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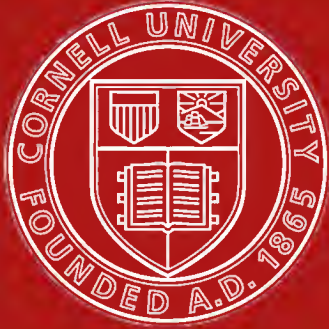
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In Kent with Charles Dickens.



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IN KENT WITH CHARLES DICKENS.

IN KENT
WITH
CHARLES DICKENS.

BY
THOMAS FROST,
AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF THOMAS LORD LYTTTELTON," "THE SECRET SOCIETIES
OF THE EUROPEAN REVOLUTION," ETC.

"Kent, sir; everybody knows Kent—apples, cherries, hops, and women."
Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club.

LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.
1880.

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CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

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IN KENT WITH CHARLES DICKENS.

CHAPTER I.

Meeting of three friends in Symond's Inn—Dickens pilgrimage resolved upon—Down the river—Through the fields to Cobham—Halt at The Leather Bottle—Return to Gravesend—Farther down the river—The Ship and Lobster—Through the marshes—Chalk Church—One of Dickens's favourite walks.

SOME years ago, on a bright morning in the beginning of September, three men, each eager for the enjoyment of the pure air and eye-refreshing greenery of the country and the invigorating breezes of the coast, were sitting in a dim and dingy room in Symond's Inn, the dimness and dinginess of which contrasted unfavourably even with such sunlight as could be found on the farther side of dingy Fetter Lane. One of the three was a clergyman, but did not

look like one, and another, who was not a clergyman, had much more of the conventional clerical aspect, though it was the opinion of the curate, imparted to the author in a confidential whisper, that, in his endeavour to look like a clergyman he only succeeded in looking like a sheriff's officer in disguise. The third man was the present writer, who looks like—it is hard to say what, for he was once erroneously supposed to be a retired acrobat, and on another occasion was mistaken for a Wesleyan minister.

We were arranging the programme of a holiday trip to the seaside, and had no difficulty in determining that our destination should be the coast of Kent. The gentleman who cultivated a clerical aspect, but had been deterred from taking orders by consideration of the difficulty of bringing up six daughters upon the stipend of a curate, had a married sister living at Dover, and wished to make that ancient town his goal. For me the scenery of Kent had a peculiar charm, and the bracing air of the North Sea was as the

elixir of life. But to run down by rail to the seaside, shot through long tunnels and deep cuttings almost as swiftly as one of Jules Verne's heroes was shot to the moon, and to sit upon the pier at Dover, or the sands at Ramsgate, or the cliff at Margate, every morning until the time came for my return to London, was not my way of compressing the utmost amount of enjoyment into the week or ten days to which my holiday extended.

I love to turn my back upon the close streets of towns, to avoid even the dusty highways, and to explore the narrow tracks among the golden-blossoming furze and broom or purple-flowering heath, of broad commons,—to ramble through green lanes, “fringed with the feathery fern,” and fragrant with the scent of wild flowers,—to thread the half-hidden paths through woods, where furred or feathered fellow-creatures run or fly in freedom, and the brick-and-mortar world is quite shut out,—to wander by the banks of rivers, far from towns, with the sound of water rushing over a distant weir to lure me on,—to follow the windings of

a rocky coast, where a new view is discovered as each bold point is rounded, and the receding tide forms little pools, in which tiny crabs lurk, and narrow channels between seaweed-festooned rocks. It was my desire, therefore, to make a pedestrian tour through portions of the beautiful county of Kent; and my admiration of the genius of one of the greatest novelists of any age led me to suggest a visit to the numerous localities associated with incidents in Dickens's inimitable and immortal works.

The idea was well received. The curate would have gone anywhere with congenial companions, and our friend only stipulated that we should not spend more than three days between London and Dover. Away we went, therefore, and were on the deck of a Gravesend steamer before the sun had reached the zenith, making the voyage performed by Pip and his companions in an open boat, and which terminated so disastrously for the man whose safety they were endeavouring to secure.

As on that occasion, "It was a bright day,

and the sunshine was very cheering." The Pool, more crowded with shipping than in Pip's day, and more turbid and offensive to the senses, was slowly threaded, and then our vessel made more rapid progress, and green hills began to be seen upon the right. "By imperceptible degrees," as Pip records, "as the tide ran out, we lost more of the distant woods and hills, and dropped lower and lower between the muddy banks, but the tide was yet with us when we were off Gravesend."

Landing at the town pier, we ascended the narrow High Street, leaving behind us "ancient and fish-like smells," and skirting the eastern brow of Windmill Hill, descended the shady declivity of Sandy Lane to the southern foot of that eminence. Opposite the lower end of the lane is the commencement of a pleasant footpath, which we followed across green pastures to Singlewell Lane; and then, turning to the left, and passing some old cottages and a pleasantly situated little hostelry, known as The Halfway House, found another footpath on the right, leading

through hop-gardens and arable fields to the village of Cobham, where Mr. Tupman retired to conceal his woe from the world, and Mr. Pickwick made that famous antiquarian discovery which rivals that of the inscription pronounced Roman by Scott's antiquary, Jonathan Oldbuck, and so contrariwise interpreted by the roving mendicant, Edie Ochiltree.

We passed the picturesque old church, pausing only to step into the little burial-ground, and peer through the windows at the monuments of the Cobhams, and went through the village, passing the clean and comfortable little ale-house, called *The Leather Bottle*, which the great novelist has made famous as the retreat of Tupman when crossed in love. Presently the extensive park spread out on our left, surrounded by wooded hills, which form a background of dark verdure to the noble hall. Deer grazed on the green slopes, or rested in the shade of the magnificent oaks and elms, of which, besides some fine clumps, there are avenues across the park

in every direction. We sat down for awhile on the greensward, just within the gates, and under the shade of a far-spreading elm, and drew upon our memory-cells for the description of the walk of the Pickwickians across the park to recall to the world their love-lorn brother.

“A delightful walk it was; for it was a pleasant afternoon in June, and their way lay through a deep and shady wood, cooled by the light wind which gently rustled the thick foliage, and enlivened by the songs of the birds that perched upon the boughs. The ivy and moss crept in thick clusters over the old trees, and the soft green turf overspread the ground like a silken mat. They emerged upon an open park, with an ancient hall, displaying the quaint and picturesque architecture of Elizabeth’s time. Long vistas of stately oaks and elms appeared on every side: large herds of deer were cropping the fresh grass; and occasionally a startled hare scoured along the ground, with the speed of the shadows thrown by the light clouds which

swept across the sunny landscape like the passing breath of summer.

“‘If this,’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking about him, ‘if this were the place to which all who are troubled with our friend’s complaint came, I fancy their old attachment to this world would very soon return.’

“‘I think so too,’ said Mr. Winkle.

“‘And really,’ added Mr. Pickwick, after a half-hour’s walking had brought them to the village, ‘really, for a misanthrope’s choice, this is one of the prettiest and most desirable places of residence I ever met with.’

“In this opinion also both Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass expressed their concurrence; and having been directed to The Leather Bottle, a clean and commodious village ale-house, the three travellers entered, and at once inquired for a gentleman of the name of Tupman.”

To that place of refreshment, where we had ordered dinner in passing, I and my companions returned, and, passing through a door at the end of the passage, entered the room

in which Tupman was found at dinner by his brother Pickwickians, “a long, low-roofed room, furnished with a large number of high-backed leather-cushioned chairs of fantastic shapes, and embellished with a great variety of old portraits and roughly coloured prints of some antiquity.”

Under the roof of this old-fashioned house Dickens passed a night in the autumn of 1841, and the beautiful park of Cobham was at all times one of his favourite resorts. On the particular occasion just mentioned, he was returning from the annual sojourn which, at that period of his life, he was accustomed to make at Broadstairs, when, meeting his friend, Mr. John Forster, at Rochester, they passed a pleasant day at Cobham, sleeping at The Leather Bottle, and on the following night at Gravesend, after another day's rambling in this delightful neighbourhood.

It seems probable, though the fact is not mentioned by the novelist's biographer, that they would not be two days in the neighbourhood without visiting Swanscomb Wood, where,

according to tradition, the men of Kent made such a resolute stand against the troops of William the Conqueror, on their march to London after the decisive battle of Hastings, that the victorious Norman granted them the confirmation of their ancient rights and customs. This, according to the tradition, was the origin of the distinction, the memory of which has been preserved to the present day, between "men of Kent" and "Kentish men;" but there is another explanation, namely, that the former term was applied to the original inhabitants, and the other to later settlers in the county. All that seems certain is, that the residents west of the Medway have always called themselves men of Kent, and their neighbours beyond the right bank of that river Kentish men.

Swanscomb Wood, which I visited on another occasion, is of considerable extent, stretching northward to the village of that name, and eastward to the lane leading from Southfleet to Greenhithe. It consists chiefly of oaks, and just within its northern borders

is a cave called Clapper Napper's Hole, associated with which are many legends and traditions. A green lane, intersecting some small hop-gardens, leads from this part of the wood to the village, which is entered near the picturesque little church, said to be one of the oldest in Kent. This character applies, however, only to the lower part of the tower and portions of the walls, in which Roman bricks are mingled with masonry of Saxon origin.

Four years later than the occasion to which reference has been made, Dickens drove to Cobham from Rochester, accompanied by his wife and her sister, and his friends Maclise, Jerrold, and Forster. They visited the church, where there is an ancient wooden screen, an old round font, and several memorial brasses of the Cobhams; and afterwards strolled through the park. During his residence at Gad's Hill, this was one of Dickens's favourite walks, his fond recollection of which is evidenced in a passage of one of his letters from Lausanne, written in 1846: "The green woods and green shades about here are more like Cobham, in

Kent, than anything we dream of at the foot of Alpine passes." He would have come this way even more frequently than he did could he have been allowed to take his dogs into the park. One of those faithful and intelligent companions of his rambles, Don, the Newfoundland dog, whose rescue of one of his pups from the Medway is recorded by Mr. Forster, is now in the possession of the Earl of Darnley; but his mate, Linda, lies under one of the magnificent cedars in the shrubbery at Gad's Hill Place.

Having refreshed and rested themselves at The Leather Bottle, the three pilgrims again entered the park, which they crossed towards the close of the afternoon, when the giant oaks and elms were throwing long shadows athwart the velvety greensward, and gleams of golden light played among the foliage, and shimmered upon the grass beneath the spreading branches. Time did not permit the discovery of all the sylvan beauties of the park, among which are an avenue of four rows of limes, more than half a mile long, and a magnificent chestnut,

with a girth of thirty-two feet, known as The Four Sisters, from the four arms into which the enormous trunk divides before spreading out its branches. This fine tree stands about a mile from the Hall, near the path leading to Knight's Place Farm.

Emerging from the park at the lane leading to Chalk, we passed through more beautiful woodland scenery, the leafy shades of Shorne Wood, where the wood-pigeons cooed among the topmost branches of the trees, and many small birds were twittering their last morsels of song until to-morrow's sun should again prompt them to melody. On the right, beyond the wood, is the village of Shorne, the quiet picturesque churchyard of which was often the resting-place of the great novelist, at the close of a walk from Gad's Hill which the heat of the day, or some other restraining circumstance, prevented him from extending.

We reached the high-road at the little village of Chalk, where Dickens passed his honeymoon, paying for the holiday with the money which he received for the first and

second numbers of *The Pickwick Papers*. Returning to Gravesend through Milton, which has grown to be part of the town, we refreshed at the house at which we had arranged to pass the night, and then started again for a walk along the seaweed-strewn margin of the river, in the direction of "those long reaches below Gravesend, between Kent and Essex, where the river is broad and solitary, where the waterside inhabitants are few, and where lone public-houses are scattered here and there," in search of the scene of Magwitch's fatal encounter with the Thames police.

Threading the lane in which the Custom-house stands, we passed the fort which at that point commands the river and the flat expanse of Gravesend Marsh, crossed the canal which connects, or used to connect, the Thames with the Medway, and continued our walk along the side of the river, which, as Pip observed, "turned and turned, while everything else seemed stranded and still." Pip's description of the scene came forcibly to my mind as we followed the winding shore by the fast-fading

twilight, with the blue-gray river and the level marshes before us, stretching away to the Medway and the sea.

“For now the last of the fleet of ships was round the last low point we had headed, and the last green barge, straw-laden, with a brown sail, had followed; and some ballast-lighters, shaped like a child’s first rude imitation of a boat, lay low in mud; and a little squat shoal lighthouse on open piles stood crippled in the mud on stilts and crutches; and slimy stakes stuck out of the mud, and slimy stones stuck out of the mud, and red land-marks and tide-marks stuck out of the mud, and an old landing-stage and an old roofless building slipped into the mud, and all about us was stagnation and mud.”

We seemed to be traversing a region which had, long years before, been wrecked and submerged by an inundation, so slimy was every remnant of man’s work, so ruinous and decayed every black structure, so melancholy the ripple of the tide upon strips of shingle, and the rustle of the half-dry seaweed that clung to

mouldering piles and slimy masses of chalk. Not a human being was in sight ; not a sound of human life was heard, save our own voices and our own footfalls upon the uneven path.

Presently a dark shapeless mass on the right, which we had sighted some time before, resolved itself into a black and ruinous mill. Many years must have passed since grist was taken to that tumble-down old building, which looked like a part of those seeming vestiges of a flood-wrecked world which we had passed before. The sails were broken, there were large openings in the boarded sides, the interior showed only decaying and cobwebbed joists.

Just beyond this wreck stood a public-house, with the sign of The Ship and Lobster swinging before it, and a light, the only one visible all around us, shining from one of the lower windows. This we decided must be the house at which Pip and the escaped convict passed the night preceding the frustration by the Thames police of the latter's attempt to get away from the country in a passing

steamer bound for Hamburg. "When I awoke," says Pip, "the wind had risen, and the sign of the house (The Ship) was creaking and banging about, with noises that startled me."

The curate and I lighted our pipes at this house, and, having ascertained that there was a footpath across the marshes, if we could only find it in the obscurity that was now gathering over land and water, and, having found it, keep the track, and not walk into the canal, we began to retrace our steps. A sharp look-out enabled us to find the track through the marshy pastures and the little wooden bridge over the canal, and by the time we reached the by-road from Chalk to Higham, the moon had risen, and the planet's silvery light reconciled my companions to my proposition that we should turn up the narrow sandy lane leading to Chalk Church, instead of going direct towards the village.

This was one of Dickens's favourite walks from Gad's Hill, commencing at the lane leading to Higham, turning off to the left

at that village, and following the by-road to Chalk which we had just crossed, and returning by the highway. A short walk brought us to the ivy-mantled church, which stands about a mile from the village, as I have observed that a large proportion of the village churches in Kent do. It is of great antiquity, and moss-grown gravestones several centuries old may be found in the churchyard. Over the entrance are several grotesque figures carved in stone, one of which represents an old monk sitting cross-legged, holding a drinking vessel which may be supposed to contain some fluid more exhilarating than water. Dickens was much interested in this old fellow, and is said never to have passed the church without greeting the quaint figure with a friendly nod and a jocular remark.

There was light enough to enable us to discern this figure, and to note the ancient and moss-grown gravestones, half sunken in the earth, and in some instances almost concealed by the luxuriant herbage. There are some fields between the churchyard and the

high-road, and, having skirted these by the sandy lane, we turned to the right, and with pleasant talk of Dickens and his works beguiling the way, passed through Chalk^r and Milton into Gravesend.

CHAPTER II.

Gad's Hill—Traditions of the spot, Shakespearian and other—Gad's Hill Place—Cooling, and its Dickensian associations—Successors of Falstaff and Bardolph—Nixon's ride—Tramps and vagrants—View from Frindsbury Hill—Originally contemplated scene of *Bleak House*.

OUR eyes opened next morning upon another bright day, and as, though the distance from Gravesend to Rochester, the pre-determined goal of our second day's pilgrimage, is only seven miles, there was much to be seen in that ancient city, we lost no more time before resuming our journey than was necessary to the satisfactory disposal of an excellent breakfast.

Passing through Chalk once more, and turning to look at the little ivy-clad church when we had got a mile farther, we ascended

a gentle rise, with occasional glimpses of the Thames on our left, and a charming panorama of woodland scenery on our right. Gad's Hill,* now as intimately associated with the name of Dickens as with that of Shakespeare, was reached in about an hour, and those associations were held to justify a halt. The sign of The Sir John Falstaff, swinging before a wayside hostelry, was as suggestive of Shakespeare as was the comfortable-looking

* "Near the twenty-seventh stone from London is Gad's Hill, supposed to have been the scene of the robbery mentioned by Shakespeare in the play of *Henry IV.*; there being also reason to think that it was Sir John Falstaff of comic memory who, under the name of Oldcastle, inhabited Cooling Castle, of which the ruins are in the neighbourhood. At a small distance to the left appears on an eminence The Hermitage, the seat of Sir Francis Head, and close to the road, on a small ascent, a neat building lately erected by Mr. Day."—*History of Rochester*, 1772. On the Hermitage estate there are now two houses, called The Great Hermitage and The Little Hermitage, the former of which was the residence of Perry, of the *Morning Chronicle*, in the palmy days of that journal. The "neat building lately erected by Mr. Day" was at one time supposed to be Gad's Hill Place, but that supposition has since been found erroneous.

red-brick house, called Gad's Hill Place, of Dickens.

Gad's Hill Place, which has been made familiar to the reading world by the woodcuts in Mr. Forster's biography of the novelist, is a plain, old-fashioned, red-brick house of two stories, with a wooden porch and a bell-turret on the roof. It was built in 1780 by a well-known character in this neighbourhood, an illiterate fellow named Stevens, who had been a hostler, and having had the good fortune to marry his employer's widow, became a brewer, made a fortune, and was elected mayor—or, as he wrote it, "mare"—of Rochester. At his death it was bought by a gentleman named Lynn, and leased to a sporting clergyman of the Regency days named Townshend, who was succeeded in its occupancy by another clergyman, the Rev. Joseph Hindle, then and still rector of Higham, in which parish the house is situated.

Dickens bought the house towards the close of 1856, and obtained possession in the following March, becoming, as he wrote to

Mr. Forster, "the Kentish freeholder on his native heath," a description which, while it evinced the exuberance of feeling which he experienced on becoming the owner of a house on which he had long had a longing eye, was not quite accurate, as, though he had been brought up at Chatham, he was a native of Portsmouth. His first act of proprietorship was to hang upon the wall of the landing the following framed inscription, illuminated by Owen Jones :

THIS HOUSE,

GAD'S HILL PLACE,

Stands on the summit of Shakespeare's Gad's Hill, ever memorable for its association with Sir John Falstaff in his noble fancy.

"But, my lads, my lads, to-morrow morning, by four o'clock, early at Gad's Hill! There are pilgrims going to Canterbury with rich offerings, and traders riding to London with fat purses: I have vizards for you all; you have horses for yourselves."

Dickens made considerable additions and improvements, both to the house and grounds. There was a shrubbery, of which two noble

cedars were conspicuous ornaments, but the high-road divided it from the grounds surrounding the house, and it was desolate and neglected. Dickens had a tunnel made to connect it with the front lawn, and erected in its leafy seclusion the Swiss *châlet* presented to him by Mr. Fechter. "I have put five mirrors in the *châlet*, where I write," he wrote to an American friend; "and they reflect and refract, in all kinds of ways, the leaves that are quivering at the windows, and fields of waving corn, and the sail-dotted river. My room is up among the branches of the trees, and the birds and the butterflies fly in and out, and the green branches shoot in at the open windows, and lights and shadows of clouds come and go with the rest of the company. The scent of flowers, and indeed of everything which is growing for miles and miles, is most delicious."*

When the old bridge at Rochester was demolished, the contractors presented the novelist

* Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens*.

with one of the balusters, which he set up on the back lawn, and on the top of which he placed a sun-dial. Many interesting memorials were dispersed at his death, but the house remains, and, after nine years' occupation by his son, has lately passed into the possession of Captain Austin Budden, of the 12th Kent Artillery Volunteers.

Dickens's love of long walks through the lanes, and the fields, and the woods was a trait of his character with which his biographer has made all appreciative readers familiar. Note has been made in the preceding chapter of his rambles to Shorne, and Cobham, and Chalk, and these were among his most favourite walks; but many were also the lunches and dinners of which he partook, when friends were staying at the Place, in the cherry-orchards and hop-gardens of this beautiful county, and the excursions made to more distant spots, among which was Blue Bell Hill, near Aylesford, and in the immediate neighbourhood of the remarkable Druidical monument called Kit's-Coty-House.

One of his longest pedestrian rambles, only made in the autumn when the stubble could be crossed, commenced at the lane leading to Higham, in which stands the blacksmith's forge from which the *feu de joie* was fired, equally to his surprise and gratification, on the occasion of his younger daughter's marriage with Mr. Charles Allston Collins, brother of Mr. Wilkie Collins. From Higham he would tramp across the fields to Cooling, a village in the marshes, which Mr. Forster has made the unaccountable mistake of supposing to be on the opposite side of the Medway. There are the ruins of an old castle there, and, as the dreary churchyard and the adjacent marshes are the scenes of some of the most striking incidents in the story of *Great Expectations*, I was wishful to follow in the novelist's track ; but time forbade, and the wish remained, and remains, ungratified.

It is in the churchyard of Cooling that the story just mentioned opens, the first chapter introducing Pip to the reader as, when a boy, he sat there alone—"a bleak place overgrown

with nettles"—contemplating by the fading twilight the graves of departed members of his family, and "the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dykes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it," and "the low leaden line beyond," which marked where the river ran. Then the escaped convict, Magwitch, appears on the scene, and with fearful threats coerces the frightened boy into procuring for him a file from the workshop of his brother-in-law, Joe Gargery, with which to remove his fetters. The man and the boy part, to meet again at various turns of the story; and then we have a description of the prospect across the marshes which brings the scene as vividly before the mind's eye as if we saw it in a picture.

"The marshes," Pip tells us, "were just a long black horizontal line then, as I stopped to look after him; and the river was just another horizontal line, not nearly so broad, nor yet so black; and the sky was just a row of long angry red lines and dense black lines

intermixed. On the edge of the river I could faintly make out the only two black things in all the prospect that seemed to be standing upright; one of these was the beacon by which the sailors steered,—like an unhooped cask upon a pole,—an ugly thing when you were near it; the other, a gibbet, with some chains hanging from it, which had once held a pirate.”

A visit to Cooling having been, reluctantly on my part at least, voted impracticable, we trudged on towards Strood, recalling as we went all the old stories about Gad’s Hill that we had ever heard or read. The road which we were travelling formerly ran between thick woods, the haunt of the robbers whose frequent depredations procured it the ill-repute which it probably had in Shakespeare’s time, and which it is known to have had for a century afterwards. John Clavell, in his *Recantation of an Ill-led Life*, published in 1634, mentions—

Gad’s Hill, and those
Red tops of mountains where good people lose
Their ill-kept purses.

In 1656, the Danish ambassador was robbed on Gad's Hill, and on the following day received a letter from the marauders, in which they informed him that "ye same necessitie that enfore't ye Tartars to breake ye wall of China compelled us to wait on yr excellencie at Gad's Hill." Later Falstaffs and Bardolphs these, for the letter indicates plainly that they had received an education which in those days only "men of quality" could attain.

Twenty years later, a highwayman named Nicks or Nixon is said to have robbed a traveller on this part of the road at four o'clock in the morning, and ridden the same day to York, where, at a quarter to eight in the evening, he was playing bowls, as was afterwards deposed on his trial for the robbery. This story exceeds in its demands upon the elasticity of our power of belief the similar story which has been told of the highwayman Turpin, who is said to have performed the feat of riding from London to York between the close of the afternoon of a summer day and eight o'clock on the following morning.

Both performances must be regarded as apocryphal, however much the spirited narrative of Mr. Harrison Ainsworth, aided by the false glamour which he has thrown around his hero, may interest us. Such a task as covering nearly two hundred miles in sixteen hours (and in the case of the Kentish highwayman it would have been two hundred and twenty-six) is beyond the powers of any horse that ever was foaled. When the possibility of the feat was re-discussed on the occasion of the equestrian task accomplished by Lieutenant Zubovitz in riding from Vienna to Paris in less than fifteen days, Mr. Harrison Ainsworth replied to those who questioned the possibility of the feat attributed to Turpin, that Osbaldiston was of a different opinion, and that "the Squire" was a good judge of such matters. But though that famous equestrian rode two hundred miles at Newmarket in ten hours and three-quarters, he was not limited to any number of horses, and used no fewer than twenty-eight in the accomplishment of his task. So also, when in 1759 a gentleman

named Shafto rode fifty miles in less than two hours, the horse was changed ten times; and when, two years afterwards, he made a bet that he would find a man who should ride one hundred miles upon each of twenty-nine consecutive days, it being stipulated that the rider was not to have more than one horse upon each day, John Woodcock, by whom the arduous undertaking was accomplished, used fourteen horses. The course selected was from Hare Park to the Ditch at Newmarket, and thence across the Flat to the end of the Cambridgeshire Course, and back to Hare Park; and it was marked out along its whole length with posts and lamps.

Very different were the conditions under which Nixon and Turpin are said to have performed their equestrian exploits. The roads were not so good in the seventeenth century as they are now; and Turpin had not the advantage of lamps along the course of his nocturnal ride as John Woodcock had, and the moon would have been of little service to him where the road was overhung

by trees. The strongest point of contrast is, however, that both the traditions concerning Nixon and the story of Turpin's ride represent the distance as being ridden upon one horse. It happens that a similar feat was attempted in 1773 by two gentlemen named Walker and Hay, who, having a dispute over their wine concerning the merits of their respective horses, agreed to decide it by riding from London to York. Walker's horse dropped, utterly exhausted, six miles from Tadcaster; but Captain Mulcaster, who rode Hay's mare, reached Ouse Bridge, at York, and won the wager. The time, however, was forty hours and a half, instead of sixteen, and the winner of the wager did not perform Turpin's feats of leaping over donkey-carts and turnpike-gates by way of interlude.

From this digression let us return to the pilgrims on the dusty road to Rochester. Dickens has, in his paper on tramps, described "a piece of Kentish road," which I think may be recognised in a section of the road

which we were now travelling. "I have my eye," he says, "upon a piece of Kentish road bordered on either side by a wood, and having on one hand, between the road-dust and the trees, a skirting patch of grass. Wild flowers grow in abundance, and it lies high and airy, with a distant river stealing steadily away to the ocean, like a man's life. To gain the milestone here, which the moss, primroses, violets, blue-bells, and wild roses would soon render illegible, but for peering travellers putting them aside with their sticks, you must come up a steep hill, come which way you may. So, all the tramps with carts or caravans—the gipsy tramp, the show tramp, the cheap Jack—find it impossible to resist the temptations of the place; and they all turn the horse loose when they come to it, and boil the pot. Bless the place, I love the ashes of the vagabond fires that have scorched its grass!"

On that strip of grass, blackened here and there with the ashes thus apostrophised, the novelist may have seen, and not improbably

talked with, the originals of Dr. Marigold and Chops the dwarf, and the pink-eyed albino lady, and Codlin and Short, and many more of the characters that figure in his stories. There ran through the whole of his kindly nature a strong vein of sympathy with all strollers of this class, which reveals itself in many passages of his works, and in none more plainly than in the appeal of Sleary, the lispng circus proprietor, to Mr. Gradgrind: "People mutht be amuthed. They can't alwayth be a-learning, nor they can't alwayth be a-working; they an't made for it. You *mutht* have uth. Do the withe thing and the kind thing too, and make the bethht of uth; not the wutht."

But for another class of tramps, which is numerously represented all through the summer upon this road, and upon all the main roads of the county, indeed, and of which there are many casual notices in *David Copperfield* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, he had no sympathy whatever. Of such is the ruffianly tinker who beats his

wife and robs David Copperfield of his handkerchief. It may be that some of these vagrants work occasionally, in a desultory manner, and by way of relieving the monotony of mendicancy,—in the hay-fields in June, in the cherry-orchards in July, in the corn-fields in August, in the hop-gardens in September; but their favourite occupation is begging, for which purpose they assume the character of unfortunate artisans or labourers in quest of employment, and in the greatest distress. They have invariably either eaten nothing since yesterday, or sold their waistcoat to buy a bit of bread for their breakfast.

Twenty years ago, I met on this road, while walking from Gravesend to Rochester, a brace of rascals, who, asking my pardon for arresting my progress, told such a doleful tale of destitution and distress—journeymen tailors they called themselves, and assured me they had never begged before, but were driven to it by hunger, not having yet broken their fast,—that I bestowed sixpence upon them, and they went their way, invoking the bless-

ing of Heaven upon me for my charity. Returning to Gravesend a few hours afterwards, I saw the same men sitting at a table before *The Sir John Falstaff*, with long pipes in their mouths, and a quart of ale before them, which one of them lifted on recognising me, calling in an impudent manner as I passed, "Will you drink, old man?" And at Gravesend I learned that these men lived during the summer by tramping backward and forward between that town and Strood, telling to unwary travellers the story they had told to me.

The gipsy tramp, whose tent and little tilted cart was formerly so constantly present a feature on the wastes of Kent and Surrey, is now an almost extinct variety of the nomad tribes who perambulate the roads of the south-eastern counties during the summer. The tent and the cart may still be seen on commons and in green lanes, but the owners will generally be found to be indigenous vagabonds, wandering from place to place, and obtaining a livelihood as hawkers

or tinkers, and not veritable gipsies. The last specimens of the Romany tribe who came under my observation were two young women whom I saw, three or four years ago, tramping over Thames Ditton Common ; and I have not seen any considerable assemblage of gipsies since the days of my youth, when, upon one occasion, I smoked a pipe with a party numbering between twenty and thirty persons, being the only "house-dweller" present.

At that time I heard many stories of the gipsy Lees and Coopers, much of my early life having been passed in what was then the hamlet of Norwood, and a very favourite resort of these nomads, but has long been absorbed into the southern suburbs of the metropolis. The two Lees, father and son, who were hanged at Horsemonger Lane, on conviction of a petty robbery at Hersham, notwithstanding a very general belief that they were innocent, and that the prosecutrix was mistaken as to their identity with the offenders, were well, and not unfavourably, known to many respectable members of a

generation which has passed away. An old inhabitant of the village of Streatham told me forty years ago, that he and Adam Lee, the elder of those unfortunate men, had often played the fiddle together at balls given by farmers and others in that neighbourhood; and "familiar in their mouths as household words" with that generation were the stories of the gallon measure of gold which Adam Lee was said to have given to his daughter on her wedding-day, and of the guineas and seven-shilling pieces which, fashioned into buttons, the old Romany wore on his coat and vest.

