

PICTURESQUE
CHESHIRE

BY

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SHERRATT AND HUGHES
LONDON AND MANCHESTER

1903

PREFACE

COMPLAINTS have been made to me that I love the country too much. That I love it I do not deny ; too much is another matter. Now that the dweller in the town can by train or awheel easily find himself far from the toil and turmoil of the necessary city, the love of the country grows apace. Let me offer this book, not as a county history, not as an antiquarian or archaeological treatise, not even as a cycling guide, but as a short appreciative description of the county I know the best and love the most.

Though written as a continuous tour I did not cover the whole of the ground at one time ; during the spring and summer of this year I visited the various places mentioned. Many of them I had seen before, some of them very frequently ; and the more I see of them the more I wish to see. The time-honoured village church with all its old-world associations, the ancient home with its crowded historical interests, the peaceful mere, the old timbered park, and the tree -shaded lane may be visited again and again and never grow stale ; the wooded sandstone hills, the rugged grit escarpments, and the wild open moorlands, in any weather, are places of everlasting joy at whatsoever season of the year we see them.

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To make this earth our hermitage,
A cheerful and a changeful page,
God's bright and intricate device
Of days and seasons cloth suffice.

I have striven to collect my historical information from the most reliable sources, and to those learned and painstaking historians, some of them now no more, who spent years and years in collecting interesting and useful matter connected with the county I am deeply indebted. To owners and occupiers of old halls and ancient buildings, and to many others who have willingly helped me, I tender my warmest thanks.

BOWDON, October 1903.

CHAPTER VII

THE FOREST OF DELAMERE

THE fine wide street of Frodsham is in one place cut deep into the sandstone rock and the houses stand high above the pavement, terraced along the sidewalk. Through the quaint old street I ride, climbing the hill that leads towards Helsby, where there is a steeper and finer bluff than even Overton Hill.

Skirting the hill, a fine situation for the earthworks that mark the site of the camp or fort that crowned its summit, I turn towards Alvanley. To my right is Hapsford and across the level marshes, Elton, once the home of William Frodsham, Richard II. 's Chamberlain of North Wales. Another mile further on is the riverside village of Ince.

I nee was one of the granges of the Abbey at Stan low, the little promontory now cut off by the broad Ship Canal. In 1178 the Baron of Halton founded a convent at Stanlow for the Cistercians, building the monastic house where, unfortunately, it was exposed to fierce winds and fiercer tides. Dr. Ormerod considered that the Abbey was built here so that the holy men might mortify the flesh, away from their favourite pursuit of hunting, that the dreary scenery was intentionally chosen to put them in a better frame for prayer and fasting. Apart from the fact that the wild marshes gave them security from attack, the sportive monks would here find much to their liking, for there was fishing in plenty and wild fowl abounded.

Salmon and herring, wild goose and mallard, heron and swan must constantly have been amongst the dainties of their board, and these old monks knew well how to cook the succulent curlew, snipe and a whole host of smaller waders which they could net with ease.

They had not been settled here for more than twenty years when they began to find that their land was being taken away from them by natural causes. They sent a humble petition to the Archbishop of Canterbury stating that in " Wyrall and in their manor of Ynes they had lost by the inundations of the sea thirty carucates of land, and were daily losing more." For near a hundred years they had to bear it, sometimes their foundations being entirely flooded by the tide, until in 1289 a worse storm than usual caused one of the church towers to come down with a crash. Then a great part of the abbey was destroyed by fire (perhaps they knew how), and a second flood in the same year rose three feet in the offices of the monastery. They begged to be moved; the approach to the monastery was positively dangerous in bad weather, and their buildings were threatening to fall about their ears. At last in 1294 their prayers were granted, and the majority were moved to Whalley, four unfortunate monks being left to conduct divine service, for Stanlow was retained as a cell of Whalley Abbey until the Dissolution.

The village of Alvanley was at one time the north-west boundary of the Forest of Delamere : Maiden's Cross, which stands by the roadside near Alvanley Cliff, a fine wooded hill, is considered to be a forest mark. Less than two hundred years ago, I believe, but I am not certain of the exact date, there still survived at Alvanley a strange and barbarous custom, the origin of which carries us back to prehistoric times, in fact to the ages when our ancestors worshipped fire. Baal or Beltane fires were lighted here in spring and autumn, and the villagers in turn sprang through the blaze ; little they thought that they were keeping up one of the oldest heathen customs that is

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known to exist. I do not know what the fires were called in Cheshire, but in the south of England they retained the name of Baal till quite recently. In Ireland the country folk were not content with passing through the fires themselves, but must needs make their unfortunate and scared cows jump over the burning wood.

