THE VILLAGES OF NORTH LEICESTERSHIRE.

WYMESWOLD.

Situated about five miles to the east north-east of Loughborough, the walk to Wymeswold through Cotes and Hoton, even on this chill October day, is not without its attraction. Leaving Hoton—with which we have already dealt—the highway, after a brief descent, rises and expands into a broad road. This, for a long distance, is bordered on each side by a wide belt of grass, fringed at intervals by timber, and, being carried along the summit of the Wold hills, becomes in the autumn and winter alike exposed and breezy. But to-day the prospect of far-stretching field, meadow, and wood is not beheld to the best advantage. Autumn bleak and sunburnt is ruthlessly stripping Dame Nature of the glow and verdure of her summer robes, and the landscape is tantalisingly circumscribed by mist and pall-enshrouded sky, and the brightness of its June and July robes of purple and gold has given place to the mellow, subdued, and sombre tints which the fifty acres of the year. Withal, however, even this dull October day cannot rob the surrounding country of all its charms, and the pleasant afternoon's walk Loughborough Station to Wymeswold opened up vistas of soft England beauty that would have added their own peculiar attraction to any gallery of landscapes.

A Londoner, recently describing Wymeswold as "well built." But the visitor who entertains any great expectations on this subject, and who catches his first glimpse of it as he enters the "Little London," is doomed to profound disappointment. A straggling collection of cottages than that which here first attracts attention could hardly be conceived. The architecture—if it can be so described—is of the most primitive and rudimentary character. Some seem to have been dropped into their places utterly regardless of any general plan—in short, almost as if they had fallen in a thunderstorm, and there had been no time to arrange them. And yet, despite their shortcomings as measured by the canons of the profession, look as cosy and snug as the most exacting villager could desire; and here, sheltered within their grateful embrace, he may laugh with impunity at the roughest of rude Boreas' blasts. Standing in quaint and picturesque irregularity as they do, however, they are not entirely without their more pleasing remembrance. One, we are told, was the residence of a well-known blind Methodist preacher named Joseph Marshall; while another was the first in this district to witness the manufacture of the now popular article, Stilton cheese. However Wymeswold grows in favour the more we become acquainted with it. Leaving its unpretentessing entrance behind, we enter Far-street, which has likewise its features of interest. On the right hand we have a cottage which has supplied the Religious Tract Society with one of its most useful leaflets. This was the dwelling of an old lady whose life has been written by Miss Collman, and who is still remembered by the villagers as "Jenny Hickling." This devout old dame was confined to her bed for sixty-seven years; but this serious drawback did not prevent her becoming a busy and achieving other remarkable feats which render her name familiar among the parishioners as "a household word." Further up we reach "Cross Hill." This, small about a century ago, was also the site of a cross, supposed to have been erected in the time of the founder of the local weekly market—Edward I. But the square on which the cross was raised now forms part of the lawn of Clay House, a dignified and by no means unpretentious mansion named the "Hermitage." An excellently preserved carving of the arms of the Earl of Huntingdon ornamental door-way; while the entire structure proudly still exhibit two objects of interest to antiquarians—the stoup that formerly occupied a place in the north porch of the parish church, and the font of the original St. Mary's. In addition, we reach the commodious Manor House, which is mainly noteworthy from the circumstance that it has as its foundation the stones of the spire of the church, shattered by lightning in 1783.

