Our English Villages

P.H. Ditchfield

M

O. xv 12

OUR ENGLISH VILLAGES.

OUR ENGLISH VILLAGES:

Their Story and their Antiquities.

BY

P. H. DITCHFIELD, M.A.,

FELLOW OF THE ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY;
RECTOR OF BARKHAM, BERKS.

LONDON:
METHUEN & CO.,
18, BURY STREET, W.C.
1889.

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

TO

MY SINCERE FRIEND

JOSEPH HENRY WILSON, Esq.

PREFACE.

A SERIES of articles upon "Our English Villages" were contributed by the author to Canon Erskine Clarke's *Parish Magazine*. Several correspondents, personally unknown to the author, kindly wrote approvingly of them, and suggested that the articles should be published separately, and expanded into a volume. This suggestion has been carried out; and it is hoped that the book may enable the dwellers in our villages to appreciate the rich store of historical treasures which lie around them; to know more of the manners and customs of their forefathers; and to associate the fields in which they work, the church in which they worship, the houses in which they dwell, with the past history of their home and country.

The writer desires to express his thanks to Canon Clarke for his permission to reprint the portions of

the work which appeared in his Magazine, and to acknowledge the kindness of his friends, Dr. Stevens, Hon. Curator of the Reading Museum, and the Rev. R. S. Mylne, B.C.L., F.S.A., for their valuable assistance in revising the proof-sheets. The works of Seebohm, Maine, Bishop Stubbs, Canon Taylor, Freeman, and others, have been consulted in the historical portion of the book; and Mr. T. Wright, F.S.A., Hone, and other writers, have given the author much information upon the subjects of archæology and folk-lore.

Barkham Rectory,
1889.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER V.

CHAPTER VI.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHAPTER IX.

CHAPTER X.

CHAPTER XI.

CHAPTER XII.

OUR ENGLISH VILLAGES.

CHAPTER I.

IT is a sad pity that so little is known about the villages in which we live. All writers seem to join in the same lament, and mourn over the ignorance that prevails in rural England with regard to the treasures of antiquity, history, and folk-lore which are to be found almost everywhere. Mr. Hughes, the author of "Tom Brown's School-days," says that the present generation know nothing of their own birthplaces, or of the lanes, woods, and fields through which they roam. Not one young man in twenty knows where to find the wood-sorrel, or the bee-orchis; still fewer can tell the country legends, the stories of the old gable-ended farm-houses, or the place where the last skirmish was fought in the Civil War, or where the parish butts stood.

I wish to create an interest about the places in which we live, and in some of the objects which many of my readers witness every day without ever imagining how really interesting they are, if they were only observed closely and carefully; and I would like to give you a pair of excellent spectacles, which you may put on, and with which you may examine things for yourselves. Of course I am not acquainted with the particular village in which you live. You

ROMAN COINS.

may have a Roman villa near your abode, and while you are digging in your fields you may be able to pick up Roman coins. A woman told me a few days ago that formerly she sold as many as thirty shillings' worth of coins in a week, which were gathered when she was hoeing or gleaning in the fields. I do not think she acted quite rightly in selling them, because they belonged to the owner of the soil. But all are not so favoured as to have a Roman camp in their neighbourhood. However, there are few villages in

England which have no objects of historical interest, no relics of the past which are worth preservation, and I will endeavour to show how these treasures of knowledge may be gathered and saved from the destructive hand of time.

It has been well said that every man's concern with the place where he lives has something more in it than the mere amount of rates and taxes that he has to pay. He may not be able to write a history of his parish, but he can gather up the curious gossip of the country-side, the traditions and stories which have been handed down from former generations. Moreover, he can read history and acquire knowledge which will occupy his mind when he is digging his garden or looking after cattle ; and this will give him much greater pleasure and satisfaction than thinking and talking about his neighbours' faults, or imitating the example of the agricultural labourer who, when asked by his clergyman what he was thinking so deeply about, replied, "Mostly naught!" As I am not acquainted with the particular village in which you live, I cannot describe it in detail. Therefore, I propose to give a sketch of some of the general features of an ordinary English village, and request that you will fill up the details and adapt the picture to your own particular locality.

We will walk together through the main roads of your village, and observe some of its many points of interest. Indeed, it is no small thing to live in such

a "city of memories" as every village is when at every turn and corner we meet with something that reminds us of the past, and recalls the pleasing associations of old village life. To those who have lived amid the din and turmoil of a large town, where everybody is in a hurry, and there is nothing but noise, confusion, and bustle, the delicious calm and quietude of an old English village, undisturbed by the world's rude noise, is most grateful. But to live in memory of what has gone before, of the lives and customs of our forefathers, of the strange events which have happened on the very ground upon which we are standing, all this will make us love our village homes, and delight in them exceedingly. In most of our large towns the old features are fast disappearing; historical houses have been pulled down to make room for buildings more adapted to present needs, and everything is being modernized; but in the country everything remains the same, and it is not so difficult to let one's thoughts wander into the past. When we go to our work in the fields we shall think perhaps of the first farmers, the Saxon folk, who tilled that ground, or of the old monks who knew so much about agriculture, or of the scenes of slaughter which perhaps took place there; for did not Tom Jones's father find a rusty old sword and a cannon ball when he was draining the meadow a few years ago? Perhaps you may find trophies of this kind some day. And when you think of the gallant

fight of the Cavaliers and the Roundheads, you will remember a line of poetry which probably you learnt at school, "How that red rain hath made the harvest grow,"—a harvest of peace which, please God, may never be broken again.

It would add tenfold to our interest in life to know these things, to read about them, and think about them. Nay, life is a burden, labour mere drudgery, when a man has nothing to interest himself in. When we remember the long hours which an agricultural labourer spends alone, without a creature to speak to, except his horses or the birds, how dull his life must be if his mind is not occupied. But here, on his own ground, he may find an endless supply of food for thought, and perhaps in our walk to-day we may pick up a few of these treasures.

We see arising above the trees the church, the centre of your village life—not only the centre of the religious life, but of the secular and social life also. The spire ever points to heaven, and bids us with its silent voice to lift up our hearts. "Sursum corda" is the sermon the spire's voice ever preaches, and has preached to the generations who have long since passed away, and who now lie asleep in their last resting-place in God's hallowed acre.

How much interesting information may be gathered from the old time-worn registers which are kept in the iron safe in the vestry, and which your clergyman will be glad to show you! They breathe the atmo-

sphere of past generations, and tell the stories and romances of the "rude forefathers of the hamlet." The tombs and monuments of knights and ancient heroes attract our attention, and inspire us to imitate their glowing virtues; and the windows, brasses, bells, and inscriptions have all an interesting tale to tell.

Then we notice an old farm-house which has doubtless seen better days, for there are the remains of an ancient moat around it, as if some family of importance once lived there, and wished to guard themselves and their possessions from troublesome visitors. If only the walls could speak, how many stories they could tell of the strange customs of our ancestors, of bread-riots, of civil wars, and disturbances which once destroyed the tranquillity of even such a village as this.

Nestling amid the trees we see the manor-house, standing probably on the site of a much older house; and this building carries our thoughts back to the Saxon and early Norman times, when the feudal system existed, of which we shall learn more presently, and when the lord of the manor had vassals and serfs under him, and reigned as king in his own small domain.

And as we think of these early days of England's history, we call to mind the many waves of invaders which rolled over our country—the Celts, the Romans, Saxons, Danes, and Normans—all of whom left some

traces behind them, and about whom we should like to know more perfectly.

The very names of the fields are not without signification, and tell us of strange animals which are now extinct, of the manners of our forefathers, of the old methods of farming, and of the common lands which have passed away.

The old village inn, with its curiously painted sign-board, has its own story to tell, of the old coaching days, and of the great folks who used to travel along the main roads, and were sometimes snowed up in a drift just below "The Magpie," which had always "good accommodation for travellers," and stabling for fifty horses. But the railroads and iron steeds have changed all that now; many old inns have degenerated into beer-houses; the roads are deserted, and the coaches have left us many more houses of entertainment than are required by the few travellers who now frequent our highways.

There is a curious formation on the summit of yonder commanding hill, which looks very much like an earthwork, and which we will presently examine more closely, and find out by whom it was constructed. An ivy-covered ruin near the church shows the remains of a monastic cell, or monastery; and in the distance we see the outlines of an old Norman keep, or castle. When were these built, and when destroyed? What does history tell us about them? These are questions about which it would be interesting to know something.

Then there are the curious legends and stories which were told us by our grandfathers, which are almost forgotten by the present generation. These we should treasure up, lest they should quite be lost. Local tradition has often led the way to important discoveries.

In this brief circuit of your village, we have found many objects which arouse our interest, and excite our imagination. Let us proceed to examine them more closely, and we shall find that they well repay our study, and lead us to love our village home, and to take a more intelligent interest in our surroundings.

CHAPTER II.

IT is possible that you may have near your village some gravel-pits, which may contain certain objects of great interest. I refer to the flint implements, which were used by the early savage inhabitants of this country long before history begins, and before the Celts conquered this island. In these gravel-beds are frequently found the remains of flint tools, such as hatchets, scrapers, awls, and the like. There was a time when the primitive race who used these strange tools lived in this country, and it is not remarkable that, after all these years, we are able to find their weapons and instruments, as the material of which they are made is practically indestructible.

There was a time when the northern part of our fair country was a mass of ice, and evidences of the action of ice may there be seen almost everywhere. Large fragments of rocks, quite different from any in the neighbourhood, are found here and there, which

in some far-distant period had been brought there by becoming fixed in a glacier, which moved gradually onwards and, when the ice melted, left its luggage in some distant plain. There was a time when there was no sea between England and the Continent; when the elephant, rhinoceros, boar, bear, lion, wild ox, and mammoth were prowling about the country; but as these animals do not belong to the same climate, they could not all have been here at one time. There was a time when the sea almost covered our island; and sea-shells have been found at a height of 1350 feet above the sea level, on the sides of Snowdon, and at other places.

But all this belongs to pre-historic times, of which we have no record except what the earth has preserved for us; and in your gravel-pits you may find traces of the strange, rude people who lived here thousands of years before history begins. You may also discover the fossil remains of animals, shell-fish, and such-like, and make a collection of all the curiosities which your neighbourhood affords.

But our concern is principally with the history of our English villages, and to that I desire now to direct your attention. In the first place, the history of your village will depend upon the roads which run through it. A recent writer says, "If you would read aright the history of any district or village, begin by learning the alphabet of its roads." Of all the antiquities of a country the roads are the oldest; for

by following the natural features of the country, or the cross-tracks by which wild animals descended from the high ground to water, man first gained a hold of the country. Rivers were the first high-roads. The early colonists made their way up the Thames or the Humber; they worked their way inland along the tracks of the animals. Presently the trail widened into a waggon-track, and then into a road. The fords of the rivers generally mark the course of the old roads, which extended from ford to ford, and then ran along the high ground, as the river valleys were very marshy and full of swamps.

The rivers were not so deep then as they are now; for the ground was not then worn away so much by the constant flow of water. When the early colonists found a naturally strong position which seemed to command the country and prevent others from following in their steps, they made a rude fort or earthwork; and in after-years, when other conquerors came who knew the art of building strong castles, they often erected on the same spot, well chosen for defence, a huge erection of stone walls, which, before the age of gunpowder, seemed to defy all attacks.

Whether your village was an important place in olden times or not depends very much upon its nearness to these old roads, and upon its natural position as regards its suitability for defence, and its proximity to the main rivers of England.

You are probably aware that several waves of

invaders have rolled over this country. They all came westward, and followed each other just as you have seen one wave following another on the beach when the tide is rising. First there was the oldest race of all, of which we know scarcely anything. It was called the Euskarian race; and the black-haired, short-statured people who are found in Caithness and in the south-west of Ireland, and the Basques who live in the Pyrenees mountains, are the only remains of the earliest inhabitants of this country. They have, however, left their trace behind in the long barrows, and in one or two names of places, as well as in the stone implements which are found on the surface of the ground; and the name Britain is supposed to be of Euskarian origin.

In tracing the early history of our villages we shall find great assistance from the names, as we shall see throughout the course of this book; for there is no record so enduring as the names of places, and even when a nation has been conquered, driven out, and destroyed, we can almost read its history by studying the names of the places which they have left behind.

The next wave of invaders was the Celtic race. There were two great branches of this race, the Gaels and the Cymry. The latter supplanted the former, and drove them into Ireland and into the Highlands of Scotland. The whole of England was once peopled by the Celts, who in this country were called the

Britons, and, in fact, over the greater part of Europe this powerful race once held supreme dominion. They have left their trace behind in the names which they gave to the rivers and mountains of the lands which they occupied. The Danube, the Don in Russia, the Rhone, the Eridanus, or Po, in Italy, are all derived from a Celtic word which means *water*, or *river*. The Irish, the Welsh, the Highlanders of Scotland, and the dwellers in Cornwall, are still Celts in blood, and, in some parts, speak the Gaelic language. Many of the towns, villages, and rivers retain to this day the names which the Celts first gave them —for example, London, Canterbury.

The Celts were followed by the Romans, led by the victorious Cæsar. After a gallant resistance the Britons, or Celts, were subdued; but the Roman rule was not of a permanent nature. After the lapse of four hundred years their armies were withdrawn to defend their own country, and the British were left to defend themselves against their troublesome neighbours the Picts and Scots (also a Celtic race), and their equally troublesome visitors the Saxons.

These Saxons were the next invaders of the country; they came over from Germany, and completely conquered the Britons and drove them into Wales and Cornwall. It is certain that the Romans completely conquered, but did not extirpate, the ancient inhabitants of England, whereas the Saxons annihilated, as far as possible, all who came across

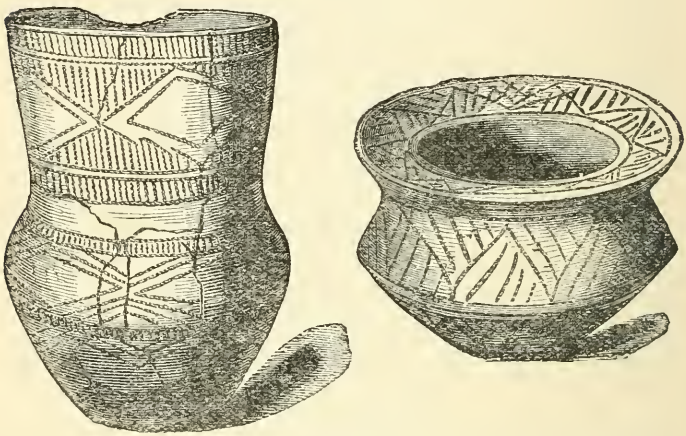
their path. Yet, under the softening influence of Christianity, their love of human blood diminished, and hence to the west some slight admixture of the races is found. Then came the Danes and Norwegian pirates, who gained a hold on the seaports, while the Danes carried devastation inland, sailing up the rivers, burning towns and villages, and creating great terror wherever they went. But the Saxons were victorious in the end, until at last another wave of invaders poured over the land; the Normans, under William, surnamed the Conqueror, crossed over from Normandy, in France, defeated the Saxon king, Harold, and established complete dominion over the unfortunate Saxon race.

It was necessary to give this short account of the different races which overspread our land, in order that you might understand the condition of the country in those early times; and you will gather from what I have stated, that the early history of your village depends very much upon the part of the country in which it is situated.

If your village is situated in the south or east of England, or in that part of the country which is bounded by Wales on the west and Lincolnshire and Leicestershire on the east, including also the West Riding of Yorkshire and the east part of Lancashire it was probably a Saxon settlement. The south-east part of Scotland is also Saxon. From time to time the Northmen, who came from Norway and Denmark,

made incursions into this country, and conquered a considerable portion of the land. They were a strong, powerful, warlike race, and pushed their conquests far and wide over the greater part of Europe, sailing in their vessels to France, Spain, Italy, and Greece, plundering and taking possession of the towns and villages wherever their victorious ships went. There were two branches of this race—the Danes, who settled in the east of England, and the Norsemen from Norway, who occupied Cumberland, Lancashire, the northern extremity of Scotland, the western islands, and numerous towns and strips of country on the sea-coasts all round England. All places ending in *by*, such as Derby, Whitby, Rugby, Grimsby, were Danish settlements, the word *by* meaning a village; and if you were to go to Denmark you would find many of the names of the Danish villages ending in *by*, just as some of our English towns and villages do. If, therefore, your village name ends in *by*, you may conclude that it was a Danish settlement. *Thorpe* is another Danish word, which tells the same tale. On the contrary, words ending in *wick*, *wald*, *guard*, *ford*, denote, in most cases, Norwegian settlers. It is curious that the most northern part of this island should be called Sutherland (the south land), but when you know that it was a colony of the Northmen who came from more northern regions, you will not be so much surprised. For the same reason, the western islands of Scotland were called Sodor, Su-

dreyjar, or Southern Islands. The Bishop of that small island which lies between Lancashire and Ireland is called the Bishop of Sodor and Man, because the diocese of these Southern Islands was united with the diocese of Man about eight hundred years ago; and although the Bishop of Sodor and Man has no longer any authority in the Scottish isles, the title still remains the same.



BRITISH POTTERY.

I have now given you a rough outline of the various settlements of the Celts, Saxons, Danes, and Norwegians in this country. If you live in Wales (with the exception of Pembrokeshire) or Cornwall your village is probably of Celtic origin; if in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, parts of Derby-

shire, Norfolk, or Suffolk, you will find a great number of Danish villages; if in Cumberland, Westmoreland, east of Lancashire and Cheshire, Pembrokeshire, or on the south coast of Wales, the Norwegians most probably once held possession of the place. If your village lies in any other part of England, you may conclude that it is of Saxon origin.

There are exceptions to this general statement. For example, we know that the Danes pushed their conquests considerably inland; they gave our good King Alfred a great deal of trouble; they besieged and destroyed towns and villages, sometimes establishing themselves as colonists for a time. The Danish village names of Heythrop in Oxfordshire, and Danesend in Herts, are evidences of their inland victories. Neither was the expulsion of the Britons or Celts quite complete. Many of them lived on in their old villages—the descendants of the woad-dyed, coracle-paddling worshippers of the oak-trees, who did such brave things under Queen Boadicea against the old Romans. They became the serfs, or slaves of the Saxon conquerors, who, when their time came, had in their turn to bow their heads, serve, and do homage to the haughty Norman lords. But, as I have said before, many of the old British names remained, and it is quite possible that your village name may be Celtic, although you live in the part of the country so long held by the Saxons.