Through beautiful country, well wooded and hilly, I ride south. The road leads by Simmond's Hill, where tradition from the look of it I should emphasise tradition says that the peregrine falcon nested quite recently, across Manley Common, by Rangersbank a grand forest name to Mouldsworth.

Mouldsworth may now be considered the western verge of the forest, though the woods of Ashton Hayes and the rough forest country extend a little farther. Ashton Hayes, where Nicholas Ashton planted 477,000 young trees, mostly firs and larches, when the land was disafforested, evidently boasts one of the most extensive rookeries in the county ; the fields all round are full of rooks, and streams of the sable birds keep passing overhead, their solemn caws mingling with the clarion notes of innumerable daws.

Peel Hall, where William of Orange stayed when on his way to the memorable battle of the Boyne, is now demolished ; the modern house, with traces of the old moat, is but a step from the inn at Mouldsworth, while the old Stonehouse, repaired by one John Davies of "Mandalay" in 1674, is just across the road. Do not imagine that Davies is a Burmese name ; Manley, which I have just passed, was spelt in many ways in old deeds.

Dropping down the steep hill from the inn, I turn sharply to the left before the road crosses Ashton Brook, and then commences perhaps the most enjoyable bit of road in all Cheshire. All the forest roads are charming, but from Mouldsworth to Hatch Mere is certainly one of the best that could be chosen. The thick woodlands are crowded with old forest

veterans and young saplings, Spanish chestnut, fir, larch, beech, oak, ash, in fact all the usual timber trees, with vast numbers of beautiful silver birches.

Those faint red boles with many a line,
Those peeling sides, the ring-dove's perch,
Which white in darkened coppice shine.
Are silver clusters of the birch ;
They seem bright woodland ladies fine !

Between the trees the ground is thick with spreading bracken, and here and there, where a mossy bank peeps out * amidst the waving green, great clumps of heather cluster, while elders, briars, and brambles fill in the spaces where they can. And over the road the branches often meet, making a green tunnel, and spattering the gravel roadway with dapples of light when the sun's rays struggle through the leaves. The road itself is nowhere level ; long smooth undulations carry me from mound to mound, the hillocks of a great glacial moraine.

The squirrel darts across the road, leaps lightly to the trunk of a tree, and in a second is round to the other side ; the russet jay flies screaming overhead, and disappears still screeching among the trees ; the ring-dove calls softly from the tops, the turtle purrs, and the deep notes of the stock-dove sound from the thicket. The woodlands are full of birds, forest lovers of the truest sort, and the air is musical with the hum of myriads of busy, buzzing insects.

There were three Norman forests in Cheshire, Wirral, Macclesfield, and Delamere, though the last was really double, being the forests of Mara and Mondrem. Little by little this great forest land became curtailed ; farmers cultivated the land, hamlets grew into villages, and villages to towns, while land-owners enclosed and annexed other portions. The original forest covered most of the land between the rivers Weaver and Gowy, and extended from Frodsham, then on the estuary of the Mersey, as far south as Baddiley, near Nantwich. But

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a small remnant remained in 1812, when by Act of Parliament the whole was disafforested, portions being sold or allotted to certain landowners and part being reserved to the Crown as a nursery for timber. Ships were needed then to guard against the threatened Napoleonic invasion, but three years later Napoleon was hors de combat, and long before the young trees, mostly oak and fir, which were then planted, had grown mature enough for the navy, the wooden walls of England were obsolete. These fragments of the Royal Forest, rented by shooting tenants, but not cultivated, are the beautiful woodlands which now surround us.

Long before this time two large portions had been enclosed for the preservation of vert and venison the Old Pale in the reign of Edward III., and the New Pale in the seventeenth century. The Forest was formerly full of deer ; even the rare roebuck hid in the thickets, and the hundred was then known as Roelau, whilst in Domesday four hays for roes are mentioned at Kingsley. Leland, writing in the days of Henry VIII., says, " In the foreste I saw but little come, because of the deere " ; and Webb, speaking of the time when James I. visited Vale Royal and hunted the stag, describes the forest as containing "no small store of deer, both red and fallow, plenty of pasture in the vales, wood upon the hills, fern and heath in the plains, great store of fish and fowl in the meres, pewits and sea-maws in the flashes."

The jurisdiction of the Forest was originally vested in four families, the Kingsleys, Grosvenors, Wevers, and Mertons. The master-forestership was conferred by Earl Randal in the twelfth century on Ralph de Kingsley, to hold the same by tenure of a horn.

