unpretending, so inviting, and there I obtained some bread and cheese and ale, as that could be had at once for the asking; moreover, it was nicely served in a cheerful little room, and a neat, be-ribboned maid waited quietly on me. I noted that the walls of the room were covered with grey canvas and not with paper; now canvas, after wood panelling and lordly tapestry, is the most artistic wall-covering imaginable. I never expected to find such a thing at a small country inn, where I am content with comfort and never look for the luxury of art. The landlord, anxious to be obliging, apologised that there was no cold meat, but, said he, I could have chops, only they would have to send for them. Fancy a famishing man waiting for the purchase and the cooking of chops; then possibly the chops might prove tough. Bread and cheese and ale, I explained, were good enough for me, and they could be had instanter. Now hunger is the best of sauces, and no meal ever I had did I relish more than my modest one that day. The table was spread with the whitest of cloths, flowers in a vase [Pg 124] adorned it, and there is much in the manner a meal is served; the bread was crusty and the crust was crisp, the cheese excellent of

flavour, the clear, nut-brown, frothing ale was, as Shakespeare puts it, "a dish for a king." Honestly, just then, I would not have exchanged the simple repast I had in that inn's tiny parlour for the most sumptuous lunch at the most expensive restaurant; and the civility and attention of the maid were more to my liking than the servile service of any black-coated waiter, with a tip in view according to his servility. Then my enjoyable lunch cost me exactly one shilling; no charge was made for stabling my car, and the attentive maid received my modest gratuity with such smiling thanks as though she expected no such thing. Even the landlord thanked me for my poor custom.

Wherein lies the charm of these unprogressive little country towns, whilst modern cities, though they may be fine, are generally so uninteresting, is as difficult to explain as the attraction of personality or character. It is not in architectural merit, for they rarely have that, except perhaps in an odd building or two. One thing is, their buildings are low, and so their streets are sunny, which gives them an air of cheerfulness. But I think their real charm lies in their naturalness and welcome absence of all show, assertiveness, or pretence, and this causes a feeling of restfulness, for the eye is not called upon to admire anything; also they have a delightfully finished look—where the town ends there the country begins. The prosperous modern town never seems finished, and as it grows, it grows the more ugly. [Pg 125]

From Wootton Bassett on to Cricklade I have now no recollection of the road, beyond that we caught a glimpse on the way of a delightful old Tudor, or Elizabethan, home of many mullioned windows and a great porch that spoke a welcome—a picture rather than a place. Of Cricklade I have a pleasant memory of a stone-built, old, and grey-roofed town, with little of life about it, and of a tall canopied cross in the churchyard at the farther end of its long street. If Cricklade has more to show I missed seeing it. So quiet the town was, it looked like a town asleep and not anxious to wake again. Its long street was free of traffic, excepting for a solitary cart; not even a dog troubled to bark at us. But you cannot see or understand any place by simply driving through it; these, therefore, are but passing impressions. On a long journey you have not time to loiter everywhere you would, or the journey would take a whole year, perchance even more; already I had loitered long at Wootton Bassett, and Cricklade looked less attractive.

After Cricklade we came upon a level, long stretch of straight road, so straight indeed that it suggested Roman origin, and on consulting my map I found it there marked "Roman road from Cirencester to Speen" (where the Speen alluded to is, or was, I am not sure, but there is one in Berkshire and one in Buckinghamshire, neither of importance nowadays). This straight road extending far as the eye could trace with all revealed ahead, nothing left to imagination, is not an attractive one, except, perhaps, to an engineer's eye, but it has a look of set purpose that impresses the mind; it concerns itself with nothing but its destination, turning not aside for this or that; a road of importance, or rather once it was. This very road, of old, the Roman Legions trod; that takes one back some centuries! The spirit of the past still seems to linger over it; it impressed itself on me. In this old land history greets you volumes deep; you cannot escape it. "Happy is the country that has no history," runs the ancient proverb; and true though the proverb may be, to travel in I prefer a country with a storied past—an eventful past that lends an interest to the present. When touring in California, in spite of its glorious scenery, I felt a vacancy; why, I could not imagine for some time; then I realised it was the absence of any ancient history, legend, or tradition connected with anything I saw beyond poor Indian legend, for something more than mere scenery is needed to satisfy the reflective mind. [Pg 126]

At the small hamlet of Latton we passed through, I noticed the worn steps and broken shaft of a wayside cross. How numerous these crosses must have been in the pre-Reformation days is proved by the number that still remain in their ruined state, in spite of the complete destruction of others during the Puritan time, and from the frequent and familiar name of "Stone Cross" or "Stony Cross" one finds on the maps, though no vestige of a cross can now be discovered at such spots. Then, to avoid the monotony of the straight road, we took to a lane that a signpost informed us led to Down Ampney, when I suddenly remembered having seen, at some picture gallery, a painting of a charming old house of that name; for [Pg 127]

I always note both the paintings and photographs I see of picturesque old houses, and when they bear a title keep it in memory—this in case Fate should some day bring me within reach of the originals; and here was my opportunity.

A mile or so brought us to Down Ampney, once the stately home of the famous Hungerford family, and there the lane ended. What pleased me most about the place was not the mansion but its quaint and exceedingly interesting and picturesque arched gate-house of the pre-Elizabethan era, with its two octagonal embattled towers on either side of the archway. It was well worth while making the short detour to see that fine old gate-house, for a pre-Elizabethan gate-house is somewhat rare in the land, and, when found, forms such a pleasant roadside feature, besides taking the memory back to the days that are gone.

Then we resumed our drive along the old Roman road, and this brought us to ancient Cirencester, where at "The King's Head," a flourishing inn before railways were invented, we found comfortable quarters for the night. Thrice before on my driving tours have I found myself by chance at Cirencester, for all the roads around centre on that town, like the spokes to the hub of a wheel, and take you there unawares; but I had not come to it by the Roman road before. I thought I had seen all Cirencester had to show, but I [Pg 128] discovered a fresh interest on this visit in the shape of the Royal Agricultural College about a mile away, and the Principal most kindly showed me all over the building and took me a stroll through the grounds besides. This college, as many know, was established by Royal Charter in 1845, "to train land-owners, estate agents, surveyors, intending colonists, etc., in agriculture, forestry, and allied subjects." It is beautifully situated on high ground and admirably fulfils its purpose. I have often wondered why some of the number of men of limited income, of no occupation, and trained to no profession, instead of idling life unprofitably away without an object, do not study at the Royal Agricultural College, where all things are well ordered, and go in for farming; and what a pleasant and healthy life it is, in close touch with Nature: a man can be a farmer, a sportsman, and a gentleman. Better this, surely, than to lead an aimless, lazy existence?

At Cirencester, going into a shop to replenish my tobacco supply, I got a-chatting with the owner, who appeared to have a soul superior to tobacco, for, to my surprise, I discovered him to be an enthusiastic and well-informed antiquary. Who would have thought it? He told me that round about Cirencester there were no fewer than fifteen churches with fine Norman doorways; he kindly gave a list of these, only to be lost! He also showed me a photograph of each one, so that I was able to judge what beautiful and well-preserved specimens of Norman masonry they were; in such [Pg 129] instances photography asserts its usefulness. The only church of the number the name of which I can remember is Quennington, and this because I bought a picture-postcard of it, showing a most beautiful and richly sculptured doorway; judging from the photograph, nowhere have I seen so fine a one. The postcard has printed on it the following particulars: "The Norman doorways" (it appears there are two) "of Quennington church are noted for the beauty of their workmanship, and for the curious carved tympani they contain. The south door has elaborate carving, with beak heads around the top of the tympanum, which latter represents the mythical Coronation of the Virgin." Then he told me of a very old church not far away (he pointed out the position of it on the map, and on consulting my map again I feel fairly certain it is Daglingworth) where is a Saxon sun-dial, and where he had discovered in some of the stone-work of one of the windows portions of an ancient Roman inscription, proving that the monkish builders paid scant regard to the despised pagan altars and inscribed tablets that in early days were so plentiful at Cirencester, but used them as they would stone from a quarry; for Cirencester, or Corinium, was an important Roman military station. Fortunately many interesting relics of the time are now carefully preserved from further "base uses" in the Cirencester museum. In turn, to even matters, the monks' "graven images" and other "superstitious" work was ruthlessly destroyed by the stern Puritans. So the pagan was avenged!

For want of a better occupation that evening I amused myself by [Pg 130] looking over some old local newspapers I discovered in the smoke-room, for in these papers you often come upon odd and interesting bits of information, possibly contributed by some resident antiquary;

there I came upon the particulars of a curious bill that I thought worth noting, and this is the paragraph that caught my eye: "Below is an abstract from *The Annual Register*, 1771, page 140. 'Cirencester, August 31st. The following is a true copy of a painter's bill of this place, delivered to the church-wardens of an adjacent parish: Mr. Charles Ferebee (churchwarden of Siddington) to Joseph Cook, Dr. To mending the Commandments, altering the Belieff, and making a new Lord's Prayer, or £1 : 1s.'" So curious is this that it really seems like an invention, only that it is given on the authority of *The Annual Register*, and vouched for as true; otherwise I should not have ventured to requote it, and the very names of the churchwarden, the painter, and the church are put down. Invention surely could not improve on that old bill—and invention is no laggard!

At another inn I discovered some second-hand book catalogues left presumably by some former guest, and spent quite an interesting and profitable hour going over these. The various literature you chance upon when travelling oftentimes proves entertaining reading; the following extracts I made from four of these catalogues will, I think, prove my contention. In the first case an "Autograph Album" is offered for sale at the modest price of £25, [Pg 131] but then it contains "A collection of over 100 signatures, including those of Lord Tennyson" and other world-famous authors, "and an Autograph Poem by Lord Tennyson addressed to Lady Tennyson," a sample verse of which is quoted, and thus it runs:

> "Here on this Terrace fifty years ago,
> When I was in your June, you in your May,
> Two words 'My Rose' set all your face a-glow;
> And now that I am white and you are grey,
> That blush of fifty years ago, my dear,
> Lives in the past, but close to me to-day,
> As this red rose upon the terrace here
> Glows in the blue of fifty miles away."

Then, curiously enough, in another second-hand book catalogue a volume of poems, privately printed, is offered, containing likewise "an unpublished sonnet by Tennyson, beginning

> Me my own Fate to lasting sorrow doometh,"

but this is the only line of the sonnet given. Then another catalogue offered a book by John Wesley, dated 1770, and entitled *A Preservative against Unsettled Notions in Religion*, in which Wesley, in an open letter to Robert Barclay, says: "Friend, you have an honest heart, but a weak head. Once your zeal was against ungodliness, now it is against all forms of prayer—against saying 'you' to a single person, uncovering your head, or having too many buttons on your coat. O what a fall is there! What poor trifles are these that well-nigh engross your thoughts."

Still a further catalogue offers a "Black Letter book, printed in [Pg 132] double columns, published about 1555, 'Of the tragedies, gathered by Jhon Bochas, of all such Princes as fell from theyr estates throughe the mutability of Fortune since the creacion of Adam.' A fairly long history. This has a note written on the title-page as follows, 'This book was boughte in the yeare of Or Lorde God 1555.'" There were other volumes offered in these catalogues at a price, but they were of less interest. I think, however, I have quoted enough to show what an entertaining evening may be spent in simply conning over second-hand book catalogues.

I am afraid I have wandered off the road, but such occasional digressions, in the absence of the usual added love-story, may serve to break any possible monotony in the chronicle of our tour. We left Cirencester betimes (to use a favourite expression of Samuel Pepys, of Diary renown), though not so early but that sundry country folk were astir on the road before us; and how inexpressibly fresh and sweet is the morning air, "before it has been braithed over," that was Iden's *elixir vitae* in *Amaryllis at the Fair*! We started forth, as usual, without any definite idea of where we were going or of our destination for the night, simply taking this road and that, rough, or smooth, or hilly, as seemed best in our eyes at the moment. Excepting perhaps in a flat country, such desultory travel is not wholly advisable unless you can rely upon your car mounting the worst of the hills that may be encountered, for now and then on these byways you may come unexpectedly to a hill that is startling in its steepness, and though it be short it has to be climbed, or you

have to hark back ignominiously and not see what you set out to see. Fortunately I knew my car, my old and well-tried travelling companion that, when traversing some of the wild Welsh mountain and moorland tracks, had surmounted gradients of no ordinary severity. So I travelled on strange roads with a mind at ease. To go exploring cross-country roads in a hilly district you need a reliable car. It may have been the quality of my car, it may have been good fortune, it may have been careful driving, for careful driving counts, but the fact remains, in spite of many bad and stony roads, during the journey I suffered no breakdown, nor did I on a previous journey of some hundreds of miles.

SYDE CHURCH.

[Pg 133]

So, leaving Cirencester, where the church bells have little rest, for they were chiming the hours and quarters at length both day and night, we wandered about uneventfully till we found ourselves in the out-of-the-world hamlet of Syde, built on the slope of a hill, with a glorious rolling country around. I love these little remote hamlets and the placidity of them—hamlets where "the telegraph, the railway, and the thoughts that shake mankind" have never penetrated. I daresay dull care finds its way to them as elsewhere, but to the outward eye they suggest untold peace. Some one says that "care will come and climb even the side of a ship far out at sea in search of its victims."

[Pg 134]

At Syde we discovered a tiny and charming church with a saddle-back tower, a tiny church, pleasing in its simplicity, and close to it a fine old tithe-barn with a grand roof of open timber, and a delightfully quaint little Gothic window at one end of the building: the monks would have even a barn beautiful. From great beams of oak was the roof constructed, not sawn straight out of a tree regardless of grain in the manner of to-day that tends to weakness, but the natural bends of the wood were utilised so as to ensure the utmost strength of the material, and that made for lastingness and curves that unconsciously please the eye. The medieval craftsman knew the art of making the best use of raw products, and to his credit be it said, as far as I could note, the ancient roof shows no signs of weakness though constructed centuries ago, and apparently all those centuries left to take care of itself. Still such roofs, though strong in themselves, are heavy, and need substantial walls and a generous use of masonry to uphold them. The modern builder would probably construct at least two barns of the same size out of the materials employed in the construction of this one, and then have something to spare, but I greatly doubt if they would stand the

stress of centuries as this one has done without constant renewals and repairs.

Leaving Syde we wandered about the lonely Cotswolds for most of the day, leisurely and deviously, delighting in their breezy openness, their frequent solitudes, and the extensive prospects afforded to us of hills beyond hills rising out of the blue. Houses are few and scattered in the Cotswolds, and these are mostly farmsteads of past days, grey and old, well and strongly built of the [Pg 135] native stone that has a pleasant tint. Simple and yet picturesque are these old houses with their great gables, mullioned windows, stone slate roofs, and big chimney-stacks. The Cotswold architecture is a style of its own, than which a better style for an Englishman's home, from cottage to mansion, there could not be, for it is a style equally suitable for a small dwelling as for a stately hall. I think the keynote to the attractiveness of the Cotswold houses, large or little, is that they are first of all homes; this is what impresses you about them. Iron or lead, in the pre-railway days when the roads were indifferent and transport expensive, was not readily available in this remote district, so the ancient craftsman designed his buildings to have as little guttering and metal work as possible; he used stone wherever he could, stone for his mullioned windows, stone slates for his roofs, stones for his porches, stones for his chimneys, and for all his copings, his ridges, and his cappings; so his houses form part and parcel of the rock on which they stand, as though they had grown up from it. Were I ever to build another home for myself I should go to the Cotswolds for inspiration; still, a good design might be spoilt in its realisation by unfeeling workmanship; you may command the design, but you cannot command the spirit in which it is carried out. Even such a simple thing as a plain stone wall may be built to be beautiful; in the Cotswolds, the mason of old laid his stones in straight courses, carefully keeping them of different sizes; he also varied these courses in width, thus escaping the monotony of [Pg 136] uniformity; he laid the biggest stones at the base, making for strength, to the eye at least, but here and there he ran a band of big stones between the smaller ones above, so he secured breadth with variety, and this just because he took a pride and a joy in his work and regarded the look of it. I have yet to meet the modern workman whose pleasure is in his work; he calls it "a job." Here ends my amateur lecture on architecture—fortunately it is short.

I made my midday halt at a lonely, elevated spot, with not a building or any other sign of man's handiwork in sight, excepting the long and winding road and the rugged stone walls that bounded and followed it in curving parallels, up hill and down dale for many a mile, till lost to vision in the haze of space. There on a soft grassy margin of the road, with the wall as shelter from the wayward wind that always seems to blow over the Cotswolds, I spread my rug, reclined at ease, and, free from care as a man can be, enjoyed my alfresco meal and contemplative pipe to follow, feeling in the best of humours with all the world and myself, envying none. I heard no sound but that of the wind gently surring among the tall grasses, and softly murmuring through the many crevices of that loose and broken wall. My eyes saw nothing but the sunlit and rolling land stretching far around, and the silent, spacious sky above. I was impressed with the sense of solitude and the peace of the spot. It is good for man to be alone at times with the wide earth and sky; it [Pg 137] teaches him how small a thing he really is, for nature shows man neither respect nor attention; she treats the tramp and the lord the same. Even on the wild Canadian prairies, before the coming of the colonist, one could hardly find a solitude more apparently profound than mine that day, for the eye cannot see farther than the uttermost horizon; beyond might be the end of the world.

Just to live in the present, content with the present, that was my mood of the moment, neither looking backwards nor forwards, being simply thankful to be alive without any pain of body—that is the true holiday spirit, that is the wine of life; then pure laziness is a virtue, for if a man would enjoy his holiday lazing, laze he should. The gospel of exertion has been preached overmuch. It was a fair spot I had found, and the world is very fair in fair places; and does not Ben Jonson say, "How near to good is what is fair!" Long I rested there, so long that the shadow thrown by the wall changed round like that of a dial, but the matter of time troubled me not, for my hours were not marked by the clock. I wished my mind to be fallow. Emerson says, "The hardest thing in the world is—to think." I cannot follow him, for I find it impossible not to do so. I would be

At vacancy with Nature,
Acceptive and at ease,
Distilling the present hour
Whatever, wherever it is,
And over the past, oblivion.

When I tired of my solitude there was my car, ready at a moment's notice to whisk me back to the haunts of man. "Solitude hath its charms," but, to me, only when I know I can get away from it after having had my fill. One travels to escape for a while from man and town, from streets and houses, and then in turn one longs to get back again to despised humanity and neighbourship—at least I do, being no moody philosopher but a lover of my kind. [Pg 138]

Leaving my peaceful nook, after further lonely wandering, I struck upon a decent though hilly road, and eventually came to a long, steep descent, at the foot of which I found myself in the truly old-world village of Stanway, where is another fine specimen of a tithe-barn. An apology perhaps is needed for using the term "old-world" so often, but I came during the journey to so many quaint and ancient places that no other word will so well, tersely, and truthfully describe, so I feel bound to use it occasionally, even frequently, though not, I trust, without good cause.

At the foot of the descent, facing me, stood a notable gate-house giving access to a time-greyed and noble mansion built in the Jacobean days; the former looks like the work of Inigo Jones. I was tempted to photograph this old gate-house, and any photograph here reproduced will serve to show what manner of building it is, for a picture of any kind appeals direct to the eye, thus conveying a better impression of a place than pages of printed description could: and be it said in favour of a photograph over a drawing that there is no romance about it, it simply records what is before the camera, whilst most artists are prone to treat their subjects with more or less poetic licence, so that one can never be quite sure how much of their work is faithful to fact or how much is fanciful.

GATEHOUSE, STANWAY.

[Pg 139]

Then, as the west was growing golden and the shadows lengthening, my thoughts turned to an inn for the night. It seems to me that an inn of the good old-fashioned sort, friendly, unpretentious, clean, and comfortable, deserves a warm corner in the heart of the wayfarer—for how would he fare without one? Whenever I come upon such an inn I make a note of it so as to keep it in memory, besides marking its site on my map for easy reference on the road. Many a time, and many a mile, have I gone out of my way, and gladly, to revisit such desirable quarters, sure, from past experience, of a welcome, civility, and a moderate reckoning, three qualities I mostly prize in the order given. Healthily hungry, agreeably tired after a long day's journey in the open air, how delightful it is to arrive at a good inn when the day is done—that is one of the joys of travel, and not the least of its joys. Suddenly I remembered that at the foot of the Cotswolds, and not very far away, was an ancient, many-gabled, Jacobean and storied hostelry of mullioned windows and panelled chambers where erst I had taken "mine ease"; thither would I go again, so I sped on my way, rejoicing, to the ancient "Whyte Harte" at Broadway, one of my ports of call when cruising on the road, and there I harboured for the night.

In the smoke-room of my inn that evening, seated by its big ingle-nook before a blazing log-fire that threw a ruddy, cheerful glow on [Pg 140]

beamed ceiling, panelled wall, and antique furniture, I got a-chatting with the chance and friendly company gathered there. Amongst the company was a touring cyclist who talked interestingly about the country and the places he had passed through; another was a fellow-motorist who "talked motor," but he had an eye for scenery as well; still another had recently returned from a long voyage, but he had neither met the Flying Dutchman nor seen the sea-serpent, nor even an iceberg, and what worth is a tale of the sea without a little romance thrown in? I love to hear the good old-fashioned sailor spin his confidential yarn; salt is cheap, so you can allow him more than the proverbial grain. The last yarn I had was from a skipper aboard his ship out in the wide Atlantic, who told me positively that he had seen the sea-serpent "swimming in the sea." "I estimated that it was ninety feet long," said he, "judging from the length of the ship, but perhaps he was a young one: it was a sea-serpent or a snake of some kind sure enough, and much alive." "Did you record it in the Log?" was my response. "Not I," replied the skipper. "You see, another captain of our company had previously seen a sea-serpent, only a much bigger one than mine, and he noted the fact in his Log. Now when our people saw the Log they said to him, 'Captain, if you see any more sea-serpents you won't get another ship.' He never saw another." And this is an unvarnished tale as told to me by the well-known skipper of a famous liner, faithfully retold, word for word, as far as my memory serves.

CHAPTER VIII

The Vale of Evesham—A stormy drive—An angler's inn—A big fish—Dating from "the flood"!—Fishermen's tales—The joys of "the gentle craft"—Hotel visitors' books—A "quiet day"—Burford church and its monuments—The golden age of travel—A fine old half-timber inn—Ludlow—A Saxon doorway.

Leaving our ancient inn we proceeded westward along winding, hedge-bordered lanes that took us through the beautiful and fruitful Vale of Evesham, a very Land of Goshen. We had an uneventful drive to close upon Pershore, where we found ourselves on a good main road; then crossing a narrow bridge we drove into that quiet and ancient town, famous for its fine old abbey church, and for what else I know not; as for the town, it has a pleasant look. Then into the country again and into a storm of rain. By a signpost we learnt that the road led to Worcester, and, as it appeared to keep on high ground with the promise of fine views, we followed it.

We had a stormy drive on to Worcester, for it rained the whole of the way; to our left the Malvern Hills loomed up a mass of purple-grey under the leaden sky, appearing almost mountainous, magnified in size to the eye by the mist and rain. Approaching [Pg 142] Worcester it poured in torrents; if this keeps on, I said to myself, I shall seek the shelter of an inn. I was in ill-humour with the weather; I do not mind ordinary rain, but this was a deluge, and the roads were becoming rivers. The hint was not lost on the weather; as we drove into Worcester the rain ceased, or almost ceased, and ahead there even appeared a watery gleam of sunshine. Such are the surprises of the English climate. This was encouraging, so through Worcester we went without a stop; no inn I needed now, and to escape the main road and straggling houses I took a turning to the right at a venture, and we were soon in the open country again, wet and gleaming, but we drove into fairer weather.

The country we passed through was pleasantly pastoral, the rain-washed air was wonderfully clear and fresh, the distances distinctly blue, and the moisture brought forth the pungent scent of the earth. Presently we passed a finely wooded park, in which we caught sight of a little lake mirroring the sky, the silvery water shining cheerfully bright. Soon after this we reached the village of Great Witley, not a large place, but perhaps "great" for a village, and it presented us with a pretty picture with its old houses, some of half-timber, climbing the hillside, for we were amongst the hills again, hills topped by wind-blown firs darkly outlined against the sky.

Before arriving at Great Witley we asked a man, on the way, to where the road led. "To Witley," he replied; "there's a decent public in the village where they sell good beer." As though beer was man's [Pg 143] chief desire in life—as perhaps it is with some! I did not take the hint, so instead of the usual twopence I simply tendered thanks for the information given. The man was disappointed; he looked reproachfully at me—at least so I thought. Now the "public" turned out to be a homely but an inviting-looking inn, "The Hundred House," to wit, and, judging of it from a passing glance, had I been benighted I would have claimed its hospitality, and deemed myself fortunate in having found such quiet, unpretending quarters. In truth I almost wished for the rain to come on again as an excuse to sample its entertainment. But as the sun was occasionally shining and the clouds were uplifting I was not inclined to stop, when I had half the day unspent before me for exploring. Somehow I fancy that the people I meet in such out-of-the-way places differ from other people; at least I know I get friendly with them quicker than with those who live where the pulse of the world beats faster—so I have that feeling strong upon me.

After Great Witley we had for some miles a hilly drive; at once our road began to climb steeply, only to descend again; it was all up and down, and from the tops of the rises we obtained glorious views of the wild Welsh cloud-loving mountains, standing in rugged array where the remote distance met our gaze, here and there above the mists a peak clearly showing. Next we came to a welcome level stretch of country, our road narrowing into a lane with fine high [Pg 144] hedges on either side, Devon fashion; their one fault was that they effectually shut out the view—from leagues our vision was limited to yards.

When, at last, the Devon-like lane ended, facing us stood "The

Swan Inn" by the Teme side, an inn where anglers congregate, for the Teme is a troutful stream; there I put up for the night, and found comfortable quarters, good fare, and companionship. What more could the traveller desire? The landlord came forth to greet me in a manner after my own heart. "Glad to see you," said he; "you always bring me luck." I thought he had mistaken me, for, as I explained, I had not been to Tenbury till that day. "Well," responded he, "it was certainly not here I saw you last, but I well remember you coming to 'The Porth Arms' at Llandysill, when I was its landlord some few years ago, and just as you arrived one of my guests there had caught the fish of the season." Then, thinking back, I too remembered the circumstance. "Now," continued he, "I've a fisherman staying here who just before you came caught a splendid trout, as fine a trout as ever I've seen; I'll show it you. There's as good fish in the Teme as ever came out of a river;" and he brought the trout out on a dish for my inspection, a grand one in truth. At least, thought I, there are big trout in the Teme. When next I go a-fishing may I catch its like! There is a consoling old saying that "the worst anglers catch the biggest fish." Some of those old sayings appeal to me!

Writing of big fish reminds me that once in an old curiosity shop I noticed, amongst the various odds and ends shown for sale there, a glass case with a fine fat trout stuffed and carefully preserved in it. I was surprised to find this marked at a high figure, as it appeared to me a somewhat unlikely article to find a purchaser. So I ventured to remark upon it. "Well," said the dealer in curiosities, "that's as good an article to sell as any I have in the shop, though you mightn't think it. You see, the landlord of some fishing inn is sure to buy it and hang it up in one of his rooms, as a sample of the sport to be had in his river. I'll get my price for it. I think I know where to place it as it is." Have I not seen the like at certain river-side inns I know!

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It is pleasant to be remembered thus on the road; twice during the journey when arriving at a strange inn in a strange place did the landlord of it remember me, he having moved from some other inn elsewhere which on a previous tour I had visited. Landlords and head waiters of country hostelries appear to have the faculty that kings are supposed to possess of recognising faces, and of even bearing names in mind. The waiter of "The King's Head" at Cirencester knew me from having waited on me at another inn on the road, "and that were over two years ago." "However do you manage to remember people and their names?" I queried, "for you must see so many different people coming and going in the course of the year." "I don't remember them all," he confessed, "only the nice people." I felt flattered, though perhaps he was thinking of his tip. A good memory is a valuable possession when used diplomatically.

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As there was still an hour or two of daylight left, I crossed the river by a patched-up stone bridge to inspect Tenbury, for the town lay on the other side of the Teme—a countrified little town, like those you find here and there in the heart of the shires, so I was the more surprised to discover it boasted of being a watering-place, though its reputation in this respect was unknown to me, for it possesses a Spa with a regulation pump-house where people drink and bathe in the waters, and around the pump-house are well-laid-out grounds with winding walks. No town that ever I was in gave me less the impression of being a watering-place where invalids congregate, for not even a Bath-chair did I see, nor was there a soul at the Spa. I take it that, up to the present, Tenbury is more famous for its fishing than for its waters; if the latter were only more pronounced, or more distasteful in flavour, possibly Tenbury might become renowned. "They ought to do me good," once I heard a visitor at Harrogate remark, "for the waters are nasty enough." Well, at any rate, Harrogate waters possess that virtue and Harrogate prospers, though I heard of one invalid who, having tasted those waters, declared he preferred his malady!

Rain coming on I sought shelter in the church near by; I was glad I did so, for I found much to interest me there. For the second time this journey I discovered another curious, though unfortunately mutilated, miniature effigy to a knight of old in chain armour with his legs crossed; one hand is on his sword, the other holds a shield with a coat-of-arms carved upon it. This effigy is only a little over two feet in length and bears no inscription.

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The records of his name and race

Have faded from the stone.

A possible, but doubtful, explanation of these miniature monuments is that they are merely heart shrines; another even more doubtful is that they are to children of knightly parents, and so are represented in armour.

Near to this modest memorial to a warrior, in startling contrast, is a stately altar-tomb with life-sized alabaster figures, beautifully sculptured, of a man in armour with his wife by his side, she being quaintly and picturesquely attired; the man's feet rest on a boar, his lady's on nothing, for the faithful hound that presumably once was there has disappeared. A portion of the long inscription in raised letters over this monument runs as follows:—

Here lyeth Thomas Actone of Sutton Esqre
Who departed this lyfe in 1546
And Mary his wyfe who deceased on
The XXVIII Aprill 1564....
Ioyse
Their only daughter and heire being then of the
Adge of XII yeres was espoused to Sir Thomas LVCY
Of Charcot knight which Dame Ioyse in dutifull
Remembravnce of theis her loving parents
Hath erected this monument. Anno 1581.

Here we have the knight whom Shakespeare ridicules under the title of Justice Shallow in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. What caused the Bard to hold up this Sir Thomas Lucy thus to ridicule no one [Pg 148] appears to have discovered; the ancient story that the knight prosecuted Shakespeare for poaching his deer in Charlecote Park is out of court, for in those days there was neither park nor deer there.

As I was leaving the church I noticed a brass plate against the west wall about three feet from the pavement, bearing record that

On May 14th, 1886
The River Teme overflowed its Banks
And rose to the height of the mark
Placed below.

And to this day certain Tenbury folk date events "from the year of the flood," which to the unknowing sounds strangely of a period immeasurably remote.

I dined well at "The Swan" that night in the pleasant company of two anglers, one of whom had caught the big trout already mentioned. The simple dinner was excellently cooked, and my fellow-guests indulged in a bottle of good red wine; so also did I for sociability. Not but that

Pure water is the best of gifts
That man to man can bring;
But what am I that I should have
The best of everything?

Dinner ended, in the spirit of the Roman of old I could say, "Fate cannot harm me, I have dined to-day."

We three made merry over our meal (fishermen, sailors, and artists all seem to possess cheerful souls); we talked and we joked [Pg 149] and "the good wine quaffed"; fishing stories went round the table, true every one of them—or at least they were not impossible. I scorn that cruel libel that declares "the angler goes out in the morning full of hope, returns at evening full of whisky, and the truth is not in him." But we did not talk of fishing alone; we talked of many charmed spots where tranquil rivers flow, of sleepy pools where the big trout lie, of mountain streams with their heathery banks, streams that gurgle and splash along their rocky beds; and I learnt that a trout rises to a fly either because he is hungry, or merely out of curiosity; if the former you may surely land him, if the latter it is a touch and go if you do. Many days the trout have had their fill, so they "rise short," being only curiously minded; then the angler changes his flies, but it is not a fresh fly that is needed, but a hungry trout.

Much has been said of the joys of the gentle craft.

Other joys
Are but toys,

we are told, but I think there is another craft more gentle, fully as fascinating and as pleasure-giving—to some even more so, bold

though the saying be—and that is sketching from Nature, "good, right, healthy work," Ruskin calls it, and the sketcher need never return home without something to show for his day in the open air. I do not exactly see the gentleness of taking a barbed hook out of a fish's mouth, or of impaling a wriggling worm on a hook, and to do [Pg 150] this, mind you, "as though you loved him, that is, harm him as little as you may possibly, that he may live the longer"! which is the dictum laid down by gentle Izaak Walton. After all, may it not be that the term "gentle craft" came from the fact of the use of gentles as baits? But whether one goes a-fishing or fares forth with sketch-book and colours, much of the joy that either gentle craft gives its votaries is, I take it, the pleasant scenery they habitually find themselves amongst. Now I come to think of it, our table talk was of scenery as much as of fishing, so as a listener it struck me that to some wise men fishing after all is in the main an excuse for a delightful and restful holiday with an object, not the mere catching of fish the sole aim of it.

In the coffee-room of mine inn I discovered a Visitors' Book, and I glanced through it in the faint hope of perhaps finding there some quaint or humorous effusion, but the day seems past for these things. Of old such men as Kingsley, Tom Taylor, Tom Hughes, and a host of other literary wits were not above making merry in these books; even such notables as Lord Byron, Sir Walter Scott, Samuel Pepys, to mention a few of the many, amused themselves by recording their names, scratched with diamonds, on the window-panes of some of the old inns and houses they visited, and in a few instances their signatures remain there to this day. I saw that of Sir Walter Scott in Shakespeare's birthplace not long ago. Seldom now either do I come across any quaint or notable epitaph in our [Pg 151] churchyards, yet when I was young I came upon many a one. Indeed I had a notebook filled with them, and curious they were. As I have previously remarked, Time is not the only culprit responsible for their disappearance, though Time has had his hand in the matter, and there is now no Old Mortality to re-cut crumbling inscriptions. A case was brought to my notice where a quaint epitaph (quite harmlessly quaint, as a layman, I thought) was deliberately chiselled off a tombstone "by the parson's orders."

In the Visitors' Book at "The Swan" I came upon the following:—

> In July a man came to the Swan
> And the fat of the land lived upon,
> "But," said he, in September
> If I rightly remember,
> "It's just about time I moved on."

I copied this, not that the verse has any merit, but to show the temptation there is to linger on at a comfortable country hostelry, as I have been tempted to linger often for an extra day or two, instead of travelling on. In this respect a good inn is an enemy to travel. Twice have I had pointed opportunities of confirming this attraction of an inn. I remember spending the night at a cosy little Kentish hostelry, and there I met a man who told me he had come for a week-end only, but so pleased was he with his quarters that he had stayed on three weeks, even regretting that he was obliged to leave on the morrow. But an almost startling incident of the kind I came upon at a sequestered Sussex inn; a fellow-guest there confided in [Pg 152] me that he arrived at the inn intending to spend one night only, but so comfortable was he that he decided to stop on from day to day, and the days had grown into three years. He was a homeless bachelor, and "here," said he, "I've found a home, no trouble about servants, no rent or taxes to pay, entertaining company at times without the cost of entertaining; I've only to order what I want to get it." I felt genuinely sorry for the man that he should have to make his home with strangers at an inn, but he did not appear sorry for himself. At that same inn I also stayed a week: the portly landlord of it was the best of fellows—may his shadow never grow less! The landlady as kindly an old soul as ever breathed—long life to her! The maid who waited on me thought nothing of her trouble, the rooms were clean, and there was a large and shady garden attached where I idled many an odd hour pleasantly away, lazily reading a favourite author whilst reclining in a hammock hung between the trees. But these old, unspoilt, home-like inns are not to be found every day, though I know of a few, but wild horses could not drag from me their whereabouts. "I have certainly spent some very enviable hours at inns," remarks Hazlitt. So have I. Do I talk

too much of inns? Thackeray says, "It always seems to me very good talk." A big book could be written about inns of the good old-fashioned sort, and yet not exhaust the pleasant subject; but it needs be written lovingly, as Izaak Walton wrote of fishing, so that the two works may lie side by side and ready of reach amongst the treasures of a well-selected library. [Pg 153]

As I was leaving "The Swan" at Tenbury the landlord informed me that close to my road at Burford, and but a mile away, was a most lovely old church, beautifully decorated, and with some fine gilt and painted altar-tombs. "You really should not miss seeing it," said he. I know not why, but somehow it seemed strange to me for an innkeeper to be so keen about a church. As he was so pressing I promised the landlord I would see the church, and thither I went. I pulled up the car at the corner of a narrow lane that led to the building, proceeding the rest of the way on foot, and on my way I overtook two ladies slowly walking in front of me. I was bold enough to inquire of them, and as politely as I could, whether the church door were open, or if not where I might find the clerk. One of the ladies answered me in a low voice, and with so solemn a look that I felt I had made a mistake in addressing her; however, she said, "The doors are open. It is a quiet day." I thanked her and congratulated myself that I had come on a "quiet day," then I could inspect the church undisturbed and at leisure. I did not then know the significance of a "quiet day." Since I have learnt that a "quiet day" is one wholly devoted to silent prayer and meditation, in church and out of it, and that those taking part in such are supposed not to speak to one another during the day more words than are absolutely necessary. Further, I have been told the story of a parson who, in reply to his bishop offering to conduct "a quiet day" in his parish, declared that what his parishioners required was not "a quiet day" but an earthquake! [Pg 154]

The church proved to be richly adorned; there were several exceptionally fine altar-tombs in it, more suitable, I thought, to Westminster Abbey than to that little country fane; there too I noticed a beautiful rood-screen, and its fine timber roof had for supporters the carved figures of angels gracefully wrought; three lights, in hanging lamps, were burning before the "altar"; I quite expected to find a faint odour of incense, but this I failed to do. It was a Protestant church after all, though to me it hardly had the look of one. But to those who do not see "the mark of the beast" in an ornate church interior, and in burning lights before the "altar," the effect and richness of such decoration is pleasing. What would one of Cromwell's stern Puritans, could he come to life again and see that church, think of it, I wonder? Without that resurrection it is enough to make him turn uneasily in his grave.

One of the tombs against the north chancel wall has the recumbent effigy of Princess Elizabeth of Lancaster under a finely carved canopy; she is represented with longhair bound round with oak leaves; two kneeling angels hold her cushioned head. Her epitaph runs:

Here lyeth the bodie of the
Most Noble Elizabeth,
daughter of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster,
own sister to King Henry IV.
. . . . . .
She died the 4th yere of Henry VI.
An. Dni. 1426.

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So I picked up much unknown, or wholly forgotten, family history on the road.

Another magnificent altar-tomb, glorious in gilt and colour, stands in the centre of the church; on this rests the effigy of Edmond Cornewalle, deceased 1508; he is shown in plate armour, his head on his helmet; his feet with gilded spurs are supported by a crowned lion, painted red. If a dead man could behold his monument, this Edmond Cornewalle should be very proud of his. There are other interesting and beautiful tombs, including two heart shrines, but I had to content myself with a hurried glance at these, for people were silently arriving and kneeling in the pews, and some of them looked up so reproachfully at me for wandering about that I felt ashamed I was not like them; and what else could a sinner do, under the circumstances, but take his quiet departure? I had, however, time just to note a wonderfully fine and ancient decorative panel in perfect preservation and of large size in the chancel; this

has figures of the apostles painted on it, with sundry coats-of-arms, all done in rich colouring, though what the apostles have to do with coats-of-arms I cannot imagine. As I was leaving the church I was surprised to find, standing just within the porch, an old grandfather's clock marking faithful time, for it looked curiously out of place, almost as much, it struck me, as would a lectern in a drawing-room. So hushed was the church that the subdued tick of the clock was plainly audible, mildly disturbing the Quaker-like quiet of the people gathered there. In the churchyard I observed a [Pg 156] beautiful modern stone cross raised on the ancient and worn steps of a former one doubtless destroyed by the Puritans, to whom a cross of any kind was as a red rag to a bull; but there is a cross back in the old place again, as though there had been no such thing as the wrathful Puritan. "See how these Christians love one another," once exclaimed a gentle Japanese pagan when listening to a hot dispute between a Protestant and a Roman Catholic missionary in his own peaceful land. Now I suppose both the Roman Catholic and the Puritans called themselves Christians, but there was little of brotherly love between them!

After Burford our road led us up a valley of clear streams and green pastures, bounded ahead by a long line of blue and undulating hills; we crossed one or two grey old stone bridges, so narrow that two vehicles could not pass over them at the same time. Perhaps this slight impediment to travel does not greatly trouble people in these parts, for we met little traffic on the way, only a cart for some miles, and a solitary tramp trudging along disconsolately. We had the country almost to ourselves until we came in sight of the grey old town of Ludlow, one of the most interesting and picturesque towns in England; but to see Ludlow at its best it needs to be approached, as we approached it, from the south, for to the north a collection of ugly modern brick houses has unhappily sprung up, and these are sadly out of harmony with the rest of the age-mellowed buildings. Before the railway was invented was the golden age of pleasure travel—for those who had money in their purses. [Pg 157] Then Buggins the builder had done comparatively little harm in the matter of the uglification of the countryside; there was pleasure in posting across country in those picturesque, motorless days.