Far-street from this stage presents the aspect of the principal thoroughfare of a country town, being lined on each side with shops of the usual diversified type. Of these, however, the class that devotes itself to the "refreshment" of the inner man appears to be the majority. Their array of rival "banners" in Far-street is, to say the least, prominent. Passing the Baptist Chapel—which, more anon—we reach the commodious brick building known as the National School, with its spacious playground. This neat structure cost £600, and was erected on the site of the old meeting-house in 1845. Here on the day the average attendance is about 115, and the Government grant—which may be accepted as a test of efficiency—is gradually increasing. A little way beyond this is the Infant School. This was also newly erected. It was closed for some years, but was provided with a certificated mistress and re-opened in 1875. The average attendance is now about 80. Turning up Willoughby-road, there is a quaint old henhouse which bears the inscription been the birthplace of Mr. Clarke, who, like a modern Dick Whittington, some years ago became Lord Mayor of London, and filled a representative office in Retropolis in the Commons House of Parliament. Retracing our steps, and entering Church-lane, attention is called to two cottages, one of which was the early home of Dr. Rawson, who became a physician of high repute of some note in New Zealand; the other is the dwelling of Mr. Holwell, the author of "The Harp of Israel," a creditable collection of original hymn tunes. Beyond this is an ivy clad and upright old cottage which is noteworthy as the birthplace of the late Rev. Mr. Hopewell, who, though self taught, gained some reputation in the ranks of the ministry.

But it is only when we turn into Brook-street that we reach the original Wymeswold. Down the centre of this wide thoroughfare runs the streamlet from which it derives its name; known in the old MSS. as the river Mantle. Formerly unwercumscribed by its bubbling brook enough on its way through the village. But when the excessive rainfalls of autumn and winter enormously enlarge the drainage of its watersheds, it swells into a miniature torrent, transforming the lower end of the town into an inland lake, and invading the dwellings on both banks. But if this streamlet occasionally thus foams and runs riot through the village, it can at least plead the excuse, if not the justification, of being a historic one. This amply watered valley is supposed to have even pre-existed irresistible attraction to the temporary settlement, to Roman invaders. Be that as it may, the brook has to-day shrunk into very insignificant dimensions, and, at this dry time of the year, almost be bridged by a child. However, let us stroll up that which was once probably the sole thoroughfare in Wymeswold, and note some of those who had been born or lived in the old-time cottages by which it is bordered. To the right, standing modestly back from the highway, is a quaint little farmhouse, known by the appropriate name of the "Nook." This primitive and old-fashioned looking cottage is associated with the family of Thos. Underwood, and represents the birthplace of the present Rev. Dr. Underwood, one of the most eminent ministers in the Baptist denomination, and of the kindly hearted brother. Another old farmhouse, a little higher on the same side—remarkable from the fact that its red brickwork is relieved by black in the form of huge diamonds—was at one time the property of Mr. Burrows, who became distinguished in quite a different direction. "Some," we are told, "are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them." Mr. Burrows belonged to the latter class, for, physically, he rose until he became undoubtedly the greatest man in the county, attaining the extraordinary height of seven feet, and—what is even more unusual—being at the same time "stout and well proportioned."

Not far distant is the "Plaisance," at one time the home of Mr. Wrighton, a poet of no mean ability. This author is probably best known to fame by his edition of "Roscoe's Wales;" but he is also a composer of not a few poems and essays which—though not all publicly associated with his name—are to be found in his portfolio. Another comfortable looking cottage was for some years the home of the Rev. John Ayre. This gentleman began his career as a fellow-midshipman with Prince Leopold, but he then joined the Church; did active duty in the ranks of the clergy for some years, and eventually sought the *otium cum dignitate* in the rural retirement of Wymeswold, where he paid the debt of nature in 1833. The older villagers tell not a few curious stories illustrative of his character and his eccentricity. Occasionally, said the veteran parish clerk, he would conduct service in the parish church in his favourite, take part in the worship at the Baptist Chapel in the afternoon, and assist in the devotions at the adjoining Wesleyan Chapel in the evening. As for his favourite literature, it was equally Catholic and comprehensive, his "reading" being daily divided impartially between the "Scriptures," "the pious and learned Hooker," and—tell it not to Gath—a work of fiction. This tolerant and liberal son of the Church, as may well be supposed, won the esteem of all classes and denominations of the villagers, and at his death they felt that in many respects they could not soon hope to look upon his like again. The Manor House, another noteworthy residence, was bought by the Baptists as a manse for their local minister. This accordingly became the temporary dwelling—for a time—of the Rev. Mr. Lewitt, missionary and who subsequently became well known for his achievements in one of the greatest of all fields, India; second, of the Rev. Wm. Bailey, who was equally successful in another particular sphere, the same vast empire, Orissa, and who, greatly respected and lamented, passed away in Leicester but a few weeks ago. On the right, towards the upper end of Brook-street, is the "Limes," which, at one time was the seat of Judge Leake, one of the early notabilities of the parish, and last occupied by Catherine, Lady York, his only daughter. The grounds have not yet lost all traces of their early beauty, stately old trees and grassy slopes still telling in unmistakable tones the story of departed greatness.