This horn the grand forester wore at his side
Whene'er his liege lord chose a hunting to ride ;
By Sir Ralph and his heirs for a century blown,
It passed from their lips to the mouth of a Done.

The Kingsley property passed to the Dones of Utkinton by

marriage, and Richard Done usurped the entire forestership, putting in a long series of claims. Richard le Grosvenor, in 1304, disputed his rights and won the case. For two hundred years the Grosvenors of Budworth held the post, and then it was purchased by the Dones ; from them it descended through the Crewes and Ardens to the present Chief Forester and Bowbearer, the Earl of Haddington. Many of the claims of Richard Done are curious ; a few of them are worth mention.

He claimed the forestership in fee, and for the keeping of the office to have eight under-foresters and two ga^ons, who he could billet on the farms, " to witt, one day to supp, and to tarry all night, and to breake fast in the morrowe following." To have provender for his own horse, and fern in the forest, except at hunting time.

" Pannage, windfallen trees, wood, croses of trees cut down with axxes, crabstock, and stubb," and half the bark of all fallen oaks. For every beast oxen, kine, bulls, heifers, bullocks, and goats, and all strays "a halph penny."

"All sparhawkes, marlins, and hobbys."

"All swarmes of bees."

The right shoulder of every deer ; any " stroken " deer found dead, the horns, hair, and sides to be sent to Chester, the forester to have the rest.

Further, he claimed the right to have hounds, greyhounds, and dogs to take foxes, hares, cats, weasels, "and other vermyn," and to possess himself of waifs and strays, if his claim was not challenged.

The Dones, having bought the forestership, held it for many years, but it gradually decreased in value. In 1626, not many years after Webb spoke of the "great store of deer," Sir John Done wrote to the Commissioners of Forests complaining of his poor office. The wind-blown wood, but birches and a few dead oaks fit for nothing but bark, brought him only 6 odd per year, the halfpenny fine on cattle

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realised about ^{^3}, the swarms of bees perhaps ^{^5} ; but the sparrow-hawks, merlins, and hobbys were of no value, and the deer produced no income. In his letter he gives an estimate of his entire income, and plaintively adds, " And although that inheritance have been descended to me by many ancestors, who for the space of five hundred years have enjoyed it, yet I am not so in love with it, but that for his Majesty's service, and advance of his profit, I shall be content to leave it." In accordance with his request, considering that the deer were well nigh if not entirely annihilated, Sir John was recompensed by a grant of land, the Old Pale, where he was born, and other places.

Warburton, in his ballad of "The Old Brown Forest," says of Mara in its early days :

Our king the first William, Hugh Lupus our Earl,
Then poaching I ween was no sport for a churl :
A noose for his neck who a snare should contrive,
Who skinned a dead buck was himself skinned alive.

Figurative perhaps, but true in the main, for the forest laws were terribly strict and cruel. In the thirteenth century, even the Abbot of Chester was charged with trespassing and killing two deer ; Randle Merton, one of the foresters, took a strange revenge a few years later, for he cut the pipes which conveyed the water from Christleton to the Abbey, where they crossed his land.

If any man committed felony and fled, if the lord's venison should be discovered in his house or oven, the forester and his lord divided the culprit's goods between them ; his beasts and live stock, even to his hens and geese, his linen and woollen goods, his cooking vessels, agricultural implements, his timber, turf, and even his money, were at their mercy. If caught in flagrante delictn the poacher got short shrift a rope or the sword prevented further offences. In the Plea Rolls and other documents there are a few incidents which throw light on some of the tragedies such, for instance, as a pardon

granted to Richard Done, Hugh de Frodsham, and others for killing Robert Cosyn, who refused to surrender when found slaying a deer. Desperate men were the foresters, desperate men the poachers.

The forest laws were sharp and stern,
The forest blood was keen ;
They lashed together for life and death
Beneath the hollies green.
The metal good and the walnut wood
Did soon in flinders flee ;
They tossed the orts to south and north
And grappled knee to knee.

The day of the deer is over, and the days of feudal laws are past, but the stain of blood is still on heather and bracken, on oak and fir the blood of men who claimed the right to " hunt God's cattle upon God's ain hills," and of the men who, at any cost, strove to enforce the law.

In the map which was issued in 1813, when the forest lands were divided, there are many mosses and sheets of water which have now disappeared. To my right lay Blake Mere, a considerable pool, now drained, and existing only as a low, somewhat marshy portion of the forest, but Hatch Mere remains. Old forest folk still call it by its ancient name, Hatchew, and it seems to be no smaller than of yore, though on the opposite side of the road a low damp hollow, where bog asphodel and lousewort grow amongst the sundews, is all that is left of Flaxmere.

