ENGLISH VILLAGE FOLK.

Wakeman Wanders Among the Towns and Studies the People and Ways.

Historic Reminders Which Each Tiny Bit of Old England's Face Affords.

Panoramic Sweeps of Some Gray Old Nests Which the Centuries Have Softened and Beautified.

LONDON, April 3.—It is no wonder that the cockles of a Briton's heart, be he Irishman, Scotchman or Englishman, thrill with fadeless affection as he recalls, in any foreign land, the immediate environment of the home-spot that gave him birth. Were he but cotter's child, and knew in his youth-tide hours only the fierce and hurtful stings of penury, there is still an untellable charm in the backward vista centering in the lowliest British home.

It is because rural England—and it is almost equally true of rural Scotland and Ireland—in nearly every square acre is so endearing in its age, association and natural winsomeness, that those who possess it, and those who have left it and, for the absence, hold it more intensely close and precious, will justly brook no belittlement; any more than you would let some smart stranger come into your home and sneer at your sweetest and most cherished, if simple, belongings—beautified by effort, hallowed by time and use, even more tenderly loved for your own errors and shortcomings—without pitching both him and his airs incontinently into the highway.

It is such a beautiful country; such a well-kept and delicious old garden; such a smiling land in sunshine and song and comfortable one in storm; and withal gives to the stranger within it such a sense of constant interest, coupled with close human companionship and sympathies, that cynic and prig and incapable of interest in any land but his own, though one be, he cannot now and then repress a kindling enthusiasm, be here and there pricked into secret admiration, or in this place and that find a tender and associative interest.

In less than a three hours' journey, on an English day in May time, what innumerable scenes of interest, of stirring quality and of restfulness and repose flash upon you from your carriage window! Still more gratefully fessful are the things one will see and feel, as innumerable hamlets, steadings and halls are passed. Glorious old manor houses flash from parks and demesne forests. Thatched roofs of village homes, yellow with lichen, are varied here and there by red tiling. Avenues of ancient elms, beech and limes give tempting vistas above broad roads, tasselated with lights and shades, and as gray and smooth as some old cathedral floor. Cropped hedges with trim, tiny fields give place here and there to downs, rolling away in billowy hills of heather, spangled with the golden asphodel, or wide meadows and tiny marshes where flames the yellow marigold, or where the forget-me-nots are so dense and blue that their surface seems like a breeze-rippled pool. Hawthorn lanes are white above and beneath as banks of driven snow. Great masses of honeysuckle trail from copse and hedge; and in, around and above all this May-time nature-heaven, thrushes and blackbirds, high above the roaring of your train, flood all the day with song.

In the tremendous object lesson and historic reminder which each tiny bit of the face of England affords, there is no more impressive study than that of English villages and their folk. These villages are the most delightful of all objects in every panoramic rural scene. Closer study reveals countless hidden beauties—for even age and decay here possess a mournful beauty and charm—to the artistic and vagrant mind. And their quaint, quiet folk, of whom I shall particularly speak in another article, though regarded as dumb and sodden by many, still provide one of the most interesting sociologic studies to be found in any land.

Although many characteristics of English villages differ in different shires, or in different parts of the same shire, they all leave the same typical picture in the memory, when considered as a part of the landscape. I never yet came to an English village, and I have visited hundreds on foot, that it had not the same general massing of picturesque effects as all others. This, too, whatever its relative topographical situation. It was just the same whether nestled in an Avon, Wharfe, Derwent, or Tamar vale; clumped on a breezy southern down; half hidden in the shadows of a midland hill or peak; toppling along the edge of ragged chine or flowery burn; or wedged into the stony face of some dreary northern moor.

There it stood, ever a distinct and characteristic picture in itself. A rift of low outlying cottages, tiny splatches of white and gray and red, at either side, because lost towards the center in luxurious shrubbery. Then a few gables, quaint and old. Then another mass of foliage, denser and of darker hue. Then a jumbled mass of higher gray and red roofs and outjuttings of more pretentious architecture. And finally, the highest mass of foliage, dominated by perhaps a battlemented roof, above which always rises a huge, square centuries-old tower that tells of the English parish church from Land's End to the misty Cheviot Hills.

I sometimes think, wonderful and compact as storehouse of historic relics, of garnered art and of splendor in cathedral, castle, hall and monastic ruin, as old England truly is, that after all the sweetest part of one's wanderings is experienced away from the beaten lines of travel among these gray old nests, which the centuries have softened and beautified even in their age and decay.

Come with me then, vagrantly, into a few of these lovely old home-spots of rural England. Not far to the north of damp and grimy Liverpool is pretty Ormskirk. It is half village and half town, for the spindles are humming here as almost everywhere in Lancashire and Yorkshire. Two huge, white roads leading from green fields, which were impassable mosses in olden times, rising to a gentle eminence intersect the place, and the verdure growth of four hundred years almost hides from view the nestling, ancient homes, the quaint old shops, the sleepy, restful inns, and the historic church itself.