A story very characteristic of the gipsy race used to be told, longer ago than I can remember, by a great-uncle of mine, a Kentish farmer, concerning Tom Lee, the younger of the two men who suffered for the Hersham robbery. One of the farmer's horses had been stolen, and, almost as a matter of course in those days, a gipsy was supposed to have been the thief. The farmer, meeting Tom Lee one day, expressed to him this suspicion, and perhaps hinted a little too broadly that Tom

was not unlikely to have been the offender. "Well, Master Sharpe," said the gipsy, "I didn't have the horse; but I know where he is, and, if you like, I'll steal him for you."

At a later period, Gipsy Stevens, a quiet well-conducted man, was a well-known figure at the Kent and Surrey fairs, at which he was a regular attendant with a drinking and dancing booth, of which his two dark-eyed daughters were not among the least attractions, though I never heard the slightest imputation upon their fair fame. Another gipsy celebrity of that day was Mother Cooper, maternally related to the pugilist of that name, and of considerable renown as a fortune-teller, in which character she was allowed the *entrée* of the Beulah Spa Gardens, a fashionable resort of forty years or more ago at Norwood, where she became a "house-dweller," and died at an advanced age, in very comfortable circumstances, as was often the good fortune of the gipsies of that generation.

From these recollections, which arise naturally from reflection upon "the ashes of the

vagabond fires " by the wayside, let us return to our pilgrims, who, telling old stories as they trudge onward, have by this time reached Frindsbury Hill. What a scene opens before us as we reach the brow of the hill, and begin to descend into the valley of the Medway! Before us, at the bottom of the hill, lies Strood, in which neighbourhood, which Mr. Forster calls "that prettiest quaintest bit of English landscape," it was the original intention of Dickens to open the story of *Bleak House*. Beyond the old houses at our feet, Rochester Bridge spans the broad river, above the rocky right bank of which rises the massive ruins of the old Norman stronghold which for ages has frowned upon the stream below; and beyond the ruins, backed by the clear blue sky, we see the towers of the yet more venerable cathedral. Such a view is to be found at few spots in England, and we feel, as we pause to gaze upon it, that it is of itself worth the pilgrimage.

CHAPTER III.

Rochester Bridge—Dickens's description of the city—
Ruins of the castle—Cathedral sketches in *Edwin Drood*—Interior of the cathedral—Watts's monument—Tablet in memory of Dickens—Gundulph's Tower—Legend of a buried treasure and a phantom hand—Old gate-house of the Close—Minor Canon Corner—The Nuns' House—The Poor Travellers' House.

WE thought of David Copperfield, "coming over the bridge at Rochester, footsore and tired," on that journey to Dover which was destined to have so strong an influence upon his future life, as we trudged over the handsome iron bridge which has succeeded the old stone structure of former days; and, as we paused upon it midway to look up the river, we thought of Mr. Pickwick too, and I

conjured up before my mental vision the figure of that estimable gentleman, his beaming countenance, his spectacles, and his amplitude of vest, "leaning over the balustrade of the bridge, contemplating nature, and waiting for his breakfast.

"On the left of the spectator lay the ruined wall, broken in many places, and in some overhanging the narrow beach in rude and heavy masses. Huge knots of seaweed hung upon jagged and pointed stones, trembling in every breath of wind; and the green ivy clung mournfully around the dark and ruined battlements. Behind it rose the ancient castle, its towers roofless, and its massive walls crumbling away, but telling as proudly of its own might and strength as when, seven hundred years ago, it rang with the clash of arms, or resounded with the noise of feasting and revelry. On either side the banks of the Medway, covered with cornfields and pastures, with here and there a windmill, or a distant church, stretched away as far as the eye could see, presenting a rich and varied landscape,

rendered more beautiful by the changing shadows which passed swiftly across it, as thin and half-formed clouds skimmed away in the light of the morning sun. The river, reflecting the clear blue of the sky, glistened and sparkled as it flowed noiselessly on ; and the oars of the fishermen dipped into the water with a clear and liquid sound, as the heavy but picturesque boats glided slowly down the stream."

Just as Mr. Pickwick saw it then, we saw it now ; and the reflection occurred spontaneously that Dickens must often have leaned over the bridge as we were doing, and gazed upon the castle ruins and the sunlit stream which they were then overshadowing. Mr. Forster relates that he met him here on his return from Broadstairs at the end of September, 1841, and that they passed the day and night here ; and we find them here again, with the novelist's wife and Miss Hogarth, and Maclise and Jerrold, four years later, when they visited the castle and Watts's almshouse, and went over the fortifications of

Chatham, having their quarters at The Bull Inn. At a later period of his life, during his residence at Gad's Hill, Dickens often walked into Rochester, turning out of the High Street through the Vines, one of the old houses in which locality, called Restoration House, served him as a model for his picture of the gloom and desolation of Satis House, in *Great Expectations*; thence to Chatham lines, round to Fort Pitt, and across the bridge again.

Our great novelist knew this city intimately, therefore, and the fruits of his knowledge of it are found, not only in the story just named, and in the work by which he first made his mark on the records of English literature, but riper and more abundant in the last production of his genius, which was unfinished when he was suddenly snatched from life, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, in which, though the many graphic sketches of local scenery are readily recognisable by any person who knows Rochester, its identity is thinly veiled under the name of Cloisterham.

“An ancient city, Cloisterham, and no meet

dwelling-place for anyone with hankerings after the noisy world. A monotonous, silent city, deriving an earthy flavour throughout from its cathedral crypt. . . . A drowsy city, Cloisterham, whose inhabitants seem to suppose, with an inconsistency more strange than rare, that all its changes lie behind it, and that there are no more to come. A queer moral to derive from antiquity, yet older than any traceable antiquity. So silent are the streets of Cloisterham (though prone to echo on the smallest provocation), that of a summer day the sun-blinds of the shops scarce dare to flap in the south wind; while the sun-browned tramps who pass along and stare quicken their limp a little, that they may the sooner get beyond the confines of its oppressive respectability. This is a feat not difficult of achievement, seeing that the streets of Cloisterham city are little more than one narrow street, by which you get into and get out of it; the rest being mostly disappointing yards with pumps in them, and no thoroughfare,—exception made of the cathedral close,

and a paved Quaker settlement, in colour and general conformation very like a Quaker bonnet, up in a shady corner.

“In a word, a city of another and a bygone time is Cloisterham, with its hoarse cathedral bell, its hoarse rooks hovering about the cathedral tower, its hoarser and less distinct rooks in the stalls far beneath. Fragments of old wall, saints’ chapel, chapter-house, convent, and monastery, have got incongruously or obstructively built into many of its houses and gardens, much as kindred jumbled notions have become incorporated into many of its citizens’ minds. All things in it are of the past.”

Turning to the right, we ascended the steep path leading to the ruins of the old castle, looking up at its massive walls and towers, and recalling to our minds the events of which it had been the scene,—how it was three times taken and retaken in the troublous times of the tyrant John, and how it was unsuccessfully besieged by Simon de Montfort, in the days when the barons were the champions

of freedom, as yet undreamed of by the trader and the artisan, and by that famous Kentish man, the Dartford tiler, in that later time when crude ideas of liberty were beginning to ferment in the minds of the serfs.

From the castle we soon turned, however, to the venerable edifice on our right, which still connects the past with the present, and which Dickens has so intimately associated with the mystery which he wove around the fate of Edwin Drood, and which the non-completion of the story left unsolved. Standing under the Norman archway of the cathedral, the curate contemplating its characteristic zigzag mouldings, the dim light within reminded me of the simile of Mr. Grewgious, that it was like looking down the throat of old Time. It was earlier in the day, and earlier in the year, than when Grewgious went to meet Jasper, the chief chorister, whom we cannot help suspecting of being the murderer of Edwin Drood; but there was no difficulty in realising the scene before us as it was beheld by him on that occasion, when—

“Old Time heaved a mouldy sigh from tomb, and arch, and vault; and gloomy shadows began to deepen in the corners; and damps began to rise from green patches of stone; and jewels, cast upon the pavement of the nave from the stained glass by the declining sun, began to perish. Within the grill-gate of the chancel, up the steps surmounted loomingly by the fast darkening organ, white robes could be dimly seen, and a feeble voice, rising and falling in a cracked monotonous mutter, could at intervals be faintly heard. In the free outer air, the river, the green pastures, and the brown arable lands, the teeming hills and dales, were reddened by the sunset; while the distant little windows in windmills and farm homesteads shone, patches of bright molten gold.”

We entered the cathedral, and looked around upon the massive columns, the rounded arches, the stained glass windows, the oaken stalls, the sculptured tombs of bishops and abbots, the memorial brasses of barons and knights, of the olden time. But the objects

which chiefly attracted my attention were the quaint monument of the founder of Watts's charity, which forms a prominent feature of the wall of the south-western transept, and the brass tablet beneath it, which bears the following inscription :

CHARLES DICKENS,

BORN AT PORTSMOUTH THE SEVENTH OF FEBRUARY, 1812.

DIED AT GAD'S HILL PLACE, THE NINTH OF JUNE, 1870.

Buried in Westminster Abbey.

TO CONNECT HIS MEMORY
WITH THE SCENES IN WHICH HIS EARLIEST AND LATEST YEARS
WERE PASSED,
AND WITH THE ASSOCIATIONS OF ROCHESTER CATHEDRAL
AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD,
WHICH EXTENDED OVER ALL HIS LIFE,

This Tablet,

WITH THE SANCTION OF THE DEAN AND CHAPTER,
IS PLACED BY HIS EXECUTORS.

As we stood in the nave, looking up at the low-arched galleries and the sculptured corbels of the roof, I thought of that "unaccountable expedition," as Dickens himself calls it, of Jasper, the opium-smoking chorister, and

Durdles, the sottish mason, which seems to have some unexplained connection with the unsolved mystery of Edwin Drood's disappearance. Drood and Neville arrive separately at the chorister's house in the cathedral close, but of the time and manner of their leaving it we are told nothing, except by the mouth of Jasper, who declares that his nephew and Neville, rival aspirants to the affections of Rosa Bud, left his house together, and that of Neville, who deposes that they afterwards walked along the river, above the bridge, and then parted. Drood is not seen again, but Neville finds his watch and chain on the weir.

It is on this night that Jasper and Durdles, in fulfilment of a previously expressed desire of the former, ascend the winding stairs which lead to the summit of the great tower of the cathedral. As they toil up the stairs, "turning and turning, and lowering their heads to avoid the stairs above, or the rough stone pivot around which they twist," Durdles makes such frequent applications to Jasper's brandy-flask,

from which the chorister is evidently disposed to allow him to imbibe as much as he pleases, that by the time they have got down again he is helplessly intoxicated. He lies down, sleeps heavily for a couple of hours, and awakes at daybreak to find himself shivering with cold and Jasper pacing the stone pavement by his side. In the manner of the chorister's occupation during these two hours seems to be the solution of the mystery.

The great tower, which rises on the north side of the choir, is named after Bishop Gundulph, who, in the eleventh century, built or rebuilt the nave. The ascent and the view from the summit, as seen by Jasper by moonlight, are thus described by Dickens :

“ Their way lies through strange places. Twice or thrice they emerge into level low-arched galleries, whence they look down into the moonlit nave ; and where Durdles, waving his lantern, shows the dim angels' heads upon the corbels of the roof, seeming to watch their progress. Anon they turn into narrower and steeper staircases, and the night air begins to

blow upon them, and the chirp of a startled jackdaw or frightened rook precedes the heavy beating of wings in a confined space, and the beating down of dust and straws upon their heads. At last, leaving their light behind a stair—for it blows fresh up here—they look down on Cloisterham, fair to see in the moonlight: its ruined habitations and sanctuaries of the dead at the tower's base; its moss-softened red-tiled roofs and red-brick houses of the living clustered beyond; its river winding down from the mist on the horizon, as though that were its source, and already heaving with the restless knowledge of its approach towards the sea."

"Is there not some legend connected with this tower?" I inquired of a verger.

The man looked at me steadfastly for a moment, then down at the pavement, and up at the roof, before he replied, as if he were questioning his memory as to whether he had ever heard of any such legend.

"Well, yes, sir," he at length replied. "There is some mention in histories, I believe,

of something that was supposed to be seen in the tower in the old times.”

“A ghost?” said the curate.

“Not exactly,” replied the verger. “Unless there could be such a thing as the ghost of a hand; for I think the story this gentleman alludes to was about a hand that was supposed to guard a hidden treasure.”

“An illuminated hand, was it not?” said I.

“Something of that sort, sir,” replied the verger. “I don’t suppose there ever was such a thing, or the treasure either; but the story was, now I think of it, that the hand used to be seen in the tower on St. Mark’s Eve, and that many attempts were made to discover the treasure, which it was supposed the hand would point out to any person who could succeed in extinguishing the light.”

“Was it ever discovered?” inquired one of my companions.

“No, sir,” replied the verger, smiling languidly as he shook his head. “Nobody could ever blow out the light.”

Passing from the cathedral into the shady and sequestered close, where Rosa Bud walked with Edwin Drood, we were reminded of Dickensian pictures at every step, from every point of view. The sun was high in the unclouded sky, and there were no puddles on the uneven pavement; but the Virginia creeper was turning red upon the cathedral wall, and a few yellow leaves had fallen from the old elms. It was easy, therefore, to imagine the picture as described by Dickens at a later period of the year.

“The low sun is fiery and yet cold behind the monastery ruin, and the Virginia creeper on the cathedral wall has showered half its deep red leaves down on the pavement. There has been rain this afternoon, and a wintry shudder goes among the little pools on the cracked uneven flagstones, and through the giant elms as they shed a gust of tears. Their fallen leaves lie strewn thickly about.”

There was Minor Canon Corner—Minor Canon Row is, I believe, the right name of the place—where the Reverend Septimus

Crisparkle lived : “ a quiet place in the shadow of the cathedral, which the cawing of the rooks, the echoing footsteps of rare passers, the sound of the cathedral bell, or the roll of the cathedral organ, seemed to render more quiet than absolute silence.” There, too, was the old ivy-covered stone gate-house crossing the close, with an archway beneath it for the passage of the few persons who go that way, which the novelist made the abode of John Jasper, the opium-smoker of Bluegate Fields, the sweet-voiced chorister of Cloisterham Cathedral, the uncle of Edwin Drood, and the passionate admirer of Rosa Bud. Dickens describes it as seen on an autumn evening, when :

“ Through its latticed window, a fire shines out upon the fast-darkening scene, involving in shadow the pendent masses of ivy and creeper covering the building’s front. As the deep cathedral bell strikes the hour, a ripple of wind goes through these at their distance, like a ripple of the solemn sound that hums through tomb and tower, broken

niche and defaced statue, in the pile close at hand."

We failed to discover, or perhaps to identify, the Nuns' House, where John Jasper taught music and Rosa Bud was a charming and particularly petted pupil, and which Dickens describes as "a venerable brick edifice, whose present appellation is doubtless derived from the legend of its conventual uses," standing "in the midst of Cloisterham." Passing The Bull Inn, the quarters of the Pickwickians, when they came down from London by the Rochester coach half a century ago to ruralise in pleasant Kent, as well as of Dickens, Jerrold, Forster, Maclise, and others, when they came to see the old castle and the older cathedral some years later, we went on to the celebrated almshouse, of which the novelist has given such a graphic description in one of the Christmas numbers of his periodical, and which was founded in the fifteenth century by Richard Watts, whose quaint monument we had seen in the southwestern transept of the cathedral, "for six

poor travellers who, not being rogues or proctors, may receive gratis for one night lodging and entertainment and fourpence each." *

* Like those of many old charities, the revenues of the Poor Travellers' House have far outgrown the requirements of the founder's purpose, amounting at the present time to between three and four thousand pounds per annum. This increase induced the trustees, about a quarter of a century ago, to submit to the Court of Chancery a scheme for the erection and endowment of an almshouse for ten men and ten women, and for empowering the trustees to contribute four thousand pounds towards the erection of a general hospital for the benefit of the city and neighbourhood, and an annual donation of one thousand pounds towards its support. The scheme received the sanction of the Court, and was carried out by the erection of a handsome block of almshouses, in the Tudor style of architecture, on the Maidstone road, at a cost of nearly ten thousand pounds, with two magnificent gateways, which cost seven hundred pounds more. The hospital portion of the scheme was part of a plan for the reconstitution of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, originally founded by Bishop Gundulph, in 1078, for the benefit of lepers returning from the crusades, but which had been many years in abeyance. A handsome general hospital was erected on the New Road, and opened in 1863, and is maintained partly from the revenues of Bishop Gundulph's endowment, and partly from the annual donation from the funds of Watts's charity, aided by voluntary subscriptions.

The question of our eligibility for the benefits of the charity was jocularly raised by the curate, and an application to the master might perhaps have been defensible on the plea urged by Breslaw, the conjuror, who, having announced, while performing at Canterbury, that he would give the proceeds of the last night's performance to the poor, divided the money among his musicians and assistants, who, as he told the mayor, were as poor as anyone in the city. The curate's proposition was not entertained, however, and we turned back into the High Street to dine, and take a parting look at the ancient city, which we then saw glowing in the sunlight, as Dickens has described it in those last pages of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, which he wrote in the Swiss *châlet* at Gad's Hill Place the day before he died.

“A brilliant sun shines on the old city. Its antiquities and ruins are surpassingly beautiful, with the lusty ivy gleaming in the sun, and the rich trees waving in the balmy air. Changes of glorious light from moving

boughs, songs of birds, scents from gardens, woods, and fields,—or, rather, from the one great garden of the whole cultivated island in its yielding time,—penetrate into the cathedral, subdue its earthy odour, and preach the Resurrection and the Life. The cold stone tombs of centuries ago grow warm; and flecks of brightness dart into the sternest marble corners of the building, fluttering there like wings.” .

Those were the last lines the hand and pen of the great novelist ever traced, and the deep interest which the knowledge imparted to the description when I first perused it was revived as we took our last look at Rochester, before trudging into Chatham.

CHAPTER IV.

Pickwickian description of Chatham—Shop where David Copperfield sold his jacket—Localities associated with Dickens's childhood—Chatham originals of Dickensian characters—Opening scene of the legend of Sir Robert Shurland and his horse—The knight's monument in Minster Church.

WHEN the Pickwickians had their head-quarters at The Bull Inn, High Street, Rochester, their immortal leader entered in his diary a few brief remarks upon Strood, Rochester, and Chatham, which evince his close observation of everything which came under his notice in the course of his travels. "The principal productions of these towns," he wrote, "appear to be soldiers, sailors, Jews, chalk, shrimps, officers, and dockyard men. The commodities chiefly exposed for sale in the

public streets are marine stores, hardbake, apples, flat-fish, and oysters." These characteristics are especially observable in walking through the streets of Chatham, of which we did considerable on that September afternoon and evening, in our search for localities associated with the early years of Dickens; and Mr. Pickwick might have added to them, that the most numerous shops in all parts of that town are gin-shops, beer-shops, rag-shops, and second-hand furniture shops.

In one street which we traversed every third house was devoted to the sale of intoxicating liquors, and we had no difficulty in finding the shop where poor little David Copperfield sold his jacket, on the morning after he trudged, weary and footsore, into Chatham,—“which, in that night’s aspect, was a mere dream of chalk and drawbridges, and mastless ships in a muddy river, roofed like Noah’s arks,”—and slept “upon a sort of grass-grown battery, overhanging a lane, where a sentry was walking to and fro.”

Our first inquiries were directed to the

discovery of St. Mary's Place, otherwise The Brook, by which name the place is now generally known and designated. Here, in a small, plaster-fronted, unpretentious-looking house, with a small garden before it, Dickens passed five years of his childhood, his parents exchanging Chatham for the metropolis when he was in his tenth year, when, as Mr. Forster says, "the Kentish woods and fields, Cobham park and hall, Rochester cathedral and castle, and all their wonderful romance, including the red-cheeked baby he had been wildly in love with, were to vanish like a dream." But only for a time. The world knows now how fondly he cherished the memory of the scenes amid which his early years were passed, how often he visited them in after life, and how, in his manhood's prime, he returned to end his days among them, becoming "a Kentish freeholder" on what he had learned to regard as his "native heath."

From The Brook we strolled to Rome Lane, a portion of which still remains; but the house in which the future novelist and his sister

Fanny attended a preparatory school had disappeared, having long before been pulled down for standing in the way of the Chatham and Dover railway. Clover Lane, now improved into Clover Street, was the next place visited; but there also the demolisher had been at work, and the play-ground of Dickens's second school, to which he was transferred in his eighth year, had become a portion of the site of Chatham station. This was the school kept in those days by the Rev. William Giles, minister of the Baptist chapel in St. Mary's Place, of whom Dickens retained "a not ungrateful sense in after years that this first of his masters, in his little-cared-for childhood, had pronounced him to be a boy of capacity; and when, about halfway through the publication of *Pickwick*, his old teacher sent him a silver snuff-box, with an admiring inscription to 'the inimitable Boz,' it reminded him of praise far more precious obtained by him at his first year's examination in the Clover Lane academy, when his recitation of a piece out of the *Humourists' Miscellany*, about Dr. Bolus,

had received, unless his youthful vanity bewildered him, a double encore." *

In Chatham he found the originals of several of the characters who live deathlessly in his novels. The half-starved little drudge of the Bevis Marks household, whom Dick Swiveller, in the grandiloquent style proper to the Perpetual Chairman of the Glorious Apollos, calls the Marchioness, was suggested by a girl who was taken from Chatham workhouse, when the Dickens family removed to London, to perform the menial service of their new home. Gaffer Hexam, who plies the ghastly trade of fishing corpses out of the Thames, and his son, the selfish brother of the loving and brave Lizzie Hexam—where did Dickens find her, I wonder?—had their originals in a dockyard labourer and his son whom Dickens mentions, in a letter which has been given to the world by Mr. Forster, as “the uneducated father in fustian and the educated boy in spectacles whom Leech and I saw in Chatham.”

* Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens*.

Our search for brick-and-mortar mementoes of the novelist's early years having been attended with some amount of disappointment, and there being yet some available daylight, we found our way to the river, and strolled along its marshy banks in the direction of Brompton. There, as we turned towards the broad stream, which makes a very acute angle at the extreme point of our view southward, we saw the towers of Rochester castle and cathedral change from red to gray in the fading twilight, and, looking northward, the extensive marshes between the estuaries of the Medway and the Thames growing more dim and indistinct as we gazed.

On such a spot as that whereon we stood was washed ashore, one day towards the close of the thirteenth century, the corpse of that drowned mariner whose finding and burial formed the first link in the remarkable chain of sensational incidents comprised in the legendary story of Sir Robert Shurland and his horse. According to the version of the legend which I followed, in repeating it to

my companions as we strolled towards our quarters, the drowned sailor was cast ashore at Chatham, and interred in the burial-ground of a little church dedicated to St. Bridget, of which, however, no trace can be found at the present day. Its red bricks and Kentish ragstone cannot, therefore, be pointed out as mute evidences of the verity of the story, as Gaffer Hexam pointed to The Jolly Fellowship Porters as proof of his statement that Rogue Riderhood had confessed to him that he had murdered John Harmon.

It would seem, at first sight, that there could have been no connection, by way of cause and effect, between the burial of a drowned mariner at Chatham and the death of the knight of Shurland, in the Isle of Sheppey, some years afterwards. But, according to the legend, St. Bridget, resenting the interment of the corpse in the burial-ground of a church dedicated to her saintship, on the ground of the sailor having died without receiving priestly absolution from his sins, appeared to the clerk, and commanded him to disinter it, and throw

it into the river. The saintly order was obeyed, and the ghastly and unwholesome "subject" drifted down the river with the tide.

For several days the horrible thing was carried backward and forward, every flood and ebb, between Sheerness and Gillingham Reach; but at length a strong breeze from the north-west wafted it round the point and caused it to be washed ashore near the village of Minster, on the foreshore of the extensive domain of Sir Robert Shurland. On the unwholesome presence of the grim waif becoming known to the knight, he gave directions for its burial in the parish churchyard; but the story of its rejection by St. Bidy had reached Minster, and the priest refused compliance with the knight's order. Sir Robert insisted, ordered a couple of his serfs to dig a grave in the churchyard and lower the corpse into it, and went himself to see that the order was obeyed. The grave and the corpse were there, but not the priest. Irritated by his absence, for knights were not accustomed in those days

to have their orders disobeyed, whether lawful or not, he sent for the priest, who presently stood beside the grave.

“Now do thine office,” said the knight, with an ominous frown, “or, by the Holy Rood——!”

He said no more, but completed the sentence with a gesture which left no doubt as to what the priest might expect if he continued obdurate. He again refused to offer a single prayer, and the knight, becoming purple with passion, lifted his right foot and bestowed upon him a kick that precipitated him headlong into the grave. According to one version of the story his neck was broken by the fall; another has it that he was buried alive. Be this as it may, the grave was hastily filled up, and Sir Robert Shurland returned to his castle.

Why St. Bridget should have troubled her saintly head further about the matter is not very clear: perhaps she felt that the interment of the corpse at Minster was a reflection upon herself; but feminine reasons lie too deep for

discovery. The legend tells us only what her saintship did, namely, that she complained to St. Augustine, who presented her grievance before the abbot of his monastery at Canterbury, the still existing magnificent gateway of which closes the vista of St. Paul's Street. Then the abbot called upon the sheriff of Kent to set the law in motion against the sacrilegious knight of Shurland, and the sheriff summoned the *posse comitatus*, and, presenting himself before the gates of Shurland Castle, commanded Sir Robert to surrender and be hanged. The knight ordered the drawbridge to be raised and the portcullis to be dropped, and bade the sheriff "go and be hanged" himself. The representative of the law made a futile effort to vindicate its outraged majesty ; but hammering at the gate had no other effect than to irritate the lord of the castle, who at length, finding that the noise disturbed his afternoon nap, sallied out at the head of a dozen of his retainers, and laid about him with such hearty good-will with his two-handed sword that the sheriff and his followers soon took to

flight, and left him to the enjoyment of his *siesta*.

Some time afterwards, having learned that the Abbot of St. Augustine's had written to the Pope (Boniface VIII.), and that the papal legate in London had demanded that justice should be done upon the sacrilegious knight of Shurland, threatening excommunication in default, Sir Robert seems to have become uneasy in his mind as to the possible consequences. The appearance of the royal barge off the coast, with the king on board, brought the matter to a crisis. The knight mounted his horse, and rode down to the beach, where, instead of dismounting and calling for a boat, he rode into the sea and forced his horse to swim to the royal barge, which is said to have been anchored two miles from the shore. Perhaps he thought that the feat would win him the favour of the king; perhaps it was only the freak of a man addicted to exploits of an uncommon character.

What he urged in palliation of his offences is not told; but he received the royal pardon,

and returned to the shore in the same manner as he had reached the ship. Then, as one version of the legend runs, he heard the croaking voice of an old woman, who gave utterance to a prophecy that his horse would some day be the cause of his death; but another version has it that, as he rode up the beach, he heard mutterings that such an exploit could only have been performed by the aid of the Evil One, who was supposed to have taken possession of the horse. Whatever he was moved by, the knight sprang from the saddle, drew his sword, and at one blow struck off the gallant steed's head.

The date of this occurrence, and the circumstances of the knight's death, are variously stated. As Philipott says, Sir Robert's tomb in Minster church has "become the scene of much falsehood and popular error, the vulgar having digged out of his vault many wild legends and romances." According to one account, the remarkable feat of equine natation was performed when Edward I. was preparing for the invasion of Scotland; and it was on

Sir Robert Shurland's return from the war that, landing on the beach with the remnant of his retainers, and coming upon the bleaching skeleton of the slain horse, he gave the skull a contemptuous kick, and in so doing wounded his foot with one of the bones. The inflammation of the wound produced mortification of the injured member, and the knight died. But, according to another version of the story, it was the French war for which preparations were then being made, and the knight's death was caused by his horse, while bearing him in the chase, stumbling at the spot where the skeleton of the horse lay, and throwing the rider from the saddle upon the skull, from which he thus received the fatal injury.

How much of this story is truth, and how much fiction, it would now be very difficult to determine. Sir Robert Shurland* was knighted by Edward I. for his gallant conduct at the

* Another brave Kentish soldier was knighted for like services at the same time, namely, Sir John Hadloe, who derived his name from the village now called Hadlow,

siege of Caerlaverock Castle ; his name survives in Shurland House, a mansion near Eastchurch, on the right of the lane leading from Minster to Warden ; his tomb is shown in Minster Church ; and there can be no doubt that the horse's head sculptured above the recumbent figure of the warrior, and which also figures in the vane which surmounts the spire of the church, commemorates some memorable circumstance of his life. But we may be permitted to be sceptical concerning those portions of the story in which St. Bridget and St. Augustine figure.

Those who would see the remarkable monument which either commemorates some such feat as tradition affirms to have been performed by Sir Robert Shurland, or (as Philipott suggests) has been the foundation upon which the legend has been built up, will find in an excursion to Minster much to interest them, irrespective of that which

near Tunbridge, and whose castle and estate at that place afterwards passed into the possession of a family named Fane.

attaches to the knight's tomb. Minster may be reached, either from Queenborough or Sheerness, by a walk of less than three-quarters of an hour; or by a walk of about two hours and a half from Rainham, at which place there is a station on the railway from Chatham to Dover.

Though it was not on the occasion of the Dickens pilgrimage that I explored some of the most interesting portions of the Isle of Sheppey, the reader will probably not object to accompany me in a ramble from the spot where the corpse of the drowned mariner was first washed ashore to the churchyard where it ultimately found burial, and the ancient church which contains the tomb of Sir Robert Shurland. Opposite Rainham church there is a lane which, passing under the railway, follows the indentations of the creeks and marshes on the right bank of the Medway. This amphibious tract extends from Gillingham to the Swale, and is intersected by numerous creeks and channels of the estuary, which, including the low islands, is more than twice

as wide here as it is where the batteries of Sheerness command its mouth.

Between two of these creeks, and about a mile and a half from Rainham, is the village of Upchurch, famous for its deposits of Roman pottery, and the ancient cemetery, on the ridge behind the marsh, to the east of Otterham Creek, in which the potters and their families were interred. These deposits extend about three miles along the marshy banks of the river, and it seems, from their extent and nature, that the field of operations was changed as the clay became exhausted, and that the broken pottery was left in heaps on the ground. After the abandonment of the works, the fields gradually became covered with alluvial soil, deposited by the tide, which afterwards scooped channels and creeks in it.