Hatch Mere is a regular forest pool, its reed-fringed borders dotted with tall spearworts, gorgeous with bright yellow flowers in the late summer, its surface covered with thick lily beds. Round the marshy margin of the pool grows in profusion the sweet-scented bog myrtle. Leaning my wheel against the hedgebank, I stride into the myrtle scrub, rubbing the fragrant leaves in my hands as I watch the grebes and listen to the cheery concert of the reed-warblers.

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Turning at Hatch Mere, I ride south towards the hills, passing spots with place-names suggestive of the former condition of the Forest. Hart Hill, on my left, is surely named after the red stag ; Gallowsclough Hill brings sinister recollections of old forest laws. The old Roman road ran through the Forest, and older inhabitants still have left their records in the numerous tumuli that rise, neatly shaped mounds, in many places ; Castle Cob and Gleadshill Cob, in the north of the woodlands, are the names of two of these. Until it dawned upon our ancestors that sanitation was desirable in towns, the glead, or kite, was a protected bird, for it rendered signal service in the dirty street kennels by devouring the garbage, taking toll occasionally on "lesser linen." Probably large numbers of these town scavengers dwelt in the Forest, and some large nest, perhaps decorated with frills and furbelows from the housewife's clothes-line, may have been a prominent object of the landscape on this tumulus. Raven's Clough tells of another now extinct member of the avifauna ; the raven and the kite, the red deer and the roe, have gone from Delamere for ever.

Directly after crossing the railway, Relick's Moss, a long, thick covert, lies on the left, while on the right the ground rises to the height of over 500 feet. A steep lane ascends to the Old Pale, where Sir John Done was allowed to settle, and where, close to the present farmstead, are the remains of the town or fortress of Eddisbury. A deep foss and earthwork rampart protect the hillside, still visible like a sunk road ; Eddisbury was once a strong position. Webb says, " The Hundred of Edisbury may well prove the antiquity of itself, and of other hundreds ; for that whensoever they had their division, this got its name from the place, which then was of no small account, and that was the city, town, fort, or whatsoever other great foundation, which had been built by that noble Elfleda, the Mercian Lady " ; for it is said that ^Ethelfleda built a town here in the tenth century. Of this town Dr. Charles Leigh, writing in 1700, says there is " now nothing but Rubbish, and

at this day called the Chamber of the Forest." The Chamber, the lodge of the Dones, seems to have gone like the castle, for I can see no trace now of the house on the actual spot where it is supposed to have stood; the Old Pale farm is on the opposite side of the hill. By the side of the lane, close to Eddisbury farm, there are extensive sandstone quarries, and some of the excavations appear very ancient; doubtless the stone for the Chamber, possibly for the ramparts of Eddisbury Castle, was procured from these quarries.

Standing on the earthworks of the castle ditch, I look down upon a great expanse of the forest land stretching away to the Weaver valley, the chimneys of the salt towns Northwich, Davenham, Winsford, and Over marking the line of the river. In the fields, cleared forest land, between me and the woods of Oakmere Hall and Abbot's Moss, large herds of dairy cattle are grazing, sleek Cheshire shorthorns, brown, white, and roan, for the district round Delamere is practically the centre of the cheese country. These shorthorn dairy cows are as typical of Cheshire as the rough, long-horned Highlanders are of the north. Every large farm owns a considerable herd, and often the whole of the milk is made into cheese, though a very large proportion of the milk used in Manchester is despatched from stations on the Cheshire Lines Railway.

It is very pleasant to-day in these earthworks ; it is not so close as in the woodlands below. A light breeze recalls to me the description of the country by William Smith, Rouge Dragon : " The ayr is very wholesome ; insomuch, that the people of the countrey are seldome infected with Diseases or Sicknesse, neither do they use the help of the Physicians, nothing so much, as in other countries. For when any of them are sick, they make him a posset, and tye a kerchieff on his head ; and if that will not amend him, then God be merciful to him. The people then live till they be very old ; some are Grand-fathers, their Fathers yet living." Possets, however, were not the only cures resorted to in Cheshire ; for " chin-cough " roast hedge-

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hogs and fried mice were used. Live frogs were also held to the lips. It is recorded of one good woman that she stated that, " Her lad's cough would not go, though he'd sucked two toads to death ! " There was another remedy for all evils which was considered best of all ; find a dame who had married but not changed her name, and beg some bread and butter from her. If that did not cure, the rosemary might be gathered and the funeral biscuits baked.