The old church looming above the red tiles of the cottage roofs is curiously surmounted by separate tower and steeple; the pile so gray, mellow and ivy-massed as to involuntarily suggest a gigantic tree lopped off in its lower trunk, where the huge battlemented tower stops, out of whose edge, where the steeple rises, has sprouted a second slender tree. The tradition goes that two capricious maiden sisters, desirous of raising some sacred memorial, agreed upon erecting upon Ormskirk a tower and steeple, yet, disagreeing as to uniting and connecting their work, they finally expended all their wealth and energies upon both, each independent of the other. The earliest of the renowned Derbys and Stanleys are buried here. Mossy, lichened, slumberous, grave, the entire place is a wondrous picture of tender repose, and is but one of the scores of winsome Lancashire villages, blending, low-lying and hushed, in the pleasant landscape between the thunderous towns of mills.

What precious old bits of gray and sunshine and green are the half deserted villages of Cockermouth and Hawkshead up there in the English lake region, the former in Cumberland, and the latter just inside Lancashire where that county pushes a jagged arm up among the scars, fells and lakes of the English Alps! Cockermouth itself, where Wordsworth was born, is but one of the many quaint old Cumbrian villages, which seem as ancient and mossy as the rocks out of which they were hewn. It is a sweet, dim, dreamful and songful old spot, for the Derwent river sweeps melodiously by, and the Cocker river, from which the village derives its name, is emptied into the Derwent at the village side.

Wordsworth's father, John Wordsworth, was an attorney here, and law agent to Sir James Lowther, afterwards the earl of Lonsdale. The house where the poet was born is a long, two-storied, hipped-roof structure, standing at a corner of Main street and a recessed alley, and must have been regarded as a stately affair in its time. A tier of nine windows in the second and eight in the first story face the street, which is shut off by a massive stone wall with wide coping and monumental projections at regular intervals and at the corners. In the area between the street wall and the house are several partly trimmed shade trees, and the ample garden in the rear extends to the banks of the lovely Derwent.

Hawkshead lies midway between the queen of the English lakes, Windermere, and Coniston water, near which may be found the home of John Ruskin, and nestles prettily beside the beautiful Esthwaite water. It is by far the most beautiful village in the lake country. The old school house is standing just as Wordsworth left it. It is no more than a tiny stone dungeon, with wide, low windows, a single broad, low door, and a whitewashed school room interior, where a tall man would be in danger of bumping the ceiling beams with his head.

The schoolboy, Wordsworth, cut his name into his desk, and the scarred old plank is accordingly prized as a precious relic. Every one will remember the good old dame, Anne Tyson, with whom Wordsworth lived, and who was so much a mother to him during his boyhood's days at Hawkshead. Her cottage is still standing; and

The snow white church upon the hill,

made famous in the "Prelude," stands as then in a near field. Around it the sheep and lambs are grazing. But the old life went out of Hawkshead with the hand looms; you will never find more than a score of worshipers at service within it; and the incumbency is so reduced that the village rector himself rings the chime of bells which calls the dim old folk that remain to this all but deserted shrine.

Here again are types of villages, one in the north and another in the west riding of Yorkshire; neither like the scores of sunny hamlets in tender Yorkshire vales, but standing grimly and stoutly against the shuddering moors, defiant of change and the tempests of centuries. Come with me over dreary Stanemoor's wilds and look down there upon dead old Bowes.

There lies the sinuous shell of the ancient village—a winding, cobbled, grass grown street of half a mile in length, flanked by ruined houses, half of whose thatched roofs have fallen in. Far to the east the eye catches a glimpse of the classic domain of Rokeby. To the north the dells and fells where flows the river Tees. To the south, the glen of Greta, where that river tumbles and sings. That huge, lone, stone structure, the first at Bowes from the Greta bridge way, weird and ghostly under huge sycamores, was formerly another Dotheboys hall. Richard Cobden once owned it and made it his home.

Then the Unicorn inn, with its acres of out buildings, empty and moss-grown. Opposite, another silent inn, the Rose and Crown. Then, facing westward, a little Norman church. Near it, the ruins of a Norman castle. Behind these ruins, the ancient Roman station of Savatae, where are remains of baths and an aqueduct. Then, roofed and unroofed hovels on either side to the westward, where you will see, still standing just as Dickens described a veritable Dotheboys hall in his Nicholas Nickleby, "a long, cold-looking house, one story high, with a few straggling out buildings behind, and a barn and stable adjoining."