CHAPTER III.

IN the last chapter I tried to show the probable origin of your village, and I gave some rules by means of which you may discover whether the original settlers were Celtic, Saxon, Danish, or Norwegian. But many of our villages and towns were Roman stations; and in order to understand the early history of our country, it is necessary to learn something about the Romans, who came to Britain fifty-five years before the Birth of Christ, and whose armies were so bravely and stubbornly resisted by the Britons for nearly a hundred years. Perhaps you may have the good fortune to live near an old Roman station, and have the pleasing excitement of finding old Roman coins and other treasures when you are engaged in draining the land or digging wells. Most of the names of the Roman stations are distinguished by the termination *chester*, such as Manchester, Dorchester, Ribchester, Silchester, and many others. *Chester* is a form of the word

castra, which is the Latin word signifying *a camp;* and wherever you meet with this word you may imagine the legions of well-drilled Roman soldiers who used to frequent the neighbourhood, and astonish the natives with their strange language and more civilized customs. The Romans were celebrated for their wonderful roads, which extended from camp to camp, from city to city, all over the country. These roads still remain, and are evidences of the great engineering skill which the Romans possessed. They liked their roads well drained, and raised high above the marshes; they liked their roads to go straight ahead, like their victorious legions, and never swerve to right or left for any obstacle. They cut through the hills, and filled up the valleys; and there were plenty of idle Britons about who could be forced to do the work. These roads were called *strata*, or *streets;* and I may mention Icknield Street, or Way, from Norwich to Dorchester and Exeter; Watling Street, from London to Chester; Ermin Street, from London to Lincoln; Akeman Street, from London to Bath—a very appropriate name, for sick people used to be carried along it to bathe in the hot springs at Bath to be cured of their *aches*. It appears that Bath used to be frequented by rheumatic Romans, as it is now by some of our rheumatic neighbours still.

All places whose names contain the word *Street*, such as *Streat*ley, or *Stret*ford, were situated on these Roman roads. You may have been treading in the

footsteps of the old Romans for many years, and yet have been unconscious of the fact. You may see these roads wending their way straight as a die, over hill and dale, staying not for marsh or swamp, and in some central place extending like spokes from the centre of a wheel, although nearly eighteen hundred years have elapsed since their construction. The name of a place called Devizes, in Wilts, is a corruption of the Latin word *divisæ*, which marks the place where the old Roman road from London to Bath was *divided* by the boundary line between the Roman and the Celtic district.

But the Roman engineering skill did not confine itself to making roads. They constructed bridges over the rivers, and in the north of England they built two famous walls, which were guarded by soldiers, in order to keep back their wild, troublesome neighbours who lived in that part of Great Britain which we call Scotland. Most probably you have burned in your grate some best *Wallsend* coal. This is brought from a place in Northumberland which bears that name, and which marks the spot where the old Roman wall built by the Emperor Hadrian ended. The greater part of this famous wall is still standing, and there are many places which mark its course, such as Wall, Wallhouses, Walltown, Wallby, and so on.

If your village lies along these Roman roads, or near the wall, or in the neighbourhood of any great Roman station, Roman remains in the shape of

coins and earthenware may probably be found. The principal Roman cities which were honoured with the name of a *colony* were Richborough, London, Colchester, Bath, Gloucester, Caerleon, Chester, Lincoln, and Chesterfield. There were two municipal cities which ranked nearly as high as the colonies—Verulam and York; and ten free towns—Inverness, Perth, Dumbarton, Carlisle, Catterick, Blackrod, Cirencester, Salisbury, Caistor in Lincolnshire, and Slack in Longwood. There were many other stations which did not enjoy quite so high a rank as those which I have named. Any place whose name contains *chester*, *cester*, or *caster*, was once a Roman station.

Oftentimes labourers have unexpectedly met with the buried walls and beautifully tiled floors of an ancient Roman dwelling-place. Here is an example of how these buried relics have been brought to light. A few years ago, at a place named Chedworth, near Cirencester, a ferret was lost, and instead of bringing out the rabbit, it had itself to be dug out of the rabbit burrow. In doing this some Roman tiles, called *tesseræ*, were dug up; and when further excavations were made a Roman villa with rooms of large size, artistic pavements, a Roman bath, and many beautiful relics of Roman art, were brought to light.

Throughout the country there may be seen artificial mounds, which are called *tumuli*, or *barrows*, or, in the neighbourhood of Wales, "tumps." These are ancient burial-places of the early inhabitants of our

country. The Britons burnt their dead, and interred the charred bones in badly-baked earthen pots beneath a large mound ; and besides the urns, it is not unusual to find implements of stone, bone, or bronze, and simple ornaments in the shape of necklaces and pendants of jet or bone. The Romans also incinerated some of their dead, and others they interred entire ;

ANCIENT BRITISH MOUNDS, OR *TUMULI.*

but their cremation pottery is of better shape and texture than that used by the Britons. There is the story of a great Roman Emperor who on his death-bed called for the urn which was destined to contain his ashes, and said, "That which the world could not contain this little clay shall hold."

The Saxons, who followed the Romans, after a

similar fashion practised cremation and inhumation, and used both tumuli and cemeteries. In the latter, in later Saxon times, the mounds of earth covering their dead more nearly resemble the small heaps of earth placed over the graves in our own village churchyards. But their barrows, as in the case of the Britons, usually stand on elevated places, either solitary or in groups; and it is not uncommon to find that the Saxons placed their urns in the mounds of the Britons. Sometimes a large solitary Saxon barrow is found to contain the bones of a chief buried with all his personal ornaments and military trappings, of which the barrow at Taplow, Bucks, furnishes an instance. This tumulus stands in the centre of the old churchyard, and this occurrence is not unusual. The church was built much later than the erection of the mound; but probably the early preachers of the gospel took advantage of the reverence which was paid to these ancient tombs, and chose to build their churches near them.

Many of these mounds have not yet been examined, and perhaps some inscription or coin which you may find may throw light upon some disputed or unexplained portion of the history of the Roman occupation of Britain, which lasted nearly four hundred years.

I do not think that the following legend will deter you from your search. It is gravely stated that years ago an avaricious person dug into a tumulus for some treasure which it was supposed to contain. At length,

after much labour, he came to an immense chest, but the lid was no sooner uncovered than it lifted itself up a little, and out sprang a large black cat, which seated itself upon the chest, and glowed with eyes of fire upon the intruder. Nothing daunted, the man proceeded to move the chest, but without avail ; so he fixed a strong chain to it and attached a numerous team of horses. But when the horses were started, the chain broke in a hundred places, and the chest of treasure disappeared for ever. Some say that if you run nine times round a tumulus, and then put your ear against it, you will hear the fairies dancing and singing in the interior.

Indeed, it was quite a common superstition that good fairies lived in these old mounds, and a story is told of a ploughman who unfortunately broke his ploughshare. However, he left it at the foot of one of these mounds, and the next day, to his surprise, he found it perfectly whole. Evidently the good fairies had mended it during the night. But these bright little beings, who used to be much respected by our ancestors, have quite deserted our shores now. They found that English people did not believe in them, so they left us in disgust, and have never been heard of since.

If you live in the south-west part of England, your country had some earlier visitors than the Romans ; and, indeed, we do not know how long ago they came: some people say at least fourteen hundred

years before the birth of Christ; but I believe this to be an exaggeration. These early visitors were the Phœnician merchants, who came to carry off that for which Britain was famous, namely, tin and lead. An ancient writer informs us that Britain also produced "gold and silver and skins and slaves, and dogs sagacious in hunting, which the Celts used for the purposes of war as well as their native dogs." For these the merchants gave them in exchange such things as earthenware, salt, and brass vessels. Also trinkets, beads, glass vessels, and Roman earthenware found their way to Britain, through the merchants, long before the Romans came.

British towns or villages were not very luxurious places. Cæsar, who led his victorious armies into Britain, says that the number of them was great, and that the Britons called that place a town where they used to assemble for the sake of avoiding an incursion of enemies, when they had fortified the entangled woods with a rampart and a ditch. It is quite possible that you will find some remains of such British towns in your neighbourhood, as they are very numerous in all parts of England. The writer of a book, entitled "Cæsar in Kent," thus describes them:—

"They are all similar in form; some of them are surrounded, not by one, but by many ramparts, with deep ditches between them, and were evidently strongly fortified towns. The habitations contained within these walls of earth were mere huts of

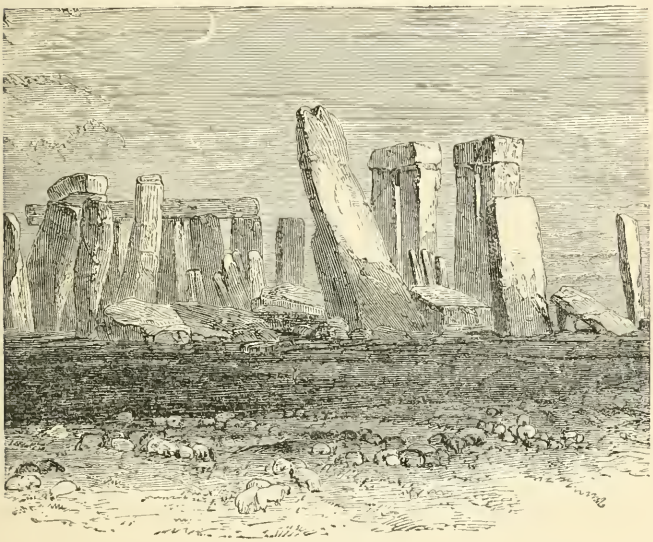
wood and thatch, though some which have been discovered consisted of holes dug in the earth, over which a thatched roof was probably constructed. Mr. Frank Buckland writes, that some labourers when digging gravel at Brighthampton, near Oxford, came across several such excavations. They were simply pits dug in the earth, large enough to hold one or two persons, and from the sides of these pits a certain quantity of earth had been removed so as to form a seat."

But the earthworks in your neighbourhood may have been constructed by other hands than those of ancient Britons. If they are square or oblong in shape they were probably constructed by the Romans, as their soldiers were always drilled in that form. If the earthworks are circular, they are probably of Saxon or Danish origin; but if they are irregular, following the natural outlines of the summit of the hill, they were probably made by the ancient Britons.

It is possible that you may have other remains of this ancient people in your neighbourhood—Druidical stones, perhaps, on which they used to offer human sacrifices, such as at Stonehenge, about which we know so little; or the quaint figures of horses cut in the turf on the hill-side, such as the White Horse Hill, near Wantage, in Berks, which is probably of British origin. Near it there is another British curiosity, the Blowing Stone, wrongly called King Alfred's Bugle Horn, but which was probably a rude trumpet of stone, used by the British tribes for calling their scattered families together.* Either British lungs

* Cf. "History of Berks," by Lieut.-Col. Cooper King.

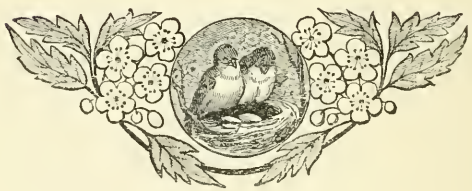
were more powerful than ours, or the musical arrangements of the stone must have been destroyed by age, and its mouth considerably enlarged ; for I am sure that the most accomplished bugler would fail now to produce the least sound.



STONEHENGE.

But if you have no other Celtic remains, at least you have the enduring possession of the words which they have bequeathed to us, such as *coat, basket, crook, cart, kiln, pale, pitcher, comb, ridge,* which have all been handed down to us from our British ancestors. Their

language, too, lives on in Wales and Brittany, in parts of Ireland and Scotland, and in the Isle of Man, where dwell the modern representatives of that ancient race which was once so powerful, and which has left its trace in most of the countries of Europe.



CHAPTER IV.

ENGLAND is the land of homes, and the natural affection which we all feel for our homes is to a great extent peculiar to Englishmen. The French, the Spaniards, the Italians, do not have the same respect which we feel for home. However humble our houses may be, however poor, we all love our home-life with all its associations, and it is possible that we may inherit this instinct from our Anglo-Saxon forefathers. The Saxons were a very home-loving people; and when they came into this country, sailing from the mouths of the Elbe and the Rhine, they conquered the Celtic race, and established their homes and settlements over the greater portion of England.

The Saxons at the time of their invasion were, of course, barbarians, very fierce and relentless in war; and when they came to England they committed terrible ravages, sparing neither men, women, nor children, burning buildings, houses, and corn, destroy-

ing churches and killing the clergy (for Christianity had been thoroughly established in the country during the Roman occupation), and drove the poor unfortunate Britons into the hills and barren wilds of Cornwall and Wales, or made them slaves. But the history of the Saxon invasion under Hengist and Horsa, of the battles which were fought between the invaders and Vortigern, the leader of the British troops, how the latter loved the daughter of the crafty Hengist, all this is outside our present subject, and I advise you to read it up in some good history book, although some of these characters are somewhat legendary.

When the Britons were despoiled, extirpated, or enslaved, the Saxons turned their attention to other subjects than the art of conquest, and established village communities, which, by degrees, extended over the country. It must not be supposed that the Saxons came over in large bodies on one or two occasions. They came over in clans; the head of the clan built a ship, and taking with him his family and relations, founded a settlement in England, or elsewhere, wherever the winds happened to carry them. Many of our village and town names retain the names of their early colonists; for example—the Uffingas, children of Offa, built Uffingaston, or Uffington; the Redingas gave the name to Reading; the Billings to Billinge, Billingham; the Wokings to Woking and Wokingham. The latter was probably

formed by a branch of the original family who first settled at Woking; and then, like bees, they "swarmed," and started another hive at the village of the Wokings. Other examples of this are numerous.

Most of the Saxon villages were roughly fortified, or enclosed, by a hedge, wall, or palisade, and all the names ending in *ton* denote a Saxon settlement hedged in and protected from intruders. The terminations *yard*, *stoke* (Basingstoke), *worth* (Kenilworth), all mean the same thing, and are of Saxon formation. But the most characteristic word is *ham*, which is the same as the German *heim*, or home, and denotes a Saxon homestead or village. Most of the land was wild and uncultivated, but the Saxons were fond of agriculture, and their families used to set out from the villages and make in the forest clearings which they called *fields*, where they built a settler's house, and lived. Thus we have Swallowfield, Macclesfield, etc. The word *field* is derived from *feld*, a forest clearing, where the trees have been *felled*.

Hence we see that the clan formed a settlement; then a section of the clan formed a branch settlement, and several members of each section started on their own account, and formed homesteads, where they tilled the land, and looked after their cattle, and lived like little princes in their own domain. There were, of course, degrees of rank and classes in those days as there are now, but in the early days of the

SAXON LADY.

Saxon settlement these distinctions were not so clearly defined. There were the two main divisions, the *eorl* and *ceorl*, the men of noble birth and the men of ignoble origin. Of these we shall speak presently more at length.

If you look at a map of your county you will see that your village lies in the Hundred of ——. What is the meaning of the word "Hundred"? We have inherited it from the early Saxon forefathers. In order to protect themselves from their neighbours, the Saxon colonists arranged themselves in hundreds of warriors. This little army was composed of the picked champions, the representatives of a hundred families; men who were ready in case of war to uphold the honour of their house, and to fight for their hearths and homes. These hundred families recognized a bond of union with each other and a common inheritance, and ranged themselves under one name for general purposes, whether for defence, administration of justice, or other reasons.

On a fixed day, in some place where they were accustomed to assemble—under a particular tree * or near some river bank—these hundred champions used to meet their chieftain, and gather around him when he had dismounted from his horse. He then placed his spear in the ground, and each warrior touched it

* Until the last century there stood a pollard oak in the parish of Shelford, Berks, where the Hundred Court used to be held.

with his own spear in token of their compact, and pledged himself to mutual support. At this assembly also criminals were tried, disputes settled, bargains of sale concluded; and when the Saxons became Christians and learnt to write, many of these transactions in the Hundred Court were inserted in the chartularies of abbeys or the Registers of Bishops, which thus became a kind of register too sacred to be falsified.

A large number of the Hundreds are not named after any place, but after some old chief of the tribe who used to preside at the court, and lead the hundred warriors to battle. Very probably you will be unable to find any township which bears the name of the Hundred in which your parish lies; it was named after some old Saxon chieftain, who used to call together his band of bearded, light-haired warriors, and administer rude justice beneath a broad oak's shade. He has perished, but his name remains, and will remain while England lasts.

The way in which the Saxons administered justice has been the foundation of all our modern modes of trying causes and judging prisoners. In fact, the same courts have continued from their day to our own. We have a County Court, but that is only the old Shiremote, to which our Saxon forefathers brought their grievances for settlement, and where they obtained recompense for injuries and wrongs done to them by their neighbours. The Hundred Court was

the link between the Vestry and County Court, but has fallen into disuse. The court of the tithing, or township, is now called the Vestry, presided over by the Rector or Vicar, assisted by the two churchwardens. We hear a great deal now of local government, the establishment of county boards, and the like. Politicians seem to think that they have discovered a new plan for carrying on the internal affairs of the country, and the idea is to leave each district to manage its own concerns. Formerly the pet theory of politicians was centralization, causing everything to be done at one centre; making London the centre and head of everything, so that nothing could be done in Cornwall, Northumberland, or elsewhere, without the sanction of the Local Government Board or some central council in London. Now the idea is to let every district manage its own concerns, which is supposed to be a grand new discovery, but really it is only a return to the Saxon plan, not quite as old as the hills, but nearly so.

Then your village is situated in some county—I do not know which county that may be, or I should be glad to write about it more particularly. But most of our counties in England are called "Shires," such as York*shire*, Hamp*shire*; and we are again indebted to our good Saxon forefathers for our Shires as well as our Hundreds. "Shire" means a *division*, and is derived from a Saxon word, from which we

get also *shear*, *share*, and *shore*. The original shires were the divisions of the country assigned to particular clans or tribes of Anglo-Saxon settlers, and most of the counties retain to this day the boundaries which were originally given to the Saxon settlements. Some of our counties were old Saxon kingdoms, such as Sussex, Essex, Middlesex, *i.e.* the kingdoms of the south, east, and middle Saxons. Surrey is the Sothe-reye, or south realm; Kent is the land of the Cantii; Devon is the land of the Damnonii, a Celtic tribe; Cornwall, or Corn-wales, is the land of the Welsh of the horn; Worcestershire is the shire of the Huiccii; Northumberland is the land north of the Humber, and therefore used, as its name implies, to extend over all the north of England, from the river Humber to its present northern boundary. Sometimes the name of the county is derived from its chief town; these were districts which were conquered by some powerful earl or chieftain, who held his court in the town, and called his newly acquired property by its name. There are so many shire names of this class that we may conclude the Saxon earls were very fond of taking what did not belong to them, and of measuring their right by their might.