The deposits of pottery consist chiefly of fragments, but now and then a tolerably perfect specimen rewards the search, which, however, had better be left to the natives, as there is little chance of a "find" without

wading knee-deep in the mud, and exploring the banks, below the water, with a stick or a rake. The pottery is of firm and hard texture, and usually blue-black in colour ; but articles of red ware, ornamented with lines and raised dots, in a variety of patterns, have occasionally been found. Traces of the buildings occupied by the potters have been found in Halstow Marsh, especially near the church of Lower Halstow, which the rambler comes upon soon after leaving the little village of Upchurch. An embankment which has here been raised against the encroachments of the tide abounds in fragments of Roman tiles and pottery ; and many of these tiles have been worked into the lower portion of the walls of the little church, which stands upon a mound, on the borders of the marsh. Beyond this place the road skirts the marsh for a short distance, and then runs by the side of the narrow channel which divides it from Chitney Island until we approach the King's Ferry.

Though the scenery of this part of Kent does not present much variety of surface, or

abound with the objects which constitute the beauty of an English landscape at a greater distance from the sea, it has a charm—I will venture to say, a picturesqueness—peculiar to itself. The vegetation of the marshes, the birds that wing their flight over them, are of species distinct from those of inland districts; and the alternations of land and water presented by the marshes, the low green islands, and the channels between them, make a picture as different from the wooded hills far away to the right as the aquatic plants and the soberly plumaged birds of the shore and the sea are from the shrubs and plants and bright-winged warblers of the woods, or as the murmuring of the tide, as it washes against the clayey banks, and gurgles among the reeds and sedges, and the cries of the gulls and terns, are from the song of birds and the hum of insects in the woods and the green lanes. But different as are the scenes and sounds of these marshes to those of an inland district, they have their peculiar charm for the rambler, if he be, as he ought to be, a lover of nature.

The Swale was formerly the ordinary passage for vessels sailing between the Thames or Medway and ports to the southward, and, as it is still deep enough for vessels of two hundred tons, its disuse may be attributed to the increased size of the ships of the present day, rather than to any diminution of the depth of water. It is now used only by barges and small coasting vessels ; and the ferry has been superseded by the railway viaduct, which has been so constructed as to serve also for an ordinary carriage-road and footpath, while a drawbridge in the centre enables masted vessels to pass under it.

The church of Iwade is seen on the right as we approach the Swale ; and as we cross the viaduct the distant mound of Tong Castle may be discerned in the same direction. The low shore of Sheppey reached, the rambler proceeds in a north-easterly direction, parallel to the railway for a short distance, but on the right of it, and gradually diverging from it. A lane leading to the village of Minster turns to the right, where the road to dull Queenborough

and dirty Sheerness bears to the left ; and, as our sense of smell begins to take cognisance of the saline odour of the North Sea, we enter the village and look about us for the remains of the old monastery.

Of Shurland Castle no trace can now be found, but of the abbey there remain the gate-house and the church, under the south entrance of which the distinguishing characteristics of a Norman arch are discoverable. Entering the church, we find the tomb of Sir Robert Shurland beneath a pointed arch on the south side of the chancel, with the sculptured figure of a knight—represented in the chain-mail of the thirteenth century—reclining upon it, with the hands clasped on the breast, the legs crossed (showing that he had fought against the Moslems), and his shield and banner beneath him. The sculptured head of a horse—do not forget to look for this—projects from the wall at the back of the recess in which the tomb stands, just above the recumbent figure of the knight ; and it will be observed that it seems to be emerging

from stony waves, as if in the act of swimming.

Philipott thinks it probable that the horse's head was added to the monument because the manor of Shurland had attached to it, among other privileges, a grant of the wrecks on the coast of Sheppey within its limits, which grant was "esteemed to reach as far into the water as at low tide a man can ride in and touch anything with the point of a lance." But this explanation is somewhat far-fetched; and, though incredulity as to the knight's ride through the waves may be natural, neither of the generally received versions of the story (the supernatural features excepted) are in other respects unfeasible.

Leaving the village of Minster, we proceed towards the beach, from which the brown alluvial cliffs rise to a height varying from eighty to a hundred feet. Under the combined operations of the waves, the brick-makers, and the searchers for the fossils and the nodules of pyrites embedded in the clay, they are rapidly diminishing; and, though time has shown

great exaggeration in the estimate of Sir Charles Lyell, in 1834—that, calculating by the rate of destruction during the previous twenty years, the whole of the island would be washed over by the tide in another half-century—the face of the cliff has receded considerably to the south.

On the occasion of my visit to this part of the coast, I had scarcely set my foot on the beach when the roughness, exceeding even that of the shingle of Dover and Deal, drew my attention from the pea-green sea to the stones at my feet, and the remarkable appearance of one of them prompted me to pick it up. It was the petrified fruit of an extinct palm, similar to several species now abundant in the tropical regions of the far East. Another and another arrested my gaze as I walked on; I could not step without setting my foot on some water-worn remnant of the organic life of a former period which the waves had washed out of the cliff.

As the beach of this portion of the island is a favourite hunting-ground of geologists, and

is besides under a constant process of exploration by a rather numerous tribe of local collectors, who gather fossils for sale to the curious in such things, it is only by exceptional good fortune that the rambler can pick up a prime specimen among the wave-worn pebbles. Fossil fruits, fragments of the carapaces of tortoises and turtles, vertebræ of crocodiles and serpents, teeth of large sharks, may be discovered ; but if rarer relics of the antediluvian world are desired, and cannot be found upon the beach, recourse must be had to the aforesaid collectors, most of whom live in the cottages about Scapsgate, in the lane leading from Minster to The Royal Oak, near Hensbrook, and at Warden Point. From these men may be obtained at moderate prices bones of an extinct vulture, carapaces and plastrons of the tortoise, and skulls of an extinct species of fish.

My ramble under the brown cliffs of this rich fossil-yielding shore was made at low water ; and the inexperienced explorer will do well to ascertain the state of the tide before

setting out, or he may be caught by it, and shut in between two projecting points, with the rising sea on one side of him, and the crumbling and precipitous cliff on the other. It has been my fortune to be twice caught in this manner on the Kentish coast, one of which adventures will be told in another chapter. The little hamlet of Hensbrook is situated above a picturesque opening in the cliffs between Minster and Warden. The ramble between these villages may be made either along the beach (the state of the tide permitting) or by the road, the distance being about the same. Warden is situated just above the little promontory named after it, and in the midst of evidences of the continual encroachment of the sea upon the land. Twenty years ago, an extensive landslip carried away a large portion of the church-yard, and the east end of the church is now on the verge of the cliff, and the entire edifice is threatened with destruction.

Beyond Warden Point the coast trends to the south-east, and the cliffs gradually become

lower, and at length sink to the low and marshy shore bordering the Muscle Bank. The Rambler is advised, therefore, if he has reached the point by the beach, to return by the road; or, in the alternative case, and if he does not wish to return to Sheerness or Queenborough, to turn from the road at the lane which skirts the western side of Shurland Park, and return to the viaduct over the Swale by the by-road which crosses Bramble Down.

CHAPTER V.

A legend of Gundulph's Tower—The old house at the foot of Rochester Bridge—The miser's tenants in Five Bells Lane—The bowyer's son and the miser's daughter—The hostler at The Golden Cross—Trespassers in the cathedral—The Phantom Hand—What the bells of St. Margaret's rang for.

SIR ROBERT SHURLAND and his' horse have kept me away from Chatham long enough, and I must now return to our pilgrims' quarters. I lay awake some time that night, thinking of the phantom hand and the hidden treasure in Gundulph's Tower, and imagining a variety of incidents which might have arisen, in the olden time, out of the search for the supernaturally guarded gold. The thoughts that came and went as I lay in that strange room, sometimes with my eyes closed, some-

times watching the changeful lights and shadows produced by the passing of light clouds over the moon, crystallised just before I fell asleep into something like the form given to them in the following tale.

THE PHANTOM HAND.

Bishop Gundulph, in whose time the nave and tower of Rochester Cathedral were erected, had been in his grave four hundred years, and the era was younger by as long a period than it is now, when there lived in that city, in a crazy old wooden house, at the foot of the bridge, an old man named Roger Rainham. In that old house Roger had lived many years, the only other occupant, since the death of his wife, which had occurred a long time before the period at which he is introduced to the reader, being his only child, a maiden over whose head twenty summers had passed at that same epoch, leaving their roses and lilies reflected upon her fair face, their blue skies in her eyes, and the sheen of their suns upon her golden hair.

Roger had no definite occupation. He owned some shops in the High Street, and a score of cottages in the lanes and yards adjacent, where the harshness he displayed in collecting the rents from the poor tenants made him a particularly unwelcome visitor. Widow Joyner, who lived in one of his poor tumble-down houses in Five Bells Lane, used to say that his beetle brows cast a shadow over the street whenever he entered it. He was known, too, to lend money to the needy at high rates of interest; and, as he took good care to have good security for the repayment of the principal, he had the repute of being as wealthy as he was known to be avaricious.

On the evening on which this story opens—a fine evening in April—the old miser might have been seen protruding his head from the door, and, with his thin hand shading his eyes from the level rays of the westering sun, looking across the bridge and up the street. Muttering inarticulately, owing to a sound which he emitted when

displeased, and which can be compared with no other in nature except the subdued growl of a carnivorous beast, he closed the door, and returned to his seat by a barred window.

“I won’t have it!” he growled, striking the oaken table with a stout ash stick. “She shall marry the miller, or she shan’t have a penny of my money. I will leave it all to St. Bartholomew’s Hospital rather than it shall be squandered by a young fellow who, having nothing of his own, doesn’t know the pleasure of possessing money.”

His soliloquy was interrupted by the quiet lifting of the latch, and the entrance of as lovely a specimen of the feminine moiety of humanity as could have been found in Rochester—ay, or in Chatham and Strood besides.

“So you have got back at last!” said Roger, with a distrustful glance at the young beauty.

“Have I been long?” she returned, as she set down a basket which she had been carrying, and removed her hat.

“Long!” growled the miser. “You have been loitering, you jade! You have been talking to that young popinjay, Hubert, the bowyer’s son.”

“Indeed I have not loitered, father,” returned his daughter. “And with Hubert I only exchanged a ‘fair evening’ as I passed his father’s shop.”

“I warrant me your eyes said a good deal more than ‘fair evening,’ minx,” said Roger. “But I won’t have it! Mind me, Mildred, I won’t have it! Why, he has not a bit of bread of his own to give to a beggar.”

“Will riches without love bring happiness, father?” Mildred inquired, raising her azure eyes to the miser’s sordid countenance.

“Love! Bah!” returned the old man with a gesture of contempt. “When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out at the window.”

“I can never love the miller,” said his daughter with a sigh.

“And you shall never have a penny of mine if you don’t,” exclaimed Roger, striking the table with his stick, as if to give weight to

his words. "Mind that, Mildred. Not a penny. Why, Gaffer Gillingham has the best mill within a dozen miles, and some goodly pasture-land, with fat beeves grazing on it; and he has saved money, Mildred—think of that, girl—money that will buy everything that heart can desire."

"It cannot buy love, father," rejoined Mildred.

"Love!" ejaculated the miser, stamping on the bare floor with his stick. "How the girl talks! I haven't patience to listen to her. Look you, Mildred, you will be the wife of Gaffer Gillingham in a month from now. Mark that! Now go to your room, and don't let me see your face again until you can show a more dutiful and becoming spirit."

Mildred obeyed, and on the following day did not leave her chamber, the window of which looked upon the pleasant path beneath the castle wall. Hubert, the bowyer's son, walking that way in the evening, heard the casement opened very quietly, and, glancing upward, beheld Mildred's tearful countenance.

“Hush!” she whispered, touching her lips with her finger. “You must not speak to me. I am to be the wife of Gaffer Gillingham within a month. Oh, what is to be done?”

“Gaffer Gillingham!” exclaimed Hubert, his handsome countenance reddening with indignation. “Why, he is almost as old as your father, and doesn’t bear a much better—I mean, he doesn’t bear a very good character.”

“But he is rich,” said Mildred, with a touch of bitterness in her tone and manner, “and gold, in my father’s estimation, makes amends for everything else that may be deficient.”

“Such a sacrifice must not—shall not be!” exclaimed Hubert, with clenched hands and flashing eyes.

“And who will prevent it, young man?” demanded Roger Rainham, creeping round the corner, from the concealment of which he had been listening to the lovers’ conversation. “Who will prevent it, I say?” he repeated, shaking his ash stick at the young bowyer.

“I will!” replied Hubert, confronting him with a stern and indignant glance.

“You! you impudent varlet! you beggar!” exclaimed the enraged miser, menacing him with his stick.

“Look you here, Master Rainham,” said Hubert. “You are Mildred’s father, and an old man, and I bear from you what I would not brook from any other man, my own father excepted; but I am a honest man, and no beggar, and, if you touch me with that stick, by all the saints in the calendar, I will pitch you into the river.”

The ash stick was slowly lowered, and the miser turned away, first raising his eyes to the casement, which had been closed during his brief altercation with the young bowyer.

Hubert stood motionless for a moment, and then hastened after the old man, whom he overtook as he was about to enter the house.

“Master Rainham,” said he, subduing his indignation by a strong effort, “if I, in a week’s time, can show you as much money as the miller can put down, will you give Mildred to me?”

“You show as much money as Gaffer

Gillingham !” said the miser, regarding him with mingled wonder and contempt. “ You ? Why, who are you going to rob ? ”

“ No more of that,” exclaimed Hubert, cheek and brow reddening again, “ or you will make ground-bait for the fishes yet ! Will you promise ? ”

“ Oh yes ! ” returned Roger Rainham, in a jeering tone. “ When you can show as much money as Gaffer Gillingham can, you shall have her.”

He entered as he spoke, and closed the door. Before he reached his accustomed seat by the barred window, however, he paused, and leaned upon his stick, suddenly becoming thoughtful.

“ What can his impudence mean, I wonder ? ” he muttered. “ As much money as the miller ! Why, where is he to get it ? Can he be going to rob somebody ? It would be a good thing, now, to find out his game, to make him hand over a part of the plunder, and then to hang him and marry the girl to the miller.”

Every word of the last sentence was

uttered very deliberately, as if each was a stone of the edifice of guilt the erection of which he was contemplating.

Hubert was walking slowly towards the cathedral, looking as thoughtful as the man from whom he had just parted. He was revolving in his mind a bold enterprise, born of desperation, and as yet shadowy and undefined. A stroll in the precincts of the venerable temple would, he thought, enable him to give it form and substance. Two or three monks were walking in the cloisters of the monastery, but their presence seemed to give nothing of life to the gloom that pervaded the sacred precincts, so sombre and silent were they; and even the rooks cawed drowsily, and the flapping of their wings was scarcely heard. There was nothing to distract his mind from the idea which was there being elaborated.

He walked there for about a quarter of an hour, and then passed under the arched portal of the precinct, and returned to his father's house, over the door of which a couple

of arrows crossed upon a target served for a sign. In that quarter of an hour he had resolved upon an enterprise which he trusted would enable him to claim the fulfilment of the miser's promise, and to win the miser's fair daughter for his wife.

On the following night, just as the deep-toned bell of the cathedral boomed eleven, Roger Rainham alighted from a sorry-looking steed, which had carried him to the distant homestead of a farmer, whom he had been dunning for arrears of interest, and delivered the animal to the hostler of The Golden Cross.

"You have ridden him pretty hard, Master Rainham," said the man, as he noted the steaming and mud-splashed flanks and legs of the animal.

"Hard!" rejoined the miser. "Ay, it was hard work to get him along, or I should have been home before this."

"You could have had a better beast, master," said the hostler, as he led the horse towards the stable.

“Ay, but the charge!” returned Roger, who, as the man and horse disappeared under the arched gateway of the inn yard, glanced upward at the darkening sky, which seemed to presage a storm, and proceeded towards the bridge as fast as he was able to walk, muttering: “Does the varlèt suppose that I am made of money?”

The long narrow street was silent and deserted, and from one end to the other not a light was visible. He had not gone far, however, before he discerned through the gloom two persons who were walking slowly in the same direction, but somewhat in advance of him.

“Hold up, Stephen!” said a voice which he recognised as that of Hubert Bowyer. “You will soon be at home now.”

“Don’t leave me till I am safe home, there’s a good young fellow!” rejoined the bowyer’s companion, in the thick accents of inebriation.

“That is the sacristan’s voice,” muttered the miser. “It is not in keeping with the

character of an official of the cathedral to be drunk, and it is a late hour for that young blade to be out. I will see the end of this."

Just keeping them in sight, he followed them until they disappeared within the sacristan's abode, and then ensconced himself in a doorway to watch and wait.

Hubert closed the door, groped his way to the chimney-nook, and deposited his helpless companion upon a settle. Then he struck a light with flint and steel, lighted a small brass lamp which stood upon an oaken table, and sat down upon the settle beside the drunken sacristan, who blinked at the light like an owl.

"Are the keys safe, good fellow?" the latter asked, fumbling at his girdle. "Great 'sponsibility, you know, office of sac'stan."

"All right, Stephen," said Hubert, making the keys rattle for the sacristan's satisfaction.

"Loosen my girdle, good fellow," said the drunken man. "I am as full as an egg, and as tight as a drum."

Hubert more than complied with the request, adroitly unbuckling the sacristan's belt, and slipping off the ring to which the cathedral keys were attached.

“Let me help you to your bed, or you will be falling on the hearth,” he then said ; and the sacristan staggering to his feet, with a scarcely articulate “good fellow !” he supported him to his truckle bed, upon which the drunken man seemed to fall asleep almost immediately.

Hubert then extinguished the lamp, and went out, with the keys in his possession.

Silence and darkness reigned around the cathedral, silence as unbroken, darkness as profound, as in the long columned aisles and low-arched galleries within. Hubert paused and listened as he approached the nearest door, for he had thought more than once that he heard footsteps in his rear ; but the sounds ceased, as they had ceased before, when he stood still, and he concluded, therefore, that they were the echoes of his own.

He paused and listened again as he stood within the deep-set doorway, and strained his

eyes into the gloom ; but all was still, and no living thing met his searching gaze. Then he inserted a key into the lock, and the heavy door swung open. He stepped into the darkness, which seemed to swallow him up, and closed the door.

A feeling of awe crept over him as he groped his way into the nave, and saw the white figures of bishops and abbots, barons and knights, dimly and indistinctly revealed between the gray columns, looking like the ghosts of the men whose bones rested below. But he shook it off, and advanced towards the north side of the chancel, his eyes gradually becoming used to the obscurity. He had provided himself with a candle-end and the means of procuring a light, but he feared to use them where the gleam of a light might be observed through the windows by a watchman or some belated traveller.

After groping about for some time he discovered a door, and, by trying one key after another, he succeeded in opening it. A rush of cold air came forth, and the darkness

beyond was so pitchy that for a moment he hesitated to proceed. It was the Eve of St. Mark, and on that night, according to a tradition to which everybody in Rochester gave implicit credence, supernatural appearances might be seen in the great tower which Bishop Gundulph had erected in the eleventh century.

“It is for Mildred,” he murmured, nerving himself for the enterprise with that name. “For her I would face all the host of hell.”

As he was about to step into the darkness he heard, or thought he heard, a sound as of a heavy door swinging slowly on its hinges; and, after pausing a moment to listen, he turned and retraced his steps to the door by which he had entered. It was closed, as he had left it, and not a sound could be heard to indicate the presence of a lurker without or within.

“It must have been fancy,” he murmured, as he hurried back to the door in the north wall of the chancel, which he passed without a moment’s hesitation, stretching out his hands

to avoid stumbling over the stone stairs which lead to the galleries and the summit of the great tower.

Almost at the same moment he became aware of a faint light from above him flickering upon the stairs and wall; and, raising his eyes, not without experiencing a momentary thrill of awe, he observed a strange sight—a human hand, suspended in the air, with the fingers extended upward, and emitting a faint luminosity, resembling that of the glow-worm.

As he paused for a moment, gazing at the startling spectacle with widely dilated eyes, and one foot on the lowest step, the phantom hand began to ascend slowly, seeming to float before him as the thistle-down is wafted on the summer air.

Ascending two or three steps so hastily that he struck his shin against one of them, he summoned to his aid the courage of which no small share had descended to him, through several generations, from an ancestor who had fought against the conquering host of Norman William at Swanscomb Wood, and blew at

the luminous hand as he had blown not long before at the sacristan's lamp.

The light wavered, but was not extinguished, and the hand continued to float slowly up the stairs.

Let us now return to Roger Rainham, whom we left ensconced in a doorway, watching the sacristan's lodge.

He had scarcely posted himself there when a light flickered for a moment within the lodge, and then shone steadily through the red curtains at the window, showing that a lamp had been lighted. Presently the shadow of a man was thrown upon the curtain, and in a few moments the young bowyer issued from the lodge, and walked quickly towards the cathedral.

The miser left his concealment a moment afterwards, and followed him, keeping close to the ivied wall, lest he should be observed if Hubert caught the sound of his stealthy footsteps, and looked back.

“So sacrilege is his game!” the old man muttered, as he saw Hubert pause at a door of

the cathedral. "He has filched the keys, and is after the sacramental plate."

This conclusion was so satisfactory to his debased and sordid mind that he did not immediately determine to ascertain whether the plunder of the sacristy was really the young bowyer's purpose in entering the cathedral. But when he had walked a few yards in the direction of his own house, he resolved to obtain proof of the crime which he supposed Hubert to meditate, and turned towards the cathedral again.

Hubert had disappeared, but he had no doubt that he was in the cathedral; and on making a stealthy attempt to open the door, he found that it was unfastened, and that the way was open to him.

Stealing into the dark interior, he closed the door, but not so silently that the sound did not reach the ears of the nocturnal trespasser who had preceded him. He heard the footsteps of Hubert returning, and concealed himself behind a column until he had retraced his steps towards the chancel.

Then he followed in the young man's track with the stealthy tread of a night-prowling animal of the feline kind. On reaching the door through which Hubert had disappeared, and finding it open, he paused in wonder, and his thoughts took a new direction.

“This must be the door leading to Gundulph's Tower,” he said to himself. “And this, now I think of it, is St. Mark's Eve, when the phantom hand is seen. They say there is a great treasure concealed somewhere in the tower. Can this fellow have discovered it, or has his love-madness goaded him on to seek for it?”

For some moments he hesitated to proceed farther, being held back by the fear of phantoms and goblins as strongly as he was urged forward by the hope of profiting by Hubert's discovery of the hidden treasure. Curiosity and avarice at length prevailed over fear, and he began to ascend the stairs.

Groping his way upward as noiselessly as he could, he presently heard Hubert's echoing footsteps before him, and when he had ascended

to a height which he guessed to be level with the galleries he discerned a flickering light which a dark figure was eagerly pursuing. The apparition awed him for the moment, though he could not see distinctly what it was ; but reflecting that there could be no danger which would not first be encountered by Hubert, he continued to ascend.

Up the winding stairs, now narrower and more steep, the phantom hand floated like the goblin fire of swampy woods, or the corpse-candle of Welsh churchyards, flickering in the draught which came down the stairs, and in the strong expirations from the lips of the young bowyer, but never becoming extinguished. So absorbed was Hubert in the pursuit, which became more exciting as the harsh cries and flapping wings of startled rooks and daws warned him that he was near the summit of the tower, that he did not hear the miser's footsteps following his own.

His last effort to extinguish the phosphorescent light that encircled and wavered about the phantom hand, was made when his right

foot was on the topmost stair, and the mysterious appearance seemed to be about to mount into the air. A despairing cry burst from his lips as he witnessed its failure, and at the same instant lightning flashed from the black cloud that hung over the cathedral, and, as it momentarily illumined battlement and stair, he heard what seemed the echo of his cry from the stairs below, followed by the sound of a heavy body falling against the wall.

The flash was succeeded by pitchy darkness and the rumbling of the thunder along the black concave above. The phantom hand had disappeared. Hubert stood motionless for some moments, and then, imagining that its disappearance might be a sign that the flagstones on the summit of the tower concealed the hidden treasure, he struck a light, lighted his candle, and, with feelings alternating between hope and despair, examined the stones around him.

Not a trace of any removal could he find, and he was unprovided with tools for a further prosecution of the search. He had not

abandoned it, however, when he was startled by a groan from the stairs below.

Starting to his feet, with cold perspiration distilling from every pore, he held his light above the stairs, listening intently for a repetition of the sound that had startled him. Some dark object was lying upon the stairs below, at a point where they wound round their supporting column.

“Can I have been followed?” he asked himself, as he looked down, lowering the light and holding it forward.

Then he descended, and found upon the stairs an old man whose coarse features he recognised as those of Roger Rainham. The face of the miser was deathly pale, blood was trickling from a ghastly wound upon the head, and no sign of life could be detected. The grovelling spirit had departed with the groan which had attracted Hubert's attention to him.

The conviction that the old man was beyond mortal aid was succeeded in Hubert's mind by the serious and perplexing question, How was he to act? Should he call up the

head-borough, and tell him that there was a man lying dead in the cathedral? Or should he leave the corpse where it was, and say nothing about the matter? If he adopted the first course, he would be called upon to account for his own presence in the cathedral, and perhaps be accused of having murdered the old man. If there had been any life left in Roger Rainham, humanity would have prompted that course, and Hubert would not in that case have been the man to listen to the suggestions of selfishness; but he saw no reason why he should imperil his own life to enable Roger's corpse to be removed before it stiffened.

So he descended into the chancel, left the door at the foot of the tower open, with the key in the lock, and quitted the cathedral, closing the outer door, but leaving it unlocked.

Great was the excitement in Rochester next morning when the news spread through the city that the keys of the cathedral had been stolen, and the corpse of Roger Rainham, with the skull fractured, found on the stairs of Gundulph's Tower. As all the ecclesiastical

plate was found safe in the sacristy, and the miser was shown by the evidence of the hostler at The Golden Cross to have been abroad at a very late hour, and to have been going towards the cathedral at the same time that the sacristan was staggering homeward from The Bull's Head, it was surmised that the deceased had robbed the drunken man of the keys, entered the cathedral with the intent of searching for the traditionary hidden treasure, and fallen down the stairs in Gundulph's Tower, a fractured skull being the result.

Of course the pretty Mildred did not become the wife of Gaffer Gillingham. She was sole heiress of all the miser's possessions, and she conferred them, with her hand, upon Hubert Bowyer, to whom all her heart had long been given. The bells of St. Margaret's never rung a merrier peal than on the day they were married, and their future lives passed so happily that Hubert often remarked that he possessed a greater treasure in his wife than he could possibly have discovered in Gundulph's Tower.

CHAPTER VI.

Dingley Dell—The Pickwickians' journey to Manor Farm—A halt at Rainham—Hop-gardens on the road to Canterbury—Going a-hopping—A hop-picker's experiences of Kent and Bermuda—The convict's story.

“WHERE is Dingley Dell?”

This question was asked by the curate as the pilgrims stepped into the street at six o'clock on the following morning, and turned towards Chatham Hill.

“Somewhere in this neighbourhood,” said I, not having a very clear recollection of the data given by Dickens for the discovery of that interesting locality. “On, or probably off, one of the by-roads between this and the high-road from Canterbury to Maidstone, I fancy.”

“Two miles from Muggleton,” observed the curate with a smile.

“Which is not to be found on the map or in any gazetteer,” I rejoined. “It belongs to the same category of towns as Eatanswill.”

“Dickens may have had towns in his mind which he disguised under those names,” observed our white-cravatted companion.

“Possibly,” said I. “But he has not given us the means of identifying it, which he so amply provided in the case of Cloisterham.”

This curious topographical problem could not be solved then, however, as neither of us had preserved in the cells of memory the precise data of the Pickwickians' eventful journey to Dingley Dell, and their subsequent visit to Muggleton. So we reserved it for future study, when such light could be thrown upon it as might be afforded by the novelist's amusing record of the journey, aided by a good map of Kent.

The result of the investigation may be given at once, however, while the pilgrims

are tramping over Chatham Hill, and along the highway beyond, with the green pastures bordering the estuary of the Medway on their left, and the distant woods of Boxley and Malling on their right.

Dingley Dell, according to the information given to the Pickwickians by the waiter at The Bull Inn, must be looked for on the circumference of a circle drawn on a map of Kent at the distance of fifteen miles from Rochester. On the main road from that city to Canterbury, that distance is reached at Judd's Hill, about a mile west of the finger-post at the road leading to Faversham. But Dingley Dell was on a cross-road, and was reached from Muggleton, two miles distant, "through shady lanes and sequestered foot-paths." Faversham is the only town within two miles of the curve drawn from Judd's Hill to Otterden, Staplehurst, and Paddock Wood; and it must be obvious that the Pickwickians would not have travelled from Rochester to Dingley Dell by by-ways if the place had been only two miles from Favers-

ham, which is only one mile from the high-road.

If we extend the radius to the country west of the Medway, it will pass through Tunbridge and Sevenoaks; but we are precluded from that extension of the area to be examined by the consideration that the Pickwickians did not cross the Medway. They appear to have turned off the high-road as soon as they were out of Rochester, and the Medway can have been crossed only at Aylesford, a place which excursions to Blue Bell Hill and Kit's-Coty-House had made Dickens acquainted with, but which he cannot have intended the reader to suppose was passed through by the Pickwickians on their way to Manor Farm. The distance from Rochester to Aylesford is six miles, and the bridge over the Medway is a stone structure; while the only bridge mentioned in the narrative of the journey is the wooden bridge near which the carriage broke down, and which must have been less than four miles from Rochester. It was an hour's walk from

that spot to the "little road-side public-house with two elm trees, a horse-trough, and a sign-post in front," at which Mr. Pickwick was informed that the distance thence to Dingley Dell was more than seven miles.

Dingley Dell, if it is to be found at all, must be sought, therefore, east of the Medway, between the two lines of railway, and west of a curved line drawn from Judd's Hill to Paddock Wood, through Otterden and Staplehurst; and in that portion of Kent, though there may be many spots the seclusion and picturesqueness of which might suggest such a name as Dingley Dell, there is no town to correspond to Muggleton. All the localities mentioned by Dickens in his narrative of the Pickwickians' journey and their sojourns at Manor Farm must be regarded, therefore, as being equally with Mr. Wardle and the fat-boy the creations of his fancy.

The village of Rainham, which we reached about eight o'clock, straggles along both sides of the high-road, with the church on the right, the lofty tower of which makes it a conspicuous

object in the rural scene. We had by this time acquired by exercise a formidable appetite, and a beef-steak, procured from a little butcher's shop on the right-hand side of the village street, and cooked very fairly at a decent little inn a few doors farther on, with a quart of our host's excellent ale, provided us with a substantial old-fashioned breakfast.

Invigorated by our repast, we started again, without any more definite arrangement for the day's journey than the understanding that we should dine whenever and wherever our stomachs reminded us that nature required farther recruitment, and that we were to sleep that night in Dover. It was one of those fine days which make September so enjoyable a season for the lover of the country, and we strode gaily onward, inhaling the pure air with as keen a zest as we had disposed of the beef-steak and our host's ale, snuffing the fragrance borne upon the light breeze from hop-gardens and apple-orchards, and discussing the merits of novels in general, and of the Dickensian contributions to that department of literature

in particular, as we trudged steadily onward, looking over a green and sweet-smelling country on either hand.

