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COWDEN AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD.

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AMONG the many advantages attending the institution of a Society such as this which has been so auspiciously commenced in our county, one of the greatest is the occasion which it affords of bringing into notice districts and places of much interest, but which, being situated in distant and unfrequented parts of the county, are seldom visited, and are comparatively little known.

Such a district is, or perhaps it might more properly be said, was till very lately, that country which surrounds the village of Cowden, at the extreme western boundary of the county. If we take that place as the centre of a small circle with a radius of eight or ten miles, we are introduced to scenes and places, in the sister counties of Kent and Sussex, possessing great natural beauty, and which are full of interesting historical associations.

It is situated on the borders of a wild forest country, extending far into the county of Sussex. This forest belonged to John of Gaunt, and in old title-deeds is frequently called Lancaster Great Park. A curious record of this possession is still to be found there in the signs of the public-houses which are scattered through the district; the badges of that royal line, the Swan and the White Hart, having never been superseded by the most popular of English heroes, the Marquis of Granby, or by any other more modern signs.

The character of the country and the names of many of the parishes included within it, such as Hartfield,

Bucksted, Horsted, Maresfield, clearly indicate that it was devoted to the chase, that passion of our countrymen in all ages, whether indulged in by kings or nobles, with a total disregard in other days for the welfare and the rights of their fellow-men, or boldly followed by the daring outlaw and his band of bowmen, or, as is now the case, sometimes furtively and sometimes audaciously practised by the poacher and his gang.

The name of Cowden, like that of the old town of East Grinstead, a few miles off, implies a spot of green pasture, in the former case placed in a valley, and showing that it was applied to the support of animals far more useful to man than stags and deer; and it fully justifies its appellation. The village, which has in a remarkable degree that appearance of comfort and cleanliness which may be fairly claimed generally for the villages of Kent, though seated on rising ground, is surrounded with hills which overlook it, and the greenness of the meadows in which it stands is very striking. It would be difficult to find a lovelier view than that from the garden-walk of the parsonage, and impossible to meet with possessors of such enjoyments more anxious to share them with their friends and neighbours, than is happily the case with the kind and hospitable owners of it. Close behind the parsonage stands the church, with its lofty spire and tower,—if so it may be called, for it seems to be all spire seated upon a framework of timber. There are many steeples in Kent, and many more in the Weald of Sussex, formed of this material; but there are none, probably, where both the steeple and the base from which it springs are, as is the case at Cowden, covered with wood.¹

¹ In the churchyard there are the following simple and touching lines upon the tombstone of an infant:—

“ She laid him in his little grave ;
‘T was hard to lay him there,
When spring was putting forth its flowers,
And everything was fair.”

Those who built these churches in the wild country where they lived and died, availed themselves of the best materials which they could get. The roads were wretchedly bad, and for many months in the year they were impassable by heavy loads of stones; so they hewed down their finest oaks which were near at hand, and cut out the choicest and hardest pieces, the heart of the wood, and with these they covered the framework of the edifice. These shingles, as they are called, have done their duty well; they have resisted the wear and tear of the elements, the expanding heat of summer, and contracting cold of winter, for centuries. Those who would wish to know how gigantic were the oaks of Kent and Sussex in olden time, would do well to mount the steps into the belfry; a more curious sight than the interior of that part of the building can scarcely be found anywhere; arches of timber of enormous size meet together at the top, which is like the keystone of some chapel, and these, which are as sound as when they were placed there, more than four hundred years ago, support the whole weight of the fabric above.

There are other features of interest, too, connected with this church. From Michaelmas to Ladytide the bell from the old steeple is tolled every morning at five, and every evening at eight o'clock, telling with iron tongue the hour; and we may well suppose that in this wild district, its sounds, heard far and wide, may have guided many a bewildered traveller towards a place of shelter.¹ Nor is this the only thing peculiar. By the side of the pulpit stands the framework of an hour-glass, with its broken glass within, that more striking symbol of the lapse of time than the modern timepiece, remind-

¹ The small sum of twenty shillings was charged annually upon an estate in the parish, about a hundred and fifty years ago, by a person of the name of Still, to be paid to the clerk or sexton for the performance of this duty; and if declined by them, there are always competitors for it.

ing the preacher when to close his sermon and dismiss his hearers, who, there is some reason to believe, were more patient¹ of a long discourse than is the case in the present day.

