

Wakeman's Wanderings.

ODD INCIDENTS OF FOREIGN TRAVEL AND
OBSERVATION.

LONDON, April 19, 1893.—In my preceding article on English villages and their folk, I gave some account of seven English villages, and those in merest outline. Seven hundred is truly near the number I have personally visited. Each one could furnish through literary study, for brush or pen, abundant material for a volume.

Some writers would have us believe that English villages were things of the past; that rural England had completely gone to decay; that the smoke of factory-stacks hung like a pall over the remains of all that is noble and old and good; that the humdrum of the mills had drowned all the dear old country sounds; that commercial England, with hard and cruel laws, had effaced almost the last vestige of the art, sweet and charming countryside; and that brick and iron, stone and steel, coal and steam, had replaced the old and the new.

As goodly a proportion of English as American people have come to accept this as true. But it is astonishingly false, so any one who will really see, not rush about England may know. Rocks are largely responsible for this. English fiction, like American fiction, of from a half century to a century ago, was replete with pictures of village life and character. When Charlotte Brontë laid down her pen, and the labor of George Eliot—who was to the early Victorian age, at least in degree, what Shakespeare was to the Elizabethan—was done, masterpieces in this school of delineation seemed to cease.

Neither America nor England has since produced a lasting work of fiction upon rural scenes and lowly folk. Novelists have allowed in altruism, psychological phenomena, subtleties of crime and in detection, hideous salaciousness, positive and comparative religion, the heroics of agnosticism and infidelity and in the shredded and dragged war and wool of ultra-utopian metropolitan life. So those who rely on intelligent fiction to reflect reality have felt that the English village and its folk had surely passed away.

Again, the great world of activities has come constantly to intelligent attention, through the press, the reviews and through statistical volumes, largely to the exclusion of the great underlying world of fact and sentiment. In America the stupendous affairs and progress of our great cities have almost obliterated the memory of some of the sweetest old nooks in all the world—the historic and beautiful hamlets of New England, of the eastern and even of the southern and middle states. Yet they are all just as they once were, prettier and tenderer for their pensiveness and increasing age. Here, similarly, everything is London, Leeds, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Hull, and that host of practically new manufacturing towns and cities of Yorkshire and Lancashire.

The American commercial mind and

the English commercial mind have heard for a quarter of a century of spoils, potpourri and looms, fabrics and ships, lock-outs and walk-outs, depression and their tremendous trade superfluities of every hard and harassing description.

But the material and literary fact still remains that all the thousands of ancient English villages, and with not a half hundred exceptions, are here just as they were at the beginning of the century, and just as we have poured over them in the best old works of English fiction. Not only this, but hundreds of modern villages with winsome olden architecture in the balustrade of Elizabethan and even earlier Tudor times, enriched with luxurious parkings and intelligent landscaping, and windows filled with ruddy English faces, have been added to the number of olden ones.

Even in the congested districts of Lancashire, Yorkshire, northern Warwickshire, Staffordshire and Shropshire, not an ancient village has passed from sight, save in one or two cases where growth within and around it, and where factory-stacks crowd every acre of the horizon like giant spears above some mighty encircling camp, there between still stands the ancient hamlet, more swathed for the grimy fellow-shall, on trade, and endless source to eye and heart of those who ceaseless toil.

Therefore, when the lively American who "does" England in a week tells us that the rural England of literature is no more, he tells us what perhaps some Hyde Park orator, railway station porter or traveling adonis, has told him, but still something which he does not know; and when the London literary dilettante falls upon and flounders of rural England in a single breezy magazine article or smart review, he commits for a needed sip of ten or twenty pounds little short of literary crime.

Such as these and better still all those who love the truly beautiful and winsomely picturesque in any land, without seeking Quixotic quests among political and social problems, should certainly pass at least one summer among English villages. Hundreds can be found even along the lines of railway. Leaving these at any station, by coach, by trap, upon bicycle, or more advantageously and fuller of elation than all, on your own good legs, every fine old hedge-bordered highway will furnish you an astounding revelation in every half-day's drive or walk.

What wondrous journeys into the past are thus afforded! What splendid pages of history are thus reopened—for it has been in and about English villages rather than in towns that the great and the immortal come from their warlike lands and walk beside you where they once dwelt. And how you find that all you knew of books has inexpressibly lived in the true color and feeling until you thus wed presence and actuality with the timeless tale of words!