On the opposite side is the site of a house in which the late Bishop Davys spent some of his early years. This was a mansion that originally belonged to the Huish family, who, curiously enough, adopted as their motto "Huish! Do not curiositate." As for the vanity of human dignity, this ancient family seat has passed away to give place to that characteristic embodiment of modern progress—a gasworks. Had any "local prophet, in the sense of the gospel," predicted this head of their house that Wymeswold was destined to be lighted by carburetted hydrogen gas, his reply would probably have been much the same as Sir Walter Scott's with reference to Edinburgh—he would as soon have thought of lighting the village with a slice of the moon? But had the old squire been spared to see this last quarter of the nineteenth century, he would have doubtlessly rubbed his hands, and exclaimed "the whirigig of time brings in his revenges." The story of this unfortunate venture is probably unique. It is soon told. The Gas Company was founded in 1830, when the population was about 1,200. Its nominal capital was £1,000, in shares of £5 each; but out of these only 133 were allotted. Of course the works, plant, &c., proved unexpectedly large, reaching, in fact, the sum of nearly £1,600. The consequence was that though gas was at first supplied at 5s. 10d. per 1000 feet, it had subsequently to be raised to 6s. 3d., at which level it continued to the end. For a few years its prospects seemed encouraging; then a little difficulty was experienced in obtaining sufficient funds for working expenses; then property was mortgaged to the late Lord Lonsdale, and at length passed absolutely into his possession. The consequence was that on the day of our visit the specials presented a gasworks was silent, painful and melancholy. The fires were black and cold; the floor of the retort house was strewn with the meters, large and small, which had been removed from all parts of the village to be sold once more for the antiquated and re-furnished oil lamps, and the foreman was pacing the silent and deserted yard disconsolately—his occupation gone. The whole situation was unique—the only case on record in which parishioners had offered £300 for the buildings and plant complete, and, on the whole, in first class working order. But the owners refused to part with them for less than £400 and hence this wise decision—which, after a few days, the process of dismantling and demolition was to commence forthwith. The origin of this diminution to pay for the works from £1,600 to £400 in original cost, was not difficult to discover. In the first place the population is admitted on all hands to be declining. In the second the cost of the carriage of coal over the five miles that divide Wymeswold from Loughborough, is relatively, a serious item, and one that cannot be overlooked in the estimate of the prospects of the investment. Meantime we have heard of gasworks being opened in the village, and this was fortunate, as Wymeswold represents the first instance we know in which consumers, who have once enjoyed the immense advantages of gas, have ever permitted them to lapse. Such an incident is probably unique, and is more than less than a return to the dark ages—and that in more senses than one.