In no district in England do we meet with more of those picturesque old houses and cottages, with their whitewashed fronts set in their framework of dark-coloured squares of timber, with bold projecting gables, and large massive stacks of chimneys in the centre, to which they seem to cling for support. Nor can we fully understand how much such buildings add to the beauty of the scenery, till the eye falls upon some modern red brick house, with its slated roof, or upon that most unpicturesque of all buildings, a hop oast.

Probably no British remains are to be found, at least they have not been recognized, within our prescribed district, though the foot of the labourer may have often struck against the celt of flint, in which his unpractised eye has seen nothing more than a common stone.² But of the first invader of our land there is a fine monument in the remains of a Roman camp, at Lingfield Marsh, close at hand, which is in some places triply, in others doubly entrenched; the banks rising occasionally to the height of sixteen or eighteen feet from the bottom of the fosse, and enclosing an area of six-and-twenty acres.³ As yet no vestiges of Roman villas have been found, with their tessellated pavements, and elaborate baths and flues, such as have been brought to light by the deep

¹ "Sir J. Jekyl," says Lord Dartmouth in a note to Burnet's History, "told me that he was present at a sermon which Bishop Burnet preached at the Rolls Chapel, on the 5th November, and that when he had preached out the hour-glass, he took it up and held it in his hand, and then turned it up for another hour; upon which the audience, a very large one for the place, set up almost a shout for joy."—*Note to Burnet's History*, vol. ii. p. 439.

² Some fine specimens of these were lately found in a field near Reigate.

³ For a full description of this camp, see Mr. Beale Poste's account of it in the Transactions of the Archæological Association.

searchings of the drainer at the foot of the South Downs, in Sussex; but there they probably are; for Kent was the most genial, most civilized part of Britain when the Roman held possession of our land, and well might the officer of the Prætorian Guards, however much he may have longed after the games of the Circus, and missed his walk or drive along the Via Sacra, have blessed his lucky stars that he was not doomed to waste away his life on the cold and savage hills of Northumberland.

Nor is this camp the only vestige of the Roman,—there is another very curious one, if it will be accepted as such by our readers. In the Weald of Kent, and more frequently in that of Sussex, it often happens that the traveller finds in the quiet valleys large sheets of water, in some cases rising almost to the dignity of lakes, which have been formed in other days by the damming up of one end of a valley through which some brook made its way; they are often beautiful features in the landscape, being frequently fringed with wood to the water's edge,—such a one there is, called Furnace Pond, close to Cowden, which covers an area of twenty-two acres. This is one of those numerous reservoirs of water, now the abode of those quiet fish, the carp and tench, which were formed to obtain sufficient water-power to work the mills at a time when this country, now one of the most silent districts in England, rang night and day, as Camden describes it, with the sound of hammers, filling the neighbourhood with continual noise. Iron-stone was at hand and there was abundance of wood for fuel, and there the forges blazed till the opening of fresh fields of coal in the northern parts of England, and the discovery of richer ores of iron there, blew out the furnaces of Kent and Sussex for ever.

The local names of woods and lanes are strongly imbued with this craft of other days. There is Hammerwood and Cinder Hill, Canse Iron, and the Forge Wood.

Such names as these are to be found in almost every Wealden parish, and many centuries before the time of which Camden speaks, the Roman was at work upon his forges and his furnaces here. Their pottery and the coins of Nero, Vespasian, and Diocletian have been found mingled with the scoriæ of their old ironworks. A lane, now called Spode Lane, leads directly from the Roman camp towards the castle-field at Hartfield, of which castle the mounds on which it stood alone remain; and is it too much to believe that this name has been derived from the Latin word *spodium*, signifying the refuse of an iron-furnace?—in fact, that Spode Lane was nothing more or less than Cinder Lane?