When the Saxon settlements were first formed it does not appear that there were any earls or powerful lords to exercise dominion over their tenants and serfs; for the community seems to have been quite free, and only bound by its own laws. Yet each

tithing early elected a tithing man as president, whose position afterward passed to the Rector or Vicar of the parish. The settlement consisted, as I have said, of a number of families holding a district, and the land was regularly divided into three portions. There was the village itself, in which the people lived in houses built of wood or rude stone-work; around the village were a few small inclosures, or grass yards, for rearing calves and baiting farm-stock; this was the common farmstead. Then came the second division, the cultivated portion or arable land, for growing corn, etc., and around this lay the common meadows, or pasture land, which constituted the third main division Around the whole colony lay the woods and uncultivated land, which was left in its natural wild state for timber, fuel, and rough pasturage for pigs. The names of places sometimes record these old divisions of land; for example, there are three villages in the suburbs of Reading, Earley, Grazeley, and Woodley. *Ear*ley marks the spot where the Saxons cultivated their corn; *Graze*ley, the grazing land; and *Wood*ley, the wild uncultivated land where the pigs pastured. The pasture land was held by the whole community in common, so that each family could turn his cattle into it; but there was always an officer elected by the people, whose duty it was to see that no one trespassed on the rights of his neighbour, or turned too many cattle into the common pasture.

Then the cultivated land was divided into three large fields, in which the rotation of crops was strictly enforced, each field lying fallow once in three years. To each householder was assigned his own family lot, which was cultivated by the members of his own family and his servants. But he was obliged to sow the same crop as his neighbour, and compelled by law to allow his lot to lie fallow with the others.

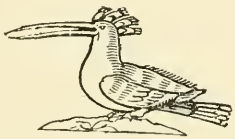
The father of each family was a very important person ; he had complete command in his own house, wherein he made law, and enforced it strenuously ; but in all matters which concerned the welfare of the village he was closely associated with his neighbours, and was not allowed to trespass on their rights, while they duly respected his.

This was the kind of village which existed in early Saxon times, and the laws which governed its inhabitants were based on the grand principle of common sense, which still remains as a strong characteristic of the English people. The remains of this old common-field system are still evident in many parts of the country. They are often called "lot meadows," or "Lammas lands." How long these Saxon communities remained independent we cannot tell. By degrees some chieftains became powerful, and began to exercise rights over the communities, undertaking to defend them from any attacks from their neighbours, and in return demanding certain services.

There were lords of the manors of England before

the Normans came, or rather, there were Liberties, or special estates, granted by Edward the Confessor, and his predecessors, analogous to the Norman Manors. We know many of the names of these ancient owners and their estates,* which they passed on to their descendants, until at length William the Conqueror came with his hungry followers, and took possession of the old Saxon lords' property.

* Cf. "A Popular Account of the Domesday Book," by Walter de Grey Birch (S.P.C.K.).



CHAPTER V.

WE can easily picture to ourselves the ordinary village life which used to exist in later Saxon times. There was the thane or lord of the land, who lived at the manor-house and owned the estate, and who was entitled to the services of all the tenants and villagers living upon it. There were the *geburs* or *villans* (so called, not because there was anything *villainous* about them, but because they lived in the *villa*, or village) who held land granted to them by the thane for their own use, sometimes as much as one hundred and twenty acres, and were required to work for the lord on the home farm for two or three days a week, or pay rent for their holdings. This payment consisted chiefly of the produce of the land. They were obliged to provide one or more oxen for the manorial plough team, consisting of eight oxen. There was a strong, independent body of men called *socmen*, who were none other than our modern English yeomen. They were

free tenants, who, according to one of our great historians, have by their independence stamped with peculiar features both our constitution and our national character. Their good name remains; English yeomen have done good service to their country, and let us hope they will long exist among us, in spite of prolonged agricultural distress, which has tried them severely. The next class were the *cottiers*, or cottagers (afterwards called *bordarii*), who had small allotments of about five acres, kept no oxen, and were required to work for their master some days in each week. Below them were the serfs, or slaves, who could be bought and sold in the market, and were compelled to work on the lord's farm.

Listen to the sad lament of one of this class, which comes to us from a Saxon writer:—

"'What sayest thou, ploughman? How dost thou do thy work?'

"'Oh, my lord, hard do I work. I go out at daybreak, driving the oxen to field, and I yoke them to the plough. Nor is it ever so hard winter that I dare loiter at home, for fear of my lord, but the oxen yoked, and the ploughshare and the coulter fastened to the plough, every day must I plough a full acre, or more.'

"'Hast thou any comrade?'

"'I have a boy driving the oxen with an iron goad, who also is hoarse with cold and shouting.'

"'What more dost thou in the day?'

"'Verily then I do more. I must fill the bin of the oxen with hay, and water them, and carry out the dung. Ha! ha! hard work it is, hard work it is! *because I am not free.*'"

Let us hope that his lord was a kind-hearted man, and gave him some oxen for his own, as well as land to cultivate, and then he would not feel the work so hard, or the winter so cold.

Frequently men were so released from slavery; sometimes also freemen were degraded to the rank of slaves. A man so reduced was required to lay aside his sword and lance, the symbols of the free, and to take up the bill and the goad, the implements of slavery, to fall on his knees and place his head, in token of submission, under the hands of his master. But Christianity improved the condition of the slaves. Each bishop was their appointed protector in his diocese, and often reminded their lords that slave and freeman were of equal value in the eyes of God, and they would be judged with the same severity as they had shown to others. The good Bishop Wilfrid released and baptized two hundred and fifty slaves in the Isle of Selsey, now no longer an island, in Sussex. The merchants of Bristol were the last to give up slave-dealing, but at last they were convinced of the errors of their ways by the preaching of Wulstan, Bishop of Worcester.

Each trade was represented in the village. There was the carpenter, a very important person; the *cementarius*, or stone-mason; the constable; the *faber*, or smith, who looked after the iron-work of the ploughs and shod horses; the *prepositus*, or steward of the manor, who collected the rents and

looked after the interests of both landlord and tenant; the *custos apium*, or bee-keeper, and many others.

When the early village community was first founded there was no church, as the Saxons were not converted to Christianity, and had probably destroyed the early British church, if there happened to be one in the old village, although most of their settlements were established on new ground where no British settlement stood before. The British were driven into the wilds of Wales and Cornwall, where the Church lived on and flourished vigorously, allied to the churches of Ireland and Scotland, sending out missionaries to the continent of Europe, having schools and colleges, monasteries, and numerous churches. Llancarvan, in Glamorganshire, was a favourite seat of learning; and all places named Bangor, such as Bangor-Iscaed, St. Asaph, and many others, possessed schools or colleges. The village names of numerous places in Wales and Cornwall record the labours of the earnest sainted men who brought Christianity among the savage people who lived there. There are nearly five hundred of these names of holy men in Wales alone whose memory is retained by this simple record; and Cornwall is dotted over by churches dedicated to men and women with strange names, about whom we know nothing. History tells us about some of these early saints and martyrs: for example, St. Alban, the first British

martyr, who was slain A.D. 303, during the cruel persecution of the Roman Emperor Diocletian, in the city which bears his honoured name; and St. David, a Welsh prince, who followed the ascetic life of John the Baptist, and preached like him, we are told. The memory of early saints is enshrined in the names, St. Ives, St. Neot's, St. Bees, and in St. Edmund's Bury, named after St. Edmund, who was taken prisoner by Ingvar, the Viking, and, having been bound to a tree, was scourged, and made a target for the arrows of the Danes, and afterwards beheaded.* All these record the bravery and zeal of holy men of old who loved their God, and for His sake feared not to die.

But the Saxons worshipped Woden, and Thor, and other gods, until at last, by the preaching of St. Augustine, who did little, and of the native missionaries, who did much towards banishing the worship of false deities, they were led to embrace the truth. Soon the village church arose in each hamlet, and the parish priest took a prominent place among the villagers. St. Gregory the Great, who was the Bishop of Rome, A.D. 590, in a letter to Abbot Mellitus, whom he sent to aid St. Augustine in his task of converting England, ordered the idols to be destroyed, but the idol temples, if well built, to be converted into churches. And the Saxons were not slow in making provision for a resident clergyman, giving

* Cf. Canon Isaac Taylor's "Names of Places."

tithes of the produce of their fields, and building and endowing monasteries for the honour of God, whom they had begun to know.

The peace of many a Saxon village was disturbed by the inroads of the Danes, whom I have already mentioned.* These people have left few traces behind, except the names of the towns and villages which they occupied; but they were a terrible scourge to the Saxons, and, being a very savage race, they plundered and burnt our English villages, destroyed the churches and monasteries, slaying the priests at the altar, and butchering men, women, and children. We are told that they "combed their hair once a day, bathed once a week, and changed their garments continually." At length they too were converted to Christianity; and the Kirbys, or church villages, in the Danish part of England† mark the spots where they built their altars to the one true God.

A curious circumstance is connected with a place called Daneshanger, near Stony Stratford, in Bucks. It is just beyond the border-line which divided the Danelagh, or Danish district, from the English portion, according to an arrangement which Alfred made with the Danish chief Guthrum. Watling Street, the old Roman road from London to Chester, was the main division. It was agreed that all Danes found west of this line should be hung, and the name Daneshanger seems to suggest that there, at any rate, several

* Cf. Chapter II. † Ibid.

trespassing Danes suffered the extreme penalty of the law. Evidently the Danes and the Saxons were as zealous in guarding their territory from trespassers, as the modern French and Germans are in causing "frontier incidents."

On almost all property a heavy tax, called Danegeld, was levied, in order to provide means to check these marauding Danes and the pirates which attacked the villages on the coast; but all Church property and the incomes of the clergy were not taxed, as the Saxons thought that more dependence ought to be placed in the prayers of the clergy than in the defence of arms.

Alfred, to whom England owes so much for his wise laws and careful government, had a wonderful way of checking crime, and criminals had a very bad time of it in his days. I have mentioned the Hundred already, which was formed for protection and good government in early Saxon times. Alfred developed this system, and every person was made to belong to some hundred, or its subdivision called the tithing. Now, each person in the tithing or the hundred was responsible for the other members of that company; so when any one committed a crime, he was soon apprehended and brought to justice. So well did this system work that a pair of gold bracelets might be exposed on the highways without any one daring to steal them. This good state of things only lasted a short time, for afterwards the peace of many

villages was disturbed by lawless bands of robbers, who used to drive away the cattle from the lonely farmsteads. Thieves fared badly if they were caught, as the sentences were very severe.

They had also something like trial by jury, which is one of our oldest systems of judging prisoners, and which still remains amongst us. Another method of trying supposed criminals happily does not remain, and that was, the trial by ordeal of water and iron. This was considered an appeal to God, and was conducted in the church. If your church is a Saxon one, some such scene as I am about to describe probably took place there. The procedure of the water ordeal was as follows :—The accused spent three days in fasting and prayer, and was directed to take an oath that he was guiltless. He received the Holy Communion, at which the priest said to him, "May this Body and Blood of Christ be to thee a proof of innocence this day." Then a fire was kindled under a caldron in a remote part of the church, and when the water boiled, the accused plunged his hand into it and took out a stone placed at the bottom of the vessel. His scalded hand and arm were bound up by the priest, and examined again in three days. If the flesh was then healed, the accused was considered innocent. The iron ordeal was much the same, only the accused was required to carry a bar of red-hot iron three or nine feet, and afterwards the burn was examined as before, and the prisoner judged accordingly. There was

another water ordeal, which required the accused to be plunged into deep water; if he sank he was considered innocent; if he floated, not having a sufficient weight of goodness, he was condemned. Happily our modern system of administering justice is somewhat different to these barbarous customs.

But the villages of England, especially those in Yorkshire, Lancashire, and in East Anglia, were in a very sad condition at this time. The continual contests with the Danes drew the husbandmen from the soil; consequently there were no crops, and the land was uncultivated. Many regions had absolutely no inhabitants left in them; a cruel famine devoured its wretched victims; and whatever small store there was, was consumed by the Danes, who spread like a swarm of locusts over the land and devoured everything. You may imagine the pitiable condition of many of our English villages in those terrible times.

But happily all did not so suffer, and in some parts of England there was much quiet happiness and prosperity before the Normans came. The Saxons were very fond of feasting, and, I am sorry to say, of drinking, which often led to quarrels and murders, as their passions were most violent. They used to carry on what is known in Corsica as a *vendetta;* that is to say, if a man was killed by a neighbour, his relations immediately took up the quarrel, and tried to kill the murderer. But some wise laws which gave time for

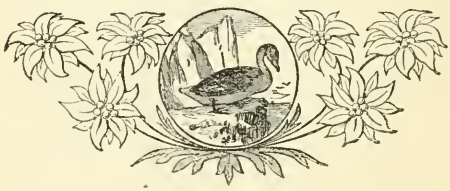
the evil passions to cool down, restrained this mad spirit of revenge.

Every festival of the dedication of the village church was observed by a great feast. St. Gregory, who knew the taste of the people, ordered that on that day each man and woman should carry a branch of some tree and make a bower, and hold a feast. This was the origin of the well-known wakes in the north of England, which are always held upon the festival of the saint to whom the church is dedicated. The Saxons, and their neighbours the Danes, both entered heartily into this part of their religious duties, and were guilty of great excess at these feasts. Many of them were Christians only in name, and retained a fondness for their old Pagan manners and customs. In olden days they sang the praises of Woden and of Thor in their revels; now they began to sing the praises of the Holy Trinity in much the same irreverent way; and Sir Walter Scott, in his poem, "Harold the Dauntless," describes very graphically a scene which must often have taken place :—

> "High was the feasting in Witikund's hall,
> Wild was the laughter, the song, and the cry;
> With Kyrie Eleison came clamorously in
> The war-songs of Danesmen, Norweyan, and Finn."

But a different note was soon to be heard in our Saxon villages than that of joy and laughter; but of that I propose to treat in the next chapter. The

Saxons had certainly not improved as time went on. At first they had embraced with eagerness the teachings of Christian faith and practice; they had built churches and monasteries, and abandoned their old vices. But the Danes taught them gluttony and drunkenness, and "they left off to behave themselves wisely and to do good." The village priests could scarcely stammer through the service, and all classes of the community had degenerated.



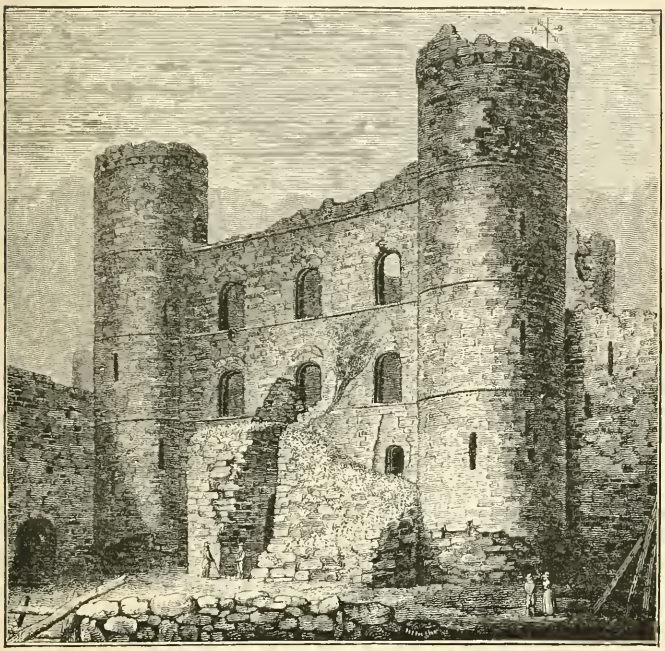
CHAPTER VI.

THERE was a great stir in our English villages when the news was brought to them that William of Normandy had landed in England, and intended to fight for the English crown. News travelled very slowly in those days. First the villans and the cottiers who were not fighting with their lord, heard that a great battle had been fought at Stanford Bridge, in Yorkshire, in which their gallant King Harold had defeated his own brother Tostig aided by the King of Norway, Hardrada, and a large army. Then the news reached them that William of Normandy had arrived, and that Harold was marching night and day to meet him. Then they heard of the fatal battle of Hastings; and when it was told them that their brave King Harold was slain, and that William, the Norman, was the conqueror of England and the acknowledged king of the country, all England groaned to hear the fatal news. And then, after a few years, they

found that their old lord had been deprived of his estates, and a new, haughty, proud Norman, who talked like a Frenchman, and laughed at their dear old Saxon language, came and ruled over them. He brought Norman servants with him, who took the best of the land, and made the Saxons do all the hard work on the farm, treating them like slaves.

In order to keep that which they had taken, the Normans built large castles, with strong walls and gates and moats. Many of these remain until this day, and possibly you may have the grey ruin of some Norman keep, or castle, in the neighbourhood of your village. Every powerful man built his castle, and England was filled with castles, which replaced the earthworks and stockades of the earlier inhabitants. These Norman rulers cruelly oppressed the wretched men of the land with castle-works, and when the castles were built, they were filled (to use the emphatic language of the Saxon chronicle) "with devils and evil men." It is said that over a thousand castles were built in nineteen years; and in his own castle each baron reigned as a king, coining his own money, making his own laws, having power of life and death over his dependants, and using his power most violently and oppressively. The name "English" became a term of reproach, and Saxons were treated with great scorn by their tyrannical conquerors. The Norman castles were very numerous on the borders of Wales, which for a long time defied

the foot of the invader; and from its mountain fastnesses issued forth strong bands of the descendants of the ancient Britons, who, by their fierceness and



HARLECH CASTLE, NORTH WALES.

their valour, often succeeded in defeating the forces of the Normans, sometimes gaining possession of their strongholds. There is a most exciting account of one of these attacks in Sir Walter Scott's "The

Betrothed," which I would advise you to read, if you would like to know more of the history of these troublous times.

Many of the Norman barons have given their names to their possessions; the Mandevilles settled at Stoke, and called it Stoke-Mandeville; the Vernons at Minshall, and called it Minshall-Vernon; Hurst-Pierpont, Neville-Holt, Kingston-Lysle, Hampstead-Norris, and many others give us the names of some of William the Conqueror's followers who received the rewards of their services at the expense of the poor Saxon lords who were deprived of their lands and property.