The Nonconformists have no lack of religious accommodation. Of their three congregations the oldest is undoubtedly the General Baptist cause. Its unpretending original chapel is situated in Brook-street, and is not only paved with tombstones, but has been built by a burial ground. Some of the inscriptions carry us as far back as 1740; and it is probable that the Baptists can date their first meetings for worship to still earlier times. About 1797 they opened a chapel in Far-street, but from this, in 1847, in order to meet the growing requirements of the body, was materially enlarged. A few years ago it was again the subject of considerable improvement. It boasts of a gallery, &c., and, internally, is regarded as one of the prettiest little chapels in the county. The denomination has also a good school, which dates back almost to the year 1800. It is now conducted by a average attendance is about 70, and the scholars have the use of a creditable library. Under the pastorate of the Rev. W. Morris, the church appears to enjoy a fair share of prosperity, and has also the distinction of a point of age come the Wesleyans. All that is known about their early history is that they held their first services in a farmhouse about the close of the eighteenth century. Their present chapel was erected by themselves to a new chapel near Church-lane. In 1825 this was enlarged to accommodate about 250, and here they periodically met for worship till 1845, when their present chapel was erected at a cost of about £700. The preachers at the opening service included Dr. Newton Dr. Hannah of Didsbury, and the Rev. J. Ratenbury. This condenotices of the proceedings at the time. The chapel is provided with a gallery, and is estimated to seat about 400 worshippers. About a couple of years ago, a fine organ, with nine stops, was secured, and this adds not a little to the attractions of the worship. The Sunday school is still conducted in the old chapel, and is attended by about 90 children, who enjoy the privilege of obtaining books from a well selected library of 400 volumes. The Primitive Methodists have also the first objects that meet the eye of the visitor on entering the village from Little London, and dates back to 1836; only a few years later than the birth of the "cause." This place of worship will accommodate 150, and is likewise Sunday after Sunday fairly attended.

St. Mary's church, and the incumbency of the late Dean Alford, can only receive justice in another article.

RAMBLER.

THE MORTALITY OF LEICESTER AND LEICESTERSHIRE.

THE REGISTRAR-GENERAL ON THE PREVENTABLE DEATH RATE.

The Registrar-General has published his quarterly return of the births and mortality during July, August and September. In the course of his introductory remarks, he refers to the mortality in the large boroughs and county of Leicester:—"The annual death-rate among persons of both sexes in the several English counties ranged from 13·6 to 13·7 in Dorsetshire and Wiltshire, 14·4 in Northumberland, 15·2 in Leicestershire, and 26·2 in Lancashire. In twenty of the largest English towns, the death-rate averaged 23·2 per 1000, against 20·5, 20·7, and 18·3 in the three preceding summer quarters. The lowest rate was 18·0 in Bristol; they ranged upwards in the other towns to 29·2 in Leicester, 29·7 in Salford, and 30·2 in Liverpool. The rate of infant mortality, measured by the proportion of deaths under one year to births, was equal to 195 per 1000, against an average of 171 in the ten preceding summer quarters. The proportion last quarter was but 87 in Westmoreland, 109 in Dorsetshire, and 111 in the two counties to 271 in Leicestershire. In the twenty large towns, the infant mortality averaged 238, and ranged from 160 in Bristol to 366 in Leicester. In the twenty-six towns, the lowest rates last quarter among persons aged upwards of 60 years were 45·7 and 50·8 in Leicester and Bristol. The rate from the seven principal zymotic diseases was below 2·0 in Wiltshire, while in Leicestershire it rose to 9·72. In the twenty large towns the average rate was 6·4. It varied from 3·9 in Bristol to 13·3 in Leicester. The deaths from diarrhœa were equivalent to an annual rate of 1·75. The rate was but 0·24 in Wiltshire, and in Leicestershire 6·6. In the twenty large towns the rate was 4·4, varying from 2·4 in Bristol to 8·4 in Salford and 10·6 in Leicester.

Diarrhœa is notably a disease of summer. Its fatality varies with the summer temperature, though not with such closeness as to justify the conclusion that its sole cause is heat. In the twenty towns in the most fatally large towns the average rate was 6·4. It varied from 3·9 in Bristol to 13·3 in Leicester. The deaths from diarrhœa were equivalent to an annual rate of 1·75. The rate was but 0·24 in Wiltshire, and in Leicestershire 6·6. In the twenty large towns the rate was 4·4, varying from 2·4 in Bristol to 8·4 in Salford and 10·6 in Leicester.

Diarrhœa is notably a disease of summer. Its fatality varies with the summer temperature, though not with such closeness as to justify the conclusion that its sole cause is heat. In the twenty