Of the presence of other invaders of our land, the Dane and the Saxon, those sturdy forefathers of Englishmen, from whom we have inherited, with other manly qualities, that ardent love of the sea which has made us the best sailors in the world, we have proofs in the names of places within our prescribed limits, of Dane Hill and Danehurst, of Saxonbury Hill on the heights of Eridge, and more distinctly revealed in the Saxon work in the curious old church at Worth. It is remarkable how many of the descendants of the Norman chiefs who followed the fortunes of the Conqueror have been established within our chosen district. The names of Nevill, Sackville, and West are identified with this country. The castles of their ancestors, with one great and fine exception, that of Tunbridge, have disappeared, but their descendants still dwell there in mansions better suited to the tastes and wants of more civilized life. There is no satisfaction in reflecting upon the conduct and character of those fierce and violent men, the Norman barons, but in judging them we must recollect that they were placed in a condition most adverse to the development of good moral character. In the words of M. Guizot, "A feudal chieftain of those days belonged to

himself alone ; he held nothing of any one, and all his rights and all his power centred in himself alone. What a vast influence must a situation like this have exercised over him who enjoyed it !. What haughtiness, what pride must it have engendered ! . . . No general and powerful law to restrain him, no exterior force to control him, his wishes suffered no checks but from the limits of his power and the presence of danger." But of the descendants of these fierce and lawless men it may with truth be said that, as a class, they have amply compensated to society for the misdeeds of their ancestors, and that they have been among the foremost in acts of piety and kindness and Christian love.

To the list of noble names which we have given as associated with this district, we might have added a few years since the illustrious one of Talbot. He who bore it, attracted by the quiet beauties of Cowden and its neighbourhood, came to live there. Gifted with talents which were proved in the struggles of an arduous profession, possessed of energies which were too severely tried, and, what was infinitely better, blessed with a disposition to do all he could to further the best and highest interests of his fellow-creatures, he was taken away from those to whom he would have been a guide and friend : and the church which he built in a distant part of the parish, is his best monument.¹

"As every change," to use the words of Mr. Hallam, "in the dwellings of mankind, from the earliest cabin built of wood to the stately mansion, has been dictated by some principle of convenience, neatness, comfort, or magnificence, it is interesting to trace them, showing, as they do, accompanying alterations in the tastes and habits of those that built them." Taking these words as our text, let us apply them to some of the buildings which still exist in this our favourite district, and there

¹ The Hon. John Chetwynd Talbot; he died May 26th, 1852.

are abundant opportunities of doing so. Hever Castle is close by, and there we see reflected some symptoms of improvement in social habits,—there are some indications of confidence in the greater security for life and property, and an increased appreciation of those refinements which, indeed, compared with the elegances and luxuries of modern days, must be considered as extremely rude and barbarous, but which were obvious improvements upon the previous ages. The sterner features of defence, though not altogether gone, are greatly modified; the proud keep has disappeared, and there are no dungeons to tell of cruelty and suffering. A century or two had exerted some influence upon the savage character of our countrymen. But the moat surrounding the castle, the strong gate, and the old portcullis, the loopholes in the walls and the towers which flank each angle of the front, sufficiently show that at the time when it was built, and indeed long afterwards, its inmates could not dwell there in perfect peace and safety, in reliance on the law to guard them, but that they were forced to trust very much to the strong arm and the stronghold. The moat was the chief defence of many a humbler home than this; they are to be found surrounding houses throughout the whole district, particularly the parsonages, both in Kent and Sussex; and at Horsted Keynes, a beautiful village scarcely beyond the limits of our range, and in many of its features very like Cowden, at a place called Broadhurst, in the house where Archbishop Leighton passed the later years of his life, there is a heavy shield of wood suspended over the staircase, which when let down at night and strongly barred precluded all access to the sleeping-rooms.¹