Through Newington and Bobbing, and on to Sittingbourne, through Bapchild and Green Street, over Judd's Hill, and through Ospringe and Preston, we tramped until the sun, which had been shining brilliantly all the morning, had passed the meridian, and we were beginning to think of dinner. Our way lay through a succession of scenes of rural beauty unexcelled in any part of England. Again and again we passed through a village, with gardens before the cottages, and oast-houses rising in the rear of the farm-yards—for every Kentish farmer who has a field sloping to the south grows hops—and the gray tower of the parish church crowning a hill, which was often a mile off the road. Then came hop-gardens, with the pendent clusters of hops hanging in rich profusion from the long lines of poles, and orchards where the red-streaked apples gleamed amidst the foliage, hops and apples combining to load the air with a delicate fragrance. Then

a road-side inn, with farmers' waggons and carriers' tilted carts before it; and more orchards and hop-gardens, or perhaps a wood, where the hazel-nuts and the ripe bramble-berries hung in tempting clusters, and the orange-red hips glowed upon the trailing briars.

A Kentish hop-garden, in the month of September, is one of the prettiest scenes to be witnessed in any part of the country. Above a hawthorn hedge, surmounting a mossy bank, "fringed with the feathery fern," rise the tall poles, each encircled with a luxuriant growth of large dark green leaves and trailing bunches of pale green flowers, each petal of which is charged at its base with golden dust. Up the long arcades of waving greenery comes the murmur of voices, those of women and children predominating. Presently an open gate is reached, and the wayfarer, looking in the direction whence the sounds come, sees a portion of the ground cleared, and a double line of pickers, chiefly women and children, along the margins of the standing poles, still

festooned with the green leaves and trailing clusters of hops.

If the pickers are not working at too great a distance from the road, the wayfarer will observe that they stand in two lines, facing each other, and having between them what are called, in the technology of the hop-garden, "binns," square receptacles for the picked hops, consisting of wooden uprights and cross-bars, upon which coarse canvas, called "binn-cloth," is stretched to form the sides and bottom. Men are at work near them, cutting the hop-bines close to the ground with a large curved knife, pulling up the poles, and carrying them, with the bines clinging about them, to the binns, which they are laid across at a convenient angle. When the hops have all been picked off, and dropped into the binn, the pole is thrown upon the cleared ground, where other poles lie by dozens, amidst green heaps of broken trailers of the bine, and another is quickly brought by a pole-puller.

Presently a man comes along carrying a bushel basket, followed by another with a

sack, and the farmer with a book in his hand. As they pause at each binn, the measurer lifts the hops, and drops them lightly into the basket, which he barely fills before emptying the contents into the sack. As he calls out the number of bushels, the farmer enters them in the book, opposite the name of the family or companionship working at that binn, and then the three men pass on to the next. At one o'clock the measurer calls out: "Dinner time!—three-quarters of an hour!" and then the pickers who live in the village hurry to their homes, if the distance is not too great, and those who have come from London or Maidstone sit down in the shade of the growing hops, where there is often a shabby perambulator or two, and perhaps a cradle or a clothes' basket, with a baby in it, and open their provision baskets.

Hop-picking in the south-eastern counties of England has one point of resemblance to cotton-picking in the southern states of the American Union, namely, that it requires to be begun and completed within a very limited

period of time, or the crop will be spoiled. For this reason, the local supply of labour in the hop-growing districts is never equal to the demand, and has to be largely supplemented by the employment of poor families whom the prospect of an unwonted rate of earnings tempts from their homes in the towns, and the vagrants who find the occupation a pleasant variation from mendicancy, and a tent or a barn a lodging more to their taste than the casual ward of a workhouse, or even a tramps' lodging-house.

Hence it was that we passed so many groups whose appearance indicated that they were bound to the hop-gardens—in their own phraseology, “goin’ a-hoppin’”—as plainly as that of the typical grazier did to the sharp cabman (*vide Punch*) that he was going to the cattle-show. Now it was a middle-aged man and woman, the former carrying a bundle at his back, and the latter a child in her arms, while each held an older child by the hand, the whole only a day or two out from Westminster or Whitechapel. Then a young man,

with close-cropped hair, the peak of a greasy cap over his right ear, a very foul and very short pipe between his lips, and a shawl twisted loosely about his throat; a young woman, bold-looking and blowsy, tramping by his side, and carrying a bundle. Here we passed a pale, forlorn-looking woman, trailing two young children after her; there a group of three sunburnt vagabonds, ragged and dirty, stretched upon the grass by the road-side, smoking their dirty pipes.

We had descended the farther slope of Judd's Hill, and were resting upon a felled tree which conveniently lay upon the shady side of the road, when there turned the corner of a lane, and came towards us, an athletic, sun-browned man, wearing a hard-worn velveteen jacket and fustian trousers, and seeming to have the scent of the hops in his nose, and yet showing neither the foot-sore limp of the town labourer or costermonger, nor the slouch of the habitual tramp. He had about him more of the free, bold air of the gipsy, a suspicion of relationship to which

race might have been suggested by his dark complexion.

“Have either of you gentlemen got a match about you?” he asked, as he came up, and produced a short smoke-blackened pipe from his pocket.

Neither of us was smoking, but I had about me a box of lights, which I placed at his service. He thanked me, lighted his pipe, returned the box with another “Thanks!” and stood a few moments to assure himself that his pipe was well lighted.

“You gentlemen seem to have been doing a good tramp,” he then remarked, glancing as he spoke at our dusty boots. “Did you see much hop-picking going on as you come along?”

“Picking had begun in some places,” I rejoined.

“Well, it is fine weather for it,” said he, sitting down upon the bank in our rear, which was clothed with the sweet-scented ground-ivy.

“Warm for September,” said the most

clerical-looking of our party (the one who was not a clergyman), removing his hat, and wiping the profuse perspiration from his broad and glowing forehead.

“I have been where it is much warmer in September than it is here,” observed the stranger.

“Australia?” suggested our friend.

“Bermuda,” said the stranger.

“That is about the latitude of Madeira and Algeria,” observed our friend, “and as the sugar-cane flourishes in the one, and the date-palm in the other, they must be tolerably hot.”

“Intolerably sometimes Bermuda is,” said the man in the hedge. “I had five years of it, and I know what it is. But, except for the heat, which aren’t so bad when you get used to it, I was better off there than I ever was before, or have ever been since. I didn’t work as hard as I have often had to do in this country, and I lived better, and never had to look for my living.”

“Happy state of existence!” murmured

the curate, with a smile. "But what took you to Bermuda?"

"Well, I got a free passage out, and had everything provided for me by Government," replied the stranger. "To tell you the truth, I got into trouble—the first time in my life, gentlemen, and the last; leastways, as I looks at it, for one thing rose out of another, and the beginning of it was a hare."

"A very common beginning of trouble in these parts, I am afraid," said the clerical-looking gentleman who was not a clergyman.

"Wait a bit," said the gipsy-looking wayfarer. "As I am going to rest a bit here, and I like to be sociable, I will tell you the story. It was like this, gentlemen."

He took the pipe from his mouth, and we shifted our seats upon the tree, so as to face him and listen to

THE CONVICT'S STORY.

"It is a good many years ago now, as you may suppose, for transportation beyond the seas has long been done away with. In them

days, if a man got a sentence that wasn't long enough to make it worth sending him to the penal settlements in Australia, he was sent to Bermuda, where he had to work upon the roads and the harbour, and any kind of work the Government had for him to do.

“ Well, I was standing one day at the gate of my father's cottage, when I heard the yelping of hounds in full cry, and before I could move to see where they were, a hare came through the hedge, and made for the other side of the road. I happened to have a stick in my hand, and as soon as I see the hare, without a moment's thought about it, I sent the stick flying through the air just above the ground, and knocked him right over. Hadn't I as much right to a wild animal on the highway as any other man? I thought so, anyhow; and I picked up the dead hare and carried it indoors. Presently I heard the hounds coming nearer, and in another minute they come bustling into the road, some over the hedge, some through it, and running about in all directions, yelping and snuffing the ground.

“ ‘Oh, George!’ says my mother, beginning to be frightened. ‘Throw the hare out, and let ’em think it has been killed by the hounds.’

“ ‘Why, it will make us a dinner!’ says I—‘a couple of dinners! And who has a better right to the game than the man who kills it?’

“ I had shut the door to keep the dogs out; but presently I heard other voices than theirs, and the door was opened hastily by a young swell in a scarlet coat and white cords. I knew him, and had cause for remembering him; for he gave me a cut with his whip once, when I was a youngster, for not opening a gate quick enough to please him.

“ ‘Where’s the hare?’ says he, for he saw plainly that the hounds were at fault, and some of ’em was yelping at the door, and scratching at it.

“ ‘What hare?’ says I, standing so as to prevent his seeing it.

“ ‘You know what hare well enough,’ he shouted, in a furious rage, and raising his

whip as if he was going to lay it about me.

“He thought better of that when he saw how I was looking at him ; but he pushed past me, and got into the room before I could prevent him.

“ ‘ You get out ! ’ says I, and in another minute he was on his back in the road.

“ ‘ You shall smart for this ! ’ he cried, shaking his fist at me, as he gathered himself up from the dust.

“ ‘ Wasn’t you a-trespassing ? ’ says I. ‘ Don’t you shove yourself into other people’s houses without being invited.’

“ Then I banged the door in his face, and I heard some loud talk, and a good deal of swearing, going on in the road ; and then they all went off, hounds and all. Presently comes a policeman, with a summons.

“ ‘ What is this for ? ’ says I.

“ ‘ Game case,’ says he. ‘ Illegal possession of game.’

“ So I had to go before the magistrates to answer the charge ; and the young fellow in

the scarlet coat swore that he saw the hare in the cottage.

“ ‘ Will you swear that the hare belonged to you ? ’ I asked him.

“ He didn’t answer, but looked at the chairman, and the chairman asked me where I got the hare. I told him I knocked it over on the road with a stick.

“ ‘ Six months,’ says he, and then I was walked off to a cell, and sent away to Maidstone gaol.

“ I didn’t tell you that my mother was a widow at that time, did I ? She had bad health, too, and couldn’t do much ; and when I came out I found somebody else living in the cottage, and was told she was in the union-house.

“ ‘ That’s the work of that fellow who got me the six months ! ’ says I, clenching my hands, and feeling I should like to have him before me.

“ Then I went to the farmer I used to work for, and found him at his gate. He received me kindly enough, but it was a slack

time for farm-work, and he had as many hands as he could find employment for.

“ ‘I am sorry for you, George,’ says he ; ‘but I shouldn’t be advising of you for the best if I said anything to encourage you to stay here, where every farmer is afraid of offending the gentry in the matter of the game. Take my advice, lad, and get right away from here.’

“I thought his advice was good, and, lest I should come across the young squire, and be tempted to give him a thrashing, I made my mind up to start at once. But there was one that I wanted to see first, and I turned down the lane where she lived ; but I hadn’t gone far when I met an old man who was a neighbour of her mother’s.

“ ‘Don’t go any further, lad,’ says he, with a very sorrowful look upon him. ‘I know where you be a-going, and it’s no good, George.’

“ ‘What do you mean ?’ says I.

“ ‘George,’ he answered ; ‘I be sorry for you, lad ; but you had better hear of it here

than go down yonder and see it. It is plain enough to be seen, and all the village be a-talking about it.'

"And then he told me how the girl had been seen about the lanes and fields with the young squire soon after I was sent away, and how shame and disgrace had been brought upon her; and when I left him all my blood seemed boiling up into my head.

"I walked away from the village very fast, determined never to return to it; but, unfortunately, as I was making a short cut through a wood, I saw, coming towards me, the man upon whose head I was invoking curses as, with clenched hands and set teeth, I tramped along the narrow path. For a moment I felt a savage joy at the opportunity for revenge that seemed to be thrown in my way, and I stood still, knowing that he could not pass me on the path unless I chose to let him. The next moment I was struggling hard against the temptation; and to avoid it I dashed into the wood.

"Whether he knew me I was never able

to say. He said afterwards that he did not, and that may have been the truth. The path was a public one, but the wood was part of the squire's estate, and there was a board at each end of the path warning those who used it not to trespass. Whether he knew me or not, he dashed into the wood after me; and in a few minutes we were face to face, for when I heard him crashing through the bracken and the brambles, I turned like a stag when the hounds are close upon him.

“ ‘So it is you, gaol-bird!’ says he; so he knew me then, if he didn't before. ‘What are you doing in my preserves? You are after no good, I'll be bound.’

“ ‘What have you been after, scoundrel?’ I shouted at him, and then I sprang at him, clutched him by the throat, and pitched him into the bushes.

“As he scrambled to his feet, with his face paler than before, and scarified and bleeding, I dealt him a blow with my clenched fist which knocked him down as if he had been shot. I thought I had killed him, so still he

laid amidst the bracken, and so heavily he groaned. I stood there, gazing down upon him, for a few moments, and then I returned to the path, leaving him where he fell, and walked all night, determined to get out of the county, and as far away as I could.

“But I didn’t get far. Next day, as I was eating some bread-and-cheese in a little public-house, a constable stepped in, clapped the handcuffs on me, and marched me off to the station-house. I thought I saw the black scaffold, and old Calcraft waiting; but, by the mercy of God, it was not to be so bad for me as that. The man I thought I had killed had only been knocked senseless; but that was thought enough to send me for trial at the assizes, and the judge thought it enough to make it his duty to sentence me to seven years’ transportation. That’s how I come to know Bermuda; and it was a better thing for me, mind you, than if I had had a year in Maidstone gaol, for I worked in the open air, in a beautiful climate, and was never so well off in my life as I was while I was there.”

He rose when he had finished his story, drew a long whiff from his pipe, which he had kept alight by a draw at intervals, and wishing us "good day," strode away in the direction of Sittingbourne.

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CHAPTER VII.

Canterbury pilgrims, mediæval and modern—Inn dinners in Kent and in Dorsetshire—A Boughton Boniface on agricultural depression—The story of the Bossenden Wood tragedy, as related by an eye-witness—View from Boughton Hill—Bossenden Wood.

ABOUT an hour after noon we reached the village of Boughton, where the servant of Chaucer's rich canon—the alchemist who could have paved with gold “all the road to Canterbury town” — overtook the pilgrims bound to the shrine of Thomas Becket. We, too, had our faces Canterbury-ward, and a remark upon the association of the locality with the pilgrimage described by the mediæval poet with so much quaintness and humour led to many comparisons and contrasts, more or less felicitous, as we strolled through the

village, looking for what might seem to be the most eligible hostelry.

Having made our selection, we sat down in the sanded parlour, which the curate said reminded him by its furniture and decorations of *The Leather Bottle* at Cobham, and awaited the serving of dinner with appetites sharpened by our long walk and the pure air. There are certain features of the public rooms of village inns in the south of England which are common to most of them ; the same hard chairs, the same stuffed birds in the same square cases, the same varnished engravings in the same black frames, may be found in a very large proportion of the guest parlours of hostelries of this class. In how many, as I asked the curate, should we not find that old print of "The Stopper stopped," representing a rustic going through the woods, on the eve of a fox-hunt, to close the apertures by which Reynard might run to earth, and finding himself, to his dismay, confronted with the Evil One ?

Our hostess was not long in producing a

juicy and well-cooked steak, a dish of the mealiest potatoes, and a quart of bright amber-hued ale. Praise to the Bonifaces of Kent! Just such a dinner I once had served at a moment's notice, at a little hostelry in Sandwich. Beef-steaks for breakfast at Rainham, beef-steaks for dinner at Boughton! At a little town in the south-western corner of Dorsetshire, I was once unable to procure a steak, because it was not market-day; and at the best inn in a neighbouring village I could obtain nothing but bread and cheese, the latter comestible as white and almost as hard as chalk, being presumably made of skimmed milk. What a contrast! And how loudly it proclaims the prosperity of Kent!

“Beautiful weather, gentlemen,” said our host, bringing us in some tobacco and a further supply of the amber-hued ale.

“Fine weather for the hops,” responded my clerical-looking non-clerical friend.

“Yes, sir,” responded Boniface, who was a very jolly-looking fellow. “And, if it lasts, there will be a splendid crop this year.”

“Such weather at this season ought to make glad the hearts of the farmers,” observed my companion.

“It did ought to,” rejoined our host. “But, somehow or other, the farmers never do seem satisfied, much less thankful, whatever the weather is, and however the crops are. Hop-growers especially: if the crop is light, and prices are high, as they are apt to be, they grumble because they have so few to sell; if the crop is heavy, they grumble because prices are low.”

“You think that the farmers are a discontented section of the community?” said I, anxious to gather the views of a man living in the midst of an agricultural district.

“The farmers, sir,” returned Boniface, striking a large hand sharply on the beer-stained table, “are the most discontented men on the face of the earth. Always a-grumbling: if they see a cloud they shake their heads at it, and prophesy a bad harvest; if the sun shines, they declare the crops are being scorched up. And who ought to be better off

than the Kentish farmer? The hops pay the rent, and the cows keep the pot boiling; they pay only half as much tax on their incomes as tradesmen do, and they are allowed a horse and a she'p-dog tax-free, while I can't keep a horse or a dog without paying taxes on them. Yet they grumbles! Rents is too high, taxes is too high, wages is too high; yet they pay only the market value of land and labour, the same as tradesmen, who never get any abatement of rent, however bad trade is, and they are more lightly taxed than any other class in the state."

"Rents and wages are higher in Kent than in many parts of England," I observed; "but I suppose they would not be so if the average value of the produce was not much higher."

"They ought to be higher, sir," responded our host. "Then they would have to farm better, and the country would gain by it; and if they weren't able to go galloping about the country in the hunting season in scarlet coats and white cords, why should they expect to do it? If farming is such a bad game as

they try to make us believe, why *do* they do it? and how *can* they do it?"

"A very pertinent question," I observed.

Our host was now called away, and we, having lighted our pipes—that is, the curate and myself did, our friend not favouring the consumption of the nicotian weed—stepped upon the dusty road once more, and faced the pleasant rise of Boughton Hill. Before us stretched the extensive woods formerly forming Blean Forest, with the white road winding between them, Herne Hill rising on our left, and the gray tower of a village church peeping out of them on the right.

"In those woods," said I, as we walked gently up the hill, "on the left of the road, was quenched in blood one of the most remarkable impostures of modern times; for it was there that a volley from the muskets of a military detachment from Canterbury terminated the career of John Nichol Thom."

"That was before my time," observed the curate. "Pretended to be an incarnation of the Saviour, didn't he?"

“That was towards the close of his career,” I replied. “The affray created a great sensation at the time, when gross ignorance prevailed among the labouring classes in the rural districts, and the changes then lately made in the laws for the relief of the poor had created profound discontent among them.”

“An ignorant mob, led by a madman!” said my other companion, with a sigh.

“Let us hear what this old fellow has to say about it,” said the curate, lowering his voice as we overtook a bent, gray-headed, sun-browned man, who was walking slowly in the same direction as ourselves. “I will be bound he had a finger in the pie.”

“Was is not here that the riots were some years ago?” I inquired of the old man.

“You mean when the men were killed in the wood yonder?” he rejoined, after a momentary hesitation. “When the red-coats were sent for from Canterbury, and Lieutenant Bennett was shot by Sir William Courtenay?”

“Yes.”

“Yonder’s the wood where the fighting was; there, on the left hand. If you go through the gate on the top of the hill—Courtenay’s Gate it has been called ever since—you may find the very spot, with Courtenay’s name, and the names of the men who were shot down with him, cut in the bark of the trees.”

“I suppose you knew some of them,” the curate observed.

“Them as belonged to this place, I did; but they come from all the villages round about. It was a terrible sight, sir; and I hope as I may never see such a sight agin.”

“What did you think you were going to do?” the curate asked.

“Well, sir,” said the old man, hesitating a little before he replied, “we was poor and iggorant, and we thought we couldn’t be worse off, come what might; and Sir William he told us there should be an end of it all, and all wrongs be righted, and no harm come to any of us, if we stood by him.”

A few more questions elicited from him a narrative of the exciting incidents which pre-

ceded the fatal affray in Bossenden Wood, which the reader will understand the better for first learning something of Thom's life and previous connection with the neighbourhood.

Except that he was a native of Truro, very little is known of the former until his first appearance at Canterbury in 1832, when he quartered himself at The Rose Inn, on the Parade, calling himself Sir William Courtenay, and assuming the style and title of King of Jerusalem and Knight of St. John. He was a man of singularly striking appearance, closely resembling the ideal portrait of Jesus of Nazareth, as depicted by the old masters, and affecting in his costume the flowing robes of Eastern countries. Nothing was known about his antecedents, and no information concerning them was ever volunteered by himself; but, by his manners and language, he impressed those with whom he came in contact with the idea that he was an intelligent and well-informed foreigner, possessing almost unlimited wealth.

The first general election under the Reform

Act was then impending, and, just as the sitting members were congratulating themselves on the prospect of an uncontested and inexpensive return, the oriental-looking stranger at The Rose announced himself as a candidate. In his printed addresses to the constituency, he declared himself an advocate of the abolition of tithes, the repeal of the excise duty on malt, and other changes likely to find favour with a rural community; and in one of them he indicated a claim to the noble mansion and estate of Hales Place, belonging to a family of that name, and since made famous by its introduction into the evidence in the extraordinary Tichborne trial.

His candidature was, as might have been expected, a failure; but it elevated him into a certain degree of local importance, which was probably all that he anticipated from it. His next public appearance tended, however, less to his advantage. He gave evidence at Maidstone against some men who were charged with smuggling; and, his statements being proved to be unfounded, he was prosecuted

for perjury, and committed, on the ground of insanity, to the county lunatic asylum at Barming Heath, near Maidstone. His subsequent actions tended strongly to support the view then taken of the state of his mind ; but it is difficult, in the analysis of such a character, to determine how much is due to mental aberration, and how much to inordinate self-approbation and wild ambition. However insane he may have been, he had craft enough to conceal the manifestations of a diseased intellect ; and in a few years he obtained his release, and returned to Canterbury, where he again established himself at The Rose.

The amendment of the laws relating to the relief of the poor was at that time exciting the minds of the labouring classes throughout the country, especially in the rural districts ; and Thom incited the poor people of the neighbourhood against it by long and violent harangues, delivered sometimes from the balcony of The Rose, and sometimes on the wastes of Blean. His seditious and inflammatory discourses gradually assumed a religious tinge, which

became more blasphemous in proportion to the credulity of the persons whom he addressed, thus affording a further proof of the craftiness of his character. The climax came in a declaration that he was the Saviour, in corroboration of which he displayed cicatrices on his hands, which he alleged were those of the wounds inflicted by the nails which had secured them to the cross. He should be with them for a time, he told his ignorant and credulous listeners, and then should be taken up to heaven in a cloud of glory.

“You surely did not believe those wild ravings?” I said to the old man who trudged up the hill with us, and who prefaced his narrative with a brief account of what he had seen and heard at the first gathering of Thom’s deluded followers which he attended.

“Well, sir, you see, we was all poor iggorant folk, and didn’t know what to believe, and what not to believe. There was many that doubted and scoffed at first that come to be the strongest believers in him; and the women went quite wild about him, and they

egged on the men, and then he talked us all into such a state of mind that we went as wild as the women, and would have gone through fire and water if he went before us.

“Every time I went to them meetings I found more men met together, till at last I believe every farming man in the village, and a good many more of all sorts, went to hear him. Well, the end of it was, he rode into Boughton one morning, mounted on as fine a horse as ever I see, and dressed like you see Jesus Christ in the pictures, but carrying a sword and pistols. Men and women, boys and girls, all ran out to welcome him; the men he told to arm themselves and follow him, the rest were to stay at home. Then he rode down the lane that we have just passed, about a hundred of us following him—some with guns, and some with hay-forks, sickles, or anything that would serve for a deadly weapon; and he led us through the lanes to a farmhouse at Fairbrook, a little place yonder, below Herne Hill. There he set up a blue and white flag, with a lion on it, a-rearing up like; and

he made a speech, telling us that neither steel nor lead could harm him, and that, if we had faith in him, and followed wherever he led us, we should overcome all opposition, and not a hair of our heads should be hurt. It seemed true, for he fired a pistol at his own head, and then at the heads of two or three more, and nobody was harmed. When we saw that we believed on him more than ever, and we swore to follow wherever he led.

“Then we marched off to Goodnestone, a village this side of Faversham, and then round to Herne Hill again, where bread-and-cheese and ale was served out to us at a farmhouse. When we had rested a bit we went to Dargate Common, just beyond the hill, where we all went down on our knees, while Sir William offered prayer for half an hour as well as any minister as ever went into a pulpit. Then we went to a farm in the woods, where we had more bread-and-cheese and ale, and slept in the barns.

“About three o'clock next morning, while the sky was yet gray, we were moving again,

tramping over Herne Hill and startling the blackbirds and thrushes from their sleep, and scaring the rabbits that were cropping the herbage on the skirts of the wood. Tramp, tramp, tramp ! all along the by-way, setting every place we passed through in a commotion, wondering where we were going and what we were going to do. We got into Sittingbourne about six o'clock, and there we had breakfast, Courtenay paying for all ; and then, when we had rested, we started again, turning off the high-road, and marching through Newnham, Eastling, Throwley, Seldwich, and Selling, spreading the excitement and commotion wherever we went, and halting in every village for Sir William to make a speech and draw the men on to follow him. At last we got back to Boughton, wondering what it was all to end in, but resolute to do whatever we was set on to.

“ There was some talk of marching through the woods to Hales Place, and taking possession of it, but nothing was done next day, which was Sunday ; and on Monday morning

the first blood was shed, and that was the beginning of the end. We were all in a field, wondering what the next move was to be, when one of the farmers came, with three constables, after a man who, as most of us had done, had left his work and broken his contract of service. As soon as Courtenay saw these men coming towards us, he whipped out one of his pistols and fired. One of the constables fell dead, and the others, and the farmer, ran for their lives, spreading terror and excitement all through the village.

“Courtenay drew his sword, and hacked the body of the dead constable, which two of the men then lifted, gashed and bleeding, and threw into a ditch. Waving his bloody sword, he told us to follow him, and we all marched off into the heart of the wood, where he made a speech that worked us all up into a fever of excitement. Then we all went down on our knees, and Courtenay offered a prayer, and a hymn was sung, all of us believing that there would soon be some fighting, and we should carry all before us, and do I don't know what.

“By-and-by we heard the tramping of feet along the lane by Berkeley Lodge yonder, and we drew into the thickest part of the wood, those who had guns being posted in front. The constabulary sergeant had ridden into Canterbury, after the man had been shot, and the magistrates had called upon the military for help, and were coming against us with every soldier in the city. Presently we heard them pushing through the bushes and the tall bracken, and then we saw their bayonets glittering in the sunshine where it gleamed here and there through the branches of the oaks. Courtenay made a sudden movement forward, and we saw a flash, and then the report of his pistol rang through the wood, and the startled birds flew in all directions twittering and screaming.

“The next moment there was another flash, and a sharp rattling in our front, and I saw Courtenay fall, and several poor fellows sinking on their knees amongst the bracken, or staggering against the trees. A wild cry was raised by the men, and those who had

guns fired at the soldiers ; and then there was a rush, and we saw the gleam of steel, and in a moment we were flying in all directions through the wood. Three soldiers had been shot, two of them mortally wounded, besides Lieutenant Bennett, killed by Courtenay ; and Courtenay and sixteen of his men were left upon the ground, nine of them dead or mortally wounded, besides Courtenay himself."

Here the old man's story ended. The coroner's jury returned a verdict of justifiable homicide in the case of Thom and the nine labourers whose blood had stained the spring flowers and bright green moss of Bossenden Wood, and one of wilful murder against the madman and eighteen of his deluded followers in the case of Lieutenant Bennett and the two soldiers. The captured rioters were subsequently tried at Maidstone, when three of them were sentenced to be transported, two for life, and the third for fourteen years, and most of the others to various terms of imprisonment.

Thom was buried at Herne Hill, a few

days after the affray ; and so great were the alarm and excitement that still prevailed throughout the district that the burial service was hurriedly performed, and every allusion to the doctrine of the resurrection was omitted from it (was this omission sanctioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, I wonder ?), lest it should seem to countenance the belief of the Thomites in the expected resurrection of their leader. But though one woman expressed a firm belief that he was not dead, even when she was shown his corpse in a coffin, and another acknowledged that she had carried a vessel of water half a mile, in order to pour some of the fluid between his lips, in the event of his being slain, because he had told her that he would be resuscitated by that means, the delusion seems to have quietly died out soon after the fatal termination of his career.

Many mementoes of this melancholy affair may, however, still be found in the villages and hamlets in which the delusion existed. Thom's long black hair and beard, which were cut off by the surgeons, fell into the hands of

one of his disciples, by whom they were treasured with the deepest reverence. It is said that fancy prices were given for locks of his hair, not only by his followers, but even by respectable inhabitants of Canterbury and its vicinity, who were actuated by a morbid desire for the acquisition of such relics. Even the corpse of the blasphemous impostor would have been disinterred, if a strict watch had not been kept on the grave for months after the interment.

The names and initials of Thom and several of the deluded men who fell with him may still be seen, rudely cut with clasp-knives, on the trees in Bossenden Wood. The tree against which Thom fell was stripped of all its bark by the crowds whom the tragedy attracted to the spot, and his autograph was eagerly sought after, and bought with gold. Nor was this morbid curiosity confined to believers in the impostor, or to the poor and ignorant; for many ladies and gentlemen of good social position visited Boughton, some travelling long distances, for the purpose of seeing the spot

where he fell, obtaining some memento of him, and stroking his horse!

We had reached the summit of Boughton Hill while the old man was telling his story, and now paused to look over the surrounding country. Large tracts of woodland stretched away on either hand, the bright greenery fading into blue in the distance, with a light streak on the northern horizon, which we knew to be the sea, and a depression in the opposite direction marking the valley of the Stour. From a point a little beyond the gate leading into Bossenden Wood, and which is called Courtenay's Gate, we had a very distinct view of Canterbury Cathedral, and the towers of three or four village churches rose above the woods on the right and the left.

Bossenden Wood, which abounds in picturesque glades and hollows, with many chestnut trees mingling with the oaks of which it chiefly consists, is a portion of the wild tract called Blean Forest, or the Blean, which formerly stretched from Faversham to Canterbury, and thence to Herne Bay, and of which many

extensive woods still exist. There the badger, which is now seldom seen either in Kent or Surrey, still has its haunts; and there, too, may sometimes be seen the rare yellow-throated variety of the marten, commonly called the pine marten, which resembles the weasel in form, but is larger than that fierce little carnivore, and has a bushy tail, like that of the squirrel.