Coming to it from the south, the castle-crowned town of Ludlow greets the traveller with a genuine flavour of antiquity. He enters it, as did the traveller of centuries ago, through a narrow, arched, stone gateway with round flanking towers. The gateway stands "massive and grim across the street," a graphic reminder of the feudal days when Ludlow was surrounded by fortified walls, broken and ruined now, but they can still be traced encircling the town. Then as we drove on we had a glimpse of the famous "Feathers Inn," with its nodding gables, as fine and as well-preserved a specimen of a half-timber hostelry as one may hope to look upon. The interior of this ancient house with its elaborately carved chimney-pieces and enriched plastered ceilings is even more interesting and picturesque than the exterior, and there are many other quaint and beautiful old houses in the town, notably the Reader's House. I should like to unearth the story of the "Feathers," for it looks like an inn with a storied past, else why those stately chambers? But though, on my return home, I searched for this in many books, I could discover nothing certain about it. Probably it was originally the home of some notable personage.

We left Ludlow by the broad highway that leads to Shrewsbury, but we soon deserted it for a lane which took us across a wide and [Pg 158] breezy common, with an open, shelterless country stretching for miles away in front. Then we observed great banks of louring clouds ahead rapidly approaching, leaving trailing lines of rain behind which blotted out all the distance. Suddenly the wind rose ominously, then followed a low growl of thunder; we were in for a storm, and our road was unpleasantly exposed. However, there was nothing to do but to drive on; then suddenly I espied, a little to the right of our open road, a village almost buried in leafy elms, that together, village and trees, stood out from the plain like a wooded island from the sea. Other shelter was there none, so to that village we sped on apace; it was a race between us and the storm, and we won by barely a minute. Stanton Lacy proved to be the name of the village, and I do not remember ever having been in one so buried in trees before—great branching trees that at one spot afforded us fair shelter from the worst of the storm. Fortunately the storm was short, though sharp, for I do not think our natural umbrella would

have provided protection for long.

SAXON DOORWAY, STANTON LACY CHURCH.

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Having taken shelter close to the church, I thought I would while away the time whilst the rain came down by taking a glance at it, though I had already seen one church that day; for there was nothing else to do but to sit in the car beneath the drip of the trees. After all it was a fortunate storm, for without it I should not have visited that village or its very ancient church, which proved of uncommon interest. A Saxon church of old, I discovered by the "long and short" projecting stone-work on a portion of the building, and by a very perfect though simple Saxon doorway in the north wall having a boldly carved raised cross on the top, and above this a curious bit of ornamentation of which I could make nothing. In the churchyard is an eighteenth-century tombstone to Thomas Davies, whose epitaph runs:

> Good-natur'd, generous, bold, and free
> He always was in company;
> He loved his bottle as a friend,
> Which soon brought on his latter end.

The storm over, we once more resumed our way. The open fields, after Nature's copious shower-bath, were freshly green and smiling; the distant hills of Wenlock Edge stood out shapely and sharply with their fringes of fir against the now bright sky; the air was enchantingly pure and fragrant with the scent of many growing things; the road was dustless, and the brisk breeze fluttered the foliage of the few trees by the way, and sported with the long grasses in the fields as it swept over them, giving a sense of joyous movement everywhere. It was well worth suffering the storm for the after glory of the day, the peaceful evening that followed it, and the clear starlit night succeeding that.

The next village we came to was Culmington, a sleepy out-of-the-world spot on the Corve; the ancient church there attracts the eye on account of its fine and uncommon broach spire. There is little else of interest in the place. Next we turned up at the rapidly growing village of Craven Arms, curiously so named from a solitary inn of some pretence that stood there—and still stands, I believe—in the old coaching days, with a wonderful tall milestone in front of it, on which are recorded the names and distances of no less than thirty-six towns, near and afar, so important a centre of travel was the "Craven Arms"—the hostelry, that is—in past times. Now it is an important railway junction, and round about the once solitary inn

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has grown a large village that promises in turn and time to grow into a small town, though for the name of a village that of Craven Arms sounds strange in my ears.

CHAPTER IX

Place names—Bell ringing for lost travellers—A Robber's Grave and its story—Wild Wales—A picturesque interior—The fascination of the moors—Machynlleth—A Royal and ancient house—Ten miles of beauty—Aberdovey—Tramps and their ways—The poetical tramp.

Out of Craven Arms I took the fine old coach road that leads to Shrewsbury, intent on seeing Church Stretton on the way, for I had heard much in praise of the scenery round about that quiet little Shropshire town. From my map I gathered that the road for some miles went between high hills, and so promised me a pleasant drive, for I am a lover of hills.

Of the ten miles or so on to Church Stretton one spot alone now comes back distinctly to my memory, a spot where I was sadly tempted to desert the broad highway for a tempting lane that led westward into a mystery of moorlands. I had some difficulty in resisting the temptation, but I desired to see Church Stretton. For once I had a definite destination before me, yet I almost wished I had not, for it robbed me of my freedom.

First we came to Little Stretton, where we had for company the ancient Roman Watling Street with its parvenu follower, the railway. I wonder will the railway endure as long as the Roman road has done! Soon afterwards we found ourselves in Church Stretton, with [Pg 162] the green hills rising grandly around and forming a pleasant background to the straggling, old-fashioned town built along the sides of the highway; hence, possibly, its name is derived from Street Town, but this is mere guessing, and in guessing you sometimes go sadly wrong, as I found out once when I deemed I was certainly right. In Sussex there are two villages not very far apart—one is called Friston, the other Alfriston. Now I jumped to the conclusion that Alfriston meant Old Friston, to distinguish it from the younger village; but a learned antiquary would have none of my guessing, he declaring that Alfriston stood for Alfric's tun or town, it having been given by the king to one Alfric, lord of the manor, who gave the place his name.

At Church Stretton we tarried a time, but I am not going to describe the familiar; the guide-book writers have written fully of the place. I do not desire to enter into a needless competition with them. Merely will I say that those who love hill rambles and scrambles will not be disappointed with the country round about Church Stretton, for it is a pedestrian's paradise. The churchyard there contains one or more curious epitaphs; that to Ann Cook, who died in 1814, runs:

> On a Thursday she was born,
> On a Thursday made a bride,
> On a Thursday broke her leg,
> And on a Thursday died.

In old times I was told the church bell was rung on foggy days [Pg 163] and nights, as a guide to the town for travellers who might be lost on the hills around; now they are not so thoughtful for the fate of befogged wayfarers. Not that I think that the ringing of a bell is really of much guidance under such circumstances, for once I lost myself on the South Downs in as dense a fog as well could be, and though I heard some church bells in the distance faintly ringing, I could not make out with any certainty from what direction the sound of the bells came; in truth they rather confused than helped me.

On to Shrewsbury a change gradually came over the scenery; we left the hills behind and entered into a pleasantly undulating, pastoral country. We dallied not in Shrewsbury, but drove straight through that ancient and interesting town, for who that professes to know his own country knows not Shrewsbury by the winding Severn side? My object was not to revisit places I knew full well, however attractive these places might be; I was in search of the fresh and the unfamiliar.

Being at Shrewsbury, after a glance at my map I suddenly made up my mind to strike from there right through the heart of Central Wales to Aberdovey and the sea, steering, roughly, a westerly course as the roads permitted. A longing to get a glimpse of wild Wales had taken possession of me, to refresh my eyes by a sight of its tumbling rivers, foaming falls, lone mountains, and heathery boulder-strewn moors. Then this portion of Wales being out of the

general tourist beat, I looked forward to seeing it in its native simplicity. I would I could have seen North Wales in the days of [Pg 164] David Cox before the railway and the cheap tripper had invaded and vulgarised it, the days when Bettws-y-Coed was a poor and primitive village, before the "Royal Oak" there—then the haunt of tweed-clad artists and cheery anglers—was converted from a homely little inn into a flourishing hotel where noisy tourists mostly congregate. I am afraid I am a selfish man, for, amongst the mountains, the only company I crave is the landscape painter, the honest angler, and the weather-beaten shepherd; these are in unobtrusive harmony with their surroundings, and claim their part in it from ancient right.

Crossing the Welsh Bridge at Shrewsbury, we followed, for some long way, a winding road through a country given over to farming; a country of fields, hedgerows, and growing crops, of sleepy hamlets and stray farmsteads; idyllic but unexciting. Still, there were peeps of hills and the promise of wilder things in the vague beyond to which we were bound. No amount of disappointment robs the beyond of its glamour, for the unknown unfailingly attracts, the disenchantment of to-day may be followed by the surprise of to-morrow. Yet distance is but a gay deceiver; where we may be at any moment, is not that the delectable distance to others far away? "The delusion that distance creates contiguity destroys."

We kept steering a westerly course to the best of our ability, and on the whole we succeeded in doing so fairly well, trusting to arrive somehow and at some time at Aberdovey. Who has not heard of the [Pg 165] sweet bells of Aberdovey?—I know not whether they ring sweetly still, for no bells rang for us when we were there. For many miles the scenery, though pleasant enough, was devoid of special character, but as we progressed the country grew wilder and the villages lost their indefinable English look; we had not arrived in Wales, but we were nearing the borderland. Long Mountain rose grandly to our right, clear cut as a Grecian statue against the sky, and to our left the curiously-shaped range of hills known as the Stipperstones stood prominently forth, their summits broken by huge rugged rocks, "the fragments of an earlier world," that stand boldly forth from them. According to a local legend, at times on stormy nights "Wild Edric," an ancient warrior chief, may be seen riding in the air above the Stipperstones, and when he is seen it forebodes some calamity. Give me the West Country for legends! I have heard of ghostly huntsmen with their yeth-hounds being seen there; of ghostly highwaymen; of headless horsemen who pursue lone travellers at night on lonely roads; of the ghosts of men and horses who once a year, on the anniversary of the battle of Sedgemoor, may be heard a-galloping away from that fatal field; and of the Devil himself riding across country, whose horse once cast a shoe, when the Devil called at a blacksmith's to have it re-shod, and how the blacksmith declared he caught a glimpse of his Satanic majesty's cloven foot beneath his cloak—and this within the memory of living man!

Most singular is the formation of the Stipperstones. Of course there are sundry legends to account for these gigantic rocks that [Pg 166] strew the crests of the hills, as though some cyclopean city had been ruined there, and the Devil plays a prominent part in all. How busy the Devil appears to have been in England during the old days! I call to mind the Devil's Leap, the Devil's Dyke, the Devil's Bridge, the Devil's Punch Bowl, the Devil's Stone, the Devil's Den, the Devil's Frying-pan, and many another spot named after him. The one sin of idleness cannot be placed at his door. Then as we drove on Marton Mere, church, and village made a pleasant diversion, and shortly afterwards the tiny old town of Montgomery came into view, climbing the steep hillside, with its ruined castle above, and tumble of hills beyond. From this point Montgomery presents such a picture as Turner loved to paint—a prominent castle, grey and old, a sleepy little town below, with dreamy hills beyond, and a winding road leading the eye towards them.

When last I was at Montgomery—let me see, that was over twenty long years ago. Alas, how time flies! Still, however I may have changed, the old town looks to me just as it did then; it is one of those delightful, remote places that never seem to change, let the outer world wag as it will—Well, twenty years or so ago the clerk (may he be alive and as well as I!) showed me the Robber's Grave in a quiet corner of the churchyard there, a grave on which no grass will grow, in proof of which the grave was pointed out to me, a bare spot roughly in the shape of a coffin, when all around was freshly

green. Whether the grave be still bare I know not, for my present road did not lead me into the town; I almost wish now I had gone the short distance out of my way to reinspect the spot. This is the story I noted down at the time of the Robber's Grave as told to me by the said clerk, only retold in brief. A certain John Newton, a long while ago, was accused of highway robbery, convicted and sentenced to be hanged, such an offence being then punished by death. On the scaffold Newton loudly proclaimed his innocence, exclaiming, "I have prayed God in proof of my innocence that no grass may grow on my grave." I forget now how many years the clerk told me he had been clerk there, but they were many, during which period he had carefully watched the grave, but not a blade of grass would grow upon it. Fresh sods had been laid there, but they withered away even in one night; the earth was dug up and grass seeds sown, but they would not come up, so the grave remained bare and brown. "I've been clerk here for all those long years," said he, "and I'm only telling you the truth." I cannot say why, but that clerk reminded me of another of the fraternity who exclaimed to a certain Dean he had shown over his church, "I've been clerk here for now over forty years and never missed a service, and, thank God, I'm still a Christian"!

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So small a town is Montgomery, though the capital of the shire, that a man, it is said, who once tramped there in search of work, inquired in the town how far it was to Montgomery, for he thought he was merely passing through a village on the way to that place.

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Now our road wound round the side of a wooded hill, from which there was a fine view of the country; and in this wood I sought shelter from the sultry sun and rested there awhile for refreshment, when the birds began to sing for my special entertainment, for there was no one else for them to sing to, and the "Wind, that grand old harper," struck his harp of pines by my side and played a soft accompaniment. Reclining at ease on a mossy bank I smoked a fragrant pipe, well pleased with my wayside hostelry, my comfortable couch, and the music provided with my meal. "The outer world, from which we cower into our houses, seems after all a gentle habitable place," says Stevenson. Only at night in the summer time do I desire to "cower" into a house, and that for the convenience of it; indeed the only room I can suffer on a summer day is a library walled round with a goodly company of books, and with just a picture here and there of a pleasant landscape for my eyes, when in a lazy mood, to rest upon. On winter days, when the wild Nor'-easter blows and the rain and hail descend, I grant it is good to be indoors; then give me a seat in a good old-fashioned ingle-nook with a blazing wood fire upon the wide hearth before me, the sweet incense of it reminiscent of the forest. As Richard Jefferies says, "The wood gives out as it burns the sweetness it has imbibed through its leaves from the atmosphere which floats above grass and flowers."

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Once more on the road we dropped down into a valley and soon came to the Severn again, here in its youth lashing and frolicking along—how good it is to be young and gay! So we followed the rejoicing river up to Newton, where I took the precaution of filling my petrol tank before making my dash across wild Wales. The man who sold me the petrol asked me where I was going—this, as he politely explained, in case he might give me any information as to the route. Such is the friendliness of the road. When I told him where I was bound, he exclaimed, "You've got a lovely drive before you, through the most beautiful scenery." I was glad to hear this, though I expected much of the country, and I was pleased to find that the vendor of petrol had a thought for the scenic charms around. He was not a mere vendor of petrol, though he courteously supplied it to a needful world.

Soon after leaving Newton we entered upon a pleasant valley, as pleasant a valley indeed as shapely hills, shady woods, and a sparkling river running through it could make a valley; an uncommercial clear-running river, for it turned no mill by its banks as far as I could see. Its only concern was to be beautiful, and after all that is no small concern. Clouds appear as devoted to the hills as a lover to his lass, and here we found the clouds prevailing over the blue sky, shadowing for a time the hills; then as the clouds passed over them, and a gleam of sunshine came, the hillsides would stand forth all in glowing colour, purple where the heather grew, glowing with gold where the gorse was in bloom, a yellow green on their grassy slopes, and a gleaming grey where the wet rocks showed.

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For the rich and varied colour of its landscapes I know no country to compare with Wales, though it has its dull days, of course, like most other lands.

So we drove on in contemplative enjoyment, and then we came to Carno, a tiny hamlet pleasantly placed on a crag above the voiceful river that would be heard as well as seen. I wish all Welsh villages had such easily spelt and such pronounceable names as Carno; for many a day and many a time, when I have been on the road in Wales, have I been unable to ask my way because I could not pronounce the names of places so that a Welshman could understand me. What can you make of a gathering of consonants, with only a stray vowel here and there amongst the lot? At Carno I espied a homely little inn, the "Aleppo Merchant," to wit, though what possible connection there could be between an Eastern merchant and this remote and tiny village I could not fathom. There I pulled up and called for a glass of ale as an excuse to take a glance at the interior of the old house in case it were answerable to its exterior, for some of these Welsh houses within are most picturesque; nor was I disappointed. There I caught sight of a low, brown-beamed, ceilinged room—I think it was the kitchen, for there was a fire in it though the day was warm, and above the fireplace, arranged in orderly array, were sundry old brass utensils, so brightly polished as to glow like gold; and mingled with these were some pewter pots that shone like silver, and how pleasant they were to look upon. For decorative effect there is nothing like blue and white china, and polished brass and pewter, and they are all as much at home in a mansion as in a cottage. Hanging from the beams I saw a goodly display of hams, no less than thirty-four in all, for I carefully counted them out of curiosity. "Home-cured," the maid who served me with my ale declared. I thought I would buy one, for home-cured hams are not easy to come by nowadays, and such a ham is a delicacy to be enjoyed. But they were not for sale; not even one of them would they spare me, though I did not haggle about the price. "We want them all for ourselves," explained the maid, and with that she went away to serve another customer. I thought to myself these Welsh country people do not fare so badly.

A BIT OF WILD WALES.

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Some way beyond Carno we began to climb out of the valley and reached a wide moorland, encircled by misty mountains. A moorland waste enlivened only by the dreary gleams of peaty pools, but how buoyant and bracing were the breezes that blew over it! The air was inspiriting if the scene was not. From the moorland we descended steeply to the Tal valley with its tumbling river by our side making wild music as it dashed on its downward way. We were

> Amongst a multitude of hills,
> Crags, woodlands, waterfalls, and rills.

That describes our road in two short but sufficient lines, and what need is there of more? At Cemmaes we found ourselves in the wider valley of the Dovey; then we rose again to another moorland high above it, with far-reaching prospects over the river to a confusion of bare hill-tops rising above the deep woods below. The Dovey is a river much favoured by fishermen, as our eyes bore witness, but one irate angler I afterwards met, who had fished it without success, declared to me that there were more fishermen on its banks than fish in the stream. Possibly he was prejudiced; possibly the river is much poached, for the Welshman is a born poacher, though, being religiously minded, I am told he considers it a sin to poach on Sundays.

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I did not reach Aberdovey that night, for as I drove into Machynlleth, a town of unpronounceable name to me, the rain came down, and finding a good inn there I proceeded no farther, though Aberdovey was but ten miles on, but it was late and at Machynlleth I was certain of my quarters. Aberdovey could wait. There were two fishermen in the porch of my inn when I arrived; they had just returned from the river with empty creels. "It will be a good day to-morrow for fishing after the rain," one of them consolingly exclaimed. What virtue there lies in to-morrow and in the promise of it!

In the smoke-room that evening I discovered a man poring, and apparently puzzling, over some maps and guide-books, so I ventured to ask if I could be of any assistance. I learnt from him that he was a courier and was travelling in a motor-car with a lady and her daughter from the States, and that he was planning their route for the morrow; but what truly astonished me was his statement that [Pg 173] his party had come over to England solely to see the moors and the mountains, and that he was instructed to avoid all large towns as far as possible. It certainly struck me as passing strange that any American should come to England in search of wildness to the avoidance of old-world places. "We've had a rough journey of it," the courier exclaimed. "We landed at Southampton, made straight for Dartmoor, then we did Exmoor, now we're doing the Welsh mountains in the most deserted districts, next we're off to do the Yorkshire moors, then we're going the round of Scotland. We've had awful roads, and the chauffeur does not much fancy the job. No more do I, for that matter, but when a woman with money has got a whim in her head, she's bound to carry it out. It's the funniest journey I've ever undertaken."

The rain was dashing against the window-panes. "What a day we shall have to-morrow over the mountains," said the courier; "whatever the weather, off we go; I've got to see the thing through, and to be at Liverpool at a certain date to catch the steamer." I found some entertainment in the conversation, and though I am prepared for surprises on the road, I was hardly prepared for such a surprise as this—an American to come to England in search of wildness. But one may travel till one ceases to wonder at anything. Now when I come to think of it, I do remember some years ago meeting at Warwick two American ladies who were on a driving tour, and who told me what impressed them most in the Old Country was "the weird wildness of the moors where the world seemed as [Pg 174] though it had only just been created; we thought to see nothing but meadows and cultivated fields," continued they, "and we've found solitudes." So did John Burroughs, by the way, during his English wanderings. Now that the motor-car has been invented you meet American travellers on motor-cars in the most out-of-the-way and unexpected places, and they appear to delight in them and in their discovery. Columbus discovered America; now the Americans have set about the discovery of rural England. Soon there will be nothing left in the world to discover.

Then one of the fishermen came in, but he never broached the subject of fishing; he appeared to take more interest in my tour than in his sport. I left the subject of conversation to him. He asked me where I had come from that day, and when I told him, I was interested to learn that he too was a well-seasoned road traveller who, like myself, knew his roads better than his Bradshaw, and that he considered the drive from Newton to Machynlleth one of the most beautiful in the kingdom, "because it is so changeful and so continuously pleasant." Truly it has no presiding peak, no particular waterfall, no old castle, no special *coup d'œil*, no shrine for the tourist to worship at, nothing that you feel bound to admire whether in the humour or no, so you can quietly jog on your way without fatigue of mind or eye, without a thought of missing this or that you ought to see and friends expect you to see and perhaps praise. Where all is interesting there is no special assertive point of [Pg 175] interest, and for one I prefer my scenic meal served thus. I certainly can commend that drive, and during the whole length of it I met no other car, so I imagine it is not a much-travelled road, unless it were the chance of circumstance that no motorists were in evidence then. It is an easy road, too, with only one really steep hill on all the way from Newton to Aberdovey.

Machynlleth is a cheerful town, which all Welsh towns are not; its wide main street is lined with trees, and what adds to the pleasantness of the place is its fortunate position in the sheltered

Dovey valley from which rise wooded hills around; after Conway I think it is the cleanest and pleasantest town in Wales. Though it possesses no castle to centre its interest, or church of note, still it boasts of some old buildings that have the charm of character. One very ancient and historic building is the "Royal House," though its plastered front effectually disguises its ancientness, nor is there anything about it to suggest its past importance, but there it was in 1402 that Owen Glyndwr was crowned King of Wales, and there he held his Parliament, and within its walls his life was attempted by one David Gam. In this very house, too, Charles I. slept a night on his way to Chester. I was informed that the walls of the building were in parts of Roman masonry, so old is it, but as the walls are plastered over I had to take this statement on faith. Still it is within the bounds of probability, for the Romans had a fortified station at [Pg 176] Machynlleth "to keep the troublesome mountaineers in order."

There is also another house, with some fine carving within, known as the "Mayor's House," on which the inhabitants set much store, though I saw little in it; it is a mildly picturesque structure of half-timber, with two large dormer-windows above, a building that strikes an odd note in a land of stone. On the front of it boldly carved in oak is the following enlightening inscription—

1628. I. OWEN. PVQHIOVXOR.

That is all of interest the town has to show, as far as I could discover or hear about; the scenery around is its chief attraction. Finding my quarters and the company at my inn to my liking, I determined to stay there over the next day, just putting through the spare time by driving to Aberdovey and back, by way of a partial rest from continuous travelling.

The beauty of the road from Machynlleth to Aberdovey was a surprise to me; the drive was infinitely more rewarding than the object of the drive. First we crossed the Dovey by a fine stone bridge (would that the Welshmen built their chapels as beautifully!) at a spot where the river chattered and danced over its pebbly shallows, and where its quiet pools were green with the reflection of the shady woods by its sides. For the rest of the way our road with many a bend wound about the base of the wooded hills, with the river brightly gliding on the other hand; now our road rounded a projecting crag, now it dipped down to rise again, following [Pg 177] faithfully the natural bent of the land; it could not well do otherwise, unless it blasted its way through rocks and tunnelled under the hills. Had it been carefully engineered it would not have been half as pleasant; its very waywardness was the charm of it. Each bend of the road revealed some fresh combination of wood and hill, of rock and river, and the last bend of it the sea cheerfully gleaming in the sunshine. Beneath the woods and on the banks by the wayside the waving bracken flourished, forming a soft background to the many wild-flowers growing there, amongst which the stately foxglove, "chieftain of the wayside flowers," showed prominently. Approaching Aberdovey we had a fine view over the wide estuary of the Dovey, that almost looked like a lake with its background of hills. A signpost pointing "To the Roman Road" brought to mind the times remote when even the wild Welshman in these far-off mountain fastnesses felt the strong and extended arm of the Roman power. Then we came to the open sea, smooth and smiling as though there were never any hurt in it; it lapped the rocky shore in a friendly fashion without hardly a splash or a sound, a plaything fit for a child, as though it never longed for the wind, or the wreck of a ship, or took toll of the lives of men.

Aberdovey neither pleased nor disappointed me. I knew it was a watering-place, so I found what I expected: a row of ordinary houses, having apartments to let, facing the sea; a watering-place saved from being wholly uninteresting by a little jetty jutting out [Pg 178] into the water, where at the time of our coming two coasting schooners lay alongside discharging their cargoes, a few shoremen looking languidly on. There is always a certain charm about ships of the old-fashioned sort, a suggestion of adventure; and what finer sight can there be than a ship in full sail on the sea? A sight that, alas, is a rare one to-day! How monotonous is the long, level line of the sea's horizon without a ship in sail on it; for a steamer is dark and is not the same thing to the eye as a sailer. One point about Aberdovey is that the distant Welsh mountains in part break this horizon line pleasantly.

I was glad to get back to Machynlleth, for it made no pretence of being anything but a quiet little country town at which the traveller might take his ease. I spent the evening seated in the porch of "mine inn" a-chatting with "mine host," having also an eye to the people on the road, and so to the life and the humours of the place. With the help of the landlord to tell me who was who, as far as he knew, and what part each one played on the town's stage, I was entertained enough. I think amongst the loiterers, if I had been a novelist, I could have picked out a character or two of service. Plots may get exhausted, but characters seem inexhaustible. Amongst the numbers of passers-by I noticed a poor specimen of humanity in the shape of a footweary tramp; and though I have so often been taken in by tramps, yet he looked so pitiful an object that I had a mind to take compassion on him to the extent of a whole sixpence; for how could I sit there, who had dined and was even indulging in the [Pg 179] infrequent luxury of a cigar, and behold a fellow-mortal go by in need and not hold forth a helping hand? The landlord, too, had noticed him. "Look at that man," exclaimed he. "I know him well. He's on one of his yearly tramps. Always comes to Machynlleth regularly. Never did a day's work in his life. As lazy a good-for-nothing fellow as ever trod the road." I presumed the landlord knew, so hardening my heart I kept my sixpence in my pocket.

One might scarcely think it of so unprepossessing a person, but I have found the tramp to be occasionally an amusing individual, that is, when I have got him alone on the road and obtained his confidence—to accomplish which needs considerable diplomacy, a professed sympathy with his lot, and a certain expenditure of coin of the realm to prove such sympathy; then, when in a confidential mood, my tramp has more than once given me an insight into the sort of life he leads, and has even gloried in his mendacity, and has recorded with much self-satisfaction the way he manages to live and find shelter without doing a stroke of work. Such a one, as far as I can gather, would tramp the country even though weary and wet through at times, live on anything, rather than work. How is a man like that to be dealt with? He takes no pride in himself or anything; he has not even a character to lose. "It's a pretty poor life at times, I own," said one of the tribe to me; "but it's the only life worth living, it's so gloriously free. Take one day with another, it's not such a bad [Pg 180] life after all in fine weather, and I always has my pipe and bit of 'baccy with me by way of company. I never got any pleasure out of life till I took to the road. Well, sometimes it's a bit lonely, but I can generally manage to pick up a companion on the way. We are a friendly lot, we tramps be," and so on.

Whether it is their lonely life or otherwise I cannot say, but it seems that some tramps are addicted to composing poetry. Here, for example, is a trifle, expressing his sentiments, that a certain tramp left behind him scribbled on a casual ward (at Newark I think it was):—

The sailor loves his good old ship,
    The soldier loves his camp;
But give to me the good old road,
    To live and die a tramp.

Some year or two back the Chief Constable of Berkshire, according to my morning paper, when discussing the subject of vagrancy before a meeting of the Charity Organisation Society, quoted the following verses written by a prisoner on the wall of his cell, as illustrating the predilection of tramps even for prison rather than work:—

I cannot take my walks abroad,
    I'm under lock and key,
And much the public I applaud
    For all their care of me.

The lowest pauper in the street
    Half naked I behold,
Whilst I am clad from head to feet
    And covered from the cold.

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Thousands there are who scarce can tell
    Where they may lay their head,
But I've a warm and well-aired cell,
    A bath, good books, and bed.

Whilst they are fed on workhouse fare
    And grudged their scanty food,

Three times a day my meals I get,
    Sufficient, wholesome, good.

Then to the British public "Health,"
    Who all our care relieves;
And when they treat us as they do,
    They'll never want for thieves.

CHAPTER X

Mallwyd—Falling waters—Dinas Mawddwy—Amongst the moors and mountains—A wild drive—A farmer's logic—A famous old inn—A fisherman's tale—A Roman inscribed stone—Brass to old Thomas Parr—A cruel sport—Wem and its story—A chat with "mine host"—Hawkestone and its wonders.

We left Machynlleth on a blustery morning when the wild west wind was out for a rampage across country, and who could say it nay? We retraced the road we came by for a short distance, but the landscape had a fresh look seen in the reverse direction; then we turned up the narrow Dyfi valley, hills rising near and bare on either hand, those to the right mist-crowned and scarred by numberless streams that would be torrents, which had worn for themselves long stony channels on the steep hillside, and down these they dashed, milk-white in their mimic, harmless fury, filling the valley with the sound of their complainings. A hill

> . . . that shows
> Inscribed upon its visionary sides
> The history of many a winter storm.

It was a day full of movement; the clouds above were hounded along relentlessly by the hurrying wind that even blew the birds on the wing about—a wind that played riot with the woods, tossing the [Pg 183] tops of the trees this way and that, swaying their branches even to breaking one here and there, and surring through their leaves with a sound like that of a stormy sea heard afar off. The air was full of the confused sounds of the roaring wind and raging waters. The clouds above looked drooping and threatening, but the wind trailed them along and drove them over the mountains before they had time to do much mischief, tearing some even to shreds. Nature was at play that day, and in as rampageous a mood as ever a schoolboy out for a holiday; but no mood of hers would have suited better the bare hills and bleak mountains, for, as Coleridge remarks, "there is always something going on amongst the mountains in stormy weather." There was a good deal going on that day, and loud was the din of the contending elements, and rough the embrace of the wind.

At the end of the valley we found ourselves at Mallwyd, a tiny hamlet consisting of a cottage or two, a curious and ancient church, and an old-fashioned little stone-built inn half drowned in dark ivy. Mallwyd is a lonely spot shut in by gloomy mountains; its inn is the fit resort of anglers and artists, for who else, except perhaps a poet, would seek such solitary quarters, unless it were some one who desired to flee mankind? The old inn appealed to me, so far removed from the busy world it seemed, so restful with all around so full of unrest, its strong stone walls fit to bear the buffeting of all [Pg 184] weathers; such strong walls it needed, and it looked so cosy, solid, and comfortable, in such contrast with the inhospitable country about and the wild winds that were raging.

In front of the inn, overhung by drooping trees, is a deep ravine down which the flooded river rushed and roared, a ravine spanned by a grey old bridge; and this with the tumbling, churning waters below, the dark, damp, shining rocks, the boulders that would impede the river's rush, the green, dripping, and trembling foliage of the trees above, made a picture to be remembered—"A roaring dell, o'er-wooded, narrow, deep." There on the bridge I stood awhile watching the turmoil of the waters; for a space they glided smoothly but swiftly over the rounded rocks with a polished surface clear as crystal, only the occasional and sudden darting lines of white foam and bubbles revealing their movement; then they broke and crashed into the dark pools beneath, sending their spray up on to the rocks and trees, which in turn dropped back beads of moisture into the whirling waters below. Strange that watching the restless waters should have given me a feeling of rest, but so it did; and do not some people find rest by the restless sea?

Great is the fascination that falling water has for certain people, and of the number I am one. Give me a mountain torrent in some wild and rocky glen remote in the wilderness, and let me be there alone, then I can, for an hour or more, contentedly watch its mad downward dash and mazy side-plays, its plunges and its plashings, its struggles with the boulders it overleaps and that itself has

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brought down but to obstruct its troubled course; its changeful colours, here silvery and bright in the shine of the sun, there dark and porter-hued in the shade of the rocks, a translucent amber tint where just escaping from the shelving rocks, with many greens above; and the bass roar of it sounds like music to my ears, the memory of which brings to me a sense of deep refreshment when in the thronged and bustling town; and sometimes at night in the roar of the streets' traffic I fancy I hear again the torrent's hoarse voice.

From Mallwyd we went to Dinas Mawddwy, a little more than a mile away, a village veritably walled in by high mountains that rise close and sheer around. It lies at the bottom of a mighty rock-girt cup. When we were there the mountains were roofed across with clouds, so they might have been of any height our fancy pleased. Dinas Mawddwy oppressed me with a sense of gloom—not but what there was a certain grandeur about its gloom, but the mountains around looked so dark, dreary, and enclosing. The place obsessed me, it had such an eerie look under the louring sky; I was glad to get out of it. The prevailing gloom depressed my spirits, a depression that lasted till I got far away on to the wide open moors. I love mountains, to be on them, but I do not care to be imprisoned in them.

Returning to Mallwyd we began to climb high amongst the hills; it was a wild, glorious drive, one vastly to be enjoyed, though on our exposed road we came in for a rare buffeting with the wind, but little we heeded that. Right bracing we found it, a tonic of tonics. As we rose the clouds began to break, and great patches of bright blue showed overhead; then frequent bursts of sunshine raked the distant mountains and swept over the moors, causing the wet rocks to glitter here and there, revealing too, now and again, a sparkling rill or a gleaming pool, so enlivening the wide waste of green and dull grey. We had exchanged mountain gloom for mountain glory. It was a fine landscape, delightful in its spaciousness and far-receding distances. [Pg 186]

Having climbed some miles we began a gradual descent to a sheltered hollow, where we entered into a straggling wood that had a civil look after the bareness of the mountains and the bleakness of the moors. Here our road took a sudden bend and crossed a deep dell boldly spanned by a one-arched bridge, and beyond the bridge we looked up to a cleft in the hills down which a tumbling stream left its white and broken trail, a stream that lost itself for a space in the woods below to shortly reappear again. This was one of the beauty-spots of the journey. The wooded dell, the grey bridge spanning it in one leap, the water falling and foaming down the dark rocks of the mountain side, the tawny-coloured stream below the bridge—altogether what a picture they made! "It seemed but a comparatively short and easy step from Nature to the canvas or to the poem" at that captivating spot!

Leaving the wooded glen we came to the open moors again, moors strewn with great weather-stained boulders that have lain there untold ages, before the stones of the Pyramids were hewn or the monoliths of Stonehenge raised from the ground, lain there since the close of the last geological epoch—some old writers indeed have declared "since God created the world." Centuries come and go, kingdoms wax and wane, but the moors remain the same, unchanged, and apparently unchangeable, in an age of change, in an age when most of the land is tilled to the uttermost. Here was a solitude with nothing but the mountains and the moors for the eyes to look upon; the wind had dropped, and great was the silence prevailing except for the faint tinkling of unseen rills that made the silence seem the more profound—not the comparative silence of the countryside, which to the attentive listener is not silence at all.

WELSH MOUNTAINS AND MOORLANDS.

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Gradually we dropped down to where the moors gave place to more kindly soil, though treeless and open still excepting for some rough and low stone walls by the roadside, but of what service (there being only hardy Welsh sheep dotted sparsely about) I could not imagine, for such sheep can climb a wall as well as any man; the only way to confine them is to place thorn branches along the tops of the walls, held there by big stones on them; even this arrangement sometimes fails, for the sheep are apt to pull down both branches and stones.

As we descended we came to patches of cultivated fields, and these increased till most of the land was enclosed and tilled, or under grass, so the scene became tamer. At the beginning of our descent we espied, close to the road, a lone farmhouse with a large water-wheel by the side of its outbuildings, so that the farmer, enlightened man, evidently utilised the power provided by the running streams instead of letting it go to waste, presumably to do his threshing, corn-grinding, chaff-cutting, and possibly churning, to the saving of labour. In a village I know the water-mill there grinds corn by day and generates electricity at night for its inhabitants, thus doing double duty. Rather different to a certain village in Essex where a meeting of the inhabitants—so I read in my morning paper—was held as to the lighting of it. At the meeting a local farmer opposed the project on the ground that "the Creator would have provided light if it had been necessary in the country at night," and strange to say, but true all the same, the lighting scheme was abandoned, though possibly on account of the expense and not because of the farmer's logic.

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Then we left the hills behind and came down into a green and fertile valley and to "Cann Office Inn"—why so curiously called I cannot say. "What's in a name?" says Shakespeare. Now I think there is much in a name; Aberdovey has a pleasant sound, but Cann Office is not a name suggestive of rural pleasantness, yet "Cann Office Inn" is a charming, old-fashioned, comfortable-looking wayside hostelry, ivy-covered to boot, and it boasts a restful garden; moreover, it is set in the heart of a lovely country far from the sight and sound of the fussy railway, though to be reached by the ubiquitous motor-car, for where goes the road there comes the car. Truly I wish the car was not so ubiquitous; indeed, oftentimes I find myself looking longingly and selfishly back to the desirable old days when the motor-car was not, when I travelled either afoot or by horses, slowly perhaps but contentedly enough on the then little-travelled, peaceful country roads, and took my ease at quiet rural inns, feeling fairly certain of accommodation and even of the best room of the house; now I do not feel so certain of either, nor of the old-time quiet—inns that in those days seemed so remote, and I delighted to give myself up to the delusion of their remoteness. How pleasantly those past wanderings linger in my memory, when in the country you were sure of finding peace and often solitude away from the railway! There is no getting away from the car or the sound of its horn. But vain is the cry of Backward Ho!

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"Cann Office Inn" was a famous hostelry in the good old coaching and posting era, so I have heard, and that there our hard-drinking ancestors made right merry over their glasses—

> In the past Georgian day
> When men were less inclined to say
> That time is gold, and overlay
> With toil their pleasure.

Nor troubled they about the morrow—or the gout.

Unlike many other coaching inns, Cann Office never seems to have fallen upon evil days, for when it lost its travelling and posting custom, anglers, just in the nick of time, happily discovered it, and ever since have haunted the troutful rivers and streams around. One angler indeed said to me, "If you can't catch fish here, you won't catch them anywhere." By my map I see that the rivers Banwy, Gam, [Pg 190] and Twrch meet close at hand, and many a minor stream runs near by. "Twrch"—there is a fine specimen of a Welsh name, without a vowel in it, for a Saxon to pronounce! Truly it is short, but there are others that are long, and still have not a helpful vowel in all their astonishing array of consonants.

An angler friend, who in years gone by had fished the rivers about Cann Office, told me that on bringing back his catch to the inn one day, by some mischance his fish got mixed with those of another angler who had fished another river there. He was somewhat vexed, but the landlord said he could quite easily sort them out, for the trout of the one river differed in appearance from the trout of the other—and he sorted them to the satisfaction of both parties. The same angler friend told me a story, for the truth of which he vouched. It appears that though a fairly good fisherman there were days when his sport was poor, and even he had to return at times with an empty creel, yet another angler there on those very days generally came back to the inn with a more or less satisfactory show of fish. So he consulted a native on the matter who knew, or was supposed to know, all about local conditions. The native replied that the man mentioned had a special fly to which the trout rose greedily, but he kept it a secret. One day, however, the man lost his cast on the branches of a tree; this the native discovered and recovered, and, for a consideration, handed to my friend. "All's fair in love—and fishing," so my friend sent the fly to his rod-and-tackle [Pg 191] maker to be copied. The fly was unlike any fly my friend had ever seen, but he used it with marked success, and during the rest of his stay he used no other.

At Llanerfyl, a little village beyond Cann Office, I pulled up to inspect a long printed notice I observed on the church door there. I found this related to the proposed Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Welsh Church. A great deal has been said of late, both in Parliament and out of it, about the neglect of the Welsh parsons of their parishes in past times.

But to go back to the eighteenth century, here is the story told by the author of *The Spiritual Quixote*, published in 1772, who in his Welsh wanderings found "a poor Welsh vicar of the diocese of Llandaff, sitting in his humble kitchen paring turnips for dinner, while he read a book and listened to one of his children repeating his lesson." Then he repeats what the vicar said to him:—

> "Now you must observe, sir, that after spending some years in the University and taking a Master of Arts degree, I am possessed of a little rectory of about £30 a year, and of this vicarage which, if I could make the most of it, might bring me in £20 more. Now each of these preferments these poor people consider a noble benefit, and though you see in what way I live, yet because I am possessed of half a dozen spoons and a silver tankard, they envy me as living in a princely state and lording it over God's heritage. And, what is worse, as my whole income in this parish arises from the small tithes, because I cannot afford to let them cheat me out of half my dues, they represent me as carnal and worldly-minded, and as one who regards nothing but the good things of this life, and who is always making disturbances in the [Pg 192] parish, and this prejudice against me prevents my doing that good amongst them which I sincerely wish to do. One man has left the church and walks miles to a Methodist meeting, because I took one pig out of seven as the law directs; another has complained to the Bishop of my extortion because I would not take three shillings and sixpence in lieu of tithes for a large orchard, as my predecessor had done. In short, sir, there are two or three Dissenters in the parish, who give out that all tithes are remnants of Popery; and would have the clergy consider meat and drink as types and shadows, which ought to have been abolished with the Levitical Law."