The wealth of number of these olden villages in Kent alone would confound the Dryad and the Immortals of rural England. It is with a thrill of delight that you wander through Gilt-wode, peeping out between leafy hills upon the glorious sea; Lympne, money and still beside the most ancient church of southern Kent, so ancient that in its walls are actually seen every specimen of ecclesiastical architecture from Saxon to Perpendicular, so ancient still that St. John's, one of its seven saints and daughter of the Saxon King Ethelbert, who reigned more than 1,500 years ago, lies buried within; with its unique old houses, its winding lanes of green, banks of chalk, stately cypress and tender yew, Calverley, lastest, youngest and prettiest of all Kentish villages, with its lovely park, its stately towered church and houses of two years in memory of the white Calverleys, and its "Leather Bottle" inn made famous in the immortal pages of Pickwick; beautiful old stone, graced with massive elms and richest arbutus bloom, and a hundred more, set along the lane-grids down, clustering in the woody Weald, or nestling among the Kentish orchards and hop-gardens, with their towns of cottages with white washed walls, dormer windows, thatched roofs and garden fronts each a masterpiece of quaintness, carven and roses, and all of them from a hundred to a thousand years old.

Who is there to fully describe or paint the dawning old villages of that curious English region variously known as the "North Kent," "The Broad District," and the "North and South Fens," where, as at Dillingham and Roston, many an old dach-and-wattle cottage may still be seen? It is a land of lagoons of grassy dykes, of gleaming wind-mills as huge and as numerous as in Holland, of rich and low lying farmsteads interspersed by "broads" of soddy, shallow lakes, of mighty herds of cattle and sheep; of duck, wildfowl, mallard and coot; of picturesque "timber-cott" half hidden among copes of willows; of ruined castles, abbeys and priories whose ancient mounds are now serving as market-gardens' canals; of gray old hamlets set about with clumps of pollard oaks; and of a peasantry as simple, brave and true as that of Sir John Falstaff's day—and Shakespeare's ancient kneave of the "Merry Wives," but of the red Falstaff who valiantly fought the battle of Hattin and soundly thrashed the French.

The essence pictures from some of these olden villages. Hamlet, perchance, is worthy the brush of a Turner or a Millet. As the sun goes down in forests of waving reeds, it flames the thatched of hamlets on opposite shores, vividly lights the arms of the spectral wind-mills, bringing to a looming loneliness the grim Norman towers of far older days, and giving the level top of some medieval ruin as with gold. As it sinks from sight the waters of the broads are for a moment purple, then pitchy black, when instantly the stars are shimmering in the depths above and from the waters beneath with a shimmering luster enveloping all. Then the songs and chirps of myriad insects; the whirr and splash of late-blooming water-fowl; and the wailing, whispering sighing of the breeze in the rushes and the reeds. Up in Cumberland and Westmoreland, what loving wreaths of memory are conjured when looking in the glowing beauty of slumberous, verdure-clad, blossom-bowered Kewick, Gramerey, Rydal, Ambleside and Bowness! Here in old Kewick town dwelt and sang, and lies buried in Crosthwaite church-

yard, near the nurseries of the Greta, he so loved, that high-souled poet of pensive remembrance and meditative calm, Robert Southey. Here, too, the unhappy Coleridge passed the most fruitful, though still the most miserable, years of his life; and to a deadly dream, and with his girl-wife, Harriet, Shelly here knew the only happy hours of his unfortunate life. In ancient Gramerey—Gramerey of ancient "moss-bearing" fame; Gramerey, with perhaps the oldest and certainly the quaintest church in England, Gramerey where the brave old classically educated and learned friend of Wales for "harrying" her sheep; Thomas De Quincey lived in his dreamlike madness; and in St. Oswald's churchyard sleep Holmes Coleridge and William Wordsworth, beside the beautiful Rothay, which, leaping from engineering meadows, gives out along the old church-wall the ceaseless songs they sang.

That one whose memory gives to the originators of the two churches of Rydal their wondrous beauty-shilling power, who is first and last when you eyes of fancy penetrate the park at Wordsworth, whose head—on a Rydal moor, above the hamlet, for forty years. Sturdy, impassioned, yet true and practically Christian, if still heretic, Harriet Martineau stands bright, clear in the picture among the blossoms of a wondrous Ambleside. Christopher North, with his large frame and lion-like face, as if the very spirit of the lovely region shone from his kindly eyes, makes these village scenes summing for his strong, sure tread. With him, though later, you will see another one, firm, calm, tender, noble, one who through his labor at Ragley, spent forever in the British educational system the rule of brutality and dread, fully said, noble Dr. Arnold; while old business huddle still between the highway and the roadside is sweeter still because you see through its tiny cottage panes the wealth of good Felicia Hemans, with a tinge of sadness in her polished, patient face.