I ride down the uneven sandstone-littered lane to the road again, and shortly pass the " Abbey Arms," the inn that guards the corner where the four roads meet close to the church of



"The Abbey Arms."

Delamere, turn to my left, and leave my bicycle at a small farm by the roadside in charge of a genial old man. He is one of the old inhabitants of the district, but maybe his father still lives ; at any rate, though somewhat slow on his feet, he has not arrived at the posset stage. A walk across his fields brings me to the margin of Oakmere, a strange lake that apparently has neither inlet nor outlet. Here grow in profusion the buckbean and the marsh potentil " pit straberry " the natives call it, and not a bad name either. At one end, near the keeper's cottage, the lapwings dabble in the shallow water, and mallard drakes, whose wives nest on the bank and in the

coverts, swim in bunches under the shelter of the island-promontory, for it is cut off by marsh land. The little wood at this end is full of sundews and cotton grass, and round the margins of the pool grow many moorland plants sundew and cranberry, the pink andromeda, and the black -berried crow berry.

Oakmere is rather smaller than it was fifty years ago ; when the first Ordnance Survey was published the pool on the north side, now separated from the main mere by a tract of ling-covered land, was part of the same water. A sandy promontory projects somewhat into the lake, where there are the remains of entrenchments on the landward side, the water at one time guarding three sides from attack.

Down a little lane that runs by the side of Abbot's Moss, a good training ground, two stones were marked on the old ordnance, Headless Cross and the Long Stone. In the different versions of Nixon's Prophecy there is always some allusion to Headless Cross, but none to the Long Stone.

A crow shall sit on the top of Headless Cross,
In the forest so grey,
And drink of the nobles' gentle blood so free.

The general notion seems to be that Nixon foretold that a crow or raven would be able to drink of the blood which flowed past the stone while sitting on the top of the cross, for great battles were to be fought in the neighbourhood. It is further asserted, by those wishing to prove the truth of the wise man's saws, that the cross at that time stood many feet above the ground, but that it had since sunk so low that it is in the position predicted. Wishing to see for myself how the stone and other matters stand, I ride down this sandy little lane, keeping a sharp look-out for the cross. At "Cabbage Hall," a roadside inn bearing the strange title on its front, I make inquiries, but though the people have heard of the cross they do not know where it stands or stood. One

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girl, however, says she knows it, and directs me to the Long Stone, which stands by the side of the lane opposite a white cottage. The Long Stone is a short upright stone fixed in a cross-shaped socket which is flush with the ground : the girl at the white cottage says, "It is nobbut a mark." This young lady, I suspect, is correct in her surmise; the Long Stone is probably a mere-mark, one of the limits of the old Forest of Mara. This low upright stone, which I suspect has never been any higher, is what the interpreters of Nixon have seen, and have concluded that it is a cross which has sunk in the soft ground. Riding back, I find what I believe to be the true Headless Cross ; lying as if thrown in the ditch is a fair-sized square stone, similar to the socket stones of all the Cheshire crosses, for there is a hole in it for an upright. The position of this stone and its shape and size are very similar to the stone at Maiden's Cross, and an archaeologist of some standing has assured me that these two crosses mark the north-western and south-eastern boundaries of the forest. To theorise on slight data is dangerous, but I think it quite possible that the Long Stone is a later mere-mark than the Cross, having been placed where it stands, a short distance beyond the Cross, to include within the forest bounds the whole of Abbot's Moss and Newchurch Common ; or the Cross may be the mark for the Forest, and the Stone for the bounds of the lands belonging to the Abbot of Vale Royal.

The marshy ground that surrounds Oakmere and the open Newchurch Common and Abbot's Moss show what Delamere Forest was like before it was planted with woodland timber, but a better example of the common land is not far off. South again from Oakmere lies Little Budworth Common, a great heathy tract which I enter by turning off the Tarporley road where a sign directs to Oulton Park. A long gravel drive runs first between trees and then out across the Common a delightful road to ride along. Heather and ling, with small fir plantations and clumps of trees, and dotted with graceful

birch trees, stretches on either side. Here and there are deep black-looking pools or marshy spots, where the water lies thickly grown with rushes ; the Common is one of the last of the Cheshire mosses.