In the churchyard of Llanerfyl I noticed a large and ancient yew-tree, its extended branches shadowing the ground far around, its roots amongst the dead. In the shade of it I discovered what I took to be, from the look, the shape, and the lettering on it, a Roman inscribed stone, a stone weathered and worn, with much of the inscription wasted away; still, with difficulty, I managed to decipher a part of it—not that the deciphering left me much the wiser—and this is what I recovered:—

HIC . . . . . .
. . . . . .
D . . . . . .
GEDLAPA
TERMIN . .
AN . . XII . N .

Our road presently followed alongside the river Banwy, a river overhung with trees through which we caught constant silvery peeps of it tumbling over its bed of shelving rocks in shallow murmuring falls, anon resting, here and there, in many a quiet pool [Pg 193] where the big trout lie hidden, or should do so. The English language, and perhaps all others, needs a word to express the sound of falling water—"gurgling" and "plashing" are the nearest I can think of, but they hardly fulfil the need. Then Llanfair village, picturesquely situated on a hill just above the running river, came in view, with its large, tall-towered church keeping watch and ward over its cottage homes; you rarely see so fine a church in a Welsh village—most frequently you find a chapel, a gaunt and square eyesore, where they preach the Calvinistic Creed.

A signpost informed me that the road led to Welshpool. Now to Welshpool I had no desire to go; it is a large town where, I believe, they manufacture flannels, a useful town, but it had no interest for me; however, as the road was a pleasant one I kept to it. By the way, the first signpost was inscribed "To Welshpool," but farther on this was shortened to simply "Pool." We duly reached Welshpool; it had a prosperous look; there was much traffic in its streets. We were glad to get out of it into the quiet country again, and a very pleasant country it proved to be, our road leading us along the hillsides and past fragrant pine-woods, with distant peeps of finely-shaped hills.

Close to the hamlet of Wollaston I pulled up to consult the map, and to ask the name of the place from a youth who was passing by, and when he had told me this I jokingly queried if there were anything to see there, for it looked an uninteresting spot where nothing had ever happened, or was likely to happen. "Well," replied [Pg 194] he, "old Parr lived here—you may have heard of him; there's a brass about him in the church. I know where the key's kept, I'll run and get it for you"—doubtless with an eye to earning an honest penny or two, where, I should imagine, pennies were hard to earn. But he was a civil youth, so I let him get the key. There in the church I found a brass against the wall with a portrait of that old man engraved on the top, and the following inscription below:—

The Old, Old, very Old Man
Thomas Parr
Was born at the Glyn
In the township of Winnington
Within the Chapelry of Great Wollaston
And Parish of Alberbury
In the County of Salop
In the year of our Lord 1483.
He lived in the reigns of Ten Kings
And Queens of England (viz.) King Edward 4th
King Edward 5th King Richard 3rd King Henry 7th
King Henry 8th King Edward 6th Queen Mary Queen
Elizabeth King James 1st and King Charles. Died the 13th
And was buryed in Westminster Abby
On the 15th of November 1635
Aged 152 years and 9 months.

From Wollaston we had for some miles a pleasant stretch of pastoral country varied by shady woodlands, and we caught peeps on the way of some charming old half-timber homes, such as one finds in Shropshire, for we were in that shire now and approaching Shrewsbury again—so the signposts told us. We managed to drive round Shrewsbury by the Severn side, so did not enter the town, [Pg 195] and were soon again on the open road, climbing, most of the way, to the village of Albrighton, having glorious panoramas, over a richly wooded country to our left, presented to us the latter half of the stage.

At Albrighton I learnt there used to prevail the cruel sport of whipping a cat to death on Shrove Tuesday, and the old signboard, that once hung in front of the inn there, is still preserved, on which is a painted and faded representation of a man whipping a cat, and the legend below—

The finest sport under the sun

Is whipping the cat at Albrighton.

At the place I could glean no information as to the origin of this cruel and curious custom, but later on during the journey I found enlightenment of a Shropshire parson, who told me he believed it arose from a cat having got into the church and having ate the Sacrament.

It was now growing late, and I began to think about my night's quarters. I passed an inviting-looking inn by the roadside, but, as I saw no stabling for the car there, I drove contentedly on in the gathering gloaming through a country that appeared to me to be exceedingly beautiful and richly wooded, and then with the evening star I made the little town of Wem (no town could surely well have a shorter title); there at the "Castle Inn" I found excellent accommodation, much civility, and a landlord who was interesting, informing, and obliging. I was glad I came to Wem.

That evening in his cosy bar I had a long chat with "mine host." I [Pg 196] discovered him seated there reading Mitford's *History of Greece*, which much surprised me, as being, I thought, a rather heavy work for a landlord to read, and he told me he was reading for his amusement! He also lent me a *History of Wem*, by Herbert Merchant, which I found interesting, and from this I learnt that Hazlitt lived for twelve years at Wem. Augustine Birrell says that "by his writings Hazlitt, the most eloquent of English essayists, has so infected the place with his own delight that it is hard to be dull at Wem"—but not impossible, I think. Coleridge visited Hazlitt at Wem, walking with him from Shrewsbury to that place; I presume they walked along the same road we had come, and Coleridge was so delighted with the scenery on the way that he exclaimed, "If I had the quaint muse of Sir Philip Sidney I would write a sonnet to the road between Shrewsbury and Wem." Surely Coleridge's muse was quaint enough—who else but he could have composed *The Ancient Mariner*? Hazlitt, it appears, like Thackeray, first sought fame as an artist, for he had inscribed on his tomb, "William Hazlitt. Painter, Critic, Essayist. Born 1778. Died 1830."

In 1643, when the rest of Shropshire was loyal to the King, Wem declared for the Parliament; thereupon the King sent Lord Capel with five thousand men to capture the town, but—so the story goes—he was repulsed by the garrison of only forty men, aided by the women of the place, who were dressed in red cloaks and placed in [Pg 197] positions where they could be seen by the King's forces. Lord Capel, judging from the number of red figures he observed, thought the garrison was too strong to be successfully attacked, and ignominiously retired. Hence the old couplet—

> The women of Wem and a few musketeers
> Beat Lord Capel and all his cavaliers.

There was, too, a Royalist mock litany of the time, a part of which reads—

> From Wem, and from Nantwitch,
> Good Lord, deliver us.

This story of the red-coated women of Wem reminds me of the similar story told of the French invasion of Fishguard in 1797, where and when a small French force was landed from three frigates to raid the country. Lord Cawdor at the head of a hastily collected body of militia, of about half the strength of the enemy, went forth to meet them; a number of Welsh women, in red cloaks, gathered on the hills around to watch the expected battle, and these were mistaken by the French for regular troops prepared to cut off their retreat; thereupon, deeming they were overpowered, the Frenchmen surrendered. Both stories read much alike. I wonder if either one is true? "I hae my douts."

I learnt much about Wem from the landlord, how in past days the houses of the town were all thatched, and that there is still preserved in the old town hall a huge iron hook fixed to the end of a [Pg 198] long oak pole that was used to pull down the thatch from any house that was alight and so to prevent the flames spreading, and he offered to show it me in the morning if I cared to see it. I thought I should; such a contrivance must be somewhat of a curiosity—at least I had never seen or heard of anything of the kind before. However, in spite of the hook, it happened that the whole town was burnt down, the church steeple too, in 1677. "Wem was quite a

large place at one time," he continued; "and though you might hardly think it, some of the quiet country lanes around were once the town streets. It is the only Shropshire town mentioned in the Doomsday Book, which perhaps may prove its former importance. Judge Jeffreys, who had his home a mile from the town, was created Baron of Wem. His house is still standing and has his coat-of-arms carved over the doorway." Then some customers came in and the conversation became general; I wish they had not, for I was interested in the landlord's account of the place, and I fancy there was much more he could have told me about it.

Amongst the company was a farmer, at least I took him to be such, and the weather was his main subject of conversation. I gathered from him that for some cause thunderstorms were fairly frequent at Wem and round about, and I understood that a farmer in the locality had recently lost several sheep by lightning. "Talking of lightning," he went on, "do you know it is a fact that lightning never strikes a moving object?" I did not, though I had to confess I had no [Pg 199] recollection of such a circumstance, which was but negative evidence. Then said he, "According to my experience, if there's a full moon on a Saturday it's sure to rain the next day, and if there's a star close by the moon it's bound to blow hard the next morning." Though why this should be he could not explain—and little wonder! Many other things he said about the weather, but I did not note them down. The only man I trust about the weather is the shepherd of the downs or the plains, for on those open places the weather reveals its secrets to him who has little to do but observe it. I do not even trust the newspaper's forecasts except in settled times, when there is no need of them, for as a traveller who is concerned as to what the day will be, I have as often found them wrong as right. Sometimes they strike a provokingly uncertain note, such as "Rain in places," which is very safe forecasting and leaves me much in doubt.

During the conversation some one talked about his "near-dwellers," and the same man twice used the term "unked." These were unfamiliar expressions to me, and on inquiry I found "near-dwellers" to mean neighbours, and "unked" was employed to signify down-spirited. Then some one made use of the old saying, "You'll have to mind your P's and Q's." "Does any one know how that saying originated?" queried another of the party, "for I do." No one appeared to know. "Then I'll tell you," he went on, manifestly pleased to be informing. "In the old days, when the publican had to trust many of his customers, slates were kept in the bar with the [Pg 200] customers' names written on them, with a P and a Q below. The P stood for pints and the Q for quarts, and crosses were chalked under the P's and Q's corresponding to the pints and quarts for which each customer owed. So, you see, they had to mind their P's and Q's." I had plenty of entertainment that night, of which I have given a fair sample. Much else about other things was said, but perhaps the talk of strangers at an inn is not a subject that profits to enlarge about or even worth mention at all; however, the conversation, and the unexpected turns of it, served to pass my evening pleasantly enough away. A fisherman once told me of a brother of the craft, which brother I own was given a little to romancing, that he "talked salmon and caught only tiny trout." Perhaps the moral applies to the conversation I listened to; agreeably tired after my long day in the open air, I grant I was in no exacting mood as to the quality of my entertainment, I was too dreamily lazy to be critical; then there was nothing to pay for it, and happy is the man who can find entertainment wherever he chance to be.

Glancing through the *History of Wem* that the landlord lent me, I read there a glowing description of Hawkestone Park, a most romantic spot according to the description, and as it was only four miles from Wem I determined to go there next day. I also discovered that Dr. Johnson visited Hawkestone on July 24, 1774, and this is what he had to say about it:—

[Pg 201]

> We saw Hawkestone and were conducted over a large tract of rocks and woods, a region abounding with striking scenes and terrific grandeur. We were always on the brink of a precipice or at the foot of a lofty rock.... Round the rocks is a narrow path cut into the stone which is very frequently hewn into steps, but art has proceeded no further than to make the succession of wonders safely accessible. The whole circuit, somewhat laborious, is terminated by a grotto cut into a rock to a great extent, with many windings and supported by pillars,

> not hewn with regularity.... There were from space to space seats in the rocks. Though it wants water it excels Dovedale by the extent of its prospects, the awfulness of its shades, the horror of its precipices, the verdure of its hollows, and the loftiness of its rocks. The ideas it forces upon the mind are the sublime, the dreadful, and the vast. Above inaccessible altitude, below is horrible profundity. He who mounts the precipices of Hawkestone wonders how he came thither and doubts how he shall return. His walk is an adventure and his departure an escape.

Now all this strikes a most romantic note, and surely Dr. Johnson was too great a man to be given to gush, so all the more it surprised me how it was that I had never heard of Hawkestone and its wonders before. Just "Ignorance, pure ignorance," as the famous doctor once remarked to a lady in reply to her query how it was he did not know something that she considered he ought to know. Truly Hawkestone was one of the surprises and discoveries of the journey. There is one advantage in not knowing all about the country you are travelling in, for such lack of knowing keeps you ever in a delightful state of expectancy as to what fresh discoveries you may make; no matter though to others they are familiar, that does not rob you of the thrill of pleasure in discovering them.

[Pg 202]

Next morning I learnt from the landlord that there was a good inn at Hawkestone, so after a look at Wem I determined to spend the rest of the day there and explore its beauties at leisure. Wem did not detain me long that morning. My curiosity induced me to see the "fire fork" already mentioned that was used to drag down the burning thatch from the houses, and I estimated this to be thirty-six feet long, but I was told it was much more than that originally. It looked just like a big iron fishhook at the end of a pole. In a niche of the church tower I noticed a much-weathered stone figure, and this the clerk told me represented St. Chad, "a favourite saint in these parts." I asked him if there were anything of interest in the church, and he said no, "but there's a unique Gothic doorway at the west end well worth seeing, it's four hundred years old"; so I went to inspect it, and I found a most quaintly shaped doorway, the like of which I had not come upon before, but it struck me as more uncommon than beautiful—and this was all I discovered worthy of note in Wem; its interest is historical, and that does not appeal to the eye.

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CHAPTER XI

Red Castle—A stately ruin—Old houses and new owners—The joy of discovery—High Ercall and its story—Mills and millers—The life of a stone-breaker—Old folk-songs—Haughmond Abbey—Ancient tombs—A peaceful spot—A place for a pilgrimage.

On leaving Wem I sought instruction of the landlord as to the road to Hawkestone, for the roads about Wem are many and winding, and it is not easy for a stranger to find his way on them. He told me to go to Weston, a village adjoining the park, "where there is a good inn. If you ask your way to Hawkestone," said he, "the natives may send you miles round; for Hawkestone is a big place, and there is no inn but at Weston." So to Weston we went, guided by the signposts, and not a signpost, strange to relate, did we see with "Hawkestone" upon it.

Weston proved to be a charming little village of black and white half-timber cottages with an old church set on a hill above them, and by the churchyard wall were its ancient stocks intact. At the end of the village we came to the inn delightfully placed facing the park and its glorious scenery, and with only a low hedge between it and the park. The Hawkestone hotel gave me an agreeable greeting, for [Pg 204] on entering it I found myself in a panelled hall, and beyond this I caught a peep of a pleasant little garden belonging to the inn. Again I was fortunate in finding comfortable quarters. I liked my inn; it had a home-like look. I asked about seeing the park, and was told I could have a guide to show me over it, though I was welcome to go alone if I wished. No guide was pressed on me, and I appreciated the fact; but I felt I might miss much if I went without one. The park was extensive, there were many things to see there; so I obtained a guide, and set forth to explore Hawkestone, and I went alone with the guide. After Dr. Johnson's description of the place and all the adjectives he used—I presume he considered them necessary—I feel somewhat at a discount in attempting a further description, and finding fresh, suitable adjectives; but we see places with our own eyes and glean our own impressions. What struck me first about Hawkestone was a certain indefinable theatrical look, a sense of unreality, as though I were viewing a stage production on a large scale. I had never seen Nature and Art so romantically combined before. Though I climbed the precipices by narrow paths cut along their sides, I did not feel "my walk an adventure and my departure an escape," nor did I feel the "sublime, dreadful, vast, or horrible profundity" of the spot—I wondered much at those expressions; to me it appeared fully to justify the terms romantic and picturesque, but not in the least that of dreadful: never were my spirits daunted! The guide was loquacious; had he talked less, I might have [Pg 205] remembered more of all he told me, and he told me much of the past history of Hawkestone and of its lords, from the early days when the first castle was built there to close upon the present time; and he expressed his surprise that I had not heard of Hawkestone before. "Not to know Hawkestone is to show yourself unknown," I almost fancy he thought.

I was first shown the Red Castle, built in the reign of King Henry III., of which castle, except some broken masonry, a tall, round keep, standing isolated and stately on a crag, alone remains. "How like one of Salvator Rosa's pictures!" I could not help exclaiming to myself; and really it is. The far view from this tower over a vast extent of peaceful, pastoral, and wooded country to the stormy mountains of Wales, so rugged of outline and contrasting, is wonderfully fine and space-expressing. There was a bigness about it, looking over "the sweep of endless woods," that pleased me, a green spaciousness that was splendid. I forget now how many feet high the guide said the top of the tower on its crag was from the ground; but one had to crane one's neck to see it from below, and this gave one the impression of commanding height whatever its height might be.

Next we went under a wide-arched rock at the end of a ravine, and began to climb the crags on the opposite side by a narrow winding footpath with steps cut here and there in the steepest parts; so we reached a wonderful series of grottos, consisting of arched chambers in the solid rock, with many roughly-hewn pillars. These [Pg 206] grottos were lined with shells and spas: the guide gave me the history of them, but I have forgotten it; some one, however, cut them out of the rock, and some ladies decorated them in the manner

described. Then I was conducted on to the top of the crag, opposite to which is the Raven's Cliff; from this point the view over the park and rocks is very striking, the rough grey rocks peeping out here and there from the sea of soft green foliage, forming a telling combination and contrast. Then we descended, only to ascend again up a steep and stepped path to the Hermitage, a cavern in the cliff side, over the entrance to which is inscribed—

Procul, O procul este, profani.

It was a strange whim of our ancestors to have a Hermitage in their grounds; and as real hermits were not to be procured, often an aged pensioner was made to take their place for the benefit of visitors—but nobody was of course deceived. I am afraid it was an age of shams, even of sham ruins built to beautify the view! In the present instance, however, a wax figure of a grey-haired and bearded man seated at a table with a skull upon it did duty for a living hermit, though it did not do it very well; for the effect of the figure was marred by the dripping of moisture from the roof of the cave: not even a hermit could endure that for long and live. The guide told me that he was supposed to leave me here and go in by a secret door at the back of the figure and somehow introduce himself beneath its [Pg 207] cloak and talk. He was quite open about the proceeding; it was mere acting; and I told him, after such a confession, he need not trouble himself or me. Though actually he declared some young people were taken in by the device, owing to the gloom of the cavern; if this be true, I am afraid there are a good many young innocents abroad. Then I saw the Druid's Cavern and St. Francis's Cave, and a recess in the rock where, according to an inscription, "Rowland Hill, a gentleman renowned for his great wisdom, piety, and charity, who, being a zealous Royalist, hid himself in the Civil Wars of the time of King Charles I.; but being discovered, was imprisoned in his adjacent Red Castle, whilst his house was pillaged and ransacked by the rebels." There were other things of interest in the park, but in truth its gloriously rocky and wooded scenery, and its ruined castle keep, appealed to me vastly more than the rest.

June is a month to joy in, for when in a gracious mood it can produce the pleasantest of weather, and the next morning gave us a sample of its occasional perfectness. A glorious sunshiny day followed the promise of the morning with a deep sea-blue sky above, and hardly a cloud in it—a day that made us feel the joy of being alive. So we made an early start, and wandering about deviously we suddenly espied before us, standing gaunt and deserted and lone in a grass field, the ruined hall of Moreton Corbet, its roofless walls, its upstanding gables and great vacant windows, darkly silhouetted against the bright sky. I recognised the old house from a friend's [Pg 208] photograph; it had a familiar look, though I had never been there before and had come upon it unexpectedly. The house covers a considerable area of ground, and some of the quaint carvings on its front appeared to be almost as sharp as the day they were carved, and that was centuries ago. Were I an architect, I think I should try to discover the quarry from whence came that enduring stone, for many a fine building I have seen has suffered sadly from the perishable nature of the stone employed in its construction. An architect cannot be too careful in the selection of his material if he wishes his work to last—and what architect does not—not to mention his client, who surely deserves some consideration?

Moreton Corbet was begun by Sir Robert Corbet in 1606, but he died of the plague before the building was finished; his brother Sir Vincent Corbet continued the work, but the house was never finished or inhabited, and now the rambling ruins are but the home of owls and other birds. Camden the antiquary in his day wrote of it: "Robert Corbet began to build a most gorgeous and stately house, after the Italian model, for his future magnificent and splendid habitation, but death countermanding his designs took him off, so that he left his project unfinished and his old castle defaced." The remains of his "defaced" old castle are at hand, with the initials A. C. for Sir Andrew Corbet over its doorway. There is a hazy local tradition that some enemy of the Corbets, when the house was building, uttered the prophecy that "Moreton Corbet shall never be finished." But who can tell, it may be some day, though late the day, for its walls appear sound, the stone mullions stand in the windows still, and I have known ancient houses even more ruined that have come into the hands of a new owner and have been restored and converted into delightful homes. "Patch and long sit," runs the old

proverb, but "build and soon flit" it ends, and from my limited experience of the ways of men there is some truth in the proverb. But proverbs are so often contradictory that I have lost faith in them. One says, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder"; then another has it, "Out of sight out of mind," and I might go on quoting familiar proverbs of an antagonistic nature, only to do so would be a waste of space. You can generally by searching find a proverb to fit a special case whichever way you desire—that is the beauty of proverbs.

THE RUINED HALL OF MORETON CORBET.

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A ruined home, whether of cottage or mansion, is always, more or less, a pathetic sight and one that appeals to the sentimental traveller, but coming thus suddenly and unexpectedly upon so stately a ruin as Moreton Corbet right in the heart of a quiet country, a country with no suggestion about it but of farms and fields—one expected nothing else—the greater was the appeal to such sentiment. The coming to the notable ruin of an abbey or castle for which the traveller is prepared by guide-book description is quite a different thing; at least I, for one, cannot command my sympathies to the order of a guide-book. To repeat, in effect, a previous remark, I really think that the chief charm of travel is the [Pg 210] coming upon the unexpected, the enjoyment of discovery, so that even the lesser sights by the way assume an importance that perhaps is not rightly theirs and become memorable.

Leaving Moreton Corbet we got wandering amongst winding lanes, and very pleasant lanes they were; these eventually brought us to High Ercall, a lonely little village consisting of an ancient church, an old Tudor manor-house of some size standing close by, and a cottage or two. High Ercall had not much to show us, but what it had to show was interesting, chiefly the fine church which retains some features of interest in spite of the fact that it was sadly battered about by the Puritan party, and the time-toned Tudor house built, according to an inscription on it, in 1608. The main portion of the house is of stone, but it has brick gables above that give it an odd appearance. The old home took my fancy. "It looks history," I exclaimed to myself, though at the time I knew nothing of its past. Why I should have imagined that house had a story to tell I cannot say, but so it impressed me, perhaps simply because it was so old. Anyway, on making inquiry I found my intuition not wrong, for I discovered it was one of the many Shropshire houses that had been fortified in the time of the Civil Wars and held for the King, and though but a house, so gallantly was it defended that it successfully resisted several fierce assaults, being indeed the last house in the shire to surrender, only the strongholds of Bridgnorth and Ludlow [Pg 211] holding out longer. I wonder if anything eventful will ever happen at High Ercall again. Who would have expected to come upon history there? It looked so innocent of anything of the kind. Certainly the Civil Wars have given the added interest of stirring days to many a now dreamy spot in England, for those wars concerned themselves with the sieges of so many private houses scattered far and wide over the countryside. Those days have passed for ever, for no private house could now be converted into a fortress. Many of these old houses still retain bullet marks on, and sometimes the lead of the bullets in, their thick oak doors; their strong walls too occasionally show, even to this far-off day, the indentations made by some of Cromwell's inexhaustible cannon-balls. You cannot escape from Cromwell's doings when you go a-touring in England.

Beyond High Ercall we crossed over a marshy upland, and over a

bridge or two so narrow that there was only just room for the car to pass. The country had a remote look, for we travelled far before meeting a soul, and that soul was a solitary man breaking stones by the side of the road. From the uplands we dropped down to a picturesque old mill, its wheel turned by a sparkling stream; and a pretty picture the old mill made with its foaming weir above, its sleepy pool below, and the green fields gently sloping down to it. The mill was busy that day, and the muffled hum of its machinery, the swish, swish of its wheel and the plash of its weir, broke pleasantly the silence of the spot.

I saw no miller, or any one, about; perhaps the miller was at his [Pg 212] dinner whilst his work was being done for him. I wish I could have seen him, for I have a liking for millers, always having found them jovially disposed and not averse to a gossip; now I have a weakness for gossiping with country folk, trusting by so doing to glean something of their views of life. Such folk I have generally found willing to talk about anything but politics—well, I do not care to talk politics, but why they should so carefully avoid the subject I cannot say, nor yet why millers are so cheerful a race, any more than why farmers in contradiction should be given so to grumbling, even when the seasons are good. I remember that picture in *Punch* of a squire addressing a tenant of his: "Good morning, Mr. Turnips, fine growing day." "Yes, sir," responds the farmer, "'twill make the weeds grow." But the miller looks on the bright side of life; perhaps it is because he seems to have so little work to do, only having to watch whilst the running water or the willing wind do his work for him. I know I have chatted with a miller for an hour or more inside his mill and amongst his whirling wheels, as the flour flowed fast and free from the wooden shoots into the sacks below, and he merely glanced round now and then to see if a sack were nearly filled, so that he might put another in its place; nor did this take him long to do, nor did the work seem hard. It was this miller who so kindly explained to me how much better it was to rely on water than wind power, the latter being so uncertain, for "the wind may drop in [Pg 213] the daytime, and then blow at night when you are comfortably in bed, so you may idle away half, or even the whole of a day, but water-power is constant, if you have a decent stream to depend upon." Then the miller told me how in his father's time, for his father was a miller too, the gleaners used to come to the mill to have their gleanings ground, and in those friendly past days the miller used to grind their gleanings without charge in his spare time, as the custom was. "Then helped every one his neighbour," for those were "the good old days," at least they seem good to look back upon.

After the mill followed a stretch of open country with wide cornfields on either hand waving round us like a golden sea and rustling in the wind; then by way of change we entered upon a tree-lined road, with at one spot great rocks by its side, and from this spot Shrewsbury and its church spires came into view vaguely showing in the mist like the city of a dream. Not desiring to revisit Shrewsbury, I stopped the car and consulted my map; it was a fortunate circumstance, for in doing so I discovered "Haughmond Abbey" marked thereon, and apparently not very far off. I seemed to be always making discoveries on my map. Now I had heard of Haughmond Abbey, but what the ruins were like, where they were hidden away, whether extensive or the mere fragments of a building, I had no idea. Bolton, Tintern, Fountains, Glastonbury, Melrose, and other famous ruined abbeys were familiar to me in pictures, engravings, photographs, and poetry long before I saw [Pg 214] them, but of Haughmond I had seen neither picture nor engraving, nor, as far as I am aware, has any poet sung its praises. Yet Haughmond Abbey I found to be a beautiful ruin, not so romantically situated as either Tintern or Bolton truly, but set in as sweet a spot as all fair England can show, delightful to the eye with its verdant meadows, shady trees, tranquil water, grey rock, and sheltering wooded hills around—a spot so peaceful in its seclusion, so peace-bestowing, too, and without a hint of the modern world, for at Haughmond nothing is to be seen but quiet woods, gentle hills, and the spacious sky above. Never came I to a more tranquil spot; the monks of old must have left their benediction there, though robbed of their abbey they loved so well and turned adrift into the outer world, and though they doubtless fondly hoped and believed it would "have canopied their bones," or at least they would have been laid to rest in the shade of its church.

But I am a little previous. Close to where I pulled up I saw a man breaking stones by the roadside, and I asked him if he could tell me the whereabouts of the abbey. "It be right down there," said he, pointing ahead with his finger into space, "not more than a quarter of a mile away. You comes to a cottage, and on the other side of the way is a footpath by a stream leading to it." He was a civil man, his instructions were clear, stone-breaking is wearisome work; I was sorry for him to the extent of a sixpence, better expended than on a tramp, I thought, and tramps in my green days wheedled many a [Pg 215] sixpence out of me. I remember that the last tramp to whom I gave a trifle exclaimed in the fulness of his heart upon unexpectedly receiving it, "God bless you, sir. May we soon meet in Heaven!" Since then my donations to tramps have ceased. I would chat with that stone-breaker, I would see the world through a stone-breaker's eyes. But his view of the world was limited; manifestly the monotony of his labour had told upon him, perhaps too the loneliness of the life, so that I got little profit out of the conversation. It needs a strong mind to sit by the roadside all day long and break stones, do nothing but break stones, and have any imagination left.

Finding a secluded, shady spot by the wayside I rested there awhile, for the day was hot; moreover I was already beginning to feel hungry, and my luncheon-basket was handy. How hungry one gets motoring in the fresh air, to be sure! Whilst resting there and thinking, it suddenly struck me how seldom in Wales I saw any children romping about in the villages as English children are wont to do; even to-day sometimes on the village greens one finds the latter playing games so old that no one can tell how they originated. Take, for instance, the game of "Old Roger" often played at children's gatherings in the West Country to an old song as follows. I have given this song in a previous book, but it will bear repeating, and I repeat it to show how this old song, long years ago, found its way to America, and how it became altered there. This, then, is how the original "Old Roger" runs:—

[Pg 216]

Old Roger is dead and lies in his grave—
Hee-haw! lies in his grave.
They planted an apple-tree over his head.
The apples were ripe and ready to drop,
When came a big wind and blew them all off;
Then came an old woman a-picking them up.
Old Roger jumped up and gave her a knock,
Which made the old woman go hipperty-hop.

Now an American lady reading this in my book wrote to me about it, enclosing the words of a song that was sung to her by her grandfather, who had learnt it from his grandfather. "It is very plain," wrote the lady, "that our song came over from your country, and that it originated in your 'Old Roger.' This is very interesting to me. We call our song 'Old Father Cungell.' It goes this way:—

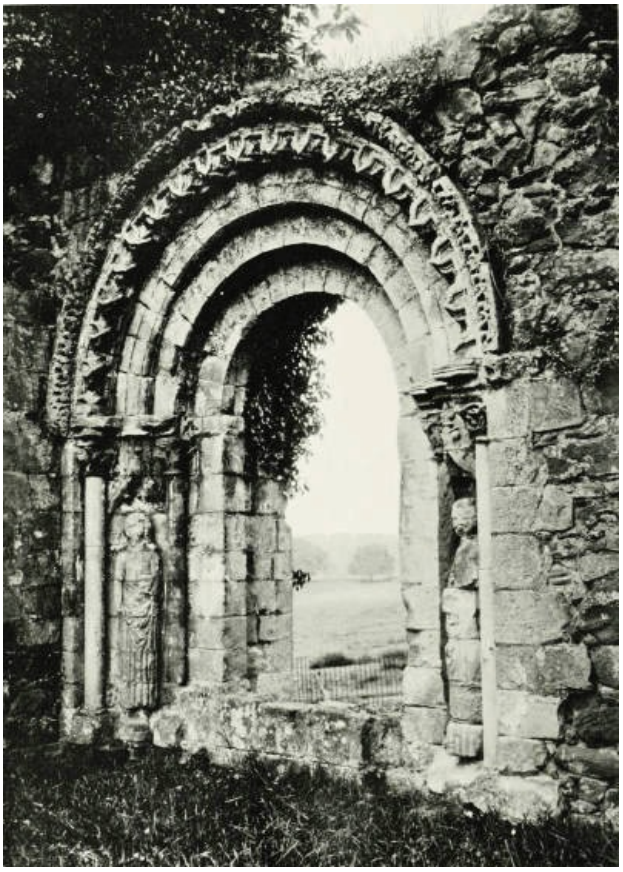
Old Father Cungell went up to White Hall,
Hum, ha! up to White Hall,
And there he fell sick amongst 'em all,
With my heigh down, ho down,
Hum, Ha!

Old Father Cungell was car-ri-ed home,
Hum, ha! car-ri-ed home;
Before he got there he was as dead as a stone,
With my heigh down, ho down,
Hum, Ha!

Old Father Cungell was in the grave laid,
They covered him up with shovel and spade,
And out of his grave there grew a big tree
That bore the best apples that ever ye see!

Before they were ripe and fit for the fall,
There came an old woman and stole them off all;
Her gown it was red, her petticoat green,
The very worst woman that ever was seen.

Old Cungell got up and hit her a knock,
That made the old woman go hipperty-hop.
The neighbours were scared and said in their fright,
'The ghost of Cungell gets up in the night,'
With my heigh down, ho down,
Hum, Ha!"



HAUGHMOND ABBEY, CHURCH DOORWAY.

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Rested and refreshed I went in search of Haughmond Abbey, the ruins of which, though near to, are not visible from the road, so the casual traveller might pass them unawares, as doubtless many do. A short stroll along a shady footpath and by the side of a limpid stream soon brought me to the spot; the hoary, ivy-clad ruins peeping through the branching trees made a perfect picture, the sunshine resting on them and brightening the century-gathered gloom of their broken walls and rugged gables. It was, in truth, a pleasant spot the monks selected for their abbey, an ideal spot well secluded from the outer world; even to-day it retains its old-time tranquillity undisturbed. I had the ruins to myself, rejoiced to escape from the noisy prattle of the mere sightseer; to myself, excepting that some birds were holding a profane service on the grass-grown ground where erst the high altar stood. The ruins are of considerable extent, though, but for a portion of a wall and a fine sculptured doorway, the church itself has wholly disappeared; its foundations, however, may still be faintly traced. Unlike most abbeys the ruined churches of which remain whilst their monastic outbuildings and offices have vanished, at Haughmond the reverse is the case. So one generation builds a fane of prayer and another generation levels it to the ground, even glorying in its destruction; and the sad thought of it is, who can say that what we build in our pride to-day may not at some future time share a similar fate? Doubtless the monks who reared this stately abbey thought it would last to Doomsday; it lasted about four hundred years, for it was founded in 1135 by Fitz Alan of Clun, and was suppressed by King Henry VIII. in 1541, he "being mynded to take it into his own handes," as he did many another abbey, "for better purposes." The world knows what those "better purposes" were.

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Nettles and weeds now flourish in the abbey's deserted courts and around its roofless buildings, the only roofed portion being the Chapter-house, which is entire with its three richly ornamented arched doorways, of which I give an illustration. It may be noted that between the pillars are statues under canopies, a remarkable feature that I do not remember to have seen in any ecclesiastical edifice before. It struck me that these statues were an after-thought and had been introduced at a later period by cutting pillars away to receive them; I cannot say that they altogether pleased me, for they disturbed the unity and simplicity of the fine Norman arches. The flat oak roof of the Chapter-house appears to be in perfect condition, though I was surprised to find an oak roof there and not a vaulted one of stone. The chief offices appertaining to the abbey appear to have been built round a court beyond the cloisters; of

these the Abbot's Lodge retains its beautiful bay-window, and what was probably the guest-house retains all its side windows with their tracery intact. This building has a large gable at one end flanked by shapely turrets.

HAUGHMOND ABBEY, CHAPTER-HOUSE.

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Of the many stately tombs the abbey church once contained only two inscribed slabs remain, but these are interesting: one to John Fitz Alan, deceased 1270, who was buried before the high altar, bears the following inscription in Norman French, as was the fashion of the time:—

VOVS KI PASSEZ ICI PRIES PVR LAME IOHAN FIS ALEIN
KI GIT ICI DEV DE SA ALME EIT MERCI. AMEN.

ISABEL DE MORTIMER SA FEMME ACOST DE L ... DEV
DE LVR ALME ... MERCI. AMEN.

Another slab has the incised effigy of a woman shown wearing a quaint head-dress with a coat-of-arms on either side of it, her gloved hands folded in prayer; the inscription is in Latin, that prevailed during that later period and for long afterwards, and thus it runs:—

Hic jacet ... filia Iohis Leyton armigi & uxor Ricardi
mynde que obiit in festo Cathedre Sancti Petri
Anno Dni Millesio cccc xxviij cui aie ppiciet Deus Amen.

I loitered long at Haughmond, and loth I was to leave so peace-bestowing a spot; thither the world-weary pilgrim might well come in search of rest, for nowhere could he find a quietude more profound. I wish I could, in words, express the peacefulness of the spot, a peacefulness that grew upon me and that seemed to me on leaving like an unuttered benediction, but not the less a benediction because unuttered. Never bade I farewell to a spot more reluctantly; [Pg 220] never have I felt a greater desire to return to one. Such was the spell it cast upon me. "Within its walls peace reigned; from its stately church came the sounds of prayer and praise; its gates were ever open to the pilgrim and the poor; its hospitality and brotherly kindness softened the harsh incidence of the feudal days."

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CHAPTER XII

An angler's haunt—Ferries and stepping-stones—Curious old stained-glass window—The ruins of Uriconium—Watling Street—The Wrekin—Richard Baxter's old home—A Cabinet minister's story—A pretty village—Buildwas Abbey—Ironbridge—The "Methodists' Mecca."

Leaving Haughmond to its ancient peace, and finding the road we were on led to Shrewsbury, we took a byway to our left, chancing where it might go. We did not select our road, we took the first one we came to so as to avoid revisiting Shrewsbury, and it led us, with many pleasant windings, through a country of great charm, and unexpectedly to many interesting places. No guide-book could have done us better service. We had at the start fir-crowned hills to the left of us with a tower on the top of them, a modern one, but still a picturesque feature, and the silvery Severn to the right, and in the narrow and pleasant stretch of country between our road went in a dreamy, indirect fashion.

At Uffington I noticed a river-side inn with an angler, rod in hand, standing idly in the doorway, so concluded, with the river close by, this must be a fisherman's haunt. I was almost tempted to pull up there and go a-fishing, for it looked such a pleasant hostelry, [Pg 222] one whereat a lazy man might laze contentedly. At Uffington the monks of Haughmond had a ferry, and so in the absence of any bridge they crossed the Severn there on the way to Shrewsbury. I am told the ferry still exists, and I was glad to hear it, for ferries and stepping-stones form such picturesque features in the landscape. In Wales, where I once stopped awhile at a remote farmhouse, the only way across the little river in front of it was by stepping-stones, and I took quite a childish delight in crossing and recrossing them, and more than once I discovered an artist painting the spot; there was a very real fascination for me about this primitive way of crossing a stream, in an age when all things are made so uninterestingly smooth and easy, a method probably originally suggested by the boulders that strew the bed of a mountain river.

So we followed the Severn down, now losing sight of it, now recovering it again, till we came to Atcham, where the river flowed wide and strong under a fine seven-arched bridge; there by the roadside stood a large old house that had evidently been a coaching inn, and there under the shade of some trees I pulled up the car to have a look around, for it was a pleasant spot.

I wandered into the churchyard overlooking the river. The church I found old and interesting. At the east end I noticed two of the so-called leper or low-side windows that have caused so much discussion amongst antiquaries; these were in such a position behind the high altar that, of course, neither the altar nor the [Pg 223] elevation of the Host could be seen from them, and this, I think, surely proves, at least to my satisfaction, that such windows were not for the use of lepers to observe the service from without; but as I have already discussed the subject, I will say no more about it.

There is some good carved old oak in the church; the reading-desk has some quaint carvings on it of the story of the prodigal son; the fine openwork screen too merits attention, and its walls still plainly show the marks of the medieval masons' chisels; but what specially interested me was a very curious and ancient stained-glass window representing a woman kneeling and presenting a book to Queen Elizabeth enthroned; the top lights above contain the drawings of five angels busy with harps. The inscription below runs:—

> Blanch daughter of Henry Miles Parry Esqre.
> Of Newcourt Herefordshire by Alicia daughter
> Of Simon Milborn Esqre. Chief gentlewoman
> Of Queen Elizabeth privy chamber whom
> She faithfully served from her
> Highnesses birth dying at Court
> The 12th of Febry. 1589. Aged 82.
> Entombed at Westminster. Her bowels at Bacton in
> The county of Hereford.

A little beyond Atcham, whilst driving along a narrow and quiet country road and thinking of nothing in particular, I suddenly noticed some crumbling ruins on rising ground not far away, and I asked at a blacksmith's forge, close by, what the ruins might be, and was told they were the ruins of the Roman city of Uriconium. This [Pg 224]

was interesting information, and at once the low and broken, moss-grown and ivy-clad walls assumed a look of importance. We had come upon the site of an ancient city of wide renown. "We keep the key here," said the blacksmith, for I found that what remains of the once great city of "gleaming white walls" is fenced round and turned into a sort of peep-show with "a charge of sixpence a head for admission." What an indignity to the ancient city, perhaps the chief city of the country when England was but a colony of Rome: how strange to think of England as a colony! I have said perhaps the chief city of the country, for according to J. R. Green, the historian, "the walls of Uriconium enclosed a space more than double that of Roman London, and exceeded in circumference by a third those of Pompeii, while the remains of its theatre and its amphitheatre, as well as the broad streets which contrast so strangely with the narrow alleys of other British towns, shows its former wealth and importance." It was to Uriconium that the famous Watling Street went direct from Dover through London, and thence as straight as the Romans could conveniently make it to Uriconium. The Romans wisely favoured the high ground in preference to the low for their roads, which to keep dry were carefully trenched on either side, but they always went straight ahead to their destination, excepting when the gradient proved too severe or they had to round a hill, but after such divergence straight ahead they went again; one cannot but admire the purposefulness of them. Watling Street has now [Pg 225] been reopened and reconnected from Daventry to Shrewsbury, a distance of eighty-three miles; and to be a little previous, from close to Boscobel on to Daventry we followed the ancient street on our homeward run—excepting for a diversion to Uttoxeter at the Lichfield turn, rejoining it at Atherstone, missing but about fourteen miles of its length between the point above Boscobel and Daventry—and a very pleasant rural road we found it, delightful for its absence of towns and even villages; indeed it took us for miles and miles right through a thoroughly old-world sparsely peopled land. So we followed the footsteps of the Roman legions. The foundation of most of the street, in spite of years of neglect, is as firm to-day as when the ancient Romans made it, for they built for centuries. Our modern road-builders might well take a hint from those clever old engineers. There was no scamped work in those benighted ages, for scamped work meant death—not a fortune.