Peasant indeed is a week's life looking among the villages of Surrey. Some of the most picturesque timbered cottages of England can be found among these ancient hamlets. Sleepy old Godalming was once a nest of fufles' homes, and numbers of these habitations are still in good preservation. At Shere, the former home of the earls of Ormond and the noble house of Audley, and roundabouts are wonderfully interesting bits of cottages. Besides, there are Wotton, with its fine gables and chimneys and charming picturesque old mill house; Haslemere with its high and graceful chimneys; Chiddingfold, where glass was first made in England, with its fine fourteenth century cottages and famous old Crown Inn; Witley, with its church-tower surmounted by a spire as quaint as that of Stoke Poges, and its cottages which are in every artist's sketch-book; Alford, most primitive of Surrey villages, with its curious iron-work and moats; and, with scores more, winsome old Cranleigh, where, at Bopnards, Jane Roper, wife of the younger Sir Edward Roper, so long kept the head of her father, Richard Sir Thomas More, which was finally deposited in St. Dunstons, Canterbury.

You will never need the passing hours, if, about upon the Avon, you set out in quest of English villages within the western shires. The thatches of the hamlets lean everywhere along the Avon almost to the river's brink. On will have no need for an inn. With your young companion you will be welcomed everywhere at night among the village peasantry. By and by you

come to the vales among the Cotswolds. Then will you see hamlets and villages dotting the valleys, embosomed in gardens, perched upon the heights, in settings of orchards, waving fields within checked lines of hawthorn hedges or dense rows of limes, and these in turn backed by banks of forest primrose; all in such dreamy quiet, ample content and smiling ignorance that, full of the winey exultation of it, all you again and again irresistibly exclaim, "Here is Arcady at last!"

In Essex one could wander for a whole summer and never tire of its mossy banks like Thaxted with its long, straggling street of many-gabled homes, its exquisite church, its strange Mount Hall and its noble robe, Horham Hall, Cogshall, with its mouldering abbey ruins and curious "Woolpack" inn; Saffron Walden, home of Essex superlatives, with its ruined castle, wonderful old houses and antique Sun Inn which has set the Essex antiquarian endlessly by the ears; Fitchingfold with its humble cottages piled one upon another and its quaint timbered houses, like those of Coventry; St. Osyth, with its remarkable church, splendid old priory and marvellously beautiful gatehouse; and Little Dunmow, suggesting, they have said, that it is, but famous the world over for its siden "Fitch of Bacon" prize for conical felicity.

And if all these were not enough to make you know the indescribably interesting and beautiful rural England of today, come here where the shires of Bucks, Berks and Surrey join, and summer for but a day round about royal Windsor.

At Chertsey, but nine miles distant, once famous for its abbey, lived and died the poet Cuddey, while Albert Smith, author of "Christopher Tadpole" and many other charming works of fiction, was born in the same quaint old village. Datchet, on the Thames, about a mile from Windsor, has the remains of a very ancient monastery; while Datchet Mead was rendered famous by Shakespeare in his "Merry Wives of Windsor."

But four miles distant is the quaint and sequestered village of Horton. In this, at Horton Manor House, lived Milton, with his father and mother when they retired from business in 1632 and here were written his "Comus," "Arcado," "Lycidas," "L'Allegro" and "B Penitence." At old Windsor, two miles down the river, is one of the most impressive old castles and express shaded churchyards in England. In Mount Farm was the hunting seat of Saxon kings. Mrs. Robinson, the authoress and the unfortunate Perfidia, is buried here; and its Mount Lodge, was the former home of Warren Hastings.

May is but five miles distant, up the Thames. The "Vicar of Bray," one Symonds, was that spiritually evasive cleric who changed his religion four times, in successive religions that he might die in his "living." At Beaconsfield, to the north, is the home occupied as long by Sir William Herschel, and you will see here a part of his great forty foot telescope; while two miles further, beyond meadows green, nestling in clumps of yew and oak, is the olden home of the Penns, near which is the mossy old parish church and hamlet of Stoke Poges, where was written the purest and sweetest elegy to be found in the English tongue.

ROGER L. WAKEMAN.



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