Hearing Oulton Park the woods are thicker ; small firs and larches, where I hear the goldcrest faintly singing, give place to noble beeches which surround the gateway; the Park is well timbered within and without. Passing the gates I make for Little Budworth, a charming village with an old church, an old mill pool, and an old sundial, all worth looking at. Just outside the village, somewhat removed from the road, is a cosy little inn, the "Egerton Arms," a hostelry well known to the Cheshire Hunt, but often missed by cyclists. Here, ordering a meal which from long experience will I know be first-rate, I leave my machine and walk past the tall beeches along the park wall to a stile. There is a private footpath, but no restriction is made so long as visitors will keep their dogs from chasing the deer, and will behave themselves in a decorous manner.

The Hall of Oulton, a large building, added to and considerably altered at the beginning of the nineteenth century, is the seat of Sir Philip Egerton. The Egertons of Egerton possessed land here in the reign of Richard III., and on the death of Hugh Done, son of Sir John Done of Utkinton, in the days of Henry VII., they became lords of the whole estate. A Tudor mansion, built by a Sir Philip Egerton, was burnt in the eighteenth century, and little was saved except some valuable Japanese wainscotting, which was hurriedly stripped from the walls and thrown into the moat; it now adorns a room in the present hall.

Nixon foretold trouble for a lord of Oulton ; he was to be hung at his own door. This prophecy was fulfilled, said the credulous followers of superstition, by a fatal accident that befell one of the Egertons when he was thrown by his horse at the gates of the Park. Like many of the Cheshire families,

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the Egertons were great fighters ; Sir John, along with some of his relations, fell on that fatal day at Blore Heath, while in 1544 Sir Philip was knighted for valour at the siege of Leith.

Charles I., when hard up, wrote a begging letter by his own hand to Sir Rowland Egerton. It begins : " Trusty and welbeloved wee greete you well," and then goes on to ask for a mere trifle of $\text{^}2000$ "for our necessary support, and the maintenance of our army, which wee are compelled to rayne for the defense of our ; peson, the Protestant religion, and the laws of the land." The King gave his own personal promise to repay with interest, but perhaps he never had the opportunity. Sir Rowland's son, captain of yeomen, and afterwards lieutenant-colonel, was knighted soon after the Restoration.

Besides the fine beech trees, which are nearly two hundred years old, there are some noble chestnuts in the Park ; beneath these trees the fallow deer, of which there are a number, some of them almost white, thoroughly enjoy themselves when the nuts drop, for deer like nothing better than ripe chestnuts. The Pool at Oulton, well stocked with fish, is the source of supply for the Northwich Water Company ; on a tree-covered island there was at one time a heronry, but as at so many other places in the county, no birds build here now.

Having refreshed at the " Egerton Arms," I repass the gates of Oulton, and rounding Cote Millpool, reach the hamlet of Cote Brook. On making some inquiries from a native of the place, I learn that the name is only of recent origin, the place being called Utkinton-cum-Rushton, but owing to sheep being folded there in some numbers it gradually gained the name of Cote. The name Cote Brook is given to the old portion of the village on the first ordnance map, but Cote Mill is there called Oulton Mill, and was the spot where the club-footed miller was supposed to be Nixon's predicted miller with two heels on one foot ; it is also stated that another malformed individual, according to the prophecy, was born at Budworth,

a lad with three thumbs. Many country children are apparently gifted with ten thumbs and no fingers.

The road now commences to climb, for I leave the main highway which would lead me back by the Seven Lows to Delamere, and take a steep hill lane. The Seven Lows, spoken of by Leland as the "work of men of warre," are supposed to be tumuli, and though I hear that some of them have been opened and a quantity of black, apparently burnt, sand found, I cannot see much difference between these irregular hillocks and the ordinary glacial mounds of the moraine. Pushing my machine up this stony lane, I meet an ancient inhabitant, very aged and much crippled with rheumatism, but withal cheerful and communicative. I ask him about Nixon and the Headless Cross. He had "yeerd o' Nixon," but not of the Cross. "Ask some of th' ould uns, it's a bit out o' my country." Then a happy thought strikes him, and he grins with his toothless gums. "Theer's th' 'Edless Woman down at Duddon." That was his own country; he knew the publics there.

I question the old man further, and he stops a passing farmer, an elderly man whom he calls a "young feller." The farmer can give no more information, but suggests that it may be another name for the remains at Eddisbury.

"Oh, Yedsbury," says my old friend, "if it's by another name, so be it." And with that I leave him, gleefully chewing some of my hot smoking tobacco, and cross a field to the top of High Billinge.