But to return to Uriconium. To show the size of the ancient city, its walls, still traceable, are over three miles in circumference, enclosing now open fields and meadows; in these, I was told, the plough occasionally turns up portions of mosaic pavement, bits of pottery, tiles, and other relics. I entered what now remains of the city above ground by a locked gate and wandered over its grass-grown streets, or at least a very small portion of them, and amongst the fragments of its time-worn walls that are still standing. Wild [Pg 226] roses, brambles, nettles, and docks were growing everywhere disorderly; ivy, moss, and lichen were creeping over its stones at will. Some of the foundations of the buildings have been uncovered and laid bare, but Nature is busy at work covering them up again with many a wild growing thing. Little enough remains, in truth, to reveal the former glory of Uriconium; the chief wall standing, built of squared stones, varied by courses of thin red tiles, is presumably that of the basilica; adjoining this are the baths, the plan of which can be roughly made out, the furnace chambers may be traced, and a number of small pillars constructed of thin bricks reveal the hypocausts or heating arrangements. The public baths are the best preserved parts of the city that have been unearthed, and show the extent of civilisation to which the Romans in England had attained. I was glad to have seen Uriconium; it made me respect the civilisation of our early conquerors. I was impressed with the picture that I recovered to myself of the refined life the Romans led in their British colony close upon nineteen centuries ago! Delightful is the situation of Uriconium on its gentle rise, with far views of the country around, and the Severn winding just below. It seems strange that, whilst the sites of so many Roman towns are the sites of English towns to-day, Uriconium so favoured in position should be left desolate—given over to the winds of heaven and the birds of the air.

Leaving the ruined city to its sole inhabitants, the birds and [Pg 227] perchance the rabbits, we had a fine view of the isolated hill of the Wrekin, from the top of which flamed forth the beacon that told the great Armada was in sight. Then

... streamed in crimson on the wind the Wrekin's crest of light.

"To friends all round the Wrekin" is a famous Shropshire toast, and all good Salopians know how that hill came into being: how that the Devil, once upon a time, as the fairy story-books have it, had a grudge against Shrewsbury, and was carrying a great load of earth and rocks on his back, intending to dump it down in the bed of the Severn, and so block the flow of the river and drown all the Shrewsbury people; but even the Devil grew weary of his heavy load, and threw it down on the spot where the Wrekin now stands, declaring he would carry it no longer. So the mountain arose and Shrewsbury was saved. At one point or another the Devil appears to have been very busy in Shropshire knocking the scenery about. When later on I found myself at Ironbridge, with its furnaces and factories, I really thought the Devil must still be busy in Shropshire, for who but he could have entered into the mind of man to cause him to spoil so fair a spot for the sake of mere money-making? Remove the dirty, mean, and ugly town and all connected with it, Madeley too, with its collieries close above, and smoky Broseley but a mile away, and I doubt if the Severn could show in all its pleasant meanderings from its source in lone Plynlimmon to the sea a spot so fair as this would be—and was in the days of old. [Pg 228]

The scenery improved with every mile as we wound our way down by the Severn side, from which rose gently sloping and wooded hills on the other hand, a very pleasant land in truth. Coming to the little village of Eaton Constantine, I pulled up there to photograph an exceedingly picturesque black and white half-timber farmhouse with a great gable at one end, its roof sloping down to a sheltering porch. Were I an architect and designer of country homes I certainly would seek for inspiration in Shropshire; I know no other part of England where the houses look more like homes. Chatting with the owner of the farmhouse, who kindly allowed me to photograph it from his farmyard, and even stood in front of his porch to be included in the picture—though I did not desire this further favour of him—I learnt that it was formerly the home of Richard Baxter, the Nonconformist divine and the author of *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, and quite a host of other improving religious works well known to fame, but which I regret I have never read. It was at Eaton Constantine, I believe, that when a boy Richard Baxter used to rob his neighbours' orchards, but, as some one says, "often the worst boys become the best men," a pleasant way of excusing their peccadilloes. Even Bunyan I have somewhere read "sowed his wild oats" freely when a youth, and I have even heard of a certain Cabinet minister who has boasted that he frequently went poaching as a lad. Perhaps it is because I was so good a boy that I have failed to distinguish myself in any way; had I to live my life again I might have got more enjoyment out of my youth, knowing now what good and clever men bad boys can make. I heard a Cabinet minister at dinner tell the story of how his schoolmaster one day declared to him that he was a lazy, troublesome boy, always in some mischief, a disgrace to the school, that he would never do any good for himself or any one else. In after years, when the boy had become one of Her Majesty's ministers, the very same schoolmaster, then an old man, met him and clapped him on the back, declaring, "I'm proud of you, my boy. I always said there was the making of a clever man in you." The story must be true, for a Cabinet minister would not tell a lie—about a trifle, but only for the good of his party.

BUILDWAS ABBEY, LOOKING EAST.

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The next village of Leighton was almost ideal, with its picturesque black and white cottages half drowned in foliage; then our road became as beautiful as a dream till we came in sight of Buildwas Abbey, gloriously situated by the banks of the Severn, where the river flows gently by. But the situation is robbed of much of its charm by the intruding railway, that passes close to the abbey's ruined walls and sadly disturbs its quiet. All you can do is to try and forget the railway as though it were not. Amidst the ruins you cannot see it, but alas! you can hear it; and how can one romance to the sound of a railway train and the locomotive's blatant whistle?

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Buildwas Abbey is the relic of a splendid building, beautiful and stately even in decay, seemingly too proud to mourn its long-lost grandeur, "cased in the unfeeling armour of old time." Its massive pillars and stout walls, braving all weathers, stand strong and enduring still. Time, that gentle healer, has tinted and adorned its broken walls with many hues, and fringed their rugged tops with bright wild-flowers, grasses, and weeds; here and there, too, the ivy creeps over them and peeps in from without through the vacant windows. Its silent stones seem laden with memories: would that they could tell their story apart from the written one! Its open arches frame pleasant pictures of rich meadows, of woods beyond them, of blue hills beyond again, with bits of sky peeping above. Says Disraeli, "Men moralise amongst ruins"; here is a rare spot to moralise in for those so minded.

The abbey church is cruciform in plan, with a central tower ruined low; its stout Norman pillars with their square capitals are very effective in their suggestiveness of strength. There is a massive dignity, purity, and simplicity about the architecture of Buildwas that pleases the cultured eye; there is nothing petty or pretty about it, rather perhaps it errs on the side of sternness, if it errs at all. Grace of outline rather than ornamentation was evidently the monkish designer's guiding inspiration, but what the building lacks in richness of detail it gains in breadth and quiet harmony.

The site of the abbey in a valley formerly lonely and of much sylvan beauty, with a river running by, was one that commended itself to the Cistercians, and none were better judges of scenery than they. How did the abbey come by its name? Some antiquaries assert that it came from "beild," a shelter, and "was," a level; others declare, equally sure they are correct, that it came from "build" and "was," a building by the wash of the river. I am inclined to favour the former view; but when learned antiquaries disagree, how shall a mere layman decide?

BUILDWAS ABBEY, LOOKING WEST.

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It was an unwelcome change, from the rural pleasantness of the country about Buildwas, coming to the squalid and smoky town of Ironbridge in Coalbrookdale, a town that climbs the steep hillside above the Severn, and practically joins the almost as mean a town of Madeley above, around which latter are numerous collieries with their tall chimneys and heaps of slack, that scar and make hideous the countryside. Ironbridge gains its name, of course, from the bridge of iron that spans the Severn there in one bold arch. At the time of the building of this bridge in 1779 it was considered a great engineering feat, even a thing of beauty, though I saw no beauty in it excepting the curve of its arch. Its black colour is out of tone with the landscape; it seems to have no part in it. Now a bridge constructed of the local stone, such as the monks would have built, would be in agreeable harmony with the scene, and, growing grey with age, would not force its unwilling attention on the traveller; moreover, stone does not need periodical painting to keep it from rusting. Such a fine stone bridge as the one that takes the old mail [Pg 232] road over the Towy at Llandilo with one mighty arch, how grandly effective a similar bridge would look spanning the Severn boldly so at Ironbridge! There are one or two places called Stonebridge in England, I believe, and to me the name has a pleasant sound; but that of Ironbridge has not. I can imagine a picturesque bridge of stone, perhaps old and weather-worn and stained, but what can one imagine of an iron bridge but something very precise and proper? Nothing about it with any appeal to sentiment. I believe that this structure at Ironbridge was the first of the kind of any size that was built in England, and was thought a wonder in its day. How distant seems that day! Now people have ceased to wonder at it, or at anything else. A wireless message from Mars would probably be but a nine days' wonder; to fly across the Atlantic a no astonishing thing.

Climbing through Ironbridge to Madeley, I pulled up there to replenish my petrol supply. Madeley has been called the "Methodists' Mecca," for there lies buried the famous Methodist, the Rev. John Fletcher, of whom Southey said, "He was a man of whom Methodism might well be proud as the most able of its defenders." But what a Mecca! Whilst waiting for my petrol I got a-chatting with a motor cyclist who was on the same errand as I. I am afraid I made a not very complimentary remark about the place to him, but he did not resent it. He even owned he thought the same; but, said he, "I can tell you of something worth seeing close by. There's an old [Pg 233] house called Madeley Court not a mile away that might interest you, and prove that there is something worth seeing here. It's a grand old house, and worth a visit. Charles II. once hid in it, they say. Lots of people go to photograph it." Then he kindly described the way to it, "down a roughish and narrow lane"; but I thought I might as well escape Madeley in that direction as well as any other, in spite of the rough lane. On consulting my map I found Madeley Court plainly marked upon it, so I presumed it was, or at least it had been, a house of some importance. My road that day had provided me with many pleasant surprises, and here was still the promise of another.

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CHAPTER XIII

Madeley Court—Chat with a collier—The miner's rule of life—Charles II. in hiding—The building of Boscobel—The story of a moated house—A stirring episode—A startling discovery—A curious planetarium—A wishing-well—Lilleshall Abbey—"The Westminster Abbey of Shropshire"—A freak in architecture—Tong Castle—Church clerk-hunting.

It was certainly a rough and narrow lane, as the cyclist remarked, that led to Madeley Court, and it led past a lot of untidy colliers' cottages, for the hilly country around was well dotted with collieries; yet I fancy from the lie of the land that a hundred years or so ago, before the mines were sunk or the cottages built, that lane must have been a very rural and retired one. At one of the cottages I noticed a collier at work in his little garden; his face and hands and clothes were black as though he had only recently come up from the pit, but there he was busy amongst his flowers and vegetables, and there I pulled up the car and ventured to bid him good-day. "'Tain't a bad day," responded he, and went on with his work unconcernedly. Then I said a word in praise of his flowers, adding I supposed he was fond of gardening. "Well, a few flowers do look a bit cheerful like, so I grows 'em." Now there had been a miners' [Pg 235] strike lately, and I wanted to learn his opinion about strikes. Nothing loth he gave it me. Miners I have found, as a race, openly and frankly express their opinions "without fear or favour," and I rather think they even enjoy a chance to express them, sometimes pretty strongly too, for miners have no respect of persons nor of other people's feelings. "We just says what us think and have done with it," as one of them declared to me. "As to strikes," said he, "I'm not gone on them; maybe they's necessary at times, I don't know. You see, we're bound to belong to the trade union lest the masters should best us; but the masters be all right in these parts and we've no need to strike, but us have to strike to help other folk when the unions tell us. Striking's poor game, I'd rather work than play any day; I likes to get my money regularly every week, then I know where I be. Now one never knows when the order may come to 'down tools.' What I say is that every herring should hang by its own tail." What exactly he meant by the last remark was not very clear to me, nor had I ever heard it before, nor was I able to obtain any enlightenment on the matter, for just then he exclaimed, "There be the missus a-calling me in for tea, and I wants it," and without another word he went to his tea. Just as I was leaving two of the miner's children ran out into the garden; one of them plucked a flower, then ran and gave it to me, saying, "Father told I to pluck it for thee"—a graceful little act that was pleasing. So often under rough exteriors kind hearts beat. That miner had not forgotten me, [Pg 236] though he left and spoke so abruptly. Yet the following, I am told, is the miner's rule of life:—

> Hear all, see all, say nought,
> Eat well, drink well, and care nought;
> If thou dost ought for nought
> Do it for thyself.

But I do not believe all I hear. A parson told me the miners were not a bad lot as a whole, but they wanted knowing. They do! Now the poor country folk have often manners; the miners have none.

Then we left the cottages behind and dropped sharply down into a sheltered hollow, and there below was revealed to us the rambling and ghostly-looking old manor-house of Madeley Court, a romance in stone, built in the far-off Elizabethan days when men built pictures as well as homes. A large, cheerless pool of water, dark and still, on one side of the ancient and time-dimmed house added to the dreary and eerie impression of the spot as it is to-day: that pool was suggestive to me of some evil deed done in past days, though why I know not, but over all the ancient place there brooded a certain indefinable sense of mystery. It seemed to hold a life apart from its present-day, commonplace surroundings.

MADELEY COURT.

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It was probably on this very lane that, wet through to the skin, weary and hungry, Charles II. recently escaped from Worcester, sought shelter with his guide, Richard Penderel, under a hedge from the pouring rain. Charles had fled from "the faithful city" with a few followers and had sought temporary asylum at White Ladies, the house of Charles Giffard, that gentleman being recommended to the king by the Earl of Derby. Giffard, however, advised the king not to tarry there, as his house was well known, and suggested that he should go to his retired hunting-box of Boscobel, where there were hiding-holes that had not been discovered; so to Boscobel the king went escorted by one Richard Penderel, a trusted retainer of Giffard's. Now two other retainers of the same family of the Penderels, William Penderel and Joan his wife, had charge of Boscobel, where they assisted, from time to time, in secreting persecuted Roman Catholic priests; indeed chiefly, if not wholly, for this purpose of giving refuge to such fugitives was Boscobel in reality built and planned: the hiding-holes there were no after-thoughts. Boscobel was then "an obscure habitation in a wilderness of woods," and was ostensibly merely a hunting-box. After resting there a few days the king became uneasy, for it had become known to the Parliamentarians that he had escaped into Shropshire, and troops of soldiers were scouring the country all around in search of him. So Charles determined to endeavour to make his way into Wales, but before starting forth he had himself disguised by having his locks cut off, his face and hands stained with walnut juice, and then to complete the disguise he donned a woodman's attire belonging to one of the Penderels, and he consented to be known as Will Jones. Thus disguised, one stormy night the king, with the faithful Richard Penderel for a guide, tramped to Madeley close to [Pg 238] the Severn, trusting to find shelter there either at Madeley Court, the home of that staunch Royalist, Sir Basil Brooke, and personal friend of Giffard's, or at another house on the hill above, the abode of William Woolf, a yeoman and an honest man well known to Giffard, both houses having the conveniences of hiding-holes. The king deemed it prudent to go first to Woolf's house, as being a comparatively small one and that of a simple yeoman; he thought it less likely to be suspected or searched than Madeley Court, especially as Sir Basil Brooke was known to favour the Royalists, and he had many servants, some of whom might prove curious and become suspicious. A thousand pounds was the price for betraying the king, and death the penalty for harbouring him.

So late that night the faithful Penderel went alone to Woolf's house, and rousing its owner inquired of him if he would be willing to give shelter for the night to a gentleman of quality. Mr. Woolf said he would gladly do so, but it was impossible, he was a suspect; his son had lately been arrested and put in prison; moreover his house had been searched, all his hiding-holes discovered, so they were useless, and his house might at any moment be searched again. Then Penderel confided to him that he for whom he sought shelter was no less a personage than the king himself. Hearing this Woolf exclaimed, "I would the king had come anywhere than here, for soldiers are all round about and are watching the Severn in case any fugitives should escape that way. Now that I know who it is that desires shelter I would risk my life to do that service, but it is not safe for the king to be here." Whereupon Penderel explained that the king was tired out and famished and knew not where to go. After this the two consulted as to what was best to be done, and it was arranged that the king should hide himself in one of the barns

amongst the straw. Woolf saw to this and brought the king out refreshments, and there the king with Penderel lay hiding that night and the whole of the next day. Finding it would be folly to attempt to cross the closely guarded Severn, they walked back to Boscobel on the following night.

MADELEY COURT, GATEHOUSE.

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But to return to Madeley Court, this fine old house, now going, alas! to decay, being converted into miners' abodes and left to their tender care, still retains some semblance of its former stateliness. It is approached by a fine gate-house flanked by two octagonal and roofed towers, of which I give an illustration; beyond the gate-house the many-gabled building stands, and with its big chimneys presents an effective and picturesque outline against the sky. It is the very ideal of a haunted house, but now that it is divided into miners' tenements I can hardly imagine that any self-respecting ghost would remain in such quarters; even ghosts may have their feelings. Madeley Court possesses the abiding charm of antiquity. An ancient time-worn home like this that has made its history, what a wide gulf separates it from a modern building that has no story to tell, even though the modern building be beautiful in itself, which it seldom is. [Pg 240] I believe it was Ruskin who said he could not live in a land that had no old castles, and I should like to add ancient houses of the eventful and picturesque Elizabethan or Jacobean era. Castles have their lure to lovers of the past, though they beat the big drum too loudly for my fancy; give me rather a grey-gabled, rambling, old moated house, remote in the country and away from other human habitations, pregnant with traditions that have gathered round it; and if I fail to unearth those traditions, I am quite capable of inventing some for myself suitable to the place, and to my liking.

Some years ago during my road wanderings I came, in Worcestershire, upon the decayed but delightfully picturesque moated hall of Huddington Court, standing, isolated and with a sadly forlorn look, in a desolate district, far removed from the beaten track. Of its history, at the time, I could glean nothing, but that it had some story to tell I felt convinced; there was a certain subtle something about the place, actual enough to me but indefinable, that suggested old-time romance. I could not get away from that feeling; I had it with me for days long after. Now in a previous book I described the old place and the glamour it cast over me, and this brought me from a reader of my book and a direct descendant of its former owner a long and most interesting letter giving a graphic account of certain stirring events connected with it, and I take the liberty of here quoting a portion of this letter as showing the share in history, often forgotten history, which many an [Pg 241]

old house inherits. This, then, is the story of the ancient home as given to me:—

"Huddington Court, with its moat, its priest-holes, was the ancestral home of the Winters, and has played a notable part in many a stirring scene intimately connected with some of the most romantic and fascinating pages of English history. It was at Huddington Court that the famous Gunpowder Plot was in part hatched, Robert Winter (or Wintour, or again Wyntour), the then owner of the Court, being one of the chief conspirators with Thomas, his redoubtable brother. It was at that top window, under the great gable, shown in your excellent photograph, that Lady Mary Winter stood to watch the horseman who should bring her news as to the success, or failure, of the Plot. The prearranged signal was a raised hand (in case of success), and it is an easy matter to picture her look of eagerness and poignant inquiry as she caught a glimpse of the mounted messenger coming down the very road where in all probability you left your car whilst inspecting the Court. As the horseman drew near, what, think you, must have been her feelings when with bowed head he clattered onwards without a sign? There was no necessity for a spoken word; she knew only too well that the Plot had failed, and that the consequences must be swift and terrible. So in truth they were.

"Riding like fiends before the breath of destruction the conspirators fled into the night, and from London and elsewhere converged, one and all, upon the Court House of Huddington. The day after the discovery of the Plot they were all assembled there, [Pg 242] and received absolution at the hands of a priest who had journeyed post-haste from Coughton Court, another historic old home in the neighbourhood. Under the shadow of the Court, just across the moat, you will remember the little church into which you failed to obtain entrance; there it was that the conspirators met in those last solemn rites of the church. Then as a last desperate effort they rode forth to raise the countryside. They visited Hewell Grange, and failing to enlist the sympathy, or assistance, of the then Lord Windsor or his followers, they turned to and sacked the place, carrying away with them arms and ammunition from its well-stored armoury. By this time the forces of armed justice were close upon their heels, and their plight was desperate indeed. Fate played into the hands of their pursuers, and they found themselves 'hoist with their own petard,' for crossing the Stour (then in flood) the bags of gunpowder attached to their saddles became wet. They presently dismounted and carried them into an inn so that they might dry before the open fire. During the risky operation a spark flew out from the fire and blew the majority of the conspirators to atoms. Leaving the injured to their own devices, the remaining portion of the band clambered again into the saddle and made off in every direction. Thomas Winter, with several other desperate companions, turned to bay in a house near by, where a hand-to-hand fight ensued of a most sanguinary character. Thomas, whose sword must have done deadly service for a time, for he was a noted swordsman, only [Pg 243] succumbed after being grievously wounded in the stomach by a pike, and was taken prisoner. Robert Winter escaped to the house of a friend and lay in hiding for several weeks, only to be eventually discovered and captured. Both Thomas and Robert suffered death upon the gallows in London for their share in the Plot, and John Winter, a half-brother, was executed at Worcester. No wonder an air of desolation and the mystery of an untold sorrow still seems to hang about the place; it would be strange if it were not so."

Such is the tragedy connected with Huddington Court. Most old houses have some story to tell, at least most old houses of former importance seem to be haunted by the memory of some interesting episode in which they have had their part. Sooner or later, as in the case of Huddington Court, their story will out. The spirit of place calmly awaits discovery. One old house that took my fancy the first time I saw it I afterwards found was connected with quite a romantic incident that reminded me of Dorothy Vernon's famous exploit. Early in the eighteenth century it appears that the daughter of the house clandestinely eloped with her lover, letting herself down from her chamber by the aid of two sheets tied together, just before sunrise one morning. Reaching the garden below safely and unobserved she met the man of her choice, who was quietly waiting near by with two saddle-horses, one for him and one for her, when the pair galloped off to a distant church, where all was arranged for their wedding. This is a true story and no invented legend, and the [Pg 244]

very sheets are still kept by the family as heirlooms.

Writing of old houses, here is an account of a curious discovery made in one that I transcribe verbatim from my morning paper of July 10, 1912: "Whilst repairing the fireplace and chimney at the Feerm Farm, near Mold, workmen have discovered a revolving stone, which on being moved revealed a secret chamber. The house was built in the early part of the sixteenth century and was once a manor-house. In the chamber was antique oak furniture, including a table on which lay old firearms, household utensils, and the remains, reduced to dust, of a repast. It is surmised that the room was used as a hiding-place by Royalist fugitives during the Civil War in the reign of Charles I., and that since then it had remained undisturbed." Still a stranger discovery, and a most tragic one, relating to an old house in England is recorded by Mrs. Hugh Fraser in *A Diplomatist's Wife in Many Lands*, and this is her account of it: "The owners of a certain old house, having inherited it from another branch of the family, decided to clear away a crowded shrubbery that almost covered one side." Upon the shrubbery being cut down, we learn, "it became evident that a part of the building ran out farther into them than any one had noticed. Measurements were taken and proved that a room existed to which there was no entrance from within; this was finally effected by breaking down a bricked-up window, and then the long-excluded daylight showed a bedroom, of the eighteenth century, in wild confusion, garments [Pg 245] thrown on the floor, and chairs overturned as if in a struggle. On the mouldering bed lay the skeleton of a woman, still tricked out in satin and lace, with a dagger sticking between the ribs. Under the bed was another skeleton, that of a man, who seemed from the twisted limbs and unnatural position to have died hard. No clue had been obtained to the story."

After this who shall say that old houses have not their romances, recorded or unrecorded? Mrs. Fraser's account of a hidden chamber and of skeletons found therein is not the only one of the grim kind that has come to my notice. A book indeed would be needful to tell all the strange and, I believe, truthful tales about old houses in remote spots that I have gathered during many years of road wandering. Boscobel, like many another house of its kind, might never have become famed or known to the outer world but for the chance sojourn there of the hunted king.

I have been digressing: it was the sight of that ghostly-looking old house of Madeley Court with its haunting charm of suggested romance that set my thoughts and my pen a-wandering thus. To return to Madeley Court, its walled-in pleasure garden is now but a pathless, grass- and weed-grown space—a play-ground for pigs when I was there. When I opened the gate to peep into it, a miner's wife bade me be careful not to let the pigs out. "Them's our pigs," she exclaimed. Lucky miners to live in a stately, if dilapidated, old hall and to keep pigs galore, and yet to go on strike, as they had [Pg 246] lately done, though as the honest old miner I met, as already mentioned, frankly confessed, "we hereabouts has nothing to complain of." As a mere onlooker it appeared to me that these miners felt the need of a trade union to protect their interests, yet were themselves half afraid of the power they had set up over them. One thing remains in the neglected spot that once was, I presume, a garden trim and gay with flowers, and that is a large and remarkable sun-dial or planetarium. This consists of a great square block of stone raised on four stout pillars above some steps; on the four sides of the stone are large cup-like recesses that formerly contained the dials; these, I was informed, not only showed the time, but also the daily or nightly position of the moon and the planets. How they could do all this passes my comprehension; the position of the moon I might possibly grant, but that of the various planets that change positions every twenty-four hours is "a big order."

Had only Madeley Court been a little cared for and in pleasanter surroundings, it would have been one of the most picturesque homes imaginable. But the country about being blest with coal beneath is, by the getting of it, curst with ugliness above. I left Madeley by a rough lane that threaded its way through a hilly country and past many collieries, but in time I escaped the spoilt scenery, where both the buildings and the land looked sombre and sad, and reached a fairer country, though for some distance the atmosphere was dull and grey with the drifting smoke from the [Pg 247] chimneys of the mines. Then as the evening came on I found myself

in the little town of Shifnal, where I discovered a decent inn, and that, to me, was the chief attraction of the place.

That night I consulted my map to hunt up the position of Boscobel, for I was minded to see that historic and ancient house next day, and the study of my map revealed the fact that Lilleshall's ruined abbey and the remains of White Ladies Nunnery were not far off, so I determined to make a round of it and see them on my way, and a pleasant cross-country expedition, mostly over winding lanes, it promised to be. I had heard of Lilleshall Abbey but not of White Ladies Nunnery that I found marked plainly on my map, at a spot apparently remote and not far from Boscobel.

From Shifnal I went to Sheriff Hales, a small village of no interest, but it was a convenient point to make for first on the complicated way to Lilleshall. Somehow, though I used my eyes and consulted my map, I managed to successfully miss the abbey, notwithstanding the fact that it stood close to the road I was on; but so screened by trees were the ruins that I passed them unawares, and soon found myself a little beyond them in the village of Lilleshall, where there is nothing notable to see unless it be a tall obelisk that crowns the hill above. This obelisk, erected to the memory of a former Duke of Sutherland, is a prominent landmark for miles around, and from the hill-top is a grand panoramic prospect over a goodly country, a prospect that well repays the easy climb.

The church of Lilleshall is uninteresting; the only thing that [Pg 248]
attracted my attention in it was a monument in the chancel with the recumbent effigy of a stately dame on it, her head bound round with a fresh linen bandage. It appears that the nose of the figure had been broken off, and had been replaced and cemented on again, and that the bandage was there to hold the nose in position until the cement hardened. But in the church's gloom the freshly bandaged head gave the effigy a curious look, as though it were alive and suffering severely from toothache!

At Lilleshall there still exists an ancient pond of considerable size, the water from which once drove the abbey mill, and the course of the mill-race may still be traced. From near this pond I found a footpath over the fields that led to the abbey ruins, and half-way to them I came to a little lonely railed-in well, known of old as "Our Lady's Well."

> Above the well a little nook
> Once held, as rustics tell,
> All garland-decked, an image of
> The Lady of the Well.

Nowadays it is known as "The Wishing Well," and it is said that whoever drops a pin in it and wishes, his or her wish will be fulfilled. Having no pin with me I was unable to test the efficacy of the well; but this I can say, that I know a certain "Wishing Gate" in the Lake District, much esteemed for its virtues, where all you have to do is to lean against the gate and wish; now when I was much younger I leant against it in the company of one and wished, and my [Pg 249]
wish was realised.

Approaching the abbey ruins by the footpath, they made an effective and pathetic picture lightened and warmed by the soft sunshine, with the green woods behind them, the ruins so old and wan, and the woods so freshly green. The chief feature of the abbey is its bold and beautiful late Norman west doorway, and from this wide portal the whole of the church can be seen at a glance, so that one can judge the extent of it, and a glorious and stately fane it must have been when the last abbot in 1538 meekly handed it over to the minions of Henry VIII., "with all its manors, lordships, messuages, gardens, meadows, feedings, pastures, woods, lands, and tenements." A rare and rich morsel for that greedy monarch.

Lilleshall Abbey has been picturesquely ruined, yet I wish it had been a little less ruined, for one misses the graceful tracery that once adorned its now vacant windows; it is the tracery of their windows that gives such an added charm to Tintern and Melrose. The abbey was fortified and held for the king in the Civil Wars, and was bombarded by Cromwell's merciless cannon-balls; afterwards it was utilised as a ready-made stone quarry, so that one wonders, and is thankful, that so much of it remains. Past the abbey's walls runs a little slothful stream with scarcely a murmur, a stream now weed-grown and overhung by trees, and very pleasant it was to ramble by

its cool and shady side with the grey ruins on one hand and the tangled woods on the other; the quiet wind just whispering as it passed by, it might be, the secrets of the past. I had the abbey to myself; not a soul did I see; not a sound did I hear but the hardly audible lisp of the stream, and the subdued rustle of the wind-stirred leaves. The spell of peace was there. I fancy the abbey is little visited, for, like Haughmond, it lies out of the track of tourist travel, and there is no inn or railway within miles of it as far as I can remember; now the tourist demands an inn and refreshment in near proximity to the places he haunts. To get beyond railways and inns, that is the thing for the peace-loving traveller. The motor-car he must suffer, but the average motorist loves the highway; on the Shropshire byways I met scarcely one.

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From the abbey I started forth to discover White Ladies Nunnery and Boscobel. Eventually I discovered both, but so out of the world are they that I had much difficulty in making their discovery. Signposts were useless, for not one directed me to either place. First I went to Tong, as the road to that village is fairly clear to follow, and it appeared to be on my way; moreover I had been told of a wonderful old church at Tong, so full of stately monuments that it is locally known as the "Westminster Abbey of Shropshire," and is sometimes termed the "Church of the Dead"; also it has gained the title of the "Minster of the Midlands." Quite a choice of names.

Just before Tong I observed an Arabian Nights sort of a building, a freak in architecture standing desolate in a large neglected park. The house, with its Oriental domes, looked strangely un-English and out of place in the landscape. It might have been bodily conveyed from the East and boldly set down there. I even rubbed my eyes to be quite sure that I saw aright. This I found to be Tong Castle, though anything more unlike a castle I could not imagine; but I learnt that a castle once stood on the spot, and there was a big board put up in the park that told its story, for boldly painted on it was "Tong Castle. For Sale."

LILLESHALL ABBEY.

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At Tong I pulled up at the church to find that the door of it was locked, so I went to hunt for the clerk; fortunately I found him at home close by, and at my service. It does not always happen so, for at different times I have spent many an hour clerk-hunting, and failed to run down my quarry. It is the most uncertain of sports. It seems passing strange to me how in a small village this minor official occasionally entirely disappears, and no one can tell you where he is, not even the publican; on the other hand, so contrary do things arrange themselves that frequently, when you stop in a village for any purpose, the clerk ferrets you out at once and almost insists on showing you the church whether you desire to see it or no. On a former tour, coming to a small country town in the Eastern Counties where I had been told the church contained a very curious and interesting old tomb, unique of its kind in the kingdom, I spent one whole hour clerk-hunting. Nobody appeared to have seen the clerk that morning, and nobody could tell me where he was. The last person of whom I made inquiries was an old woman standing by her house door. Neither did she know, but she had seen him yesterday, which was not very helpful. Then, perhaps noticing my look of disappointment, she suddenly exclaimed, "I be sorry you can't find the church clerk; but I've the key of the Methodist chapel, if you would like to see over that"!

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CHAPTER XIV

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A wonderful collection of tombs—A tombstone inscription by Shakespeare—A leper's door—Relics—Manufacturing the antique—Curiosity shops—The Golden Chapel—"The Great Bell of Tong"—White Ladies Nunnery—The grave of Dame Joan—Boscobel and its story—A tradition about the "Royal Oak."

Externally Tong church strikes the rare and happy note of individuality; however beautiful our country churches may be, those in the same county of the same period are but too apt to repeat familiar forms; there is no freshness about them to attract. Now Tong church is an original conception, original without being strange, and it possesses the excellent and pleasing merit of good proportion. Its central tower is octagonal, rising from a square base, with the four corners of its base tapering off to the octagonal above; the tower is crowned by a graceful steeple with spire lights, which spire lights "are perhaps nearly unique." The roof of the church has manifestly been purposely kept low, the better to reveal its embattled parapets and pinnacles. Thought is apparent everywhere in its design. It is a cathedral in miniature, and a beautiful miniature too. At the west end of the building stand the crumbling arches of its former college, and in the churchyard is a cross that marks the plot of ground set apart for the burial of unbaptized children, to me a fresh feature of a churchyard.

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The interior of the church, with its many truly magnificent altar-tombs, proved vastly more noteworthy and interesting than I expected; the clerk, too, was both interesting and well-informed, and evidently took a pride in the building. He did not go round conveying information in a parrot-like and irritating fashion as some clerks do, as though repeating guidebook-gathered information learnt by heart, and glad to get it done. The tombs are all exceedingly beautiful and well-preserved; they have happily survived the Puritan's rage and the church-wardens' era undamaged. The effigies on them of the noble lords and brave knights of old provide an object-lesson as to the wearing and to the details of ancient armour; those of their ladies reveal the elaborate dresses worn in days of yore, and the changing fashions of head-gear, all so faithfully rendered one could almost reconstruct the armour and renew the dresses from the sculptured stone. The oldest tomb (for they were all pointed out to me in due chronological order) is that of Sir Fulke de Pembruge (who is represented in chain armour of the period of the Crusades), with Dame Elizabeth his wife by his side; though the clerk said "some antiquaries who have examined the tomb have thrown a doubt as to whether the effigy of the lady is really that of the knight's wife, from the fact that the base of the tomb below her effigy has undergone alteration and is not quite in keeping with the other part. It has even been suggested that possibly the effigy may have been removed from elsewhere and placed there for convenience, in careless past days." In truth, to do such a monstrous thing would have needed very careless days indeed. Still, in times past stranger things were done in the name and under the cloak of church restoration. I learnt that Sir Fulke predeceased his wife some years, and I formed a theory, satisfactory at any rate to myself, that quite possibly this Sir Fulke de Pembruge had first been buried beneath a single altar-tomb, and that some years later his wife might have been laid by his side, and this would account for the slight difference in the details of this under portion of the tomb, which has manifestly been added at a little later period. Quite a plausible explanation it seems to me; then wherefore seek for a more improbable one?

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There were several other stately tombs to various members of the Vernon family, who owned not only the Castle of Tong, but also Haddon Hall in Derbyshire, hallowed now by the story of Dorothy Vernon. Each mail-clad image of the noble house,

> With sword and crested head,
> Sleeps proudly in the purple gloom
> By the stained window shed.

Sir Henry Vernon, who died in 1515, the founder of the Golden Chapel and the donor of the Great Bell of Tong, has a very elaborate tomb adjoining the chapel; both his effigy and that of his wife are coloured. But the most magnificent monument of all is that of Sir Thomas Stanley, who, by the long inscription on it, we learn,

"married Margaret Vernon one of the daughters and cohairs of Sir George Vernon of Haddon in the Covntie of Derbie, knighte." His wife's effigy lies beside his. This tomb is of considerable interest because a verse attached to it, the clerk informed me, is said to have been written by Shakespeare. Sir William Dugdale, the antiquary (born 1605, deceased 1686)—I note how long lived antiquaries often are—declares positively that it was written by Shakespeare and by no one else. Now Sir William Dugdale is no mean authority. This is the verse:

> Not monumentall stone preserves our fame,
> Nor sky aspyring piramids our name.
> The memory of him for whom this stands
> Shall outlive marble and defacers' hands.
> When all to Tyme's consumption shall be geaven,
> Stanley, for whom this stands, shall stand in Heaven.

In spite of Sir William Dugdale's assertion, most people are of opinion that this verse is not of sufficient merit to warrant Shakespeare's authorship; still, to me at least, it appears equal to the well-known and much-quoted epitaph that the poet composed for himself, which is inscribed over his grave in Stratford-on-Avon church. Truly there is the difficulty of dates to be considered. Now when Sir Thomas Stanley died Shakespeare was but twelve years old; however, as frequently was the case, the monument might not have been erected until some few years after Sir Thomas Stanley's death, and again the verse may not have been written then. It may be that the verse, which is apart from the inscription, was an after-thought, placed there at a little later time. Therefore, as far as dates are concerned, there is nothing impossible in Shakespeare having composed the verse when a young man. Here is a promising matter for antiquaries to dispute about!

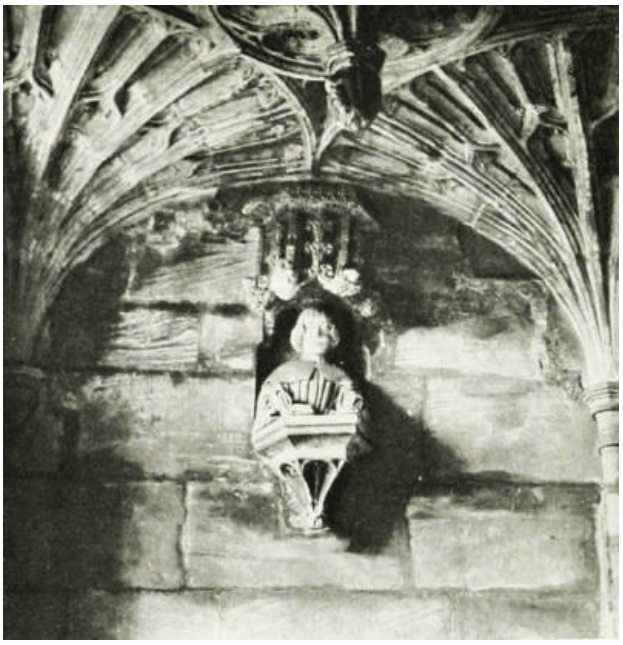

FIGURE OF SIR ARTHUR VERNON, TONG CHURCH.

BOSCOBEL.

Next the clerk called my attention to the fine old fifteenth-century stained glass of the west window, found some years back under the floor of the church, presumably placed there for safety from the Puritan fanatics. Also he pointed out the boldly carved royal coat-of-arms set up against the north wall of the church "to celebrate the capture of Napoleon Bounaparte." Then he showed me the old Collegiate Choir stalls, on one of the panels of which is a very curious and cunningly conceived carving representing the Annunciation; at the base of the panel is shown a vase with lilies growing from it, and these are so contrived to subtly suggest the Crucifixion where the flowers expand. A quaint and poetic conception cleverly carried out. "A carving quite unique," the clerk told me; certainly I had seen nothing like it before. I wonder how the medieval carver got his inspiration?

Next we inspected the Golden, or the Vernon Chapel, built in 1510, a copy on a smaller scale of the Henry VII. Chapel in Westminster Abbey. The fan-vaulted roofing of this is very fine, and both the roof and walls still plainly show traces of gilt and colouring. In a niche in the west wall and under a richly carved canopy is the figure of Sir Arthur Vernon represented as preaching, this Sir Arthur Vernon being "a priest of the College." During the [Pg 258] restoration of the church his brass was discovered beneath the floor of the chapel, though why it should have been floored over I cannot imagine; now it has been recovered and exposed for all men to read who know the Latin tongue. The original altar stone (of rough sandstone with five crosses on it) has also been recovered from the floor, and has been returned to its former rightful position, suitably elevated, at the east end of the chapel, and above it is a faded fresco of the Crucifixion. On the south wall is also a quaint brass to Ralph Elcock—Cellarer of the College.

Next we went to the vestry, and I noticed that the door entering to it had three large round holes in the top. According to the clerk this door was originally an outer one and known as the lepers' door, the holes being for the use of lepers to observe the service from the churchyard. I have come upon lepers' or low-side windows galore, but never upon a so-called lepers' door before. As, for reasons already given, I do not believe in lepers' windows, it naturally follows I could not agree with the clerk that this was ever a lepers' door. More probably, I thought that the holes were merely made in the door to afford an outlook from the vestry into the church, but that explanation was too simple to satisfy the clerk, it robbed the door of its romance. In the vestry is preserved a library of rare old tomes, also a richly embroidered ecclesiastical vestment said to have been worked by the nuns of White Ladies. Amongst the treasures of the church is a tall and richly chased silver-gilt and [Pg 259] crystal cup, given by Lady Eleanor Harries in 1625, but the cup itself is of very much older date and is probably of foreign craftsmanship. What was the original purpose of this I cannot say; possibly it was a monstrance—it could hardly have been intended for a Communion cup.

