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WAKEMAN'S WANDERINGS

A PEEP AT ANCIENT COVENTRY.

History and Traditions of Radiant Lady Godiva and Homely Peeping Tom. Nooks and Nuts of Great Antiquity. Rare Old Ford's Hospital and St. Mary's Hall.

(Copyright, 1891, by Edgar L. Wakeman.)

COVENTRY, England, Oct. 3.—The persistency with which a single fact, half of good from bygone times finds lodgment in the minds of men and eventually becomes a bulwark of local pride and power, as well as a subject of universal interest, is nowhere in Britain more strikingly illustrated than in this ancient city of Coventry.

Every well known Old World place has its greater or lesser shrine, bearing of splendid fact or myth to which the tourist, like a mariner, directs his compass when voyaging. Harwich has its "elms." Belfast its spinning mills and historic places of Irish Old St. Ives and Banbury are due in minority reports to Scotch and York and Canterbury are rich in cathedrals and lore of pilgrims. Shottsbury was the Old Saxon of Britain. Bristol had its Chatterton. Grantham and Royal Mount know Wordsworth, and Stratford was the home of Scotland and Columbia. When Shuh's Hill is mentioned we see Dido on an upper windows broad of Scotia continents. Tarmouth is simply where the "Pegmatite" dwells. Norwood only recalls Brook. Abbotsford, Melrose and Dryburgh Abbey, more than of all else, of Sir Walter Scott. Stately and Cliffden mean the dominant of one king and the sister connection of an letter, prince and his glorious house. Gloucester recalls the origin of the Sunday school. Kenilworth revives the memory of Elizabeth. Bright suggests everything wholesome and good in modern life. One sees in the mere words Dumfries or Ayr the sudden flash of "Bonny Doon." The name Anglesey discloses the entire tragedy of the Irish nation's overthrow. Stratford to the mind is but another word for Shakespeare. And Coventry has for 600 years meant, and will for every solely suggest, Lady Godiva and Peeping Tom.

Matthew, of Westminster, who flourished about 1250-70, first set down the episode in sober history, but failed to make a place for "Peeping Tom."

Every one has lingered with infinite charm upon the continued tale of how

Then she rode forth clothed on with chastity—
The wife of a hot, compassionate duke
Who, for the sake of a poor, had undertaken
To free the people from a certain toll,
And she prayed him, if she should ride naked through the town
To do so, and all the people bade to keep
Within their houses on pain of death.
So she rode, when the duke had gone his way
Unto a place called Coventry.
So when she came unto the place
She rode naked, save a scrip upon her side,
Her long hair hiding her from the sight of all
Unto the end of the town, and there
Was a tailor, that for his evil manners was called
Tom the Tailor, but ever after men called him
Peeping Tom, for he looked on the lady
Contrary to the duke's command, and
Immediately he was struck with blindness
Or, as some say, he died suddenly
Upon the sight of the lady.

How or when this "one low deed, unequal of thousand earth," was first made the helpful attributes of Lady Godiva's actual sacrifice, or why the honest mention of a tailor was called upon to supply a culprit, no man can tell. But sure is it that "Peeping Tom," whose pseudonym will continue for all time as type of execrable and inoffensive inquisitiveness, was none other than a tailor, and that all those negative things happened to him in Coventry. Worse fate than all other to Peeping Tom were his appalling remaining effigies. They are countless now in Coventry—in stone, in wood, in cloth, in porcelain, in wax; while the very schoolboys are eternally setting new jackknives upon grotesque imitations of the repulsive object. The thing leers at you from niches above ancient buildings, seems to gnaw in twilight and from the corners of new and old hotels, shows its horrible teeth from shaving shop window trifles, and hoodie and jeweler you will now see startled in one to lineaments reproduced in the form of vamps and nickelaine in shadowy guarded of the money old town.