"Yo mun leave yer name on trees, theer's lots theer," the old man calls as I cross the grass. He is right. Like so many other places, High Billinge is the repository for the names of hundreds of fools who are never satisfied if they do not leave their own insignificant, stupid titles to spoil the beauties of nature and the richness of antiquities. In the visitors' book of an inn in the Lake District there are some smart verses written by an Oxford undergraduate. After deal-

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ing with these carvers of names and desecrators of beauty as they deserve, he concludes :

Nay, every gate in Heaven's land,
It is my firm conviction,
Will bear in well-known sprawling hand
Tom Noddy's superscription.
And those who fare to warmer zones
(Scarce subject fit for jokers)
Will find the classic name of Jones
Cut deeply in the pokers.

High Billinge, the highest point of the Delamere hills, is the clump of trees so conspicuous from all the country round. The trees cluster round the summit, and grow on what appears to me to be an undoubted tumulus. Surely so carefully rounded a mound as this is not natural. No tumulus is marked on the ordnance map, nor have I seen one mentioned in any book ; but from its regular circular shape and its position it is far more like one than any of the Seven Lows. There is no view from the actual summit of High Billinge ; the trees prevent it ; but from below the clump on any side the prospect is fine.

Keeping to the upland lanes, I make for Harrow Hill, a thickly wooded portion of the Forest, and close to Manorchy Hall (pronounced Minnorkey by the natives) I stop to rest at Tirley Farm. Tirley is a row of old cottages converted into one farm. Close to it in the wood is Whistlebitch Well. Getting directions from the genial farmer and his hospitable wife, I stroll down a pretty lane to the well-head.

There is in the British Museum a rare pamphlet which was issued in 1600, describing " Newes out of Cheshire of the New-found Well." So far as I can make out from the description this is Whistlebitch Well. " There are about the midst of the forrest certaine ruinous walles of stone, some inclosures, and the prints of an auncient situation, which as well common report of the countrie, as also the testimonies of the best

writers of England's antiquities, doe affirme to haue been a citie." "The borrough or towne being utterly decaied and gone, there remaineth only upon the top of the utmost height within that situation, a proper built lodge, called the Chamber. About a mile and halfe from the Chamber toward the south-west side of the forrest is situate the New found Well."

I am aware that the Lysons, in *Magnet Britannia*, on the authority of a vicar of Little Budworth, state that this well was at the Hollins, and that "fourscore years" before the tenant of the estate, having built a house, destroyed the "bath," and conveyed the water through lead pipes into his kitchen. The Hollins, however, is nearly two and a half miles from the Chamber, and the stream that flows from the house flows first due east, joining the same stream that enters Oulton Millpool. whereas the water from the New-found Well is said to flow north for some distance and then turn south to the pool. Then, again, the Hollins would hardly be considered to be on the south-west side of the Forest ; it is in fact rather to the east of Eddisbury, though Whistlebitch Well is almost on the south-west border. Probably the vicar of Little Budworth, not knowing exactly where the well was situated, was speaking from hearsay evidence. He would not be likely to have personal knowledge of what took place eighty years before. Two hundred years for the Lysons wrote in 1810 is quite long enough for an error in locality to become an accepted fact.

The healing powers of this well were reported to be wonderful. Any disease was cured by drinking the water ; and it was even affirmed that sight was restored to the blind. It is said that so many as two thousand people daily resorted to this spot to be cured of all manner of evils, and the foresters naturally had their work cut out to prevent the deer from being disturbed. The chief forester, one of the Dones, would not allow any of his men to take fees from the sick, considering that this marvellous cure should be free to all, but posted his men so as to prevent damage to the adjoining property.

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In amongst the bracken, almost lost in thick foliage, the water trickles down through the wood. Some quarrymen have hacked out the sandstone in one spot just below a forest road, and this, by many people, is thought to be the well. The farmer, however, tells me and I agree when I see the spot that it was the well-head, now trampled by the cattle, which was once so famous. Perhaps the water has lost its virtue, for Whistlebitch Well is now forsaken and forgotten. I cannot perceive anything special in its taste. The pamphlet says : " There be many that at their first taste of the water, doe confidently affirme they feele as it were some relish or smacke of an allome-like composition ; and not a fewe I haue heard censure, that there seemes to them a little resemblance of the taste of licoris." Neither alum nor "licoris " is perceptible to me. Faith healing, I fancy, was powerful three hundred years ago, for people flocked here from all the neighbouring counties and from Wales.