Since I was at Tong I have heard that an American collector had offered a large sum for this cup, £800 I think I was told. I am glad to say that the church authorities forbade its sale. "England," as Nathaniel Hawthorne once said, "is one vast museum," but even the vastest museum, if continually deprived of its treasures, must become depleted in time. As I travel on I am continually hearing of art treasures, of ancient furniture, of fine oak panelling, ruthlessly removed from old houses, of old family pictures and portraits, old pewter, old fireplaces, old everything, having been purchased by Americans, millionaire or otherwise, and conveyed across the Atlantic; how far true I cannot say, but I have also heard that there are sundry manufactories abroad and at home of sham antiques, of old masters, old pottery, "Toby Jugs" in particular, and furniture, kept busily employed for the benefit chiefly of Americans. Of late I was informed that Shakespearian relics are booming, and those of Charles I. run a close second, and the trade is a profitable one, for the prices of these "rare" articles are high, or they would not be considered genuine. Perhaps this explains where all the old furniture comes from, and the store of ancient things one finds, now that motorists scour the land, displayed conveniently to catch the [Pg 260] eye of the passer-by in countless village curiosity shops; also the growth of these shops, and why their stores never grow less. A short time ago it came to my knowledge that a lady consulted an authority on old china as to the genuineness of a dessert service she had

purchased on the understanding that it had "been in one family for over two centuries," whereupon the lady made the unwelcome discovery that the factory in which it was produced only opened in 1850!

Old worm-eaten oak from old houses pulled down and from old churches being restored is utilised in making careful copies of ancient Elizabethan and Jacobean furniture, so the wood of these is old enough and genuinely worm-eaten. I recently visited a village, through which motorists frequently pass, where there is a large curiosity shop literally crammed with "genuine" ancient furniture mostly made yesterday, but the copies I saw were so good and had such a look of ancientness as to deceive many an innocent purchaser. Two "monks' tables" were on sale there, suits and bits of rusty and knightly armour, made I fancy, in spite of the easily obtained rust, not more than a dozen years or so ago in Germany, where they do the thing very well, old sun-dials, old dressers, Elizabethan chairs, early water-clocks and bracket clocks of the Cromwell era, and I know not what else; all most cleverly reproduced even to the signs of wear—done by a wire brush, I believe—and the cutting of initials and dates of centuries past on tables and chairs. A gentleman who had been to Japan told me that he discovered a craftsman there who was most clever in [Pg 261] reproducing old brass Cromwell clocks, works and all, even to the English makers' names and ancient dates upon them; these were sent over to England, and he showed me one that he had purchased, and so skilfully was the original imitated, even to the presumed wear of the works, that I was astounded at the cleverness of the fraud.

But to return to the vestry of Tong church, said the clerk to me, "Have you heard of the Great Bell of Tong?" I had not till he mentioned it. I waited for him to tell its story that I knew was coming. I have forgotten how much he declared it weighed, but I believe it was considerably over two tons. "It takes three men to start it," he went on, "but when once started one man can keep it going. It was presented to the church in 1518 by Sir Henry Vernon. It is only rung on Christmas Day, Easter Day, Whit-Sunday, and St. Bartholomew's Day, on the birth of a child to the Sovereign and an heir to the Prince of Wales, or when the head of the Vernon family visits Tong."

Dickens confessed that it was to Tong church that he brought Little Nell with the schoolmaster in the *Old Curiosity Shop*, and this is how he describes it: "It was a very aged, ghostly place; the church had been built many hundred years ago, and once had a convent or a monastery attached," referring doubtless to the decayed College, "for arches in ruins, remains of oriel windows, and fragments of blackened walls, were yet standing; while other portions of the old buildings, which had crumbled away and fallen down, were mingled [Pg 262] with the churchyard earth and overgrown with grass, as though they too claimed a burial-place, and sought to mix their ashes with the dust of men."

Leaving Tong I got amongst narrow winding lanes in my search after White Ladies, and a rare difficulty I had in discovering that remote spot. "It's not a good country for strangers to find their way about in," exclaimed one old body of whom I asked direction, and I quite agreed with her, it was not. I kept on asking for White Ladies of any one I saw, but the lanes were very deserted and I met few people on them, and their answers to my queries were none too clear. Indeed they reminded me in indirectness of a reply that a Shropshire gentleman assured me he once received from a villager. He was asking the villager how long her father had been dead, and she said quite calmly, "If he had lived till to-morrow he would have been dead a week." Country folk, for some inexplicable reason, never seem capable of giving a plain answer to the simplest question. They appear to love to go round it, perhaps because they like to talk. After all I really think I should have missed White Ladies, for it is hidden from the road and only reached by an ill-defined footpath through a wood and then over a field, had I not been bold enough to call at a farmhouse where I received clear instructions how to find the ruins. Fortunately they were not very far off, "only about a mile farther on," so I could not well go astray, for I had only to follow the lane till I came to "a little wicket at the corner of the wood." I was glad of it, for I felt weary of wandering [Pg 263] without arriving anywhere.

What is left of White Ladies Nunnery consists almost wholly of its

despoiled Norman church, if church be not too dignified a term for so small a building, roofed now only by the sky and paved with rough and tangled grasses, the foot of its walls being fringed with flourishing weeds. There are few architectural features of note about the building except its ornamented north doorway and its rounded Norman windows, the carving of this doorway being little the worse for the weathering of centuries. The ruins stand silent and solitary in a large meadow, and around the meadow stretch deep woods for far away, and beyond the woods are distant hills, that day faintly outlined in palest blue against the sky; these woods are the relics of the once famous forest of Brewood. It is a lonely spot to-day, and must always have been a lonely one; its only approach is by a lane, and then over the quiet fields. There solitude dwells. Close to the ruins once stood the old half-timber hall of the Giffards (an old print I have seen represents this as it was in 1660—a low, rambling, and most picturesque building surrounded by walls, and with a quaint gabled gate-house in front), of which now not a vestige remains. Thither came Charles II., fleeing in hot haste from the fatal battle of Worcester—fatal to the Royal cause at least, for Cromwell called it his "crowning mercy." It is always so, to the victor the battle is a triumph, the God of Hosts is with him. Is it not recorded that Cromwell once exclaimed to his troopers whilst [Pg 264] crossing a river, "Trust in God," followed quickly by "but keep your powder dry"?

Within the ruined walls of the convent church are many ancient tombstones, for it was long a burial-place of Roman Catholic families. The oldest of these doubtless dates from pre-Reformation days, possibly being those of some important ecclesiastic, for it is adorned with foliated crosses beautifully carved, though without inscription as far as I could discover. But, to me, the most interesting tombstone of all bore no ornamentation but was briefly inscribed:

> Here lieth the bodie of a
> Friend the King did call
> Dame Joane but now shee
> Is deceased and gone.
> Interred Anno Do. 1669.

There Dame Penderel lies.

Boscobel was not far away; I simply followed the lane trustingly, and soon I beheld the great chimney and roof-trees of that ancient and historic house peeping through the trees. I came upon it suddenly and unawares. I was prepared to be disappointed with Boscobel; I always am prepared to be disappointed with historic places, for one gets so worked up with enthusiastic descriptions of them that but too often the reality leaves one cold and disenchanted, for who can romance to order? Where historic events have happened, I demand, perhaps unreasonably, a fitting background. The romantic incident of the stay and concealment of Charles II. at Boscobel calls for a picturesque setting, and there I found it. Boscobel is still, as of old, remote amongst the woods, and [Pg 265] suits the story to perfection. Though externally the house has lost somewhat of the patina of age by renovation, yet it impressed me. Had I come upon it unknowingly the very aspect of it with its old-fashioned garden and quaint summer-house would have caused me to stop, for it had that indefinable thing—a look of romance. Never yet have I come upon a house with that special look that has not earned it. A man writes his character on his face; so does an old house.

I did not know whether this storied home would be shown to strangers, but there I found a soft-spoken dame of dignified manner, who not only showed me over it, but told me its tale again so well and so freshly that in its old-world and pleasant panelled chambers the present seemed almost a dream and the past a reality. So strong was the influence of the place upon me that I almost expected to see the faithful Dame Joan appear approaching along one of the dusky passages, or even the hunted king himself. If ever a house were haunted by past presences, that house is Boscobel. I even thought it remotely possible that the grey-haired dame who showed me the place might be a descendant of the Penderels. I confess I had a longing to ask her if she were not of the good old stock, and should have done this but from fear of being disillusioned; but whether she were or no, for the sentiment of the thing, so I pleased to fancy her. Indeed I thought I traced a resemblance in her features to those of

faithful Dame Joan Penderel, whose painted portrait I saw hanging on the wall of the ancient oratory, possibly because I looked for it, and you often see what you look for. There can be no mistake about this portrait, for on it the artist has inscribed, as was the custom of the time, both her name and a date, thus: "Dame Penderel—Anno Dom. 1662," though her age at the time he has not recorded as was usual. Full of quiet character and motherly kindness is the face, a pleasure to look upon. Great is the contrast of this portrait with those of Charles II. and Cromwell (apparently excellent likenesses) hanging in the dining-room, for the king's features reveal a weak and pleasure-loving nature, whilst those of Cromwell are determined and austere.

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It was a happy time I spent at Boscobel, and I was fortunate to see it alone. I learnt from my guide that the house was built in 1540, so that it was over a century old when the king sought refuge there, and I further learnt that the name Boscobel originated from a suggestion made to John Giffard, its builder, by his friend Sir Basil Brooke, of Madeley Court, who had recently returned from Italy; and his suggestion was that the house, being seated in the heart of a forest, should be called Boscobel, from the Italian words *bosco bello*, meaning fair woods; so it was named. Passing through the hall I was shown first the fine oak-panelled dining-room, where is still preserved the very table that was used by the king. Much as it was then is the room to-day. On its walls hangs a copy of the Proclamation issued by the Parliament at the very time Charles II. was hiding there, offering a reward of £1000 for the discovery of the king, also declaring that it was death without mercy for concealing him. It speaks well for the Penderel brothers, all poor men "of honest parentage but of mean degree" to whom a thousand pounds would have been a fortune, that even when closely questioned by the troopers when searching the house and woods around, each one in turn pleaded ignorance of the king's whereabouts, rejecting the proffered reward and risking death rather than betray their sovereign.

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Opening out of one of the panelled sleeping chambers in the upper part of the house is a small closet; a cunningly concealed trap-door in the floor of this gives access to a small hiding-hole, and from this hiding-hole is a secret stairway (or rather was, for it is closed up now) contrived in part of the big chimney-stack; this stairway led down to a concealed door at the foot of the chimney and so out into the garden, forming a way of escape from the hiding-hole should it be discovered. It was down this stairway that Charles II. made his escape into the woods when one of the brothers Penderel (four of whom were keeping constant and tireless watch on the roads around) gave the alarm that soldiers were approaching, and it was deemed safer for the king to hide in the woods than to remain in the house. So selecting a thick-leaved oak, some distance off, with a tall straight trunk that no one could imagine that a man could climb, Charles II. mounted into its upper branches by means of a ladder carried there by the faithful Richard Penderel, who hurriedly carried it back to an outhouse before the soldiers arrived. In connection with the familiar story of the king's hiding in this oak my guide related to me an incident that I had not heard before. It appears that the king took with him into the tree two pigeons in a bag, as had been arranged he should, and that when the soldiers rode past below, he released these pigeons as though the soldiers had disturbed them, this to show that no one could be concealed there. The story of the pigeons is told in a quaint carving on the top of an old oak box that is kept in one of the rooms of the house, and is so far confirmed. The carving gives a bold representation of the Royal Oak in full leaf with the two pigeons flying from it, and the soldiers in search below.

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Whilst the soldiers were searching the woods Dame Joan went out ostensibly to gather sticks for the fire; she engaged the soldiers in conversation, and so diverted their attention from the neighbourhood of the special oak where the king was. You may always trust a woman whose heart is in her task to fool any man.

Alone in a field not far from the house and surrounded by an iron railing stands a flourishing and fair-sized old oak, known as the Royal Oak. Though this is doubtless on, or close to, the spot where the historic tree grew, it can hardly be the one in which the king hid; some authorities, however, blinking hard facts, boldly avow their belief in it. Now for these hard facts, though romance suffers thereby, and you may not hint such things at Boscobel, Dr. Stukeley,

the antiquary, writing in 1713, declares that then the old tree was "almost all cut away by travellers whose curiosity leads them to see it," and John Evelyn in his day writes that when he saw it "relic-hunters had reduced the original tree to a mere stump." Moreover, the king in his own account of his hiding said that he got into a tree that had been polled and was very bushy at the top. Now the present oak has never been polled, which is surely sufficient proof that it is not the original one. If I may judge from the various chests and other articles I have seen, and which are said to be made out of the wood of the original Royal Oak, it must have been the largest tree that ever grew; but the wise traveller does not take all such relics seriously. An ancient writer indeed declares that at one time in European churches there were shown to pious pilgrims portions of the true Cross which if collected together would be sufficient to load a big ship. Even the clerk of Tong told me that he owned a large oak chest made out of wood from the Royal Oak, and he is but one of many who own chests that have this reputation, to say nothing of chairs, tables, stools, and countless snuff-boxes, all made, and carved, from the wood of that wonderful tree—the tree

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> Wherein the younger Charles abode
> Till all the paths were dim,
> And far below the Roundhead rode,
> And humm'd a surly hymn.

Upstairs in the house, beneath what was formerly a cheese attic, is another hiding-place, a dark small hole at the top of the stair and entered by a trap-door in the floor, and here it was that Charles II. spent one uncomfortable night, cheeses being rolled over the trap-door for the better concealment of it. So my guide told me. Now the puzzling thing about this is, why, especially at night when the house was carefully locked and guarded, should it have been thought needful for the king to secrete himself in this cramped place? Surely he might have slept comfortably in bed, for there ought to have been ample time, when the soldiers knocked at the door and the alarm was given, and whilst the door was being slowly opened, for the king to have secreted himself; as it was he spent a most uncomfortable night to no purpose. Now when Charles II. was afterwards sheltered in Moseley Hall and was resting on a couch in a chamber (it chanced to be one afternoon), some soldiers made a surprise visit there, but on the servants rushing upstairs crying "The soldiers are coming," the king found ample time to reach his hiding-place, where he lay concealed in safety till the soldiers departed baffled. It speaks much for the cleverness of the contrivers of the hiding-holes both at Boscobel and Moseley that none of these holes, though carefully searched for, were ever discovered. Still it must have been a very unpleasant experience for the king, hidden away in a dark and dismal hole all the while the soldiers were busily searching the house, not knowing but that he might at any moment be discovered. Indeed, when his host had seen the soldiers safely away and came to release the king, the king exclaimed to him "he thought the time very long"—and little wonder; so might any one in so unfortunate a position. It is said that Charles II. was the last person to be secreted in the hiding-holes at Boscobel. Possibly Boscobel was not so diligently searched as other houses were, owing to its being solely in the care of servants at the time, so less suspicion fell on it.

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Boscobel in its woods calls to my mind a saying of that quaint old worthy Thomas Fuller: "It is pleasant as well as profitable to see a house cased with trees. The worst is, where a place is bald of wood no art can make it a periwig."

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CHAPTER XV

A town with two names—An amusing mistake—Abbot's Bromley and its quaint horn dance—Dr. Johnson doing penance at Uttoxeter—Burton-on-Trent—The "Hundreds All" milestone—Indoor wind-dials—Stone-milled flour—The old Globe Room at Banbury—Dick Turpin's pistol—A strange find.

Leaving Boscobel by a winding lane I presently got on to the ancient Roman Watling Street at a forsaken-looking portion of it, though I fancy the whole of the street for most of the way is, more or less, deserted. I had never been on Watling Street before; it looks so uncompromisingly straight and so uninviting on the map that I never felt any desire to explore it, but now I had come to it by accident I thought it a very pleasant road, this portion at least, with its wide grassy margins, and there before us it stretched far away through a well-wooded and lonely country—a genuine bit of Old England, mellow and grateful to the eye. I forgave the road for its straightness on account of the long and goodly green vista it afforded me, reaching even to the far-away blue—and it was delightfully free from traffic. Now I am a selfish traveller, I do not care for much company on the way. Here I had the advantages of a good road with the loneliness of a lane.

So along the old Roman street we went, passing but few human habitations, here a solitary inn, there a grey old farmstead, and every now and then a cottage, but that was all; it was pleasant driving, for there were no children, nor dogs, nor fowls for miles to trouble us, and all being safe we indulged in a burst of speed purely as a stimulant. Once on it I intended to follow the ancient street all the way to Daventry, but somehow I got wrong at a point where it takes one of its few bends, and unexpectedly found myself at Lichfield. Through Lichfield I drove without a stop, for I was not travelling to revisit familiar places, and Lichfield and its cathedral I knew long ago. The route I took through the city I took at a venture, but when I got into the country again I discovered by a signpost that I was journeying to King's Bromley—well, I would go to King's Bromley, it mattered little where I went, life is too short to trouble over trifles; I was out to see the country, one way was as good as another, provided it took me through pleasant scenery, and on this score I could make no complaint. [Pg 273]

About three miles from Lichfield, at a point where London was a good hundred and twenty miles away, I was amused by a solitary and leaning signpost with simply "To London" on it, and its arm pointed down a mere lane that one would imagine led to nowhere in particular. I remember some years back coming to another such solitary signpost in Hertfordshire with just "York" inscribed on its extended arm, but that was on the Great North Road and there was some excuse for it, though York was very far off. There is such a thing as character in even signposts, and I rather sympathise with signposts that deal with big distances, they impress me with their pride of importance. [Pg 274]

The next signpost we came to had "To Abbot's Bromley" on it; I felt uncertain whether this were a different place, but a man who was passing assured me that King's Bromley and Abbot's Bromley were one and the same. "It's a small town," said he, "with two names. You can call it which you please." I thanked him for the information. I wondered who he was walking leisurely on the country road clad in a shooting suit. He might have been a squire—or a gamekeeper. I thought I would find out, so I made further innocent inquiries about Abbot's Bromley. "It's a small town," said he; "you won't do much business there." I discovered he thought me a travelling commercial—of a glorified type, I hope. I did not mind for myself, but I felt the slight on my car; fortunately a car has no feelings, but my dog growled—manifestly he had. "In what line do you travel?" queried he quite politely, possibly with the idea of being helpful. Here was a poser. Could I tell a lie? Manifestly not, so I said I was out sampling scenery. "Well, I never heard of such a thing," exclaimed he, and before he had time to think the matter over I went my way. I hope when he realised his mistake, as I presume he did, he would not think I was offended, I was simply amused. I only wish I could have kept up the character, but I was hard put to do it on the sudden emergency. I wonder who he could have been? I am sorry now I drove on so hastily, but the situation was getting strained. It is the people you meet by the way as well as places that [Pg 275]

are interesting; at least I was glad to find that every motorist is not considered a millionaire. When I come to think of it, it was an idiotic thing to say that I was sampling scenery; still, was I not? The strange fact is that when occasionally I have, at country town inns, been thrown in the company of commercials, and have tried my best to play the part of one of them, I have ignominiously failed. I might invent a new proverb, "If you want to do a thing don't try to do it"; in your anxiety you are almost sure to overact your part. To make amends for being considered a commercial, the landlord of a certain country inn once took me for a real live lord travelling under an assumed name, and the more I tried to convince him of his error the more sure was he that he had made no mistake, he had seen my photograph as Lord Somebody in some paper; he was honoured to receive me, lords would have their whims; why should they not travel under assumed names if it pleased them? He would "my lord" me—and charged for it heavily in the bill.

Abbot's Bromley, or King's Bromley, gave us quite a cheerful greeting. I saw one or two flags flying in the town; the village maids (it seemed but a village to me) were dressed in their best; some were carrying flowers and looked quite charming in a rustic way, and there were young men in attendance too, dressed in their black Sunday best that did not suit them a bit. So I would know what was [Pg 276] happening. I ventured a joke on one of the prettiest maids. "I see you were expecting me," I said. It fell flat. "No, we weren't," she replied, "it's a bazaar," and without a further word she walked away. But another maid, who had overheard the conversation, graciously came up to me and explained: "We're having an open-air bazaar; will you come to it? We're going to have the horn dance." Then I became interested. What was the horn dance? I wondered; I did not remember having heard of such a thing before. I begged for information, saying I was a stranger that chance had brought that way. I hardly need have done this, for in country places everybody seems to know everybody and their business, so the good people doubtless knew I was a stranger, and most of them appeared to think I had been attracted from afar by the news of the bazaar with its special attraction of the horn dance. It was an eventful day for Abbot's Bromley, where eventful days I should imagine are a rarity. Then I learnt that Abbot's Bromley is one of the few places where the old hobby-dances are still kept up and take place yearly, but this was a special performance in aid of the bazaar. The horn dance, I understood, is carried out by ten or a dozen performers all gaily attired, and the characters are a Maid Marian, a fool, a man with a hobby-horse, and a man with a bow and arrow; then there are six dancers each of whom carries a pair of reindeer horns of large size. These reindeer horns are kept in the church tower, and are mounted [Pg 277] on wooden skulls provided with handles. According to tradition these horns are those of reindeers that in times long past once roamed over the forests surrounding Abbot's Bromley.

In my copy of *Paterson's Roads* (that gives a short account of the various towns on the way), under Abbot's Bromley I find the following reference to this dance, from which it appears that it was then in abeyance: "The curious custom called the hobby-horse dance formerly prevailed here; it was generally celebrated at Christmas, on New Year's Day, and Twelfth Day, when a person carrying beneath his legs the semblance of a horse, made of thin boards, danced through the principal street, having a bow and arrow in his hands ... five or six other persons also dancing carrying six reindeers' heads on their shoulders."

Abbot's Bromley struck me as a very pleasant and picturesque little place; it has no railway, and that is perhaps why it has such an old-fashioned look. I have always a liking for these little towns beyond railways. Most of its houses, built long years ago, are of black and white half-timber; and the ancient inn there is of half-timber too, that with its grey gables, its casement windows, its swinging sign, is suggestive of the coaching and Pickwickian days and all the lost romance of them. It took my fancy. It ought to have some story to tell of those "good old times," but I failed to find or to conjure one; for though the house remains much as it was, the actors are dead and gone—host, coach-farer, and highwayman. It is [Pg 278] the sort of inn you read of in Harrison Ainsworth's novels, though I doubt if any one reads them to-day. How rich in incident and picturesque description they are! I know I took my fill of them when I was a boy; now, alas! they have lost much of their flavour; yet they have changed not, the change must be in me. To complete the old-

world picture of the place, Abbot's Bromley boasts of an ancient roofed-in Market Cross, with thick oak supporting-posts around. Only compare the sought-for picturesqueness of a model garden city with the natural unsought-for picturesqueness of such old towns as Abbot's Bromley, and oh, the difference! I left the little, forgotten town basking, but not sleeping, in the sunshine, for it was much alive and making merry that day.

We had not gone far before a change came over the weather—I hope the open-air bazaar did not suffer from it. Overhead the sky grew dark and threatening, then came a sudden flash of lightning, loud thunder followed, then the rain in torrents. I wondered whether a motor-car with all its metal work was the safest place to be in, for the storm was severe; but there was nothing for it but to drive on, with such uncertain assurance as the saying of the farmer at Wem afforded that "lightning never strikes a moving object." In spite of that comforting dictum lightning is not to be trusted. Since then I have heard that a motor-car travelling on the road has been struck by lightning, and, though fortunately no one was hurt, the car [Pg 279] was damaged. How the rain hissed down, and how the wind howled through and shook the trees, even blowing bits of their branches and leaves across the road! Still above the sound of the storm I could hear the steady beat of our pistons, as one hears the reassuring throb of the engines of a steamer in a gale at sea.

The country appeared to be richly wooded, as far as I could judge; but what with the thunder and the lightning, the wind and the rain, I obtained but a vague impression of it. Then after the storm had done its worst, a town loomed up on a hill before us, and this proved to be Uttoxeter, a neat town neither attractive nor ugly, and that is the best I can say for it. Here, it may be remembered, Dr. Johnson, when in the height of his fame, stood in its market-place bare-headed in the rain, "exposed to the sneers of the standers-by," as an act of penance for his unfilial disobedience as a boy in refusing to watch his weary and infirm father's bookstall set up there for a while. It is a well-known story, but the actual sight of the spot where that touching incident took place made me realise it the more.

Having viewed the market-place, made historic by this event, we took the first road handy out of the town, mildly wondering where we were going next. There was a sense of pleasurable excitement in not knowing our destination. I have a friend who does this sort of thing when he goes a-cycling, and who, like myself, travels to see the country, little caring where he goes. If a windy day he simply lets the wind settle his direction, for he always makes a point of [Pg 280] cycling with the wind behind him; he finds it much easier so, and when it blows hard he finds himself blown along with the minimum of exertion. So he never troubles about any plan, but when he starts out in the morning he just glances at the way of the wind and goes contentedly with it. Capricious though this mode of travelling be, yet it rendered fortunate results. When he traced me out on the map one or two tours he had made in this haphazard fashion, I felt bound to confess that no planned tour could have turned out better, and it took him to many odd out-of-the-way and pleasant places he would probably never have seen otherwise. Truly I did not consult the wind, but on the other hand I did not consult my map unless I wished to make for any special spot, and I also toured fortunately so, to the discovery of interesting places, for the most of my journey.

This time it was a milestone that revealed the fact we were bound for Burton-on-Trent. Now to Burton I had no desire to go; Burton is a big town, but the road was a very pleasant one, so I kept to it. The country was fine and open, with glorious views to the south, where undulating hills bounded the distant blue. We passed one or two stately old and dignified homes standing "amid their tall ancestral trees"; then the rain came on again, and in the pouring rain we passed through Tutbury, where afterwards I learnt there are the slight remains of a castle; but I saw nothing of them, for I was thinking more of the rain and the road than anything else: the rain was blinding, so little wonder I missed them. It was not a [Pg 281] moment for seeing castles or anything else.

I was not pleased at having to drive through Burton, for I expected to find it a busy town with much traffic in its streets, and this was the first large and busy town I had to pass through during the whole of my outing; I had merely skirted Shrewsbury, so that did not count. Yet never have I passed through a large and busy town so easily as I passed through Burton; its streets are wide, and

for a wonder I found the traffic on them, much of it brewers' drays, kept well to its side of the road, so I was soon into the country again.

Just beyond Burton I had a choice of two roads, and was doubtful which to take, when I saw a signpost with "To Watling Street" upon it—merely to that old highway and not to any inhabited place. This decided me; I would rejoin the famous Watling Street, of which I had a pleasant memory. I knew it avoided big, bustling towns, and that was no small recommendation. A long rise brought me into a very pleasant country, and into welcome blue skies and warm sunshine. Such varied samples of weather had I that day—the blackest of clouds and the bluest of skies, cold pelting rain and the brightest of sunshine. The scenery was delightfully rural all the long and lonely way to Atherstone, where we should be on the Watling Street again, excepting that at one spot there were some collieries on a near hill that spoilt the prospect for a while; but I looked the other way. These passed, we traversed a fine undulating country, [Pg 282] made up of meadows, fields, and woods, and ever and again wide views of much charm opened out before us; and there the air blew sweet and bracing, with the rare freshness that follows rain. I pulled up at one quiet spot under the shelter of some overhanging trees for refreshment and for a rest, and there I stopped for an hour or more, and not a soul either driving, riding, cycling, or afoot went by. It was a cross-country road, apparently little used, and one to be enjoyed for its quietude and rural pleasantness. It surprised me how often I came upon such long stretches of almost deserted roads; we travelled far on that stage before we met a human being. Perhaps when I pulled up it was the hour of the day when the good old-fashioned country folk are mostly indoors dining, and the labourers resting from their work, so no one was about; but that does not account for the rest of the road later on being so forsaken.

Atherstone is one of the order of far-extending thoroughfare towns that flourished in the old coaching days, and that seem to have fallen half asleep since, for the chief concern of such towns was with the road and its traffic, though Atherstone is not so sleepy as most of them are. All that I could discover of any interest in the place was an old milestone set up against the ancient "Red Lion Inn" there; this, curiously enough, stands just one hundred miles respectively from London, Liverpool, and Lincoln, as the following inscriptions on it show:—

[Pg 283]

To	To	To
Liverpool	London	Lincoln
100	100	100
Miles.	Miles.	Miles.

A man who was quietly watching me copying these inscriptions, when I had done my copying, exclaimed, "That be a famous old milestone. The drivers of the old coaches as stopped at the inn used always to call their passengers' attention to it." On returning home I looked up in my *Paterson* for the name of the chief inn at Atherstone, and found it was "The Red Lion."

It seems strange that to-day, when so much loving regard is shown to the preservation of old houses, and to the careful restoration of them backwards to the intention of their ancient architects, that our many quaint and friendly-looking old coaching inns should have found such few patrons to preserve their fascinating features. Standing by the roadside, how delightfully picturesque they often are, when unaltered and—save the mark!—unimproved. Many, in truth, are poems in buildings (and the term is not strained in regard to them) with their many-gabled, time-toned fronts; their signs often gaily painted, swinging on an upright post without, to proclaim their useful business; their great arched doorways under which the loaded coaches drove and landed their passengers at ease sheltered from the rain and undisturbed, or their ample porches that spoke a welcome as plain as any uttered word. Some are of half-timber and some are of stone. Perhaps those of half-timber are the more picturesque, but nearly all are pleasing to [Pg 284] the eye; some, alas! are going to sad decay, such as that fine specimen of an old English roadside hostelry, "The Bell" at Stilton, which used to be both afamous and aflourishing house in its day, and which gave its name to the well-known cheese that the landlord of the time used to sell to his guests—indeed I believe it was considered the thing to buy a cheese at "The Bell" to take home with you. One of these old inns Ashby-Sterry has pictured to us in verse,

and well the picture suits many an inn I know:

'Tis a finely-toned, picturesque, sunshiny place,
Recalling a dozen old stories,
With a rare, British, good-natured, ruddy-hued face,
Suggesting old wines and old Tories.
Ah! many's the magnum of rare crusted port,
Of vintage no one could cry fie on,
Has been drunk by good men of the old-fashioned sort
At the Lion.

"The Lion," white or red, was in the past—I am not sure that it is not even to-day—by far and away the favourite sign; "The White Hart," I think, came second. These old inns, both outwardly and inwardly, have suffered sadly from neglect, and from the mania for show that does not spell comfort. Yet when simply, decently cared for, and unaltered, how charming and restful their old-time interiors are with their snug, low, brown-beamed, ceilinged parlours, sometimes panelled and with big ingle-nooks, their mullioned windows with their lattice panes, often deeply recessed with a seat in them, their cool and cosy bars and odd nooks and curious corners. That delightful Jacobean hostelry, "The Whyte Harte," to [Pg 285] wit, at Broadway in Worcestershire, with its genuine old-world atmosphere and quiet comfort, may be given as a good example of one. Some of these old hostelries were provided with a quaint device in the shape of an indoor wind-dial worked by a vane without, so that travellers overnight could judge by it of the next day's possibilities, and learn from the direction of the wind whether it were likely to be hot or cold, wet or fair. One of these interesting and useful indoor wind-dials may still, I believe, be seen in London at the Buckingham Palace Hotel; at least one was there and working but a year or two ago, and I understand that they are being introduced into modern homes. There are still some things we may learn from our ancestors.

At Atherstone I was again on the ancient Watling Street, and I followed it to Daventry as far as it is at present opened out to the south. Again it led me through a lonely country of field and forest, unexciting but very pleasant, a country fragrant with the scent of wild flowers and the refreshing odours of the woods. I did not dally at Daventry, for the little town appeared to me featureless, and finding from my map that Banbury was but sixteen miles away, I thought to spend the night in that place as being of greater interest; moreover, I had recently read in my morning paper an account of the old historic Globe Room there at the "Reindeer Inn," with the further unwelcome information that its fine oak panelling, with its richly carved fireplace and its elaborately enriched plaster ceiling, had all been sold and were to be removed, and I wished to see it—if [Pg 286] not too late. In this room Cromwell, it is said, held a council of war in October 1642 just before the battle of Edge Hill, so it had (oh, that pathetic word "had"!), besides the charm of its ancient picturesqueness, the additional interest of being with little doubt the place of that historic gathering. Now the fine old room has been gutted. So the "vast museum" of England is being despoiled! Whatever were the citizens of Banbury about to permit of such a thing; could they not have subscribed the price demanded for the panelling and decorative work (comparatively a paltry sum when divided amongst so many), and have retained that beautiful, historic, and ancient room intact? You cannot replace or purchase history. Even taking the meanest, most commercial view of the transaction, surely it would have well repaid the town to have bought and to have preserved that fine old chamber so intimately associated with Banbury, for I know it brought many tourists from afar to see it, some from even across the wide Atlantic; now perhaps they will not desire to go to Banbury and spend their money there, for it has little else but some ancient houses to show. Years ago the iconoclastic Banbury folk pulled down their exceptionally fine and interesting old church, "one of the most magnificent in the shire," even destroying its fine monuments, to save the little needed to keep it and them in repair, to say nothing of having done away with their "goodly crosse" of nursery renown, though a later generation has replaced it with a poor and meaningless substitute. What child [Pg 287] would now "ride a cock-horse to Banbury Cross"? It is not worth riding to or talking about.

But I am a little previous, not having arrived at Banbury yet; our road to that town was either up or down hill all the way, but there

was nothing to grumble at in this, for the scenery was rewarding and the motor had to do the climbing. At the top of one hill we came upon a lonely old windmill going to decay, its gaunt arms standing darkly profiled against the sky and shaking with every gust of wind. It had a weird and haunted look, though I never heard of a mill being haunted; precisely what is it, I wonder, that gives certain buildings such an uncanny look? There must really have been some magic about that mill, for I photographed it and only got a ghostly result on my film. I have never seen a ghost, but to my astonishment three intelligent people have declared, and positively declared, to me that they have done so. A little later will be found a reference to this matter. Now a ghost is a visible object and ought to be capable of being photographed: what would I not give to see a genuine photograph of a ghost! When next I sleep in a haunted room I must take my camera with me on the off chance of a ghost appearing, so that I may snap him! Though I fear my chances are but slight, for I have slept in haunted rooms where other people are reported to have seen "things," but saw nothing—not even in my dreams, which were undisturbed. Why will "things" appear to others and not to me?

[Pg 288] Years gone by, and not so many years either, you might from one spot have seen half a dozen or more windmills busily at work where now by chance you may see one; and in those past years you might have seen farmers' waggons slowly wending their way to the mill loaded with sacks of corn to be ground, or wending their way back white with fat sacks of flour. Now, except possibly in some parts of Sussex, to see a windmill with its hurtling sails is a rare sight. Grieved indeed am I that it should be so, for as a child I dearly loved the merry bickering windmill—what child does not? Now I have grown to man's estate I have not lost the old love of the sight of one. There is something very cheery and fascinating in watching the mill sails whirling round and round in their never-completed journey, now grey in shade, now white in the glance of the sun. But I sadly fear the dear old picturesque windmill is doomed, unless the manufactured article flour, not the raw material wheat, is taxed. I am no politician—I think I have said so already—for in an age when it seems to me, to misquote Macaulay, "all are for the party and none are for the State," the business of politics, as one of the Georges, I forget now which, remarked, "is not to my fancy." I preach neither free trade nor tariff reform; I have not studied the question, and I do not profess to know the facts of the case without study, as some people do—even members of Parliament who vote for their party right or wrong; it would probably cost them their seat and four hundred golden sovereigns a year if they did otherwise.

[Pg 289] But this I know, for I have tested it, that stone-ground flour produced by the old-fashioned windmill is infinitely sweeter, more nutritious, and more wholesome than the foreign roller-mill flour that is so starchy, "hence the present-day indigestion and the decay of teeth." Then, again, there is the fact, of which some clever people lose sight, that by importing flour and not wheat to grind at home we lose the valuable asset of "waste" as a fattening food for fowls, pigs, and cattle.

The village of Charwelton was the only one on the way of which I retain a memory, and this I remember on account of a fine and very old two-arched Gothic bridge of stone there by the side of, and parallel to, the road, manifestly intended only for foot passengers, so narrow is it, a carriage bridge in miniature, so solidly built and buttressed as though it spanned a rushing river and had to resist its strivings. Now the road was dry and no water flowed under the bridge; I could only presume that water had once flowed there. So I asked a man, who was idly standing by, about it. "The road be flooded in the winter time," said he, "and then us use the bridge. The water be quite deep at times and the horses on the road have to ford it. That bridge be seven hundred years old, they do say." It looked it. He appeared inclined to talk, so I let him, not knowing what might be coming. "It's a slow place Charwelton be," he went on, "there's no getting away from that. The church be a mile away from the village, and that don't encourage you to go to it. You see,

[Pg 290] the place were badly knocked about during the war, so I suppose they built a new village here, and let the church bide there." He spoke of "the war" as though it were of recent date; I was mystified, till I discovered he meant the Civil Wars when Charles I. was fighting for his crown!

I noticed nothing further on the way to Banbury but a big mounting-block of stone standing by a grassy margin of the road, an

interesting survival, and a somewhat unusual thing to see, so I stopped to inspect it, and on it I discovered inscribed—

Thomas High of Warden
Set up this. Ivly, 1659.

It is still there to keep green the memory of this Thomas High, though I should imagine that few ever read the inscription or make use of the stone. I wonder why he put it up in that lonely spot, where, even in the old days, few people would be likely to need it. Now you rarely see a horseman on the road unless it be a huntsman; I doubt if the mounting-block has been used for these fifty years back.

At Banbury I went to the "White Lion"; there was also, I afterwards found, a "Red Lion" in the same street, a cosy-looking hostelry with an ancient front of the fifteenth century that appealed to me. In *Paterson's Roads* I note both these inns mentioned as existing in the coaching days. The "Red Lion" is the more picturesque of the two, but I was very comfortable at the "White." During the evening I hunted up mine host and inquired of him about the Globe Room. Alas! I had come too late to see it, for he told me [Pg 291] that it had already been stripped of its panelling, its finely carved oak fireplace removed, its enriched plaster ceiling had been taken down, and all these had been carted away. I felt provoked with the Banbury people; I told the landlord so. I do not think I shall ever stay in Banbury again. I learnt of one curious and interesting find that had been made in the room. On pulling down the panelling there had been discovered hidden behind it a double-barrelled pistol with flint locks; the pistol was inlaid with gold and had the maker's name, "Baker, London," engraved upon it, and above the name the Prince of Wales's feathers. The pistol bears the following inscription: "Presented to Dick Turpin at the White Bear Inn, Drury-lane, February 7th, 1735." How came it there, I wonder, and who presented it to that famous highwayman? Of the genuineness of the pistol I think there can be but little doubt. Dick Turpin, it may be remembered, was hanged at York on 7th April 1739, four years after the pistol was presented to him. Writing of Dick Turpin reminds me of the myth of his renowned ride to York that Harrison Ainsworth in his *Rookwood* romanced about; now the credit of this surprising exploit really belongs to another of the fraternity, one Nick Nevison, of earlier time; this knight of the road robbed a traveller at Gad's Hill in Kent one morning at 4 A.M., and furiously riding on to York reached that city at 8 P.M. on the evening of the same day, and so established an alibi and saved his neck, at least on that occasion. [Pg 292] The skeleton of a poor unfortunate cat was also found behind the panelling; I wonder if it was that of the historic cat that was hanged as recorded by Drunken Barnaby?

To Banbury came I, O prophane-One!
Where I saw a Puritane-One
Hanging of his cat on Monday,
For killing of a mouse on Sunday.

The landlord of "The White Lion," a pattern of civility, called my attention to "the famous wistaria" that is trained along the walls of the outbuildings of his ancient inn. This wistaria, he informed me, was the largest and finest in the kingdom, its branches extending for over two hundred feet. He was manifestly proud of it, and I duly admired it, but I had seen many fine wistarias before; I would rather have seen the Globe Room. There is little or nothing now left in Banbury to tempt the pilgrim to linger there. So I took my departure the next morning, and that early.

[Pg 293]

CHAPTER XVI

A gruesome carving—Architectural tit-bits—An ancient and historic hostelry—Chipping Norton—Wychwood—A parson's story—"Timothying"—Shipton-under-Wychwood—On the Cotswolds—"The grey old town" of Burford—Two old manor-houses—A new profession—Highworth—Church relics.

I left Banbury one sunshiny morning, shaking "the very dust" of the town from my wheels "as a testimony against it," and driving by its modern cross I took the road before me, letting it lead me where it would. Out of Banbury I would go the nearest way. The road climbed Wickham Hill and then dropped sharply down to the quiet old-world village of Bloxham, that boasts of one of the many "finest parish churches" in the kingdom. How many are there, I wonder? Certainly it is a fine church and has a fine spire; this all must grant. I thought it worthy of inspection. I found its windows guiltless of stained glass excepting for two in the chancel, but this was not a matter to grieve about, for I much prefer plain glass to the rubbishy modern stained variety one too often comes upon, and that so offends the cultured eye by its garish crudity. A peep of the blue sky, of green trees and of even the rain, framed by the graceful tracery of a Gothic window, is more to my mind than visions of [Pg 294] stiffly posed angular saints with ill-fitting halos round their heads; I have always an uneasy feeling that the halos may tumble off. Not that all modern stained and painted glass is bad, but most of it is—hopelessly bad; its drawing when rarely correct is spiritless, it lacks inspiration; its colouring lacks richness; so unlike the lovely medieval stained glass, it has no gem-like qualities whatever. I honestly find difficulty in worshipping in a church with angular saints in ill-fitting robes and halos askew staring at me! It seems more the idea of a sinner doing penance than a saint glorified.