These extensive woods seem, indeed, to abound with attractions, not only for the naturalist, but also for lovers of the picturesque, and for ramblers who wish for shade and seclusion, "far from the madding crowd" of the seaside resort and the shriek of the railway whistle. The northerly foot-path from Boughton Hill is continued by a green lane to Lamber's Wood, and thence to Whitstable, and is crossed on the south side of the latter wood by another lane, leading from Graveney to Blean, and passing over Honey Hill and Blean Common. By bearing to the right, and following the course of the stream which rises in Bossenden Wood, and flows into Herne Bay,

a little to the eastward of Whitstable, the latter lane may be struck, and followed to the road which connects Canterbury with Whitstable, from which point there is a foot-path which, leaving Blean Church to the right, passes through Thornden Wood, and thence to Herne Bay.

It will be needful, however, to bear in mind that woods, like commons, do not always bear the same name on all parts of their borders; and that Bossenden Wood is sometimes called Blean Wood, and the eastern portion, bordering on Harbledown, Short Wood, while the western portion of Thornden Wood bears the name of Blean Lower Wood, and another Blean Wood may be found farther east, near the village of Herne. The tall campanula, known as the Canterbury bell, blooms abundantly in all these beautiful woods.

CHAPTER VIII.

Canterbury—Old houses in the city—Residences of Mr. Wickfield and Dr. Strong—Precincts of the cathedral—The Dark Entry—Nell Cook's ghost—The doom of the ghost-seers—A true ghost-story—A haunted house in Westminster.

DESCENDING Harbledown into the valley of the Stour, we had a fine view over the ancient city of Canterbury, with the cathedral in its midst, the gray towers of its many churches rising here and there above the surrounding roofs, and the green pastures around, with the river winding through them like a silver thread upon green velvet, and the cattle that Sidney Cooper has so often painted reclining on the verdant banks. Rooks were sailing about the cathedral towers, as in Dickens's description of the scene; and "the towers

themselves, overlooking many a long unaltered mile of a rich country and its pleasant streams, were cutting the bright air."

Entering "the sunny street of Canterbury, dozing, as it were, in the hot light," we began at once to look about "the dear old tranquil streets," which David Copperfield held in such affectionate remembrance, "the shadows of the venerable gateways and churches," the "old houses, and the stately gray cathedral, with the rooks sailing about the towers." Entering a stationer's shop on the right-hand side of the High Street, and wondering whether it was the shop at which Dickens bought a copy of "Cruikshank's Bottle" in 1847, when on his way to Broadstairs for his annual allowance of sea air, we each purchased a sheet of letter-paper, embellished with an engraving of the cathedral, whereon to write to our wives, notifying them of our safe arrival in the capital of East Kent; and then strolled towards the cathedral, looking as we went for old houses which might have stood for the likenesses of those in which Dickens

established Mr. Wickfield and his amiable daughter and the learned Dr. Strong.

We were not long in coming upon a house which we at once assigned to the weak-minded lawyer, "a very old house bulging out over the road; a house with long low lattice windows bulging out still further, and beams with carved heads on the ends bulging out too." Dr. Strong's house we found, or thought we found, (which was perhaps more gratifying than the result would have been if we had known exactly where to look for it), nearer the cathedral, "a grave building in a courtyard, with a learned air about it that seemed very well suited to the stray rooks and jackdaws who came down from the cathedral towers to walk with clerkly bearing on the grass-plot."

Then we strolled into the precincts of the cathedral, where there are some remains of the ancient priory, thinking of the description given by Dickens, writing in the person of David Copperfield, of "the venerable cathedral towers, and the old jackdaws and rooks whose

airy voices made them more retired than perfect silence would have done ; the battered gateways, once stuck full with statues, long thrown down and crumbled away, like the reverential pilgrims who had gazed upon them ; the still nooks where the ivied growth of centuries crept over gabled ends and ruined walls." Time did not permit us to survey the interior of the cathedral, nor did my desire to view everything associated with Dickens and his imperishable creations require me to do so ; for, though it is in the shadow of the venerable pile that Peggotty, returning from his weary pilgrimage in quest of Emily, meets the fallen Martha, in the dramatic version of the story, the incident is described by Dickens as occurring in some dark nook of the metropolis. We pardon the transfer, however, for the sake of that triumph of the scene-painter's art, the moonlit exterior of the cathedral, with the snow lying deep upon the ground, the white-robed choristers filing past the lighted windows, and the organ pealing forth that grand anthem.

Some of the "still nooks where the ivied

growth of centuries creeps over gabled ends and ruined walls" are very curious, and suggested to me the idea of portions of Austin Friars and Great St. Helen's, in the city of London, mixed with the cloisters of Westminster Abbey. From the Green Court, in which the Deanery is situated, on the site of an ancient monastery, a long, narrow, covered passage, paved with flagstones, and known as the Dark Entry, crosses the Brick Walk, forming a communication at its eastern extremity with the cloisters, the crypt, and, by a private staircase, with the interior of the cathedral, and at its western end, through the Green Court, with a portion of the Precincts called the Oaks. It is a gloomy passage even by day, and the ill-repute which has clung to it for more than three hundred years causes it to be avoided after dark by all but the strongest minded persons even now.

The story of priestly profligacy, illicit love, jealousy, revenge, and crime associated with this gloomy passage and the old house at the corner, dates from the reign of Henry VIII.

The house mentioned was at the time indicated the abode of a portly canon, who had in his service as housekeeper a young woman, comely of countenance, neat in her attire, modest in her demeanour, whose name was Ellen Bean, but whom the canon was wont to speak of as Nell the Cook. One evening a young lady arrived at the canon's house, and took up her abode with him, very much to the dissatisfaction of the comely housekeeper. To all his friends the canon spoke of her as his niece, and represented that her father had gone abroad, confiding her to his guardianship; but doubts of the veraciousness of this statement soon entered the mind of Ellen Bean, who probably knew that the canon's virtue was not equal to his learning, and she resolved to ascertain whether they were well founded.

A series of surreptitious listenings at doors and peeping through keyholes raised her suspicions to moral certainty; but the pretty housekeeper, though her countenance was overcast with gloom, and her manner became moody, would take no action upon them until

she had obtained stronger confirmation. Then she would have a terrible revenge, which should be talked of in Canterbury for many a year afterwards ; for the modest look and the prim manner of pretty Nell were but as the snow on Hecla, which seems to forbid the notion that hidden fires rage beneath. Assured at length of the young lady's frailty and the canon's infidelity to herself, she sprinkled poison in a game pie, of which both partook ; and within a few hours afterwards both were dead.

The canon and the lady were buried in the nave of the cathedral, and the clergy did their utmost to prevent their fate, and the circumstances which had brought it about, from becoming the subjects of scandalous comment. Ellen Bean was never seen afterwards, and was supposed to have been sent away. Her victims were yet unburied when it was rumoured through the city that persons passing along the Dark Entry had heard subdued groans, which seemed to proceed from beneath the flagstones, one of which, beside the canon's

house, appeared to have been removed and relaid, the freshness of the mortar being remarked by the persons whom the rumour attracted to the spot. These crossed themselves, and shuddered with horror, when they heard the groans, and then went their way; and after three days the dreadful sounds were no longer heard.

Just a week after the day when they had first been heard—it was on a Friday—a man who passed through the Dark Entry during the hours of darkness reached his home pale with terror, declaring that he had seen the ghost of the canon's housekeeper. From that time the gloomy passage was avoided after dark; but from time to time, strangers who knew not the ill-repute of the place, or Canterburians who disregarded it, saw, if they passed through it on a Friday night, the spectral presentment of Nell the Cook standing by the door of the house in which the crime had been committed.*

* “This tradition is not yet worn out; a small maimed figure of a female in a sitting position, and holding something like a frying-pan in her hand, may still be

About a hundred years afterwards the flagstone nearest to that house became loose, and, on its being taken up, with a view to its relaying, a vault twelve feet deep was discovered, at the bottom of which was a female skeleton, in a sitting position, with a pitcher and a piece of pie-crust beside it. It was surmised that the friends of the canon, having traced the crime to Ellen Bean, and determined that she should die, yet wishing to avoid the scandal of a public investigation, had buried the wretched woman alive, and placed a portion of the poisoned pie in the vault, in order that, if the slow torture of starvation tempted her to eat it, she might suffer, before death, the agonies to which she had condemned her victims.

I am not aware that her unquiet ghost has been seen of late years, but the belief that it haunts the Dark Entry still lingers in the

seen on the covered passage which crosses the Brick Walk, and adjoins the house belonging to the sixth prebendal stall. There are those who would even yet hesitate to thread the Dark Entry on a Friday."—*Barham*.

city; and it would not surprise me to learn that there are persons living in Canterbury who would be found ready to depose that, on some Friday night, at some remote period of their lives, they had encountered "Nell Cook's ghost" in the Dark Entry. It used to be said that whoever saw the apparition died within a year; but the evidence upon this point would not satisfy a committee of inquiry. Tradition declares that two of the three masons who discovered the skeleton were hanged at Tyburn for murdering the third, in the time of Dean Bargrave, who died in 1642; but it is not alleged that they had ever seen the ghost, and if their fate was held to have been brought about by the discovery of the decaying remains of Ellen Bean's mortal part, the belief shows a strange jumble of ideas. I do not know how many persons are supposed to have seen the ghost in the course of more than three centuries; but the only person who, having seen it, or being said to have seen it, is recorded to have died within the year was Charles Story, who in 1780 was hanged at

Oaten Hill, and afterwards gibbeted on Chatham Downs, for the murder of a journeyman paper-maker.

“It was Dr. Johnson, wasn't it,” said the curate, as we came out of the Precincts, “who said he liked to hear ghost stories, because he regarded them as so many additional evidences of the immortality of the soul?”

“Yes, *à propos* of the story that was then circulating concerning the second Lord Lyttelton,” I replied. “I think the old Doctor's faith must have been of the kind that requires stimulants to keep it alive.”

“The anecdote shows that a belief in ghosts is not incompatible with a high order of intellect,” observed our friend.

“How any man of even ordinary intelligence can believe ghost stories, I can't imagine,” said the curate.

“Do you distinguish between ghost stories and ghosts?” I asked.

“I don't see where the line can be drawn,” he rejoined, after a little reflection.

“You don't?” said I. “Suppose you

heard an improbable story about a tiger, would you say you couldn't distinguish between tiger stories and tigers?"

"Oh!" he ejaculated. "Now I see your meaning. But I should know there are tigers, though I might not believe every traveller's story about them; while I should not believe a ghost story for the sufficient reason that I don't believe in ghosts."

"Why not?" I asked.

His only reply was a significant shrug.

"Do you?" he asked with a smile.

"I neither believe nor disbelieve," I replied. "I am disposed to be sceptical as to the ghost stories I hear, but my scepticism does not extend to a denial of the possibility of ghostly appearances; and thorough unbelief on the subject seems to me to be inconsistent with belief in the existence of an immortal spirit, the union of which with the body is dissolved by death."

"Did you ever see a ghost?" the curate inquired, after a brief pause, during which the scoffing smile had faded from his countenance.

“No,” I replied; “though I was once sitting in a room with a friend who seemed to see something which I did not see. It was evening twilight. Opposite to us were two doors, the one on the left hand opening from another room, and the other from the open air. Both were just ajar. There was scarcely a breath of air stirring, yet the left-hand door swung slowly open until it stood at a right angle with the wall, and, almost at the moment that it ceased to move, the other door swung open in precisely the same manner. It was just as if some person had entered invisibly at one door and passed out at the other. ‘Did you see that?’ my companion asked. I had seen nothing, and he didn’t say what he had seen; but his look and manner conveyed the impression that he had seen something strange and inexplicable.”

“That is something like the delusion of Nicolai, the Berlin bookseller, who thought he saw persons whom others in the room could not see,” observed our friend.

“But have you ever heard a real and well-

authenticated ghost story?" said the curate. "I mean an instance in which a ghost, or supposed ghost, has been seen, or been supposed to have been seen, by the person who told the story."

"I can tell you one which fulfils all your requirements," I replied. "I heard it, many years ago, from a maternal aunt, whose remains now rest in Beckenham churchyard. She was then on the shady side of fifty, and neither imbued with superstitious beliefs, nor gifted with the imaginative powers which sometimes invest very trivial and prosaic circumstances with an air of romance and mystery. She was returning one night from a visit to a sister when she saw, or thought she saw, between the churchyard and a thick plantation, a figure draped in white, standing motionless in the middle of the road. Slightly accelerating her pace, she went forward, not without a nervous tremor; and when she had walked a few yards beyond the mysterious object she ventured to look back. The figure had disappeared, though not the faintest sound had reached her ears.

The ghostly figure had previously been seen by several other persons, and was supposed to be the disembodied spirit of a young man who had recently committed suicide, in consequence of a disappointment in love, at the house which the plantation concealed from the road."

The faculty of ghost-seeing has been observed to be frequently developed in several members of the same family ; and I may add to the preceding story, which gave the curate something to think about as we walked towards the railway station, that my mother, then in her eighty-seventh year, related to me, a few months before her death, a strange incident, which I regarded as a delusion. She said that, while lying in bed, but in broad daylight, she suddenly became aware of the presence of a double of herself, standing between the foot of the bed and the open door of the chamber, in the full light of the morning sun, the door being midway between the window of her chamber and that of another room, into which it opened. The figure stood there several minutes, without the slightest movement. My

mother regarded it attentively, three times closing her eyes, and opening them again to test its reality. Twice she beheld it still standing on the same spot; but when she opened her eyes the third time it was gone. Such visitations are usually held by the superstitious to portend the speedy death of the person who sees the "fetch"; but my mother lived several months afterwards.

How recollections of the long past are evoked from the cells of memory! Let me tell another ghost story. About fifteen years ago, I had my abode, for a time, on the second-floor of an old house in one of those Westminster streets in which many of the aristocracy once had their town residences, and which still retain an air of faded gentility. The primary tenant was a middle-aged widower, morose of manner, and of irregular and dissipated habits. He lived there alone, keeping no servant, and, but for the occasional presence of a pale young woman, who moved silently about the house, and was scarcely ever heard to speak, seeming to be his own housekeeper. This occasional

visitant was said to be a married daughter of the morose man, whose wife had died a few years previously.

Two discoveries were made by me very shortly after I became a lodger in that house. The first was that the house had the reputation of being haunted. I found that my children would not leave the rooms after the evening twilight began to darken the landings and staircases, at no time very light; and that this disinclination to enter the gloom below was shared, though less openly exhibited, by my servant. On inquiring the cause, the young woman told me that the house was haunted—that “they say that he killed his wife with ill-usage, and that her ghost walks about the house at night, and has been seen by several persons.” I gave no encouragement to this belief, and thought no more about the matter until something occurred which recalled it in a very forcible manner.

The second discovery that I made was, that the morose parent of the pale and silent young woman was in the habit of going out

about eight o'clock in the evening, and returning in an inebriated condition in the small hours of the morning. On several successive nights—or mornings—I heard this objectionable householder signalise his return by banging the street-door, and tramping heavily up the uncarpeted stairs. On the occasion to which I have alluded I heard him talking, as if to himself. I listened; but the footsteps were evidently those of only one person. He entered one of the rooms on the first-floor, which he reserved for his own occupation, and for some time afterwards I heard his voice at intervals, now in the low tone of self-communion, now raised to the pitch of drunken or delirious raving.

All at once I heard him stumbling up the stairs, ascending them as rapidly as his inebriated condition permitted him to do, but with unsteady steps and staggering gait. He reached the second-floor landing, reeled heavily against the door of my sitting-room, and then began to ascend higher.

“I’ve got you now!” he shouted, in a tone

of savage exultation. "You can't get away from me now."

What, I asked myself as I listened, could be the meaning of this? The rooms on the third-floor were unoccupied, and no footsteps had preceded those of the drunken man up those unused stairs. I heard him enter one room after another, slamming the doors, and then he stood still.

"Where are you?" I heard him say. "Where have you got to?"

There was no reply, and in a few minutes he began to descend the stairs, which he did more quietly than he had gone up, muttering to himself in a tone so low that only the sound reached me, without the sense. I heard him no more that night, and for several days afterwards he was neither heard nor seen. The pale young woman glided noiselessly about the house, and, in reply to my questions concerning him, informed me that he was very ill. When he was able to leave his chamber, he was pallid and nervous-looking, and his hands shook so much that he could scarcely raise to

his lips the glass of ale that was before him in his counting-house, when I saw him for the first time after the strange incident I have related.

“Delirium tremens,” I said to myself.

“He must have seen his wife’s ghost,” was the comment of persons to whom I told the story of that night.

That he saw, or thought he saw, somebody or something that eluded him, and had disappeared when he reached the unoccupied rooms on the third-floor, there can be no doubt. What or who it was remained unknown to everyone but himself, unless he shared the secret with that reticent pallidity who seemed to be the only relative or friend who ever entered the house.

CHAPTER IX.

Recollections of a former journey to Dover—Haunted by an idea—A Canterbury story of the last century—The meeting in the Precinct—Walter Gilson sees a ghost in the Dark Entry—A midnight crime—The wrong man hanged—The murderer's confession.

As the train rushed through the cuttings to Dover, recollections of a former journey from Canterbury to the old Cinque Port rose vividly before my mind. Then I had left the ancient city on the top of a coach, and, a shower having laid the dust before we started, my eyes were refreshed with the cool greenery of the Bishopsbourne Woods and Barham Downs, and the blue ridge on which the white spire of Ash Church rises on the left, and the more distant hills stretching south-easterly

from Wye to Lyminge on the right. Now we obtained only momentary glimpses of the scenery we passed through from the narrow windows of a stuffy carriage, and those only at intervals, much of the line running along the bottom of deep cuttings in the chalk-hills, the almost perpendicular sides of which rise so high in some places that the sky can be seen only by protruding the head from the window.

Nothing to see, even while the daylight lasted, but those white walls, with a brief glimpse now and then of a rich cultivated country, with blue hills in the distance ; while an incessant rattle of railway joinery, varied by the harsh grating of railway mechanism and the shrill shriek of the railway whistle, rendered intelligible conversation impracticable. So I leaned back in my corner, and while the curate made an attempt to read a morning newspaper which he had bought at the book-stall at Canterbury station, and my other companion slept, passed in review the traditions concerning the haunted passage in the Precinct.

The superstition that made death within the year the doom of any unfortunate person who encountered the ghost of Nell Cook was haunting me like the ghosts of sounds that so troubled the mind of a certain vicar that, on one Sunday morning, he was obliged to go into the garden, and sing "The Lass of Gowrie" before going to church, lest he should give out, instead of a hymn, "'Twas on a summer afternoon," and on another actually added to the sentence beginning, "When the wicked man," the fish-hawker's cry, "All alive! alive, oh!" I could not get out of my head the man who was gibbeted on Chatham Downs, and whose fate was attributed by tradition to his having seen the ghost in the Dark Entry. I had heard of that apparition, and of the superstition associated with it, from a Canterbury young lady, many years before, even before Barham had made it the subject of one of the inimitable Ingoldsby Legends; but that was before the *cacoëthes scribendi* had brought out a periodical eruption of fiction. Now, the idea of a tale was working in my

mind, and before the train reached Dover, the characters and incidents were dimly outlined.

It was growing dark when we were whirled through or under "the bare wide downs near Dover," over which David Copperfield trudged, weary and foot-sore, hungry and ill-clad, on the occasion of his visit to his aunt, Miss Betsy Trotwood. Clouds had gathered during the evening, and when we alighted at the Priory station, and sniffed the briny air of the Strait, they increased the obscurity of the hour so much that the night was more than ordinarily dark.

Our walk of twenty-five miles from Chatham to Canterbury had left my companions no desire to proceed farther by a foot than was necessary that night; but I could not repress my desire to see the sea, and, dark as the night was, I strolled down to the beach before retiring to rest, and smoked a cigarette upon one of the black piles. The scene was sublime in its wild, weird dreariness and solitude. The dry seaweed that hung about the piles rustled in the light breeze, as if responding to

the hoarse murmuring of the tide upon the shingle. The smooth sea stretched far away from me, with only a line of faint light separating its darkness from the darkness of the sky. A bright speck, like a distant star, shone upon the horizon, and away to the right there gleamed another; and these I knew to be the lights on Calais pier-head and on Cape Grisnez. But no sound of human life reached my ears, and those lights were so distant that they aided, rather than diminished, the effect of the dark and solemn sea.

Lodgings had been found for the curate and myself near the house of our friend's brother-in-law, and there, before retiring to rest, I sketched the outlines of the following story.

THE DOOMED OF THE DARK ENTRY.

A quiet old city is Canterbury. Its old houses, its ivied churches and gateways, its venerable cathedral, its solemn cloisters, give it an old-world air suggestive of its having been cut off from the rest of England for two or

three centuries. The railway seems an incongruity, a discord, an anachronism. But for that there would be nothing of an architectural nature about the place to indicate to a Cantaburian Rip Van Winkle who had fallen asleep a hundred years ago, that any changes had taken place during his long nap. Such care has been taken, in making changes necessitated by Time, that they should not jar with old associations and old-world notions, that Rip would not observe that the Arundel Tower and All Saints' Church have been restored, while the Norman architecture of the new building in which the archiepiscopal library is located harmonises well enough with its surroundings.

As Canterbury presents itself to the eye of the tourist to-day, so, therefore, was it seen by Walter Gilson just a century ago, as he sauntered along the shady side of the High Street with his friend and former school-fellow, Arthur Dorling. Young Gilson was an orphan, and his father having died in indigent circumstances, though he had once

had a good business in the city, he had been indebted from childhood to an uncle for a home. Uncle Barton being in tolerably affluent circumstances, his orphan nephew had received what was then esteemed a good education, had been taken into his office, and was generally expected to succeed him in the business.

“You are a lucky fellow!” said young Dorling, cracking nuts as he spoke, and throwing the shells into the road. “You come out of every trouble like a duck out of water, none the worse for it. Left an orphan at an early age, you are adopted by a well-to-do uncle; making your appearance at the Guildhall on a charge of—what was it, Walter? Embezzlement, forgery——”

“Let that alone, Arthur,” said Gilson, reddening. “It is time that was forgotten.”

“So be it,” rejoined Dorling. “I meant no offence, Walter. I was only going to observe that you got over that as you have over every other trouble or difficulty, and here you are, soon to be your uncle’s son-in-law,

and some day his successor in the business, and finally the inheritor of all he possesses. I say again, you are a lucky fellow, Walter."

"So lucky that I sometimes fear it will not last," said Gilson, unconsciously giving expression to a pagan notion with which his education had not been classical enough to make him acquainted.

"Why not?" asked Dorling.

"That is a question I can't answer," replied Gilson, with the cloud still upon his rather well-favoured countenance. "I wish I could. It would be something to know the quarter from which the blow is to come."

"My eye and Betty Martin!" exclaimed a voice, at the sound of which Gilson started perceptibly. "Do my eyes behold Walter Gilson? And like a gentleman, I declare!"

Both the young men turned instantly towards the half-open doors of *The George and Dragon*, whence the voice proceeded, and beheld—Gilson with ill-concealed fear and openly expressed disgust, Dorling with mingled curiosity and surprise—a shabbily dressed and

dissipated looking man, a few years the senior of both.

“Bless my stars, how proud we are getting!” exclaimed the shabby man, stepping into the street. “Makes believe he don’t know me! His old pal, Miles Delaney.”

“Oh, Delaney!” said Gilson, as if he had not recognised him, and in an unmistakable tone of coldness and dislike. “So you have come back to the old city?” he added, on finding that the fellow was unwilling to accept the “cut.”

“Yes,” returned Delaney. “I am a rolling stone, you know.”

“And you seem to be another instance of the proverb,” observed Gilson.

“Well, we can’t all be as lucky as you have been, Walter Gilson,” returned Delaney. “And you didn’t seem likely to stand in the shoes you do now when I last saw you—at the Guildhall, you know. But you got out of that mess very tidily; and now, the first one I asks about when I comes back to Canterbury is you: ‘How’s young Gilson a-getting on?’”

says I. And says Andrew Jobson, ‘Why, he’s going up to the top; going to marry Rose Barton, and have all the old man’s tin, and die mayor of Canterbury.’”

“I don’t feel at all flattered by your interest in me, Delaney,” said Gilson, with a displeased look.

“Well, well!” ejaculated Delaney, with an aggrieved air. “It’s the way of the world. When a fellow is down, kick him. But you’ll stand a quart of ale, and give me a halfpenny to fill my pipe, won’t you, Walter?”

Gilson, wishing to be rid of the fellow, put a shilling in his hand and passed on.

On his return to his uncle’s house a note was given him by the servant, which she said had been left by a shabby looking man with red whiskers, and which contained only the following brief communication, written upon dirty paper in an almost illegible scrawl:

“I wont to se you verry partikler. I dident like to say wot I got to say afore yung Dorling. Cum to the cloysters after dark.

It's about the check yu was had up to the Gildhall about."

There was no signature, but its tenor left no doubt in his mind of its having been written by Miles Delaney, with whose not very prepossessing personal appearance that of the bearer corresponded. He became a shade paler as he read the last sentence, but the soft silvery tones of his cousin's voice reached his ear from the passage, and, crushing the note in his hand, he thrust it into his pocket.

There was a cloud upon his brow when he left the house that evening, just as the oil lamps in the High Street were being lighted, and proceeded towards the cathedral. A stern resolve shone in his dark eyes, and his lips were compressed, the entire expression of his countenance indicating that, with the utmost unwillingness to hold any intercourse with Delaney, he felt constrained to meet him, and that, while he apprehended evil, he was resolved not to attempt to avert it by any dishonourable concession.

Nine o'clock sounded from one gray old

tower after another as he entered the cloisters, which he walked round twice, the first time quickly, the second more slowly, without meeting Delaney, or anyone else.

Three-quarters of an hour elapsed before he left the cloisters, hurrying with long strides towards the Green Court, with a dark flush upon his brow, his nostrils dilated, and his lips quivering as with unwonted excitement. As he reached the gloomy covered passage leading into the Brick Walk he stopped suddenly, gazing into the obscurity before him with widely dilated eyes.

Just within the passage known as the Dark Entry he could dimly discern the shadowy outlines of a female figure, clad in a fashion which had been obsolete for a couple of centuries, standing motionless, with the head bent down, the arms drooping, the hands clasped before.

For a few moments Walter Gilson stood as motionless as the figure. Then he advanced a pace or two and gazed again. The figure moved not, and seemed unaware of his presence.

A strange awe crept over him, and his feet seemed rooted to the broad flagstones on which he stood. Once or twice he strove to address the apparition, but his tongue seemed to be glued to his mouth.

“Who are you?” he at length contrived to articulate, but his voice sounded strange even to himself.

There was no response ; the head remained bowed, the arms straight and rigid, the white fingers clasped.

“Speak !” he exclaimed.

Not a sound came from the pale lips, not the slightest movement could be discerned ; but the outlines of the figure began to grow more indistinct, and in a few moments it had faded to a just perceptible luminousness, which could be described only as a white shadow. This too faded out, and only darkness filled the space where it had been.

With a face as pale as that of the figure which had vanished, with every nerve trembling and a cold perspiration distilling from every pore, Walter Gilson crept past the spot on

which the apparition had stood, not without the awe-inspiring apprehension that it might reappear in close contiguity to him, and then hurried into the Brick Walk.

“Walter!” exclaimed Rose Barton, regarding him on his entrance with an expression of mingled solicitude and surprise, “how pale you are! Are you ill? What has happened?”

“Nothing, dear,” he replied, impressing a kiss upon her fair cheek. “And I am not ill; but I have been walking fast, and I met Miles Delaney, and he was insolent, and it has excited me a little.”

He said nothing about the apparition, because there was a superstition connected with it which made him unwilling to alarm her by associating it with himself. There was a tradition more than two hundred years old that the ghost said to haunt the Dark Entry had been the cook of a priest who lived in the house close to which it always appeared, and that she had poisoned her master and a lady, and been buried alive beneath a flagstone of the pavement. Her ghost, it was said, had

haunted the spot ever since, and whoever saw it was doomed to die within the year. The story obtained almost universal credence in the city, and though Walter Gilson had been bold enough to thread the Dark Entry that night, he had been oblivious until he was close to it that it was the night (Friday) on which alone the ghost had ever been seen.

When he retired to his chamber that night, he shuddered at the recollection of what he had seen, and tried to remember all the persons whom he had ever heard of as having encountered the ghost, and what had become of them. There was old Tom Pentecost, the smith, but he was drunk when he saw it, and he had lived years afterwards. And young Joe Horsnail, who saw a ghost in every shifting light, and Patty Fairbrass, who had probably invented the story as an excuse for loitering in the Precinct with her sweetheart; and these were both living still, and it was certainly more than a year since they met Nell Cook.

So Walter gradually reasoned himself

into a state of mental composure, and fell asleep.

On the following morning all Canterbury was thrown into an unwonted state of excitement by the discovery of a man lying dead in the Brick Walk, in a puddle of blood, which had flowed from a wound in the left side, evidently inflicted by the blood-stained clasp-knife which was lying open about a yard from the corpse. The ghastly object was carried to the dead-house, and the head-constable took possession of the knife, and gave notice to the coroner.

The murdered man (for that murdered he had been there was no doubt) was identified as Miles Delaney, an idle, dissolute young man, who had lost character, employment, and friends years before, and had then left the city, and gone no one knew whither. Several persons had seen him in Canterbury during the twelve hours preceding midnight of the day before the corpse was found in the Brick Walk, and the constables became quietly busy in endeavouring to ascertain who was

the last person in whose company he had been seen.

Jenny, the girl who had delivered Delaney's scrawl to Walter Gilson, heard the description of the murdered man, and all the neighbours knew soon afterwards that such a man had brought to the house a letter for Mr. Barton's nephew. This was not long in reaching the ears of the head-constable, and Walter received notice to attend the inquest.

Being asked if he knew a man named Miles Delaney, he replied in the affirmative; and to the further question whether he had seen him on the day preceding the discovery of the murder, he answered that he had met him in the High Street in the afternoon, and that he had seen him again between nine and ten that night in the cloisters.

"What took you to the cloisters?" inquired the coroner, regarding him very intently.

"I had received a note from Delaney, asking me to meet him there after dark," he replied.

"Have you that note about you?" the coroner inquired.

Walter hesitated for a moment, both because he could not remember on the instant what he had done with the note, and because he felt a natural unwillingness to have it read ; and his countenance reddened as he produced the crumpled note from his pocket, smoothed it out, and gave it to the usher to hand to the coroner.

“ You say you met the deceased in the cloisters between nine and ten,” said that official when he had read and re-read the scrawl very attentively. “ Can’t you tell us the time more nearly than that ?”