If this became night, he has merely a popular embodiment of evil as opposed to good, Lady Godiva certainly exhibit in the form. She is a historical character of authentic certification. She was sister to Thorold, Sheriff of Lincolnshire, and wife of Leofric, Earl of Mercia, a prince favorite of Edward the Confessor. In his time at the head of various state transactions. Both honors and sculptors unite in honoring Lady Godiva with the possession of national piety, goodness and beauty. The eleventh pale certainly founded here a great monastery for Benedictine monks, which after successive wealth and splendor had suffered arrange vicissitudes, passed into silence and decay, and became vestiges of its remains are still seen on the banks of the river here. Leofric died at Bromley, Bedfordshire, but was buried in one place of the monastery at Coventry, while his wife, who at her death gave "a rich chain of precious stones to be put around the neck of the blessed Virgin's image, so that those who came of devotion hither would say or make prayers at their were gave wishes," was given burial in the other. It is also lamentably true that the citizens of Coventry, when Leofric's vassals, did receive, through Lady Godiva's efforts with her gifts a rather hallowed, some sort of commission from strife tenure, as not only abolishing some dues, but as was also already evidenced by the memorial window which stood in the south transept of Trinity Church opposite Fitzmaurice's, and contained a picture of Lady Godiva and Earl Leofric, the latter holding in his right hand a charter bearing the following inscription:

I, Leofric, for love of thee
Do make Coventre free.

This memorial history and historical tradition. Lamentable and sad, sometimes more powerful and lessons than history, have done the text. Coventry is not a very large city, numbering some 50,000 inhabitants, but some of its quarters are very ancient and picturesque. The wonderful spires of Stockbridge, especially of Trinity and St. Michael's, the latter being 303 feet in height, have given the place a certain fame. There is the old gate of the monastery Coventry, who acted for its pilgrims sure from France. Later pilgrimages were held within it. The remnants of kings and queens in the place city have adjacent the most splendid monuments in Coventry history, latest years and antiquarians were sold here. The old city walls were four miles long, and had eight and twenty turrets, of which only twelve remained. In there are fifty towers. The old Cross of Coventry was formerly it also very noted. Mary Queen of Scots was for a long time imprisoned here in the Bishops' palace of Guild or St. Mary's Hall, still standing though nearly 600 years old. All these, and numberless more things of absorbing interest develop and charm all pilgrims here, though the central figures which originally attract them all are Lady Godiva and Peeping Tom.

One's first impressions of Coventry are disappointing. From a score of miles away its beautiful spires are enchantingly suggestive of antiquity and repose. Near the city it loses all. Ugly, dirty, cheapjack factory, little wooded, and with an unpleasant set of the claws and chuckering the Bells and outlining the rather impossible and hideous atmosphere. Entering the city from any direction, modern streets hemmed with modern houses leave but a sponging out of all the old nooks and corners, and give a foreboding sense of aimless quest. But once and into High street, to the right and left, to every direction and to intersecting ways, are scores reminiscences whisking and fluttering in quaint and charming confusion. Gables and Peeping Tom begin to smile and glower upon you from every corner and window.

Up there to the right leads a narrow street. Your inquiry leads you thither. Not a hundred yards more and down to your left opens one of the most characteristic thoroughfares in all Europe. It is Butchers' Row. You instantly step from the Nineteenth to the Sixteenth century. Arden's cottage would be simply wonderful here. Just behind its rambling old houses, and perhaps getting of these fine and cunningly time, but which are another the elevations of St. Michael's and Trinity. All about them is almost interesting and in architecture. Half timbered houses, time, time, four and five centuries old, crowd around the place in all manner of fantastic angles and fancies. At Hillcrofts of Her Lane and Derby Lane, just where the Row old gables is mentioned as you look back upon the half perhaps curved masses of angles and carvings, stands a one-year-old inn, restored to its top and pure of rich and hostler, black and lavender and red overhanging sashes, that the visitor may know how the old inns looked when the settlers had left their work and sought ease in frugality of 300 years ago.