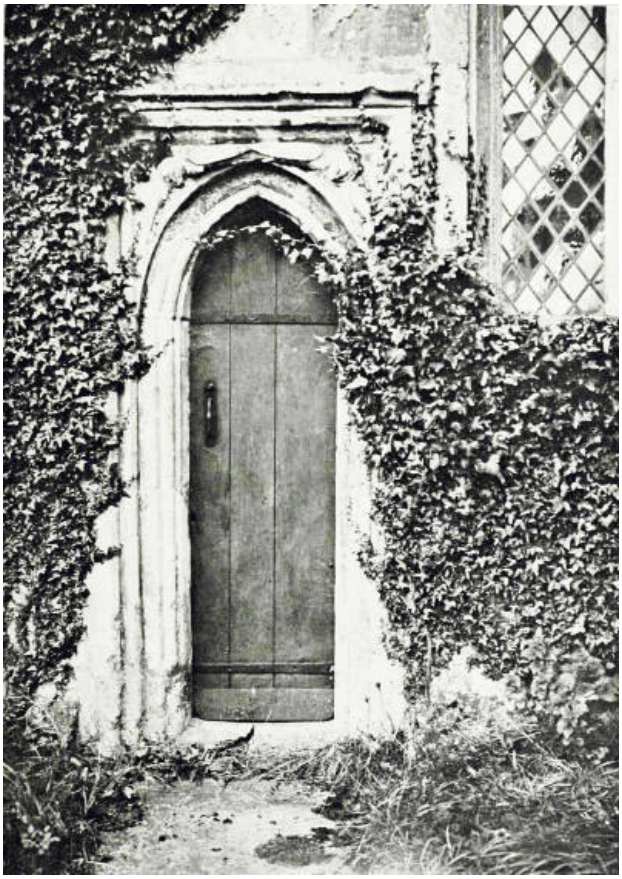
I noticed in the church a carved and coloured screen with some faded figures on it, and on the wall of a side chapel hung two old helmets and breastplates, somewhat rusty. I love to see ancient armour hanging in our churches, it takes the mind back to the days of knightly chivalry and recalls the never-returning romance of them—not the romance of fancy, but the romance of a past reality. Outside the church I found some open stone steps leading to two priests' chambers, one chamber over the other, but what interested me most was its richly sculptured west front; at the top of this are some good but unfortunately much weather-worn grinning gargoyles, for Time has been at work on these and has supplemented the carving of the monks with his, even, it may be, adding to their grotesqueness. Over and round the top of the big doorway is a quaint and gruesome representation of the resurrection, showing dead men rising from their coffins, one man being represented as lifting the lid of his and peering out with a look [Pg 295] of genuine surprise as though he did not realise what was happening; others had risen and were kneeling on the ground with hands folded in the attitude of prayer, and all looked very much aghast. Skilful indeed was the hand of the medieval sculptor to obtain these expressions. It was a nightmare in carving, crudely done but startlingly effective. I am glad I do not attend that church and have to face each Sunday that terrible story in stone; it is enough to wish death the end of all. When men could not read the monks talked to them in carving, though rarely so horribly as this; mostly those monks were in a jovial mood, and so I prefer them, as witness their grinning gargoyles, their merry devils, and frequent mirthful representations of men in the dumps; they were artists of no mean order, and verily, I believe, in their hearts loved a joke better than a sermon: truly they joked far better than they preached, for their preaching seems forced—not so their jokes! To the right of the doorway there is a curious carving of a man entering the jaws of some unearthly monster; the drift of this was wholly beyond me—surely it could not have been intended for Jonah being swallowed by the whale, for the monster's head, and that was all there was of him, bore no resemblance to that of a whale or to any creature that ever walked the earth or swam the sea, unless doubtfully in the prehistoric ages. A local rhyme perpetuates the character of the spire of this church with two of its near neighbours thus:

[Pg 296]

Bloxham for length,
Adderbury for strength,

The next village of South Newington, a village of stone-built cottages with thatched roofs, had by way of contrast a very small and poor church with square-headed windows, not those of the usual pointed Gothic type. I did not trouble to inspect it, though generally the poorest little country church can boast of some architectural feature more or less interesting. I came to a country church with only one point of interest, and that was a narrow priests' doorway gracefully designed; I presume it served the priests of past times, but I was told there was one parson of the good old Georgian days who could not use it because he was too fat! So he could not enter by the "narrow way," but had to go through the porch like any sinner.

Doorways in human habitations are often the keynote to the character of the house, and I was tempted in some of the country villages I passed through to photograph a few of their ancient doorways, for they interested me; two of these photographs, reproduced, will be found in pages farther on. The one of the fourteenth century is noteworthy, for it is a rare thing for so ancient a doorway to belong to a dwelling-house. I gathered the house had originally been a pre-Reformation vicarage; now it makes a quaint and picturesque home, with its low stone-slated roof, its mullioned windows, and its ivy-clad walls, boasting too the bloom of age that so beautifies a building. The other shows a simple type of Tudor doorway with steps up to it from the village street, but, though so simple and devoid of ornament, it is so well proportioned that it both pleases and satisfies the eye. I am rather fond of photographing architectural bits that take my fancy, and the English country abounds in such bits, apart from the larger features of buildings. It is curious to note how different districts afford and abound in special subjects: here you find ancient pigeon-cotes, often centuries old, of some pretence, and frequently most picturesque; here the minor items of sun-dials and of artistically wrought weather-vanes are most in evidence; at another spot you discover interesting "lion-guarded" gateways and picturesque doorways; again, it may be, it is the inn signs, with their crudely painted signboards and their elaborate scroll-work of wrought iron that surrounds them, that attract your attention; here a gazebo, and there an ancient roofed-in village fountain, claims your notice; anon a quaint conceit in carving on church or house, and so forth, not to waste space in needlessly enumerating the many and varied architectural tit-bits the wanderer by road constantly comes across, nor need he keep his eyes very wide open to discover them.



[Pg 297]

After South Newington we had another long stretch of very lonely road, but charming on account of its loneliness; the country we passed through was elevated and undulating and afforded us many fine and far-reaching prospects. There were wide margins of grass by the sides of our road, so wide in places as to be almost fields; on these multitudes of silly sheep were grazing—I say silly, [Pg 298] for when they heard the car approaching they would quietly cross the road in front of us, first one, then another, then the whole flock in slow procession, causing us to make many a stop, for sheep and cattle are lords of the road; they used even to stop a king's mails in the days of yore. These sheep really seemed to do it out of sheer perversity, and it was the more provoking as the otherwise forsaken road was so tempting to speed along, and occasionally, when all is safe, a turn of speed is a very inspiriting thing; it wipes the cobwebs from the brain, it drives the good fresh air into the lungs, it stimulates the mind, and braces the body. Not that I am an advocate of speed, except as a rare indulgence on lonely roads when there can be no hurt in it, and so you may test the mettle of your car.

Then we came to the old mail and turnpike highway from London to Birmingham; this crossed our road at a lonely, bleak, and elevated spot close to which formerly stood the once flourishing "Chapel House Inn"; the building still stands there indeed, but it has been converted into a residence: an inn of wide renown in the old road-travelling days, where the Birmingham coaches changed horses and stopped whilst their passengers dined; an inn far famous for its fare and its wines—so good were the latter that it has been said, and I see no reason to doubt the saying, that "there was a strong temptation to indulge in them which was rarely resisted, even the king's cellars could produce nothing better," and there over their wines our ancestors doubtless made merry as was their wont. At least they enjoyed their lives. It was to this inn that Dr. [Pg 299] Johnson and Boswell came in a postchaise during the early summer of 1776, and it was then when posting across country that the former, lover of towns though he was, suddenly exclaimed, "Life has little better to offer than this." It was on the same day, whilst dining at the "Chapel House Inn," that the learned doctor delivered his much-quoted eulogy on inns: "There is no private house in which people can enjoy themselves so well as in a capital tavern," declared he. "You are sure of a welcome, and the more noise you make, the more good things you call for, the more trouble you give, the welcomer you are. There is nothing that has been invented by man by which so much happiness is produced as a good tavern or inn." What road traveller will not re-echo those sentiments?—though I grieve for the one who can honestly say with Shenstone he has found his "warmest welcome at an inn," however warm the welcome at his inn may be.

About Chapel House many stories, astonishing and otherwise, truthful and untruthful, of old days and old ways are told; but though sadly tempted to relate some of these, I refrain, for I find I am always writing about inns. It does not do to keep harping on one subject, to be for ever "spinning your own wheel." I know a man, and a very good-natured, clubbable man is he, but even he gets bored by listening to one tune too long; his sole crime is that he is not a golfer—it is a serious one, I own. Now at his club he frequently meets a golfing friend who will talk golf and nothing else as long as any man will listen to him, just as some fishermen and motorists [Pg 300] enlarge about their hobby. Now my friend had listened long times patiently to the golfer's endless stories, but when one day the golfer complained that he was suffering badly from a "golfer's arm," my friend exclaimed, "I have suffered from a worse disease than that, 'golfer's jaw.'" Now I do not wish my readers to suffer from my "jaw" about inns.

From Chapel House we dropped down to Chipping Norton, a quiet, clean, contented-looking little town, and that I think sufficiently describes it. As Clarendon remarked of Aldermaston, it is "a town out of any great road," though near to one. So perhaps on that account it has no special history.

Beyond Chipping Norton the country grew lonely again, delightfully, restfully lonely, and all the way we went to Shipton-under-Wychwood I do not find a single house marked on my excellent and accurate map. We were in a bleak stone country, where stone walls take the place of hedges, and where the

landscape bears a Cotswold look. Those who know the Cotswolds know what that look is, a rarely pleasant one to me in the summer time, with a sense of openness about it; and how fresh and free and bracing are the airs that blow over the Cotswold hills. There you can keep cool in the hottest weather. Is there not an old saying that at "Stow-on-the-Wold, the wind always blows cold"? It is a truthful one as far as my experience goes, for I have passed through Stow on the hottest of summer days and found it none too warm there even then.

By degrees we descended into a valley and into a warmer [Pg 301] atmosphere, and crossing the little river Evenlode (of which I had not heard before, so does a driving tour extend one's knowledge of one's own country) we found ourselves in the attractive and interesting village of Shipton-under-Wychwood, but of the once wild Wychwood forest, formerly a royal hunting ground, there is not much to boast of left—sufficient, however, to earn for it to-day the title of "The Forest Country of Oxfordshire." There is a story told of a traveller in the pre-railway days whose road took him close by Wychwood, and he asked of a boy the name of the wood. "Wychwood," the boy replied. "Which wood?" the traveller exclaimed. "Why, that wood, you fool," pointing with his finger to it. Again he received the same reply. Once more the traveller repeated his query and received the same reply again; whereupon the traveller grew wroth, and deeming the boy was making fun of him, got down from his horse and soundly boxed his ears. One story calls forth another. This I had from a parson on my journey. It appears that one of his parishioners was over-fond of frequenting the public-house, and one day finding him coming out of it the parson said to him, "Williams, why do you go to the public-house so often?" To which the non-abashed Williams made reply, "Because they sell good ale there," and then he quoted the Bible to the parson. "You know, sir, the Bible tells us 'Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake'—now I cannot afford wine, so I drink ale"; and the parson was hard put how to answer him. It appears [Pg 302] that the villagers there employ the expression "Timothying" when they have been drinking. Still another story of a parson I was told occurs to me; this may be an old one, but it is one I have not heard before, nor seen it in print. It appears that this parson had recently lost his only son, to whom he was devoted, and was preaching on the text of Abraham offering up his son Isaac as a sacrifice, and during the sermon his feelings so overcame him that thus unknowingly he delivered himself: "And it was his son, his only son; now if it had only been a sheep or a daughter."

I found so much to interest me in Shipton, for there I noticed some old stone buildings, now forming part of what I took to be a farmyard, buildings with Gothic windows of good design and a graceful Gothic doorway in their walls; these could hardly be mere farm-buildings. That they possessed some history was from their character highly probable, but of that history, if there was any, I could glean nothing; as usual, nobody knew anything about them but that "they be very old." That appears to be the stock reply of the villager when you question him about such things. Then I wandered to the church a little way off, and there, for a wonder, I found the clerk within, "tidying up," as he called it. There was not much of interest in the church except a gruesome brass of a figure in a shroud, dated 1548, and a gloomy priest's chamber above the porch, reached by a dark stone stairway. This chamber, the clerk told me, was eight hundred years old; in truth it had an ancient look. Hanging on the wall, though why it should find a place there I could not understand, was a long-winded and framed account of the life of "John Foxe the Martyrologist born 1517," leaving no particulars of his life untold, I gathered from a hasty glance at it.

DOORWAY OF THE CROWN INN, SHIPTON-UNDER-WYCHWOOD.

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In the village stands a very ancient inn with a weather-worn aspect and a pathetic look of having seen better days, for its architectural features suggest it has been a house of some importance in times past. The old inn possesses a fine, early, and well-preserved high-pointed Tudor archway that, with its big door below with long exterior hinges, the quaint little two-lighted window by its side, and the old-fashioned mounting-block in front, presents a pleasing bit of ancient architecture. My photograph, here reproduced, will give some idea of this ancient doorway and of the quaint little window shown to the right of it. On leaving the village I caught to the left a delightful vision of a stately, many-gabled, stone-built Elizabethan home, standing in its pleasant park at a friendly short distance from the road. Shipton Court was, I learnt, the name of this picture in stone, for it is a home and a picture in one. Very beautiful did the building look with the warm sunshine resting upon it, for, though ancient, the house had a cheerful countenance; there was nothing gloomy or ghostly about it, nothing mysterious or suggestive of legend, but the word Home was written largely on it.

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Beyond Shipton we rose on to high ground and found ourselves in a breezy open country. Again our road was a deserted one. Few people appear to travel the byways of the Cotswolds, yet, within the same distance of London, nowhere else, I think, can such spacious solitudes be found, such wide and glorious sweeps of uplands and valleys stretching far away into dim and dreamy distances where the round hills seem to melt into the sky. The Cotswolds always delight me, for on them I realise the sense of solitude, silence, and space—a solitude that would satisfy an anchorite. Not that I love solitude except as a restful and occasional change from the burden of too much society; even when I was enjoying my solitude that day I had still a thought for the company I hoped to meet that night at my inn, and a thought of home and family when I returned to them.

After a time we dropped down to the lonely, ancient town of Burford, forgotten by the railway; but Burford does not mind, it exists quite well without the railway. There the little town lay before us, hidden in a hollow, at the foot of the hill, and we looked down upon its uneven roof-trees, and on the silvery Windrush quietly flowing by. Of all the old-world Cotswold towns none has a greater charm than Burford. Thus sings one of its many lovers:

> O fair is Moreton in the Marsh
> And Stow on the wide wold,
> But fairer far is Burford town
> With its stone roofs grey and old.

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And he calls it "The grey old town on the lonely down." But Burford is not on the lonely down—far from it; it lies sheltered, half forgotten, deep in a hollow; a place of peace.

At Burford Speaker Lenthall lived, and his home, painted by Waller, stands there to-day a little removed from the quiet street—a fine specimen of Jacobean architecture. Burford church is one of the finest of the many fine Cotswold churches raised by the pious and prosperous wool merchants of the country, and contains the truly magnificent tomb, in a chapel all to itself, of Sir Lawrence Tanfelde (deceased 1625), besides many other fine monuments. The church was turned into a prison for his captives by Cromwell, after his fight with the Banbury Levellers here, who outdid Cromwell himself in zeal and struggle against authority. At "The George Inn" here

Charles I. slept on his retreat from Oxford to Worcester, and on the glass of a window, in the upper room of the same inn, there was, and may be now for aught I know, the diamond-scratched name of Samuel Pepys below the date of 1666, though whether this be genuine or a forgery perhaps no man now can say; if a forgery, it is a clever imitation of that famous Diarist's signature. So Burford, though much out of the world to-day, was not always so. It has witnessed stirring events, it has welcomed and entertained many famous travellers, and people of renown have lived within its walls. All the roads into Burford are hilly, all the stages into the town are long and trying for horses, so that in the past coaching, posting, and horseback days horses coming there were usually given an extra allowance of corn; hence probably arose the local proverb, "To take a Burford bait," meaning to make a big meal. [Pg 306]

It was a steep climb out of Burford, at the top of which we crossed the old highway from London to Gloucester and South Wales that runs for many miles on the undulating ridge of the hills. The Cotswolds are little given to change, and much as the country looks now it must have looked to our coach-travelling ancestors, excepting that to-day long lines of telegraph poles faithfully follow the road in long array lessening to the horizon, and the sound of the wind on the wires as we passed was like the hum of innumerable bees, and it broke pleasantly the silence of the hills.

At the corner of the highway, just where our road crossed, I noticed a large board set up with a boldly lettered inscription on it, and this is what I read there:

> Only a few yards to the North is one of the most ancient towns to be seen in this part of the Country. It has historical associations of the most interesting nature. Its church is renowned for its beauty.

Thus Burford appeals to the hurrying motorists who speed upon this fine highway. I should not have thought Burford would have done any such thing; it appears to me a little undignified; yet without such a notice the motorists mentioned would doubtless rush along heedless of the ancient, grey old town that sleeps so peacefully in the hollow below. Still, I trust other interesting towns off the highway will not take this as a precedent, else we shall have all England turned into a sort of gigantic peep-show. [Pg 307]

Now we got on to a wilderness of lanes, mostly narrow and rough of surface, but they took us into an old-world land of stone-built villages, very ancient, very grey, and past many a time-mellowed home that hinted of legend. One rambling, neglected-looking old home especially took my fancy, with its great gables, clustering chimneys, and shapely stone diamond-paned windows; it had such a look of mystery about it, high-walled in as it was, and half hidden from the road, and over its porch the lichens had traced strange hieroglyphics. There appeared to be no life about the place, though a film of smoke uprose from one tall, solitary chimney. An ancient manor-house fallen to decay—

> A jolly place in days of old,
> But something ails it now; the place is curst.

In its forsaken courtyard stood a tumble-down pigeon-cote of some size, so that I knew it had been a manor-house, for in the medieval days no lesser personage than the lord of the manor had the right of pigeonry, and the pigeon-cote was very ancient. Unfortunately, owing to the high wall without and the trees that had grown up at their own sweet will close around it, I was unable satisfactorily to photograph the old house. Some day I hope to re-discover it and to see if I can trace anything of its history.

Another fine old manor-house I came to I found has also fallen on to evil days and was doing duty as a farmhouse, the farmer and his wife inhabiting but a small portion of it. By happy chance I came across the farmer in a field and I got a-chatting with him, first diplomatically about the weather and the crops; neither were satisfactory to him—I hardly thought they would be—but I listened to his complaints about both, and to his complaints about the low price of produce. I listened patiently, and I think my patience pleased—I had "an axe to grind." Then I led up to the old house and ventured to remark what a picturesque place it was. "It's all right to look at," said he, "but it's not good to live in. It's too big, and it's so draughty, and it's so cold and damp in winter, it would take a fortune to keep fires going over it to warm it properly. There's only [Pg 308]

the wife and self lives in it, and it would hold a large family, and they would only fill a part of it. Would you care to take a glance inside?" Now that is just what I wanted. I said I would. In truth it was a rambling old house. We entered by a large hall, with a fine old carved oak but much damaged fireplace at one end, and dog-irons on the wide hearth below. I could fancy that in the old days, when the lord of the manor lived there, merry were the doings and the dances that took place in that now vacant hall; the very thought of such things made it, in its bareness, look the more forsaken. One wing, where the farmer lived, was furnished fairly comfortably; the rest of the mansion, divided from it by the hall, was a very picture of desolation. Even the once strong oak staircase was shaky, and the floors of the rooms were in places so rotten that it was hardly safe to tread on them; in some the panelling was tumbling from the [Pg 309] walls, and in others the bare walls were adorned with cobwebs, erst doubtless covered with tapestry. Such is the fate of some old houses that have come down in the world, but there are others that have fortunately found purchasers and have been restored to something of their ancient dignity. I know at least a good dozen fine old houses of the Elizabethan and Jacobean days that had fallen to decay, but which have been so restored by loving hands that they now form delightful and picturesque homes, and yet have not lost the charm of their ancient look.

I met a man, when house-hunting for a friend some little time ago, who confided to me that he made it a business of buying any ruinous old house, if of any architectural merit and agreeably situated, that was for sale at a low price—"and many such houses fetch low prices," he said, "often, the land apart, not more than the value of their materials; sometimes these old houses possess a bit of interesting history, but that goes for nothing"; and purely as a speculation, though the speculation was not without its pleasure, he skilfully restored it, as far as possible, to its pristine estate, and he had done this each time at a considerable profit on the sale of the restored house. "I call myself a house improver," he said, with a laugh, "quite a novel and paying profession." This confession was made to me whilst looking over an interesting old Jacobean house that he had recently purchased and restored, and exceedingly well had he done it. "This," he explained, "had been let and occupied as a [Pg 310] farmhouse for years, and little care was taken of it; as you see, it is a picturesque old building, but it was in a dreadful state when I bought it—indeed at first I almost thought it was beyond restoration. I have spent a lot of money on it, but I expect to get it all back with a fair margin of profit. Here you see an ancient house with a formal garden to match, and even an old-fashioned sun-dial in it, to say nothing of the Haddon Hall-like terrace, and all this cost me a lot; but one has to do the thing properly or you may make a failure of it, and this house is ready for occupation. Meanwhile I make it my home; I must live somewhere, and here I abide till I find a purchaser. Then I shall go in search of another old house to restore. The idea of doing such a thing came quite accidentally to me; originally I purchased an old house and restored it for my own occupation, but I had so many unsought offers for it at a big figure, nearly double what it cost me altogether, that I was tempted to sell it. Then I bought another old house and restored it in the same way, and that I sold at a substantial profit; so now I have made a trade of doing this. Look at the panelling of these rooms, all of seasoned oak, a careful copy of old panelling of the period, every bit done by adze and hand; the hinges and locks, too, are copies of old ones I found in the house. I have opened up all the fireplaces, and on removing the modern grates I luckily discovered the open hearths behind; the firebacks are all castings from old ones, and the fire-dogs are copies too from fine past specimens. The whole thing has been properly [Pg 311] done. I have pulled down all the plaster ceilings and revealed the old rafters. The one or two sash windows I found I have replaced with mullion ones, so now you have before you the house much as it looked when first built over two centuries ago." This was quite a new way to me of making a living, or a fortune, but one learns many unexpected things when travelling by road.

To some there is a potent magnetism, an irresistible fascination about certain old houses, a subtle influence from which there is no escape. I confess to it myself. I have lived in them and love them. Of course there are old houses and old houses; not all possess this peculiar power to charm, and only those of the Elizabethan or Jacobean period, with their panelled halls and chambers, their

beamed ceilings, their great gables, their clustering chimneys, their many mullioned windows and big fireplaces, hold it over me. Those of the Queen Anne or Georgian age leave me cold; they are too formal; they lack the sense of mystery and atmosphere of romance. The old moated granges pictured in the Christmas numbers of the *Illustrated London News* of many years back, how they charmed me when a boy! What romances about them did not I weave to myself! I thought they were only artists' dreams, but since I have happily discovered them actually existing. I shall never forget the thrill of delightful surprise the first discovery of the kind gave me; I could hardly believe my eyes, yet there before me stood an ancient [Pg 312] moated home, grey, gabled, and ivy-clad, with a broken bell-turret on its lichen-laden roof, its leaded-light windows reflecting the sunlight, and its big chimney-stacks rising boldly up against the sky; nor shall I forget the special moment when I crossed the deep moat by a moss-grown bridge and knocked at the great oak and nail-studded door. I felt like one in a dream, that this could not be a reality, and that I should suddenly wake up and find myself deceived, disenchanted, and in the commonplace world again. Happily it was no vain imagining.

But I am digressing. We were wandering on winding lanes south of Burford when I began this overlong digression, and on that maze of lanes we wandered for some miles—many they seemed to me; first in one direction, then in another we went, without arriving anywhere. All the same, it was very pleasant wandering through a land purely given over to agriculture, somnolent and restful. At last we reached a fair road, and this took us to the little Wiltshire town of Highworth, boldly set on a hill, so that we could see it from afar long before we came to it, its grey church tower and irregular roofed houses outlined sharply against the sky. Seen thus the town looked like those one finds in early engravings.

A clean, homely, dreamy little town is Highworth, very ancient, even quaint in parts, and this in spite of the fact that a branch line of railway has found it out; but so far the railway does not appear to have disturbed its old-world tranquillity There I halted a while at [Pg 313] "The Saracen's Head," a relic of the old coaching days, and the inn, like the town, seemed half asleep. Then I took a quiet walk round the place, and eventually found my way to the church; there appeared to be nothing else noteworthy there except the old houses and old shops, and these, though they grouped well and made a picturesque whole, were not individually of much interest. So it was I strolled into the church, and there I found the clerk: twice running had I done this unusual thing. I bade him good-morning. He told me he was looking after a bat that had got into the roof of the building and was making a mess there. I have heard of owls in a church tower, but here was a bat in the church itself. "How are you going to catch the bat?" queried I, for he had no ladder, and he believed the bat was somewhere hidden in the beams above. "That's just what I want to know," he replied. "I'm thinking it over; meanwhile I'll show you the church if you like." I thought he might as well do this whilst he was thinking, so I accepted his services. The first thing I noticed was a cannon-ball hanging by three chains from a bracket on the wall; there must be some story attached to that, I thought, and there was. It was another of Cromwell's countless cannon-balls—I have long ago lost count of the many I have seen. "That," said the clerk, "was fired against the church by Cromwell, and it lodged in the tower. I can show you the hole it made there where it struck." Then I learnt that the church had been fortified and held for Charles I., [Pg 314] was besieged by the Parliamentarians, who eventually captured it, taking seventy prisoners; the earthworks a little beyond the town, where the cannon was mounted, are still to be made out. Those were stirring times for the countryside; the district between Oxford and Worcester had its full share in them, and in some parts of it the fighting raged furiously.

"Now I think I can show you something that will interest you," exclaimed the clerk; then he pointed out the ancient oak and much worm-eaten stalls (of the thirteenth century, he said they were), and called my attention to a quaint carving on one of them of a mermaid admiring herself in a handglass; but what interested me more than this were the ancient helmet and sword of the Baston family suspended against the wall, and still of greater interest a silk tabard belonging to the same Baston family that was worn over the armour with a coat-of-arms worked on it: this was needful in order to distinguish the mail-clad warriors one from another. The tabard,

preserved now in a glass frame, is much decayed and faded, but still a lion boldly worked thereon is visible. I understood that this tabard was discovered stowed away somewhere in the church, and that the vicar had it framed and hung up there, and I commend the action of the vicar. Many of our old churches contain, to this day, treasures of various kinds hidden away and forgotten in oak chests and cupboards, and even lost amongst lumber. There was, too, a priest-chamber belonging to the church, with the usual stone steps leading to it, but this special chamber had the uncommon luxury of a washing place. I noticed when leaving a curious bit of bold sculpture over the entrance doorway; in the dim light of the moment I could not very certainly make out what the carving was about, but I read a notice beneath it stating that it was probably a Norman Tympanon. There I bade the clerk good-day. I wondered how he was going to catch that bat!

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CHAPTER XVII

Little country towns—The romance of the ferry—"The Bear" at Woodstock—Curious conditions of tenure—Where the Black Prince was born—Islip—The mystery of Joseph's Stone—An English Holland—Boarstall Tower—The ancient town of Brill—"Acres for Aeroplanes"—Stokenchurch—A quaint hiring fair.

After Highworth we had a hilly road, and this took us without event to Faringdon, where it chanced to be market day, and the little town was crowded with farmers and cattle; there were crowds in its streets, and crowds round its inns, so we made what haste we could to get out of the place. These little country towns, however sleepy generally, manage to be very wide-awake once a week on market days. A long, quiet stretch of road now followed, with wide views on either hand over fertile farming lands. A signpost informed us we were bound for Abingdon; now Abingdon we knew, so to avoid the familiar we after a time turned up a byway and, crossing the Upper Thames on an ancient and very narrow bridge, we presently espied another signpost with "North Moor" upon it; the name suggested wildness, to North Moor we would go. We got on a rare tangle of lanes and into a land monotonously level, but no moor did we find, [Pg 317] nothing but hedge-enclosed and tame fields. Curiously enough signposts were plentiful, but only gave the names of villages we had never heard of, and one name meant as much, or as little, to us as another.

Eventually we found ourselves by the side of the river again and at Bablockhythe Ferry, of which Matthew Arnold has sung. I asked the name of it, and then I found it on my map, and so our whereabouts. The old ferry boat, the quiet river that was so still it hardly seemed to flow at all, the leafy trees, and the road on the opposite shore winding its white way into a distance of green woods, made such a pretty picture that I was tempted to photograph it. Were I a poet or a landscape painter it is a spot that would inspire me. I waited a long time on the chance of some cattle or sheep to be crossing and so help my picture, but during that time only a cyclist came, and I had to make do with him. The ferryman pulled up his boat to the bank thinking I was about to "go over," but when he told me the opposite road went to Oxford, and it was the nearest way there, I concluded I would not cross but trust to the lanes and the chance of coming upon a country hostel in a fresh land. "Where be you bound for?" asked the ferryman politely. "I might help you, for the roads about here are not gain ones for strangers"—and this though he lost custom for his ferry. It was an awkward question, for I knew not myself, and was nonplussed how to answer him. To be a traveller without a destination seems such a silly thing to the rural mind. I hope he did not take me for some [Pg 318] lunatic escaped in a car. It was cool by the river, for the day was growing late, and I thought it about time to search for an inn. There was only a public-house by the ferry, and the land around had a lonely look, so I thought it wise to hasten on.

I cannot reason why, for some things are not open to reason, but like an old manor-house (moated or otherwise) or a wayside inn of the Jacobean days, of which a few are still left to us, a lonely ferry always appeals to me with a sense of romance. There is something so primitive and picturesque about a lonely old-fashioned ferry, especially those one finds in the far-away Fens, that I cannot get away from my mind a feeling of adventure connected with such: even the one at Bablockhythe has a certain far-from-everywhere look about it, and I gave myself up to the illusion of the spot, an illusion not only of space but of time; and I verily believe just then, when in that mood, if a gaily dressed Cavalier had appeared on the scene fleeing in hot haste from his pursuers with the hurried cry of "Over," I should have taken it quite as a matter of course. I have watched patiently by a very out-of-the-world Fenland ferry I know, always in the vain hope of adventure; yet so has the spirit of the place got hold of me that I feel surely one day, when again I am there, some strange experience will come to me.

BABLOCKHYTHE FERRY.

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Very lonely, very winding and narrow were the lanes we got on, but if you travel far enough you are sure to arrive somewhere, so we arrived at Stanton Harcourt, a well-known spot to Oxford men, and where the old home of the Harcourts stands with its ancient and chimneyless kitchen, a building apart from the house with a pyramidical roof having a louvre at the top, out of which the smoke escapes as it can. This curious detached kitchen closely resembles the famous one at Glastonbury Abbey, so at least I thought from a passing glance at it. If there was an inn at Stanton Harcourt we missed it, and so we drove on, and shortly came to Eynsham, where I noticed its medieval stone cross in the street by the side of the church. Finding no inn to my liking, I consulted my map and discovered that Woodstock was not far off. Now at Woodstock I knew there was a good inn of the old-fashioned sort, so to Woodstock we went; and so in the gloaming, with the soft light of declining day giving all the landscape a mysterious look, we sped on the few miles to "The Bear" at that town.

The great stableyard of "The Bear" is a graphic reminder of the spacious inns of the coaching era of which it has been said, "A regiment of cavalry might have been housed in them, and good wine could be had for the ordering." You may order good wine now at country inns, and pay the price of it, but if you think to get good wine I can only say, I hope you may. Though I do know one or two old inns whose cellars contain some rare old port that has lain in them for years; in one case, the worthy landlord told me, "since the last coach took its last change here," which may be but pleasant [Pg 320] fiction, I cannot say; still, in truth, the wine is very old, very rare and good. I have sampled it, and hope to sample it again as long as the bin lasts, for such wine is not to be had every day, not even for money.

There were only two other guests at "The Bear" that night; they came from Yorkshire, they said—I did not ask them—and the only thing they talked about was horses. They even dated their remarks from the day, or year, a certain horse won the Derby, or some other horse that had won some other race. I stood it for an hour or two, then called for my candle, as travellers did in the days before gas or electricity, and "to bed," as Pepys has it.

I did not visit the show-house of Blenheim, for I had seen it before; moreover, show-houses are not to my mind. It may, however, be interesting to call attention to the conditions on which the Blenheim estate is held, which estate was granted by a grateful nation to the first Duke of Marlborough and his heirs in recognition of the famous victory of Blenheim, in Bavaria, on 2nd August 1704. "A representative of the family has once a year to convey to Windsor Castle an embroidered flag, which is placed in the Guards' Chamber. There it remains for a twelvemonth, till the next rental for holding the palace and the estate falls due. It is the only return the family have to make for the property they enjoy."

Next morning, on strolling round the town, I saw in a shop window a picture postcard, and on it a photograph of "The Manor-House Farm, birthplace of the Black Prince, Woodstock." It came as [Pg 321] a surprise to me to learn that the Black Prince, "that mirror of knighthood and the greatest of heroes," was born there; so I gleaned, as I travelled on, many a forgotten historical happening. To take a schoolboy a trip through England in a motor-car would be an excellent way of increasing his knowledge of its history. The manor-house is very old, though I take it, except perhaps in parts, little of

the original structure can be left. The house has a pleasant look, and possesses a curious old chimney consisting of a stone shaft having a conical roof, the shaft being pierced on all sides at its top with lancet openings for the smoke to escape. The chimney looks as though it ought not to smoke whatever the way of the wind, and that with it a down draught should be an impossibility; it is a picturesque device that might be worth trying in place of the ugly cowls. Finding nothing further to interest me in the sunny and sleepy little town, I took my early departure whilst yet the day was fresh and cool.

Out of Woodstock I found myself on the old highway leading to Oxford, but I did not travel it far, taking a lane to the left with a view of exploring that rather remote and out-of-the-way district lying in a rough square between Oxford and Bicester, Aylesbury and Thame—at least it looked out of the way on my map, only served by narrow roads; and on my map I noticed a vacant place marked "Ot Moor," an odd name, with "Joseph's Stone" also marked in the centre of the moor. I wondered what that stone could be so plainly shown there, some "Druidical Standing Stone" perhaps; it aroused [Pg 322] my curiosity; and beyond these, in the direction I was going, "Boarstall Tower" was inscribed in bold lettering, also the forsaken little town of Brill. I felt in an exploring mood that day, and here was an odd corner of the land inviting me to explore it. First I came to Islip, a bleak-looking and tiny town of stone houses, yet a town of some importance in its day; but that was a long time ago, when King Ethelred had his palace there, in which his son Edward the Confessor was born, he who founded Westminster Abbey. Shortly afterwards our road led us across lonely Ot Moor, and through the quaint village of Oddington, quaint as becomes its quaint name. Here I inquired about Joseph's Stone, and was told that a big stone of that name once stood on the moor, but "it has been broken up"; nothing further of its history could I glean, nor found I any mention of it in any guide-book I afterwards consulted, nor in any other likely work, nor did any of my antiquarian friends know anything about it. I was disappointed. As the stone is not now there, has not been there, except in bits, for long years, why do they still mark it on the map? It is so provoking to see places marked on the map, and conspicuously marked, that arouse your curiosity, only to find they do not exist. It was the same on Salisbury Plain; there at a spot by the roadside between Wylye and Devizes was printed plainly on my map "St. John á Gores Cross." I believe that a wayside stone cross once stood there, but when that was no one seems to know. Now [Pg 323] there is no vestige of it, not even its stump in the ground. Possibly it was destroyed by the Puritans. Now, trusting to my map, I went miles out of my way purposely to see it. I look upon a map as a faithful friend, and one does not like to find a friend at fault.

Now succeeded a level stretch of lowland country that had a look of Holland, excepting that the cottage homes by the way were distinctly not Dutch. A land where the eye had freedom to rove over wide spaces of green right away to a circling horizon of blue, and a wild wind swept over it, fresh, cool, and laden with the pungent scent of marsh flowers—as fresh and cool as the wind that sweeps over the sea, only without its salt savour. The wind was making holiday; it tossed the long grasses and reeds about, it bent down the hedges before it, it made mimic waves and Lilliputian tempests on the ponds that we passed. It is wind that gives life to a scene, and the strife of it stirred the blood in our veins. We rejoiced in the wind, for it came from the west, with just a suspicion of keenness, but no harshness, of greeting.

In spite of the wind and the sur, sur, sur of it, the whole countryside gave me the impression of great quietude. I could allow for the wind—it would not blow so every day; few people were in the fields, and those few seemed to be taking life easy, contentedly doing little; the hedges were delightfully tangled, a disgrace to good farming it may be, but that is a matter apart. Perhaps they needed some pruning, but they best pleased my eye just wild as they were, [Pg 324] growing as Nature would have them. It was a land to laze in, to do nothing in haste; only the wind stirred it up to a semblance of passion. There was no flow in the streams that one could perceive; it was a relief to come to a land that suggested nothing but rest. The interfering political economist might well shake his head at all this, but I was out for my pleasure, without a thought of what he might say. It was so peace-bestowing, and that was its charm. It was a land of health rather than a land of wealth—and who shall say that health is not the better thing?—a land that conformed to no canon of

beauty, but none the less pleasing to me. I will wager that no one grew prematurely old from overwork in it: why should he? Mere money-making is the bane of the age; it gives a man no time to call his soul his own. "If a person," says Stevenson, "cannot be happy without remaining idle, idle he should remain. It is a revolutionary precept." It is. I do not go so far. I only protest against money-making at the price of much leisure, the making of money for money's sake only. I knew a man who toiled hard all the week at his desk in a stuffy city office at the cost of his health, and what for?—to keep up a needlessly pretentious home with gardeners and carriage. One day, he confessed to me, the folly of all this forcibly struck him; he had so little leisure to enjoy his family or home. He thought the matter carefully over and for long, and he came to the conclusion that by working half the time he should lose half his income; on the other hand, he would have half the week to himself that he could devote to his wife and the pleasures of home. So he gave up his large house, he dismissed his gardeners, he did away with his carriage, and took a pretty little cottage where, on his reduced income, he could live in comfort, though without the luxuries of gardeners and carriage; and his wife, too, had less cares in the management of a smaller home. So happy was he and every one in the new conditions that, though his partners laughed at him and deemed him a fool, he declared to me that nothing would induce him to return to his former slavery, as he called it. He was an infinitely happier man, his family were happier too, and he enjoyed such health as he had never known since he was a schoolboy free from all but fancied care.

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From this leisured land a stiff climb brought us on to high ground and into a lighter, more exciting air. On the lowland we were content to laze along, and desired to laze so; here we must needs speed for a while, for the country was open and things not seen in detail; for there is a pace at which you can best enjoy and appreciate the type of country passed through: here, not the foreground but the distance allured us. When you see far ahead, and all is revealed before you, as in a stretch of open road over a wide moorland, your eye is ever on the horizon that beckons you on to explore the unknown, and you cannot, if human, resist its attraction. That is the magic of distance.

At a turn in the road, in a lonely spot, we caught a glimpse through branching trees of the grey old tower of Boarstall: no longer the distance held us in thrall; its power was gone. Boarstall, with its four flanking and embattled towers, is all that remains of a once fortified house. There are narrow arrow-slits in the towers that show their ancientness, but the large front and mullioned side windows do not suggest so early a date or a place of much defensive strength; doubtless they were added in later years under a feeling of greater security. The house that stood in the moat-enclosed ground beyond has now wholly disappeared. Boarstall, however, was strengthened during the Civil Wars, well garrisoned, and held for the king. Lord Clarendon in his *History of the Rebellion* says: "Fairfax attempted to take a poor house near Boarstall, and was beaten from thence with considerable loss, so that he drew off his men, little to his credit." Before the siege the following correspondence took place between the commanders of the besiegers and the besieged:—

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SIR THOMAS FAIRFAX TO SIR WILLIAM CAMPION

3 June 1645.

SIR—I send you this summons before I proceed to further extremities, to deliver up to me the house of Borstall you now hold, with all the ordinance, arms, and ammunition therein, for the use and service of the kingdom, which if you shall agree unto, you may expect civility and fair respect, otherwise you may draw upon yourself those inconveniences which I desire may be prevented. I expect your answer by this trumpet within one hour.—Your Servant,

THOMAS FAIRFAX.

This is the spirited reply that Fairfax received to his summons:

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SIR WILLIAM CAMPION TO SIR THOMAS FAIRFAX

In answer.

SIR—You have sent me a summons of a surrender of this house for the service of the kingdom. I thought that cant had been long ere this very stale

(considering the King's often declarations and protestations to the contrary), now sufficient only to cozen women and poor ignorant people: for your civilities, so far as they are consonant to my honour, I embrace: in this place I absolutely apprehend them as destructive not only to my honour, but also to my conscience. I am therefore ready to undergo all inconveniences whatsoever, rather than submit to any, much less those, so dishonourable and unworthy propositions, this is the resolution of, Sir, yours,

WILLIAM CAMPION.

So the siege began.