“ The clocks were striking nine when I entered the cloisters, but I waited there some time before Delaney came,” Walter replied.

“ What time did you part ?”

“ It must have been on the stroke of ten,” replied Walter, after a few moments’ reflection.

“ Where did you leave the deceased ?”

“ In the cloisters.”

“ I will not ask you what was the nature of your conversation ; but there is one question I must ask you. Did you quarrel ?”

“Some angry words passed between us before we parted,” Walter replied. “He tried to extort money from me, and threatened me; and I told him he might do his worst, but should have nothing.”

“And then——” The coroner paused, as if he wished the witness to say more.

“Then I left him.”

“Show the witness the knife,” said the coroner; and then the clasp-knife with which the crime had been committed was handed to Walter by a constable.

“Do you recognise it?” he asked, as the young man examined it with an air of interest.

“It is like my own, and has the same initials engraved upon it,” said Walter.

“It is your own, is it not?”

“Mine!” exclaimed Walter, with a start. “Is it possible that you suspect me of this foul crime? My own knife is in my pocket.”

His heart stood still for a moment, and his colour came and went in rapid alternations as he vainly searched his pockets for his knife.

It was gone. It was in vain that he tried to remember where he had left it.

“I have no more questions to ask you,” said the coroner, and he fell back, bewildered by the incident of the knife, among the eagerly listening auditors.

No one else had seen Delaney, or been in or near the cloisters, after nine o'clock, and the investigation soon came to an end. The coroner summed up the evidence briefly, dwelling particularly upon the incident of the knife, and upon the admission of Walter Gilson that there had been a quarrel between the deceased and himself before they parted, and against that young man the jury returned a verdict of wilful murder.

He was removed at once to Maidstone gaol, protesting his innocence, and sorrowing more for the grief and anxiety of Rose Barton than for himself, having no doubt that Providence would make his innocence manifest on his trial. Rose wept, but declared her firm assurance that he could not be guilty of so foul a crime; her father expressed the

same belief, but was far less confident than Walter or herself that the result of the trial would disprove the conclusion of the coroner's jury. Friends and neighbours merely shook their heads, and said they could not have believed it.

There was no new evidence offered on the trial. The prisoner had racked his memory in vain to remember where he had last used his knife, which had been searched for in every nook and corner of his uncle's premises without being found. He was prepared, therefore, for the verdict of "guilty," and for the dread sentence which followed.

"I have only to say that I am innocent of this man's death, and to express my confidence that the Almighty will, at some time or other, make my innocence manifest to the world," he had said, when asked whether he had aught to say in arrest of judgment.

How shall I find words that would adequately express the anguish of poor Rose Barton? Like the Greek sculptor who found himself unable to represent to his satisfaction

the grief of Agamemnon, I must draw over it a veil.

Three days after his conviction, Walter Gilson was hanged. Rose Barton shed no tear, but she secluded herself in her chamber, where she spent the day in prayer, and when she left it she was pale, but calm and resigned.

From that day she was never seen to smile until—— But to name the occasion would be to anticipate the sequel of my story. Lovely still, though pale and grave, she had many offers of marriage during the slow years that followed the great trouble of her young life, but she declined them all.

Secluding herself in a great measure from society, she seldom left her home, but when she did her chosen walk was nearly always the precinct of the cathedral. One evening in autumn, several years after the execution of her lover, she was walking in the cloisters when she heard a sharp and sudden cry from the direction of the Brick Walk, and as if wrung from the human breast by fear or pain of no ordinary degree.

Running that way immediately, she found a man, tolerably well dressed, lying upon the Walk, as if in a fit. His cry had brought to the door of the house beside the Dark Entry a matronly looking woman, who, on discovering the cause of the alarm, procured a jug of water, and dashed some of the cold fluid upon the man's face.

“Doomed! doomed!” he muttered, when the power of utterance returned, but without thorough consciousness of the situation.

“Where do you live?” asked the canon's housekeeper, in a kindly tone, while Rose Barton silently watched his countenance and waited for his answer.

“Is it gone?” he asked, opening his eyes and looking around him with a scared expression upon his pallid countenance. “The ghost? It couldn't be his, for it was a woman.”

“Lord save us! He has seen Nell Cook!” exclaimed the elder woman.

“*His?*” said Rose.

“Ay, Miles Delaney's,” returned the stranger, shuddering as he raised himself to

a sitting posture, and again gazed around him.

“What do you know of Miles Delaney?” inquired Rose, with difficulty repressing a burst of emotion.

He glanced at her for a moment without speaking, and then rose to his feet. His mind was gradually recovering its balance.

“I thought I saw a ghost,” said he. “It was a foolish idea, but I have been ill, and am not quite myself. Thank you! I am all right now.”

“You shall not go until you have said what you know about Delaney!” exclaimed Rose, endeavouring to detain him.

The man immediately took to his heels, followed by Rose, crying, “Stop him!” But he had not run far when, not having quite recovered from the recent shock to his nerves, he staggered and fell. A clergyman came from one house, and a footboy from another, a constable was sent for, and the stranger, finding that he could not escape, became sullenly passive.

“I charge him with the murder of Miles Delaney! ay, and with the murder of Walter Gilson, too!” said Rose, on the appearance of the constable.

“Upon what evidence?” the constable asked.

“God, who has given him up to justice, will give the evidence for his conviction,” rejoined Rose impressively.

“Take him,” said the clergyman, solemnly. “I believe the young lady is right.”

The stranger passively accompanied the constable to the gaol, where he was placed in a cell, seeming to be dazed by the suddenness and strangeness of the situation. He had not been there more than an hour when he expressed a wish to see the governor.

“I wish to make a statement,” said he, with the air of a man oppressed by the consciousness of heavy guilt. “It was I who murdered Miles Delaney, for which crime a young man of this city was hanged some years ago. I had an old grudge against him, and watched him into the cloisters. As I found

afterwards, he had just been quarrelling with Gilson, and he was very savage. I did not mean to kill him. My idea was to get on the track of something that would enable me to hand him over to the law ; but he taunted me so that I was provoked into striking him. Then he caught me by the throat and I thought I should be strangled ; so I whipped out my knife, opened it with my teeth, and let him have it between his ribs."

"Where did you get that knife?" the governor of the gaol asked. "The initials on the haft were not yours."

"I found it," replied the self-confessed murderer.

"Then it may have been Gilson's, after all," observed the governor. "Poor fellow!"

There was no more to be said. The prisoner signed his confession, and the governor withdrew.

When the gaoler visited the stranger's cell in the morning, he found him hanging from a bar of the grated window, and quite dead. Then it was that Rose Barton, on hearing

of his confession, smiled once more, and, raising her blue eyes heavenward, murmured, "The Lord has heard my prayer, and lifted the cloud from the name of the innocent !"

CHAPTER X.

Dickens notabilia at Dover—The novelist's comparative estimate of Dover and Canterbury audiences—Through the by-ways to Deal—Legend of Earl Godwin—Tenterden Steeple and the Goodwin Sands—Story of Ambrose Gwinett—An original theory concerning Isaac Bickerstaff.

RISING early on the following morning, the curate and I walked down to the beach, where we found upon the shingle a wounded and disabled sea-gull, several of whose kind were skimming the sea, and ever and anon dipping the tips of their wings into the pea-green waves. The fierceness of the wounded bird, which prompted it to snap at the curate's stick, prevented anything being done for its relief, if indeed anything could have been done, one of its wings being broken; so

that we were constrained to place it in a sheltered position among the black piles of the jetty, and leave it where it was at least concealed from beach-boys and cockney excursionists of stone-throwing propensities.

Having got up formidable appetites during a walk along the beach overhung by the East Cliff, where enormous masses of chalk attest the ravages of the abrading forces of nature upon the face of the towering precipice, we rejoined our friend at the breakfast-table. That important meal disposed of in a satisfactory manner, we all ascended the castled height, and saw the deep well that supplies the garrison with water, the remains of the Roman Pharos, from which soldiers were carrying coal in baskets, Wellington's bedroom, remarkable for nothing but its Spartan-like absence of the remotest indication of luxury, but nothing that pleased me so much as the fine panorama presented by the old town lying below us, dimly seen through a gray veil of mist, the green ridge of the opposite heights rising above it, the furrowed expanse of grayish-green sea

on the left, bounded at one point of the horizon by the thin white line of cliff between Calais and Boulogne, and the varied view inland on the right, where the greens faded into blues as the eye gazed farther northward, with a gray church tower or spire rising here and there from embosoming woods.

There was not much in the way of Dickensian notabilia to look up in Dover, but we saw the house in Camden Crescent where the novelist stayed in 1852, from July to October, and the building in which he gave one of his popular readings in 1861, concerning which he wrote to Mrs. Alfred Dickens, his brother's widow, who was then staying at Gad's Hill Place: "At Dover they wouldn't go, but sat applauding like mad. The most delicate audience I have seen in any provincial place is Canterbury, but the audience with the greatest sense of humour certainly is Dover."

In the afternoon we visited the ruins of St. Martin's Priory, a venerable and moss-grown remnant of the early part of the twelfth

century. One of the gateways was almost entire, but time had made wreck and ruin of every other portion of the building. Succeeding generations have little respect for the works of their ancestors which have ceased to serve the purposes of their foundation. In the morning we had seen an undoubted relic of the Roman occupation used as a coal-house ; here we saw a portion of a monastic edifice of the Anglo-Norman period converted into a cart-shed. The curate was grieved by the condition in which we found the ruins, but has since been comforted by the restoration of the refectory, which is now used as a school-room.

My friends and I parted company in the evening, and I started alone for Deal, they accompanying me about a mile on the way over the East Cliff. My original intention had been to walk along the beach, but I was warned that I might experience some difficulty in rounding the South Foreland from the springs of fresh water which there gush up through the shingle, and I knew by expe-

rience that the shingle beaches of this part of the coast are very unpleasant to walk upon. This route is, moreover, only practicable at low water, and, as the cliffs are, in some places, four hundred feet high, it is not altogether free from danger.

Passing on the right a signal-house, and then the light-house on the summit of the South Foreland, I presently reached the little village of St. Margaret's, perched on the green eminence above that lofty and almost perpendicular promontory. There the picturesque little Norman church attracted my attention for awhile, and then I tramped on again over the cliffs, the way gradually sloping downward towards the north. For more than half an hour the only building which I passed was an old signal-house on the cliff, and the only living creatures that I saw were the white-winged gulls which circled and screamed, now above the cliff, now below its edge, and then skimming the waves, and some Sussex cows who were quietly ruminating or cropping the short grass.

It was growing dusk when I reached the hamlet of Kingsdown, where the long wall of chalk sinks into the shingle, and struck into a footpath across the fields to the village of Walmer. About twenty minutes' walking from that place took me to Deal, where I lighted my pipe at The White Horse and smoked it on the jetty, looking across the Downs at the many lights that shone there like marine glow-worms, and thinking of the many tales of shipwreck and disaster associated with the long ridge of sand—

Where oft by mariners is shown
 (Unless the men of Kent are liars),
Earl Godwin's castle overthrown,
 And palace roofs and churches' spires.

The legend which connects Earl Godwin with these sands is, that they were formerly a beautiful island, on which that powerful noble had a palatial mansion. One night, as the story runs, the strong east wind which had been blowing during the day rose to a fearful gale, and the sea ran so high that the

waves broke over the coast like a cataract, to the dismay of the inhabitants of Deal and Sandwich, whose homes they invaded and wrecked. For several days the storm continued with unabated fury, and the waves cast upon the beach piles of timber, broken furniture, trees torn up by the roots, and other indications of a terrible catastrophe. Nothing could be seen seaward but the wild waves and the storm-driven masses of cloud, and it was thought that the darkness caused by the intervention of the black storm-cloud and the torrents of rain that were falling obscured Godwin's Island from view; but when the storm at length abated the island had disappeared, and the sole vestige of its existence was a strip of sand which became visible at low water.

Sir Charles Lyell, having found a stratum of blue clay at the depth of fifteen feet below the surface of the sand, thought that there might once have been an island where the Goodwin Sand now stretches, and that it might have been swept away by the great

storm of 1099, recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The sands do not appear to have attracted much attention, however, until the reign of Henry VIII., when the silting up of Sandwich harbour by the accumulation of sand caused Sir Thomas More to be appointed a special commissioner for the investigation of the cause. "Thither," says Bishop Latimer, in one of his quaint sermons, "thither cometh Master More, and calleth the country before him, such as were thought to be men of experience, and men that could of likelihood best certify him of that matter concerning the stopping of Sandwich haven. Among others came in before him an old man with a white head, and one that was thought to be little less than a hundred years old. When Master More saw this aged man, he thought it expedient to hear him say his mind in this matter, for, being so old a man, it was likely that he knew most of any man in that presence and company. So Master More called this old aged man unto him, and said, 'Father, tell me, if ye can, what is the cause of this great rising

of the sands and shelves here about this haven, the which stop it up, so that no ships can arrive here? Ye are the oldest man that we can espy in all this company, so that if any man can tell any cause of it, ye of likelihood can say most of it, or, at leastwise, more than any man here assembled.'

“ ‘Yea, forsooth, good master,’ quoth this old man, ‘for I am nigh a hundred years old, and no man here in this company near unto my age.’ ‘Well, then,’ quoth Master More, ‘how say you in this matter? What think you to be the cause of these shelves and flats that stop up Sandwich haven?’ ‘Forsooth, sir,’ quoth he, ‘I am an old man, and I may remember the building of Tenderden steeple, and I may remember when there was no steeple at all there. And before that Tenderden steeple was in building, there was no manner of speaking of any flats or sands that stopped the haven, and therefore I think that Tenderden steeple is the cause of the destroying and decay of Sandwich haven.’ And so to my purpose, preaching of God’s word is the cause of

rebellion, as Tenderden steeple was the cause that Sandwich haven is decayed.”

The old man's theory that Tenterden steeple was the cause of the accumulation of sand along this part of the coast has been thought by some to have been not altogether groundless, though the manner in which he set it forth made it seem so extravagant and far-fetched that it has become a proverbial illustration of the ascription of effects to the wrong causes. The tower of Tenterden church was built in the reign of Henry VI., the funds for the purpose being obtained, it is said, by diverting from their proper purposes certain revenues which had been appropriated to the maintenance of a sea-wall, the decay of which in consequence caused the sand to accumulate until it prevented vessels from reaching Sandwich. In the saying which thence arose, that Tenterden steeple was the cause of the Goodwin Sand, there seems, however, to be a confounding of that shoal with the Sandwich flats, through which runs the channel of the river Stour, by which Sandwich is approached from the sea.

Deal, though it has something of the aspect of an old town, has grown up in comparatively modern times, from the contiguity of the Downs and the concourse of vessels there. The original village of Deal is that now called Upper Deal, about a mile inland, where is the parish church, containing some fragments of Norman architecture. Brayley says that a house on the west side of Lower Street, then the farthest from the sea, was described in a deed dated 1624 as "abutting on the sea-bank;" and in a Chancery suit tried forty years later, a witness, seventy-two years of age, stated that he knew the site of Lower Deal before a single house was built there.

Deal is the scene, in part, of the strange narrative of Ambrose Gwinett, who is said to have been hanged and gibbeted, and to have been removed alive from the gibbet, and afterwards to have lived many years, and encountered adventures and vicissitudes which might convince us that truth is stranger than fiction if we could be sure that the story is not itself a fiction. I read the narrative when a

very small boy, and have since seen a copy of the first edition, which, in the catalogue of the British Museum library, bears the conjectural date of 1731. There is no date on the title-page of the book, which is in pamphlet form, and has an engraved frontispiece, representing two of the most striking scenes of the hero's strange story. It is written in the first person, and purports to be *The Life, and strange Adventures and Voyages, of Ambrose Gwinett*, well known in London as the lame beggar who swept the crossing at the Mews Gate, at Charing Cross.

The narrator tells us that he was born in Canterbury, and articled to an attorney there ; and in 1709, being then in his twenty-second year, he left home to visit a married sister, who lived three miles beyond Deal. On reaching that place, however, he was so much fatigued that he lodged for the night at a public-house near the beach, intending to reach his brother-in-law's house in time for breakfast. In the same room slept a man named Collins. During the night, Gwinett had occasion to go down-

stairs, and having some difficulty in opening a door, forced up the latch with the blade of a clasp-knife, which he afterwards dropped, and was unable, in the darkness, to find.

In the morning, Collins was missing, the sheets of his bed were stained with blood, and similar suggestions of violence were traced from the chamber to the yard, where Gwinett's knife was found. The latter was thereupon accused of having murdered his fellow-lodger, whose corpse he was supposed to have thrown into the sea. He was taken before a magistrate, committed to the county gaol, tried and convicted at the next assizes, and sentenced to be hanged, which in those days involved the subsequent exposure of the corpse upon a gibbet.

The first part of the sentence was executed at Deal, before the public-house in which the murder was alleged to have been committed; but, owing to a violent storm, with torrents of rain, he was removed prematurely from the gallows, placed in a cart, and driven rapidly to the village in which his sister lived

(probably Ringwold, if there is any truth in the story), and there suspended in irons from a gibbet which had been erected on a piece of waste land on which his brother-in-law's cows were grazing. He had been insensible from the moment when the noose tightened about his throat, but after the hangman and his assistant had driven away from the gibbet he revived, his neck having escaped dislocation, and suffocation having been prevented by the hasty manner in which, owing to the storm, the sentence of the law had been imperfectly executed. In the evening, a boy who came to the spot to drive home the cows discovered that he was alive, and no time was lost by his relatives and their friends in removing him from the gibbet, and taking measures for his complete resuscitation.

Fearing to remain in England, he volunteered aboard a privateer, which was captured by a Spanish cruiser, and taken to Havana. There he remained in prison three years, and, by a strange coincidence, met the man whom he was supposed to have murdered! Collins

had been bled the day before his supposed murder, and at night, during the absence of Gwinett from the chamber, he found that the bandage had slipped from his arm, from which the blood was again flowing. He rose immediately, and was crossing the street to the house of the barber by whom the operation had been performed, when he was seized by a press-gang, and taken aboard a vessel lying in the Downs. He and Gwinett left Havana in company, but parted on the voyage, and the latter, after many adventures and vicissitudes, including captivity in Algeria, returned to England in 1730.

The story, though told very circumstantially, and with an air of truth, is so improbable in its chief incidents, that it may fairly be doubted whether it is anything more than a successful example of the art in which Defoe excelled of forging the handwriting of nature. It is inconceivable that, in the last century, a jury could convict an accused person of murder when there was no proof that the crime had been committed. That we

should look in vain for evidence of the story in the newspapers of the period is less surprising than evidence of such a conviction would be; for little provincial intelligence appeared in the columns of London newspapers a century and a half ago, and Kentish journals were not yet in existence. But, besides the difficulty which most minds must experience in believing that a man can have been convicted of murdering a person who, for any evidence to the contrary, was living, it must be regarded as a circumstance not in favour of the authenticity of the story, that the narrator mentions neither the sign of the house in Deal at which he lodged, nor the name of the village in which his sister lived; and as another that he should have returned to England without any evidence of his innocence of the crime of which he had been convicted, and the penalty of which still hung over his head.

To me it seems far less probable that the story should be true, than that it should have been concocted as a literary speculation by

a writer tolerably skilled in the art of making fiction seem like truth. Though written in the form of an autobiography, it is attributed by the compilers of the British Museum catalogue to "Isaac Bickerstaff," upon what authority is known only to the gentlemen who perform that very useful work. What Isaac Bickerstaff is this? Biographical dictionaries mention only one author of that name, the lyric dramatist, who, having been born four years subsequently to the date given in the Museum catalogue as that of the publication of the story of Ambrose Gwinnett, cannot have been the author of that strange production.

The only other Isaac Bickerstaff mentioned in the records of literary enterprise is usually regarded as an unreal person, invented by Swift, whose creation is said to have afterwards been availed of by Steele for a like purpose. Mr. Robert Chambers, writing about *The Tatler*, says that "at first, the author endeavoured to conceal himself under the fictitious name of Isaac Bickerstaff, which he

borrowed from a pamphlet by Swift." The brochure referred to is *Predictions for the year 1708, by Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq.* But how did it happen that both Swift and Steele, writing within a year, used the same *nom de plume*? Is it certain that there was not a real Isaac Bickerstaff, who might have been concerned in the literary speculations of both authors? May not the author of *Ambrose Gwinnett* have been a son of the author of *Love in a Village*?

However this may have been, it is certain that the latter cannot have been the author of the former work, and nearly as certain that there must have been another writer of that name, whom literary research has failed to discover. He was probably a Grub Street hack, who would write the story for a guinea, or, for the same *honorarium*, produce a pamphlet to be published with the name of some peer or M.P. on the title-page; and he may have lent his name to Swift and Steele, for some such consideration, and allowed them afterwards to treat him as a non-existent

person, as much a being of Steele's creation as Nestor Ironside.

If it be asked why Steele should have borrowed Bickerstaff's name, if there really was such a person, when he might have written anonymously or with a fictitious name, the obvious answer is, that either Steele or Swift, if not both, did do so, and that speculation as to the motive would, at this date, be vain. It is possible, of course, that Steele was unaware of Bickerstaff's existence, and borrowed the name from the title-page of Swift's pamphlet, as stated by Mr. Robert Chambers and others; but it is much more probable that Bickerstaff was known to Steele than that, being known to Swift, he should have been unknown to the former, who, besides being a loungeur about town and a frequenter of the coffee-houses, was at that time on terms of intimacy with Swift.

I thought of the strange story of the Deal of a century and a half ago—the Deal of the smugglers and the preventive service men, the press-gangs and the privateers—as I turned up

from the beach, and wondered which of the older public-houses—if either—had been the scene of the supposed murder and of Gwinett's semi-execution. Was it *The North Star*, or *The Deal Cutter*, or *The Rose and Crown*, or *The Three Compasses*? I could not decide. I know it was the custom in those days to execute murderers on the scene of their crime, but I could not imagine an execution in one of those narrow streets. The gallows could not have been set up on the beach, for we are told that it was opposite the public-house, opposite to which was also the barber's shop to which Collins was bound when he encountered the press-gang. I gave it up.

CHAPTER XI.

Over the sand-hills—A memorial stone in an unexpected place—The story of Mary Bax—Sandwich—Richborough Castle—Recognition of an old house seen in a dream—The story of the haunted house—Mother Atwater—A strange chapter of physical history—Pegwell Bay.

FORTIFIED for a day's walking by a substantial breakfast at the clean and comfortable hostelry of The White Horse, therein following the much-to-be-commended example of Captain Dugald Dalgetty, I started for Ramsgate about nine o'clock on the following morning, intending to break the journey at Sandwich. Leaving the clean and quiet little town at the northern extremity of the esplanade, and passing wave-washed Sandown Castle on the right, I struck into an ill-defined track across the *dunes*, or

sand-hills, which I had followed to Sandwich on a former visit to Deal, several years previously.

This devious and solitary track, where nothing is heard but the tinkle of sheep-bells after the rambler, as it recedes from the beach, ceases to hear the monotonous and melancholy sweep of the sea upon the shingle, meanders between the coast and the highway from Deal to Sandwich, a distance of six miles, over an undulating tract of sand, precisely similar to that of the beach, and only prevented from drifting away by the sparse herbage that covers it. I could not avoid the reflection, as I followed the track across this sandy waste, that the Goodwin Sands only require to become elevated a few feet higher to present a perfectly similar appearance. There seems no reason why those famous sands, which have been upheaved within the last four centuries, should not some day become a sheep pasture and a rabbit warren, like these neighbouring sand-hills.

The path winds in a devious manner

between the sandy hillocks and ridges which, with the little hollows between them, are scantily clothed with a coarse grass, with here and there a patch of a low-growing shrub, the roots of which serve in some degree to hold together the loose soil. Some of these hollows are deep enough to prevent the rambler from seeing beyond the hillocks between which he is threading his way, and even on the less broken portions of the desolate tract nothing else meets the eye on either hand, except the two black sheds on the right, each covering a gun, and constituting what are called Battery No. 1 and Battery No. 2. Kentish sheep, somewhat longer-legged than the South Down breed, and differing from them in having white faces, are scattered over the waste; and wild rabbits, hundreds of whose burrows may be seen, scamper in and out among the hillocks and hollows.

About halfway between Deal and Sandwich, the rambler comes upon what looks like an ordinary milestone, standing on the left of the track most frequently used. Milestones

are not placed on footpaths, however, and the singularity prompts a glance at the face of the stone, an inscription on which informs the wayfarer that there, one evening towards the close of the last century, Mary Bax was outraged and murdered by Martin Lander, a soldier of the German Legion, who suffered the penalty of death for the crime at Maidstone.

The unfortunate young woman whose life-blood was shed on this lonely spot was a dress-maker at Deal, and, on the evening of the crime, was returning to that town from Sandwich. Failing to reach her home, her father sought her by the way she was expected to come, which is shorter than the high-road, and was horrified by the discovery of her corpse, dabbled with blood, lying upon the path, at the spot now marked by this rude monument. Suspicion fell upon the soldier, who, by a long train of circumstantial evidence, was convicted of the crime, for which he suffered the extreme penalty of the law, as the inscription on the stone records.

The path across the sand-hills is continued through fields and market-gardens to a lane parallel to the Stour, on reaching which the rambler turns to the left, and soon finds himself in the quaint old town of Sandwich, the ancient churches, crooked streets, and high steep gables of which must look nearly the same as they did a century or two ago. As I intended to devote a portion of the day to a visit to the ruins of Richborough, I made no longer stay in the town, however, than was required for drinking a glass of ale and walking through the irregular streets in the direction of the road leading to Canterbury.

I had been desirous to explore these ruins on a former occasion, when I had walked from Ramsgate to Deal; but, though visible from the road, they cannot be reached from it without a boat, owing to the intervention of the Stour, which flows in such a remarkable curve as to convert into a peninsula the tract intersected by the road between Sandwich and the original haven, where the river flows into Pegwell Bay. Just out of the town, on the

road to Canterbury, there is a lane on the right which, passing under the railway from Minster Junction to Sandwich and Deal, enables the ruins to be reached on their western side, and then intersects the marshes bordering the river.

Though the lowness of the remaining portion of the wall overlooking the Stour causes these ruins to appear almost too inconsiderable for notice, they have a peculiar interest for students of history and persons archæologically disposed as the most ancient remains of the kind in the kingdom. Richborough, under its ancient name of Rutupia, is supposed to have been the first military station established by the Romans in this country ; and, though archæological authorities differ very much as to the site of Rutupia, which Ptolemy calls one of three principal cities of the Cantii, there is no doubt of its extreme antiquity.

The remains of the ancient castle cover about six acres, and occupy a slight elevation above the surrounding country, which presents a dead level from the Sandwich Flats to Ash

Marsh. The walls are ten or eleven feet thick, but the portions which remain are, in most places, of inconsiderable height, little more than the foundations being visible at some points, and the crumbling masonry rising in others to the height of six or eight feet only. The greatest elevation is on the north, where the wall rises to twenty-two feet. The ruins are covered everywhere with ivy, but where the masonry can be seen, layers of Roman bricks can be seen between the courses of rough stone.

Some remains of a Roman amphitheatre are said to have been visible fifty years ago in the fields, about five hundred yards southwest from the ruins of the castle ; but they no longer exist, and the plough has obliterated every trace of them. Camden states that the streets of a town could be traced in his time in the neighbouring fields ; but green pastures and brown arable land over which corn waves in the summer now cover all of Richborough that is not enclosed with the crumbling and ivy-mantled walls of the ruined castle. The

site appears to have been deserted by the sea, which at one time washed its walls, during the fifth century, Sandwich not being mentioned in old records until a century later.

Retracing my steps along the lane, my attention was arrested, when near Sandwich, by an old house, standing back from the road, and partially covered with ivy. Though apparently occupied, it had a sombre and neglected aspect, the stone steps before the front door being green, and seeming to be encrusted in places with moss, while grass grew in the gravel paths, and docks and thistles flourished among the tangled shrubs and degenerated flowers. As I looked, a feeling grew in my mind that I had seen the house before, though I knew that I had never seen the place until that day. As I walked into the town, and while dining at an inn on the left-hand side of the main street from the market-place to the Strand Gate, I strove to remember where I had seen a house like the one which had so impressed me with its melancholy and neglected aspect. It was not until I was again upon

the road, however, that I remembered having seen such a house in a remarkable dream, which I have here cast into the form of a story, without the addition or alteration of a single incident.

A NIGHT IN A HAUNTED HOUSE.

The afterglow of a vivid sunset was tinging the summer clouds with the richest rose-hues, and giving a rubescent tinge and lustre to the westward windows of distant farm-houses and cottages, as I tramped along a picturesque bit of road, such as there are many of in Kent and Surrey, which wind in and out, and up and down, among the hills, with oaks and beeches overhanging them, with honeysuckle and wild rose perfuming the air, and ferns and foxglove growing upon the banks.

I was descending a rather steep hill, through the hollow at the bottom of which a splashing stream was crossed by a narrow bridge, when a curve of the road brought into view, on the right, an old ivy-clad house, standing back among older trees, by which it

was partially concealed from view. Had the night been farther advanced, and lights been gleaming through the closed curtains and blinds, it would have been simply picturesque ; but, seen through the semi-obscurity which the surrounding trees made of the twilight, it had a sombre and neglected aspect, the stone steps before the front door being green, and seeming to be partially encrusted with moss, while grass grew in the gravel paths, and docks and thistles flourished among the tangled shrubs and degenerated flowers of a long untended garden. The house looked as if it had been given up to decay, and the grounds surrounding it as if they had reverted to nature, for more than a generation.

Weaving a web of fancy about the old house, in which a ghost and a Chancery suit mingled, I descended the hill, crossed the little bridge at the bottom, and found on one side of the road a finger-post, and on the other a low-roofed hostelry, with a sign-post and a horse-trough before it. Having ascertained that I could be accommodated with a bed and

breakfast, I ordered some refreshment, and sat down in the sanded parlour, around the smoke-darkened walls of which old prints in black frames alternated with stuffed owls and hawks, jays, cuckoos, and squirrels.

“Does anyone live in the old house up the hill?” I inquired of my hostess, when she brought in the refreshment I had ordered.

“No, sir,” she replied. “There hasn’t been anyone living there for many a year.”

“What is the reason of its being allowed to be in that neglected condition?” I asked.

“Well, it is a strange story what they tell about it,” the woman returned, with evident hesitation. “Nobody knows the rights on’t, for it has been like that, as you see it now, longer than anybody in the neighbourhood can remember.”

“Haunted, I suppose?” I said, with a smile.

“Well, they do say that strange things have been seen and heard by them as have passed the place late at night,” replied the woman. “But it weren’t for that that the

place was shut up and deserted, if there's any truth in the story that is told about it."

"What is the story?" I inquired, with a feeling of interest which was increased by the little I had already heard.