Seated on the wall of Tirley farm, eating the finest Cheshire cheese and drinking new milk, I listen with interest to the stories of my worthy host. There is a right of way to the well, he says. Once he nearly got into serious trouble by blocking up the pathway with hedge-cuttings to stop the cattle from straying. One man in the neighbourhood still boasts that he annually fetches a bottle of the water to preserve his right of crossing his neighbour's land. I expect that annual bottle is regarded in the light of a fetich. From this wall, on the edge of Harrow Hill, there is a view of Beeston Castle and the western slopes of the Peckforton Hills, and away in the distance, backed by the hills of Wales, are the spires and towers of Chester. My host knows every hill by name, and every village, and points each out in turn. Talking of birds, I find he knows the nightjar by a name used on the neighbouring Peckforton Hills, but not so far as I know elsewhere. Lychfowl is the name given to it ; a sinister term meaning corpse the same word, in fact, as lichgate. The

superstitious rustics, hearing the uncanny churr at night, have associated the much -maligned and innocent bird with death and evil spirits.

Along the shoulder of the hill I ride to Kelsbarrow, passing on my way King's Gate, one of the old entrances to the Forest. There is little trace left of the British fortress at Kelsbarrow, but the situation is superb. In places the slope of the hillside is almost precipitous, and from side to side stretched a deep ditch and a rampart fourteen yards in thickness. Most of the ditch and rampart has been levelled, but here and there it still remains. The Britons knew how to choose the best spots for their camps.

The descent I make from Kelsbarrow to Kelsall is not to be recommended for cyclists ; besides, I am not at all sure if it is a public way. There is a road by Castlehill, and a better one still leads to the highroad. In any case, the descent into Kelsall requires care ; it is steep. From the highest part of the high road, with good brakes ready, one may coast almost to Tarvin. I do not stop at Kelsall, but sail through the village, passing numbers of men and women in Salvation Army uniform, for there is a large barracks here, and do not need to work for another mile.

Tarvin Church is one of these fine old buildings for which Cheshire is so deservedly famous. It is built of local sandstone, grey and weathered like the rugged bluff of Kelsbarrow Castle, and though it has been renewed in places, has much ancient work both inside and out.

In the interior some of the work is interesting, but much of it is far more modern than the exterior; there is a good squint, and some ancient monuments in the Bruen Chapel, a finely-carved altar-piece and an old carved chair. Across one of the beams of the oak roof is the following inscription :
" THIS ROVFE WAS MADE AN NO DOMINI 1650 R.APHE
WRIGHT JOHN BRUEN CHURCH WARDINS CHARLS
BOOVTH WILL VENABLS CARPINTRS."



Tarvin.

The Georgian screen, with traces of older work, is worthy of notice, as is also the plain but good oak panelling in the choir vestry, where, however, the exceedingly plain church chest, dated 1805, is a sample of the ugly work of the "Churchwarden period." John Bruen, churchwarden when the roof was made, would be probably son or grandson of old John Bruen of Bruen Stapleford, a most worthy and hospitable



Holme Street Hall.

man of the fine old school. It was this John Bruen who, in his mistaken zeal, destroyed all the stained glass in the church windows, for there were "many superstitious images in the windows, which, by their painted coats, darkened the lights of the church, and obscured the brightness of the Gospel," so "he caused all those painted puppets to be pulled down in a peaceable manner, and, at his own cost, glazed the windows again."

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Round the walls and on the tower are many marvellous specimens of monkish art, gargoyles and mural carvings. These figures and animals remind me of the strange creatures Sir John Mandeville met with on his travels. Perhaps his descriptions served as models. In an angle of the window mouldings, carefully hidden, hardly showing against the grey stone, a spotted flycatcher is nesting the living animal amongst the unreal representation of strange beasts.

By the church stands the tiny grammar school, and on the church wall is a tablet in memory of John Thomasen, "for thirty-six years master of the grammar school, in that capacity approved and eminent."

Thomasen, who died in 1740, was a great hand at writing, and "specimens of his ingenuity are treasured up, not only in the cabinets of the curious, but in the public libraries throughout the kingdom." He even transcribed for Queen Anne "the Icon Basilike of her royal grandfather."

From Tarvin I pass on to Holme Street Hall, a beautiful Elizabethan house that stands by the side of the highroad, next to a modern house which bears the name of Holme Street Abbey. It is of brick, with fine gables, bay windows a grand specimen of the solid but picturesque architecture of the sixteenth century. Holme Street was sometime the property of the Savages, and from them it was bought by the Starkies.

Great Barrow Church, a little to the right, has been much renovated, and the tower is eighteenth-century work, decorated at the corners with big vases. There is a date on the church, 1671, which marks the time when the chancel was renewed by Henry Bridgman, its rector, afterwards Dean of Chester and Bishop of Sodor and Man.