Boarstall Tower stands a picturesque reminder of "the brave days of old," with its embattled towers and weather-beaten walls. Crossing the broad and brimming moat by a stone bridge (with the date of 1735 upon it) that replaces the drawbridge of past times, I found the door locked, so I inquired of a farmhouse close by if it were possible to see the building. The maid who responded to my summons said she thought so, and presently returned with the key and permission to view it. Even with the key I found some difficulty in gaining admission, for the ancient and possibly rusty lock was hard to turn, and the door creaked complainingly on its hinges. Within, the building apparently has suffered little change since the Jacobean days: the towers contain dark circular stairs of stone, and odd and gloomy little rooms reached by narrow passages through the thick walls; but there is one large, well-lighted, and even [Pg 328] cheerful apartment on the top. Judging from the size of the gate-house, the original house which it served must have been one of some importance. Though Clarendon calls it "a poor house," I take it this was intended in a military sense. Boarstall must have been a thorn in the side of the Parliamentarians, not being far from Oxford, and by the "constant mischievous incursions of its garrison." The old tower makes a telling subject for the pencil, brush, or camera, as I trust my photograph proves. I hardly think Boarstall is as well known as it deserves to be. Situated in an out-of-the-way corner of the land, remote from main roads, it is not easy to find, but well worth finding.

The tradition of the origin of the name Boarstall is curious. It appears that "once upon a time"—that convenient "once upon a time"—it was in the centre of the royal forest of Bemwode, and that "a tremendous wild boar, the terror of the inhabitants," haunted it, and was eventually slain by one Nigel, the forester, who as a reward received a grant of land by tenure of a horn, and on the land he built a house and called it "Borrestalle" in memory of the slain boar.

BOARSTALL TOWER FROM THE MOAT.

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A little beyond Boarstall the country became wild and open again, and there before us, perched right on the top of a bleak, isolated hill, a hill much scarred with clay pits, stood the odd, little, out-of-date town of Brill. Odd, little, out-of-date town—that just describes it, there is no need for more words: on its hill stands one of, I think, the oldest windmills I have ever seen working, an ancient wooden structure with canvas sails, a mill of the kind the old masters put in their pictures, so old must it be. Brill at one time actually tried to transform itself into a fashionable watering-place, a spring of mineral waters having been discovered there, said by experts to be superior even to those of Bath. But the attempt turned out a failure; for the success of such an adventure a place needs something beyond a mere mineral spring. Prosperity and popularity require pretty or interesting surroundings, decent roads, and, above all, reasonable accessibility. Brill, though bracing in situation, has

none of these other needful advantages. Yet a pretentious pump-room was built with every required accessory, including a spacious reception-room, all in the Doric style; these are now hastening to decay, and Brill is left to its solitude. Possibly if you asked the average man where Brill is, he would respond, "I never heard of the place." So should I have done before I discovered it and learnt the unfortunate history of its bold and, to me, apparently hopeless bid for popularity, of which nothing came. I am glad it did not, for it is a quaint old town, and deserves to remain so.

Beyond Brill a winding lane brought us to Long Crendon that possesses an interesting old Court House of the fifteenth century, and a fine old Tudor gateway, and shortly after this we found ourselves at Thame, and there we took a by-road to our right that for some miles led us through a quiet, pastoral land, and eventually we came out on the main London to Oxford road. Then we drove [Pg 330] eastward. This portion of the Oxford road as far as to West Wycombe runs through very pleasant country, as the many motorists who travel it well know, affording in parts wide prospects over a well-wooded country and climbing the Chilterns with many windings through a fragrant forest of firs.

At the hamlet of Tetsworth we noticed its rambling, brick-built, and time-dimmed old coaching inn, and on its ancient front a board inscribed "Petrol." How times have changed—petrol in place of corn and hay for the passing steed of many horse power, even forty at times; machinery in place of muscle! At another old coaching inn, on a previous journey, I noticed a bold advertisement that ran briefly thus, "Acres for Aeroplanes." I did not take this seriously, though there was ample space in the hostel's large and open field for the landing of aeroplanes; but that an ancient inn should display such a sign at all gave me food for thought. Twice during my journey did I wholly unexpectedly see an aeroplane flying overhead, on one occasion when I was stopping in a village; and though the village folk looked up to see it, attracted by the noise of its engines, I hardly think they regarded it with more curiosity, or as a thing more wonderful, than they regarded the motor-car when it first appeared on the road. The miracle of to-day is but the commonplace of to-morrow, and how soon it becomes the commonplace! "The Swan" at Tetsworth is a building of some size, and, though it still entertains wayfarers, has such a forlorn look that I felt quite sorry for the poor [Pg 331] old place. Once it was known as "the great inn at Tetsworth," and was the scene of much noisy revelry; when we were there we saw no sign of life about the place.

> To the ancient wayside tavern
> Comes the noisy throng no more.

Even the motor-car does not appear to have revived its fortunes. There we pulled up for petrol, not that we required it, but it was an excuse to linger about the old inn, for, though I cannot say exactly why, it mildly fascinated me; the building, old and weather-stained, with its broad front to the street, told its silent tale of past days and doings as eloquently and plainly as though it were told on the printed page. After much waiting I procured the petrol I did not want, and, more to the point, I obtained a glance within at the inn's ancient chambers; they had a faded, antiquated look, not, to me, altogether displeasing; I think I could have spent the night at "The Swan" quite comfortably had I needed. It is an inn of memories.

Then followed a level stretch of open, cheerful, and sunlit road, with extensive prospects over a rich green land to a long line of low and undulating hills; after this a winding ascent through fragrant woods brought us presently to the bleak little village of Stokenchurch, situated high up on the top of the Chilterns, and there I caught sight of another old decayed coaching inn, but, to my eye, this was a hard-featured, unattractive building, wholly lacking in that peculiar, indescribable character that suggests a romantic [Pg 332] past, for buildings have their characters as well as men: some appeal to you, some do not.

A little beyond Stokenchurch began the long and steep descent of the famous Dashwood Hill, at the foot of which we found ourselves in the sleepy village of West Wycombe, with one or two rather curious old houses, but having nothing else to boast of. High Wycombe succeeded to West Wycombe; there is but a short and an uninteresting mile or two between them. High Wycombe is an old-fashioned, wide-streeted town, as those who travel the Oxford road

are aware, with rather a quaint, much-mellowed, red-brick market-hall raised on stone arches. At High Wycombe the curious custom of Michaelmas hiring still prevails and flourishes. I think a short account of this that I cull from a local paper of the past year may prove interesting:—

> Yesterday one of the oldest Michaelmas hiring fairs in England was witnessed in our ancient market-place. From a wide radius, including parts of the three counties of Bucks, Berks, and Oxon, farmers and agricultural employees in all spheres flocked into the town early in the morning. The attendance was large, and there was a general disposition to "change hands," though the average terms of remuneration showed very little alteration. Several old-time customs still prevail, both at the hiring and in regard to the conditions upon which the farm hands are engaged for the ensuing twelve months. For instance, ploughmen decorate their button-holes with pieces of whipcord to denote their distinctive calling, shepherds display tufts of wool in their forelocks and their caps, and other farm hands utilise horsehair and fancy ribbons and rosettes for their personal adornment.
>
> A good deal of time was occupied in making the best terms, and in accordance with the precedent of many years' standing, the engagements were conditional on the supplying of beer, or harvest money in its place.

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Leaving High Wycombe we followed a while the side of the little river Wye that turns an ancient mill on its way, and across the river rose some of the beautiful beech-clad hills for which Buckinghamshire is so justly famed. There is something about the form and growth of the close-leafed beech that causes it to clothe the hills with a graceful and following contour that no other tree does.

Now an unattractive five miles of road, with a climb on the way and at the end of it, brought us to the elevated and breezy little town of Beaconsfield that, considering it is within twenty-four miles of London, has retained its ancient air surprisingly; for its low, old houses, that face its wide and quiet street, still possess a pleasant and ancient look that charms. The town seems almost as remote and dreamy as though it were somewhere far away in the distant shires. May it long retain its primitive character! but I doubt it, for the railway has at last found it out.

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CHAPTER XVIII

An inn of the old-fashioned sort—A chat with "mine host"—A weird experience—Ghost stories—An ancient rectory house—A quaint interior—A haunted passage—Lost in a fog—The game of bowls—An old posting bill—The siege of Alton church—Ants as weather prophets.

At Beaconsfield I put up for the night at "The White Hart," an ancient and homely hostelry where I found comfortable quarters, a landlord both interesting and obliging, a waitress civil and attentive, and excellent fare: such was my accidental good fortune. "The White Hart" is a very ancient though much altered building, dating, I was informed, from the days of Elizabeth; certainly some of its big and shaped beams upstairs testify to its ancientness. The coaching days were the days of its prime, for then one hundred horses were stabled there—so I afterwards learnt. The landlord received me with a cheery smile at the door: he knew how to welcome a guest. I casually told him I was tired and hungry, for I had travelled far that day; then he must needs at once concern himself about my dinner, so that I might not have to wait unduly for it, and promised me the best that the town could supply. I explained to him I was not an exacting traveller; he was far more anxious about my comfort and my fare than was I. That is the sort of landlord for me: very different [Pg 335] his welcome to that one generally receives from the stony-eyed manager of a modern hotel. At these old-fashioned inns, with their friendly, good-natured landlords (for the one seems always to go with the other), I, but a tweed-clad, dust-stained traveller, always feel quite at home and at ease; there is such a charming simplicity and do-as-you-will air about them. Were I a millionaire I would choose them in preference to all others and desire no better. I merely sought a night's shelter, and however humble my chamber, if clean, it satisfied me. These inns give you their best, and who but the surliest could grumble at that when good is the best? I am an unpretending road-farer, though I fare in a car. I do not care to discuss my dinners when I get them; some days I made do with a tea, I found it more refreshing, but the dinner provided for me at that little inn of no pretence consisted of soup, fish, fowl, sweet omelette, with cheese to follow. Perhaps my hunger, begotten of a long day in fresh air, gave me an extra zest, but I thought at the time that never had I sat down to a better cooked dinner—I have certainly sat down to a worse in a wealthy man's house. This much for my modest inn I must say. Indeed, on the strength of its goodness I indulged in a small bottle of wine, and the wine was no worse than that of the same sort I have had at expensive London hotels at double the price, or perhaps even more.

It chanced that I was the only guest there that night, so the landlord, with kind intent, came to me after dinner and entertained [Pg 336] me with a chat, and I was well entertained. It turned out that he was an old "'Varsity" man, a magistrate, an enthusiastic antiquary, a churchwarden, a mason, and I know not what else besides, a man of many parts; and if he played his other parts as well as he played that of "mine host," he played them well indeed. His knowledge was wide, he talked of many things and interestingly, so I spent a very pleasant and profitable evening in his company over a glass and a pipe. I quite forgot my tiredness; it was late before I got to bed—that speaks well for mine host. Our gossip eventually took an antiquarian turn; he told me of a very ancient, rambling, timber-framed rectory house that stood against the churchyard, which he said I really ought to see, and he kindly offered to show me over it the next morning. This ancient rectory, I understood, was built on the site of an old nunnery and dated from about 1525, and is in part inhabited—I think by the town nurse, he said. Connected with it, he told me of a most strange experience of his, and this is the tale he told to me after some hesitation. "I hardly like to relate my experience," he said, "for you may possibly not credit me, but I tell you the absolute truth." Then he paused as though doubtful if he should continue; indeed he needed some persuasion to do so. But I prevailed on him. What was the strange story he had to tell, I wondered, that he should so hesitate to tell it? I bided my time, and at last he went on: "I was going over the old building one morning, as I sometimes do. Believe me, I am a perfectly sane man, not given [Pg 337] to fancies; I was in perfect health at the time, thinking of nothing special in particular. I was going over the building, as I said, and I opened the door of one of the rooms expecting to find it empty as

usual. To my surprise I saw a strange clergyman seated there reading a book; being a stranger I took a good look at him, for I wondered who he was, but he neither moved nor spoke, so I left the room, quietly shutting the door. In the passage outside I met an inhabitant of the place. I described the clergyman to him, and asked him who he could be. The man looked at me in some astonishment; then he exclaimed, 'Why, from your description he exactly resembles our late rector, but he has been dead these three years.' Then I went back to the room again; the door had not been opened, I was close to it, and there was no other mode of egress, yet when I entered no one was there, the chair was vacant. For the moment I hardly knew what to think; a queer sort of feeling came over me, for I was suddenly conscious that it must have been the ghost of the late rector I saw. If not, what was it? How came that figure seated there? to where had it disappeared? I did not even know in the least what the dead rector was like, yet the description of what I saw was at once recognised for him by one who had known him well. I had never believed in ghosts, was not at the time thinking about them—indeed I had never previously given them a thought. Such was my strange experience, for which I can give no reasonable explanation." No more could I.

The landlord's story did not disturb my rest that night, though I [Pg 338] slept in a very ancient chamber, but it set me a-thinking. Ghosts and ghost stories appear to be coming into favour and fashion again, even taken seriously, it seems, from the accounts I read in the papers and in books. Truly astonishing are some of these. A few years back, under the heading of "A Haunted House," there appeared in the *Standard* a long letter from an army officer who confessed to having been driven out of a good house by the ghostly manifestations that took place within it! He begins his letter: "In this century ghosts are obsolete, but they are costing me two hundred pounds a year. I have written to my lawyer, but am told by him that the English law does not recognise ghosts." I really cannot blame the law, indeed I commend it. Then he goes on to say: "I am not physically nervous, I have been under fire repeatedly, have been badly wounded in action, and have been complimented on my coolness when bullets were flying about. I was not then afraid of ghosts; besides, I suspected trickery. A light was kept burning in the upper and lower corridor all night. A lamp and loaded revolver were by my bedside every night. No one could have entered the house without being detected, and probably shot." Then he describes the different ghostly manifestations that drove him, family, and servants out of the house: "The governess used to complain of a tall lady, with black, heavy eyebrows, who used to come as if to strangle her as she lay in bed." Footsteps were constantly heard during the night [Pg 339] in the corridors. "One night, lying awake, I distinctly saw the handle of my bedroom door turned, and the door pushed open; I seized my revolver and ran to the door. The lamp in the corridor was burning brightly; no one was there, and no one could have got away." On another occasion, when the writer with his family returned home at midnight from a concert, "our old Scotch housekeeper, who admitted us, a woman of iron nerves, was trembling with terror. Shortly before our arrival a horrible shriek had rung through the house. To our questions she only replied, 'It was nothing earthly.' The nurse, who was awake with a child with the whooping-cough, heard the cry, and says it was simply horrible," and so forth. Then I read in *A Diplomatist's Wife in Many Lands*, by Mrs. Hugh Fraser, how she had frequently seen a ghost in an Italian palace where her husband and self resided for a time. Besides, have we not the extraordinary description not only of ghostly people but of ghostly scenery (the latter is quite a new departure to me) in that astonishing book *An Adventure*, of which "the Publishers guarantee that the authors have put down what happened to them as faithfully and accurately as was in their power. The signatures appended to the Preface are the only fictitious words in the book." In the *Notes from the Life of an Ordinary Mortal*, by A. G. C. Liddell, C.B., I read: "In the morning walked with Mr. Chamberlain. We talked about ghosts." So enlightened people do talk about ghosts! "He said that he had at one time been interested in the subject, and had got hold of a case where the ghost had been seen by more than one person at [Pg 340] the same time.... Four persons were sitting in an old hall and saw the figure of a monk walk across the far end of the room and disappear. The next night they fixed a rope across the track of the phantom, but it passed through the body without movement." So

much for the papers and books, though I have only quoted a few of the incidents recorded; there are many others. Now, besides the landlord of "The White Hart," three other persons of late have declared to me positively that they have seen a ghost. Yet till this, since I was a boy, I have never heard them mentioned. The first was a lady whose husband had taken a charming old house in the Eastern Counties; it had the reputation of being haunted, but, not believing in ghosts, neither she nor her husband thought anything of that; but one evening, when going upstairs to dress for dinner, my informant told me she distinctly saw a figure of a woman, richly attired in a quaint old-world dress, perhaps of the Elizabethan period, quietly walking along the landing, and she watched it till it disappeared in the wall at the end of the passage. All the servants and the guests were accounted for, and "If the figure were not a ghost, what could it have been?" I was asked. I could not say! Moreover, the lady saw the same figure on a further occasion walking and disappearing in just the same astonishing manner. Another lady told me the story of a ghost she had seen in her house, only she said she was so frightened she could not say how it was dressed, or whether it was a he or a she ghost, so I did not trouble about further detail. Now for my last relation, and this occurred in my own house, not an old house by the way, and where I have never heard or dreamt of a ghost. A lady was left a short time in a room, when she rushed out to me in another part of the house declaring that, though the room was empty when she went in and she had shut the door behind her, on suddenly looking up from her chair she saw a bald-headed man standing in front of the fireplace; for a moment she wondered who he could be and how he came there, then the thought came across her it must be a ghost, and she asked me to come and interview it! This I did with her at all speed, but when we returned to the room no one was there. I merely thought the lady must have been dozing, but she stoutly averred she had not. Still, let people say and write on the subject no end, and be hounded out of their houses by ghosts, I will not believe in one till I see it; even then, I think I should send for a doctor to learn if my health were at fault, to be sure that I had not imagined the thing.

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The old rectory house at Beaconsfield is built on three sides of a square, and its half-timber front has a picturesque look. Within are many ancient chambers, some with their original panelling and Tudor fireplaces of stone, and there are many passages besides, for it is a rambling place: one of these passages, I was told, is called "The Ghost Walk," because a ghost is often heard at night, though not seen, walking along it; her footsteps, however, are often heard, and the rustling of her dress, for it is supposed to be the ghost of some lady. I think the landlord told me her story, but I have forgotten it now. Rats suggest themselves to me as an explanation of the footsteps, for I will wager there are rats in that old house; imagination might account for the rustling of a dress—it accounts for a good many things in this world. Old houses are often full of strange noises, for panelling is apt to creak with the changes of the weather, and in the still night-time all sounds appear magnified; then the creak of old woodwork seems startlingly loud, for I have experienced this.

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My landlord pointed out to me the chamber in which he had seen the vision, but there is nothing remarkable about it except its ancientness. The house is certainly one that should appeal even to the most exacting ghost; any stray ghost out of place through his "haunt" being pulled down would miss a rare opportunity in not taking up his abode there. Some small niches in the sides of the walls were pointed out to me; what use these could have been put to puzzled my antiquarian guide—they were too small and too shallow for statues. It occurred to me that they might be to place lamps in to light the dark passages; the landlord said he had not thought of that, and deemed it a plausible and possible explanation of their purport. I felt complimented he should so esteem my suggestion, but I had seen very similar niches in other old buildings that had undoubtedly been used to contain lamps; I told him this, and then he accepted my view as being correct, though he said many people had seen the niches and were at a loss to account for them.

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It was a rare foggy morning when we left Beaconsfield, it was as though the whole country were packed up in cotton-wool; so dense indeed was the mist that we had to drive slowly and cautiously, for ahead of us was a wall of white and our vision was limited to yards. At my hotel in the evening I found a fellow-motorist who did not

venture out at all that day, he thought it too risky. However, it was merely a matter of pace, and at times, when the fog thinned a little, we drove along quite comfortably. In a way I even enjoyed the drive, for the country looked so mysterious, and the mist exaggerated the forms of half-hidden things that suddenly rose up before us; even the houses and trees by the way assumed proportions gigantic: we might have been travellers in fabled Brobdingnag.

Shortly after Beaconsfield we got on to narrow winding lanes, then into woods, though we could not see much of them, when we discovered we were at Burnham Beeches, where the roads are kept as prim as those of a park, neatly signposted too, and this robbed the woods of their suggestion of wildness; so on somehow to the main Bath road, which we followed only as far as Maidenhead, where we struck to the left over cross-country roads and eventually turned up at Wokingham, the landscape between being mostly hidden from view. The horn came in useful that day. Then followed some more cross-country roads, out of which we emerged on to the old Exeter highway and soon reached the hamlet of Hook with its [Pg 344] old coaching inn—from the notices on its front it now appears to be a motoring inn; and after this we found ourselves back in Odiham again, so we took a fresh road out of it. The fog had now quite cleared away and the sun was shining, but what with a late start and the slow travelling for much of the way, and a long halt for refreshment, the sun was already lowering in the west and the sky was growing golden there. We had a delightful drive through a more or less hilly country into Alton, passing through South Warnborough, a very pretty village—the prettiest in Hampshire, its inhabitants declare. I am glad to learn they take a pride in their village; that is the sort of pride that profits, the pride of place and not of person—to be a dweller in no mean village.

After South Warnborough we had a hilly drive over a down-like undulating country, and then we descended into Alton, where I have an idea they brew good ale. At Alton we put up at "The Swan," an old coaching inn of some former fame, and that still has a pleasantly prosperous look, keeps up its ancient reputation for good cheer, and presents a smiling front to the street. I found a fine bowling-green in the rear, and during the course of the evening some of the townsfolk forgathered there and played bowls quite seriously over their pipes and their ale. It may not be high art, but I noticed there was an art in playing bowls, and the old men who knew and studied it appeared mostly to win. A good old-fashioned game is bowls, that never seems wholly to go out of fashion, and a pleasant one to watch; engrossing too, for even Drake, when playing it on Plymouth Hoe with the dreaded Armada in sight, went on with his rub undisturbed. "There is no hurry," quoth he, and he quietly finished his game and then went and played ball with the Spaniards—but those were the days before steam. Now I never look on at a game of bowls but I think of bold Drake and those easy-going historic old days when, if they did things slowly, they did them very thoroughly.

A FOURTEENTH-CENTURY DOORWAY.

[Pg 345]

Writing of the subject of inn gardens, I remember seeing somewhere on the way boldly displayed on the front of an inn the simple legend "Lovely Garden." I am glad to note that innkeepers are becoming aware of the attraction of a garden and so proclaim it: a garden where guests may escape from walled rooms into the fresh air, there to loiter at ease retired from the street and the crowd; to secure a bedroom looking over those gardens is a further attraction to me.

It may be that special good-fortune attended me, but during the whole of my journey never once at my inn where I stopped for the night did I fail to find entertainment, either from host or from guest. I think I have said so before. Now here at "The Swan" was still another landlord both willing to gossip and wishful to entertain a lone wanderer in the smoke-room of his comfortable hostel. He brought me a time-yellowed paper of the seventeenth century having an advertisement of his inn, to show how long it had been in existence. In the same paper, I think it was, my eye caught the following announcement: "June 19th, 1684. The post will go every day, to and from, betwixt London and Epsom during the season for drinking the waters." Then Epsom was a fashionable Spa. Also he showed me an old posting bill of the house that was of some interest, for it was a bill paid by the Rev. Gilbert White for a postchaise from "The Swan" to Meon Stoke and back, when White was on a visit to a friend at that place; and thus the bill runs:—

[Pg 346]

HARROW.

HAMPSHIRE—ALTON.

Swan.

Neat Post-Chaises.

		£	*s.*	*d.*
August 1st.	Chaise to Meon Stoke		13	6
	Duty		3	0
August 6th.	Chaise from Meon Stoke to Alton		13	6
	Duty		3	0
		£1	13	0

August 27th, 1785.

Received the contents.

In the account of his Hampshire rides in this locality Cobbett thus delightfully refers to Gilbert White: "I forgot to mention that a man who showed me the way told me at a certain fork, 'that road goes to Selbourne.' This puts me in mind of a book that was once recommended to me, but which I never saw, entitled *The History and Antiquities of Selbourne* (or something of that sort), written, I think, by a parson of the name of White. The parson had, I think, the [Pg 347] living of Selbourne." Now had the "parson of the name of White" only written about farming Cobbett might have taken a more intelligent interest in him. Next the landlord remarked, "You ought really to see our old church." (How often have the landlords of inns during my journey recommended me to see their church; even one offered me his pew on a Sunday, such a staunch churchman was he.) "It may interest you," he continued, "for there are still the marks on its walls of the cannon-balls that struck them during the Civil War, when the church was besieged" (still more of Cromwell's endless cannon-balls!), "and there are the bullet marks too on the door made at the same time." The story of this siege is sufficiently and quaintly recorded on a brass in the church, and this I copied as follows:—

A Memoricall
For this renowned Martialist Richard Boles of ye
Right Worshipful family of the Boles. Colonell of a
Ridgment of foot of 1300. Who for his Gratious
King Charles ye First did wonders att the Battell
Of Edge Hill. His last action was at Alton in
This County of Southampton, he was surprised by
Five or six thousand of the Rebells which
Caused him, there Quartered, to fly to the Church
With near Fourescore of his men who there
Fought them six or seuen houers, and when
The Rebells Breaking in upon him, he slew
With his sword six or seuen of them and then
Was slayne himselfe with sixty of his men aboute him.

1641.
His Gratious Soverayne hearing of his death
Give ys passionate Expression "Bring me [Pg 348]
A Moorning Scarffe i have lost one of the
Best Commanders in this Kingdome."

Alton will tell you of that Famous Fight
Which ys man made & bade the world good night,
His Verteous life fear'd not mortalyty
His body must, his Vertues cannot die,
Because his Bloud was there so nobly spent,
This is his tombe, the Church his monument.

The next morning, after seeing the church, as I was departing the landlord exclaimed, and that in spite of a fast-falling barometer and a plentiful supply of suspicious clouds about: "You'll have a fine day, for I notice the ants are throwing up their tiny heaps on the bowling-green, and when they do that the day is certain to be fine." I had not heard of this method of prognosticating the weather before; all the same it proved true, excepting for one short shower, when from the look of the sky at the start, and the south-westerly wind that was blowing, I should certainly have expected little but rain; yet even the shower we experienced I found out was local and did not extend very far.

CHAPTER XIX

The Meon Valley—Warnford—A hidden church—A house "a million years old"!—A Saxon sun-dial—A ruined home—Corhampton and its Saxon church—A modern "Naboth's Vineyard"—An out-of-the-world village—A curious story—Quaint carvings and their legend—A church tower built by servants.

We left Alton by the Winchester road; we did not, however, follow it for long, but turned down a by-road and soon reached a pretty village of some thatched cottages built round a little green, with its pond to make the picture complete. The inn there had on its signboard the representation of a fat monk with the legend "The Grey Friar," a fresh sign to me. Then passing a finely timbered park with many wide-branching elms in it, causing grey patches of shade on the great sweeps of sunlit sward, we began to explore the lovely Meon Valley, through which runs the clear and bright river Meon between richly wooded banks and gently sloping hills. I really do not think an artist could have designed prettier scenery had he the designing of it. A valley full of quiet beauty, yet so ignorant was I of my own land I had not heard of its charms before; many a guidebook-lauded valley is not half so beautiful as it. No poet has been born in that valley to sing its praises, otherwise it might have [Pg 350] been famed. The day, too, was perfect, and the soft sunshine helped to make everything pleasant; the day and scene were attuned one to another.

Up and down hill we went, then we dropped down to West Meon, a neat, clean village. The chief occupation of its inhabitants at the time appeared to be in standing idly at their doorways, or loafing in the road; it somehow reminded me of a scene at a theatre ready set, with the minor performers in place and awaiting the principal actors to come on the stage and play their parts. I often wonder how these villagers live with no local industry; they cannot live on one another, and they do not seem exactly the sort of people to receive dividends on investments, though in all of them at least the public-house appears to prosper. It is a problem beyond me. Here we crossed the Meon on a little stone bridge and proceeded by a delightfully tree-shaded road, as pleasant as a road could be, and along by the river-side to the tiny decayed village of Warnford, a mere hamlet rather of a few pretty and ancient cottages deep in woods where each cottage is a picture. Yet it had a depressingly lonely look as though the village were under some spell, for I did not see a soul about it, not a face at a window, not a figure at a door, no one in its cottage gardens, not a child, nor a dog, nor a fowl in the road. I stopped in the village for an hour, or more, to make some sketches and to take some photographs, yet all that while there was no sign of life about the place, no one going or coming. I could not but marvel at this, it was so curious an experience. It looked like a deserted village, yet [Pg 351] the cottages appeared well cared for, and their little gardens loved and well tended. The strange loneliness and silence of the spot impressed me. Why was it? I could not account for it, unless all its inhabitants were away making holiday, but where were the dogs and the fowls? It might almost have been one of those picturesque model villages one sees in an exhibition at an early hour before the very properly dressed up and show village maidens have arrived and when no one is there, only it was far too real for that.

There was one thing besides its loneliness that seemed strange and incomplete about the spot, though for a time I could not realise what I missed; then it struck me it was the absence of a presiding church, that is generally such a prominent feature of a village and centres the life of it. I looked carefully around, but nowhere could I see the church; there was no sign of one, nor a chapel. For even peaceful villagers cannot worship one God in one way.

As I left the village by a road that bent round sharply by the side of a park, at last I saw a human being, a man close at hand in a field. So I pulled up and asked where the church was, or if there were one. "The church," replied he, "it be away in the park opposite, right in the woods. You cannot see it till you come to it. You go in at the lodge gate and follow the road over the bridge, then when you comes in sight of the house you turns to the right, and there be the church in the woods. It be a curious old place, over a thousand [Pg 352] years old they do say." I thought I would see it. A thousand years old is a fair age for a building, and though the man might be mistaken in that, probably the building was very ancient. So off I set in search

of the church that I found some way off in the park, half hidden and surrounded by trees and green in the shade of them. A humble little church with a damp and time-worn look, yet with a certain pathetic charm about it that belongs to most things ancient of man's contriving. I was surprised in so poor a church to come upon a fine altar-tomb with the recumbent effigies of a man and his two wives, and the kneeling figures of their children below; and another similar monument, both to members of the same Neale family, the earliest one bearing date of 1599. Drops of moisture were dripping down the sides of the monuments as though the very stones were mourning for the forgotten dead. There is some fine carved oak in the church going to decay, and a curious old pillared font. But the interior was so dim and damp I was glad to get out of it. It certainly is an ancient church, and perhaps looks more ancient than it really is. Some of the walls, and certainly the small yet massive tower, are Norman, but that would not make it over a thousand years old; still, a century or two is nothing to rural folk. I once asked a man in a little country town if he could tell me the age of an interesting old house there. "I don't rightly know just how old it be," he replied, "but it's over a million years old, that I know for certain." I was [Pg 353] astonished. "Surely you have made a mistake?" I exclaimed. "No, I haven't," he responded, "for there's the date carved upon it, as you may see," and he pointed this out to me, for it had escaped my notice, carved in Roman letters, "MDXCII." "There, I told you it was over a million years old. 'M' stands for a million, as you know, and the other letters for more years, but I cannot rightly read them." I said nothing; it was not my business to educate the countryman. Once I did attempt to correct a villager about some glaring mistake in reading an inscription—he would read it to me; he resented my correction and walked off in a huff; now I am careful not to run the risk of so offending again.

Church clerks too, as a frequent rule, I have found very touchy if you venture, however mildly, to differ with them about anything they may have to say about their church. I shall not in a hurry forget the rare trouble I got into with a more than usually intelligent clerk who was showing me over his interesting old church. Now I had noticed in the tiny town a small and cheap local handbook of the church for sale, so I purchased this before going to inspect the building. I had it with me as I went round the church accompanied by the clerk; I referred to it now and again and found it fairly correct as far as my knowledge went, but on one minor point of architecture I certainly thought the author was manifestly wrong. In my innocence I pointed this out to the clerk, with what I thought to be the quite harmless remark that "the writer of this book does not [Pg 354] know everything." My guide was up in arms in a moment. "What do you mean?" queried he; "the book is absolutely correct; I never, no never, heard any one question it before. It has always given perfect satisfaction," and so forth and for some time. I was fairly taken aback. Why all this rage about nothing? thought I, and as I was thinking it out the clerk suddenly exclaimed, "Do you know who wrote that book?" I confessed I did not. "Why, I did," said the clerk, "I who have been here for over twenty long years, and there's not a soul in the whole county knows as much about the church as I do; I know every stone of it, and you have only been in it ten minutes. Now what is ten minutes to twenty years' long study?" I had "put my hand in a hornet's nest," as the saying has it, and I hardly remember to this day how I smoothed matters over; indeed I am not sure if I actually did, the clerk's feelings were wounded. I was truly sorry. I humbly apologised, I even trebled my tip, trusting thus to appease him; in a measure I did, but in a measure only, for he accepted it in an off-hand manner as though he were doing me a favour; still he accepted it, upon doing which he remarked, "You're a generous gentleman, that I will own, but you really don't understand architecture; however," now in a tone more of sorrow than anger, "it takes a lifetime of study, it do." I was glad to get away from that clerk. Now I am careful when reading a book, or when having read one, that I do not talk unawares to its author. Yet I actually blundered again in a much similar way, though I hardly think I was [Pg 355] treated quite fairly that time. An artist friend took me to look over a picture-gallery; he asked my opinion of the different pictures as we passed along; my opinion was not worth much, but he seemed pleased to have it, so I gave it quite freely. Of one picture I exclaimed, as I felt bound to make some remarks, "Well, I don't think much of that." "No more do I," said my friend, "for I painted

it!" But when I profusely apologised and tried to explain I meant something quite different, even at the price of the truth, unlike the clerk my friend laughed aloud at the trick he had played and how he had trapped me, then insisted on my dining with him that night. Once on the journey I thought I saw an opportunity to turn the tables and to score in this way off a stranger. We were chatting in the smoke-room of our inn after dinner, when, to my surprise, I discovered he was reading a book I had written; he knew not my name, nor did I know his, and I hoped he might make some disparaging remark about my book, then I would tell him I wrote it, and could myself indulge in a laugh. But it never came off, for he put down the book unconcernedly and talked to me most of the evening; evidently he preferred my talk to my writing.

But to return to the little church of Warnford, it depressed me with its silence and gloom; I was glad to get out into the fresh air, for it seemed like a tomb. As I was leaving, under the porch I caught sight of a curious old Saxon sun-dial, a somewhat rare thing to find, and over it was a long Latin inscription relating, as far as I could make out, though my Latin is rusty, to the rebuilding of the church a [Pg 356] long while ago. The dial probably belonged to a still more ancient church that once stood on the spot, but why it was placed there where no sun could reach it I could not understand.

Just by the side of the neglected churchyard I caught a glimpse of the ruins of an old house buried in trees, and a grand house it must have been in its day, for six upstanding stone pillars of what once was its great hall testify to its size, but little else remains but some broken and mouldering walls. Of its history I could glean nothing, for there was no one about to ask this. Then I returned to the car, and once more proceeded on my pleasant way down the wooded valley, with the musical murmuring of the river and the song of the wind in the woods for company; and I had all this lovely country to myself for some miles, except for a stray farmer's gig and a cart or two—a country where to my mind's eye peace dwelt in lowly cottages and scattered old-time farmhouses; truly the trail of the serpent might be there as well as elsewhere, but I saw no sign of it. To me it was a valley of peace and contentment. Perhaps it was because I was an onlooker only and had no concern in its life. It is well to be a mere onlooker at times, then the drama of the little world before you runs smoothly; you do not see behind the scenes. You behold neither the tragedy nor the comedy of life, only its sunshine and its pleasantness. So it is wise not to abide too long in any place, however it take your fancy, lest you risk disillusion of finding the world is much the same the world over, and the earthly [Pg 357] paradise you have discovered is no paradise at all. I thought I had found my paradise once in a charming old and picturesque village far west, where all seemed so peaceful and blest; but I stayed there too long, for on getting to know the quiet country folk I too quickly discovered they had their grievances one against the other, just as much as those people who live in less desirable spots; these grievances mostly seemed paltry to me who had no part in them, but they were not to be got over. Yes, I had stayed there too long. Three weeks had I stayed, so charmed was I with the place and its cosy old inn: I had better have stayed for only three days, and retained my first dream of perfection.

Next we came to the adjoining villages of Corhampton and Meon Stoke; I took them for one, but I learnt that the little river Meon divides them and that they really are two distinct places. On each side of the river, almost within a stone's throw of each other, their ancient churches stand. Two places of worship where one might suffice—surely a waste of Christian energy! How much energy is often wasted in country churches! A Sussex parson once told me that sometimes he had to preach and the choir had to sing to three old women and an umbrella! Both Corhampton and Meon Stoke are lovely villages in a lovely spot enclosed by wooded hills; you might travel for many a day and many a mile before coming to so fair a corner of the land. It is as fair as wooded hills, gently gliding river, with a droning old mill by its side, green meadows, pretty cottages [Pg 358] gracefully yet accidentally grouped, and two grey, quaint, and ancient churches can make it.

Meon Stoke church with its odd black wooden bell-turret makes a pretty picture standing by the side of the river where it broadens out into a pool. Corhampton church stands on a little knoll almost opposite, and is small and most unpretending, but of much interest, being Saxon, though since those far-away Saxon times it has

suffered alteration. Now Saxon churches are rare in the land, notwithstanding that this was the second we had come upon in out-of-the-way places during the journey. Its walls still show the long-and-short Saxon stone-work, and there is a good example of a Saxon doorway on the north side, unfortunately built up. There is to me little doubt that its walls are the original ones, though patched here and there, and though later windows have been inserted in them, so that the building remains the same size and form as when first erected, long centuries past. In the churchyard is a large yew-tree undoubtedly ancient, but whether it is "as old as the building itself and the oldest in the country," as a parishioner asserted it was, I could scarcely believe; perhaps he did not realise the age of the church. I grant that the tree likely flourished in the days of Queen Bess, probably was old even then, and that takes one back a good while. How many churchyards boast of having the biggest and oldest yew-tree in the land? I have quite lost count of them, and of the "smallest church in England" I have seen not a few. Standing at one side of the porch we noticed the original altar-stone with five [Pg 359] crosses on it, and within the church, built into the south wall of the chancel, is a curious stone chair. But I think perhaps Corhampton church is of more interest to the archaeologist than to the average tourist. I suppose there are still trout in the Meon as there were in Izaak Walton's past days when he fished in that river, for as we left I observed a woman on its banks patiently and deftly casting the fly, though the water was so clear and the sun so bright she could hardly hope for much sport. But anglers live greatly on hope. Good Izaak Walton knew when to stop fishing, for of one day he writes: "We went to a good honest ale-house, and there played shovel-board half the day ... and we were as merry as they that fished." He was no slave to his hobby, and owned it. Again I must confess that fishing with me is more an excuse to get out in the country with something to do than the mere catching of fish; possibly to others its chief charm lies in this. But it does not do to analyse one's pleasures.

After Corhampton the country grew more open for a time, and at one spot on the top of a hill that rose across the river I caught sight of a quaint-looking, remote village with a fine church possessing a noble tower that dominates the landscape. I could not understand why so small and out-of-the-way a village (it seemed but a hamlet) should possess so fine a church. A sudden desire took me to explore it, so I turned down the narrow lane that led to the spot and climbed the opposite hill. I pulled up at the first cottage I came to; there [Pg 360] were only a few, but this attracted my attention, being creeper-covered and with a porch all overgrown with fragrant honeysuckle just as a poet would have it. Then I noticed its name painted over its garden gate; this struck me as strange, for it was "Naboth's Vineyard." As I was standing close by, its owner came forth and bade me good-day; I think curiosity brought him out to learn what a stranger did there, in a motor-car too, where I should imagine strangers or motor-cars very seldom or hardly ever appear. We got chatting together about nothing in particular; then I asked why he had given his pretty cottage so strange a name. I thought there might be some story connected with it. "Can't you guess?" said he, smiling; "it's because so many people envy me it and would like to possess it. I thought it a very suitable name"—and he was simply the village blacksmith who had conceived this conceit. "Would you care to come into the garden and see what a fine view I've from it?" So I went into the garden and duly admired the view looking south far away down the valley, then bathed in the glow of the afternoon sun, and the garden I noticed was a pleasant one, gay with the bright, old-fashioned, hardy flowers so familiar to the Elizabethan poets, flowers that Mrs. Allingham has pictured to us in many of her charming drawings of cottage homes. How I love those hardy flowers, never hurt by the rain; they seem fuller of colour and far sweeter of scent to me than the pampered, potted-out ones that people admire or profess to admire to-day, and that are often ruined [Pg 361] by a storm in an hour. I thought at the moment I could live in that cottage contentedly, far away from the world and its worries. I asked the name of the village and learnt it was Soberton.

As I was quietly admiring the view, the blacksmith pointed me out a field down below. "Some time ago," said he, "a stone coffin was dug up there, and in it was a skeleton of a man embedded in cement, but no one could make anything of it." A skeleton only, buried in cement in a coffin, not in a churchyard—that is surely suggestive of mystery?

From the garden I had a good view of the tall flint and stone-built church tower, and I expressed my surprise to find so fine a one there. "I expect you don't know its history," said the blacksmith. I confessed I did not, but would be pleased to hear it. "Well, it's like this," he continued; "they say it was built by the life-savings of two servants, a butler and a dairymaid, who were in service at an old mansion in the valley that has long been pulled down. You can see on the tower, if you care, the carved figures in stone of the butler and the maid, and between them there is a skull to show, I am told, that the tower was built after their death." So I went to inspect the tower and see what I could make of the carvings. How many quaint legends you pick up on the road if you only search out places remote where legends still linger. There, true enough, high up in the tower, just under the parapet, I saw plainly the two figures, opposite one another, of a butler with a key in his hand and a dairymaid with a pail by her side. They were carved with much skill and boldly, and appeared little the worse for the storms of years that must have beaten upon them, exposed as they are to all weathers. If sculptured stones could confirm a story, these stones appeared to do so. Then at the foot of the tower my eye caught this inscription:

[Pg 362]

This tower
Originally built by Servants
Was restored by Servants
1881.