The Normans were very fond of building large and stately abbeys, or houses for monks; and almost in every part of England you will find the ruins of these old religious houses. They must have been very grand and beautiful buildings when they were first erected; and the monks who lived in them were of great service to the country in many ways, although they increased the power of the Pope of Rome in this country, and were not much loved by the parish clergymen. The monks were the great farmers and agriculturists; the chief promoters of learning, founding schools and colleges; and all the copying of Holy Scripture and the recording of the events of history were done in these old monasteries, the ruins of which you may have seen, and may perhaps have near you. They were of great practical use in times when the thoughts of men were mainly devoted

to warfare; but, of course, the main purpose of monastic life was religion. In our own times, social life has been leavened by Christianity; it is not necessary for a man to retire from the world to be a true Christian: but in days of war and bloodshed, of oppression and lawlessness, men found it very difficult to be "in the world and yet not of it." Hence earnest, God-fearing people retired into the monasteries in order to devote themselves to religion; and what is called the monastic system flourished to a great extent in this and other countries until the breaking up of old ideas at the period of the Reformation.

The monastic buildings have not only suffered much from the destructive hand of time; they have been used as quarries for stone, and many a church, bridge, and manor-house have been erected with the stones taken from the old buildings. The abbey of Reading, once one of the greatest in England, supplied stone for the enlargement of Windsor Castle, and was used as a public stone quarry for years. Part of it was blown up with gunpowder to make fortifications for the town when besieged by Cromwell's troops. But if you wander amidst the ruins of an old monastery you will probably discover the site of the old monastic church, generally of fine proportions. You will find the chapter-house, the cloister, the refectory (or dining-hall), the kitchen, the abbot or prior's buildings, the hospital, and probably the hospitium, or guest-room, where strangers

were entertained. It was part of the duties of the old monks to provide food and lodging for strangers.

And as you try to discover the outlines of these old

TINTERN ABBEY.

buildings, you will like to know something of the lives of the men who lived in them. They arose in the middle of the night for their first service, called Matins, and then retired again to their beds. At day-

break, another service, called Prime, was held, after which they went to the chapter-house, where the work of the monastery was arranged, faults corrected, and occasionally matters of common interest discussed. At six o'clock, the short chapter Mass was sung, and after this the monks spent their time until 8 a.m. in study or exercise. Then the bell summoned them to the High Mass, which lasted two hours, followed by a meal in the refectory. The Holy Scriptures were read by the monks in turn during the meal. After visiting the tombs of their predecessors, and standing for a while bareheaded praying for their brethren's souls, they went to the cloister, where they studied their books and parchments until the bell summoned them to the church at 3 p.m. for their evening service called Vespers. In the cloister they taught the children of the school attached to the monastery to read and sing. Some of them were engaged in writing histories or chronicles, or making copies of Holy Scripture, illuminating their work with great care and skill, and producing some of those wonderful manuscripts which may be seen in many of our museums.

After Vespers the monks returned to the cloister until the hour for the evening meal, which always ended at five o'clock. Prayer and devotion in the chapter-house followed, and after a short service, called Compline, the monks retired to the dormitory to sleep until the bells at midnight summoned them to another round of prayer and labour.

So the days passed quietly away in the discharge of the three main duties for which the monk lived—worship, improvement, work. Everything was done by rule; even the times for shaving and washing were regulated; and special officers were appointed to attend to each minute detail of the work and to the various requirements of the monastery. In after-days the abbots became very rich and powerful. They had large bodies of servants, and the discipline of the monks became in many cases lax. But the monasteries conferred vast benefits on the country, and preserved the knowledge of the Word of God, a reverence for holiness, besides the cultivation of literature and art, which would certainly have died out if the walls of the monasteries had never been built.

The very name of your village connects it with the old corporate life clinging around the parish church and burial-ground. It is called a *parish*,* and we must go back a long time before we reach the period when the old parishes of England were first formed. Like all good institutions, they grew gradually. A Saxon thane, or nobleman, who had been converted to Christianity by St. Augustine, or by Paulinus, or Wilfrid, built a church, and endowed it, providing for

* The word is derived from "parochia" (of which the leading sense is "neighbourhood"), and originally signified the diocese of a Bishop. When the dioceses were divided into districts the name "parish" was assigned to each district.

the support of a resident clergyman. Around the church clustered the cottages of the labourers, and thus a Christian community was formed. Archbishop Theodore is said to have divided the country into parishes about the year 680.

It is, of course, absolutely absurd to suppose that the Church was ever endowed or established by the State. In the early times of which I am speaking there was no State or Parliament to establish it. All the endowments of the Church were given, as I have described, by private benefactors, who considered it their duty to provide for the support of the religion which they had learnt to prize. Archbishop Theodore was the first to organize our parochial system, persuading the Saxon thanes to build and endow churches on their estates. The payment of tithes was adopted, as in the Greek Church, for providing a sufficient income for the maintenance of the resident clergyman; but it was all done by the piety of individuals without any State interference, and therefore it is an entire fabrication to assert, as some perverse Liberationists do assert, that the Church was established and endowed by the State. Much of the Church's property was afterwards seized by greedy kings and rapacious men, especially at the confiscation of the alien priories, and the destruction of the monasteries by Henry VIII. But all that the Church has, has been given her by her faithful sons and no words can describe the injustice and wrong of

which those would be guilty who attempt to deprive her of that which is so justly hers. If your parish is an old one, you are now enjoying the benefits conferred on it by good men who lived, perhaps, a thousand years ago. And it would be a disastrous day for you and your children, if the enemies of the Church were strong enough to disinherit you and your parish of that which was bequeathed for your benefit so long ago.

Some of these parishes which Archbishop Theodore formed were very large ones, and many of them have been divided since; but we can prove that a large number of parishes are the same now as they were eight hundred years ago. We have a most valuable document, which was drawn up by the royal authority and issued by William the Conqueror, A.D. 1086, called the "Domesday Book." * Doubtless he wished to know more about his new kingdom, and the value of the lands, and the people it contained. So he ordered a very careful survey to be taken, and the description of every parish to be recorded. As an example, I will give you an exact copy of the account of my parish, made by William I. more than eight hundred years ago:—

"IN CERLEDONE $\overline{\text{HD}}$.

"Rex teñ in dñio Berchehã. Ælmer Tenuit de rege. E. T$\tilde{\text{c}}$ 7 m$\hat{\text{n}}$ p iii hid. T$\tilde{\text{r}}$a e$\tilde{\text{s}}$ iii ca$\tilde{\text{r}}$. In dñio $\tilde{\text{c}}$ una, 7 vi uilli 7 iiii bor$\tilde{\text{d}}$

* For a popular account of the "Domesday Book," read the useful work on that subject by Walter de Grey Birch, F.S.A., (S.P.C.K).

cũ iii caꝛ. Ibi v. ãc pti. Silua de XL porc. Valuit iiii lib. T.R.E. 7 post 7 m̃ : iii l̃ib.

I do not expect that you will be able to make much out of this description, for not only is it written in Latin, but the words are so shortened and disguised that only those who are accustomed to reading such documents can understand it. Here is the plain English:—

"In the hundred of Charlton.

"The king holds Barkham in demesne. Ælmer held it of King Edward. Then, as now, it was rated for three hides. The land is three ploughlands. In demesne there is one ploughland. There are six villans, four borderers with three ploughs. There are five acres of pasture. Wood for the pasturage of forty hogs. It was worth 4*l.* in the time of King Edward, afterwards, and now, 3*l.*"

I may mention that the King Edward was Edward the Confessor, as he was called, one of the last of the Saxon kings. A hide, when it is used as a measure of land, may be taken at about one hundred and twenty acres. A ploughland was as much land as one plough with oxen could plough in a year. The villans were men who tilled their lord's land, and in return for certain services had holdings under him. The borderers were cottagers who also worked for their lord, and held smaller holdings, from one to ten acres.

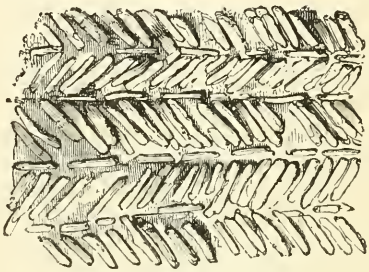
This is only an example of numerous other descriptions in the "Domesday Book;" and if yours is an old

village, very probably some account of it is given in that famous chronicle. If that is the case, your parish has been in existence at least eight hundred years, and may have been a flourishing place some hundreds of years before.

CHAPTER VII.

IN the extract from "Domesday Book" contained in the last chapter, you see there is no mention of any parish church; and there is a similar omission in the record of most villages contained in William's famous chronicle. This was not because there were no churches, but because it was not the business of the surveyors appointed by the Conqueror to give any account of Church property. The old church which stood there in Anglo-Saxon times was probably built of wood, with stone or flint foundations, and sometimes a rough rubbled wall, although during the early part of the eleventh century (1000–1060) they sought the aid of architects and masons from Normandy, and built some stone churches—*e.g.* Edward the Confessor's Abbey Church at Westminster. One of the peculiarities of Saxon building is what is called the *herring-bone* work, that is to say, the stones are inclined and the courses are arranged alternately to

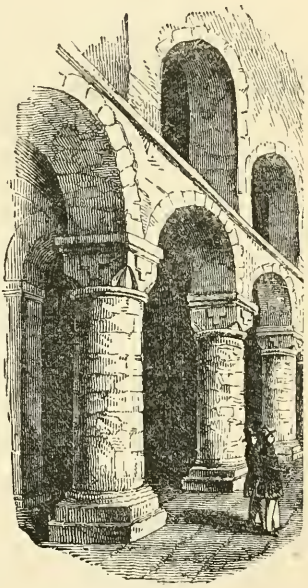
the right and to the left. The figure will make my meaning clear; and whenever you see this arrangement in old buildings you may conclude that it is Saxon work. It has sometimes been called "stone carpentry," and was of a most simple character. There is a church at Bosham, in Sussex, which is most interesting; the wall of the chancel is about forty feet in length, and displays four different periods of architecture. There is the old Roman part, with its



HERRING-BONE WORK.

pillars and massive capitals; for the church was once an old Roman basilica, or court of justice, and the Emperor Vespasian tried prisoners on that very site; then there is the Saxon wall added on to the Roman, showing the herring-bone work as in the figure. Then we have the Norman portion, and afterwards the Early English addition. I think it would be most difficult to find in any part of the country a more interesting specimen of various kinds of architecture in such close connection.

The freemasons helped the Saxons with their buildings, as that body was in existence long before the Conquest. We read how, A.D. 1050, Egelwick, Bishop of Durham, had a mind to pull down the church of Cunecester, which was built of wood, with intent to build a better one of stone to the memory of St. Cuthbert, who was buried there, and, as he was digging the foundations, he found a great treasure hidden in the place. Very few, indeed, of the wooden Saxon churches are left. There is one at Greenstead, Ongar, in Essex, which is very curious. The nave is composed of the half-trunks of chestnut trees, one and a half feet in diameter, fastened by wooden pegs. It was built about the year 1013.



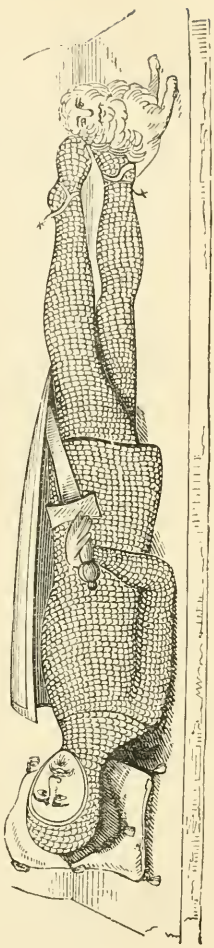
NORMAN ARCH.

When the Normans came they began to build grand, massive, and beautiful churches, instead of the old wooden structures which they found in many of our villages, and to erect the cathedrals, abbeys, and strong castles which I have already mentioned. A

large number of these fine village churches remain until this day, and are now used for Divine worship, as they have been for eight hundred years. The arches are in the shape of a half-circle, and some beautiful specimens of Norman doorways may be seen in many village churches.

This church was the centre of the life of the old village. Not only was it the centre of the religious life of the parish, but also of the secular every-day life as well. The fairs were held on the saint's day to whom the church was dedicated. The vestry was, and still is, the council-chamber of the parish; and the annual vestry meeting had great power in making rules for the regulation of the temporal affairs of the village. For example, when there were more common lands than there are now, the vestry could order at what date the cows and horses of the parishioners were to be turned into the common for grazing; it could give leave to the parishioners for making enclosures; it ordered how many animals were to be turned into the common pastures. The vestry also appointed the parish officers. Our overseers of the poor, our way-wardens, and our churchwardens are all appointed by the vestry, and have been so appointed for hundreds of years. Their offices are connected with the secular life of the parish, but the church is the centre and mainspring of its action. If your church is an ancient one, how much of the history of the parish

and the neighbourhood is connected with it! How many generations of the people of your village have offered up their prayers to God in that building, and knelt in the same place, where you do now! Perhaps there are some tombs and monuments of old parish benefactors, of "Dame Alice de ——," or of "ye Good Knyghte Syre Thomas de ——," who went with the Crusaders to the Holy Land to fight for the Holy Sepulchre of our Lord, and deliver it from the hands of the Moslems. Sometimes the figure on the tomb of a knight has the legs crossed at the ankles; this means that the knight went to one Crusade. If the legs are crossed at the knees, he went twice; if at the thighs, he went three times. Then, if you look, you may find some very curious inscriptions on the tombs. About one hundred years ago, people were very fond of writing flattering and fulsome descriptions of their deceased



TOMB OF A CRUSADER.

relatives, who were said to possess every virtue under the sun, insomuch that a little child, after reading a large number of these, asked her mother, "Where are all the bad people buried?" I think that the following very original epitaph in a neighbouring churchyard compares favourably with some of these :—

"He was——
But words are wanting to say what;
Say what is just and kind,
And he was that."

Most probably there are some old monuments of brass in your church which record the memories of pious ancestors; but a large number of these have been destroyed. The lawlessness of the soldiers of Cromwell, who, wherever they went, pillaged the churches and broke the carving and ornaments, accounts for much of this destruction. Many valuable things, such as church plate, and works of art, pieces of carved wood-work, paintings, etc., were hidden or buried lest they should be destroyed by the ruthless soldiers. They used to encamp in the church, and bring their horses inside the sacred building, and did a vast amount of damage. Here is an extract from the churchwarden's account-book of a neighbouring church :—

"for making upp the seats when the Parliament Souldiers were here 0 3 4
"To Daniel Browne and Goody Venter for making cleane the churche then 0 2 0

"for mending the seats in the church which the Souldiers had broken downe .. .. o 13 9
"for halfe a load of wood burned in the church by the Souldiers .. .. .. o 6 6

Evidently the "souldiers" were not very desirable inmates!

Many of the old altars were made of stone, and fixed firmly in the east end of the chancel; but some of the reformers insisted upon their removal, and the substitution of "a decent table" which could be brought down, and placed in the centre of the chancel when Holy Communion was celebrated. Some difficulties arose from the change as to the position of the priest during the celebration, and these are reflected in our Prayer-Book rubrics, about the interpretation of which there is some uncertainty. The old altars were richly furnished with plate, jewels, bells, and ornaments, and the desire of "certain private men," courtiers and others, to embezzle some of these valuables, contributed to the destruction of the old altars. As you enter the church, you always come to the font first, which reminds us that Baptism is the initial stage of our Christian life, and that we cannot come to the Communion table without passing the font. The word means a well-spring, like fount, or fountain.

Perhaps there is an old pulpit in your church, with richly carved canopies, upheld by figures of angels or holy men; and perhaps a stand for an hour-glass,

for sermons used to be considerably longer than they generally are now, and a sermon of an hour's length was quite a common occurrence. Indeed, the only instruction the people received, the only intellectual treat they enjoyed, the only news they heard of what was going on outside their little village, was conveyed to them by the weekly sermon. I think that our villagers of two or three hundred years ago used to value their parish church more than the present generation does. Men travelled less; the church was the centre of their lives, their home; and they always did their utmost, according to their means, to adorn its fabric and assist in the services.

Very probably you will find on the walls traces of colouring. The whole of the interior walls of nearly all of the old churches were covered with pictures of scriptural subjects, or martyrdoms, or texts. These pictures on the walls were painted in distemper, and were considered a necessity for a village church. The old teachers were wise, for by these pictures they taught the people by means of the eye the main facts of Scripture; so that, although the village folk could not read, they could carry away with them the recollections of Bible stories, of scenes in the life and death of our Lord, as displayed on the church's walls. Perhaps in these days we neglect too much this important means of education. Nearly all these old paintings have been destroyed. Numerous coats of whitewash have hidden them for years; but so good

were the colours that traces of them still remain, such as those at Friskney church, Lincolnshire, many of the old figures standing out distinctly as of old.

The old windows, with their beautiful stained glass, the art of making which is said to have been lost (although some modern stained-glass makers profess to have rediscovered it), are full of interest. The figures are very quaint in some cases, and the drawings often conventional; but they told again the story of the Cross, of the men and women who followed in the Saviour's steps and won the martyr's crown; and although sometimes Romish superstitions are here and there displayed, generally they teach wholesome lessons. I know of a man who could neither read nor write, who was not baptized, and had never been taught anything about Christianity, but when he was being prepared for Holy Baptism he showed a fair knowledge of gospel history, which he said he had gathered from looking at the windows in church.

In some churches we find several crosses on the church walls, sometimes on the outside on square patches of plaster, and sometimes in the interior. These are called consecration crosses. When the Bishop consecrated a church, he was required to mark twenty-four crosses on the walls with anointing oil. The places where the cross was to be made were prepared before-

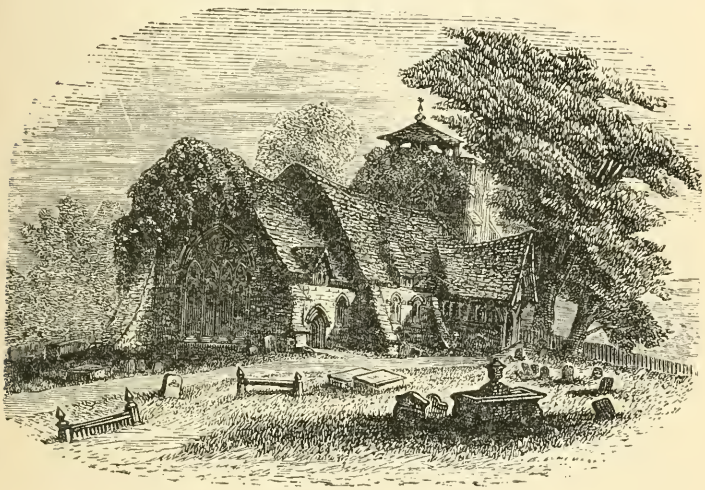
hand, and these crosses mark the spots which were so anointed. They may be seen at St. Mary Ottery, Devon; at Pevensey, Sussex; at Lickhampton, Gloucestershire, and many other places.