A little farther on, to one side from, a mass of crumbling carving, stands one of the most interesting structures of a former age in England. This is St. Mary's Hall. The oldest, or one, most fascinating spot in Coventry is Ford's Hospital in Grey Friar's Lane, an almshouse for old, old women. There are many, many quaint structures such nooks and corners here, among them, St. Michael's Church, even when even a Hoosiers would be moved into admiring. "So old, yet nothing so large as dark, with such fantasies scattered in its Sabah that, look as long as you will at it, you can always discover something new directly before your eyes," and that "of all English things I have seen, one thinks the chapel of Ford's Hospital is Trinity Church, with its spire, is the most fine, very finest in the kingdom," and Ford's Hospital, a remarkable structure, founded nearly 400 years ago as a home for aged men. But these two places are so perfect to their linking of an elder with the present day, preserve in competition some striking passages of a remote and mellow past, and within presented fully and at a glance the very time and world of that which has held all English speaking lands to the pleasant pages from the golden age of English literature, that one comes to them in their hale and stately age as we turn with heart thrill and delight to the beaming faces of dear old friends.

As nearly as can be ascertained by antiquarians the date of St. Mary's Hall is between 1400 and 1500. It is therefore nearly 500 years old. The ancient guilds of Coventry were famous for their wealth and conspicuous hospitality, and this hall was the governing place of the city's united guilds. It stands entire just as it was built. It is also remarkable as being one of the few places of public interest to which strangers are admitted in England where a fee is not demanded or expected. This alone makes one fond of the splendid antique. Its entrance gate is opposite St. Michael's Church. The carvings, though crumbled badly, seem originally almost as rich as those of Westminster Abbey. Transcend way leads through a exceptionally decorated nave over an open gallery directly to the great hall of entertainment. In the other buildings upon which the more space are seen the arrangements of age in which the whole business of festival was conducted within the walls of one establishment. The kitchen, entered beneath the gallery, is one of the largest and most antique now existing in England. Its lofty arches are supported by octagonal columns. A transcendent arch vaults the square, and at each side is an angel holding a shield. The four chimneys are the largest of the kind now extant, and have ornamental carving arches. All passing the kitchen are the vaults in which were stored records, treasure, wines and ale. It is said that the cellarage of so long or potentate surpassed those in their day. They are in every particular today as they were used in the time of their early and splendid usefulness.

The entire walls and ceiling of the interior of the great hall is a mass of rich sculpture, panelling, tracery and carving. Almost every development of art in our domestic decoration for 500 years has found expression here, and, more extraordinary than all else, each object or design stands in its respective place just as it left some master's hand. Coventry folk themselves have no adequate comprehension of the riches of art wealth these hallowed walls contain. I have the word of a famous London connoisseur that he had, out of personal curiosity, attempted a careful valuation, but had given up in disgust when found he had but thirty pages and had reached the sum of £200,000, or about $1,000,000.

Only a little way from St. Mary's Hall, down a narrow street called Grey Friar's Lane, is found Ford's Hospital, a unique specimen of architecture prevailing in the early part of the fifteenth century. The entire front is covered with the richest of wood carving. Three large and occupied gables project from the second story. A wide, low, carved archway leads to a long, narrow court, open to the sky, whose sides are wholly composed of carved supports and balconies with contiguous tiny doors. Thirty old women are in the charity. Five men are housed here in the narrow quaintness, and there are found in Grey Friar's Lane. The entire structure stands precisely as it was built 300 years ago, and is absolutely occupied by innocuous. The stipend, four shillings, free housing and physician's attendance, and annually two tons of coal. They cook their own food and come and go at will. Those living outside receive the same allowance, and all are given six shillings and eight pence per annum for coal. Pooled Brown, a local historian, and a gentleman not are noted in each room. The garden wall behind is a part of the old city walls and is pierced for cannon. Each hospitaler is allotted a square bit of ground 10 feet wide and 30 feet long for a "garden." I was shown one upon which Aged Mrs. Jones was tottering in the night of her dim old life. It was a marvel of neatness and convenience, filled with early fall, field corn, flowers, a few rose bushes, some vines and vegetables, several varieties of bees and a variety of Adam's rule with their gaudy yellow blossoms.

"Ah, yes," said Mrs. Dutchess, the trick mistress, at parting, "we have to be pretty and a comfortable lot, you see, but sometimes," (one with a sigh of considerable dimension, "it's a proper pain with a proper pain lot, as you if look I but to come for."

EDGAR L. WAKEMAN.

Grace (who loves art)—There isn't a good collection in town those days, is there, Tom?

Dunnelle (absently)—No, my dear. I never knew collections to be so infernally poor since I have been in business.—Pittsburg Bulletin.

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