Penshurst too is near at hand, showing, in the absence

¹ At a distance of about four miles from the station at Hayward's Heath, on the London and Brighton Railway, lies this beautiful sequestered village, and in the churchyard there rest the remains of Archbishop

of all means of defence, a happier and quieter state of social life, when that stately pile was raised: there it is, with its courtyard, its galleries, and, more than all, with its large and lofty hall. It requires no great effort of imagination to picture to ourselves a gallant party issuing forth from its wide portals; the knight on his handsome steed, his lady on her palfrey, with esquire and page and groom and falconer, to watch the hawk and the heron battling together in the sky; nor is it difficult to fancy them, on their return, carousing in that great hall,—the chieftains seated at the high table, and their kinsmen and retainers occupying the humbler places according to their ranks. All this has an air of splendour not without refinement about it, but what was the reality? An envoy from Venice, who came to England at the close of the fifteenth century, has let us into many secrets as to our social condition at that time: though he found many things to admire,—though he spoke of us as being “essentially polite in our language, which, though derived from the German, had lost its natural harshness, and was pleasing in its sound,”—though he mentions a trait of our countrymen which we should little have expected in them, that “in addition to their civil speeches, they have the incredible courtesy of remaining with their heads uncovered with an admirable grace, whilst they talk to each other,”—though he gives us credit for possessing good understandings, and a ready aptitude of acquiring anything to which we applied our minds,—evidently considered us in many essential points an ignorant, illiterate, and barbarous people; and well he might, for he came from Italy, a nation which then far surpassed us in civilization and refinement, in arts,

Leighton. A plain, blue, broken stone, inserted in the wall of the church, was till very lately the only monument raised to his memory; one more worthy of him has been lately placed there.

¹ ‘Italian Relation of England,’ published by the Camden Society.

literature, and science,—from the country of the Medici, of Michael Angelo and Raphael. “When we read,” says Mr. Hilhard in allusion to these times, “of the taste and civilization of Rome, the graceful entertainments of the nobility, the wit, the poetry, the courtly manners, the scholarship, the extended commerce, and the manufacturing skill which marked the period, it is difficult to believe that the best blood in England were then dining at ten, that the dinners were composed of huge masses of fresh and salted meat spread upon a great oak table, and that their food was shovelled into the mouth without the help of a fork,—that the floor of their dining-halls was strewn with rushes, among which the dogs searched and fought for bones,—and that in the intervals of feeding, their minds were recreated by the postures of tumblers and the coarse jokes of licensed jesters.”¹

It is time, however, that this paper should draw to a close, not that we have by any means exhausted every object of interest. To the lovers of old churches and their accompaniments, there are many things to delight them: there are the fine brasses of the families of Cheyne and Boleyn at Hever, and that curious one in the church of Leigh, which represents an angel with a trumpet summoning a female from her tomb, who is rising forth with joined hands, with a scroll from her mouth, with these words inscribed, “Behold, O Lord, I come willingly.” There is the lich-gate at Hartfield, under an old cottage, the corresponding house which

¹ ‘Six Months in Italy,’ by Mr. Hilhard. The savage spirit must have been pretty strong even in the best men in the days of Queen Elizabeth, when Sir Philip Sidney, though greatly provoked, could thus write to his father’s secretary:—

“Mr. Mollineux,—Few wordes are beste; my letters to my father have come to the eyes of some, neither can I condemne any but you for it. . . . I assure you before God, that if I know you do so much as read any letter I write to my father, without his commandment or my consent, I will thrust my dagger into you, and trust to it, for I speak in earnest; in the mean time, farewell.”—*Collins’s Sidney Papers*.



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HERE LIETH S^r THOMAS BULLEN
KNIGHT OF THE ORDER OF THE GAR^tER
ERLE OF WILSHER AND ERLE OF
VND^e WICHE DECESSED THE 12
DAI OF MARCHE IN THE IERE
OF OVR LORDE 1538.



hic iacet Margareta quondam vxor Willm Shepue
Que obiit xxij die mensis Augusti Anno domini
Millmo. CCC. lxx. annus aie piciet deus Amen.

formed half the gate having been pulled down, the original arrangement being evidently the same with that at Penshurst.¹

Should any one gifted with that happy quality, a love of beautiful scenery, and with a taste for archæological pursuits, be induced by what has been written to exchange for a short time the smoke and tumult and occupations of a city, for the quiet repose and refreshment of a lovely country, and should he, in so doing, find health and peace and interest, one of the objects of the writer of this paper will have been accomplished.

¹ See 'The Churches of Kent,' by the Rev. Arthur Hussey.



ANCIENT BRASS IN LEIGH CHURCH.