I presume that whoever had that inscription placed there must have felt there was some truth in the story, though, to me, I confess it seems an improbable one. Still, what traveller would be so cruelly critical as to doubt every legend he hears? In this case the curious carvings are suggestive and certainly call for some story—else why are they there, and not only there, but so prominently placed right in front of the tower?

[Pg 363]

CHAPTER XX

A tramp's story—A relic of a famous sea-fight—A tame road—Inn gardens—New landlords and old traditions—Chichester market-cross—A wind-swept land—"Dull and dreary Bognor"—A forgotten poet—Littlehampton—Country sights and sounds—A lulling landscape.

From Soberton we resumed our way down the Meon Valley, which gradually widening out lost its vale-like character and with that much of its charm; its scenery culminated at Corhampton. We had not gone far before we sought shelter beneath some overhanging trees from a smart shower; already a tramp was sheltering there. As we drove up he received me with a military salute, or what he considered to be such, for it was not very well done, remarking at the same time, "Good-morning, captain." Tramps are fond of addressing any one as "captain"; I presume they find it pleases. I simply acknowledged his salute out of civility, but said nothing. "Old soldier," exclaimed the tramp laconically. Old humbug, I thought, but still I said nothing, not from pride, but because he looked such a dirty, worthless tramp. But not a whit disheartened he came close up to the car, too close for my liking, and began to pitch a yarn how he had fought for his country against the Boers: "Now look at me, a poor old soldier who has served his country, having to tramp about [Pg 364] in search of any odd job, and jobs is hard to find, and wherever I goes to ask for work there's sure to be a dog come for me. Dogs is a terror to a poor tramp." It might have been uncharitable of me, but I was rather pleased to hear that; I have a good opinion of a dog's judgment. Then he started on a long-winded story of his experiences and hardships, real or invented—I strongly inclined to the latter—during the war. The tale was not badly told, I must give him credit for that, yet I doubted the truth of it; my experience of tramps being extensive caused me to doubt; though if I meet with an interesting tramp, and some there are, I am always prepared for a chat and to pay the price of my entertainment—and cheat. Greatly doubting the truth of the tale, a sudden idea struck me: I asked the tramp the name of the ship he went out in. A surprise question it proved, for he hesitated before answering it, then he gave me a name; I had never heard of a ship so called, still that proved nothing; then I quite casually exclaimed, "Why, that's an old paddle-ship." "That's the one," he replied in some haste, not seeing the point that sea-going paddle-ships have long been out of date, and not one naturally was employed to convey troops to the Cape. Such is the artless art of the tramp; but that tramp got nothing from me. As soon as the shower was over I went on my way. I really do not think it kindness or wisdom to encourage the professional tramp, it only tends to increase the tribe who already sufficiently pester our roads. The [Pg 365] best of them are lazy fellows who prefer their rough life to doing an hour's honest work. A friend of mine one day offered a begging tramp a good meal and a shilling to dig a corner in his garden, perhaps two hours' real work. But the tramp refused "the job," his excuse being he was hungry and needed the meal first, which might mean he would get the meal, then walk off.

Soon we reached the pleasant little town of Wickham, where William of Wykeham was born in 1324, and that is its only claim to fame as far as I know. It is a tiny town with a wide market-place, and it looked very sleepy that day. It consists of a number of gabled houses, mostly old and of various dates, the oldest, as usual, being the most picturesque. The modern city architect, with some very rare exceptions, appears to be ashamed of gables and of chimneys that so pleasantly break and vary the skyline. Wickham just escapes being quaint, but it retains the slumberous calm of old times. The charm that these quiet little unprogressive old towns have for some people lies not alone in their antiquity, though this has much to do with it, nor in their picturesqueness, for they are not all picturesque, except for an odd building here and there, but in their rare restfulness and completeness, for they never seem to grow or get ugly: now prosperous towns are always growing and eating up the green fields around, they have an unfinished look that displeases, and their modern buildings are hopelessly uninteresting, when not positively unsightly, and there is no sense of repose about them. They go in for plate-glass and show, and for tramways when [Pg 366] they can. At Wickham we discovered a water-mill, built about a century ago, though it looked much older; the big beams within it were made out of the timbers of the U.S. frigate *Chesapeake* that

was captured by H.M.S. frigate *Shannon* in that famous sea-fight of 1813, and some of the timbers bear the marks of the cannon-balls still. So in the most unlikely places we came upon history—indeed we never passed a day that we did not at some spot or another.

We did not patronise the inn at Wickham, for there was still time for more wandering. I often wonder how these little inns in the sleepy country towns and villages pay, for their customers cannot be many. One landlord at whose inn I stayed on the way, a neat and even picturesque inn where I was very well treated and served, told me he paid £55 a year rent for it with stabling attached. It seemed a low enough rental to me, not enough to pay a fair interest on the building; but that was the owner's affair, I suppose he could not get more or he would. Mine host told me, during a chat in his cosy bar, that his average takings were £10 a week, "which is not all profit, of course. There are licences to pay and rent and taxes, then there's the providing and servants' wages, to say nothing of the wear and tear of carpets and furniture, which is considerable. No, sir, the innkeeper's lot is not all cakes and ale; his hours are late, and he has much responsibility. Yet the Government tax us unmercifully. Our worries are many, but we always have to greet our guests with a cheerful face as though we had nothing to worry about and were the happiest of men. We provide a home from home for all travellers and at all hours. It's hard work is innkeeping, and ought to be better rewarded." I agreed with mine host of a smiling face, and I drank his good health. When I paid my modest bill for excellent entertainment, I left feeling I was under an obligation to him for the trouble he took to obtain me admission to see over a most interesting half-timber Elizabethan house near by, having first told me of it and its eventful past history.

AN OLD-TIME HOME.

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I had intended to follow the valley of the Meon right down to the sea, and by my map I find it would have taken me to Lichfield, but by some mischance at Wickham I got on the wrong road, a road that took me to Fareham, so the rest of the way I lost sight of the river. I was vexed with myself at having done this, for a river is always such cheerful company. No country, however tame, is without charm that has a river running through it; a river is, as a Frenchman said, "a moving road," its destiny the sea; the birds sing best by its banks, the cattle go down to and refresh themselves and wade in its waters, the fisherman haunts it, often picturesque old mills stand by its side; there is always life by a river, and the gleam of it enlivens the dullest of landscapes. I always make for a river, and follow it as far as I conveniently can. Those old monks knew a good thing, they could be trusted for that, and be it noted how generally they built their abbeys by the side of a stream. Some say it was because they might catch fish for their Fridays when they fasted, or feasted, on fish, for fish is not a bad dish, washed down by good wine—so their enemies say, in the days when the monks became lazy and fat, and let their lands instead of farming them, but I rather believe they selected such sites with an eye for fair spots, and that only.

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The road on to Fareham seemed tame and hardly worth travelling. After the quiet beauties of the valley above, I was spoilt for the ordinary. But at Fareham, an unattractive, long-streeted town, I again found a good inn of the old-fashioned sort, and that reconciled me to the place; then the inn had a little garden in its rear overlooking an inlet of the sea where ships were harboured, and the sight of their masts and their sails gave a sense of romance to the view, for the sight of a ship, however small it may be, sets my thoughts a-wandering and voyaging in imagination all the world

over. The town was forgiven, indeed forgotten. If an inn you rest at has only a pleasant garden to moon in, what matters the town? If "the finest landscape is improved by a good hotel in the foreground," how much the more so in comparison is a commonplace town? I know an old country town that might have been pleasant enough in past days, but now has been ruined picturesquely and utterly by some rows of most assertively ugly new buildings of staring red brick and blue slates and plate-glass; but at the end of it stands a fine coaching inn, a long low building with creeper-clad walls, a dream of old times with its swinging signboard [Pg 369] upheld on a post, its panelled, beam-ceilinged chambers, its cool, cosy bar, its long out-of-date comfortable Georgian furniture, not to mention its big bowling-green on which our ancestors played. In spite of its ugliness, and very ugly it is, to that town I often repair solely for the sake of that inn, not forgetting its worthy host, who might have stepped out of some novel by Dickens or Ainsworth or James. So much for sentiment and the attraction of the picturesque. I really think that the inn makes the host; the subtle influence of an ancient inn, the atmosphere or a spirit of the past that lingers about it, soon takes possession of the later landlord and makes him one in his manner and ways with those who preceded him, and so without realising it he comes to conform to the old traditions quite naturally, almost as though he were born to them. So surely I feel this the case that I always expect, and I find—I cannot remember a single exception—an old inn of the kind to have a landlord in keeping. It is the same with old houses. I know a man of modern ideas who came into the possession of one and determined to make alterations in it, but somehow or other the alterations were postponed. Meanwhile the house quietly conquered, and now is religiously preserved as it was; the only concession to modern ideas being that a diamond casement window was replaced with one of plate-glass, and this merely for the sake of a view; but to-day the new owner regrets even that, and I fully expect in due time to find the old lattice panes [Pg 370] back in their place, for the view can be sufficiently well seen through them.

From Fareham we took the road to Chichester, a road that follows the line of the coast though a little inland; a road of no beauty after the first few miles, but not without interest. Here and there on the way we had peeps of the sea and of little landlocked creeks that had a charm of their own, and these redeemed the scenery from the uninteresting succession of houses and poor villages that succeeded one another with scant intervals for many a mile. Presently we came in sight of Portsmouth over a long lagoon, its waters coming right up to our road, which is embanked to preserve it from the wash of the tide. We caught a glimpse of the grim ironclads in the harbour dimly seen through the drifting dun smoke of the town, but the smoke above where touched by the sunshine was tinged with gold and glorified, and under such conditions even smoke can be beautiful seen afar off. As the road gradually rose we had a fine view across Langstone Harbour, over which the wind blew free towards us with a cool and refreshing salt savour. So through Havant and Emsworth we found our townified and dusty way and came to a land of flat green plains, ahead of which rose, pearly-grey against the white sky, the steeple of Chichester Cathedral with the irregular outline of the city below. Seen thus from our point of view it suggested a city of romance in the days of pilgrimages. Would that the reality could only come up to our vision! How much truth lies in Campbell's often-quoted line, [Pg 371] "Distance lends enchantment to the view." We almost wished we could have avoided Chichester and so have retained that poetic vision, for "There is a pleasure, now and then, in giving full scope to Fancy and Imagination." But the road led to Chichester and nowhere else; to the south was the sea, and there was no other way. But Chichester is a pleasant old city, though it does not realise impossible dreams; its grey-toned cathedral makes a fine background for its beautiful arched market-cross. I am afraid I admire the market-cross more than the cathedral, for the cathedral is rather interesting than beautiful, whilst the market-cross is wholly beautiful and interesting besides. Never had an architect of lesser structures a more happy inspiration than when designing that graceful cross.

We drove southward from Chichester to regain the sea front, and the road we selected we found led to Bognor: dull and dreary Bognor I have heard it called; its name is against it, and it is a hard

thing to struggle against a bad name whether in man or place. Now we found ourselves in a flat land, a land of meadows and fields of waving corn, a land that stretched far away, wide and open to the long level lines of the distant horizon. Truly it was not a beautiful country according to the accepted traditions of beauty, for it was devoid of all character except flatness, and that is a quality that mostly appeals to a Dutchman or Fen dweller. Yet there was a certain charm about that flat country to me; I think it lay in the wide dome of sky above that flooded the landscape with unshadowed [Pg 372] light, and the bracing breeziness of it, swept as it was by the unchecked winds from the sea. It was all so open, free, and flushed with the freshest of airs; then there was such a homely, friendly feeling about it, for it was a country of modest homes, not one of mansions or villas—a country of odd farmsteads and cottages only. Truly there was nothing strictly to admire in all the far prospect, only a succession of grass and green cornfields, "one field much like another," as I think Dr. Johnson once said of the country; but the brightness of the vast spaces of sunlit land, and the pronounced pureness and clearness of the air, made for cheerfulness and were inspiriting. If the landscape was in a measure monotonous, the wild flowers that abounded by the way made fair atonement for it. I knew not their names, but what mattered that? It was their beauty I prized, their colour and form. I pity the man who can travel from Dan to Beersheba and cry, "'Tis all barren." He had best stay at home and travel by book, till he learns through other eyes how to see. As Keats wrote of the pre-Wordsworth poets:

> Ah, dismal-soul'd!
> The winds of heaven blew, the ocean roll'd
> Its gathering waves—ye felt it not. The blue
> Bared its eternal bosom and the dew
> Of summer nights collected still to make
> The morning precious: beauty was awake!
> Why were ye not awake? But ye were dead
> To things ye knew not.

I think it was Stevenson who wrote an interesting article "On the [Pg 373] Enjoyment of Unpleasant Places"—not that the country we passed through that day was in any way unpleasant, it simply was somewhat uninteresting; and there is an art in enjoying the uninteresting, or what you may deem so, though I must confess it does not come up to the higher art of "the enjoyment of unpleasant places." A man who can do that can be happy anywhere and without travelling far, but its accomplishment needs a good deal of training and time and trying, I should imagine—not, be it noted, to make the best of, but actually to *enjoy* the unpleasant. "Ay, there's the rub." That surely is an education in itself, somewhat in the shape of a task! Now I travel for pleasure and not to be taught.

Perhaps it was because I fully expected to find Bognor a dull and dreary spot that I was agreeably disappointed with it. Then I confess I have a fancy for seeing places differently from other people, amounting almost to a confirmed opposition to prevailing opinion. It may be just then that I was in the unconscious humour to enjoy unpleasant places, but I could see nothing unpleasant about Bognor to test it. Basking in the bright sunshine it looked quite cheerful to me; indeed I thought I should much prefer to stay there than at fashionable and familiar Brighton, which seems like a town where the sea is but an accident and the shops on the front are the real attraction—Bond Street at second-hand. Hear what Richard Jefferies says: "All fashionable Brighton parades the King's Road twice a day, [Pg 374] morning and afternoon, always on the side of the shops.... These people never look at the sea.... The sea is not 'the thing' at Brighton, which is the least nautical of seaside places"—and I fear that the music at the Pavilion is more to the liking of visitors there than the music of the waves. Now at Bognor I noticed there were crowds by the sea, crowds with a happy look on their faces, a sea that was sparkling and dancing far away with joy in its dancing, whilst the white-crested waves came rolling in on the beach, breaking and splashing in masses of silvery spray. I must have had my rose-coloured spectacles on that day, for I could see nothing dreary or dull about Bognor; all the people I saw there seemed light-hearted and sprightly, and it is not a bad rule to judge of a place by the people in it. Those who read this may smile, but in spite of its reputation and name, and reputation influences much, I took quite a liking to the place. Truly I must allow that the sun was shining down gloriously, "doing its best to make all things pleasant," and

succeeding—making even Bognor look gay.

It was but a short way from Bognor to the village of Felpham, where William Blake lived for some time to be near his friend Hayley the poet, who—the poet, that is—gained some repute in his day, though his popularity has not stood Time's trying test. Of Hayley it may be said, "Everything was good about him but his poetry." Still he wrote pleasant enough verse, though his thoughts were not deep. The last lines he composed to the swallows on his roof may be quoted as an example, not of his best, nor yet of his worst:

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> Ye gentle birds that perch aloof,
> And smooth your pinions on my roof,
> Preparing for departure hence
> Ere winter's angry threats commence;
> Like you my soul would smooth her plume
> For longer flights beyond the tomb.

Hayley, who was given to writing epitaphs, also composed the well-known and much-quoted one to a local blacksmith that is to be found in Felpham churchyard, which runs thus:

> My sledge and hammer lie reclin'd,
> My bellows too have lost their wind,
> My fire's extinct, my forge decay'd,
> And in the dust my vice is laid,
> My coal is spent, my iron gone,
> The nails are driven, my work is done.

This epitaph has been frequently repeated elsewhere; I have come upon it in at least a dozen churchyards, sometimes with variations that are no improvements. An epitaph once popular soon became common property. Twice when touring in the Eastern Counties did a clerk of a church declare in effect, knowing I was in search of quaint epitaphs, "Now I can show you a curious one to a blacksmith that is quite original," only to find, once again, Hayley's epitaph there; and I really do not think I have ever been in a churchyard without coming upon the everlasting—and irritating because so commonplace—

> Afflictions sore
> Long time he (or she) bore.

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Whoever originated these lines has much to answer for. On the other hand, the man who had simply inscribed on his wife's tombstone "Though lost to sight to memory dear," without a thought of such a thing has given us a classic quotation. Here, however, are two epitaphs that strike a fresh note. The first is at Cobham to a photographer, both brief and to the point, for all it says is "Taken from life." Another to John Knott, a scissor-grinder, may be found in smoky Sheffield:

> Here lies a man that was Knott born,
> His father was Knott before him,
> He lived Knott and did Knott die,
> Yet underneath this stone doth lie
> Knott christened,
> Knott begot,
> And here he lies
> And yet was Knott.

From Felpham we drove along narrow roads to Littlehampton. I am not sure that we went the nearest or best way, indeed I feel almost sure we did not; even on the map it is not simple to follow. I know we wound about a good deal, first in one direction, then in another, but it was very pleasant wandering, and we passed by many delightful old homes and pretty cottages. It was a land of pleasant homes and quiet abiding. Now and then we caught a peep of the sea on one hand, and of the fine rolling "hills of the South Country" on the other, and on the level land between our road took its devious way as though of uncertain mind whether to make for the sea or the hills, then finally making for the sea at Littlehampton.

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Now and then we heard the fussy rattle of a mowing machine busy at work in a field. Not only country sights but country sounds have changed greatly during the past century. Scarcely ever now one hears the once familiar whetting of the scythe, or the soothing swish of it in the long grass. Sings Tennyson:

O sound to rout the brood of cares,
The sweep of scythe in morning dew.

That is the value of pleasant sounds. It is long since I have heard the beat of the flail threshing out the grain on the barn floor; to-day in its place we have the steam threshing-machine, and that is the only mechanical sound that pleases my ear, the dreamy hum of it when mellowed by distance. Doubtless associations have much to do with the pleasure sounds afford. Who loves not the "caw, caw, caw" of the rook? Yet in reality it is a sound harsh and grating, but then one always so intimately connects it with the country, big trees, ancestral homes and rural delights, that, though truly discordant, the notes even gratify the ear.

So we reached Littlehampton, half port half watering-place, of no great importance as either. From Littlehampton our road kept up much the same pleasantly rural and uneventful character, with hills to the north and the sea to the south, and the same sort of level and, in parts, well-wooded land between. "Hills," it has been said, "give hope, wood a kind of mysterious friendliness with the earth, but the sea reminds us that we are helpless." We had all three, but the sea [Pg 378] that day, gleaming and bright in the glance of the sun, looked more like a friend than a foe; it did not suggest the helplessness of man but rather his convenient highway over the world to distant lands of old romance—if any be left.

There is an infinite pleasure to the quiet-loving pilgrim in driving through a lulling land like this where all is restful to the eye and hurry a thing unknown, a land through which you drive on in a sort of day-dream and for a time desire nothing better, a land

Where the wind with the scent of the sea is fed,
And the sun seems glad to shine.

In truth there was a touch of sunny Southernness about it, a warmth and brightness suggestive of Italy, though the scenery was essentially English.

Then we came to the sea again at Worthing, when my rose-coloured spectacles must surely have dropped from my eyes, for I could see nothing attractive about it: otherwise how can I account for the fact that Bognor, "dull Bognor," appealed to me and Worthing did not? Perhaps because, I thought, there was more pretence of being a watering-place about Worthing, and I heard a band playing there, and I heard no band at Bognor but only the surge of the sea. I was glad to escape from Worthing; it had no interest for me beyond its fresh air.

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CHAPTER XXI

Travel in the old days—Sequestered Sussex—Country homes—A mellow land—A gibbet post and its story—Chiddingly and its church—The Pelham buckle—Wayside crosses—St. Dunstan's tongs and his anvil—A curious brass—Iron stocks—Home again.

From Worthing our road led for three or four miles along "the beached margin of the sea," a straight stretch of dreary and shelterless shingly road, looking doubly dreary after the pleasant green lanes we had so recently travelled. At the end of this we crossed the Arun close above where it joins the Channel, its short race run, its life almost too brief to grow into a real river; sea-gulls were whirling about it, but what they did there I could not make out; they were not catching fish, nor did they alight on the land or the water, but kept whirling round and round restlessly just over one spot in an apparently purposeless manner; but it pleased me to watch them, for the freedom of the wing is a glorious thing. When sea-gulls do this away from the sea I am told it is a sign of bad weather.

On the other side of the river stood the old town of Shoreham with its shipping, and above the town rose its weather-beaten, ancient Norman church tower; square, massive, grey and stern like its builders, strangely sculptured, too, by the salt spray and sea winds that have wrought their will upon it. From our point of view the town had an ancient look, though much of it is modern enough, but the grime of its smoke had toned down the new to the old. Beyond Shoreham lies Brighton, and to avoid the tedious and unprofitable drive through both towns and along a mere succession of houses we turned up by the river-side and went northward inland in search of old-fashioned places.

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We paid a toll at the bridge by which we crossed the Arun, and that was the only toll we had on the way. Years ago, when I was much younger and took long driving tours, the tolls I had to pay at the toll-gates often cost me more than my dinner, to say nothing of the provoking fact of having frequently to pull up, and often besides be kept waiting for change. Those old toll-keepers were a race apart, and in remote places would dally at the gate whilst they asked me for the news of the day. Such trifles seem to make those old times appear farther off than they are. It was slow travelling then, and with tired horses often your choice of an inn for the night was "Hobson's choice," for you could not go farther—yet these leisured old times make pleasant memory. Now wherever you go you can rarely escape the morning newspaper; to do so is a test of remoteness indeed. What with telegraphs, telephones, railways and motors, news travels fast and the world is made smaller. It was the coach that brought the first tidings of events in times past, and its arrival was eagerly watched for in the towns and villages on the way: so was the news of Trafalgar and Waterloo spread through the land. Some of those toll-keepers, it is said, were in league with the highwayman, and signalled to him about any likely passing and lonely traveller by an open or a shut window, at night by means of a light in the same window; but this may be scandal. At least we know that some rascally landlords of inns were accomplices of the highwayman; rumour indeed has it that Dick Turpin was so indignant at a certain landlord giving information to a rival "when under articles to him" that he threatened to shoot that landlord. In return for his services the toll-keeper was never robbed of his day's takings. There is a tale told of a certain lady of quality who in those exciting times of travel always used to take with her a purse filled with base coin to hand over: but how, I wonder, did that lady become possessed of so much base coin?

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It was a pleasant drive by the side of the river to the pretty village of Bramber, with its half-timber cottages and fragment of a Norman castle on a wooded knoll. I think it was at Bramber that a friend told me a few years ago he visited an interesting little museum and found the following admission notice: "Adults twopence, Children One penny, Ladies and gentlemen what they will." I wonder how many extra pennies good folk were induced to part with for the glory of being in the latter category? A somewhat similar notice I read in an inn garden: "People must not pluck the flowers. Ladies and gentlemen never do." There was some art in that notice.

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From Bramber we drove through a fine open country of wide prospects, the forgathering of the hedgerow trees making the distance look like one vast forest—a forest never reached but that always circles the horizon. Next we came to Henfield, a quiet and picturesque village. After Henfield we got into a sequestered land beyond railways and on to some pleasant by-roads and narrow lanes where in sunny nooks hosts of wild flowers flourished, and the hedges delighted in tangled disorder. We were again in a land of sleepy farmsteads of the old Sussex type, farmsteads of time-toned walls, weather-tinted tiling, long, low, lichen-laden roofs, and great chimney-stacks—always a great and shapely chimney-stack of much the same pattern, but of a very good and pleasing pattern. This type of farmhouse is not confined to Sussex, but may be found over its near borders both in Kent and in Surrey. Such farmhouses are much sought after to-day, I am told, to be converted into homes for town people, because of their picturesque charm. This has come about, I believe, in a measure owing to the motor-car making accessible even remote country places; no longer do people depend wholly on the railway as formerly; indeed an estate agent told me that often the stipulation of country home seekers now is "not near a railway." People,

> Weary of men's voices and their tread,
> Of clamouring bells and whirl of wheels that pass,

desire to get into the real country and away from the crowd. I have just been reading in that delightful book, *An Odd Farmhouse*, how such an old house was found, and the charm of the life in it. "It lay in a dimple of the Downs, all around it were meadows.... A long, low, Jacobean building of simple but beautiful lines.... I looked through the dining-room windows and saw the tiled floor, the oak cupboards built into the wall, the great beams traversing the ceiling, the Gargantuan chimney-place, some eleven feet long, and deep enough to hold settles in the ingle-nook. There was a raised platform for logs, an old Sussex iron fire-back and a swinging crane with many hooks and arms." Such a picture sets me longing to live in some similar old Jacobean farmhouse: would only such good fortune were mine. I know the picture is true, for I have more than once, and in different old Jacobean homes, spent a night with mine hosts in them. I have sat in their ingle-nooks before blazing fires of logs on their hearths, watching the fitful flames leap up their wide chimneys, as they threw a ruddy glow on beamed ceiling and panelled wall whilst casting mysterious shadows around; and I have fed my full of the poetic charm and the romance, rare in these commonplace days, of those nights. The builder of a house never invented a better thing than the old-fashioned big ingle-nook: not the poor pretence affair that the modern architect calls one, with a cheerless, slow, combustion coal grate in its centre; but an ingle-nook at least ten feet wide—and many are more—with a big oak beam above, and deep enough to hold settles to seat comfortably four about the wide hearth, with its fire-back and fire-dogs intended for the burning of wood, such as they built in the Jacobean age when men knew how to build homes to live in and joy in, not merely houses for shelter—homes that were pictures without and within.

A JACOBEAN DOORWAY.

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But I have strayed from the road. It was a quiet land we were in, one out of the way of much traffic, for the lanes seemed to lead nowhere in particular, and only to exist for local convenience, but they take you into the heart of the real country: a land as hushed as ever it was in the distant days of "Queen Bess," for there has nothing arisen since to disturb its foretime tranquillity—unless, perhaps, the rare and temporary intrusion of a motor-car whose driver has lost his way. It is for such unpretentious, peaceful scenery that the Englishman yearns at times when in foreign lands far away. Just a yearning for the sight of England's green fields, green hedges, leafy elms, and old homes, nothing more. Even Byron, that wanderer, sings:

> A green field is a sight which makes us pardon
> The absence of that more sublime construction
> Which mixes up vines, olives, precipices,
> Glaciers, volcanoes, oranges, and ices.

Also did not Keats, when in Italy, once tell Severn that he lay awake one night just thinking all the while of England's green fields and her flowers?

I have often wondered how so simple a thing as a purely English pastoral landscape can so greatly please; wherein exactly lies its strong power to charm? I once took an American friend for a long drive through a beautiful corner of England. I selected it specially, [Pg 385] wishing to give my visitor a pleasant impression of the old country. There were hills and fair woods on the way, winding streams with ancient stone bridges across them, a lovely ruined priory in a lonely glen, old homes, many gabled and ivy-clad, picturesque cottages, and a quaint, old-world village or two. These were some of the good things we saw. When the journey was ended—we took it by motor-car, so we went far—I asked my friend what pleased him the most. "Well, I think," said he, "it's the mellow, domesticated look of the country, as though man and nature had long been on familiar terms there; but what really appeals to me most are just your green meadows studded with daisies, and your beautiful hedges." It was actually the simple sight of the daisied meadows and the green hedges that pleased him more than all the other good things, and the other things were very good indeed. It is sometimes enlightening to see our land as others see it. Listen to what Mark Twain says in his *More Tramps Abroad*:—

> After all, in the matter of certain physical patent rights there is only one England. Now that I have sampled the globe I am not in doubt. There is the

beauty of Switzerland, and it is repeated in the glaciers and snowy ranges of many parts of the earth; there is the beauty of the fiord, and it is repeated in New Zealand and Alaska; there is the beauty of Hawaii, and it is repeated in ten thousand islands of the Southern Seas; there is a beauty of the prairie and the plain, and it is repeated here and there in the earth; each of these is worshipful, each is perfect in its way, yet holds no monopoly of its beauty; but that beauty which is England, is alone; it has no duplicate. It is made up of very simple details—just grass, and trees, and shrubs, and roads, and hedges, and gardens, and houses, and churches, and castles, and here and there a ruin, and over all a mellow dreamland of history. But its beauty is incomparable, and all its own.

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There must surely be some special charm in a country, unassuming though it may be, to cause such praise of it to be written. Does not even cosmopolitan Kipling pronounce his preference for "Sussex by the sea" over all the world?

We were in Sussex again, but, in spite of Kipling, I love Sussex inland, sequestered Sussex of woodlands, sleepy villages, ancient farmsteads and cottages, and genuine ruralness, infinitely more than "Sussex by the sea," with its fringe of more or less fashionable watering-places. Inland Sussex, on the whole, is the Sussex and the England of the long past, delightful to see, but much of seaside Sussex is the England of to-day, and is rather depressing to me. The real charm of Sussex lies in its ancientness and in its simple, good-humoured country folk, not in its modernness. People who rush from London by rail or by motor on the main highways to Brighton, or other of its seaside towns, know little of rural Sussex or the rare charms of its silvan scenes.

Travelling through this peaceful land, loitering along its lanes that tempted one to loiter because of their pleasantness, we eventually turned up at Ansty Cross, where we were on one of the three familiar Brighton roads, for there is a choice of roads from London to Brighton, all beloved of the speedy motorist who heeds not the scenery he passes; but they are dusty, with much hasting traffic, and not the roads that a quiet-loving pilgrim would choose. For this cause we did not go far on the Brighton road, but left it by the first promising lane, and in time we reached a little green in an out-of-the-way spot. I could not find it named on my map; there was no village there, but a cottage or two faced it, and in the centre of the green was a post with a weathercock on the top, and the weathercock had the date of years past pierced in it, a date I have forgotten. The post was railed round for protection, so I thought there might possibly be some story connected with it, otherwise why so protected? I asked particulars of a cottager, and he, nothing loth to be informing, told me that the post was part of an ancient gibbet—I do not remember having seen such a thing before—whereon a man was hung in chains for robbery and murder. It appears from the tale I was told that a tramp sought food and shelter one night at a cottage close by; the cottager took pity on him and gave him food and a night's lodging, and was in return robbed of the small savings he had by the scoundrel of a tramp, who richly deserved his fate. Such are the tales of the road.

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It must have been a gruesome sight in old days, and one not at times to be avoided, for travellers to see a man hung up thus by the wayside, his shrivelled body swinging, or perhaps only his bones rattling, in the wind to the creaking of the chains. I remember a certain church clerk telling me a story of how in past days, at a spot near his church, a poor woman's only son was exposed on a gibbet—I think it was merely for stealing a sheep he suffered death, stolen to provide his widowed mother with food,—and how in after days the poor, bereaved, broken-hearted, solitary widow used to tramp all alone on dark winter nights to the gibbet to pick up any bones of her boy that might have fallen to the ground, and carry them carefully home, so that she might secretly bury them in a quiet corner of the churchyard. I could only hope that the story was not true, but the clerk assured me it was, "every word of it." Sometimes I am thankful I live in these latter days.

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Then wandering over more winding lanes we came to the top of Scaynes Hill, where the road dropped down steeply before us, and from where there is a fine view looking over the fair wooded Weald to the bare but not barren downs, and just then over their long, undulating line the sea mists were creeping, and I thought there came wafted inland the rare scent of the sea. The mists kept rolling in great masses down the green sides of the hills, then as if by magic vanished from view. I never saw the South Downs look so

glorious or so mountainous as they looked with their crowning of mists and their dark shadowed bases. To realise the full beauty of the downs you must see them in all weathers and not in sunshine alone. Sunshine is cheerful, but sunshine is a tamer; now mists give the downs just a suspicion of grandeur. Even Snowdon looks tame on a clear, cloudless day.

Descending Scaynes Hill we mounted again to a wide open [Pg 389] common with a big white windmill topping it and so exposed to all the winds, a mill boldly in evidence that surely would have tempted Don Quixote, had he been of to-day and passed by that way, to try a tilt or two at it. Without the mill the common would have looked bare and have been wholly characterless except for its openness. I think, after an old castle or a ruined abbey, there is more character about a windmill than in any other building; moreover, a windmill is always a telling and a graceful structure, so a pleasing, even a poetic, feature in any landscape. I really think that more than half the charm of Holland lies in its many bickering windmills, and the life their whirling sails give to its flat and dreamy landscapes with their slow canals.

After a time our road led us between great rocks, so quickly in England does the scenery change its character, for the rocks suggested a road in the wild North Country; it was as though we had suddenly been transported there. So we reached steep-streeted Uckfield, and in a few more miles the little railless town of East Hoathly, somewhat beyond which I espied, peeping over distant woods, a tall stone church steeple; it attracted my eye, for it is an unusual sight in Sussex, where the churches have mostly square towers, or steeples roofed with oak shingles. On consulting my map I found the steeple belonged to Chiddingly church, a little remote village off any main road. I had indeed some trouble in finding my way there along the narrow lanes that alone led to it. The church [Pg 390] proved interesting. For the village I cannot say much. It consisted of but a few houses, not more than half a dozen, I think, a small shop where they appeared to sell everything from bacon to pins (it was the post office also), and a little inn boasting of the sign of "The Six Bells," a sign that presumably gives one the number of bells in the steeple, for it was an old custom to represent the number of bells in the neighbouring church on an inn sign—one amongst other odd bits of information I picked up on the journey; my journey indeed provided me with quite a storehouse of information about unimportant matters.

Chiddingly church has an ancient and time-worn look. I noticed that the steeple was bound round with iron chains, and I asked a man of the place if he knew why they were there, for they were not ornamental. "They be to keep the old steeple together," said he. Poor old steeple, thought I, to have to depend upon chains to hold it in place. "It was the village blacksmith's idea," explained the man. Now I should have thought it was an architect's job. But iron chains exposed thus to all storms would in no long time rust away, I should imagine, though I dare say they will last for some years; but never before have I seen a building so repaired. It is truly a primitive arrangement without even the advantage of being picturesque.

The west doorway displays at either end of the drip moulding the quaint device of the Pelham buckle. Now this device was the crest or badge of Sir John Pelham, that gallant knight who made prisoner [Pg 391] the King of France at the famous fight of Poictiers, after which he assumed as his crest or badge a representation of the sword-belt buckle of the captured king, and on any building he founded, or helped in its construction, he caused a carving of that badge to be placed. This bit of information I also picked up on the way, though on a previous tour. On a good many churches in Sussex you will find the Pelham buckle engraved. Such was the pride of the Pelhams.

The west window of the church is notably out of the centre of the tower, and is but one example of many showing how the old builders considered not strict uniformity, and by so doing, I feel, added a certain charm of irregularity to their structures; they were content with eye measurements; to-day the foot-rule settles everything with a mathematical and eye-provoking accuracy.

Within the church what first caught my eye was the gorgeous monument, in a side building all to itself, of "Sir John Jefferay, Knt., late Lord Chief Baron of the Excheqvr," who "dyed the xxiii of May 1575." This monument is somewhat mutilated, it is said at one time by country folk who mistook it for the tomb of the hated Judge Jeffreys. A little away from the church stands a portion of the wing,

with its windows bricked up, of the once stately home of the Jefferays, now converted into the outbuildings of a farmhouse—and that and their tomb marks the end of their glory.

I noticed in the church an old-fashioned two-decker pulpit, with a sounding-board above; you do not see many of these nowadays. This [Pg 392] reminds me of a story of old times I heard on the way and that was fresh to me. It appears that in a certain country church a strange parson had taken duty one Sunday. Now it was the custom there not to begin the service before the squire had arrived. But the strange parson knew nothing of this nor of the squire, so he promptly started with "When the wicked man," whereupon the clerk below hurriedly stood up and in a loud whisper exclaimed, "You must not begin yet, sir, he has not come in."

From Chiddingly we proceeded over hilly and winding lanes and roads to Cross-in-Hand, a lonely spot with an inn and a few cottages, so named, I presume, from a pre-Reformation cross that probably once stood there. These at the junction of roads (as here), where they often were placed, were frequently provided with a hand to point out the way, and so were the forerunners of the later finger-posts. A few more miles brought us to historic Mayfield, set boldly on a hill, where in the Convent (once the palace of the Archbishops of Canterbury) they show you the veritable tongs of St. Dunstan, and point out the very dent made in them caused by his Satanic Majesty's nose when he pinched it, and his anvil also at which the saint was at work at the time. They sell picture post-cards of them in the town also. I thought it was a monk of Glastonbury, and at Glastonbury, who had the credit of this thrilling exploit; but at Mayfield they declare the event took place there, and are not the actual tongs proof sufficient? At Glastonbury there are no such [Pg 393] tongs; now at Mayfield the doubting traveller may see the tongs and the dent in them.

By the way, I heard a rather quaint story of the palace in the troublesome old days when the roads were infested with robbers. Late one night a loud knock was heard at the door, whereupon the porter opened the little iron-guarded shutter to see who was there, and discovered a man begging in God's name for some food; but the porter did not like the look of the stranger and took him for a thief, so he kept the door closed, when suddenly the big bolts flew aside of their own accord and the door opened of itself; it was a saint who was standing outside! But how could the poor porter tell that, if the man looked not the part? So I think it was hardly fair of the saint to reprove the porter for not at once opening the door in God's name. The modern tramp is no saint, but he makes very free use of God's name.

From Mayfield we struck west over a wild, open country in search of Ticehurst, that appeared, from my map, to be a little village or small town, fairly remote from the rail and therefore possibly interesting. It was a fine drive through a rough-and-tumble country, and though Ticehurst disappointed me, the road to it did not. Ticehurst proved to be a clean, neat, wide-streeted village, with a village well in the centre—a village of some old houses and pleasantly situated, but not otherwise specially attractive. The inn there is said to be of the fourteenth century, though it hardly looks it. Finding the village uninteresting I strolled to the church, a grey [Pg 394] and ancient pile overlooking a vast extent of rolling and wooded hills. It was almost worth going to Ticehurst for that revelation of scenery. Over the church porch I noticed a parvis chamber, and within the building a quantity of stained glass in its many and large windows; some of the glass is old and good, some modern and not so good. I noticed also the curious circular clerestory windows of singular design, a unique feature of the church as far as my knowledge extends. Portions of the stone steps to the former rood-loft still exist, I observed, and there is an old carved oak cover to the font with a worn inscription on it that I could not decipher. The chief interest of Ticehurst church, however, lies in a curious brass to "John Wybarne Armigi," who died "sexto decimo die ffebruarii Anno Rigni Regis henrici Septimi quinto." He is represented on his brass in full armour between his two wives, and at least four times their size. This suggests that the brass was originally only intended for one figure, and that those of the two wives were added afterwards, so there was no room to make them larger in the remaining space available. It is, too, a curious circumstance that the armour shown is of a considerably earlier period than that in which this John Wybarne lived. This further suggests to me that it may have been a

memorial to some former knight basely appropriated, for such things were done in times past, as many a palimpsest brass proves; to me in the details of its armour it bears a close resemblance to the one to Sir John D'Agentine at Horseheath in Cambridgeshire, bearing date of 1382.

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From Ticehurst we had a glorious drive through a rolling and well-wooded country as far as the Hastings main road; this we followed to Robertsbridge with a long and steep descent to that little, old-fashioned town. I think it was Walpole, when posting one night this way, called this descent a precipice, but it scarcely is that. Those old travellers often took a strangely exaggerated view of things, some of them going so far as to call even the modest Welsh mountains "frightful, horrid, awe-inspiring," and so forth in superabundance.

We followed the Hastings road as far as Battle, where we turned to the right and proceeded westwards towards Eastbourne and home. In due course we came to Ninfield, a little village high up in the world, and not far from "Standard Hill," as shown on the Ordnance map, and where tradition asserts William the Conqueror of old first raised his banner in England, and the morrow beheld a kingdom he had won with the aid of his armoured knights and a ruse. The hill has a commanding position overlooking the country all round, so there is nothing improbable in the tradition recording a fact, and the name of the hill, preserved through centuries to this day, is suggestive. At Ninfield there are some iron stocks under trees by the wayside. I do not remember having seen stocks of iron before. There is a tale told of these, that a man was condemned to be placed in the wooden stocks that preceded them, only his friends hacked them to pieces overnight, and there were no stocks to put him in; so fresh ones of iron, not readily to be demolished, were ordered, which stand to this day as serviceable as when they were made, and that must be a long while ago, though I am unaware of the date when the punishment of the stocks was abolished.

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We drove on from Ninfield over winding roads that led us along the top of the hills overlooking the sea, sparkling in the sunshine that day, and past time-mellowed farmsteads, many with their quaint, conical-roofed oast-houses adjoining; then we dropped suddenly down from the hills to the wide plain of the Pevensey marshes, green as a land may be; we were nearing Eastbourne and home, and the end of our journey. So now, kind reader—I think I may venture to call you "kind reader" as you have followed me so far, for that surely is test enough to admit of such an address—I here bid you a reluctant farewell; for your company in spirit on our pleasant journey I heartily thank you. Good-bye.

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FOOTNOTE

[1] Since writing the above I noted the following paragraph in my morning paper: "A team of draught oxen in Sussex was disposed of near Lewes. The wooden yoke was purchased by the Mayor of Brighton for presentation to the Brighton Museum." A future generation may need the aid of a Commentator to understand the agricultural operations of to-day and the recent past.

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