"It is a wild and improbable story, sir," said my hostess, hesitating to begin for a few moments, "and nobody knows now whether there is any truth in it; though why, if there isn't, the place should have been left to go to wrack and ruin like that, I can't imagine. As I heard the story when I was a girl, there was an old lady lived there ever so many years ago, who directed by her will that she shouldn't be buried, but left on the bed as she died, and that everything in the house should be left just as it was, and the house shut up for a hundred years."

"A hundred years!" I exclaimed, my surprise and curiosity equally excited by that singular testamentary instruction.

"The story goes," continued my hostess, "that she believed she should come to life again at the end of that time; and that was

why she wouldn't be buried, or even put in a coffin."

"And how long ago is that eccentric old lady supposed to have died?" I inquired, more and more interested in the story.

"It must be nearly a hundred years now," replied the narratress. "It is nearly thirty years since I heard the story from a great-aunt, who was then nigh seventy, and she had lived in this neighbourhood all her life, and said the house had been shut up, and that story told about it, longer than she could remember."

This strange story excited a desire to explore the old house which grew stronger every moment that I sat there, looking at the ancient prints and the stuffed animals through the wreaths of blue smoke that curled upward from the bowl of my pipe. When I retired to rest I drew aside the curtain of my chamber window, and looked across the orchard towards the brow of the hill, where the haunted house was then scarcely distinguishable in the darkness from the trees which surrounded it.

To my surprise, a light glimmered from an

upper window, shining through the foliage like a star. What hand could have lighted it? If I had known that the hundred years during which the old lady's eccentric spirit had been separated from its mortal abode terminated that night, I think I should have been sceptical as to her having just experienced her expected resurrection, and lighted a candle to see how the old place looked; but I had given no credence to the story, not being able to conceive the probability of any executors or trustees being insane enough to allow a house to be shut up, with a corpse in it, for a hundred years.

Still the appearance of a light at what, for a secluded little hamlet, was a late hour, in an uninhabited house, was more than a little remarkable. While I was wondering at it, however, it disappeared, and the darkness without was only relieved by a few twinkling stars.

I fell asleep while thinking of what I had heard and seen, and my first thought on waking, when the gray light was stealing over the earth, was of the haunted house on the

hill. I resolved to visit it, and, if I could obtain an entrance, to satisfy myself of the truth of what I had heard from my hostess. I dressed at once, therefore, descended the stairs very quietly, and let myself out.*

Crossing the bridge, I ascended the hill, and entered the neglected garden of the haunted house. A broken pane of glass afforded the means of opening a window in the rear of the house, and in another moment I had dropped into what seemed to have been the dining-room. A cloud of dust was raised by the moving of the curtains, and the light which I let in by drawing them back showed a thick film of dust upon every object in the room.

I stood still a few moments, looking around upon the heavy old-fashioned furniture, which seemed, in some degree, to corroborate the story which I had heard at the inn. The

* In the dream there was an abrupt shifting of the scene from the inn parlour to the interior of the haunted house; but, as the time had changed from evening twilight to daylight, or morning twilight, the story requires the intervention of a night to be supposed.

carpet was worm-eaten, and every corner had its cobweb, or rather its half-dozen cobwebs, the different degrees in which dust had settled upon them marking their various periods of construction.

Silence reigned throughout the house as I listened at the foot of the stairs for a few moments before I began to ascend them. Why did I listen? What did I expect to hear in a house that had not had a human inhabitant for a century? I could find no answer to this query, yet the recollection of the light which I had seen on the preceding night had prepared my mind in some degree for a startling discovery.

I ascended the stairs slowly, and with furtive tread, as if I feared to alarm a sleeping household. On the landing I paused. I had heard a sound—the first not caused by myself since I had been in the house—a rustling sound, but whether within or without I was uncertain. It might have been the trailing ivy flapping against a window in the gentle breeze.

Two doors opened on this landing. One was closed, the other was opened about an inch. Advancing, I knew not why, with the same furtive tread that I had ascended the stairs, I peered into the room. My eyes dilated widely, and for a few moments my feet seemed rooted to the spot by what I saw. The narrow view just took in the head of a large, massive, old-fashioned bedstead, upon which the outlines of a human figure could be discerned beneath a white covering.

Was the strange story which I had heard at the inn a verity, then? It seemed so. There was no sign of the presence of a living human being in the room. Dust hung upon the white curtains, and lay thick upon the dressing-table and the washstand, as I saw when I pushed the door open wide enough to enter and look around.

As I did so, I observed a movement of an arm of the figure beneath the counterpane, which, to my surprise and horror, was immediately afterwards thrown back, disclosing the gray locks and wrinkled yellowish - white

countenance of an old woman! Was I about to witness the resurrection of the eccentric old lady who had been dead a hundred years? Bewildered by an event so contrary alike to experience and belief, I stood speechless and motionless, awaiting the next stage of the marvellous resuscitation.

I had not many moments to wait. The old woman's eyelids unclosed, and a pair of cold gray eyes regarded me with an expression of surprise as she raised herself to a sitting position, and put back the tangled gray locks from her wrinkled and parchment-like forehead with a hand that might have been a portion of the anatomy of an Egyptian mummy.

"I don't know whether I be a-doin' wrong," said she, "but I've slept in this house many a night when I've comed this way, and never saw a livin' soul in it before."

"Who are you?" I asked, wonderingly, and yet with some perception of a ludicrous solution of the awful mystery dawning upon my mind.

“A poor old ’oman as sells threads and tapes,” she rejoined. “What’s the time, master?”

I hurried from the room without replying, and left the house as quickly as I could, scarcely knowing whether I was pleased or not with the farcical manner in which so sensational an adventure had terminated.

The resemblance of the old house near Sandwich to the haunted mansion of my dream must, I suppose, be regarded as a simple coincidence. The story of an old woman who expected her resurrection a century after death had, however, long been known to me, though in a somewhat different form to that which it assumed in my dream. I frequently heard, when a boy, of a long-deceased old woman called Mother Hotwater (as the name used to be pronounced), who had, at some period of the last century, been the hostess of The George, an ancient inn at Croydon, and who was said to have predicted

her resurrection a hundred years after her decease.

The name of this old woman was probably Atwater, which may be found in the parish registers, and upon one of the tokens figured by Garrow and Steinman in their histories of the town ; the conversion of *a* into *o* in proper names being of frequent occurrence in the records of the topographical nomenclature of Surrey, Croydon having formerly been called Craydon, Dorking Darking, and Tolworth, a hamlet of the parish of Long Ditton, Talworth. The old woman seems to have been addicted to the practice of magic, or to have maintained what in Scotch superstition is called a brownie, for there is a tradition that there was a closet in the house into which the dirty plates and dishes used to be put, and from which they were brought out clean without human hands being concerned in the process ; and it used to be a common saying of servants and workwomen in the town fifty years ago, “ I wish we had Mother Hotwater’s closet.”

The George Inn stood at the corner of High Street and George Street, and is said to have had an ill-repute in its latter years, owing to the mysterious disappearance, from time to time, of pedlars and other travellers who were supposed to have lodged at the house, and were never seen afterwards. The name of the house was preserved to a period within my own recollection in the adjacent George Yard, but the house is now, and has been as long as I can remember, called Albion House, and at the earliest date to which my memory extends was occupied by a draper named Stapelton, one of whose daughters informed a cousin of my own—daughter of the late John Skelton Chapman, then master of Archbishop Whitgift's School, in that town—that there was a closet in the house the door of which was nailed up, and which had never been opened within her recollection. A vague suspicion seems to have been entertained that this closet contained the skeletons of men who had been murdered in the house in the olden time.

From this digression and the hostelry of

my dream let me return to the inn at Sandwich at which I dined, and from which I started an hour afterwards for Ramsgate. Leaving the ancient town by the Strand Gate, and crossing the swivel bridge which there spans the Stour, looking like the drawbridge of some fortress of the feudal age, I proceeded northward, over a broad flat, the scanty salt-marsh vegetation of which struggles for existence with deposits of cockle-shells and wave-worn pebbles. The river was on my right and my left at the same time, on the former side flowing northward, on the latter, where it laved the ivy-clad walls of Richborough Castle, running southward. Looking seaward, I was surprised by the sight of a small steamer, apparently paddling over the marshes, the river not being visible, and its eccentric windings causing the vessel to appear where the presence of deep water would otherwise have been unsuspected. The steamer, as I afterwards learned, belonged to the owners of some neighbouring salt-works.

That these flats were once covered by the sea is evident from the great difference of

depth between the channel made by the current of the Stour and the adjoining waters of Pegwell Bay, the former being the arm of the sea which formerly separated Thanet from the mainland, and into which the Stour then flowed at Stourmouth. On both sides of this channel the water is so shallow that it may be waded across at low water, when, indeed, scores of shrimpers may be seen, immersed to their knees, at long distances from the cliff on which the village of Pegwell is perched. Ignorance of the existence of this channel was the cause, some years ago, of a fatal and melancholy disaster. Two young men, who attempted to wade across the bay, as a short route from Deal to Ramsgate, were plunged suddenly into deep water, and, being unable to swim, were both drowned.

If the facts were not attested by existing records, it would be difficult to believe that Sandwich was once a great naval and commercial port, and that Richborough Castle was formerly close to the sea. The records referred to show, however, that a broad channel

once flowed from Reculver to Sandwich, and that the mouth of the Stour was then at Stourmouth, about four miles and a half, in a north-westerly direction, from the point at which it now flows into Pegwell Bay. The breadth of this channel varied from a mile and a half to four miles, with sufficient depth of water for the largest vessels of that early period when it was the accustomed route between London and the northern ports of France.

The rising of the land, and the consequent diminution of the breadth and depth of this channel, were probably going on long before the change attracted much attention; but they had become visible in Bede's time. The sea had receded between Deal and Ramsgate, and the proprietors of the adjacent lands were taking measures to secure the flats from which it had retired from being again overflowed. By imperceptible degrees, century after century, the channel between Reculver and Stourmouth became choked; the Stour was observed to be less rapid; a creek which ran up to Ebbsfleet, which had been a convenient

and much-used landing-place, became dry; and from that place to Sandwich the Stour, which had usurped the place of the southern portion of the former channel, meandered sluggishly through a broad tract of marsh where once the sea had been.

Near the solitary public-house called *The Sportsman*, where a pleasantly shaded road descends on the left from the village of *Minster*, with the branches of old trees forming an arch of verdure most refreshing to the eye after a long walk in the glare of the sun, I left the road, and struck into a footpath through the fields on the right. Here the cliff begins to rise out of the shell-strewn flats, at first showing reddish clay, through which the chalk rises, however, before *Pegwell* is reached. Along the edge of this cliff the path runs until the coast-guard station at *Pegwell* is reached, where the shrimpers ascend from the beach by means of a vertical ladder constructed against the face of the cliff, and a bronze-visaged seaman paces the Point monotonously, with a telescope under his arm.

CHAPTER XII.

Dickens on the sands—Circuses and circus-men—The novelist at Broadstairs—Thanet races—Over the cliff—The North Foreland—Caught by the tide—Natural tunnel in the cliff—Sunset on the sea.

ON the following morning, after breakfasting at The Old Post Office Inn, in the High Street of Ramsgate, where I had passed the night, I walked down to the beach, with the intention of sauntering to Broadstairs in the shade of the cliffs as Dickens had done more than thirty years previously. “I walked,” he says, in a letter, “on the sands at low water to Ramsgate, and sat upon them till flayed with cold.” That was in September, when the air is sometimes very cold before noon and in the evening, and the wind and waves so rough that on

one occasion I could scarcely stand up against the former on the East Cliff at Dover, and the latter beat so fiercely against the jetty that the spray was blown over my head.

On the present occasion the sun was shining brightly, and the air was pleasantly warm. Elderly gentlemen and stout ladies occupied the chairs on the sands, contemplatively watching the smoke of distant steamers; young ladies were promenading in morning-dress, with their back hair let down to dry; frolicsome girls and boys were riding donkeys, one of which seemed to be gravely amused by the little feminine screams which he contrived to extract from his rider by persistently walking close to the water-line reached by the tide; and younger children were busily constructing what looked like miniature earth-works and trenches in the sand.

Dickens, though he visited this part of the coast every summer for fourteen or fifteen years, never chose Ramsgate for a resort, and seems to have visited it from Broadstairs on

only two occasions, one of which has been mentioned. Eight years later he again visited Ramsgate, but only for the purpose of seeing a circus entertainment, of which popular form of amusement he was very fond, though, for a writer who appears to have seen so much of the manners and habits of strolling entertainers of every description, his knowledge of circus life was strangely limited. When the interesting story of the fortunes and misfortunes of the Gradgrinds and the Bounderbys appeared, the incidents in which various members of Sleary's circus company figure excited surprise equally among those who were conversant with circus life and those who knew nothing about it, the former that he should know so little, and the latter that he should know (as they thought) so much.

By way of explanation of the novelist's supposed knowledge of the habits, manners, and language of circus-men, it was said that he had acquired it by obtaining the *entrée* to the arena at Astley's at the forenoon hours which riders, acrobats, and gymnasts devote to

practising the feats by which they win the applause of the spectators at night. There seems to have been no foundation for this statement, and a letter which has been published, in which Dickens asked for a hint as to places where the desired knowledge of circus manners and language could be gathered, does not appear, if we may judge from the results exhibited in the story which he was then planning, to have been very successful.

Several years after the publication of that work, I was staying for a few days at The White Horse, Micklegate, in the city of York ; having a sitting-room in common with the ring-master, the head vaulter and revolving globe performer, and two of the gymnasts of a circus then located for the summer season in a permanent building on St. George's Field. One afternoon, when rain confined me to the house, I was reading the story, while the gymnasts were amusing themselves with the globe performer's "props," one of the brace juggling with four brass balls, while the other balanced a sword on its point on a forefinger.

“Have you read this book?” I asked one of them.

“Some of it,” he replied, with his eyes on the rapidly revolving brass balls.

“What do you think of it?”

“Rot!”

Such was the circus-man's monosyllabic and emphatic condemnation of the story, which probably applied, however, only to the “professional” matters pertaining to Sleary's circus.

“Look here,” he said, dropping the balls into his pockets, and himself upon a chair by the table at which I was sitting, “there's a bit about Sleary's company which shows how much the writer knows about circuses.”

He turned over the leaves for a few moments, and read the following passage: “All the fathers could dance upon rolling casks, stand upon bottles, catch knives and balls, twirl hand-basins, ride upon anything, jump over everything, and stick at nothing. All the mothers could (and did) dance upon the slack wire and the tight-rope,

and perform rapid acts on bare-backed steeds.”

“Sleary’s people must have been exceptionally clever,” I observed.

“I should think so,” he rejoined ironically. “There are not many clowns and acrobats who can ride at all, and just as few riders who can do the balancing and juggling business. Alf Burgess is a rare exception. As for lady riders, out of a score who can ride a pad-horse, and fly through hoops and balloons, and over banners and garters, I don’t suppose you would find three who can do a rapid act on the bare back of a horse.”

“Each performer has his or her particular line of business, I suppose?”

“Just so. You might just as well talk of Charles Mathews acting Hamlet. And as to ‘all the mothers’ riding and doing the slack-wire and the tight-rope, there are more often none who can do anything in the show at all. Why, in our show there are eight married men, and not one of their wives ever appears in the ring, or ever has done.”

I ascertained afterwards that the ring-master's wife was an actress, and had at that time an engagement in London. One of the gymnasts had left his wife in Manchester, and one of a brace of acrobatic brothers had left his in the metropolis. The other brother, another acrobat, and the three clowns had their wives with them, but the only one connected with the circus was an elderly woman, the wife of one of the clowns, who was money-taker at the gallery entrance. There were five *equestriennes*, but they were all members of the proprietor's family.

“Look here again,” continued the gymnast, turning to another part of the story: “Sleary's company seems to be a rather strong one, and most of the men have wives and children, all with them; and yet the whole of them, Sleary and his family and all, are represented as lodging at one house, a little pub. in the outskirts of the town! They must have been like sheep in the pens of a cattle-market. I never heard of such a thing! Why, there is more of us here than in any other house in the city.”

I may add that the proprietor and his family had, in this instance, apartments over one of the best shops in York. These, however, are matters which, while they render it of little value as a picture of circus life and character, do not diminish the interest of the story, which many consider one of Dickens's best works, and which the episode of Stephen Blackpool alone would entitle to a place amongst standard works of fiction.

The acrobats and minstrels who give their entertainments on the sands and the cliffs had not made their appearance when I turned my back upon the harbour and the bathing-machines, and went northward, according to the compass, though my path lay in the shadow of what is called the East Cliff. It lay over a level beach, where patches of moist sand alternated with flat protrusions of chalk, garnished with tufts of dark ribbon-like marine algæ, with many little pools and narrow channels, in which tiny crabs had been belated by the receding tide. On my left rose the high and perpendicular cliff, on my right

stretched the sea, looking like an immense sheet of corrugated green glass.

Broadstairs reached, I left the beach near the little harbour, and looked about the favourite seaside resort of "the inimitable Boz," the only discoverable reason for which preference seems to have been its comparative quietness, which enabled him to work. For a period of fifteen years he came here nearly every summer. In 1837, when he was writing the *Pickwick Papers*, he lodged at No. 12, in the High Street, which, though not very long, shows a mixture of shops and private houses, most of which have their first floors devoted to the reception of summer visitors. In 1840 he was here twice, in June and September, staying on both occasions at Lawn House, a villa on the Kingsgate road, occupied with the pathetic story of little Nell and her grandfather, which, aided as its effect is by such original creations as Dick Swiveller and Quilp the dwarf, is in my opinion the most highly-finished work he ever wrote.

In the following year he came down in

August, shifting his quarters to Fort House, in the same pleasant neighbourhood. Next year he came down a month earlier, when he attended Thanet races, of which he wrote: "I saw—oh, who shall say what an amount of character in the way of inconceivable villainy and blackguardism! I even got some new wrinkles in the way of showmen, conjurers, pea-and-thimble men, and trampers generally." These races are held on elevated park-like land on the right of the road from Margate to Acol, and seem to attract large assemblages of the motley character usually found attending such amusements. I saw the scene from the distant and dusty road on one occasion, but, though the reviewer of an evening journal assumed, at a later date, that I was in the habit of wandering from fair to fair, conversing with acrobats and showmen, I left its noise and blackguardism behind me, and strolled on to Acol.

Though Broadstairs is even now quieter than Margate, duller than Ramsgate, Dickens found it thirty years ago a less desirable

summer retreat for a hard-working literary man than it had been a dozen years previously. He complained of brass bands and organ-grinders, and, while pondering in his mind the story of *David Copperfield*, often talked of shifting his quarters to Dover, Folkestone, or Sandgate. Eventually he went to the Isle of Wight, but found the climate too enervating; and, after considering the relative advantages of Ramsgate and Herne Bay, returned to Broadstairs. His last visit to the latter place was made in 1851, when he was sketching the outlines of the story of *Bleak House*.

I left the town by York Gate, an ancient flint-built arch, furnished in the olden time with a portcullis and gates, which have long since disappeared. A pleasant walk it is along the breezy road over the green ridge on which the lighthouse stands to warn the mariner from that bold promontory, the North Foreland, the dread of cockney voyagers, many of whom land at Margate to avoid it, while others, after duly laughing at their fears and

qualms, leave the deck when the pitching of the vessel and the driving of the spray over the foredeck warn them of their approach to it. Here, if there is a gale anywhere along the coast, it rages with the greatest violence, and the waves beat more fiercely against the lofty cliffs.

Leaving the lighthouse behind, I descended the slope of the green ridge on which it stands, and soon saw the white walls and towers of Kingsgate Castle rising out of the trees which surround them on the land side, and cutting the clear blue sky. The picturesque hamlet in their neighbourhood is named from the circumstance of Charles II. and his brother, then Duke of York, having once landed there, at a gap in the cliff, over which a brick arch has been constructed, and which is now used for launching the local lifeboat. A steep path, a little more to the southward, leads from the hamlet to the beach, the latter portion of the descent being facilitated by the construction of a rude flight of steps, cut in the chalk.

Descending these, I found a man loading a

cart with seaweed, which is much used on land near the coast as a manure, on account of the soda and potash it contains. With this exception, and that of a solitary nursemaid and two or three children, there was no one on the beach; though Kingsgate struck me as a more desirable site for a new marine resort than the locality which has since become Westgate-on-Sea. The accommodation afforded by The Admiral Digby, a public-house on the cliff, causes it to be made the terminal point of many rambles from Margate.

The cliff between this point and Margate is much more broken than is observable farther south. Lofty and solid as is the range of chalky heights, its seaward face has evidently receded before the waves, which, in tempestuous weather, are driven with tremendous force against the base of the cliff. The results of this sapping action are seen in deep recesses, with their sandy bottoms strewn with seaweed, and detached masses of chalk, round which the tide flows at high water, but which are left standing for the present to show where the

face of the cliff was once. Two of the most remarkable of these isolated masses have, I am informed, been removed, since my last visit, to obtain a site for the Margate Aquarium.

At one point a broken projection of the cliff stretches out across the beach, leaving only a narrow passage round its extremity at low water, and none when the flood tide beats against the steep white wall from which it juts out. The sight of it, as I approached it on this occasion, reminded me of an adventure which had befallen me at that point a few years previously. I was walking along the beach towards Kingsgate, and had calculated when starting from Margate that I could reach that place before the tide flowed up to the cliff. I had walked about half the distance without the advance of the briny influx creating in my mind any suspicion of the accuracy of my estimate, when I met an elderly gentleman, walking very fast, with his trousers turned up to his knees, revealing a pair of bare legs and feet.

“The tide is coming in very fast,” said he,

scarcely pausing to give me the warning. "You had better turn back, or you may not be able even to wade through it as I have done."

"I think I can reach Kingsgate," I rejoined, with careless confidence in my ability to accomplish what I had undertaken.

"If you will take my advice, you will turn up at the next gap," the stranger looked over his shoulder to call to me as he hurried in the opposite direction.

I looked at the advancing tide, and then at the cliff, and accelerated my pace. It would be no joke, I thought, to be caught between them. I could not swim, and scaling that almost perpendicular wall of chalk was simply impracticable, except for an insect. The tide was coming up so fast that it soon became necessary for me to keep close to the cliff, where the irregular masses of broken chalk, strewn with seaweed, made walking more difficult than on the sand. My confidence underwent very slight diminution, however, until I approached the little promontory which has been described.

The extremity of the ness, which has evidently been worn down by the operation of the waves, was under water, and the tide reached within a few feet of the cliff. By wading into the water I might reach a point where it might be practicable to clamber over it, but the slipperiness of the green film of minute vegetation which covered it was suggestive of the peril of a slip and a fall into the water, perhaps with a broken leg to prevent me from getting out again. There was no time for deliberation, however, and my perception of the necessity of instant action prompted me to step upon the rock, and from one ledge to another, until I was three or four feet above the beach.

As I did so, I discovered at about the same height, but nearer to the cliff, what seemed to be one of the recesses which the waves have scooped in the chalk, and which are so numerous along the coast between Kingsgate and Westgate. There is one into which a fissure from the surface opens, and another where the fissure has been enlarged and ex-

tended until it affords a passage by a rough and steep ascent to the top of the cliff. Impelled by the thought that here might be a means of escape from what I was beginning to regard as a perilous dilemma, I scrambled towards the opening, which I found extended some distance, parallel with the line of cliff, but curved in a manner which prevented me from seeing the end of it. It was just wide enough to admit one person, but barely five feet from the sandy bottom to the wave-worn crown, so that I had to penetrate it in a stooping posture. In a few moments I saw the light at its southern end, from which I scrambled down to the beach. Then I began to run, now splashing through the tide, now bounding from one half-submerged mass of chalk to another, until I reached the next gap.

Margate jetty soon became near enough for the harbour pier to be discernible between the black piles, and, leaving the beach near the towering pinnacles of chalk which had had the name of No Man's Land conferred upon them, I proceeded to the High Street in quest of a

dinner. Though the end of the season was approaching, the continuance of bright pleasant weather warned me of the desirability of securing a lodging before the next steamer from London discharged its living cargo on the jetty to wander through the streets, carpet-bag in hand, with anxious faces seeking a resting-place. It is a standing joke, which the regular frequenters of the place play upon unsophisticated passengers, that they will have to sleep in a bathing-machine, all the lodgings being occupied; and, though almost every other house in the town is a lodging-house, I have seen scores of tired and famishing visitors tramping about the streets, far into the night, seeking from house to house anything in the shape of sleeping accommodation; perhaps to be told by some jocular letter of lodgings, as I actually heard said at Ramsgate, that the door-mat was at their service.

Though never tired of wandering over the cliffs, or along sandy beaches, seaside towns are, of all forms of brick-and-mortar agglomeration, my special aversion. I gladly leave to

the mass of summer visitors the delights which they seem to find in basking in the broiling sun on Ramsgate sands or the East Cliff at Margate, while I stroll away from the town to seaweedy solitudes, or the seclusion and greenery of the inland by-ways. I had no sooner dined, therefore, than I tramped away to the sequestered hamlet of Acol, whence, after a rest and a glass of Cobb's ale at The Crown and Sceptre, I strolled across the fields to Birchington.

Evening found me returning to Margate, along the beach, with the cliff towering up on my right hand, red in the slanting rays of the setting sun, gray in the shadows, and a long stretch of flat masses of chalk on my left, intersected with narrow channels and clothed with moist bunches of dusky-green ribbon-like seaweeds, varied here and there with fringe-like tufts of pink and white. Here the channels of water lay in shadow, there they caught and reflected the rich tints of the sun-dyed clouds. Beyond, the sea spread out like a trembling sheet of gold.

CHAPTER XIII.

Margate jetty by night—Recollections of old times—Bill Johnson the smuggler—His escape from Horse-monger Lane Gaol—The germ of a story—The sea by night—Margate in the seventeenth century—A fray and a disappearance—Return of the missing man—Charles II. at Bartholomew's Gate.

MARGATE jetty was dull and deserted that night. I went there when darkness precluded farther strolling, but, with the rest of the loungers, was driven off by a steady fall of rain. The sky was overcast with dark clouds, and the pattering rain formed a dismal accompaniment to the melancholy surging of the sea among the iron columns below. I sought my lodging, therefore, and strove to while away an hour in conversation with the old son of Crispin, at whose domicile I had quartered myself.

“This must be a very dull place in the winter,” I remarked.

“Oh, no,” he rejoined. “You don’t see so many people of course, and it is quieter all ways—no band, no niggers, and such like about; but, bless you, there is always something exciting going on—a ship coming ashore, or the lifeboat going off, or a disabled vessel being towed into the harbour.”

“Any smuggling done now?” I asked.

“Nothing, or next to nothing,” the old man replied. “It don’t pay now like it did in the old times, when there was heavy duties on foreign wines and spirits, and silks and lace. Fortunes used to be made in them days in what they called the free trade.”

Without recalling the story of Will Watch, embodied in more than one old ballad and modern romance with which I was acquainted in my boyhood, I could remember hearing much about smugglers and smuggling which disposed me to be a willing listener to anything the old man might say upon that subject. I had heard my father speak of the

smuggled merchandise brought into London in those days by strings of pack-horses, through by-ways and green lanes; and I knew a mansion in Surrey, within six miles of the metropolitan bridges, which was the suburban residence of a wealthy wholesale mercer, whose father was said to have made a fortune by speculations in smuggled French silks, the said mansion being, when I was a boy, familiarly spoken of in the village as Smugglers' Hall. I remembered, too, that being one day, many years ago, at one of the oldest houses in Norwood, then the property of one of my maternal aunts (the old lady who saw the ghost), my relative produced a bottle of hollands, with the remark: "This was smuggled by old Will Fox. It is the last bottle!"

"There must have been some money flying when the famous Bill Johnson escaped from Horsemonger Lane Gaol," I observed, in response to the old man's last remark.

"Ay!" he returned. "It was a golden key that opened the prison-doors for him, you may depend upon it; and a sight of money

must have been spent to open the way to Boulogne for him. I have heard my father say that relays of post-horses were ready every ten miles of the road to Dover, and that all the turnpike-gates were thrown open for him to dash through without a moment's hindrance."

"The smugglers on this part of the coast used to run their cargoes ashore at the gaps, didn't they?" said I.

"Ay, many's the cask and bale that's come up the gaps between here and the Foreland," he replied. "There was always men on the look-out when one of the luggers was expected, and then she dodged off and on until a favourable opportunity offered, such as a dark night, or the preventive men being led away on a false scent, and then a signal was given, such as a flare or a blue light, and the cargo was run, and before daylight was carted away inland."

"Sometimes there was a fight, I suppose?"

"Not so often as might be supposed, or the trade couldn't have been carried on. Still, the preventive men used to come down

upon them sometimes, and then shots would be fired, and perhaps there would be some cutlass work. I remember hearing a story, when I was a boy, of a fray like that, in which a preventive officer was shot dead, and a young man who was said to have been helping to run the cargo disappeared, but whether he had been killed in the fray and secretly buried, or whether he had run away on account of being concerned in it, nobody could say. When several years had passed without anything being heard of him, his father, who was a farmer, and had accumulated some property, as farmers could in them days, died, and the second son stepped into everything, telling everybody that his brother had died in France. In less than a year, however, the elder brother came back, and claimed the property. The other one tried at first to make out that he was an impostor, but finding that wouldn't do, he gave information to the justices, and the young man was taken upon a warrant, and tried at Maidstone for the murder of the officer."

“ Was he convicted ? ” I asked.

“ No, there was not sufficient evidence found when it come to be tried ; and so he was acquitted.”

The rain had by this time ceased, and I went out to look at the sea again, and to ponder the old man's story, the chief incidents of which I recast into the following form as I leaned over the railing at the back of the houses on the north side of the High Street, looking at the sombre sea, and listening to the mournful sound made by the tide as it alternately rolled up the shingle below, and then swept it back again.

THE KING'S PRESS.

Two hundred years ago no one would have predicted that Margate, or, as it was then called, Mergate, would ever attain its present proportions. It was a village only, consisting of a straggling street of wooden houses, occupied chiefly by fishermen, with a sprinkling of necessary shops, and the old flint-built church dedicated to St. John the Baptist, which had

been erected in the eleventh century, sixteen years before William the Norman marched through Kent with his victorious army. Such it had been for centuries, and such it seemed likely to remain, and probably would have remained, but for the inventions of Watt and Stephenson.

One night, at no later hour than the band now plays on the jetty, but at which few lights twinkled in cottage windows, and shops were all closed, in the days when economy in candle-ends prompted early hours, a band of seamen, armed with cutlasses and pistols, and whose leader's uniform showed that he was an officer of a King's ship, came from the little harbour in which the fishermen moored their boats, and tramped along the street in the direction of the village ale-house, before which swung the sign of The Six Bells. There they paused, and listened. Light shone through the faded red curtain at the window, and from within came the sound of merry voices, bursts of laughter and snatches of song, mingled with the chinking of ale-mugs.