Very frequently we meet with a curious hole on each side of the chancel arch, as in Great Amwell Church, Herts, which is called a hagioscope, through which the people in the north and south aisles might see the elevation of the Host, an important part of the old Catholic service of the Mass. Sometimes the seats of the benches and of the choir stalls are carved with curious grotesque figures, and if the church was ever used by the monks the seats were so constructed that if the occupant went to sleep during his devotions, his seat would fall down with a loud bang, and the luckless monk would have to undergo penance for sleeping at his post.

The old bells, too, tell their story, and often hand down the name of their donors, having been so called when they first began to summon the congregation to church. For example there are the "Thalebot" and the "Bretun" at Rochester; and sometimes they bear the names of noted holy men, such as Dunstan, Paulinus, and others. Sometimes churches were built in the shape of a cross, with chancel, nave, north and south transepts, and a massive tower in the centre; and occasionally the chancel is not quite in line with the nave. This was not caused by any carelessness on the part of the architect; but beauti-

fully represents the leaning on one side of the Sacred Head of our Lord as He hung upon the cross.

What wonderful buildings some of our old village churches are! So grand, so massive, so firm! Time seems to have little effect upon them. They were built in the good old days of church-building, when



VILLAGE CHURCH.

people did not begrudge a little extra cost in making a sanctuary which was not for man only, but for the Lord. Many of our churches were built eight hundred years ago. How many of our modern churches will last that time?

Then, in the vestry your clergyman will show you

the old register books which record the names of past generations of villagers, and many curious facts about them, which are not found in modern registers. For example, we may find that "John Miles was *buried in wool*," because a foolish king listened to the foolish statements of the wool-staplers, who asked him to make a decree that every one should be buried in wool, in order to improve the condition of their trade. The first register books were commenced in A.D. 1538, when the first Act was passed ordering registers to be kept; but most old registers do not begin until 1558, when the second Act required the due enforcement of the law.

The old church plate invites careful examination—some so old, with no inscriptions on them, that were it not for the Hall-markings we should not be able to tell how old they were. A vast number of beautiful chalices, plate, and jewels have been stolen at times from the churches. During the reign of Edward VI., great spoliation took place, for the king was induced by his ministers to appoint a commission to collect all valuables and sell them, leaving only one or two chalices in each small parish church or chapel. Also the Act for the Abolition of Chantries was passed in this reign. Robbery of the church was ever a favourite amusement for lawless men. Acts of spoliation are often talked about in our own times; for the honour of England, if for no other cause, may the enemies of the Church never be allowed to put their evil schemes into practice.

In the churchyard stands the old weather-beaten yew-tree, looking like a sentinel keeping watch over the graves of our forefathers. Some of these trees are remarkable for their age; the yews at Fountain's Abbey, in Yorkshire, were probably in a flourishing condition so long ago as the year 1132, and some are older still. Why they were planted in churchyards it is difficult to ascertain. It has been conjectured that they were planted in so secure a spot in order that the men might provide themselves with bows, as all the bows used by the English, with which they did such execution against their enemies, were made of yew. Others contend that its green boughs were used instead of palms on Palm Sunday, or for funerals. But I think that they were regarded with veneration by our forefathers when they were still heathen, and that some religious symbolism—such as of immortality—attached to them; and that when the Christian teachers came they made use of this religious sentiment of the people, planted the Christian cross by the side of the yew, and under its shade preached lessons of true immortality, of which the heathen ideas were only corrupt legends and vain dreams.

At the entrance of the churchyard there is often a lich-gate, *i.e.* a corpse-gate, where the body may rest while the funeral procession is formed. *Lych* is the Saxon word for a dead body, from which Lichfield, "the field of dead bodies," is derived. Bray, in Berkshire, famous for its time-serving Vicar,

who resolved that whatever "king might reign" he would—

"Still be the Vicar of Bray, sir,"

LICH-GATE.

is also famous for its large lich-gate, which has two rooms over the gateway.

Here is a list of—

"The goods and ornaments of the Church of St. Gyles, Reading, as they were left this present Good Fryday, the xxist of March, 1599, when W^{m}. Malthus left his office, viz. :—

In primis. A Communion cupp of silver and guilt weighing xii ounces and a half, and somewhat more.

Item. One tinn pott.

Item. Two tables and twoo frames to them.

Item. One blewe carpett of three yardes of broad cloth.

Item. One other carpett of divers colours.

Item. One table clothe of twoo ells and a quarter of Holland of iii^{s} y^{e} ell.

Item. One olde silke carpett.

Item. One small dyshe of pewter for Communion Bread.

Item. One great chest.

Item. One iron-bound chest, wherein the —— find a tent for the Church-lands liethe.

Item. One chest wth three locks, wh^{e} the Register is kept.

Item. One other little chest.

Item. One Bible of the largest volume.

Item. One Booke, called the Paraphracis, and a desk to lay it on.

Item. The Booke of Foundations.

Item. Twoo Bookes of Comon Praier.

Item. One parchement booke for a Register.

Item. One other Register of paper.

Item. XV candlesticks.

Item. One other candlestick with joints for pulpitt.

Item. Twoo platters of wood, painted.

Item. One mattock, one spade, and a sholve.

Evidently Mr. Malthus was a very conscientious churchwarden, and contrasts very favourably with others who have undertaken that important office, and who did not scruple to rob the church of which

they were the appointed guardians. In the above list mention is made of several books. After the Reformation, men longed to know more of the Bible which had been kept back from them for so long; and as books were scarce and very costly, an order was issued for some copies of the Bible and one or two other books to be placed in every parish church, and chained to a desk lest they should be removed, as at Cumnor, in Berks. Many of these chained books are still in existence.

Our churches have seen some very strange sights. Before the Reformation, there were generally high screens, called rood screens, separating the chancel from the nave, with a rood-loft or gallery at the top of it, on which rested a carved figure of the Crucifixion. When the Puritans were in power they pulled down these screens and lofts, because they regarded them as relics of popery. Very few remain now, but the staircase leading to the rood-loft can be traced in nearly all old churches. Churchwardens, too, who cared more for their gains than for their church, have been known to take away the brass monuments from the tombs and sell them. Our churches have suffered, too, from other causes. In the last century, they used to whitewash the walls, and cover up all the old paintings which were there. They covered up the beautiful old oak roofs, and made low, flat ceilings. They put up hideous galleries and "three-deckers," as they were called, and quite disfigured

the old church. A great deal of harm has been done to the old features of many churches by so-called "restoration," carried out by men ignorant of architecture and antiquities. But we have learnt better now, and if the old church in your parish has been recently restored, the architect will have taken care to make it as much like the church as it stood in the time of the Normans as possible. It is impossible to say as much as I could wish in this chapter about your church; but I ask you to inquire into the subject for yourselves, and you will not find your time wasted.

CHAPTER VIII.

I WISH to call your attention to a subject very familiar to you—to the names by which the fields in your parish are known. These are full of interest, and often tell us about matters which would be entirely forgotten. Some names tell us of the great forests which used to exist all over the country, when kings and noblemen, outlaws and poachers, used to hunt the deer and the wild boars in many a successful run. William the Conqueror, was very fond of hunting, and it is recorded of him in the Saxon chronicles that "he made large forests for deer and enacted laws therewith, so that whoever killed a hart or a hind should be blinded. As he forbade killing the deer, so also the boars; and he loved the tall stags as though he were their father." It is a pity that he did not care more for his people and less for his stags, for he is said to have laid waste the country in Hampshire for

an extent of thirty miles, expelling the poor people from their houses, seizing their property, even pulling down churches, in order to make a new deer-park for his hunting. These forests did not consist of large trees growing together; but were large tracts of country in its natural state, partly wood, partly heather and grass, which were owned by the king, and were especially brought under the harsh forest laws of the Norman sovereigns.

Some of our field names remind us of the existence of these old forests where corn now grows, and also of swamps and islands where everything now is dry and far removed from water. Sometimes they tell us of the old common lands which used to be farmed by the villans and borderers; and of the strange way in which they used to manage their farming. Each man used to keep one or more oxen for the village plough, until they made up the team into eight; then they ploughed the land in strips of an acre or half acre each, divided by a bit of unploughed turf called a balk. Each strip was a furlong, *i.e.* a "furrow long," *i.e.* the length of the drive of a plough before it is turned. This was forty rods, or poles, and four of these furrows made up the acre. These pieces of land were called "shots;" and there were "headlands," or common field-ways, to each shot; and "gored acres," which were corners of the fields which could not be cut up into strips, and odds and ends of unused land, which were called "No Man's Land," or "Jack's Land." It

is curious, too, that all the strips belonging to one man did not lie together, but were scattered all over the common land; which must have been a very inconvenient arrangement for farming purposes. There were also in each village community a blacksmith, whose duty it was to keep in repair the ironwork of the village ploughs, a carpenter for the wood-work, and a pound-keeper, or punder, who looked after the stray cattle. Many of the "balks" still remain on the hillsides where these old common lands existed; and the names of the fields bear witness to the prevalence of this old field system.

They tell us, too, of the way in which attempts were made to force the growth of particular crops, and in many parishes you will find a "flax piece," which reminds us of a foolish Act of Henry VIII. ordering the cultivation of that plant. Metals, too, which have long ago been worked out, and trades which no longer exist, have left their traces behind in the names of our lanes and fields. Also they speak of the early days when the wolf or the bear might be seen in our woods or fields, or of the beaver which loved the quietude of our streams, of the eagle which carried off the lambs undisturbed by sound of the keeper's gun. Sometimes he was disturbed in his thefts by the flight of a good strong English arrow, which came from a sturdy English bow, drawn by a good strong English arm. The English archers were famous everywhere, and many a battle has been

won by their valour and their skill. A law was passed in the reign of Edward IV., that every Englishman should have a bow of his own height, and that butts for the practice of archery should be set up in every village; and every man was obliged to shoot up and down on every feast-day, or be fined one halfpenny. Consequently, in some villages you will find a field called "the Butts," where this old practice took place.*

The manor-house in your village is probably still standing, possibly surrounded by a moat, or trench of water, to protect its inhabitants from enemies. The drawbridge, which could be raised when they expected troublesome guests, has long since disappeared; and, happily, we do not need such defences nowadays: but these old, pleasant, half-timbered granges and manor-houses tell us of the wealth and comforts of the yeomen and squires of past ages. These houses often contained secret rooms and underground passages, which were used as places of refuge in troublous times; for example, there is a subterranean vault under an old house at Hurley, in which the bones of monks were found, where the supporters of William of Orange used to meet to plan his succession to the English crown. The walls of many of the manor-houses and halls in Lancashire

* In many cases the name "Butts" refers to the fact of the land, under the common field system, *abutting* on meadows, or roads; *e.g.* "Butt-close," in the parish of St. Mary Bourne.

and Yorkshire, if they could speak, could tell of many a plot to restore the Stuarts to the throne, and of

MANOR-HOUSE.

many a deep health drunk to "Bonnie Charlie," whilst the chorus rang—

"He's o'er the seas and far away,
He's over the seas and far away,
But of no man we'll stand in awe,
But drink his health that's far away."

The history of the manor, the account of all the families who held it, and the way in which it passed from one great man to another, are full of interest, but require very careful inquiry and much searching in old books and records.

But before we think of these later times, let us try to imagine the ordinary life and appearance of a mediæval English village in the "piping times of peace." Of course no two villages are quite alike; each has many distinguishing features: but a strong family likeness is observable. In the Middle Ages a village was much more independent than it is now. Then there were no Acts of Parliament to control its affairs, and it regulated its own conduct much to its own satisfaction, without any outside interference. Of course, sometimes things were managed badly; but the village knew it had only itself to blame, and therefore could not grumble at the Government, or the fickleness of members of Parliament, or the unreasonable conduct of Local Government Boards. Was not the lord of the manor quite capable of trying all criminals? and did not the rector and the vestry settle everything to the satisfaction of every one, without any "foreigners" asking questions, or interfering?

Hence there was a good deal of independence in these old days ; but independence means often isolation, and isolation made the villagers unable to protect themselves from oppression. "Union is strength," but as each hamlet was quite distinct from its neighbours, the people could not unite so easily against the spoliation of rapacious barons. Some of these men who lived in their fortified castles, secure from attack, were great tyrants, guilty of all kinds of atrocities, who cruelly oppressed the defenceless villages. But these cases were by no means general, and there was plenty of quiet happiness to be found in "Merry England" in the Middle Ages.

Here is a picture of village life in those days. The village church stood in the centre of the village, with a carefully made fence around it, in order that no swine or foul beast might desecrate the graves. Surrounded by the churchyard, with its yew-tree and lich-gate, the church was very similar to the old structure which, I suppose, still stands in your midst ; possibly a Saxon tumulus was still observable, near which the Christians first erected their wooden building. All the houses of the village had thatched roofs, and chief among the other dwellings stood the lord's hall, very similar to the rest, only better built. If the lord was a powerful man, or if the country was likely to be disturbed by the savage inroads of plundering Scots or Welshmen, his house would be fortified, and surrounded by a moat. Near the church was a

curious building called the church-house, which has almost entirely passed away, except in the records of old churchwardens' accounts. It was a large building, in which could be stored wool, lime, timber, sand, etc., and was often let to pedlars, or wandering merchants, to deposit their goods during the fair.

In this building there was a long low room with a large fireplace and hearth, around which a dozen or more could sit in comfort, except when the wind blew the smoke down the wide, open chimney; but our ancestors were accustomed to smoky chimneys, and did not mind them. In the centre of the room was a large oak table. This was the scene of some very festive gatherings. Aubrey thus describes the church-house :—

"In every parish was a church house, to which belonged spits, crocks, and other utensils for dressing provisions. Here the housekeepers met. The young people were there too, and had dancing, bowling, shooting at butts, etc., the ancients [*i.e.* old folks] sitting gravely by, and looking on."

The churchwardens bought, and received presents of, a large quantity of malt, which they brewed into beer and sold to the company. Hence these feasts were called "church ales," and were held on the feast of the dedication of the Church, the proceeds being devoted to the maintenance of the poor. Sometimes they were held at Whitsuntide also, sometimes four times a year, and sometimes as often as money was wanted or a feast desired. An arbour of boughs was erected

in the churchyard on these occasions, called Robin Hood's Bower, where the maidens collected money for the "ales," and "all went merry as a marriage-bell"—rather too merry, I am afraid, sometimes, for the ale was strong and the villagers liked it, and the ballad-singer was so merry, and the company so hearty, and there were no temperance societies to tell them that they ought not to take too much—and was it not all for a good cause, the support of the poor? So I am afraid the good folks generally tried to quiet their consciences, until at last "church ales" were prohibited altogether, on account of the excess to which they gave rise.

There was a large amount of gaiety in the old villages in those days. Men were not in so great a hurry to grow rich as they are now. The Church authorized many holidays in the course of the year; and what with May Day festivities, Plough Mondays, Hock-tide and Shrove-tide sports, harvest suppers, fairs, and "ales," the villagers had plenty of amusement, and their lives certainly could not be described as dull. Sometimes the village would be enlivened by the presence of a company of pilgrims on their way to the shrine of St. Thomas, at Canterbury, or to Holywell, blessed by St. Winifred, in order to be cured of some disease. Although these pilgrims were deemed to be engaged on a religious duty, they certainly were not generally very serious or sad. Chaucer, the father of English poetry, who lived in

the reign of Edward III., describes a very joyous pilgrimage in his "Canterbury Tales,"—how the company met at the Tabard Inn, in Southwark, including the knight and the abbot, the prioress, and the shipman, the squire and the merchant, the ploughman and sompnour (or summoner, "of whose visage children were sore afeard"), and rode forth gaily in the spring sunshine—

> "The holy blissful martyr for to seek,
> That them hath holpen when that they were sick."

Pilgrim crosses are numerous all over England, where the pilgrims halted for their devotions by the way, and sometimes we find churches planted on the roadside far from human habitations, with no parishioners near them; and some people wonder why they were so built. These were pilgrim churches, built for the convenience of the travellers as they wended their way to Canterbury. Of course, pilgrimages were "fond things vainly invented, grounded upon no warranty of Holy Scripture," part of Romish superstition happily discarded by the Church of England at the Reformation; but the villages through which they passed must have been much enlivened by the presence of these not very austere companies.

Of the sports and pastimes of our old village folk I propose to treat in another chapter; but how shall I describe an old English fair of the Middle Ages? We can hardly imagine its vastness. Near Cambridge,

there is a small village called Stourbridge, where an important fair was held, which originated in King John's reign, and became one of the largest in Europe. The booths were planted in a corn-field, and the circuit of the fair, which was like a well-governed city, was over three miles. The shops were built in rows, having each a name, as Garlick-row, Booksellers'-row, Cook-row, etc.; there were the cheese-fair, hop-fair, wool-fair, and every trade was represented, together with taverns, eating-houses, and, in later years, play-houses of various descriptions. In the last century it is said that one hundred thousand pound's worth of woollen manufactures was sold in a week in one row alone. Evidently the times were good in those days. But this will give you some idea of the extent of these old fairs, and indeed it would have been impossible to carry on the trade of the country without them.

Here is a curious relic of olden times, an ancient market proclamation, which breathes the spirit of former days, and which was read a few years ago at Broughton-in-Furness, by the steward of the lord of the manor, from the steps of the old market cross. These are the words :—

"O yes, O yes, O yes ! * The lord of the manor of Broughton and of this fair and market strictly chargeth and commandeth on Her Majesty's behalf, that all manners of persons repairing

* This is a corruption of the old Norman-French word *oyez*, "hear ye."

to this fair and market do keep Her Majesty's peace, upon pain of five pounds to be forfeited to Her Majesty, and their bodies to be imprisoned during the lord's pleasure. Also that no manner of person within this fair and market do bear any bill, battle-axe, or other prohibited weapons, but such as be appointed by the lord's officers to keep this fair or market, upon pain of forfeiture of all such weapons and further imprisonment. Also, that no manner of person do pick any quarrel, matter, or cause for any old grudge or malice to make any perturbation or trouble, upon pain of five pounds, to be forfeited to the lord, and their bodies to be imprisoned. Also, that none buy or sell in corners, back sides, or hidden places, but in open fair or market, upon pain of forfeiture of all such goods and merchandise so bought and sold, and their bodies to imprisonment. Also, that no manner of persons shall sell any goods with unlawful mete or measures, yards or weights, but such as be lawful and keep the true assize, upon pain of forfeiture of all such goods and further imprisonment. Lastly, if any manner of persons do here find themselves grieved, or have any injuries or wrong committed or done against them, let them repair to the lord or his officers, and there they shall be heard according to right, equity, and justice. God save the Queen and the lord of the manor!"