The other is Haworth. Seen at a distance it seems a half-defined line of ragged gray above which is the lofty, dreary Haworth moor. There is but a single street; closes sometimes extend for a house-length to the right and left. The yard wide pavements are series of stone stairs and platforms. Beneath the latter are shadowy shops and living rooms. All stand open. But few inhabitants are to be seen. Up, up, up, for a half mile, you plod, and at last reach a tiny open space. The houses are set around it closely. Quaint shops and ancient inns crowd it at all sorts of curious angles. This is the head of the village, topographically, in habitations and in aristocracy.

Not for its attractiveness, but because it seems an outlet to somewhere, you pass into a little court behind the Black Bull inn. It is a maze of angles and wynds. Suddenly another tiny open space confronts you. Here are an old, oblong, two-storied stone house, with a few yards of grass plot at its side; a little stone church, attached to, rather than blended with, a grim Norman tower; a grave yard clustered with crumbling stone; the whole barely covering an acre of ground. These were Haworth parsonage, church and churchyard; the earthly and final home of the Brontes; and their living eyes ever rested on Haworth moor, which rises immediately above the churchyard like a wall of rounded stone.

Come to such as these in the summer time only. Then fleecy clouds struggle over and between the hills as if shadowy hosts were marshalling behind the horizon. Here and there splatches of color lie against old walls and house fronts. The heather blushes from the undulant green of the moors. And one can then easily imagine bits of Apulian pastoral scenery here and the shepherds and their flocks, like cameo reliefs on beds of dazzling emerald, with a perspective of billowy lines and misty clouds.

Over here in Northamptonshire, just at the edge of the garden shire of Warwick, is ancient moss-grown Crick, sleeping under its thatches beside Watling street, most famous of Roman roads. There are both rest and delight in old, old Crick; rest, because it is one of those English villages which stands just as it always stood; where the roar of the workday world's activities never comes; where the old parish church, the graveyard, the decayed manor-houses, the huge stone dovecotes which house 500 families of doves, the thatched farm laborers' cottages, the ivies and mossy walls, and the simple village folks, all invite to quiet and repose.

Not ten miles away you suddenly come upon the daintiest and most flower spangled village in England. It is a tiny collection of dependencies upon the manor of Ashby St. Ledgers; but there can nowhere else be found such flower embowered homes. Just at the northern edge of this, the whole forming a striking background to the side broidery of one of the finest wide, high overarchings of ancient ash trees I have ever seen, first appears a huge wall, high, thick, ivy hung and mossy. Surmounting this is a wonderfully picturesque old gatehouse with two stories of chambers and an attic—the veritable meeting room of the conspirators in the noted Guy Fawkes Gunpowder plot of 1605—over a capacious archway, which formed the ancient sole entrance to the domain. Behind this are other venerable outbuildings, half a thousand years old and in perfect maze. To the right and higher, shows a grim, square Norman tower and the mossy roof of the parish church. Behind and above all, are the many massive gables of this most splendidly fantastic manor house within the England midland shires. How glorious an historic romance could be wrought within Ashby St. Ledgers' grim and ghostly old walls!

In the eastern and western midland shires of England are scores of ancient villages of restfulness and beauty, hidden coy from the globe-trotters' lorgnettes in the sunny hollows of the verdant hills. Old Broadway—"Bradwein" it once was, from the shepherds' "cottes on the mounted wolds down to the most fruitful vales of Evesham"—is a lovely type of them all. All its houses are picturesque. Indeed, here is one of the few ancient stone built villages of olden England, left precisely as its makers built it all the way from 300 to 500 years ago. On every side are high pitched, gabled roofs, with wonderful stone and iron finials, mullioned windows and bays, leaded casements containing the original glass, and huge, tall, stone chimney stacks, all weathered to most beautiful colors.

Low stone walls in front enclose little old world gardens with clipped and fancifully shaped yew trees. Its quaintest of hostelries abound in bits of detail, old oak doors and hinges, old glass and casement fastenings and most curious chimney pieces, plastered ceilings and panelled rooms. Every house has flat-headed mullioned windows, with massive wood lintels inside and huge baulks of oak, roughly squared and molded over the ingles and fireplaces. In these snug old inns and in half the huge stone farmhouses round about, tradition will tell you, Charles I. or Elizabeth passed a night. How wise of them to do so if they had the footing, time and will.

EDGAR L. WAKEMAN.

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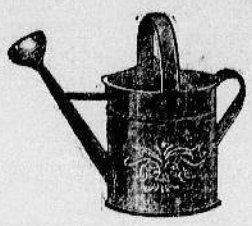

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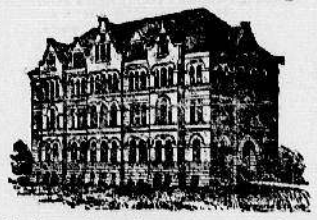

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