“There must be a dozen stout fellows in there,” whispered the officer to a boatswain; “we shall have a rare haul.”

Entering the house alone, he looked into the room in which the toppers were assembled, and saw that most of them were fishermen, with here and there a yeoman or farmer of the neighbourhood.

“What cheer, lads?” he exclaimed, assuming a jovial tone. “How many of you will volunteer to serve the King?”

The voices ceased, the merriment died away instantly, and mugs on their way to mouths were set down again.

“The press!” cried one, as the figures of the seamen were seen beyond the officer; and then they all sprang to their feet, some rushing to the window, others snatching up ash sticks and fire-irons to defend themselves.

The officer and his men rushed into the room, and the former, seeing an athletic young fellow endeavouring to escape by the window, caught him by the arm, and tried to pull him back. A struggle ensued. A knife was

snatched from a seaman's belt, and plunged into the officer's breast. He staggered back with a gurgling cry, which subsided into a groan as he fell upon the floor, and the homicide made his escape by the window. Similar struggles were going on at the same time between the latter's companions and the seamen, both sides using their weapons freely, but without any more serious results than cuts and contusions on heads and arms. In the end, half-a-dozen of the villagers were dragged away to serve the King, their companions having escaped by the window, and the corpse of the officer was left to await the coroner's inquest.

The affray, resulting as it did in the slaying of a King's officer, and the impressment of six fishermen, produced an unwonted excitement in the quiet little village. There was another man missing—the eldest son of a substantial yeoman of the neighbourhood—but, as his description corresponded with that given by more than one of the seamen of the young man whom they had seen struggling with the

officer, and the boatswain swore that he was not among the impressed men, it was supposed that he had fled to avoid the consequences of the fatal blow, and a warrant was issued for his apprehension.

Ten years passed, and Paul Maxted did not return. If his relatives received any communication from him, they did not make it public, but professed to know no more than their neighbours. His father died a few years after his disappearance, and his younger brother, Stephen Maxted, took possession of the patrimonial estate.

One day, as the young yeoman was calculating the probable value of his ungarnered corn crop (for he was a man over-much concerned with the care of adding guinea to guinea), a footstep on the garden-path and a shadow on the porch drew his attention to a stalwart figure in the garb of a mariner, who, as he looked up, stepped forward and extended a large brown hand.

“What cheer, Stephen?” said the mariner, with hearty joviality.

Stephen Maxted stared, changed colour, and neither moved nor spoke. His wife, who was rocking the cradle on the other side of the table at which he was sitting, looked up on hearing the stranger's voice, and wondered who he was.

"Don't you know me?" said the mariner. "Has ten years' wanderings so changed him that you don't know your own and only brother?"

"My brother!" exclaimed the yeoman, with an air of surprise and incredulity. "My brother went away ten years ago, and has never been heard of since. Who you are I don't know."

"Then I must be more changed than I thought I was," said the mariner, with an expression of disappointment on his sun-browned, but not unhandsome countenance.

He doffed his cap on perceiving Stephen's wife, and, without waiting to be invited, seated himself near the table, and looked around the room.

"The old place is little changed," he observed, "and I should have known you,

Stephen, if I had met you on the custom-house quay at Rotterdam. That lady—Mrs. Stephen Maxted, I reckon—has changed more than you have, but I think I remember her when she was called Jenny Harnett.”

“I don’t remember you,” said the young woman, averting her eyes from the mariner, and occupying herself with her baby.

“And I don’t believe you are Paul Maxted, any more than I am the Duke of York,” said her husband.

“You don’t?” exclaimed the mariner, with even more surprise and incredulity in his tone and look than had been manifested by the yeoman.

There was a strong resemblance between the two men, not only in the colour of the hair and the eyes and the general cast of countenance, but even in every feature, their dissimilarity being confined to the expression of character and temperament, in respect of which the balance was in favour of the mariner.

“What will convince you?” the latter asked, after a pause.

“It will take a good deal to convince me that you are Paul Maxted,” Stephen replied, coldly.

“It would be up-hill work to convince you against your will, Stephen,” said the mariner, with a thoughtful air. “Have you got a bit of my writing anywhere?”

“Not a scrap,” replied Stephen, with a shrug.

“Not the letters I wrote from Rotterdam?” said the mariner.

“My brother never wrote,” rejoined the yeoman. “We have for years believed him dead.”

“Try me with questions about the family and about the place,” said the other.

“Not I,” returned Stephen. “You have got your story up well, I daresay.”

“This is not the sort of welcome I expected,” the mariner observed, as he rose, and turned towards the door. “But I daresay I shall find old mates in the village that will know me, and be glad to see me.”

Stephen Maxted changed colour again on

hearing this remark, but he said not a word, and the unwelcome visitor departed.

“He has gone towards Margate,” said the yeoman, gazing after him with an air of anxious thought.

“Is he Paul, think you?” inquired his wife.

“He can’t be,” he replied. “He is not a bit like Paul.”

“But what made you say Paul never wrote?” Jenny asked.

“What made me say that?” returned Stephen, with a slight degree of confusion. “Why, I wasn’t going to give him a chance of producing a tolerable imitation of Paul’s handwriting. Let him make out his claim the best way he can.”

He made two or three turns across the room, corrugating his brows, and looking anxious and perplexed, in spite of his strong expressions of disbelief of the mariner’s claim. In truth there was in his mind no doubt whatever that it was his brother from whom he had just parted so coldly after a separation

of ten years ; but he was unwilling to acknowledge the conviction to his wife, having long before determined that he would never willingly surrender to Paul the patrimony which circumstances had placed in his possession.

“This fellow must be looked after,” he observed, “or he will make mischief. There is nothing very particular to be done to-day, so I think I’ll ride over to Canterbury, and see a lawyer about it.”

So while the mariner walked towards Margate, gradually forgetting his disappointment under the influence of sunshine and his natural lightness of heart, Stephen Maxted was riding towards the ancient city of Canterbury, pondering the possible means of ridding himself of this awkward claimant.

“Nothing easier, my good sir,” said the lawyer to whom he stated the case, rubbing his hands as he spoke, as if he thought the suggestion a good joke. “If he is Paul Maxted, there is a warrant out for him ; and I would go bail he would be glad, if he saw it,

in company with a constable's staff, to prove that he is not Paul Maxted; though, after claiming to be your brother, he might find that as difficult as proving that he is Paul Maxted."

Stephen Maxted had thought of this while riding, and he was not sorry to have it suggested to him by a lawyer. It made it so much easier for him to satisfy his conscience as to the shortest way of dealing with the claimant. So he rode to the residence of the magistrate who, ten years before, had issued the warrant for his brother's apprehension, and gave information that a man claiming to be Paul Maxted was in Margate.

"Mind," he was careful to say, "I don't say that he is Paul Maxted. I don't believe that he is, but he says he is, and if he isn't——"

"Why, then your information is worth nothing; and, if he is Paul Maxted, you will have hanged your brother," rejoined the magistrate, with a look of emphatic condemnation of the informer.

“But I don’t believe he is Paul,” said Stephen, colouring to the roots of his hair, and casting down his eyes.

“Then what have you come here for?” the magistrate asked. “I must do my duty, Master Stephen Maxted, and that is to put a constable on the track of this man; but, mark me, whether he is your brother or not, your name will stink in the nostrils of Kentish men as long as you live.”

Stephen Maxted left the magistrate’s presence, looking very red and very glum, and, remounting his horse, rode slowly home. He said nothing to his wife about his visit to the magistrate, limiting his communication of the result of his journey to Canterbury to a statement that the lawyer’s advice was that the mariner should be left to his own devices, as, if he was not Paul Maxted, he was not likely to risk a halter for Paul Maxted’s crime.

The mariner was, in the meantime, consoling himself for his reception by Stephen Maxted with a carouse at The Six Bells with various old acquaintances of Paul Maxted, who had

flocked to the house on the rumour spreading through the village that the missing man had returned. Some had recognised him at sight; others, without doing so, shook his proffered hand heartily, and asked for no proof of his identity, when assured by him that he was Paul Maxted.

“But aren't it a bit risky, Paul?” whispered Will Hogben, the wheelwright.

“What, after ten years?” returned the mariner. “I reckon that has pretty well blown over by this time, Will; and who is there that would inform against a neighbour for what he did in defence of his liberty? If there is one that would, Margate manners must have changed while I have been across the herring-pond.”

“And so you have been sailing to the Indies with the Dutchmen,” said Sam Mockett, who kept a general store in the village, and had just run in to see whether it was really true that Paul Maxted was at The Six Bells. “I warrant you saw many things to be talked about in them outlandish parts. Is it true

that the Emperor of Java has a palace covered with plates of gold ?”

Before the mariner could answer the question, the village constable stepped into the room, staff in hand, and approached the table at which he was sitting.

“I arrest you, Paul Maxted, for the murder of Hugh Clavering,” said he. “Here is the warrant, and I call upon all to aid and assist in the King’s name.”

No one moved except the mariner, who cleared the table at a bound, overthrew the constable, and rushed for the door. There, stumbling at the threshold over a dog, he was detained by a waggoner who did not know him, and who, thinking he looked like a foreigner, deemed that circumstance and his flight sufficient to warrant his detention. His endeavours to extricate himself caused the waggoner to hold him with a more determined grip, and the constable, having picked himself up, closed the handcuffs upon his wrists with a savage click.

An hour afterwards one of the fishermen

of the village boarded a small Dutch vessel, which had come into harbour that morning, and asked to see the skipper's wife. A fair young woman, with a glory of golden hair waving about one of the loveliest faces the fisherman had ever seen, came from the cabin and looked inquiringly upon his weather-beaten countenance.

"I wishes somebody else had to tell it you," said he, regarding her with an expression of compassion, as he doffed his cap, "but it had better be told you at once, and——"

"What is it? Has anything happened to my husband?" she asked, turning pale at the thought.

"He is well, my good lady," returned the fisherman; "but he has got into a bit of trouble along of a fray there was in the village ten year ago, when a King's officer was killed while pressing men for the navy, and it was sworn as 'twas Master Paul Maxted's hand as struck the blow that killed him."

"Is he in prison?" the poor wife asked,

pressing her hand upon her heart. "Oh, take me to him!"

"Don't get stericky, there's a good lady," said the fisherman. "He has gone up to the justice's house to hear the charge, and it may be that they'll be able to make out nothing against him; but, while we hope for the best, we must be prepared for the worst."

"Where is he?" she asked, all the anguish of her mind finding expression in her lovely countenance. "Take me to him; I must see him."

"Poor lass," murmured the fisherman, as she hurriedly attired herself for the shore, and came forth from the cabin, leading by the hand a beautiful girl of three or four years old.

They had not advanced far along the village street when they were met by a brown-faced fisher-lad, who was hurrying towards the harbour with an expression upon his countenance that indicated the possession of news and a burning desire to impart it.

"What cheer, Master Kebble?" he cried,

scarcely pausing, but turning round and walking backward, speaking as he went. "Heard the news? Paul Maxted is committed, and they say he'll be hung!"

"Never, sure!" exclaimed Kebble, dilating his eyes widely. "Heart alive! But, there! don't be cast down, my good lady. It mayn't be true, after all."

For a moment the mariner's lovely wife looked as if she would faint; but she leaned against a wall, and a mug of water brought by a fisherman's wife arrested the receding life. As she put back the golden tresses from her forehead, her blue eyes discerned a well-known figure on the opposite side of the street. It was her husband, handcuffed, and in the custody of the constable. In a moment she had bounded to his side, and clasped him in her arms, while the little girl clung, weeping, to her father's coat.

At that moment the joyous clang of bells rang out from the old church tower, and the clatter of horses' feet upon the hard road causing the fisher children who had gathered

about the prisoner and his grief-stricken wife and child to turn their gaze eastward, a cry was raised of "Here they come!" and the sorrowing group was immediately deserted for the new attraction.

"Huzza!" shouted the villagers, running from their shops and their cottages and from The Six Bells, as a troop of velvet-coated and sworded cavaliers trotted into the village. "Huzza for the King and the noble Duke!"

"The King!" exclaimed the prisoner's wife, catching at the word as if it had been a reprieve from the scaffold; and then she rushed into the road, and throwing herself upon her knees in the dust, raised her clasped hands and tearful countenance, lovely even in grief, crying: "Pardon, most gracious King! —pardon!"

"For whom do you implore pardon, my good woman?" asked the King, who, with his royal brother, had just before landed at Bartholomew's Gate, thenceforward to be known as the King's Gate. "For yonder good-looking rascal with the bracelets on his wrists?"

Come hither, fellow ! Surely I have seen him before," he added, as if speaking to himself, as the prisoner and the constable stepped into the road, the latter taking off both his own hat and the prisoner's. "Of what is he accused ?"

"He has just been committed, may it please your Majesty, on the charge of murdering Hugh Clavering, an officer of the fleet, ten years ago," replied the constable.

"Ten years ago !" repeated the King, stroking his moustache with an air of thought as he contemplated the sad, yet bold, face of the prisoner. "What do you say to the charge, fellow ?"

"It was a hasty blow, your Majesty, struck by a desperate man in defence of his liberty," replied Paul Maxted.

"Resisting the press, may it please your Majesty," said the constable.

"Ought to be hanged," observed the Duke of York, with a frown. "How is the fleet to be manned ?"

"The certificate, Paul !" cried the kneeling

beauty, raising her blue eyes anxiously to her husband's countenance, "where is it?"

"In my breast-pocket," replied the prisoner, a ray of hope shining into his heart as he remembered it.

In an instant she had sprung to his side, and took from his pocket a little leather case, from which she drew a folded paper.

"Ah!" ejaculated the King, as he extended his hand for it. "I thought I had seen him before."

The paper was in his own handwriting, and set forth that Paul Maxted had on a certain day saved the life of Charles Stuart.

"The boon you crave is granted, good woman," said the King, returning the paper. "By my faith, a sweet face, James! The pardon shall be sent down as soon as I reach Whitehall."

"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, your Majesty," said Paul Maxted.

"A bold fellow!" murmured Charles, glancing at him under his bushy brows; "as ready with his tongue as with his cudgel."

But I have a sad habit of forgetting things that I ought to remember, I must confess. Draw me up a pardon in as clerkly a form as you can," he added, addressing one of his attendants, who instantly dismounted and disappeared within the doors of The Six Bells.

"Heaven bless your Majesty!" cried the prisoner's wife, as with tearful eyes she leaned upon her husband's shoulder.

"You should have seen how the fellow laid about him," said the King, turning to his royal brother. "He saved my life, I verily believe, when I was sorely beset by the rufflers of Alsatia during a night frolic with Rochester and Sedley."

The pardon being brought him for signature, he scrawled *Car. R.* at the foot without leaving the saddle, gave it to Maxted's wife, who availed herself of the opportunity to kiss his hand, and rode on amidst cries of "God bless your Majesty! Huzza for the King and the noble Duke!"

The constable, being unable to read, would fain have taken his prisoner back to the

residence of the magistrate by whom he had been committed; but the villagers insisted upon Maxted's instant liberation, and he was awed by their vociferations and threats into unlocking the handcuffs and setting him free. They would then have carried him off to The Six Bells, but Paul, shaking hands with the nearest, hurried towards the harbour with his wife and child.

Stephen Maxted left the neighbourhood a few days afterwards, and took up his abode in an adjoining county, under a change of name. Paul Maxted abandoned his roving life on the ocean, renounced taverns and roystering companions, and lived quietly and happily during the remainder of his life on his patrimony, remitting to his brother on every quarter-day a sum of money sufficient for his support for the next three months, thus returning good for evil, though Stephen could never be brought to see the matter in that light.

CHAPTER XIV.

Over the cliff—Through the marshes to Reculver—Story of the Sisters of Davington—Ruins of the church—View from Mount Pleasant—Legend of Domneva—Thunnor's Leap—Story of Anthony Gill and the smuggler—Ramble to Monkton and Minster—End of the pilgrimage.

ON the following morning, as soon as I had breakfasted, I started on a ramble westward, leaving the high-road and following a foot-path, or rather a track worn by the feet of preceding ramblers, along the edge of the cliff. Arable land, across which the view was extremely limited, was on my left, and on the right, below the tall white cliff, stretched the sea, which for a short time after I started was shrouded in mist. Presently the fog lifted and quickly dispersed, the sun shone out upon land and sea, and, beyond the broken masses of brown and green rock below me, over which the white-tipped waves were breaking,

an illimitable expanse of water changed by imperceptible gradations from green to silver.

Returning to the high-road near the village of Birchington, I left it again by the lane which passes the railway station, and terminates at a farmhouse at the western extremity of the village. From this point there is a footpath through the marshes between Cliff End and Reculver, and which extend inland as far as Stourmouth. It is a narrow causeway between the green pastures which stretch away on the left as far as the villages of St. Nicholas and Sarr, and the strip of waste which the sea-wall separates from the beach, and protects from the encroachments of the waves. The yellow-flowering poppy of the coast, and other plants which grow only in marshes bordering the sea, may be found in this waste, in traversing which the rambler will probably meet only a brown-faced fisher-boy, and hear only the bleating of sheep on the one hand and the hoarse murmur of the sea on the other.

This part of the coast abounds with evidences of the physical changes which have

been going on for ages, and are still visibly in progress. The greater part of the parish of Reculver has been washed away. A yeoman whom I once met and conversed with, while resting and refreshing myself with a glass of ale at The Red Lion at St. Peter's, and whose patrimony is bounded northward by the edge of the cliff, assured me that his farm was several acres less in extent than when he inherited it. The church is a ruin, perched on the edge of the clay cliff which extends from that point to Whitstable, and has been saved from the fate which, more than half a century ago, overtook the greater part of the burial-ground, only by the construction of the sea-wall by the corporation of the Trinity House, by whom also the two towers of the church are maintained, on account of their utility to passing vessels as landmarks. Before the cliff was faced with stone, human bones were frequently picked up on the beach, and the broken ends of coffins might be seen protruding from the crumbling face of the cliff.

The name of this place is derived from the military station called Regulbium, which the

Roman governors of the island established to guard the channel which in those days divided the Isle of Thanet from the mainland, but of which the only existing traces are two or three ditches through the marshes. The site was near the coastguard station, in which direction there appears to have been a considerable town, many vaults, cisterns, and foundations of buildings having been discovered at various times by the falling of the cliff, together with large numbers of Roman and British coins, utensils, and articles of pottery.

Some of the old chroniclers state that a palace was built here by Ethelbert I., King of Kent, and this may have been the castle mentioned by later writers, within the walls of which the church formerly stood, and some shattered portions of which still remain on the eastern and southern sides, overgrown with ivy and briony, and half-concealed in some part by elder-trees. These fragments show the walls were twelve feet thick, and built of flints, pebbles, and septaria, unmingled, as at Richborough, with Roman bricks. There are no traces of towers. Of the monastery which

existed here in the Anglo-Saxon period, and in the church of which the Kentish kings, Ethelbert I. and Ethelbert II., are said to have been buried, the latter in 760, not a stone remains.

To look for Roman remains here at the present day would be useless, the site of Regulbium having long been under water. Battely, writing towards the end of the seventeenth century, says he remembered that "when part of the cliff, being undermined by the waves, fell down some years ago, some brick foundations of great bulk were discovered, in which were some small vaults, arched over; and, while I was examining them with my hand, I saw some fragments of a tessellated pavement, and of other Roman works; but I only saw them, for very soon after, either broken by the waves, or swallowed by the sand, even these ruins were destroyed."

Hasted says that, "from the present shore, as far as a place called the Black Rock, seen at low-water mark, there have been found great quantities of tiles, bricks, fragments of walls, tessellated pavements, and other marks of a

ruinated town ; and remains of household furniture, dress, and equipage of the horses belonging to the inhabitants are continually met with among the sands : for, after the fall of the cliffs, the earthen part of them being washed away, these metalline substances remained behind."

Of the old church nothing now remains but the two towers, known for ages as the Two Sisters, and a portion of the walls. The former vicarage-house, very near these remains, has been converted into a public-house, and is much frequented during the summer by visitors from Margate and Herne Bay. The present village and church are about a mile and a half distant, in a south-westerly direction.

The towers of the ancient church, which are conspicuous objects at a great distance, whether on land or sea, are often pointed out to each other by cockney voyagers as "The Reculvers," which is as absurd as it would be to designate the towers of Westminster Abbey as "The Westminsters." The spot is even marked by this ridiculous appellation on Bacon's map of Kent. Their traditional name

originated in the circumstances of their reparation by an abbess of the Benedictine convent at Davington, near Feversham, as related by a Dominican friar of Canterbury, who quitted England at the time of the Reformation, and died at Louvain, bequeathing his manuscripts to the university of that city. According to this narrative, the abbess, Frances St. Clair, during a dangerous illness, vowed that, in the event of her recovery, she would visit the shrine of the Holy Virgin at Bradstow—as Broadstairs was then called—and there offer a costly present as a grateful acknowledgment of the saint's intercession in her behalf.

Having recovered, she, in fulfilment of her vow, embarked aboard a small vessel, accompanied by her sister Isabel, to whom she was devotedly attached; but they had been scarcely two hours at sea when a storm arose, which drove the vessel on a sand-bank near Reculver. The abbess, with some of the passengers and crew, succeeded in reaching the shore in a boat, and Isabel, who remained on board the disabled vessel for some hours after her sister, was, with the remainder of those on board,

rescued from it by a boat sent off to their relief, but died on the following day from the effects of cold and exhaustion. In pious remembrance of the peril from which she had been delivered, and to perpetuate the memory of her sister, as well as to warn mariners from the dangerous proximity of the shoal, she caused the towers of the church, which had fallen into decay, to be repaired and raised higher, directing that they should thereafter be called the Two Sisters.

Leaving the ancient churchyard, in which many moss-grown gravestones of considerable antiquity may be found, many of them so deeply sunken into the earth as to be overtopped by the tall nettles, I dined and rested at the neighbouring public-house, called, if I remember rightly, The King Ethelbert, which is probably unique among signs. I was the only guest that day. On a former visit, when I walked from Herne Bay on a Sunday afternoon in summer, the parlour was crowded with visitors, who filled it with a blue haze of tobacco-smoke—all "*bonâ-fide* travellers," as defined by the statute, for they

had all come from London by rail or steamboat, and walked from Herne Bay or Margate.

The following day, being the last of my pilgrimage, I devoted to an inland stroll through the most pleasant spots of which Thanet can boast. Having followed the high-road westward as far as Birchington, I there turned into a secluded lane on the left, which leads at a little distance to a footpath across the fields to the hamlet of Acol, and thence to Mount Pleasant, the highest spot in the island, and in the midst of scenes made interesting by their historical and legendary associations.

From the summit of this hill I looked over the most extensive prospect which the eye can command anywhere between the Stour and the sea. To the right, looking across the green pastures between St. Nicholas and Reculver, was the sea, its emerald waves glittering in the sunlight as if tipped with silver, and the towers of the ruined church of Reculver distinctly defined against the clear blue sky in the distance. Westward, the delighted eye wanders over a wide tract of intermingled pasture, arable, and woodland, pleasantly undulating,

with the towers and spires of village churches rising among the distant woods, the white spire which surmounts the tower of Ash Church, and serves as a landmark, being especially conspicuous towards the south ; and the venerable towers of Canterbury Cathedral, backed by Harbledown and the woods beyond, closing the view up the valley of the Stour. On the left is Pegwell Bay, with the Stour meandering through the once-submerged flats, and guiding the eye onward to where the towers of the Sandwich churches rise against the bright blue sky, and thence to the Downs.

The early history of our island seems to unfold itself before the mind's eye as we stand on this hill, and look around. It was here, according to tradition, that the Kentish king, Ethelbert I., met the Roman monk, Augustine, and held the first conference on the prospect of converting to Christianity our pagan ancestors. Away to the right, where the towers of the ancient church of Reculver cut the sky, stood the palace or castle which was built by Ethelbert, and the monastery to which he is said to have retired after his conversion.

Close at hand are the low green ridge which marks the course taken by Domneva's deer, and the chasm which engulfed the base assassin, Thunnor. To the left is Sandwich, where the galleys of imperial Rome have anchored, and whence fleets have so often sailed to prosecute the interminable Anglo-French wars of the Middle Ages. And then what memories crowd upon us as we look towards Canterbury, or gaze southward upon the shipping in the Downs !

The remarkable events embodied in the legend of Domneva's deer and Thunnor's Leap are said by Thorn, a native of Thanet and a monk of the monastery of St. Augustine, at Canterbury, to have occurred in the latter part of the seventh century. The manor of Thanet was held at that time by Egbert, King of Kent, whose nephews, Ethelred and Ethelbright, were left to his guardianship, under a solemn promise that they should succeed him in the sovereignty. Thunnor, a base and sycophantic minister, advised Egbert to have these princes murdered, lest they should disturb him in the possession of the throne,

which execrable deed he undertook to perform, and actually perpetrated.

On the crime being discovered, Egbert was advised by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Abbot of St. Augustine's to make such atonement for it as would satisfy Domneva, the sister of the murdered princes, who was a nun. The princess demanded of the king that he should give her as much land of his manor of Thanet as would build and endow a convent, wherein she and her nuns might continually pray for his absolution and the repose of her brothers' souls. Egbert granted her prayer, and asked how much land she required, when she replied, as much as a deer could run over in one course. The king agreeing to this singular stipulation, a stag was taken to Westgate, and liberated on the beach, in presence of all the court and a large concourse of people.

Among the spectators was the assassin Thunnor, who, ridiculing the monarch for his lavish gift and the mode of determining the extent of land to be given, sought every means of obstructing the course of the deer by crossing its path and encountering it, until, says the

monkish chronicler, "Heaven, in wrath at his impiety, while Thunnor was in the height of his career, caused the earth to open and engulf him." The deer, after making a small curve eastward, directed its course south-westward, nearly in a straight line, running over forty-eight ploughed lands, comprising about ten thousand acres of the best land in Kent. Egbert thereupon surrendered to his niece the tract which the animal had traversed, and granted her a charter, which concluded with a singular curse upon anyone who should infringe its provisions. With this land Domneva endowed the abbey which she erected at Minster—according to some accounts upon the spot where the church now stands, though others represent the ancient and handsome mansion now known as The Abbey as occupying the site of Domneva's foundation.

An embankment was raised across the island to mark the boundary of the lands surrendered by the king, and some traces of it are still discernible in a ridge near The Prospect Inn, on the summit of Mount Pleasant. The spot where Thunnor is said to have been

swallowed by the earth, and which was long known as Thunnor's Leap, is not far from The Prospect, and has very much the appearance of a long-abandoned chalk-pit. Its depth is considerable, and the brink overhung with brambles. It is now called the Smuggler's Leap, from a tradition that a famous "free-trader," endeavouring to evade the pursuit of an active officer of the preventive service, was precipitated with his horse into the hollow, which is said to have been haunted ever since by the ghost of the pursuer, who met with the fate which might have been anticipated, but which the smuggler seems to have escaped.

The remarkable incidents of this story, sensational enough for an Adelphi drama of the "Flying Dutchman" and "Three-fingered Jack" period, are said to have occurred in the early part of the last century. Anthony Gill, an active and intrepid officer of the preventive service, had long been endeavouring to compass the apprehension of a smuggler as bold and as active as himself, but whose name has not been preserved. One night, when a cargo of spirits had been landed under the lee of the

Reculver cliffs, and was on its way into the interior, the convoy was intercepted by Gill and his men at the turn of the road leading to Herne. The smugglers fled in all directions, but Gill, who had recognised by the moonlight the man whom he was so anxious to secure, singled him out for pursuit, resolving to continue the chase until he had run him down.

Both were well mounted, and, outside the chapter of accidents, success was likely to attend the man who rode the best horse; unless, indeed, the smuggler could find a refuge to which he could not be tracked. Such a place there was at that time, a cave near the hamlet of Manston, about a mile northward from the road from Sandwich to Ramsgate; and to gain this retreat the smuggler directed all his endeavours, galloping down Chislett Lane, then turning off sharp to the left, thundering over Sarr Bridge, and rousing the sleepers of Monkton and Minster. Too closely pressed by Gill to reach the cave, he turned his horse's head northward, and urged the reeking and panting animal towards Acol, with what purpose can never be known.

Probably he had no other than to outride his pertinacious pursuer.

The closing incidents of that ride for life can only be surmised. Gill and his horse, both dead, were found next morning at the bottom of the old chalk-pit near Acol. Beneath them was the crushed and lifeless form of the smuggler's horse, but the desperate rider was never seen afterwards. The manner of his escape must have been a terribly perplexing mystery, unless, as seems very probable, the Thanet folks solved it by ascribing it to the agency of the devil.

From Mount Pleasant I strolled on to the straggling village of Monkton, pleasantly situated on the southern slope of the island. The little church, which looks ancient, but is in good substantial condition, is built of flints and bricks, some of the latter having the appearance of Roman. A very agreeable exception to the want of shade which characterises most of the roads in Thanet (I believe the only other is a portion of the road between St. Lawrence and Pegwell, and that is shaded on one side only), is presented by the road

from Monkton to Minster, and thence to the junction with the road from Ramsgate to Sandwich, near The Sportsman Inn, where the cliffs subside into the shell-strewn flats which stretch away to the Stour. The latter portion of the road is shaded by trees on both sides, and, the road being narrow, their branches meet overhead, forming an arch of verdure very refreshing to the eye after a long walk in the glare of the sun.

From the church at Monkton to the village of Minster is about two miles. The church at the latter place is ancient, but the mixture of styles in the architecture seems to indicate partial reconstruction at different periods. The carved oak seats are undoubtedly antique, and, with the handsome roof, give a good appearance to the interior. After refreshing myself with a glass of ale at The Bell, I strolled down the shaded road before mentioned, and looked once more upon the shining waters of Pegwell Bay from the pleasant garden of The Belle Vue Hotel.

There I dined that day, and there, on that bright September afternoon, I saw the shallow

waters of the bay dotted with shrimpers, with their hand-nets and baskets, pursuing the staple industry of the village. Pegwell is the chief seat of the potted shrimps trade, many men and boys being employed in the capture of the tiny crustaceans, and a considerable number of hands, chiefly women and girls, in preparing and potting them.

Early in the evening I strolled back to Minster, and in a few minutes was seated in the train which was to bear me back to London. In concluding this record of a delightful ramble, I have only to recommend those in quest of a week's recreation to go over the same ground in the same manner; and the admirers of the works of Charles Dickens in particular to at least visit Cobham and Strood, and Rochester and Canterbury, with the most portable edition of those works of the great novelist which have associated those places with his genius. May they enjoy the ramble as much as I did!

THE END.