I have mentioned one unhappy cause of misery in many of our villages—the unjust tyranny of powerful men; but there were two other causes which produced untold wretchedness in the hamlets of England, two unwelcome visitors who came very frequently and were much dreaded—famine and pestilence. The following extract will fairly illustrate the terrible havoc which they caused:—

"There is necessarily a sameness in the records of these pestilences, and this makes it wearisome to dwell upon the

sufferings of the people throughout well-nigh the two centuries which lie between the death of Edward I. and the coming of Henry of Richmond. The history of the people of England cannot, however, be understood without dwelling upon the sad monotony of suffering. In the pages of the chroniclers we come upon the record of famine and the details of the pestilence which followed close on the famine. There is hardly any period of five years during that time without these ghastly records. Disease not only arrested the growth of the population, but reduced it far below the number it had reached at the close of the thirteenth century. Disease was mostly of a typhoid character. The undrained, neglected soil; the shallow, stagnant waters which lay upon the surface of the ground; the narrow, unhealthy homes of all classes of the people; the filthy, neglected streets of the towns; the insufficient and unwholesome food; the abundance of stale fish which was eaten; the scant variety of vegetables which were consumed; the miserable wages of labourers and artisans, predisposed the agricultural and town populations alike to typhoid diseases, and left them little chance of recovery when stricken down with pestilence."

In the above extract from "England in the Fifteenth Century," it is stated that the wages of the labourers and artisans were miserably low. I do not think that this is quite accurate, for although the actual wages paid were certainly very meagre, yet money was more valuable, and the labourer of those days had a great many rights and privileges which made him better off than his successors. He had his own house and ground, common rights for pasturage of sheep, and the right of collecting fuel in his lord's wood; so his actual wages formed only a small part of his income.

CHAPTER IX.

THE exciting tales of war are connected with the history of many an English village, and many "little Wilhelmines" and labouring "grandsires" have discovered "something large and round," traces of these ancient conflicts and "famous victories."

> "For often when they go to plough
> The ploughshare turns them out,
> 'And many thousand men,' quoth he,
> 'Were slain in that great victory.'"

Many a lance and sword, and gilt spur, beautifully enamelled, which once decked the heel of a noble knight, have been found in our fields, and remind us of these battles which were fought so long ago.

> "The knights are dust,
> Their good swords rust,
> Their souls are with the saints, we trust."

It is not my intention to give you a description of

the wars which have harassed this country at various times. All this you will find in the history-books, and as I am not acquainted with your village, I cannot describe any of the battles which may have taken place in its immediate neighbourhood. Sometimes the spectres of armed knights and warriors are supposed to haunt these scenes of ancient slaughter, and popular superstition has handed down the memory of the battles which were fought so long ago. It tells us of the mythical records of the fights of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, by the banks of the river Douglas, which ran with blood for three days, so terrible was the slaughter. It tells us how stubbornly the Britons resisted the Roman armies, so that on one occasion not one Briton was left to tell the tale of their defeat.

If you take your history-book in your hand and visit the scene of some famous battle, you will be able to imagine the lonely hill-side peopled again with the dense ranks of English archers, or hear the clanging of the armour as the men-at-arms charged for "St. George and merry England;" and the air will be full again of the battle-cries, of the groans of the wounded, and the shouts of the victors.

Visit the scene of the battle of Hastings. Here, on the high ground, flanked by a wood, stood the brave English, under the leadership of Harold, with his banner, woven with gold and jewels, shining conspicuously in the morning sunlight. Here they stood

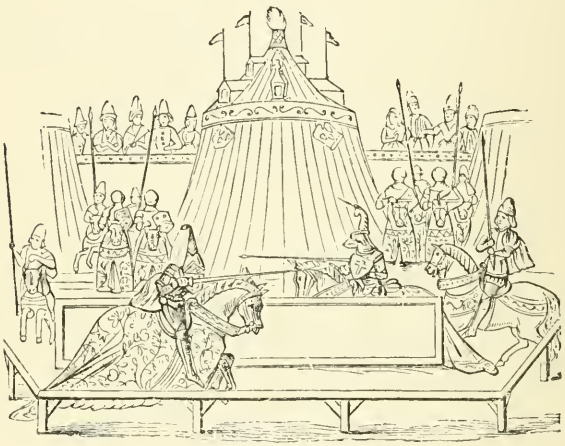
in the form of a wedge; there they turned the Normans, and put them to flight. Then the Normans rallied; pretended to fly; decoyed the brave English from their position, and by stratagem succeeded in defeating them at last. Or go to the Madingley Windmill, near Cambridge, and see the fifteen miles of rich drained corn-fields which intervene between "Ely's stately fane" and the spot on which you are standing. Here read Kingsley's well-known story of "Hereward; or, The Last of the English," and instead of the rich corn-fields you will see that black abyss of mud and bottomless slime into which sunk the flower of Norman chivalry as they tried to cross that treacherous bog to conquer the gallant Hereward, and to plunder the monastery of Ely, the last stronghold of the English. On they came, thousands upon thousands, rushing along the floating bridge which they had formed, until at last it gave way beneath the weight, and the black slime swallowed up the miserable wretches.

Or let us take our stand on the Round Tower near the summit of the Edge Hill, and see the site of the first battle between the troops of Charles I. and the soldiers of the Parliament. The whole of that green lane was lined with troops. In a cottage which stood at our feet the King breakfasted before the battle; from that mound he surveyed the forces of the enemy. Just as the bells in yonder church had ceased to ring for service on Sunday afternoon, the cannon began to roar, and the fight commenced. There Prince Rupert

charged with headlong fury, carrying all before him. And so we can follow the fortunes of fight until the brave Cavaliers retired to rest,—

> "And thousands had sunk on the ground overpowered
> The weary to sleep, and the wounded to die."

The memory of many a fight is recorded in the name



TOURNAMENT.

of the fields, places, and hills on which the battle raged. Lichfield (*i.e.* the field of the dead), Battlefield, Battle, Battleflats, Standard Hill, Slaughterford, and many others, all tell the tale of war and slaughter.

In the Middle Ages, men were very fond of miniature wars, which were called tournaments. These combats between two opposing knights were often judicial; that

is to say, if an accusation was made by one man against another, the question as to who was in the right was decided by an appeal to arms. Tournaments and jousts were a favourite form of amusement in the Middle Ages, and the jousting-grounds and stands for the spectators were as familiar then as race-courses are now. A very good description of a tournament is contained in Sir Walter Scott's novel, "Ivanhoe." The knights were encased in full armour, which was so heavy that sometimes they were exhausted by the sheer weight of metal. Their horses were armed also with plates of metal. Long lances were the chief weapons used. Much formality was observed before the contest began; and then, when a shrill blast of a trumpet was heard, each combatant galloped hard at the other, his lance in rest, with the object of finding some vulnerable spot in the other's panoply, or forcing him from his seat. These conflicts were witnessed by thousands of spectators, amongst whom the wildest excitement raged as to the issue of the combat, and any unfair blow or unknightly deed was received with loud execrations; while skill, prowess, and bravery were greeted with wild applause.

If your village is in the neighbourhood of an old castle, it is probable that many such scenes as I have described were once witnessed in some field near at hand, where the jousts were held, and village sports took place on holidays.

In some parts of the country, especially in Oxford-

shire, there are fine avenues of trees, which appear to lead to a large house ; but when you have walked to the end of the trees there is nothing to be seen. These avenues tell the tale of war, of the destruction of the manor-house of some old Royalist who fought for his King when the "Roundheads" and Cromwell's "Ironsides" were more than a match for the gallant Cavaliers. His house was destroyed, he and his sons killed, unless they were fortunate enough to escape to France and wait the merry time "when the king should enjoy his own again." How many of our uplands and gentle vales have been stained with blood, and seen the terrible horrors of war, of which we in these favoured days know nothing from our own experience! We read about the sad battles and sieges which have taken place in other countries, but can hardly imagine the time when hostile soldiers were riding through our village lanes, and the noise of the cannon was booming in the distance, as on that famous Sunday morning in October, 1642, when Richard Baxter was disturbed in his preaching at Alcester by that strange sound, and knew that the terrible conflict had begun between the King and Parliament. Never was England in so sad a state as she was then, except perhaps during the time of the Wars of the Roses, which began with the battle of St. Albans in 1455, and ended with the defeat of Richard III. on Bosworth Field in 1485. I cannot tell you in this short chapter of the fights which took place during these terrible wars—of Northampton,

Wakefield, Hexham, Barnet, Tewkesbury, and all that happened there; nor of the later struggles of Edge Hill, Newbury, Marston Moor, Naseby, Worcester; or of the gallant sieges of Reading, Bristol, Gloucester, and other places. All this you will find in the history-books.

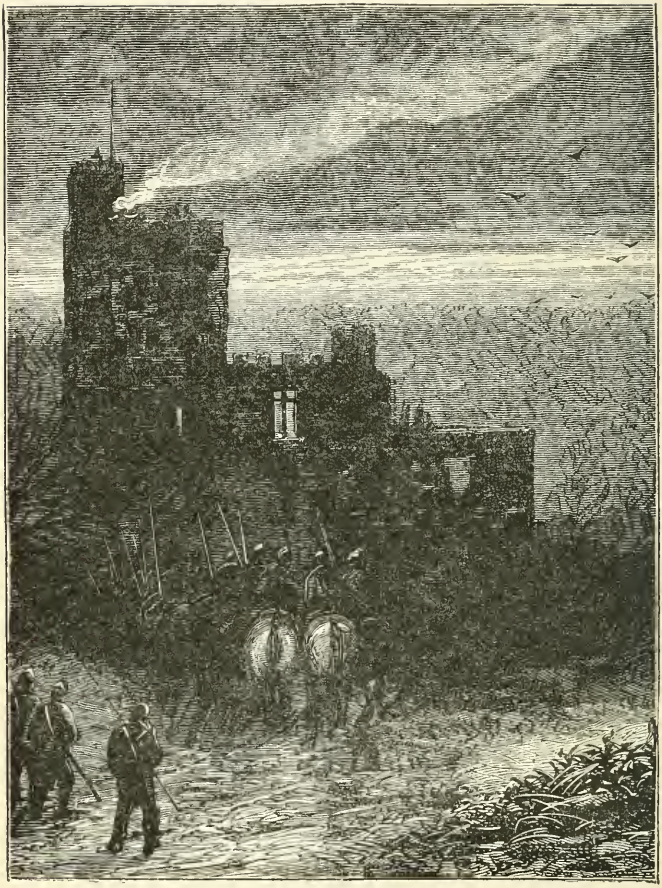
But our English villages suffered very much from these wars. All farming was stopped, manor-houses destroyed, some of the best blood in England spilt, and many a home made desolate. Indeed, in some parts of the country the people had literally no bread to eat, and no clothing to cover their nakedness; and Cromwell ordered collections to be made in London for the relief of the distressed people in Lancashire. Then the old clergyman was driven from his flock, and some commissioner appointed, who wrote in the register-books of the parish the names of the children who were born, but did not record their baptism as the clergyman did. And then some black-gowned Puritan, with his hair cut short, came and took possession of the living, and preached very long sermons about Cromwell "girding his sword upon his thigh," and about blinded Papists, and about Maher-shalal-hash-baz who made haste to divide the spoil.

But in the glorious year 1660 every one began to throw up their caps and welcome right royally the King (Charles II.) from over the water; and the long-faced Puritan disappeared, and the writing in the register-books changed into that of a scholarly hand;

and many of our churches were enriched by thank-offerings of plate and other gifts, because the good people of England rejoiced exceedingly that their loved Church and her services were restored to them ; and "the King at last enjoyed his own again." The memory of the adventures of King Charles II., when he was endeavouring to escape from England after the last crushing defeat of the Royal troops at Worcester, called by Cromwell "the crowning mercy," still lingers in many of the country villages through which the unfortunate monarch passed. The King and a few faithful followers avoided the towns, passed the ford of the Salwarp at Hemford Mill, and proceeded by Chester Lane to Broadwaters and Kinfare Heath. Presently they reached Brewood Forest, where there stood two old hunting-lodges, built by the Giffards in troublous times as hiding-places for proscribed Papists. They were called White Ladies and Boscobel, and were inhabited by staunch Royalists named Penderel ; so the King knew he would be safe there. He was disguised as a forester with leathern jerkin and trunk hose, his long hair cropped, and his hands blackened. All day he lay concealed in a coppice, and in the evening, under the name of Will Jackson, he supped with the Penderels, and then tried to cross the Severn, but all the fords and bridges were guarded. The next day he and Colonel Carlos remained concealed in a large oak near Boscobel, and the memory of Royal Oak Day is still preserved. He

had other narrow escapes, and was saved by Mistress Jane Lane, the beautiful daughter of Colonel Lane. A pass had been obtained for her and her groom to go to Abbott's Leigh, near Bristol. The plan was arranged that the King should act as groom; so Charles mounted his horse, and Mistress Lane sat behind him on a pillion, and together they rode through Warwickshire to Bristol. The King was nearly captured at Long Marston, for some troopers of Cromwell suspected the party, and came to examine the house where they rested. The cook, however, set Charles to wind up the jack, and because he was awkward struck him with the basting-ladle just as the soldiers entered the kitchen. Their suspicions were thus removed; and in this old house the remains of the jack are still preserved. The poor King was disappointed of his ship; the skipper unfortunately told his wife that he was going to take the King to France, and she was angry, and locked him up in his room so that he could not fulfil his engagement. At last Lord Wilmot procured a ship for the fugitive King, who set sail joyfully from Shoreham, near Brighton, and reached Paris in safety. There must have been great excitement in the villages of England when the troopers were scouring the country in all directions, and the unfortunate King was known to be wandering about disguised as a servant.

If there are any hills or high ground in your neighbourhood commanding an extensive view of



A BEACON FIRE.

the country, it is probable that in olden days a beacon was placed there, so that the country might be aroused in case of an invasion. When the Spaniards determined to invade England in the reign of "good Queen Bess," and sent the Invincible Armada, consisting of an enormous number of ships and men and guns, bonfires were placed on every hill; and when a gallant merchant vessel brought the news that the Spaniards were coming, the bonfires were lighted, and every one prepared to resist their attack. Macaulay has told us in very stirring verse of how the news spread, as each fire was lighted,

"From Eddystone to Berwick bounds, from Lynn to Milford Bay;"

how Beachy Head caught the signal from St. Michael's Mount, and sent it swiftly over the country from tower to hill-top,

"Till Skiddaw saw the fire that burned on Gaunt's embattled pile,
And the red glare of Skiddaw roused the burghers of Carlisle."

Again, within the memory of the old inhabitants of your village, the hill beacons were brought into use when Napoleon I. threatened to invade England; and on January 31, 1803, by some mistake, the fire on Hume Castle, in Berwickshire, was lighted; other beacons responded, and ere morning dawned thousands were marching ankle-deep through the dense mud of the winter roads to their appointed stations. The mistake was not without its uses, as Napoleon

saw that England was ready, and did not venture to attack our shores. A similar accident took place in the reign of Henry VIII. There was a conspiracy against the King by the Roman Catholics, who did not like their monasteries being destroyed, called "The Pilgrimage of Grace." Beacons were erected on the heights of Pendel, in Lancashire, and on the various hills of Yorkshire and Derbyshire; but the beacon on Pendel was fired before the conspirators were quite ready for action, and their plot came to nothing.

Once again in the history of our country were these beacon fires lighted; but it was not to announce the approach of an enemy, but to reflect the gladness of the nation which for fifty years had enjoyed the reign of so good a ruler as Queen Victoria. And as you witnessed the sudden blaze of the beacons you would think, doubtless, of other occasions when they were used, and be thankful that rejoicings and thanksgivings are now the cause, and not invasions or conspiracies.

CHAPTER X.

IT is the custom of some writers to represent the lot of an English villager in past ages as having been particularly hard and disagreeable; to enlarge upon the scanty wages which he received; and to compare his position unfavourably with that of the agricultural labourer of the present day. I have already pointed out that the small wages which he received are no test of his poverty, because he received so much more in lieu of wages; and certainly he had far more opportunities of enjoyment and recreation than the present generation have. Now we have scarcely any village games or sports, except when some energetic rector or curate starts a cricket club. Old social customs, which added such diversity to the lives of the rustics two centuries ago, have died out. The village green, the source of so much innocent happiness, is no more; and a recent writer has observed that the ordinary existence of agricultural labourers

is so dull, that in East Anglia they have almost forgotten how to laugh!

We will now try to realize how our village forefathers used to enjoy themselves, how they used to spend their holidays, and to picture to ourselves the scenes of happy social intercourse which once took place in our own hamlet. Every season of the year had its holiday customs and quaint manner of observance, some of them confined to particular counties, but many of them universally observed.

On the eve of Twelfth Night, January 5th, we see the good farmer and his labourers in Devonshire joining hands around his apple-trees, and singing—

> "Here's to thee, old apple-tree!
> Hence thou mayst bud, and whence thou mayst blow!
> And whence thou mayst bear apples enow!
> Hats full! caps full!
> Bushel, bushel, sacks full,
> And my pockets full too! Huzza!"

A hearty supper followed, and with laughter, songs, and good wishes to the farmer and his wife, the company passed a very joyous evening. In Herefordshire, Yorkshire, and other parts of England similar customs prevailed.

Then followed Twelfth Night, which was celebrated by great rejoicings and merry-makings, a game called the choosing of kings and queens being played, and Twelfth Night cakes consumed in plenty. The next Monday was called Plough Monday, when the labourers

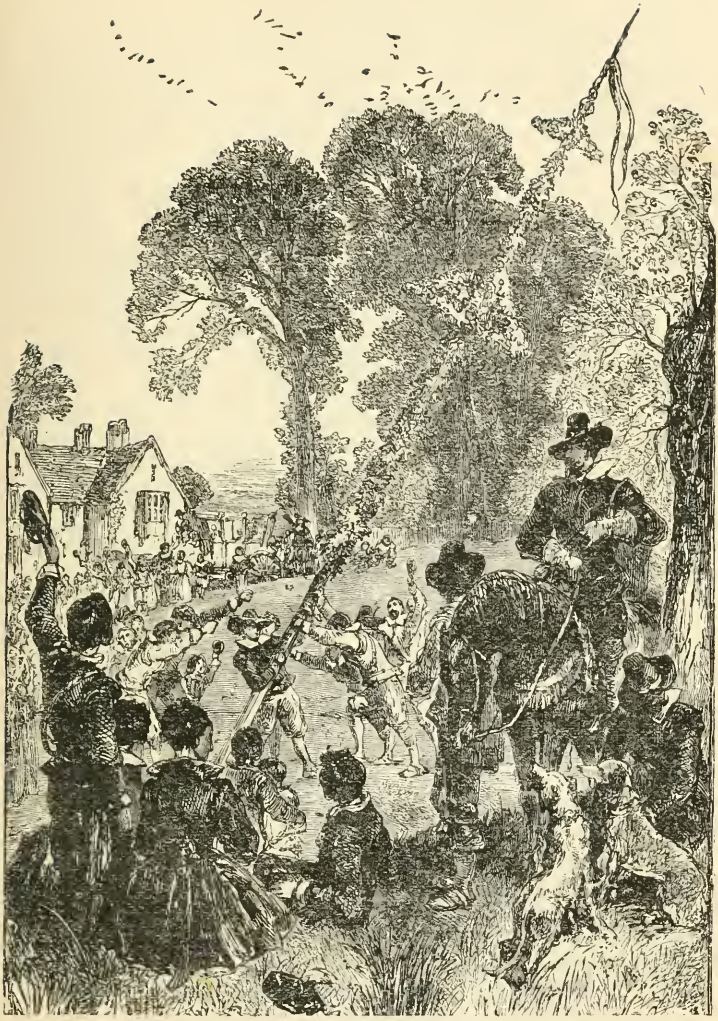
used to draw a plough round the parish and receive presents of money, favouring the spectators with sword-dancing and mumming, preparatory to beginning to plough after the Christmas holidays. The men were decked out with gay ribbons, and were accompanied by morris-dancers. The Christmas holidays lasted these twelve days, and during them it was customary for the gentlemen to feast the farmers, and for the farmers to feast their labourers. Then came the Shrove-tide festivities, on Shrove Tuesday, when pancakes, football, and, I am sorry to say, cock-fighting, and a still more barbarous custom of throwing sticks at hens, were generally in vogue. On Mid-Lent Sunday, commonly called "Mothering Sunday," it was the pleasing custom for servants and apprentices to carry cakes or furmity as presents to their mother, and to receive from her a cake with her blessing. This was called "going a-mothering." The old poet Herrick alludes to this custom in Gloucestershire in these words:—

> "I'll to thee a simnell bring,
> 'Gainst thou go'st a-mothering;
> So that when she blesseth thee,
> Half that blessing thou'lt give me."

Then came the diversions of Hock-tide, on the second Monday and Tuesday after Easter, when the men and women intercepted the public on alternate days with ropes, and boldly exacted money for pious purposes. There was a Hock-tide play,

which was acted before Queen Elizabeth, and caused her much amusement. She gave the players two bucks and five marks of money, which delighted them exceedingly.

Very shortly afterwards the great rural festival of our forefathers took place, the glad May Day, when, in the early dawn, the lads and lassies left their towns and villages, and going into the woods by the sound of music, gathered the may or blossomed branches of the trees, and bound them with wreaths of flowers. At sunrise they returned, and decorated the lattices and doors with the sweet-smelling spoil of their joyous journey, and spent the rest of the day in sports and pastimes, and dancing round the may-pole. The setting-up of the may-pole was a very joyous ceremony. A long string of oxen, gaily decked with flowers, drew to the village green the time-honoured pole, decked with streamers, flowers, and flags, where it was raised amidst laughter and shouts; and the Queen of the May was enthroned in an arbour, and all danced round; and the morris-dancers, Robin Hood, Friar Tuck, and Maid Marian performed wonderful antics as they led the revels. Targets were set up at the other end of the green, and archery formed an important part of the day's pleasures. The preachers at the time of the Reformation thought the people made an idol of the may-pole, and condemned the innocent amusements, which were revived again when Charles II. came to the



THE MAY-POLE.

throne. After May Day our villagers had not long to wait until the Whitsuntide holiday came round—

> "A day of jubilee,
> An ancient holiday ;
> When, lo ! the rural revels are begun,
> And gaily echoing to the laughing sky,
> On the smooth-shaven green,
> Resounds the voice of mirth."

I have already given a description of these Whitsuntide rejoicings in a preceding chapter.

Then there were the miracle plays, or "mysteries," as they were called, on June 2nd, Corpus Christi Day, which were performed before the Reformation, principally in the neighbourhood of large monasteries ; Coventry, Chester, London, York being specially renowned for these performances. The subjects were taken from Holy Scripture, or from the lives of saints, and were intended to teach the people religious knowledge, but the scenes were disfigured by many absurdities and grotesque perversions. Their history is a curious one, too long to enter upon in this chapter ; but often in the open fields, at the bottom of natural amphitheatres, were these plays performed, very similar in construction to the famous Passion play performed by the peasants, at Ober Ammergau in Bavaria, the last surviving specimen of the ancient religious drama.

Then there were the bonfires to be lighted on St. John's Day upon the hill-sides, and the dance of the

young people around them, the more venturesome youths leaping through the flames, all carrying home the firebrands and forming a glad procession. Afterwards followed the busy harvest time, when every one was too hard at work, and too tired at the end of the day's labours to think of holiday-making; but at length came the harvest home, when the last sheaf was gathered in, and the harvest supper was a very joyous occasion. With light hearts, smiling faces, and cheerful shouts, the harvest labourers and their wives and children, carrying green boughs, a sheaf of wheat, and rude flags, formed a glad procession to the farmer's house, where they found the fuelled chimney blazing wide, and "the strong table groaning beneath the smoking sirloin." The feast over, they retired to some near hillock, and made the welkin ring with their shouts, "Holla, holla, holla, largess!' —largess being the presents of money and good things which the farmer had bestowed. Such was the harvest home in the good old days, a joy and delight to both old and young. Shorn of much of its merriment and quaint customs, it still lingers on; but modern habits and notions have deprived it of much of its old spirit and light-heartedness.

The floors of the old churches were formerly unpaved and unboarded, simply made of clay, and were covered over with rushes. Once a year there was a great ceremony, called "rush-bearing." Rushes were cut in the neighbouring marsh, and made up into

long bundles, decked with ribands and flowers. Then a procession was formed, every one bearing a bundle of rushes, or placing them in the rush-cart beautifully adorned; and with music, drums, and ringing of bells, they marched to the church and strewed the floor with their honoured burdens. Long after the rushes ceased to be used in church the ceremony was continued, and I have myself witnessed a rush-bearing procession such as I have described. A village feast, followed by dancing round the may-pole, generally formed the conclusion to the day's festivities.

"Beating the bounds" of the parish was another annual ceremony, which often took place on Ascension Day and is still in use at Oxford. Boundaries of property were not so clearly defined in those days as they are now; and hedgerows, walls, and railings were scarce. The bounds of a parish were often marked by trees, called "gospel trees," because the clergyman used to read the gospel for the day under their shade. The people carried a processional cross and willow wands, and boys were generally flogged at the boundaries, or ducked in the river, if that constituted a boundary, in order to impress upon their memories where the bounds were. The village feast afterwards made some amends to them for their harsh treatment.

The village sports were a great source of enjoyment, and were frequently indulged in. I have already mentioned the time-honoured archery which

developed the skill of our English bowmen, and won for them many a battle before the days of gunpowder and cannons. Then there was the very ancient game of the quintain, which consisted of an upright post with a cross-post turning upon a pin. At one end of the latter was a broad board, at the other a heavy sand-bag. The play, which required skill and dexterity, was to ride against the broad end with a lance, and pass by before the sand-bag, swinging round, could strike the player to the ground. This was a common sport at wedding festivities. There were also the games of singlestick, cudgelling, and wrestling, which had many votaries, and the famous game of quarter-staff, so general in Berkshire, and so graphically described in "The Scouring of the White Horse," by Mr. Hughes. An old parishioner of mine was the reputed champion of this game, which has now almost died out. Foot-ball, I am glad to find, is an ancient sport, and the manner formerly in vogue most nearly resembles the game authorized by the Rugby rules. The foot-ball was thrown down in the churchyard, and the object was to carry it perhaps two or three miles, every inch of ground being keenly contested. "Touch-downs" were then unknown, but it is evident from old records that "scrimmages" and "hacking" were much in vogue. Sack-racing, grinning through horse-collars, running after pigs with greased tails, were some of the lighter forms of amusement which pleased the villagers.

Then in the winter evenings there were "carols" to be practised for Christmas, and each village boasted of its own musicians, who played violins, flutes, clarionets, and other instruments in church, before the days of harmoniums and organs. Their music might not be of a very first-rate order, but they delighted in it, took an interest in it; and how pleased they were to take part in the service, and to play over their favourite hymn tunes, with a great many twirls and variations, to their children during the winter evenings! Christmas brought its accustomed merry-makings. In the north, every farmer gave two feasts, one called "t' ould foaks' neet," and the other "t' young foaks' neet." Here is Sir Walter Scott's description of an ancient Christmas:—

"And well our Christian sires of old
Loved when the year its course had roll'd
And brought blithe Christmas back again,
With all its hospitable train.
Domestic and religious rite
Gave honour to the holy night:
On Christmas Eve the bells were rung;
On Christmas Eve the Mass was sung;
That only night in all the year
Saw the stoled priest the chalice rear.
The damsel donn'd her kirtle sheen;
The hall was dressed with holly green;
Forth to the wood did merry men go,
To gather in the mistletoe.
Then open wide the baron's hall,
To vassal, tenant, serf, and all;

Power laid his rod of rule aside,
And Ceremony doff'd his pride.
The heir, with roses in his shoes,
That night might village partner choose ;
The lord, underogating, share
The vulgar game of 'post and pair.'
All hailed with uncontrolled delight
The general voice, the happy night,
That to the cottage, as the crown,
Brought tidings of salvation down.

"The fire, with well-dried logs supplied
Went roaring up the chimney wide ;
The huge hall-table's oaken face
Scrubb'd till it shone, the day of grace,
Bore then upon its massive board
No mark to part the squire and lord.
Then was brought in the lusty brawn,
By old blue-coated serving man ;
Then the grim boar's head frowned on high,
Crested with bays and rosemary.
Well can the green-garb'd ranger tell
How, when, and where the monster fell ;
What dogs before his death he tore,
And all the baiting of the boar ;
While round the merry wassail bowl,
Garnished with ribbons, blithe did trowl.
Then the huge sirloin reek'd : hard by
Plum-porridge stood, and Christmas pie ;
Nor fail'd old Scotland to produce
At such high time her savoury goose.
Then came the merry maskers in,
And carols roared with blithesome din ;
If unmelodious was the song,
It was a hearty note, and strong.
Who lists may in this mumming see
Traces of ancient mystery ;

White shirts supply the masquerade,
And smutted cheeks the visor made;
But, oh! what masquers, richly dight,
Can boast of bosoms half so light!
England was merry England when
Old Christmas brought his sports again.
'Twas Christmas broach'd the mightiest ale;
'Twas Christmas told the merriest tale.
A Christmas gambol oft would cheer
A poor man's heart through half the year."

Such was the manner of keeping Christmas in olden times; and if "the mightiest ale" was sometimes too mighty, and although the intemperance of our forefathers was a vice much to be deplored, at any rate their hearty manner of keeping this annual feast was effectual in promoting "goodwill amongst men," and in cheering the hearts of the poor.

In this chapter I have attempted to show the varied amusements and recreations in which our village ancestors took part. On the old village green, which in too many of our villages has been enclosed and become a thing of the past, many of these sports and pastimes once took place. There stood the village stocks, in which the refractory paid the penalty of their misdeeds; and sometimes, too, a pillory was added, which held fast the head, arms, and legs of the culprit, while the villagers, rude vindicators of the law, threw stones, rotten eggs, and other missiles at the unhappy victim. At the edge of the pond you might have seen a long plank which turned on a

swivel, with a chair at the end overhanging the water. This was called a "cucking stool," and was used to duck scolds or brawlers. The culprit was placed in the chair, and the other end of the plank was raised several times, so that the ardour of the culprit was effectually cooled by frequent immersions. These

THE STOCKS.

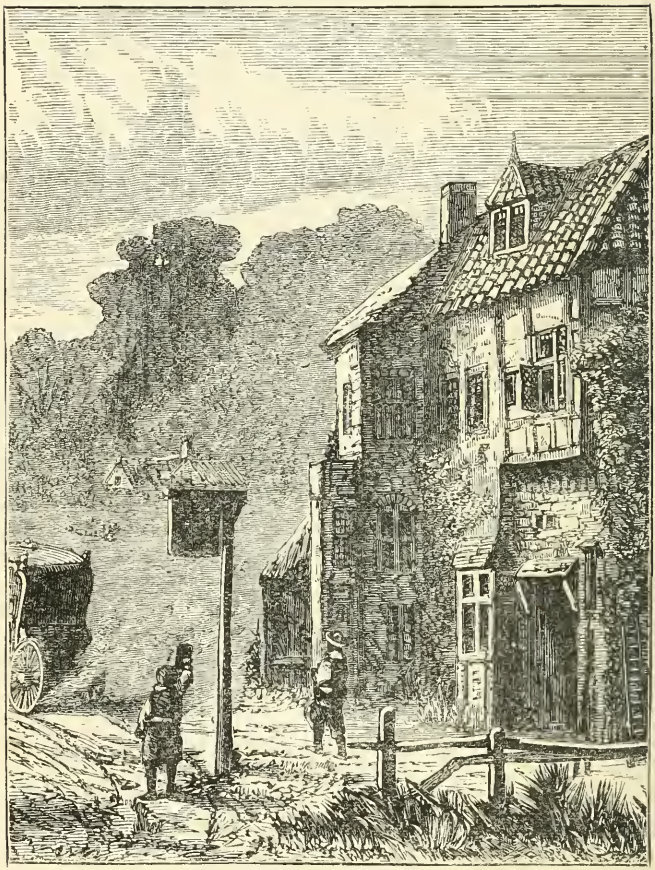
were rough methods of administering justice, but often very effectual in checking vice.

The social customs which formerly existed in each village, the sports and pastimes associated with the village green, the May Day festivals and the Christmas carollings, were of great value, inasmuch as they tended to infuse some poetical feeling into the minds of the people, softened the rudeness of rustic manners, and gave the villagers simple plea-

sures which lightened their labours. They prevented them from growing hard, grasping, and discontented with their lot. They promoted good feeling between the farmers and their labourers. The customs of the town were a poor exchange for the ancient country manners and amusements; and it was a sad day for our country when the villagers lost their simplicity and the power of appreciating the primitive pleasures of rural England.

CHAPTER XI.

IN almost every village in England there is an inn. Before the Reformation there were very few of these hostelries, as travellers were always accommodated at the monasteries, each of which had a hospitium, or guests' house, where their wants were attended to by special officers appointed for the purpose, and where they could remain for several days. But the destruction of the monasteries produced many changes in the condition of the country; it introduced the necessity of a poor-law, for the poor were always relieved by the monasteries; it required the erection of schools and places for education, as all the education of the country had been carried on in these monastic buildings; and when the old guest-houses ceased to exist, travellers, merchants, and pedlars required some place to lodge when they moved about the country, and inns became plentiful, in many cases



VILLAGE INN.

too plentiful as time went on. Hence in almost every village in England there is an inn, which is generally a landmark; and whenever you wish to direct a stranger to some place where he desires to go, you doubtless tell him to turn to the right by "The Bull," or to keep straight on until he comes to "The Magpie." Indeed, a friend of mine, who is a strong teetotaler, asserts that the only good use inns have is to help people to find their road. But old inns have a great history. In former days they used to be the meeting-places of plotters and conspirators. All the distinguished people in the country used to pass through the villages and towns on the great roads through the country, and when the horses were being changed they used to partake of the good fare which the landlord provided. Those were busy times for the old inns, when there was stabling for fifty or sixty horses, and the coaches used to rattle through the village to the inn door, long before the iron horses began to drag their freight of passengers along the iron roads, and the scream of the engines took the place of the cheerful notes of the post-horn.

Sometimes a gentleman would ride to the inn door on a beautiful, fleet-looking steed, and receive a hearty welcome from the landlord; but the pistols in his belt looked ominous, and presently some soldiers would steal noiselessly into the inn where the gentleman was refreshing himself, and there would be heard the sounds of vigorous fighting; and often, in some

wonderful way, "Claude Duval" or the noted "Dick" would fight his way out, whistle to his steed, jump into the saddle and ride away, before his less nimble pursuers had recovered from their astonishment. Very many exciting scenes have taken place in our old inns, but in these days railways have changed all things; and in many streets where the coaches used to rattle along, and the place was alive with merry sounds, the moss now grows, and all is silence and desolation. I do not wish you to suppose that it would be preferable to live in those days rather than in our own. We should certainly think it inconvenient to take three days to travel from London to Bath, and it would not be pleasant to have a visit from "Dick Turpin" on the way, and to have all one's valuables appropriated by that notorious highwayman; but in these days of worry and busy bustling, it would be refreshing to catch a glimpse of those quiet times when people were not so much in a hurry, and to hear the sound of the post-horn once more instead of the whistle of the steam-engine.

But the quaint-looking pictures and curious names which attract our notice as we pass an inn door have some queer stories to tell. We notice a very curious collection of animals sometimes, and a strange assortment of things; and the reason why our ancestors put some of these curious things together it is somewhat difficult for us to find out. In olden days, other

houses of tradesmen besides inns had signs. Grocers, tailors, candlestick-makers all had signs; but most of these have disappeared, except one belonging to a certain sweep of my acquaintance, whose house is adorned with the figure of a man coming out of a globe, with the motto, "Help me through the world." Over their doors barbers still have their poles, which represented once the fact that the barber was prepared to bandage up wounded arms and legs; the stripes on the pole were intended to represent the bandages, and the barber was the surgeon of the town. I think you would rather go to a doctor than to a barber to have your limbs mended; nor do we seem to have so much blood to spare as our forefathers, for the barber always bled his customers once or twice a-year, as it was supposed to be good for the health, especially in the spring-time.

One reason for the curious mixture of animals and other things which we see on signboards is that an apprentice, when he had finished his time and began to set up for himself, adopted some sign, and then joined with it the sign of his old master. This will account for some of the curiosities to which I refer —such as "The Lamb and Dolphin," "The Goose and Gridiron," "The Fox and Seven Stars,"—combinations of things for which it would otherwise be difficult to account. Another reason is that signs were taken from the armorial bearings, or crests, of some popular character, or of some great family

in the neighbourhood. For example, I may mention "The Bear with the Ragged Staff," which was the crest of Richard Nevil, Earl of Warwick, commonly called "The King-maker," who was slain in the battle of Barnet, A.D. 1471. "The Blue Boar" was one of the badges of the House of York. You have heard of the Wars of the Roses, which were fought between the Houses of York and Lancaster for the throne of England, and to which I referred in a previous chapter. "The Bull" is a very common sign because it was a very common crest, and we have them all colours—black, red, white; lions also rage in blue, white, and red attire. Sometimes we meet with "The Cross Keys," the keeper of which was probably an old servant or tenant of an abbey or monastery, and chose his sign from that of the monastery with which he was connected. Frequently, in olden times, a cross was erected at the meeting of two or three roads, or where the pilgrims to Canterbury used to pass; afterwards an inn was built near it, and was, in many cases, called the Cross Inn.

One very common cause of curious signs is the way in which the original word has been corrupted by ignorant people frequently repeating words which they did not understand, and thus changing their whole meaning. You may have seen an inn described as "The Swan with Two Necks,"—a very rare bird indeed. But it was never intended to disfigure

the bird by giving it two necks; the original sign was "The Swan with Two *Nicks*," and nicks were the marks which were cut on a swan's bill to distinguish it from other swans, so that it might be known to whom the bird belonged. But *nicks* became *necks* in course of conversation, until at last a fabulous creature with two beautifully curved necks appeared on the signboard. This same cause will account for the two strange signs, "Bull and Gate" and "Bull and Mouth." The original signs were "Boulogne Gate" and "Boulogne Mouth," *i.e.* the gate and harbour of the town of Boulogne, in France, which was captured by the English under King Henry VIII. in the year 1544. The English were very pleased to hear of the defeat of the French, and of the taking of that important town, and several inns were named as I have just mentioned; but the French "Boulogne" was too much for our good English mouths to speak, so it became "Bull and." Another victory, perhaps, for John Bull!

Another name which puzzled our forefathers was "*La Belle Sauvage*" ("the Beautiful Savage"), which was named after a noted savage beauty who was the rage at Paris. Others assert that the name of the landlady was Isabella Savage, shortened into Bella Savage. However, in course of time the name was altered into "Bell and Savage," and a picture representing this odd combination stood over the door In the same way, the original sign, "Whip and Nag,"

between which there is often a very close connexion, became "Whip and Egg;" and the reason why these two articles should be placed together is not so evident. So also there does not seem any reason for an inn to be called "Bag o' Nails;" but when we are told that the original word was "Bacchanals," —*i.e.* followers of Bacchus, the old god of wine, we can understand how the corruption, "Bag o' Nails," arose. Before the days of licensing, when every one could sell liquor who chose without obtaining any licence from the magistrates, it was the custom to put a bush over the doorway, in order to inform the passers-by that liquor could be purchased there. This is the origin of the saying, "Good wine needs no bush."

It is curious that the memory of a holy martyr should be kept up by a public-house sign; but "The Catherine Wheel" tells us the sad story of St. Catherine, who was born at Alexandria, and for converting fifty heathen philosophers to Christianity was sentenced by the Emperor Maxentius to death on a wheel, devised by most ingenious cruelty, armed with knives, saws, and nails. It is recorded that she was rescued from this fate, but was afterwards beheaded A.D. 305. It is curious that this instrument of torture and the story of St. Catherine's heroism should be recorded on a sign-board. But it may have been brought before the public by a certain miracle play, founded on the life of St. Catherine, which used to be

performed on festival days. These plays were very common, and were taken from Old and New Testament narratives. However, the Catherine wheel appears frequently on the coats-of-arms of several families, and it may be that the sign was taken from these.

"The George," also, is a very popular sign; and the "St. George of merry England" is the patron saint of this country, and the battle-cry of her knights and yeomen of ancient days. Who does not remember that stirring scene on St. George's Mount during the Crusades, described in Sir Walter Scott's "Talisman," when King Richard tore down the Austrian banner, which the Austrian monarch had dared to erect beside the royal standard of England? St. George is generally represented as slaying a dragon, but this is a mythical story. He was a soldier who served gallantly under the Emperor Diocletian, and commanded a legion of soldiers; he was a Christian, and by the dragon whom he slew is meant the Devil, red with the blood of the Christians. So popular a personage as St. George, whose name inspired our ancestors with courage, and was often borne by them into the heart of the foe, would soon be recorded in paintings and become a general sign. "The Goat" is a common sign, and is taken from the crest of the Duke of Bedford; but "The Goat and Compasses" has puzzled many people as to its origin. It appears to be a corruption of a pious expression, "God en-

compasseth us ;" and this shows how strangely words may be twisted and converted by ignorant and careless usage.

I think that I have now come to an end of my list of general signs, and their curious and often grotesque collection of animals and other things. There are some very noted inns where great events have taken place, amongst which I may mention the Bull Inn at Coventry. Here Henry VII. was entertained the night before the battle of Bosworth Field, when he won for himself the English crown. Here Mary Queen of Scots was detained by order of Elizabeth. Here the conspirators of the Gunpowder Plot met to devise their scheme for blowing up the Houses of Parliament. And when the citizens refused to open their gates to Charles I. and his soldiers, no doubt there were great disputings amongst the frequenters of "The Bull" as to what would be the result of their disloyal refusal.

Some of the inns in remote country places did not enjoy a very enviable reputation, and were little better than man-traps, where the unfortunate traveller was robbed and murdered. At Blewbury, in Berkshire, there was an inn, the landlord of which was suspected of murdering his guests with great secrecy and mystery, and no one could tell what he did with the bodies of the victims he was supposed to have murdered. A few years ago, an old tree in the neighbourhood of the inn was blown down, and on digging

up the roots a skeleton was found among them. People wondered how it could have been placed there, but at last a very old inhabitant told the story of the mysterious disappearance of the bodies of the late landlord's guests, and the mystery was at length accounted for. Whenever he slew a man, he planted a tree, placing the body of the murdered victim beneath it. The constables never thought of looking there; and probably under every tree which he planted (and there were several), when their roots are dug up, the bones of his numerous victims will be discovered.

Another story is connected with the old "Hind's Head" at Bracknell, which was another of these man-traps, where many travellers slept to rise no more. One winter's night, a stout-hearted farmer stayed there, and joined several jovial companions round the kitchen fire. They ate and drank merrily, and at last the serving-maid showed the traveller to his chamber. She told him that he was surrounded by robbers and murderers, showed him a trap-door at the side of the bed, on which if he stepped, he would tumble headlong into a deep well. She directed him to tie the bed into a bundle, put it on the trap-door, and escape by the window. He did so; down went the bundle, instead of the farmer, into the well, and he managed to effect his escape. Rousing the neighbourhood, he captured the villains, who were all executed, and the bones of many of their

victims were found in the well. Happily such inns were rare.

To describe the conditions of the old inns for which England was famous, of the good fare which awaited the travellers by the coach, of the spacious corridors, of the comfortable beds hung with silk and smelling of lavender; to tell of all the great folk who entered their doors—kings, queens, poets, generals, highwaymen, statesmen, grooms, conspirators, coachmen—all this would require much space to relate. When railways came in, their ancient glory departed; the old stables are destroyed; grass grows in the court-yard; and the object of their existence has almost ceased to be.

CHAPTER XII.

IN the previous chapters we have by no means exhausted the mass of subjects connected with your village and its associations. There is the old rectory, or vicarage-house, in which the parish clergyman has lived for ages amongst the flock committed to his charge, tending their wants, administering to their necessities both temporal and spiritual, and watching over them as a shepherd watches over his sheep. Long before the Reformation, during the Reformation, and after it, he was there carrying on his Master's work. The tablets in the church record the memory of some of these men who have passed away, and lie in the churchyard by the side of those to whom they ministered. Some of them have doubtless achieved great things, become bishops, or deans, or left their names behind on the title-pages of the books they have written, which are now almost as

much forgotten as their authors. In some churches there is a list of the rectors of the parish, and these lists often begin at a very early date. There is one at St. Matthew's, Ipswich, which begins with—

1270	A.D.	John de Plessis . .	Patron, King Henry III.
1297	,,	Henry de Alkelardestre	,, King Edward I.
1309	,,	Thomas de Haliwell	,, King Edward II.

And so on, until we come to the present time—

1875	A.D.	Francis Haslewood	Patron, Queen Victoria.

These lists show the continuity of the English Church, and proclaim that our Church was not founded at the Reformation, but that it is in fact identically the same Church that existed before that important event, although several important changes were then introduced in the form and manner of our worship. It would be advantageous if in every church a list of the rectors were placed in a conspicuous position, as this would bring before the minds of the people the antiquity and continuity of the Church of England, and teach them to reverence and love her more.

In many parishes there are old almshouses founded by pious benefactors for "poor brethren and sisters" who have fallen into poverty; and many a lonely desolate life has been made happy in its declining years by such useful and beneficent institutions. As we enter the quiet court-yard paved with cobble stones, the spirit of olden days comes over us. The

chapel where daily prayer is said morning and evening; the panel-lined dining-hall, with its dark oaken table; the comfortable rooms of the inmates; the time-worn pumps in the court-yard,—all recall the

ALMSHOUSES.

recollection of old times, when life was more tranquil, and there was less hurry and bustling.

Then there are places associated with the lives of distinguished men—authors, soldiers, statesmen. Perhaps your village may have bred other poets besides "the mute inglorious Milton," of Gray's "Elegy." Not

far from where I am writing was Pope's early home the village of Binfield, which he calls—

> "My paternal home,
> A little house, with trees arow,
> And, like its master, very low."

On the other side lies the village of Three Mile Cross, where Miss Mitford lived and wrote "Our Village;" and Arborfield, called in her book Arborleigh, about which she tells some pleasant stories, is the adjoining parish. Sometimes, as I ride down a grassy lane, a favourite haunt of the distinguished authoress, I seem to see her seated on a fallen tree, weaving her pretty romances, while her favourite dog, which she often describes, plays and barks around her. A few miles in another direction lies Eversley, the loved abode of Charles Kingsley, about whom many stories linger in the country-side. To visit the uncomfortable brick-paved study where he wrote, the garden where he used to pace and think out his great thoughts, is one of the most delightful, refreshing, invigorating things possible.

These are only instances of places which have become interesting on account of the famous men who once lived in them; and, thank God, England has many heroes of the sword and pen, whose lives each Englishman should study; and when you visit their dwelling-places you will recall their achievements, and perhaps endeavour to imitate their examples. Here is an instance of how little the

villagers know of the distinguished men who once lived amongst them. The great Duke of Wellington did not live a very long time ago, and yet some friends of mine who were staying at Strathfieldsaye, near the Iron Duke's house, and made inquiries amongst the villagers about their recollections of the hero of Waterloo, could obtain no information. At last one venerable rustic vouchsafed the extraordinary intelligence, "I believe as 'ow 'e were very good at war!" What a thing it is to be famous!

There is yet another class of subjects connected with the old village life of the country, of absorbing interest and importance. I refer to the old superstitions and folk-lore which still linger on in the recollections of the "oldest inhabitant," and which ought to be at once treasured up, lest they should be altogether lost. The generation of those who believed firmly in the power of "the evil eye" of the witch, and who feared to disturb the revels of the fairies on their rings and mounds, is only just passing away. A few days ago, an old gipsy told me of the witch at Farnham who was supposed to make the cows wild and prevent them from giving milk; of another witch who lived at Henley-on-Thames, and who was thrown into the river, and "floated like a cork." Here we have a revival of the old Saxon method of trying culprits by the water ordeal, which was often used in examining witches. This particular witch could turn herself into a hare,

so my venerable gipsy friend, aged ninety-six, informed me, and the dogs hunted her. He told me also of the Tadley witch, who "wished" several people, and injured them. Why the Henley witch should turn herself into a hare, and be hunted, is not at first very evident; but it seems to have been a practice of the old witches, in order to vex the squires, justices, and country parsons, who were fond of hunting, as the old dames could elude the speed of the swiftest dogs. An old writer states "that never hunters nor their dogs may be bewitched, they cleave an oaken branch, and both they and their dogs pass over it." Mary Dore, the parochial witch of Beaulieu, in Hampshire, used to turn herself into a hare, or cat, in order to escape detection when caught in the act of wood-stealing, to which she was somewhat addicted.

I am afraid that old women were rather harshly used in the days when people believed in the power of witches. If any farmer's cattle died, it was immediately concluded that the animals were bewitched; and some wretched old woman was singled out, and summarily tried and burnt. If any one fell ill, some "witch" had evidently a waxen image of the sufferer, and stuck needles into it; and such was the power of the witch that, wherever the person was, he felt the stab of the cruel needle. Hence the witch had to be found and burnt. If the corn crops failed, was not witchcraft the cause? for had not old Mother Maggs

been heard to threaten Farmer Giles, and had not her black cat been seen running over the fields? Even good Bishop Jewel did not disbelieve in the power of the evil eye, for, in preaching before Queen Elizabeth in the year 1558, he said, "It may please your grace to understand that witches and sorcerers are marvellously increased within your grace's realm. Your grace's subjects pine away even unto the death, their colour fadeth, their flesh rotteth, their speech is benumbed, their senses are bereft. I pray God they never practise further than on the subject." To so great an extent did faith in the witches' fatal power prevail!

Our forefathers used to believe in the existence of other, and more pleasant little companions than the old toothless witches—the bright little fairies who, on account of the neglect which they have received from the present generation of Englishmen, have, so it is reported, left our shores in disgust, never to return. The previous inhabitants of our villages did not so treat them; and did not the fairies always bring them luck? They nailed the horse-shoe to the stable door to keep out the witches, lest they should ride their steeds by night to the witches' revels; but no one wished to exclude the fairies. Did not the dairy-maids find the butter ready churned, and the cows milked? And did not St. Nicholas fill the children's stockings with presents at Christmas time? Did not fairies haunt the wells? And is it not con-

fidently asserted that "the good people" (as the fairies are called) live in wilds and forests, and shun great cities because of the wickedness which existed therein? Have they never appeared to the lonely traveller, clothed in green, with long hair floating over their shoulders, and with faces more blooming than the blush of a summer morning? Then there were the fairy rings formed by the dancing of their merry feet.

> "Some say the screech-owl, at each midnight hour,
> Awakes the fairies in yon ancient tower.
> Their nightly dancing ring I always dread,
> Nor let my sheep within that circle tread;
> When round and round all night, in moonlight fair,
> They dance to some strange music in the air."

Then there were brownies; and knockers, who worked in mines, and showed rich veins of silver; and elves, —all of whom were included in old village superstitions, and many were the tales told of the good deeds they did, and the luck they brought. Nor must we forget the story of the invisible smith who inhabited Weyland Smith's Cave, in Berkshire. Whenever a farmer tied up his horse in the cave, and left the money on a particular stone, on his return he found his horse shod by the kind efforts of the invisible smith. There is also the old Berkshire story of the old witch who lived in a cave by the road-side, and who, by the power of her "evil eye," could stop the strongest team of horses, so that, however much the carters lashed and swore at them, the animals would not budge an inch until she permitted them to go.

These are some of the legends of old times which have come down to us. Every neighbourhood has its stories, its legends, and romantic histories. It is a sad pity that these should pass away without a record being left of them. Many curious customs and ceremonies relating to christenings, marriages, burials, etc., still linger in remote hamlets; and charms and other relics of early village-life are full of interest to the lover of our English villages.

Much more remains to be said upon the various subjects which the history of your English village suggests. But the day is closing, and our walk through its sequestered lanes and our thoughts about the various scenes which yonder venerable oaks have witnessed, must cease. But enough has been said to show what a wealth of interest lies hid beneath the calm exterior of ordinary village life. An American truly observes that everything in the rural life of England is associated with ideas of order, of quiet, sober, well-established principles, of hoary usage and reverent custom—the growth of ages of regular and peaceful existence. The impression which the appearance of an English village left on his mind is so beautifully described in the following passage, that I cannot refrain from quoting it:—

"The old church of remote architecture, with its low massive portal, its gothic tower, its windows rich with tracery and painted glass, its scrupulous preservation, its stately monuments of

warriors and worthies of olden time, ancestors of the present lords of the soil; its tombstones, recording successive generations of sturdy yeomanry, whose progeny still plough the same fields, and kneel at the same altar; the parsonage, a quaint, irregular pile, partly antiquated, but repaired and altered in the tastes of various eyes and occupants; the stile and footpath leading from the churchyard, across pleasant fields, and along shady hedgerows, according to an immemorial right-of-way; the neighbouring village, with its venerable cottages, its public green sheltered by trees, under which the forefathers of the present race have sported; the antique family mansion, standing apart in some little rural domain, but looking down with a protecting air on the surrounding scene. All these common features of English landscape evince a calm and settled security, and hereditary transmission of home-bred virtues and local attachments, that speak deeply and touchingly for the moral character of the nation."

Let us hope that those whose happy lot it is to live in the quiet hamlets of our native land, afar from the noise and din of busy towns, will learn to love more deeply their village homes, and interest themselves in their surroundings. To those who read the history of their native place, each house and field, each stone and tree, will tell its story, and recount the wonders it has witnessed. And as the stories of wars and fights, of superstition and of crime, fall on our ears, we shall be thankful that our lot is cast in more peaceful days, when no persecutions, religious or political, disturb the tranquillity of our village life. And when we read of the piety and simplicity of our forefathers, their veneration of their Church, their love of home, their innocent joys and social customs, we should strive

to imitate their virtues which have materially helped to make England a great and powerful nation. It is hoped that these chapters upon the old life of our country, and the manners and customs of our forefathers, may induce many of my readers to read and study history more deeply, may serve to create an interest in the relics that remain to us of the past, and to preserve the fleeting traditions that Time doth consecrate.

INDEX.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES.