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THE
BOOK OF THE ENGLISH OAK

Rugged Indigenous Monsters—England's Best.

Photo by E. N. Mason.

Frontispiece.

THE BOOK OF THE ENGLISH OAK

BY

CHARLES HURST

AUTHOR OF "VALVES AND VALVE GEARING"

"HINTS ON STEAM ENGINE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION"

"STATIONARY ENGINES" ETC.

WITH A MAP OF ENGLISH OAKS

AND

FOURTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

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PREFACE

IN this book I have sought to arouse greater interest regarding the English Oak. The tree is dealt with in its many moods, stages and aspects ; its traditions and place in poetry also receiving due attention. I have endeavoured to show how it lies in the power of every Englishman to enrich his country by cultivating the oak ; and thus perpetuating one of the most distinguished features of an English landscape.

I trust that the description of various parts of the country I have visited in my rambles will suggest to town-weary men the breath of fields, woods and wide spaces ; and the changes in English scenery, from early spring to the full pomp of summer.

That the question of afforestation is of national importance is shown by the findings of the Royal Commission ; and it is to be hoped that a subject which has been too much neglected will at length receive the attention it deserves.

CHARLES HURST.

COLCHESTER, *May* 1911.

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THE BOOK OF THE ENGLISH OAK

CHAPTER I

THROUGH MANCHESTER AND BEYOND

AFTER long consideration and delay I began my journey in the interest of the English oak at about half-past nine on the morning of Monday, the 26th of March, in the year 19—. There is a buoyancy of spirit attending the early stages of a long journey, and as I turned the first corner I felt that high elation of the unwearied traveller whose emprise is all before him ; for it was the first time that I had felt absolutely unfettered for an indefinite period ; and the mild, serene pity I felt for my fellows toiling under an unlovely Lancashire sky by no means diminished the enjoyment of that dull March morning.

Now as the country through which I tramped was of a gloomy aspect, and had long been familiar, I beguiled the time by composing a few lines on the promised delights of my venture, which I set down in my notebook as they shaped themselves to my thoughts.

"Adieu, grim cotton-spinning town,
 I leave your fretful humming,
 Leave sordid street for breezy down—
 The merry spring is coming.

I leave the weaver at the loom,
 I leave the spinner spinning ;
 I feel the need for elbow-room—
 The spring-time is beginning.

Across the misty mountain height,
 By lonely moorland hollow,
 Through woodland dim and meadow bright
 A devious course I'll follow.

The silent reed-rimmed mere for me,
 The corn-field and the heather ;
 The bracken and the old oak tree,
 Come calm or windy weather.

And when beneath the noonday glare
 Broad field and fallow quiver,
 I'll shun the dancing upland air
 To seek the tree-fringed river.

Where deep-set woodland pools repose,
 Where dwells the night's lone singer,
 And deep the bending river flows,
 My leisured steps shall linger.

When driving rain beats down the grass
 To wayside inn I'll hie me ;
 And through an amber-tinted glass
 I'll watch the world rush by me.

Then good-bye, weaver at the loom,
 And farewell, spinner spinning ;
 I feel the need for elbow-room—
 The spring-time is beginning."

When I had finished this little song I looked round
 and beheld the town I had left under a cloud of dun

smoke. I gazed for a few minutes on the sombre picture, and then turned resolutely to the south, and beheld that greater dimness which, except at rare intervals, for ever hangs over Manchester and the surrounding districts. The gloom, however, had no depressing effect on my spirits, for I hoped that day to pass through it to the hilly region beyond.

Early spring in this part of Lancashire is not the glorious season of melody and colour known in the midland and southern counties. It resembles rather the feeble flickering of life about the face of a man regaining consciousness after a long period of oblivion. Before Lancashire's industrial age the country was doubtless pleasantly undulating; and in the future, when hideous stacks cease their vomiting, the blue-bell, Lancashire's special flower, may again adorn the glades, and the ivy-grown ruins of the mills form a notable and melancholy feature of the landscape. Yet the virtues of the strenuous Lancashire folk may avert such a fate, and by their energy and the cheapness of transport retain the commerce whilst they discard the present sordid aspect of their county.

But although the scenery was not enchanting, the air began to feel keen and invigorating, and the question of dinner soon occupied my thoughts. As I trudged through a maze of mean streets it began to rain,—not an uncommon event in Manchester,—and I made haste to the centre of the city, the well-remembered lines of an obscure poet running through my mind—

“ . . . At length,
Sniffing the scented air, the lucky wight
Hies nimble to the well-remembered fane ;

Where, rites ablutional performed, he looks
Benevolent upon the beautiful scene.
Forthwith a neat obsequious slave arrives—
Voice meekly aspirative, actions smooth,
And posture deferential. Him the wight
Full soon commissions to procure the fare
Which best accords unto his lordly will
And glorious impulse that he feels below.
Appear the viands, and appears the wine;
And as he slowly compasses each course,
The ruddy wine he raises to the light;
No craven thoughts afflict his generous mind;
Divine content suffuses all his soul
With glow sublime. After long pause he stands
And sweeps with fearless eye the busy scene,
Bestows a largess on the faithful slave,
And, smiling blandly, takes his joyful way."

I procured an enjoyable dinner, rested awhile, and then resumed my journey.

The street that, passing London Road Station, turns to the left, skirts Ardwick Green and runs southwards, is the most direct route from Manchester to the Derbyshire Hills; and along this road I made my way. The spaciousness of Ardwick Green is refreshing; but the traveller who threads his course through the busy road soon reaches the neighbourhood of large ironworks, and the outlook becomes depressing. Mean streets branch off from the main road in monotonous regularity; and the aspect is so deplorable that one marvels that English people tolerate existence in such dreary surroundings.

Past Gorton the road improves a little, and in places the country struggles feebly with the town; and in a while, if the day be clear, the blue peaks of the Pennines, like the summit of delectable mountains, beckon from afar. At a place called Denton

four roads meet. As I passed, small knots of men were hanging about, and I noticed a man stood in the identical place and attitude that I saw him five years before when I had occasion to pass this spot. He looked anxiously down each dull street, as though he were expecting some remarkable event. He was doubtless an unproductive thinker; an inarticulate philosopher who desired no market for his speculations; a self-contained dreamer whose thoughts enriched not the blood of the world. He answered my greeting in a manner little calculated to encourage conversation; so I passed on my way, greatly wondering what his outlook on life might be.

The land now fell towards a small stream called the Tame. This offensive little river forms the boundary between Lancashire and that narrow tongue of Cheshire which runs eastward for a few miles. I regard this stream as running at the extreme foot of the Manchester side of the Derbyshire hills; for the road maintains a steady rise from the south side of the river to a distant ridge of country. Before long I passed through Hyde, a poor sort of place, but tolerable by reason of the nearness of the hills, and memorable as being for some years the home of poor Prince, the weaver poet, who drew his best inspirations from the breezy tops of the neighbouring heights. Still upwards runs the road, and soon the fine bluff head of Werneth Low is seen to the left. At Gee Cross, a healthy looking village, I left the main road, and ascended a steep path up the hillside. At last I had left the tram route and the town. Here, then, were prospects; here were distances and far horizons; and tired as I was by the long

climb, I skipped in the field with a joyful sense of freedom.

A short rest in the shrewd air that blew about the hill soon dispelled my weariness. Apprehensive of the coming darkness, and prompted by a vigorous desire for food, I sought a place where I might stay the night; and after a little search I found a farmhouse on the southern slope of the hill, where I obtained wholesome food and the promise of a good bed. The nearest post-office was at Compstall, and walking thither, I dispatched a brief note home. On my return to the farm I sat a few minutes before a bright fire; but the unwonted exercise and the fresh air soon made me drowsy, and I went early to bed.

The Gospel Oak, Polstead, Suffolk.

THE GOSPEL OAK

The Gospel Oak, as it appeared on the 27th August 1910, a day of cloud, with a watery sun just peering through a grey sky presaging wind and rain; a day on which the sweet first touch of autumn was felt in the air. Standing in the pleasantly wooded and undulating park between the church and the hall of Polstead, and surrounded on all sides by the little lumpy hills of Suffolk, it appeared as a mere husk of a tree, with but two branches bearing leaves of the short-stalked variety; but these leaves were as fresh and healthy as any that the giant put forth in the pomp of his lusty youth. In its prime the bole must have been an impressive mass, for on the above day it measured 13 ft. 6½ in. round the remaining half circumference at a height of 4 ft. above the ground. Centuries of wind and rain have worn and battered the withered branches into fantastic and beautiful shapes, giving them the appearance of those age-worn stone carvings to be seen on the exterior of some old church. With affectionate care the villagers have supported the tottering trunk by props; but so far gone is the decay that the old veteran is like to be granted at the last an heroic death, hurled to earth by some violent winter storm.

Far removed from the lines of commerce, and hidden from the highway, many summers should remain to this ancient ruin, for one feels that, unless uprooted by the wind, a hundred years can make but little difference in his condition. May the tempests a little abate their fury as they sweep along the grassy sward over which this monarch of the forest has lorded it for many a generation past! All but stripped of beauty by the ravage of the seasons, his decaying greatness confers distinction upon a sequestered and little known region.

This picture shows the trunk to be surprisingly full of markings which bear a strong resemblance to faces human and animal, sad, savage, or grotesque. Just above the child's head is the profile of a venerable face expressive of deep sorrow. Near the base of the trunk and about the centre are two faces formed where the bark has been stripped away; whilst to the right, resting on the ground, is the head of a satyr. Above this, the splintered stump of a bough is curiously like the head of a wolf with open jaws, and between this and the satyr's head are two remarkable animal faces of the ape and lynx kind. The protuberances a little above the wolf's head, and towards the left, resemble the head and shoulders of a young woman; and above her head is a grotesque imp that might have been copied from a gargoye on Lincoln Minster. Almost at the top of the tree is seen the head of a fox or deer, as the imagination of the gazer may suggest.

Within a hundred yards is the grave of poor Maria Martin, who was murdered in the Red Barn; and under the graveyard trees the little stone which marks her resting-place scarcely peers above the heaving turf, so eager have visitors been to possess a relic of this melancholy tragedy.

If we believe that evil or distressed spirits visit the earth, surely no spot is more fitted for the haunt of a troubled ghost than around this grim relic of ages.

CHAPTER II

LOOKING ROUND

I HAD now arrived in a region which seemed favourable to the prosecution of my mission, and on the morning following my arrival at the farm I sent off the following letter :—

“DEAR COMRADE,—Has the scope of your philosophical reflections ever included the consideration of the marvellous mystery of your own individuality? Speaking for myself, I am a being with certain faculties, organs, desires, aversions and weaknesses, whose usual mode of progression is upright upon two legs, and this assemblage of organs and senses is known among men by a certain name; but, my friend, who am I? I look to you for a scholarly treatment of this riddle in your reply. ‘What connection has this fruitless question,’ I hear you exclaim, ‘with the strange address at the top of the page?’ My dear friend, none whatever; and I therefore hasten to the real subject of my letter.

“Yesterday, whether foolishly or otherwise I do not intend to discuss, I left my wife and family on the most affectionate terms, and with their full knowledge and approval, and have walked to this place. I have

begun my long-contemplated tour of some months' duration, but of my future route and destination I am as ignorant as of my fate after death. I could overwhelm you with reasons for undertaking this expedition; but you will guess the main object; to the fulfilment of which I now crave your hearty co-operation. I want you to send immediately, on receipt of my wires or letters, which I shall send you from time to time, a quantity of the acorns we gathered in Sherwood Forest last October, during our brief holiday of glorious memory.

"Have you ever considered, my dear friend, what this brave island would be were it denuded of trees? If you have not done so, or your imagination is unable to realise the gloomy picture, I would ask you to visit certain places which I can name on request. As you know, I am not one of those who prate on the degeneration of the English race. I have great confidence in the happy future of the country, and I rejoice when I compare its present condition with the dark and bloody past, in which the many spangles of genius, kindness and toleration seem but as widely scattered stars in the long night. But, along with the forward movement of the race, there is a tendency, at least in the northern counties, to forget the natural beauties of the country in the fierce stress of social and political questions. Now although I cannot contribute any suggestions of novelty or value to these subjects, which I leave to those who have a talent for their discussion, yet it is in my power to do service in another direction; wherefore I quietly steal aside from the clamour of parties to perform a task which requires no qualifications beyond a little enthusiasm

and a sound pair of legs. As you regard my friendship, send by return, securely packed, about three hundred acorns, which I hope you have stored exactly to my instructions.

"Some men are so unhappily constituted as to be pursued through life by a long trail of curses. I would evade such an unenviable fate; and if I can leave a track in the form of a noble line of oaks scattered along a portion of my path through life I shall rest content.—Adieu, Comrade, yours in the truth,
QUERCUS."

I resolved to devote this day to rambling about the countryside selecting suitable spots for the planting of the acorns which I confidently expected by return of post. The difficulties of my task, which I had dimly foreseen before setting out, now began to force themselves upon me, and for a time I was depressed with doubt as to the success of my undertaking. It is a matter of common knowledge that the oak is a tree of very slow growth. Dryden, in a rather stilted passage, assigns a period of three hundred years for its growth, a maturity of three centuries, and a like period for its decay; wherefore, if we accept this as true—and I think the poet understates rather than exaggerates the longevity of the tree under the most favourable conditions—he who successfully plants a vigorous oak performs an act whose results are as lasting as a cathedral. It is this slow growth that renders of doubtful success the task of planting oaks in the promiscuous manner I was compelled to adopt. I realised that it would be futile to set an acorn in the midst of a meadow, for as the

young plant broke through the ground it would either be trodden down by cattle, destroyed by reapers, uprooted by the plough, or exposed to the attack of wanton boys. Again, it is a waste of time and energy to plant acorns in the hedgerows by the highway, for the saplings would be cramped, and cut down from time to time by the hedgers. This is much to be regretted, for nothing adorns the highways so much as a line of stately trees whose spreading branches give a grateful shade from the fierce heat of summer sunshine; whilst at all seasons they are glorious instruments from which the wind draws music, sometimes loud, sometimes low and sweet, always harmonious, and for ever welcome. But though I abandoned the attempt to adorn the highways in this expedition, I think it is possible that when the virtues of the noble tree become widely known, councils, rural and urban, will make it their duty to cultivate the oak, and the inhabitants of each district take a pride and care in the welfare of their trees.

The oak, then, must be planted in retired situations, or carefully protected by artificial means, so that its infancy may be lived in undisturbed quietness. Once this critical period is passed it may be left to stand all the ordinary accidents of existence. As it attains its full stature it throws out its giant limbs with a fine freedom, and seems to say, "There, wind, do thy worst; thou wilt find no compromise with me." For indeed the oak is a sturdy fellow. It scorns both the pliancy of the despondent willow and the clinging timidity of the stately poplar. He, therefore, who would be successful in the work of

propagating oaks must give heed to the characteristics of the trees, and plant accordingly. Give them room for generous growth, and take heed that when young they are not lashed by the sweeping branches of adjacent trees, such as beech or birch. If you cramp them they will be drawn out tall and thin by the struggle for light and air, and will lose some of the sturdiness, which is one of their distinguished features. As to soil, I note that they are not confined to any particular kind; but I have found the best and largest specimens in deep loamy soil in open country, often with a bed of fern at their knees. They will grow in open situations on the hills; but in such positions do not attain the grandeur of one hundred feet, and are more crabbed, knotted and gnarled than those in the plain or valley, as though soured by continued battling with storm. The roots of the oak strike deep. Virgil asserts that they are as profound as the topmost branches are exalted; but this I by no means believe. My own observation and reading show that, with the exception of the tap root, they run at a depth rarely exceeding six feet; which is considerably more than the depth of the roots of other English trees. They are, moreover, of vast extent, and wide as the tree spreads its brawny arms, the roots strike wider, seeking sustenance for the vast bulk. This depth of root is a great point in favour of the oak, and should recommend it to the agriculturalist; for it does not draw nourishment from the surface of the ground, thereby impoverishing herbaceous plants, grain crops, and grasses. It goes down in the cool, undisturbed earth for support, and from those

quiet depths derives the noble qualities which distinguish it.

I have said that when I considered the nature of my mission the difficulties grew upon me, and it appeared that without co-operation I should not be successful. I determined, therefore, whenever an opportunity arose, to enlist the sympathies of the farmers whom I should chance to meet in my travels, so that when I planted an acorn they would perhaps have a care to protect the young plant. Notwithstanding, I determined to plant acorns secretly in districts where my project was not favourably received, and thus do good by stealth, and in spite of the inhabitants. Surely, I thought, some of the young saplings will survive the perils of their youth. I think we often look too much to the success of our undertaking: the effort is the nobler part. That done strenuously, carefully, we may leave the result complacently to time. I doubt not many a brave deed has been left undone by too nice an estimate of its probable success.

These thoughts passed through my mind on the morning of the second day of my venture, as I sat on a large stone beneath a fine cluster of beeches that stood on a knoll near the farm. I can remember how I longed to sing the praise of the oak in appropriate verse, and although I despaired of ever creating my ideal song, I yet passed a pleasant hour in composing a short exhortation, which I resolved to apply as opportunities arose. I here present the lines—

“Pause, woodman, ere you make a stroke
Against this unoffending oak :

Think if there be no other way,
 And let the noble fellow stay.
 But if by hard necessity
 You are compelled to fell the tree,
 Then go perform an act of grace,
 And plant another in its place."

These lines, I thought, might be useful, if printed on gummed slips about six inches square, and fastened on the trunks of any threatened veterans which I might meet in my ramblings; and I therefore resolved to have a few struck off when I passed through a town or village having a printing-press.

Is ambition a vice or a virtue? Like all things human I think it is woven of good and ill together; no ambition, however praiseworthy, being without a considerable streak of selfishness in it, or however mean, without some good feature; but I must say that I know of no pursuit less open to the charge of selfishness than the one I have made my special care. I own that as I sat meditating beneath the trees that dull March morning I reflected with no small satisfaction on my project, and pictured some distant descendant of mine travelling in the footsteps of his remote and eccentric ancestor, and, with chart in hand, pausing before the ruin of a once glorious oak, saying, "This is doubtless one of the trees set by the old fellow." I can boast of no ancestors whose fame or infamy might inspire me with a vaulting ambition, for it seems that infamy doth somehow acquire a lustre if sufficiently remote. I consider the tradition of honesty and independence inherited from parents to be more esteemed than vast estates transmitted from a crooked and tainted source. But though a man

have no forebears of renown or infamy, for which he is scarcely to blame, it is in him to have an eye on his posterity, and so to order his life that, judged by their higher and kinder natures, his own character, making due allowance for his trials and temptations, and the state of society in which he lived, may bear no undue reproach. Wherefore I say if you would be worthy of your descendants, benefit posterity generally, earn peace of mind, health of body, enrich your country, and do yourself honour, plant oaks.

The valley in which I awaited the first consignment of acorns is a pleasant place. A small river, the Etherow, flows through the vale by meadows and past wooded slopes. The stream, however, bears the taint of industry, imparted by bleach-works hidden away in the folds of the eastern hills. A few miles below Compstall, which lies at the entrance of the valley, the stream unites with a current of similar size, named the Goyt, and these streams, together with the Tame, which I crossed on my way to Hyde, form the Mersey, and have their confluence near mean, melancholy Stockport. The vale owes much of its charm to the fact that it is open to the west. On a clear day, standing on its northern or southern slopes, the full expanse of the Cheshire plain lies in sight, bounded westwards by the dim outlines of Snowdon and his brethren. From the ridge of the hill on the northern or Manchester side, which is cultivated to the summit, Kinderscout can be clearly seen. "Ha! my fine fellow," I cried when I saw him in the afternoon, the air having cleared since midday, "I shall soon be making

friends with you. I have a desire to stand tiptoe on your crown, and peep over the heads and shoulders of your lesser comrades." On a clear dark night it is a fine sight to climb to the northern ridge and look towards Manchester. Myriads of lights are seen twinkling in the murky blackness below, suggesting a wide bay in which many small boats are anchored, each bearing its own little light. They told me at the farm that the sight was finest on a clear mid-winter afternoon, about a quarter after five o'clock. The lighted mills are then said greatly to increase the strangeness of the scene.

The glories of spring had scarcely commenced in this valley at the time of my visit. The trees still stood in wintry bareness, and the hedges were sombre hued. Bright emerald tints appeared in the hedge-bottoms and meadows, but the general colour of the valley as seen from the hillside was grey-green, and it was a source of regret that I should not view the scene in the full pomp of summer. But though the charm of rich colour was absent, the air pulsed with the music of birds which sing loud and long at this season. It was delightful to hear the full liquid notes of a thrush that sang from a small tree near the farm. I consider this bird to be our finest singer, and were it his wont to make music in the still night the nightingale would, I think, by general consent, be adjudged to the second place. The larks seem delirious with joy. The insistence of their melody made their song ring in my ears long after they were silent, and even in my sleep at night the sound seemed with me.

In spite of the want of leaf, however, the country at

this time of the year has a different aspect from the scene presented in the dark and dreary month of January. The fields have taken a brighter tint, and the sunbeams have a kindly warmth when not neutralised by an east wind. The clouds seem to sail higher, and the blue of the sky is deeper. Nor are the woodlands, though bare of leaf, without a subtle change, for as they stand drinking in the sunlight they assume a ruddy tint from the innumerable buds encased in their tawny sheaths. Life is unmistakably pulsating in the juicy twigs, and the sap is hurrying forward under the influence of the genial warmth. And all this bursting of bud, race of sap, song of bird, opening of flower, and awakening of hibernator, is the result of a slight alteration in the angle at which the land lies to the sun.

There are a few oaks scattered about the valley, but they are not remarkable either for size or form. It was no slight satisfaction, therefore, to think that I should introduce a finer, larger race; though I doubt if in the climate and soil of this valley they will attain the gigantic proportions of their parents. Another unfavourable feature is the nearness of that vile assemblage of brick boxes known as Manchester. Of all the enemies of the oak, and it has many, the smoke of great towns and the exhalations from iron and chemical works are the greatest. Where these abominations be the oak will surely die. In the memory of old men still living there existed in the forest of Horwich, in Lancashire, many fine trees, a few of whose ghastly decaying trunks may yet be seen, and whose pitiful descendants struggle to a

height of twenty-five feet in the more sheltered and remote spots. Even these melancholy specimens will soon be gone, and leave no successors; for the people for the most part are indifferent to their welfare, and the few who cherish the oak are unable to cope with the ravages of smoke and the wantonness of destructive youths. O Lancashire, what a miserable fate is thine if the errors of thy ways be not speedily considered and amended! But a poor hundred years have passed, and behold! a fair county is for the most part made a collection of rubbish-heaps, interspersed with patches of grey-green country. Coal is got and cotton spun; but of the wealth thus won merely an infinitesimal fraction is allotted to the means for keeping a clean sky or a green earth; though withered pelts, bandy legs, banking accounts and mortgaged cottages do increase mightily.

Before darkness fell I had explored the valley and had selected certain spots for planting. In the early evening I sat entering up the events of my journey, and a few observations that had occurred to me that day. Afterwards I passed a pleasant time by the kitchen fireside talking with the farmer, his wife, and son. They were very kindly people, and appeared to be in easy circumstances. In the summer they earned a little money by letting rooms to visitors from neighbouring towns. There is something so sweet and wholesome about a spacious, well-ordered farm kitchen that I always feel at home in one. The big old-fashioned fireplace, the yawning chimney, in which the wind is wont to make weird music in the long winter nights, the stoned and sanded floor, the

old long-case clock ticking in the corner, the ropes of onions, and the hams hanging from the beams, the white scrubbed table, the deeply recessed windows, which sometimes command a fine prospect—all go to make up a charm which is lacking in many a more pretentious apartment. The kitchen in which I sat was a fine example of the kind I have described, and I did delight to watch the play of the firelight on the old folks' ruddy faces as they enjoyed their well-earned ease. About ten o'clock I went to bed.

Wednesday. As my friend would not receive my letter before this morning, I could not hope to receive the precious parcel before Thursday morning. This day was therefore devoted to converting my friends at the farm to the good cause. I first cast my spells upon the old man. I followed him out after breakfast, and pitched gospel into him as he mixed pig-meal. He received my ministrations with coldness and suspicion. He objected to the noble tree on the ground that it drew to itself the nutriment which should go to the crops. I replied that this argument might be true of some trees, but was certainly not applicable to the oak. I asserted that far from robbing the crops and pastures it supported them, because it fed on those elements which were harmful to crops, as was proved by driving a nail into an oak, when a black stain would be seen spreading round the wound; and besides this, the roots of the tree struck so deep that they could not draw juices from the surface. At these statements he paused in his labour and looked at me steadily, but I recognised the importance of absolute gravity; my face was stolid, and I met his gaze unflinchingly. It was a

great effort, but I was successful in repressing a smile. His next objection was that the shade and drip from the foliage was bad for the ground beneath. I replied that I considered his opinions altogether untenable, for the foliage of the oak possessed the unique property of intensifying the rays of light passing through it; and the fallen leaves formed a most potent fertiliser; in proof whereof I asked him to note the greater vividness in the colour of the turf beneath an oak: and even if these statements were not true, which he must not suppose for a moment, the alembic qualities of the tree, which sustained the pastures in time of drought, would more than compensate for the ill effects of the shade of the foliage. At this juncture he again paused in his task, leaned upon the stick with which he stirred the food, and looked at me very closely. I suffered another painful inward wrestling, and remained stolid. These assertions, I think, had some weight with him, for he became more sympathetic. In the course of some remarks he chanced to mention swine fever, whereat I asserted that it had recently been discovered that the oak had an affinity for the germs of that disease; and as a consequence it was less prevalent in the neighbourhood of oaks than in other less fortunate districts; the infection being absorbed by the trees in its incipient stage before it became sufficiently virulent to affect the swine. I further asked him if he had not read that in olden times Saxon serfs drove huge herds of swine into the forest for pannage. He said that he had read something of the sort in a book called *Ivanhoe*. When I questioned him he was forced to admit that in the book there

was no mention of swine fever, whereon I pointed out the inference. This was a very fortunate shot, for he told me his brother-in-law, in Warwickshire, a large breeder of swine, had never yet had pigs afflicted, which might be accounted for by the presence of an extensive oak wood near his farm.

Thus I assailed my friend with guile and truth mingled to suit my designs. It considerably strengthened my position that I asked for no subscriptions on behalf of my mission. I pointed out that I suffered monetary loss through my zeal; but, having a little money, I travelled about showing farmers how to improve their position and enrich their country. The end of the matter was that he promised to set a number of acorns from my expected supply at intervals of a month. The object of this arrangement was to spread the period of planting over the whole year, for I was uncertain as to the best time for committing the acorn to the earth in this part of the country. As a general rule they may be set any time throughout the year, except, of course, when the earth is frost-bound. For spring planting great care is necessary to prevent the acorns germinating before they are set. They should be stored in a dry, airy place, protected from frost, and occasionally turned over like eggs in an incubator. These details I was very careful to impress upon the farmer. I then left the old man, and retired to a remote part of the valley; for I felt the necessity for laughter which it was not expedient my friend should hear. I had, it is true, been guilty of some deception, but as the end was laudable, I felt no qualms as to the means employed to attain it, and indeed I was

willing to invent any story, however remote from truth, that would further the prosperity of my favourite tree.

This day passed pleasantly enough. The weather improved after ten o'clock in the morning, and the sun shone brightly for two hours in the afternoon. The old lady at the farm seemed amused at my enthusiasm, and she was good enough to say that she did not see why her husband should not humour me by complying with my request in the matter of the acorns. She said that I had evidently no selfish end in view, or I should not wander in such lonely spots. Altogether, I was greatly pleased at my success, and, about half-past seven, with a light heart I set off to the ridge of the hill to view the lights of Hyde. On my return shortly before nine, they made a good fire in their sitting-room, and we spent a couple of hours in quiet homely talk.

A Hoary Veteran. (The Gospel Oak.)

CHAPTER III

AT WORK

THE postman's usual time of arrival at the farm was about half-past eight in the morning, and on Thursday I anxiously awaited his coming. I saw him from a distance, and noticed with pleasure that he carried a packet which I felt sure was from my trusty friend, on whom long may the sunshine play. "Ah, my good fellow," thought I, regarding the approaching postman, "little thou knowest of the vast potentialities contained in that box, or thou wouldst, methinks, handle it with more reverence. Thou art like the foolish rest of us, who fail to discriminate between the things that matter and the things that do not matter." With the box came a letter from home, which said all was well. I was entirely happy. I called for a chisel, and the whole family stood round to see me open the box on the kitchen table. "How pretty!" exclaimed the old lady as I removed the lid, and disclosed a fine layer of tawny acorns, beautifully packed in spotless cotton wool. "Pretty!" said I, "why, they are sublime; torpid indeed is the man or woman who can look upon them without emotion"; whereat they smiled at each other to see my enthusiasm. But truly they were a goodly sight

as they lay in the box; from no tenth transmitters of a foolish race, these, but the fruit of rugged indigenous monsters, England's best, selected with care by two of her devoted sons. Enclosed in the box was a plain white card on which my friend had written the words, "Good luck!" The acorns were in prime condition: not a sign of sprouting was visible. He had played his part well. I handed the old farmer about seventy acorns, which would last him about twelve months at the suggested rate of planting. I then put about thirty seeds in my pocket, and set out on my morning's task. A keen north-easter was blowing, and it was bitterly cold. It was one of those dry, arid days when the land is seen under its gloomiest aspect; when towns are dusty, the country bare and drab, and Nature appears to be in a state of suspended animation.

The setting of an acorn is such an important matter that I will describe my method minutely. Having selected a suitable spot, I remove the turf very carefully with a large clasp knife, making a circle of bared soil about eighteen inches diameter. I next prod the ground thus cleared for a depth of eight or nine inches, and remove all large stones, roots, worms, slugs, or deleterious matter that may happen to be present. I then pat the loose earth with my hands, and leave a small hollow in the centre about three inches diameter, and from one and a half to two inches deep, having reserved a little soil to fill this hollow after the acorn has been placed in it. I then place the seed gently but firmly at the bottom of the hollow, and cover it to the level of the soil with the earth reserved for the purpose. This I then press

down, making sure that the soil touches the acorn on all sides; and I afterwards sprinkle the spot with loose grass to hide all traces of my labour. Finally I place a few thorns round the spot as a fence. It was my custom at this early part of my journey to address the unwitting acorn, mentally, when I had given the final pat, after the following fashion: "Now good hap seize thee, little seed; grow in a manner worthy of thy noble parents, and be a delight for many weary men whose light is not yet blown in." It will be seen that I take great pains in setting; and though I worked with the utmost diligence all morning I only planted fourteen seeds; but when it is considered that the results of the action may be visible for a thousand years, it is, I think, well worth a little care.

There are two methods of oak culture, each of which has its advocates. By one method the acorn is planted in the spot where it is intended the tree shall grow; and under the other plan the saplings are reared in special beds, and afterwards transplanted to the desired positions. The latter is by general consent considered the better method, provided that in removing the saplings to their permanent position the roots are not mutilated. Of course, in my rambles I was compelled to adopt the former plan; but there can be no doubt it is fairly satisfactory, since all the great veterans now in our woods and forests must have sprung from acorns which fell or were placed in the position where we now behold the tree. Weeds are the chief enemy of the oakling. They choke the slowly growing shoot, to its great detriment; hence my care in removing all roots from the spot selected for the deposit of a seed.

It was very cold work that morning, and I ran rapidly from place to place to mitigate the rigour of the wind; but I permitted no haste in planting, the average time taken, excluding the period occupied in running from one position to another, being about twelve minutes. I returned to the farm at noon, blue with cold, and after a hearty meal returned to my task. In the afternoon I planted about fifteen seeds, and returned to the farm about six o'clock, feeling tired, cold and hungry, but happy in the thought of having done a fair day's work. It was my intention to leave the valley on the morrow, and pass over the hills in the direction of Kinderscout. At night I sat before a huge fire talking with the farmer and his wife. I settled my accounts with the good folks and bade good-bye to the farmer, who intended to set out early next morning to sell four beasts at a neighbouring market. He assured me that he would faithfully carry out my wishes with respect to the acorns, and I believed him.

Friday morning was wild and stormy, and sleet was driving in the wind. I left the farm at half-past nine, crossed the little river Etherow, climbed the south slope of the valley, and came upon the moorland. As I advanced into the wilds the storm increased in violence and the sleet gradually changed to snow, which soon fell in large flakes, madly whirled by the fierce wind. It was a very depressing time; but the goodness of my cause sustained my drooping spirits, and I clutched the precious box and pressed onward. There was a certain joy in the sting of the snow on my cheek, and in advancing in the teeth of the howling tempest, notwithstanding the difficulty of the ground.

I wandered for miles in utter loneliness, and the moor seemed interminable. My vision was restricted to a range of a few yards, but my sense of direction is fairly good, and I was therefore never in doubt as to the course I was making. But this kind of weather was more than I bargained for, so I abandoned my intention of making a straight course for the high land of the Peak, and swung round to the west, came to the edge of the moorland, and after floundering about for a time I stumbled across a small inn on the hillside and passed the welcome threshold.

I soon obtained permission to stay at the house, and was honoured with the offer of their best bedchamber, which, however, was no luxurious apartment, but spotlessly clean. I then borrowed a pair of the landlord's trousers, as my own were wet in the legs, and I was in dread of a plaguy rheumatism that sometimes troubled me, and which, unless I took due precautions, might interfere with my present schemes. I then sent a messenger to the nearest post-office with a wire for further supplies, and settled down behind the cosy bar until the weather became more propitious. I was the only customer, and the landlord therefore sat with me. I noted with satisfaction that he kept amber-tinted fluid of the right blend. He said that trade was very bad, and the house scarcely kept him in modest comfort. It appeared that the race of old codgers that could carry a daily load of fifteen pints without distress was fast dying out. The rising generation were pitiful degenerates in this respect, and a seven-pinter had come to be considered a notable fellow. He further said that the parson was continually preaching in condemnation of intoxi-

cating drink, yet very prompt and insistent in begging from my friend, who dared scarcely refuse giving, though he could hardly afford it. I did my best to comfort him, and promised to recommend his house to any of my friends who might chance to visit the district. I pointed to his bright, sturdy children, and told him they would soon fend for themselves, and help their old dad; whereat his eyes glistened and filled with tears. I made a bitter gibe at the parson, and called for more amber-tinted fluid of the right blend. Then with considerable cunning I approached the subject of the oak. I produced my box, and displayed the beauteous gems to his astonished gaze; meanwhile telling of the wondrous glories and virtues of the oak. After some discussion we made a compact, whereby he agreed to plant two acorns exactly to my instructions for each glass of amber-tinted fluid of the right blend that I drained in his house; and for every glass he drained at my expense he agreed to plant four acorns in the approved manner; the whole of the seeds to be set at the rate of two a week until finished. To ensure the fulfilment of his part of the bargain I hinted at the probability of my passing this way next year on a similar errand, and to observe the growth of the seeds planted in the meantime.

Behold me then, in the furtherance of my mission, submitting my body to the pernicious influence of amber-tinted fluid of the right blend, which my honoured father was wont to call distilled damnation, what time the icy wind blew whiteness from the boreal pole. The landlord produced a small, polished mahogany tea-box, into which I dropped the acorns

as they became due. Before the night was far advanced I had placed fifty acorns in the box, by virtue of our joint labours; and my exertions that day were so strenuous that I ascended to my bed-chamber with considerable difficulty.

The next morning the country presented a scene of dazzling whiteness and beauty. Came the supplies from home, and with them a letter full of anxiety as to my welfare in the fearful weather; to which I replied immediately, assuring the inquirers of my perfect health and unalterable affection. The landlord met me in the morning with a sheepish smile, which I repressed with a greeting of grave austerity. He soon told me that he had been thinking over my scheme; he was entirely in favour of it, and applauded the zeal I exhibited yesterday. I replied that yesterday's method of working was altogether exceptional, and must not be considered a precedent or a sample of an ordinary day's work, but was adopted under a singular combination of circumstances, whereof the extraordinary weather was the chief feature. He then changed the subject, and asked what I should like for breakfast. I replied that I was by no means hungry, and would prefer a little dry toast and soda-water. Meanwhile I stroked my beard with great solemnity.

After my light repast we strolled out together to view his pigs and poultry. There are few things I enjoy more than looking over a well-ordered farm, appraising the value and weight of the stock, and discussing the various breeds of domestic fowl. I have a theory that the squalid condition in which most swine are kept is detrimental to their health,

the flavour of the flesh, and antagonistic to a successful financial result. My friend's swine were in the average condition, that is to say, dirty, and we had some discussion on this point. As I have never kept swine, I advanced my opinions with deference; he thought some of my suggestions with respect to the drainage of the styes were good, and he said he would adopt them. His fowls were a middling lot. They were obviously suffering from ennui, and had no ambition or interest in life. I have myself kept poultry with some success, and I therefore with more confidence made some suggestions for improving their condition. We discussed the various breeds at some length, and I gave him my views on the best arrangement and type of roosting-place. This conversation took place as we wandered placidly about his little farm.

My friend again became very despondent, and appeared to be greatly incensed against the parson. I advised him to add bee-keeping and flower-growing to his present avocations, whereby he might forget his troubles in the prosecution of interesting and healthy business. He mentioned the difficulties and objections to these proposals: that his rent and taxes would be increased; that the owners of the house, who were brewers, and whose servant he was, would probably object; and that in the event of his being turned out of house he would not receive adequate compensation for his improvements. I had no means of testing the correctness of his statements, but I do know that publicans are needlessly harassed by tax collectors, magistrates and avaricious brewers on the one hand, and teetotal bigots and smug

rascals on the other. The misery which excessive drinking causes is vast; but in all seriousness I believe the aggregate of joy and contentment conferred on mankind by the use of alcholic liquors exceeds by far the misery which heavy drinking brings in its train; and by acorns, I say, confound all bigots, parsons, hypocrites and rascals who make scorn of any class of men! As for English rural publicans, they are the outcome of certain social conditions; they perform a function in the scheme of things; and, so far as my observation goes, they are as kind-hearted, liberal and straightforward a class in the average working way of life as this mad world can show. It is truly no heroic life to measure pots of ale for foolish men, but it is at least as honest and laudable as to wax sleek on rack rents and the labour of sweated women; and I say, let us not be such knaves as to hound this humble class, and yet utter no protest against creatures who flourish solely on interest, unearned increment, or misery, and who will in time ask for, and I hope receive, the consideration that is now frequently denied to publicans.

The morning passed in discursive talk of no great brilliance. The innkeeper described the interesting features of the surrounding country, and discussed matters of purely local interest. I was a good listener, he was garrulous, and we therefore enjoyed each other's company. After the storm, the weather gradually improved. The air was mild, the sun shone brilliantly when not obscured by small white clouds, and the snow rapidly disappeared, except in the gulleys of the upland moors. I devoted the

afternoon to planting, and laid the foundations of what I hope will prove twelve sturdy oaks. The planting of each seed gave me pleasure to think that as the tree grew it would not only be a pleasing object in itself, but would tend to encourage the cultivation of the species, for each specimen acts as an incentive to propagate the tree. I look forward to the time when all our main roads shall be tunnels of green through which the sunlight, filtering through to the surface of the road beneath, will form a moving mosaic of light and shadow. Those who have beheld some of the magnificent highways round Norwich and Leicester know what a beautiful object a road may become, with care and patience; and even these roads could be made still more delightful if more seats were provided, and bubbling fountains of crystal water placed at frequent intervals.

There are many pleasing ways in which the planting of trees could be associated with interesting events. A community could celebrate the victory of their football or cricket team in no better way than by planting a row of oak saplings. The completion of civic undertakings could be marked in a similar way. I would suggest as an entirely laudable custom the planting of an acorn or sapling on the birth of children. Those who observe Lent might celebrate that season by planting a tree, instead of adopting the foolish custom of starving themselves, which lowers their health and confers benefits on no one unless they give to others the food they deny themselves. Recoveries from disease, the long-looked-for death of rich relatives, the ending of

successful lawsuits, fortunate speculations and other forms of successful gambling, the downfall of enemies, the minor misfortunes of friends, and other mercies, could all be commemorated in the like beneficial manner. I spent the evening of this day in recording some of these observations and in thoughts of the morrow.

THE FINGRINGHOE OAK (SUMMER)

This is a fine specimen of a well-grown oak, with scarcely a sign of decay. Of any history or legend connected with the tree I can learn nothing. The knarled base of the trunk resembles a granite rock, and is worn smooth by villagers, who choose it as a seat of meditation and gossip. The situation is in a hollow by the roadside, near the church, and hard by a muddy, weed-grown pool, where harvest-tired horses splash in cool summer evenings. The village poultry strut beneath the spreading branches, and in the course of ages have scratched the surface of the soil, and the loose earth has been washed down to the pool by successive rain-storms. The roots of the tree have thus been unduly exposed, and their hold on the ground consequently diminished; and but for its sheltered position, it is to be feared that it would be overturned in a violent storm, so great is the weight of timber carried aloft and the area exposed to wind. Although the district suffered much from the alarming earth wave of 1884, no ill effects appear in the tree.

On the 3rd day of September 1910 the bole measured 18 ft. 9 in. circumference in the smallest place, at a height of about 7 ft. from the ground; but measuring 2 ft. 6 in. above the ground the circumference is 43 ft. 6 in., thus showing that the juncture of roots and branch is much exposed. The spread of the branches measured about 90 ft. in a direction from north to south, and as the growth is symmetrical, the spread is the same in all directions. The picture shows the tree on the date these particulars were taken. The air was warm and balmy; a light westerly breeze made a pleasant rustle in the leaves, and the mellow sunlight shining on the foliage cast soft moving shadows on the burly limbs and trunk; but this effect could only be seen when standing near the bole and gazing aloft. As seen in the picture, the leaves mask the boughs from the feeble rays of the setting sun.

As to Fingringhoe, it is an ancient Essex village of no special interest or beauty save what it derives from its oak, the church and the pleasant views of the Colne estuary obtained from various points near the hamlet. The water of this arm of the sea is of a cold grey colour even under a clear summer sky; but the sea has charms in all its aspects, and it is refreshing to gaze on the winding spread of water losing itself in the grey North Sea.

The Fingringhoe Oak (near Colchester), Summer.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE MOUNTAINS

I AWOKE early in the morning, and after a hearty breakfast prepared to set out on my journey to the Peak. By the innkeeper's advice I carried a little food with me, for he said I should have some difficulty in procuring refreshments in that wild region. I left the inn about half-past nine, carrying the precious box of acorns. The innkeeper walked with me for a short distance in order to arrange with a friendly gamekeeper about my passage over the moors. This matter was duly arranged to the satisfaction of all parties, and, bidding my friends adieu, I turned my steps towards Kinderscout. I had no great hopes of furthering my cause this day, as the high, lean moorland is unsuitable for the growth of oak, and is almost destitute of human inhabitants. I had no wish to waste a single seed, so I therefore abandoned the idea of serious work for a time. For the first few miles I advanced with a light heart, and recited favourite passages from the poets as I tramped the breezy moorland. It was a fine sight to watch the shadows of the clouds flying across the broad backs of the hills, and it was pleasant to hear the wild cry of the grouse as I disturbed them in the

heather. As I advanced into the hills some extensive prospects opened out, and when I looked into the blue above it seemed more inspiring than I had seen it for many a long day.

I now experienced what was continually impressed upon me in the greater part of my wanderings, and which became the most remarkable feature—the loneliness of the country. It seemed a land of dreams deserted by its inhabitants. Often in the rich cultivated lowlands there was not the sight of a single human being in a wide space of country. Of the scores of hills I passed I do not remember ever seeing a looker-out on the crest of one of them; and this in by no means the loneliest district of one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Not a little curious is it that with all these vast unpeopled stretches of country, man needs crowd into great communities to the detriment of his health and the loss of much individuality. In ugly towns he lives hundreds to the acre, whilst the open wold is all but deserted, seeming to invite inhabitants to its peaceful solitudes.

A cloud effect, which is familiar to all who are given to hill-climbing, now became apparent as I increased my elevation. I appeared to look upon the clouds endwise, and I could see that they all sailed at one level and were of nearly uniform depth. They formed a regular band or layer of white floating between two regions of transparent atmosphere, the colour of the upper region being a brilliant turquoise-blue. Mountain air is said to be exhilarating, and my own experience confirms this; but I think mountain scenery has a depressing effect on the

human mind. The depression is not felt as one stands on an isolated hill, or on the last peak of a mountain range; for looking towards the lower regions the eye beholds not mountain scenery, but views of sea and plain. It is when the solitary wanderer penetrates to the inner summits of the hills, and sees on every side the stern and rugged eminences of an apparently interminable maze of mountains, shutting him in on every side, that the sense of awe is felt. The green valleys, with their suggestions of human happiness and endeavour, are hidden from sight. Man realises his physical insignificance, and uneasy thoughts of his true position in the universe rush upon him. Such was the effect on my spirits as I penetrated the mazes of these wild and gloomy hills, and my lonely condition became for the first time unpleasant. Soon the old and terrible questions which have troubled mankind through vast ages came rushing upon me. My present enterprise seemed beneath contempt, and I was seized with a desire to fling my box away with an angry gesture when I contemplated the mysteries of time, space, and life. For how short is the life of man compared with that of an old oak! What is the age of the oldest oak compared with the duration of these hills; and what is the duration of these hills to the time that elapsed ere their peaks first appeared above the waves of the weltering sea; or to the vast æons which will pass ere they sink again to the bed of a tempestuous ocean! What of the time when earth will roll a frozen sphere of death, lost in the whirl of star-dust; or, with narrowing orbit, return to its fiery womb in

the sun; or meet whatever strange mysterious doom awaits it! These unwholesome thoughts stung me for many hours as I tramped the wild, angry-looking regions of the High Peak. I reached Kinderscout about two o'clock, and by way of diversion planted a fruitless acorn on what appeared to be the highest part of the wide stony top. I then ate some of the food I carried. These activities raised my spirits a little, and I was able to look round in better heart. At this time of the year the moors have a dreary, forbidding look; and at no time have these hills the rich colouring of Exmoor and the Quantocks, or even of the Westmorland Fells. They have not, however, that dingy tint of the Pennine range between Lancashire and Yorkshire, in the neighbourhood of hopeless Halifax. The view from Kinderscout was extensive, but unutterably solemn. The hilltops seemed like the crests of mighty billows which had been transfixed in the very instant of rolling in gigantic sweeps round the hill on which I stood. To the west I could discern the smoke of a large town, which I imagined to be Stockport; and the dim expanse of the plain of Cheshire, too far away to render any minor features of the country visible. As I gazed on the hills which closed the view in all directions but the west the melancholy thoughts returned, and I realised the necessity of action. Gathering up my box and cape, I hurried from the flat, stony summit as fast as the nature of the ground would permit, and took a southerly direction.

How welcome were the first signs of human care and endeavour—the sheep wandering on the hillsides, the scattered farms, the lowing of kine, the smoke of

distant villages and the occasional bark of a dog! I changed my course to the south-east, and after a few hours' steady walking I came to a small, neat-looking village. "What is the name of this place?" I asked of an old lady who stood at the door of a cottage. "Hope," said she. "Then I will live in Hope for a time: I have just escaped from despair," I replied, bidding her good-day as I walked up the village street.

After a short search I found satisfactory accommodation at a good inn near the centre of the village; and when I had sent home my daily message, I sat with a few old codgers in the large room of the inn. It was Saturday; trade was brisk, and there was no lack of talk. The conversation was whimsical rather than witty, and in order that the presence of a stranger might not put any constraint upon the company, I simulated an interest in local events. I was greatly amused at a weather-beaten man with one eye, who entered the room about eight o'clock, and began his conversation by violently cursing sheep as the most idiotic animals on earth. He swore that if by chance a sheep got upon its back it soon gave up the attempt to regain its feet, and died in no time. He further stated, with many bitter oaths, that some of his sheep had been held for days by a thorn in their wool, and would have died of starvation rather than make the slightest effort to free themselves. I must have appeared incredulous at these statements, for the landlord hastened to assure me that a sheep was a terrible thing for giving up.

The reputed grave of Little John, the giant companion of the noble rebel Robin Goodfellow, is not far

from Hope, and it was pleasant to find that the company were familiar with the story of that historic band that roamed the glades of Sherwood, which in those days stretched from hereabouts to distant Nottingham. In a little time the conversation turned to the subject of local rents and tithes, and not being greatly concerned in such matters, I glanced at a newspaper that lay on one of the tables. It was published in a certain Derbyshire town, and a short article I read suggested a means of furthering the promotion of my scheme. Making the excuse of a little important business, I left the company, and retired to a small room behind the bar, where I wrote the following letter:—

“ To the Editor of The ——. ”

“SIR,—As a constant reader of your valuable paper for many years, I notice with mingled feelings of sorrow and alarm that the epidemic of measles still rages with unabated fury in the — district of your ancient and loyal borough. Now, Sir, I think that when a man knows anything that may be useful or beneficial to the nation at large, it is his duty to come forward and give his fellow-men and women the benefit of his knowledge. I therefore pen these few lines in hopes that they will be of service to the town in its present affliction. I must tell you, Sir, that my father was a great traveller, being a cook on board one of those great leviathans we have all seen and admired upon the ocean; and in consequence he had seen a great many countries. One day, on his return from a voyage to the Laccadive Islands, he brought home a big sack

of seeds, which he told us were the seeds of a tree considered of great virtue in those parts, being of use for curing dysentery, low fever, measles and similar complaints. The tree is a kind of oak, and my mother planted some of the seeds in our garden, and in time they grew to be nice young trees. When my youngest brother was ill of measles she took some of the leaves and stewed them in water, and put the steaming dish in the sick-room. My brother got well at once, and none of us ever caught the measles from him; indeed we have all been remarkably free from any illness except confinements, which I put down to the virtues of these leaves.

“Now, Sir, my object in taking up my pen is to tell the people of — and the surrounding districts that I have a few of these seeds left, and I shall be pleased to send two or three to any person applying for them if they will enclose a penny stamp to cover postage. The seeds should be set in open ground, about one and a half inches deep in the soil. They grow very slowly, so that the people who plant them should not get impatient and dig them up to see if they are sprouting. They will easily grow in — and district, and will make nice little trees, very much like an English oak. The leaves must not be pulled from the tree, but left to fall, which they will do in the autumn and winter. The infusion must be made from the fallen leaves, the growing leaf being no use whatever. On no account must the leaves be eaten or the infusion drunk. The smell closely resembles our own oak leaves, and, as I said, the tree is a kind of oak.

“My offer will be too late, I am afraid, to do much

good in the present regrettable visitation, but I am sure many of your readers will be glad to set the seeds in order to cope with any further epidemic. But if my offer be accepted I do not think there will be any further trouble in this respect, as the growing tree, which is an ornament to any garden, is said to kill the germs of measles; and the experience of our family seems to prove it.

"If you will therefore allow your valuable paper to be the medium between your readers and the undersigned, you will add another to the already long list of services you have rendered to the country. Any letters which may reach me through your office will receive my careful and prompt attention.

"I enclose my card; and thanking you in anticipation, and apologising for taking up so much of your valuable space,—I remain, Sir, yours truly,

"VERAX.

"P.S.—The seeds may be set any time, but the best seasons are in March and October. They should be very carefully stored in a cool, dry place, protected from frost, and turned over occasionally like eggs.

"VERAX."

After duly posting this letter I returned to the big room and sat listening to the conversation until closing time. The landlord was a man of many quaint sayings, some of which were new to me. Of one man he said he talked gold and spent copper. He compared the actions of a fussy man to those of a throttled earwig. A certain kind of bird in that district he said was as rare as a red-haired priest.

He alluded to his wife, for whom he had evidently an affectionate regard, as his brass-finisher; and he described church-going and other religious observances as fire insurance.

As a rule, inns are sweeter, cleaner, warmer and drier than the average homes of the people around them. There is an absence of vague, mouldy odours common in old country dwellings, and the cooking is better and the food more wholesome. If a visitor wishes to form an estimate of the condition of the people in a district, he will find it faithfully reflected in its inns. A poor, miserable, dirty people have frowzy, squalid inns, just a little better than their homes. If he would know the general trend of opinion and the character of the men, let him study them in their inn. The valiant and boastful become loquacious under the genial influence of the tap, and glorious deeds which they might, could, would, or should do are expounded to all who will listen. The shy man for a time forgets his diffidence, and his scholarship will peep out in flashes, or his wit will set the glasses jingling. The unfortunate will cast his sorrows, and the true man will appear, relieved of his burden. Oh, a fine place is an inn; and may convivial drinking never be abused with excess, nor inns abolished!

THE GREAT YELDHAM OAK

As may be inferred from the name, Great Yeldham is a very small place. It lies in the heart of a sparsely populated country, and is little known beyond the surrounding districts. The land round the village is gently undulating, but possesses no great beauty. But to the oak. This, in the summer of 1910, was a corpse. Not a single living branch peered through the grim, hollow trunk, and not a leaf did it put forth. The fragment is carefully preserved. The few remaining branches are supported by tie rods, and the base is buttressed by masonry and brickwork built in the crevices of the shell, sealing the interior against the intrusion of destructive children. These precautions are wise, seeing that the object stands in the centre of a small triangular plot of grass at the junction of three highways, and is thus exposed to the assaults of the wanton. In 1910, the trunk measured $28\frac{1}{2}$ ft. in circumference at a height of 4 ft. from the ground. The traditions which have gathered round the tree are of the usual kind. It was said to have sheltered Charles Stuart, but this is an incredible story, and does no honour to the oak. The villagers aver that it is over a thousand years old. There is no evidence in support of this except the general appearance of the ruin, which is entirely favourable to the claim.

The picture shows the tree as viewed from the highways leading to Colchester and Cambridge, and was taken shortly before sunset on 9th September 1910. The early morning of that day was misty, and the air cold and still. So great was the calm that the leaves of aspen made not a quiver, and the smoke from the cottages of Great Yeldham rose vertically and faded into the pearly mist above. A heavy dew had fallen on the land, and gave the fields a grey, silvery appearance, save where wild things had left a vivid track of green as they had swept the dew away. Long before noon the sun peered through the fading mist, and the grey sky of dawn changed slowly to an intense and cloudless blue. The air was steeped in the scents of leaves and pastures, and its stillness gave a day of ineffable serenity and gracious warmth.

The young oak seen in the picture was planted as a sapling on the day of Edward the Seventh's marriage, and the villagers look to it to attain the huge proportions of its predecessor, whose traditions it will doubtless inherit in the fulness of time.

The Great Yeldham Oak, Essex.

CHAPTER V

BRISK BUSINESS

I WAS apprehensive that Sunday would be a dull day with me ; but in this I was agreeably mistaken. I was occupied the greater part of the day in entering up my journal, writing home, and sending a description of recent events to my co-operator in the cause. The morning was showery, but the afternoon was fine and warm, and I strolled out to explore the pleasant country, noting with satisfaction some favourable spots for planting acorns, which I hoped to undertake on the morrow.

From a picturesque point of view this district suffers, in common with much of the Derbyshire scenery, from the scarcity of hedgerows—stone walls being but a poor substitute. The hedgerows of England are a distinguishing feature of the country, and contribute greatly to the characteristic charm of the landscape. Not only do they give beauty to an extended view, but they are delightful in themselves. It is a great joy of the country to wander in the spring along a tall, untrimmed hedge, all snowed with the bloom of May, and festooned with wild clematis, briars, sweet honeysuckle and the sprawling bramble. But late September sees the

hedgerow in its prime glory. Then is it dowered with the multitude of autumn tints, the ruddy hips and haws, the jewel-like blackberry and its kindred fruits; then does the airy tracery of the crafty spiders hold the diamonds distilled from the September mists; and birds, forsaking their solitary habits, assemble in the hedges in cheery flocks.

At night I sat in the public room of the inn, and passed the time agreeably enough. I regretted the absence of my genial host, whose conversation and presence were most cheery. He had by some means acquired preferential shares in a litter of spaniel pups in an adjacent village, and his business this evening was to make an inspection of the litter and declare his choice. There arose a discussion on political matters, and I listened with quiet amusement to some quaint arguments in favour of lords, squires and people of gentle birth, advanced by a rubicund coachman; and a little later in the evening I heard, with placid mirth, some withering sarcasms on labour members of Parliament, socialists, co-operators and similar well-meaning persons, emanating from a gentleman engaged in the grocery business; he was a prominent man in local church matters, and I afterwards learned that he had been recently fined for cruelty to a horse. I was tempted to enter into a discussion on these subjects, but, knowing the vehement and circular nature of public-house arguments, I refrained from assailing their prejudices, the more so as they all seemed reasonably contented in the stations to which they had been called; and with a little art I succeeded in turning the conversation to a discussion on the best method of rearing ferrets.

The company dispersed shortly before ten o'clock, and after a little quiet meditation I retired.

I looked with eagerness for the next issue of the paper whose readers I had made the offer of seeds, and I was gratified to find my letter inserted. In anticipation of a large call for acorns I at once despatched the following telegram to my noble friend:—

“Send immediately four hundred embryos.

“*QUERCUS.*”

This wire I followed with a letter explaining the reason for such an urgent call, and enclosed cuttings of the article and my letter to the editor. In the afternoon I again took a stroll in the adjacent country. I have no recollection of any striking circumstance, and my notes that afternoon were scanty. I present herewith a full transcript of the disjointed entries in my journal:—

“Interesting country—caverns—arema—wrinkled precipices—magpies—rats or voles—unmistakable signs of spring—grammarian’s funeral—pontembusco—primroses—violets—cloud altitudes—analogy between motion of planets and molecules—sea-kale—shadows—joys of thirst—will it rain?—blackthorns—legend of a Welsh oak—wood louse—dityscus.”

This day I planted eight acorns in favourable positions.

Tuesday. The acorns duly arrived this morning, together with some re-directed letters, the answering of which occupied the greater part of the morning. In the afternoon I found a bowling-green, and I spent a few pleasant hours playing bowls with a little bandy-legged man, whose great trouble was bitter

jealousy of a large black cat, which he averred his wife fondled for hours, whereas she had never a caress or a kind word for her husband. This secret he imparted to me as he absorbed a can of ale which he had won by virtue of his prowess in the game. He implored me on no account to divulge his feelings to his wife; and as I was never likely to meet her I readily promised. He was so grateful for my pledge that he shook my hand with great fervour, and dashed away a starting tear; and, without asking my name and address, promised to send for Christmas, carriage paid, a York ham weighing not less than sixteen pounds avoirdupois. Finally, after a little further conversation, we parted most excellent good friends. I planted five acorns this day. Passed the evening in the tavern, amidst interesting company. Subjects discussed: Wireless telegraphy—Birth-marks—Who was "Anonymous"?—Free-will—Bottom-fishing. As far as I remember each debater retained his original opinions, and the subjects were left open for future discussion.

The next morning's post brought me in eighteen letters making application for fruit of the virtuous tree. Some of my correspondents enclosed a stamp in their letters; others referred to a stamp, but evidently forgot to send it; whilst five applicants entirely ignored my request. In the first flush of my success, however, all applications were duly discharged. One man wrote to say that he would be glad to know if the leaves used as described in my letter would be beneficial in the case of a mongoose in a declining condition; and to this curious inquiry I replied that I could give no positive assurance on the point, but

I was of opinion that they would have a reviving effect, and at any rate they could do no harm. I sent this gentleman five seeds, and expressed my sympathy with him in his grave trouble. The dispatch of all this business occupied no little time. I had to procure boxes (I purchased two dozens of matches for this purpose), string, paper and sealing-wax, address the packages, and carry them to the post; and by the time I had finished it was noon.

Considering the success of my latest manœuvre I did not feel it incumbent upon me to undertake any planting this day; and in the afternoon I therefore strolled out to the bowling-green which I mentioned under Tuesday's doings. I missed my jealous comrade, who was doubtless busied in the promotion of schemes for the undoing of his feline rival; for on the previous day I suggested various methods whereby he might render the position of his treacherous enemy untenable. I regret that I never learned the outcome of this singular feud. I spent the evening as before, and with some success encouraged a further discussion of the subjects of Tuesday's meeting.

Thursday morning's post brought thirty applications for seeds, and an ominous letter from my noble co-operator, which I here transcribe.

"MY DEAR COMRADE,—The account of your adventures has afforded us infinite delight, and if you have not added to the gaiety of nations you have at least given a welcome laugh to a small part of a nation. I regret, however, that I must be very stern with you. The stock of acorns is not inexhaustible, and is, in fact, woefully diminished; and in the

interests of my country I protest against this reckless munificence which, if continued, must inevitably starve other portions of the country. I hereby give you warning that I refuse to send further consignments to your present address, or for your present method of distribution. You must move on.

"My wife has just returned from a short visit to your home, and I am now in a position to refute your boast that you promote to any considerable extent the hilarity of your household. She tells me that every member is cheerful, and the absence of the fantastic husband and parent troubles them not at all.

"I would I could join you in some mad prank, having for its object the welfare of the oak; but as I look round my table and see the voracity of my children I realise the necessity of uninterrupted toil.—
Yours fraternally, *****."

Greatly pleased as I was to receive this letter, it nevertheless gave me some uneasiness. I had become attached to this pleasant village, and in my own mind I had decided to remain for some time distributing acorns through the post; but I recognised the justice of my friend's admonitions, and therefore reluctantly made preparations for an early departure. The first step was to send the following letter to the kind editor:—

DEAR SIR,—Thanks to your kind offices, the applications for seeds of the Laccadive oak have been so numerous that I am unwillingly compelled to withdraw my offer. I have but a few left, and these I wish to reserve for myself and friends.

Perhaps on some future occasion I may be able to repeat my offer and resume the distribution of these valuable seeds. In the course of years, I hope the trees which may spring from the seeds I have already sent out will so have prospered that they in turn will yield an abundant crop. In the meantime, I am, Sir, yours respectfully,

VERAX."

With respect to the applications received on Thursday morning I again experienced an extensive omission of stamps ; but in consideration of my offer being closed against further calls, except those which might arrive on Friday morning, I satisfied all claims. This fully occupied my time until three o'clock in the afternoon. I then called upon a few of my friends in the neighbourhood to bid them adieu. As I passed along the main road that runs through the village, I observed three men in contemplation of a sheep's carcass that hung outside a butcher's shop. They gazed long at the mutton, and at intervals exchanged significant glances with each other, but uttered never a word. I became interested, and joined their silent deliberations ; but either their zeal or leisure was greater than mine, for in less than a quarter of an hour I left them still deep in contemplation. Afterwards I sought my landlord, told him of my unwilling departure on the morrow, settled my account with him, and retired for the night.

The next morning brought four more applications, which received due attention, and at half-past ten I left the inn and made a southerly direction, taking the last look of the village where I had spent some happy days as I passed over the ridge of a hill.

THE COPFORD OAKS (IN FOLIAGE)

Late in October the oak is conspicuous among deciduous trees, for it still retains its full summer foliage ; and though every chill breath of wind showers the mellowed leaves of the chestnut, the elm and the poplar to earth, the leaves of the oak still cling vigorously to the twigs, and abate little of their verdure. Only the acorns, and a few branches wrenched with their leaves from the more exposed parts of the tree by the angry autumn gusts, are found on the grass.

The trees here shown are good specimens of lofty oaks, as they appeared on a cold, raw misty morning near the end of October in the year 1910. They stand on Copford Plain, Essex : a beautiful space of green turf shut in on all sides by sweet woods and pastures. Less than a mile away lies the great highway from London to Ipswich and the North ; but few rushing past the end of the little lane that leads to this gracious scene reckon of the beauty that lies so near. The trunks of the trees are remarkably straight for oaks, and are covered with a rich green lichen of microscopic growth. The boles are about 11 ft. circumference at a height of 4 ft. from the ground, and are as sound as a bell. The height of the topmost branches, computed by the length of the shadows they cast, is about 110 ft. These stately trees, which bear leaves of the short-stalked variety, are probably some two hundred and fifty years of age, and may have been planted by some sour and sturdy Puritan who saw the sign of divine wrath in the Great Plague or the booming of Dutch guns in the Thames. May we not also imagine that some rejoicing cavalier planted them in happy mood, thinking that the golden age had come with the return of Prince Charles ?

The rich brown soil of the plain seems kindly to the growth of oak, and these lofty trees may become as huge as English weather can make them. No blighting trail of industrial smoke as yet sweeps across the plain ; the sun and wind play freely among the branches, and have to the full their beneficent will.

The Copford Oaks (Essex) in Foliage.

CHAPTER VI

ARCADIAN SIMPLICITY

As I strolled through the smiling country the events of my tour passed through my mind in rapid review. With respect to the main object of my journey my success had been far greater than I had anticipated. By a series of unexpected events I had disposed of about three hundred and sixty acorns to persons who, for the most part, were not in sympathy with my scheme, and indeed were ignorant of it ; and yet I had little reason to doubt that the greater part would be carefully set. In addition to this I had myself set about eighty, with due care, and in favourable positions, making an average of about seven per day. Whilst carrying out this good work my health had wonderfully improved, and I could saunter a whole long day without the least fatigue. My appetite was voracious, and my spirits, which I have always regarded as an index to my bodily health, were buoyant ; and, apart from the temporary depression which seized me in the hills, I had not passed a single gloomy hour.

As I passed southward and the days lengthened, the country became more romantic. In wandering through most parts of England the great variety of

scenery that lies within the compass of a few miles is one of the most pleasing features. In Derbyshire the Rambler can pass over wild moorland, descend to secluded dell, linger in quiet pastoral country, and view stately, park-like scenes in the course of a day's walk. In halcyon weather, as he pauses to gaze on some exquisite picture, he imagines it to be the climax of beauty. He then passes on his way, and is soon entranced with new prospects, and the fascinations of the previous scene become eclipsed by the beauties of the present. Only at night, when, with a gentle fatigue that makes rest welcome, he reaches a cosy inn, does the true perspective appear. There, as he quietly sips his glass or smokes a fragrant pipe, each scene falls to its proper sequence: every prospect lingers in the memory as part of a perfect whole, and gains charm by reason of the views that appeared before and those that followed.

It is remarkable how pleasing a picture can be made from a few elements. A sunny, yellow-spangled meadow, sloping up to a sky-line, broken by the dark foliage of a few well-grown trees which deepen the azure round them, and swallows skimming over the waving grass, make a charming scene, which the mind treasures in dark, desponding days. The view of a sunlit sea from some high cliff makes a beautiful picture, in which the only elements are sea and sky. Such scenes afford greater solace than many more elaborate prospects, and will soothe when landscapes abounding in detail fail to charm; for the beholder is entranced with colour, and form becomes a minor feature.

The advance of spring was now revealed to me

with a rapidity I had never previously experienced. This was due partly to a hard and prolonged winter followed by a season of unusual warmth, and in part to my southerly course. There is a striking difference between the climate of the country lying on the north and south of the high land of the Peak. In spring, the hedgerows of Nottingham are green when those of Lancashire are black. My course now passed through that little known country lying between Matlock on the west, and Chesterfield and Mansfield on the east. The distance between Hope and Nottingham is some forty miles in a straight line, and by the route I took I passed through no town, or even a considerable village.

Pleasant it was strolling over the rolling hills of Derbyshire, to see the farmers busy in the fields, and to behold the newly dropped lambs gambolling by their dams; to hear the joyous song of the birds; to smell the fragrant earth after showers; pleasant to watch by day the ever-changing skies and by night the steady planets. There were streaks of sadness too. I met cottagers whose life was dull, hard and penurious. They chafed under their heavy yoke, and longed, not knowing the grim realities, to try their fortune in the town, and escape the monotony and gloomy future of their lives. To these people I gave the best advice I could. I told them to keep away from the town at all hazards, and if their condition seemed intolerable, I advised them to make a brave effort to save a little money and seek a new home in Canada, where they would obtain a free grant of land and thus escape from the landowner and the oppressed and oppressing farmer. I believe

my advice was sound; but I do see that there is more wisdom and fortitude required in applying advice than in giving it.

One day I was attracted by the romantic situation of a small farmhouse which nestled beneath a cluster of stately trees on the western slope of a green hill. I approached it and made application for shelter, which was granted on my assuring the lady that I was by no means fastidious as to food and apartments, and that if they had a clean, dry bed I was entirely contented. The household consisted of the farmer, his wife, daughter and a boy servant. There was a gloom upon these good people which I soon learned arose from financial troubles. The farmer had been unlucky with his beasts. Several valuable cows had died under his hands, and there was some mysterious cause at work whereby the beasts failed to carry their calves to the full time. I believe this occurrence is known to all farmers, and, as far as I gather, the visitation appears to be confined to the narrow limits in which the cattle of the afflicted farm are allowed to wander. I know not if the cause is thoroughly understood; but at any rate this poor man was unable to exterminate the mischief, and each year saw his small reserve of money growing less. There was a refinement about these people which was unusual in their class, and, knowing the pride of an unfortunate man, I was very careful to avoid giving offence in any way. At first I thought I had found another instance of hard-hearted villainy on the part of the landholder; but the good man assured me that the owner's agent or steward had been most considerate, and had remitted their rent to

an extent which the farmer considered unprecedented. Praise from a tenant is well deserved. The farmer was past fifty years of age ; his ancestors had farmed the land for many generations, and I believe it would have killed the old man to have left the place. I asked him if there was no other branch of agriculture besides dairy farming he could pursue with more profit. He replied that he was too old to strike out in a new line ; his land was not suitable for anything but grazing, and that milk farming was all right if things went well. He had been persevering for a long time in the hope of a turn of fortune, but he said the dawn was a long time coming.

On the afternoon of the second day of my stay with these people it rained very heavily, and the farmer kept indoors. They had a little parlour, which appeared to be seldom used, for it had the peculiar musty smell of a long-closed room, and the furniture was covered with white sacks. There was a small well-toned organ in the room, on which I had heard the daughter playing with much sweetness and delicacy of touch. I suggested that they should make a good fire in this room, strip the shrouds off the furniture, and spend the afternoon in comfort and pleasantness. With a sad smile the old man agreed to let me have my way, and his wife and daughter, after some little persuasion, were eager to join us. I then told them of my journey, and some of the places I had seen ; but I did not attempt to gain their sympathies on behalf of the oak, because of their troubles and anxieties. They were amused at some of the passages in my narrative, and once the old man burst into laughter, which his wife said did her

good to hear. Their daughter then played a few hymn tunes in a low, sweet manner. After she had been playing thus for half an hour, I said that if she would play "The Farmer's Boy" I would sing to the music. This she did, and I sang in a voice that they were good enough to applaud. The old folks joined heartily in the chorus, and tears rolled down the lady's honest face. The girl was an adept player, and we had many of the good old melodies. I sang "Tom Bowling," "Campdown Races," "The Tarpaulin Jacket," "Funiculi, Funicula," and again, by special request, "The Farmer's Boy," after which, the afternoon wearing on, the farmer rose to attend to his stock. I passed the evening in entering up my journal.

The next day I left them. Notwithstanding their drooping fortunes, they refused to accept payment for my maintenance, saying that my company had amply repaid them. It was only after I became disagreeably insistent that they reluctantly took what was due.

My progress southward was very slow. When I liked a place, or met with congenial people, I lingered. In the week succeeding my departure from Hope I only made about twenty-five miles due south. I was entirely a creature of impulses! I wandered to the right and to the left. Sometimes I followed a stream for a few miles, and abandoned it suddenly to pursue other pleasures. If the shape of a hill attracted me I climbed it; and when I saw a dark, lonesome wood I explored its quiet recesses if I felt so inclined. One day I swung a little from my southerly direction to visit that noble veteran the Major Oak, in Sherwood

Forest, a few of whose seeds I had treasured last autumn. The great tree stands in single grandeur, lording it over the pleasant sward. Often I made the circuit of its generous circumference, and long I gazed upon it until its outline and main features became impressed on my memory. Then I passed through the narrow opening in its vast bole, and marvelled at the immense cavity within.

Sometimes I sat in the burial-grounds of obscure little villages, or sauntered round to read the inscriptions on the graves; then I would quietly lift the latch of the church door and pass into the chilly silence of the interior. In many of these churches were the tombs of knights and dames, in their day, like enough, as proud as Milton's hero, but now as utterly forgotten as their unlettered servants laid in the lesser sanctity of the open air. I sometimes grimly smiled as I stood beside their tombs and read the pompous assurances of immortality, to think how little their pride matters now. Then I thought of the christenings, weddings and funerals that had these little sanctuaries as their scene, and wondered what the object and end of human existence might be. But when such thoughts became too insistent I passed into the sunshine or rain outside, and was cheered by the glorious actualities of nature. One day I made a wide deviation to Byron's tomb, in the churchyard of Hucknall Torkard, near Newstead Abbey, and sat for an hour or so by the dust of that unhappy man. Sometimes I sat for hours by the marge of quiet pools, until the watery inhabitants grew accustomed to the presence of my vast body, and emerged from their silent recesses to pursue their

tasks and pleasures in the open depths before my eyes. Timid voles and shrews would all unconsciously pass on their way quite close to me, and it amused me to see the quaintness and gravity of their habits.

Breaking in upon the Arcadian simplicity of my surroundings comes a caustic letter from Lancashire, in which the sarcastic writer thus expresses himself:—

“A white-faced, mealy-mouthed rogue of split infinitives has endeavoured to negotiate a £100 loan with me, and offers as security an insurance policy with a surrender value of £14, 7s. 8d. I smiled, and was sorry; but you will be delighted to hear that I have advised him to apply to you (he claims you as a friend), and his letter, per favour of your poor deserted wife, will no doubt follow in the course of a few days. If you would return immediately I think some of your friends would not altogether throw you over; but I would advise you not to strain their forbearance by a continuance of this folly. Restore your mental balance and one of another kind by the course I have suggested. Quit the benighted wilds and return to civilisation.

“Obeying the impulses of a kind and generous heart, I intend this week to make personal observation as to whether your neglected wife and children lack food.”

I replied to these gibes in all gentleness, and resumed my wandering way. Each day came greetings from home, and but for these I should have feared a strange reception on my return; for the home-coming of that illustrious wanderer of old was much in my

thoughts. Although time had seldom dragged, the aggregate of the days since I left Lancashire seemed immense, and I often wondered if my appearance had changed to a marked extent since I set out that dull March morning. Meanwhile the planting of acorns proceeded steadily. After I left Hope the daily average was about twelve. One Thursday, about the end of April, when I was in the neighbourhood of Chesterfield, whose dark, twisted spire appeared in the distance, I fell into a fantastic mood, and set four acorns together. If these should flourish there will be a quaint monstrosity in this region, which I hope may be an interesting object to thousands of future inhabitants. The same day I planted three seeds together on a hillside, which at some remote date may grow to be known as the Sturdy Trinity.

In the week-days I lived at farmhouses if I could, but on Sundays I always stayed at an inn, so as not to intrude upon the privacy of a farmer's only day of leisure. Friday, the 4th of May, found me at a place called Lambley, an obscure village some seven miles north-east of Nottingham. I was pleased with the appearance of the little hamlet, with its red-tiled roofs, decaying old church, windmills and orchards, and I decided to stay in this retired spot for a few days. I put up at a small inn kept by a sociable, good-tempered man. He supplemented tavern-keeping by making surgical hosiery in a small brick-built cabin in his garden. He informed me with glee that he had three children, and he said he expected it to snow again next month.

Saturday, the 5th of May, was passed in a skittle alley attached to the tavern, and in strolling about

the village with mine host, forming friendships with various notabilities. My friend apologised for his trousers. It appeared that he had several suits of clothes at home, but it would have been detrimental to his business to have flaunted them before his customers. I gather it is very bad policy for an inn-keeper to appear considerably more prosperous than his customers ; and I know of several instances in which beautiful trousers are ignominiously hidden in wardrobes for fear of arousing the jealousy and envy of foolish people whose liking for ale contributes to their indigence ; and the garments are only brought to the light of day by stealth, when their opulent possessors go on a distant journey.

Sunday was wet and stormy, and I remained indoors until evening writing letters, entering up my journal, and forming wholesome resolutions for the future. After a short walk in the fields I went early to bed, having spent rather a monotonous day.

The Copford Oaks, Late Autumn.

THE COPFORD OAKS (LATE AUTUMN)

When completely stripped of its leaves, the oak differs so greatly from its early autumn appearance that it were vain to argue which state has the more beauty. The rich green of full foliage holds a charm which lines on the printed page cannot suggest; wherefore drawings of summer-clad trees suffer a heaviness not found in the actual objects. On the other hand, the capacity of a black and white picture is well able to delineate the outlines of a winter woodland scene with some approach of fidelity to the thing it endeavours to portray; since the charm of colour is at that season secondary to beauty of line: and if, after a glance at the delicate tree-forms here presented, the reader should imagine the wintry scene to be the more beautiful, the limitations of the art of printing must be kept in view before he can hope to judge of such matters from a mere book.

Anything more pleasing to the eye than the airy grace of the four Copford Oaks here shown would be hard to conceive; and, comparing this picture with the autumn view, it would seem incredible that foliage could hide so much beauty. December in England is for the most part a season of tempest and gloom; but sometimes come hours of such serenity and brightness that the delights of summer are remembered without regret. It chanced to be such a day in mid-December when the present picture was taken. Larks carolled in the sky, thrushes piped in the thickets; and bees, lured from their hives by the delusive warmth, made fruitless search for flowers on the spacious plain. Bronzed leaves of oak lay thick upon the grass and glittered in the noonday sun, giving for a brief space a rich glow of colour, soon to be swept away by driving rain.

The most distant tree shows strikingly dark against the sky. This singular effect is due to the shadow of a nearer oak falling upon its lesser comrade.

CHAPTER VII

CANINE AND ECCLESIASTICAL

MONDAY opened with a fine balmy morning; and about nine o'clock I stood at the tavern door drawing in deep breaths of sweet air. Whilst I was thus enjoying myself I observed a small dog creeping on his belly towards me. At first I took little notice of the brute, and walked towards the church, intending to return to breakfast in about ten minutes, when I calculated the eggs and bacon would be done to a turn; but chancing to look round suddenly I saw the absurd creature following me. When I stopped it stopped, and resumed its grovelling attitude. I went into the churchyard for a few minutes, but found nothing of much interest or beauty; and on my return the cur was crawling about the gate. "Come here, you miserable whelp," said I; and slowly, with painful humility, it crawled to my feet. I stooped down to pat it, and the ridiculous animal rolled on its back, held up its forepaws in ludicrous fashion, and endeavoured to lick my hands. My caresses seemed to give it a little confidence, and it followed closely at my heels.

On my return to the inn I called for the landlord to ask him if he knew whose dog it was. He smiled

at my question, and assured me that it belonged to no one in the village. "Nobody here would own a thing like that, they would be laughed at," said he; "let me drive it off." "Nay," said I, "it seems to seek my protection, and it shall have it. Come along," said I, addressing the animal, "and have some of my breakfast; but stay—I think such food may be too strong for thy poor stomach: fetch me some milk, landlord!"

I had now an opportunity of studying the architecture of my strange companion. Of all mongrels I had ever beheld this was the most perplexing. In its composition I fancied I could detect a trace of every breed I knew. Its size was that of a large Irish terrier, and its colour was a melancholy yellow, with a few rusty-looking patches distributed unevenly over its body. The hair was long and matted in some parts, pitifully thin and short in others; it had long pendulous ears like a spaniel, which swung sadly from its forlorn headpiece. Its eyelids were raw, but the eyes, though they had a cowed look, were yet gentle and pleasing in their expression. But the feature which contributed most to its eccentric appearance was a trick or habit of thrusting its tongue about a quarter of an inch beyond its teeth. It was, however, a complete animal: its undocked tail made sinuous curves as it passed under its angular stern. "Shades of Sherwood!" said I to myself as I stood looking at the creature, "what wooing, begetting, carrying and labour through unnumbered years have gone to produce this pitiful product I have undertaken to support! Though I have at times been in low company, by acorns! I

have never associated with such ill-breeding as I now behold shivering before me."

In comes the milk, which the cur laps greedily, but in fear and trembling, as though expecting a sudden blow. "Poor creature," said I, "thou art the victim of countless ill-assorted unions; and I see thy ways have not as yet fallen in pleasant places. Where are thy womb companions? Thou are manifestly of tender age, and I rejoice to think thou hast come to me in thy unsullied youth. Thou hast craved my protection, which I gladly and freely extend to thee; but hark thee! creature, there must be no wantoning whilst thou art under my care. The long series of crimes culminating in thee must cease; and I must see to it that thy race be not perpetuated. Now that I have admonished thee let us be good friends: my fortunes are thine so long as thou desirest. Now I must give thee a name. What shall I call thee? I have it! Eat this delicious piece of bacon, and henceforth be known as *Pontiflunk*!"

This day I was very industrious, and planted no less than eighteen seeds. Long may they flourish! I was accompanied by Pontiflunk, to whom I explained the process. On planting the first acorn in his presence I was specially prolix, and told him the reason for every movement. When I was engaged in the work of planting, his practice was to sit on his haunches about three feet away from the bared spot, his tongue in its customary protruding position, his head held slightly on one side, and his countenance wearing an expression of grave approval. When I sat on a bank or a hillock, he would take his place

between my knees, occasionally turning his head to look into my face, licking my hands whenever they came within his reach. Shortly before noon, the day being exceedingly warm for the season, I procured some soap and washed him in the brook that meanders pleasantly through the village, seeking the Trent which flows a few miles away. I then exercised my companion in the grass, and when he was dry we returned to the inn. I borrowed a pair of scissors and trimmed the wandering locks on his face and flanks, and was very pleased to note his improved appearance.

In the evening, under the apple blossom, the cuckoo calling from the wood, the swallows darting down the lane, and a ruddy sky to the west, I, leaning on a low wall, with Pontiflunk at my feet, learned some of the features and geography of the district from the village postman. His description of Southwell Cathedral greatly interested me, and I planned an excursion thither on the morrow. It was said to be distant some seven miles to the east of the village. The fame of its chapter-house had reached me in Lancashire, and I was anxious to make approval of its reputation.

At night I had some little trouble with Pontiflunk. He howled dismally when I left him to his night's repose. I think the poor creature feared a ruse to slip him; and it was only after several visits and repeated assurances of my good faith that he settled down on his straw bed, comforted by a lap of milk.

On Tuesday I arose at nine o'clock, and at once liberated Pontiflunk, to his great joy. We then broke fast together, and at a quarter to ten we set out on

our journey to Southwell. The halcyon weather continued. Contrary to my usual custom we travelled by the road, which was very rustic and lonely, being removed from the traffic of the main highway. The air was sweet and the scenery cheerful. Pontiflunk trotted nimbly along, and seemed quite happy, except when startled by an occasional rabbit. In a little time we came to a small village, and we sat for a while in the churchyard, under the shade of a mighty yew tree, I watching the martins in their mad chase round the grey church spire gleaming in a glorious flood of blue, Pontiflunk, oblivious of the matchless canopy above him, chewing the grass on a forgotten grave. A little farther on our journey I was much interested in the remarkable windings of a small clear beck, which coursed the meadows with extraordinary sinuosity.

After a further advance of about two miles the road passed between high banks through a rich, smiling country. The trees along the roadside were numerous, and afforded a grateful shade to the travellers beneath. At one point the road passed over the crown of an undulation, which commanded an extensive prospect. I was surprised to see such hilly country to the north and east, for I had always thought that this part of the country was either flat or gently undulating.

At length we reached Southwell, five seeds having been deposited in the course of the journey. The cathedral lies a little to the south-west of the village, and we saw its plain west front as we entered Southwell. Our first care, however, was to order dinner. We called at the Saracen's Head, and were well dined in a fine, oak-panelled room, which is

said to have once harboured a faithless Stuart king. "Now, Pontiflunk," said I, when we had finished our meal, "you must behave with great decorum, for we are about to tread ground of exceptional sanctity." A few minutes brought us to the venerable fabric, and we entered the transept by the south door.

I was just beginning to admire the solemnity and dignity of the Norman nave, when a little, irritating old man rustled up, and in indignant whispers objected to the presence of the inoffensive Pontiflunk. I replied that he was a most orthodox Protestant dog, possessing all the virtues, and content in the humble station to which he had been called; but my argument was unavailing, and he insisted that the desecration must cease, otherwise he would be liable to severe censure from some dean, canon, or what not. "Come, Pontiflunk," said I, leading out the innocent creature, "this old gentleman is in the right of it; thou art but a pitiful mongrel, without a soul to save: for see the difference between us, and consider how miserably inferior thou art. Thou canst only transgress in a few directions, whereas I can fall foul in a hundred. I am proud; what pride hast thou? I am given to traducing; whom canst thou traduce? Canst thou appear zealous, and yet be most apathetic? simple, yet cunning? How canst thou be overbearing to those beneath thee, thou bottomest of bottom dogs? Avarice, felony, bribery, lying, seduction, rape, arson, scorn, mockery, sacrilege, irreverence, fraud, drunkenness, simony, perjury, adultery, blasphemy, are all beyond thee. By these tokens I clearly perceive thou art absolutely without soul; for which crime receive now the just punish-

ment, and remain tethered to the railings of this imposing tomb until I rejoin thee; and take heed that thou performest no unseemly tricks on this holy ground."

I then returned to the minster, and was again accosted by the peevish old man. He suggested I should follow him and he would show me the chief points of interest. I had no wish to hear him mumble his oft-repeated story, and I told him that I preferred to wander about alone if I could not have my little companion with me. He objected, and said that unless I went with him I should see very little of the beauties of the place, as most doors were locked, and he held the keys. It now dawned upon me that I had neglected a most important ecclesiastical ceremony. I put my hand in my pocket, and a coin quickly passed from me to my Christian brother. As I anticipated, his manner changed immediately. He assured me that nowadays it was most difficult to distinguish between gentlemen and common people, for the rabble aped their superiors in all things. I replied that he spoke wisdom beyond his years, and we had a very amiable discourse on the presumption of the lower orders. "Now, my Christian friend," said I at length, "give me your keys; go and slumber peacefully in the vestry, and we will have a little further thanksgiving when I return them." He hesitated a little at my proposal, but a timely jingling of my pocket decided him, and to my intense relief he left me to my own devices.

I first explored the nave, and was greatly impressed by its severity and gloom, which I thought typical of the age of oppression in which the fabric was erected.

I next passed into the transepts and admired the loftiness of the roof, and the vistas of nave and choir. Then I inspected some of the brasses in this part, which were very quaint. The choir is in striking contrast to the western portion of the building. Here all is cheerful, airy, graceful and refined. To be soothed by the wealth of stately ornament of glass and stone, the work of cunning hands and joyous minds, and steeped in the cool, tranquil air, whilst the old organ pealed forth the strains of some stately march, would be great solace for weary minds. No music can match that of the organ; and as surely as the oak is the prince of our trees, so is this noble instrument foremost in the whole province of music. Often in that grim Manchester have I forgotten the hideousness of it whilst listening to the organ in its great civic hall, realising, I trust not altogether feebly, the feelings which must have inspired Milton when he wrote the closing lines of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*.

After a leisurely inspection of the choir I passed by a gallery of exquisite beauty to the chapter-house, and all my anticipations were more than realised; for here, indeed, is something that has not been overpraised. In this enchanting chamber is the handiwork of some unknown or forgotten genius who carved joy and mastery into every line. The foliage was not simply carved on the face of the solid stone, but stood clear from the masonry, and was undercut in marvellous fashion. I lingered long in this palace of art, and was glad to be alive. I saw with great complacency that the foliage of my favourite tree was represented with remarkable fidelity; and on

comparing it with the other foliage carved there, I thought it was more beautiful than all the rest. Truly man is a pitiful creature in some respects, but as we stand in the presence of his great works we think only of his nobility and high attainments, and become great in spirit if not in deed.

At length I ascended to the triforium, peered over the parapet to the nave beneath; and then climbed up the winding steps to the breezy battlements of the massive central tower. Here I beheld a fair prospect of English country in the glory of May: a view of no startling features, but of rich pastures divided in random fashion by English hedges, all smiling beneath a blue sky, not cloudless, but intense, clear and inspiring. At my feet were the old ivy-grown palace ruins, whose walls were once battered by the righteous cannon of the ubiquitous Oliver. The flower-beds in the gardens round the minster resembled intricate needlework inserted in the green of the closely shorn lawns; the tombstones in the churchyard seemed no bigger than thumb-nails; whilst a little yellow spot embraced the entire anatomy and features of Pontifunk. After half an hour of silent meditation I descended the tower, and when I had returned the keys to the old man preparations for afternoon service had begun. A few giddy choir boys passed through a small door, then a sprinkling of young men, and a little later several reverend-looking old men. The organ now began its wailing, and a sound of chanting voices floated on the air. At last the priestly procession emerged from its retreat, the boys walking first, the old men bringing up the rear. When they had passed into the

choir I walked quietly up to the screen and peeped through. The congregation, so far as I could see, consisted of four aged women, six younger women, a feeble old man and three children. I then walked back to the nave, and seated on a chair, listened to the droning of the priests, the chanting of the responses, the roll of the organ, and the sweet singing of the choir. I felt strangely what appeared to me the unusual nature of the surroundings, and I could not but muse on the contrast between the serenity that hung round this solemn pile, and the rush and fret which I knew was at that instant raging in Manchester at the time of high 'Change. In due course the procession returned in its former order, and I arose and left the minster. Pontifunk met me with joy, and we returned over the undulating country to our tavern, I planting a few acorns on the way.

The same night, by way of a little diversion, I promoted a concert at the inn, and offered a small prize for the best comic song. I mentally adjudged the award to a retired puddler with a big bottle nose, who sang "A Tear fell gently from her Eye," to my infinite delight; but in consultation with mine host, and in deference to the general opinion, it was given to a merry cobbler, who rendered "On it like a Bird" in great style. After this diversion a member of the company, with commendable candour, explained at great length his policy in domestic finance. His method of keeping household expenses at a moderate figure was to assume a peevish, irritable demeanour in the presence of his family, and thus he repelled any advance on his good nature,

which he averred would be the result of any softening of his simulated bearish disposition. The members of his family were therefore in constant dread of him, and dared not ask for any favours or moneys beyond what he chose to allow them. It was the practice of this man to refer all values to pints of ale; and he stated that on a moderate calculation he was fifteen pints to the good each week as a result of this policy.

The company dispersed shortly before ten o'clock, and, in accordance with my usual custom on fine evenings, I strolled out for a little quiet meditation before going to bed. A deep orange glow in the west showed that I had missed the sight of a rare sunset; and in spite of the merriment of the tavern, I regretted that, as far as I was concerned, the glorious display had slipped unseen into the irrecoverable past.

Wayside Oaks.

WAYSIDE OAKS

Of the multitude of English roads, many are saved from monotony only by trees skirting the wayside. To be charming, a road should have a strip of greensward adorned at due intervals with ever-flowering furze; and on one side only, a bank with a crest of tangled hedges and tall trees. Failing this, the track should run by a belt of woodland, affording the traveller glimpses into cool depths of shade; or by gardened cottages and inns of prosperous but homely mien. Many fine highways command extensive views of hill, dale and sea, but are in themselves devoid of beauty, and are tolerable only because of their good surface and their position in relation to surrounding objects. Of colours, we may note the blinding white of Derbyshire limestone, the warm umber of Essex gravel, the golden sandy hues of a few high moorland tracks in Lancashire, the dark Fenland colour, the Sussex chalk, and a variety of intermediate and neutral shades; but before all these give me the rich red soil of Somerset. Romans drove the first good roads through the forests and over the hills of England; but they left the perfection of road-making to another race that added beauty to utility.

The road here shown has two features which often accompany dulness: it is straight and level. Yet although it lacks a strip of turf, the most fastidious taste must allow the pleasing effect derived solely from a line of leafless oaks. Here the spacing of the trees is most judicious, and the trunks are as exactly in line as the circumstances of the case permit. When trees are planted in rows these are important points; since objects which have obviously been intended to assume an orderly arrangement become the more beautiful as they approach to mathematical exactitude of position. Reflection invests the scene with an added charm; for no selfish motive moved the good soul that planted these trees, because he could not hope to behold the resulting beauty of his labour. No doubt his reward was reaped; for we may well believe that though shame, pain, penury or bereavement may have befallen him, the thought of his gracious act in the past assuaged the bitterness of his grief.

CHAPTER VIII

RIPARIAN

"PONTIFLUNK," said I, when we had greeted each other next morning, "we will climb yonder hill that rises just south of the village, when we have had our morning meal, the goodly smell of which even now assails my nostrils. I think we shall have a fair prospect from the grassy ridge. I am right glad to see that thy tail is carried at a more cheerful angle than when I first saw thee. I take a great interest in this terminal organ of thine, for I perceive it is under the influence of various forces which are not all acting in the same direction. First there is thy mysterious heredity, which, acting together with thy past environment (which, too, is somewhat obscure), has a drooping effect, causing it to curve beneath thy belly as when we first met. Opposed to these forces is thy present environment, which, I venture to say, without boast or exaggeration, is as delightful as a canine creature can hope to have in this moiling, devil-smithy of a world; for see, thou hast as much food as is good for thee, thou hast liberty all day, and clean dry straw at night; and as to company, though it may not be very intellectual from a dog's point of view, my society is manifestly pleasing to

thee, or thou wouldst not hang about me as thou dost, nor wear thy beseeching look when, by untoward circumstances, such as occurred yesterday, I am compelled to leave thee behind. Under the influence of thy present environment, then, thy tail tends to assume an upright position, and would do so hadst thou not been unfortunate in respect to the other influences I have named. As it is, it swings in an intermediate position. As thy present environment penetrates deeper into thy being I shall doubtless observe a gradually improving angle, until this index of thine settles under the combined influence of these three forces, and remains in elegant equilibrium at an artistic angle of about sixty degrees from the horizontal. There is another personal matter which demands a little consideration. I have heard thee howl most dismally and long, but never a bark hath escaped thee since we became friends. I apprehend these same forces are at work to produce the effect I have noticed. Thy past life and thy descent whisper thee to keep quiet or evil will befall thee; the opposing influence, thy present condition, incites thee to brave deeds and noisy merriment. As yet past influences and breeding hold sway; but after this free outdoor life, when we return to Lancashire, I believe that under the influence of gayer spirits than mine thy present silence will give place to a plentitude of raucous roars. But see, our excellent host calls us to breakfast."

At ten o'clock we commenced our journey across the breezy wold sloping to the rounded ridge of the hill. The fine weather continued, and the aspect of the country was most cheerful. Fleecy white clouds,

apparently at an immense height, floated in the intense azure of the heavens, and their whiteness accentuated the depth of the incomparable blue. In less than an hour we gained the ridge, and as fair a view as I had ever yet beheld lay stretched before us. The land sloped by graceful wooded undulations down to the noble river Trent, which was seen winding in bold sweeping curves through the broad valley. It was running almost bank full by reason of recent heavy rains, and the sight of the fair, brimming river recalled Denham's perfect lines addressed to a more famous stream—

“O, could I flow like thee, and make thy stream
My great example, as it is my theme!
Though deep, yet clear; though gentle, yet not dull;
Strong without rage; without o'erflowing, full.”

Beyond the river stretched a stately line of hills, on the ridge of which I could just perceive the massive bulk of Belvoir Castle. The whole prospect had an inexpressible charm, characteristic of English scenery, which I think owes much of its fascination to the suggestion of immemorial peace, cultivation and security, which seem to brood over the land. We wandered for some time on the hilltop. I planted a few acorns, and then descended towards the river along a rough, stony road which wound pleasantly down the hillside. As we were passing along this primitive lane, I heard the song of a bird which at once arrested my attention. I called Pontifunk to keep still, and in a little time the song commenced again. I had not been mistaken in my first surmise—it was the nightingale singing in a wooded hollow close by

the roadside. Truly I little expected to hear those throbbing notes in such a northerly district; for I had always believed that the bird was confined to the country south of the Trent. Here it was, however, singing freely in the full glare of day, and heeding not the copious outpourings of the larks. Throwing myself on a grassy bank by the roadside, I listened to the rapturous music until it ceased; when we resumed the rugged downward path.

At last we came to a pretty village, apparently the home of men whose avocations lay in the distant town of Nottingham. It nestles under the wooded hill close to the north bank of the river. Its climate must be genial, for I noticed apricot trees growing against some of the cottages on the roadside. The railway runs between the village and the river; and crossing the metals, we were soon on the Trent side. The river here flowed with a strong current through pleasant pastures. Numerous swallows and martins skimmed its broad surface; a solitary kingfisher flaunted its lustrous body in the sun; larks carolled in the blue above; and glossy-backed kine wandered leisurely in meadows bright with innumerable buttercups, daisies and other flowers of May. We rested on the bank awhile by the pleasant water, until at length the strong, steady current suggested an idea which I at once decided to put into practice. "Pontifunk," said I, springing to my feet, "I have a plan to make this noble stream an instrument in my service. Come with me to the village yonder; we will have dinner, and then to business." We called at the tavern close to the riverside, and I ordered dinner. Whilst it was in preparation we went round

the village, and I purchased some sheets of note-paper, sealing-wax, pen and ink, and, after some careful seeking, a few bottles with wide necks. We then returned to the inn, where dinner awaited us. After our meal I set to work. I placed two or three acorns in each bottle, together with a sheet of note-paper, on which I wrote the following words:—

“STRANGER,—You have here found some seeds of great virtue. They were carefully placed in this bottle by an inhabitant of an island in the stormy Atlantic. If you will plant these seeds at a depth of about an inch and a half in good open ground they will, in course of many years, grow into fine sturdy trees; and though you will never see them reach their prime, possibly your children’s children may enjoy their grateful shade, and thank the planter for his trouble. The growth of the seeds will be very slow, but pray have patience; if you will protect the young shoots they will certainly flourish. I ask you in all sincerity to perform this, the request of one who, though he knows you not, is your well-wisher.”

I then carefully sealed the bottles, and when I had thus prepared them we returned to the Trent side, and I committed them to the stream at due intervals. When the last bottle had been launched darkness began to fall, soon to be dispersed by a splendid moon which rose into the eastern sky, as we retraced our steps to the lonely village over the hill. On our way we paused whilst I listened to the nightingales singing in the wood. In the stillness of this calm

night the music was entrancing, and I could feel the pulsations of the air in my ears. We arrived at the inn shortly after ten o'clock, and, speaking for myself, glad to be alive, and well content with the manner in which the day had been spent.

"Pontiflunk," said I, on Thursday morning, the 10th of May, "if thou art not as fortunate a mongrel as ever scratched an ear with a hind leg, may I never plant another acorn. Here is a letter from Lancashire in which I am bidden to convey to thee the united greetings of my family, and to assure thee of a most cordial reception on our return. They say that they cannot think thou art such an ungainly creature as I would have them believe; and indeed I fear that in my account I did thee much injustice; for what I then thought were defects I now consider to be thy chief charms. What I then set down as cowardice and servility in thee I now perceive to be a gentle spirit, which was crushed and beaten, so to speak, under the weight of adverse circumstances. Thus do we foolishly and spitefully misjudge each other, and make this flying world hell enough. Now for the wrong I have done thee, or rather for the wrong I might have done thee—for thy friends shut their ears to detraction—I truly repent, and beg thy pardon; and if I ever again do thee the injury of ill report may I never see another cornfield. There is one small matter, however, which I shall now mention. I allude to thy singular trick of protruding thy tongue. I have been at some pains to repress a similar trait in my children, and I fear when we return home the effect of my admonitions will be considerably weakened by thy unwholesome

example. I request, therefore, that unless thou suffer some deformity in that organ, thou wilt confine it to its proper range—thus. When thou dost yawn or lap I say nothing to its exposure, but do not as a general thing permit it beyond its legitimate bounds.

“You must know, Pontifunk, that yesterday I did write home for some fine clothes, which I expect on the morrow. We are so near the merry city of Nottingham that I am unwilling to pass by without a sight of it, though as a rule I have so far avoided the busy hum of men in my wanderings. I suggest that this day be one of comparative inaction and meditation. Let us draw in deep breaths of air, and, if possible, the spirit and joy of the spring, as we lie in the sweet meadows about us. At midday I shall again wash thee and trim thy wandering locks in preparation for our journey to-morrow; and at night we will go forth again to hear the bird-music in the vale of the Trent.”

The Fingringhoe Oak, Winter.

THE FINGRINGHOE OAK (WINTER)

In December the oak has lost all but the last shrivelled remnants of foliage, and like a close-reefed ship, stands bare to meet the winter's ravage. Deep in the hidden roots the sap lies quiescent ; wherefore the frosts siege the young twigs with harmless grip.

Save the Major Oak, I know of no tree whose wintry aspect is finer than the Oak of Fingringhoe. Here are seen the massive dimensions of the trunk from which spring the huge boughs. These are twisted and turned to all points of the compass, and rapidly, but by subtle gradations, dwindle to the fine twigs which appear like mist fading into the pallid sky. Or, regarding the tree in another manner, we may look upon it as a map of a vast and intricate river system, whereof the small twigs are tiny rills springing from the high mountain-sides, and having so obscure a beginning that the observer can scarcely define their commencement. These hair-like streams soon unite into the lesser branches, which in turn flow into the main boughs ; till at last all are gathered into the trunk and disappear into the ocean of ground. The picture scarcely does justice to the tree, for a biting wind swayed the fine spray, and rendered its exquisite detail invisible in the photograph.

Never is the loneliness of the country so striking as when frost has bound all the land in its rigid grip. The farmers are seldom abroad in the fields, but remain close to their homesteads, caring for their flocks and herds ; and in the long winter nights sit round the kitchen fire with their wives, talking over the successes and failures of the closing year, and planning for the coming seasons. The glowing-cheeked children gathered about their parents' knees find faces in the fire or doze under the genial influence of the cheery warmth. The rigour of the season draws men together, and they realise that there is a bond of sympathy between them which is little felt in milder months of the year. There is a cessation of crime in the land ; and birds, forsaking solitary habits, assemble round the haunts of man, as though the frost-bound ways proclaimed a truce to the war waged by man on the inhabitants of fields and woods.

CHAPTER IX

MARCHING ORDERS

WHEN I consider the oak in all its aspects I am almost appalled at the immensity of the subject, and despair of ever doing justice to the theme. I realise what a fine bulky tome could be written on the noble tree; and in my wanderings, when inclement weather has kept me indoors, without access to literature or sociable company, I have often passed the time in contemplation of what such a mighty volume should be, and have more than once imagined myself seated in a high, lonely tower, overlooking a vast pomp of woods, and commanding a view of the distant sea, whilst deeply engaged in the great work.

I should begin with the anthology of the oak, and what a mighty chapter this would be! I should collect all references that I could find in the poets and classical writers, from the earliest days of song and story down to this panting twentieth century. How I should delight in pursuing my subject through forgotten dusty paths of literature; tracing the history of legends to their source, or until they vanished into the mists of tradition; and weaving these scattered fragments into a glorious con-

tinuity not altogether unworthy of the entrancing subject!

Another mighty chapter in this imaginary work would contain minute descriptions of all those trees, living or dead, which have been or are famous in song or story. I would describe with detail and enthusiasm the sturdy monsters in Sherwood Forest; the King and Queen Oaks, the Twelve Apostles, and the site of the vanished Rufus Oak in the New Forest; the Newland Oak; the indigenous veterans in the Forest of Dean; and the weird mossy wizards of Wistman's Wood. I would include a reference to that dead desecrated monster that gave too good a concealment to the lewd Stuart; the historic Oak of Selborne would not be forgotten; nor the eccentric Veteran of Cadenham. Then, too, would I make due note of the great Cowthorpe Oak, mightiest of England's trees, standing near the secluded valley of the Nidd, Yorkshire's sweetest dale, where, one fateful July evening, Roundhead and Royalist mingled their angry blood on Marston Moor. This monster's gigantic bole measures 48 ft. in circumference at a distance of 3 ft. from the ground, and though weighed down with the burden of sixteen hundred years, the veteran still puts forth a goodly show of leaves. I would also make reference to the Shire Oak, which droppeth its acorns in three counties; Cowper's Oak, in Northamptonshire, said to have been planted in the Conqueror's time; and that monarch of antiquity in Salcy Forest, Buckinghamshire, which, tradition avers, hath shed his leaves for full eighteen hundred years. Of the Gospel Oak, chosen, it is said, as a stand by the

Christian Missionaries to preach to the heathen Saxons in the seventh century, and under which an annual service is held, honourable notice would be given; and its romantic surroundings in the remote Suffolk hamlet duly described. The Crouch Oak, Addlestone, the King's Oak, Tilford, and the Merton Oak, Norfolk, would all be given a place. In Staffordshire, the county of contrasts, there are some fine fellows which I should include in the roll of honour, as well as other storied specimens in Essex, Devonshire and Worcestershire.

In another chapter I would set forth the changes in the aspect of the tree from youth to hoary age, and throughout the full round of the seasons. I would describe the grim, black, writhing form of bole, bough and branch as seen against the lurid sky at the close of a mid-winter afternoon; then the first appearance of the bud; the bursting of it; the more than autumnal ruddiness of the early shoots; the gay glory of the full summer foliage, heightened by the continued sprouting of young red shoots; the yellowing tints of autumn; and the ghostly ashen hues of the withered leaves rustling forlornly in the wintry blasts.

Following on this entrancing chapter would be a dissertation on the soils best suited to the tree; a section on galls and the diseases of the oak; a reference to that mirth-moving theory of Barnacle or Tree-geese; a chapter on the ancient laws of Ovest and Pawnage; information on the planting, nurture, felling and seasoning of the timber, and the means adopted in old times to produce knee-timber for ship-building.

Then would follow a description of famous buildings and objects in which oak is largely or wholly present, special prominence being given to that mighty disc which is said to have formed the Table Round of the valiant Arthur and his knights, now shown in the civic hall of Winchester, and of which tradition adds that the perforations therein were made by Cromwell's bullets. Oh, Oliver, how thou hast been maligned by Stuart sycophants! Whenever I hear a man speak of the damage done by thee, I am prepared for a snivelling rascal who will impudently ask for money for relating his lies.

After this chapter would come the vast bibliography of the subject, and finally the copious index. Then I would endeavour to enlist the assistance of masterly artists to paint with sympathetic touch some of our finest specimens of the tree. These paintings would be reproduced by the highest process of lithography, and scattered like jewels through the volume, so that the reader, beholding them, would vow fealty and affection to the oak for ever.

In the selection of the paper on which the great work would be printed I would exercise the most fastidious care. I would choose none of that lead-heavy, glossy, stinking stuff on which too many books have of late been printed; neither would I select that rotten, spongy substance which is often used; but I would have fine, hard, hand-made paper from the mills of Kent. The type would be bold and clear—the size English; the margins duly spacious in regard to the page, but not of absurd proportions; and the edges would be gilt. The binding would be

rich cream-tinted vellum, with a flowing design of oak boughs and leaves curiously wrought thereon. Oh, it would be a brave work!

I have mentioned the Selborne Oak, and I cannot refrain from quoting Gilbert White when he is describing the tree that stood in his beloved village. The passage makes no pretensions to eloquence, but to me there is a charm about it which I have failed to find in more ambitious descriptions—

“In the centre of the village, and near the church, is a square piece of ground surrounded by houses, and vulgarly called the Plestor. In the midst of this spot stood, in old times, a vast oak with a short squat body, and huge horizontal arms extending almost to the extremity of the area. This venerable tree, surrounded with stone steps, and seats above them, was the delight of old and young, and a place of much resort in summer evenings; where the former sat in grave debate, while the latter frolicked and danced before them. Long might it have stood had not the amazing tempest of 1703 overturned it at once, to the infinite regret of the inhabitants and the vicar, who bestowed several pounds in setting it in its place again; but all his care could not avail; the tree sprouted for a time, then withered and died. This oak I mention to show to what a bulk planted oaks also may arrive: and planted this tree must certainly have been, as will appear from what will be said further concerning this area, when we enter on the antiquities of Selborne.”

I take this to be the most charming picture of English village life ever penned, and if anything can

persuade the people of this century to have a care that their descendants may enjoy such rural delights as the gentle naturalist here describes, surely it is this description. The tempest of 1703 was a sorry event, and many a sturdy English oak was laid low during this visitation, the like of which has not been recorded before or since in these islands. It was this same tempest which furnished Addison with his great simile, which contributed greatly to the advancement of his fortunes.

It is remarkable that the poets, when alluding to the oak, dwell chiefly on the aged and grisly aspect of the tree, avoiding for the most part any reference to the beauty of its foliage, or the umbrageous spread of its branches. Prospero, scolding his dainty Ariel, thus threatens him—

“If thou more murmurest, I will rend an oak,
And peg thee in its knotty entrails, till
Thou hast howled away twelve winters.’

Knotty entrails! knotty entrails! The smack of that phrase is fine.

Again, we find the melancholy Jacques nourishing his sad philosophy—

“As he lay along
Under an oak, whose antique root peeps out
Upon the brook that brawls along this wood”—

as though the tree were fitting company for dolorous thoughts. Indeed, every Shakespearean reference to the oak touches upon the sterner qualities, and I append a few more quotations which bear out this statement. In *Measure for Measure* the noble

Isabella, pleading for her erring brother in a speech of great power exclaims—

“ Merciful Heaven !
Thou rather with thy sharp and sulph’rous bolt
Splitt’st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak,
Than the soft myrtle.”

In *As you Like It* the love-sick Orlando, chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancy, sees his banished brother asleep

“ Under an oak whose boughs were mossed with age,
And high top bald with dry antiquity.”

In one of the storm scenes in *Lear* there is expressed the belief that the oak is peculiarly susceptible to the lightning’s stroke. Battered by the outrageous tempest, the distraught king thus invites destruction from its fury—

“ Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks ! rage ! blow !
You cataracts and hurricanoes spout
Till you have drench’d our steeples, drown’d the cocks !
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head ! ”

Edmund Spenser hath a fine stanza which well describes the desolate aspect of a decrepit old monster. The extract forms the twenty-eighth stanza of *The Ruines of Rome*—

“ He that hath seene a great Oke drie and dead,
Yet clad with reliques of some Trophees olde,
Lifting to heaven her aged hoarie head,
Whose foote in ground hath left but feeble holde,
But halfe disbowel’d lies above the ground,
Shewing her wreathed rootes, and naked armes,
And on her trunke, all rotten and unsound,
Onely supports herselfe for meate of wormes ;

And though she owe her fall to the first winde,
 Yet of the devout people is ador'd,
 And manie young plants spring out of her rinde :
 Who such an Oke hath seene, let him record
 That such this Cities honour was of yore,
 And mongst all Cities flourished much more."

The *Shepheard's Calendar*, under February, contains a fable of an oak and a briar. The full story does not lend itself very aptly to quotation, but the description of the old tree is characteristic, and is interesting because it probably suggested Shakespeare's

 " Mossed with age,
 And high top bald with dry antiquity."

" There grewe an aged Tree on the greene,
 A goody Oake sometime had it beene,
 With arms full strong and largely displayed,
 But of their leaves they were disarayde :
 The bodie bigge and mightely pight,
 Thoroughly rooted, and of wonderous hight ;
 Whilome had bene the King of the field,
 And mochell mast to the husband did yelde,
 And with his nuts larded many swine ;
 But now the gray mosse marred his rine ;
 His bared boughs were beaten with stormes,
 His top was bald and wasted with wormes,
 His honor decayed, his branches sere."

In the first canto of the *Faerie Queene* Spenser's admiration is clearly manifest ; for in his description of the grove in which the Red Cross knight and his lady seek shelter from the storm he speaks of—

 " The builder Oake, sole king of forrests all."

It is certain that the poet had a deep affection for the tree ; and Willis, the antiquary, contended that the *Faerie Queene* was written beneath an oak in Whaddon Chase, Buckinghamshire.

Congreve in his *Mourning Bride*, wishing to describe the soothing effect of music over savage and rugged natures, chooses the oak as a type of inflexibility—

“Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast,
To soften rooks, or bend the knotted oak.”

In Tennyson's *Foresters*, a play steeped in the spirit of wild woodland life, are many allusions to the patriarchal oaks of Sherwood. Perhaps the finest description is that put in the mouth of Robin Hood as he invites Maid Marion to sit by his side after her crowning with the oaken chaplet—

“Sit here by me, where the most beaten track
Runs thro' the forest, hundreds of huge oaks,
Gnarled—older than the thrones of Europe—look
What breadth, height, strength—torrents of eddying bark!
Some hollow-hearted from exceeding age—
That never be thy lot or mine!—and some
Pillaring a leaf-sky on their monstrous boles,
Sound at the core as we are.”¹

Read again the graceful adieu to the glades of Sherwood, as Robin and Marion follow the king to the court—

Robin.

I trust

We shall return to the wood. Meanwhile, farewell,
Old friends, old patriarch oaks. A thousand winters
Will strip you bare as death, a thousand summers
Robe you life-green again. *You* seem, as it were,
Immortal, and we mortal. How few Junes
Will heat our pulses quicker! How few frosts
Will chill the hearts that beat for Robin Hood!

¹ These lines are printed by permission of Messrs. Macmillan & Co. Ltd., the owners of the copyright.

Marion. And yet I think these oaks at dawn and even,
Or in the balmy breathings of the night,
Will whisper evermore of Robin Hood.
We leave but happy memories to the forest.

Thompson, the wholesale dealer in flowing epithets, has caught the customary poetic point of view, and would have us believe that he would ponder his ambitious theme in this fashion—

“Hence let me haste into the mid-wood shade,
Where scarce a sunbeam wanders through the gloom ;
And on the dark green grass, beside the brink
Of haunted stream, that by the roots of oak
Rolls o’er the rocky channel, lie at large,
And sing the glories of the circling year.”

Chaucer, whose delight in the spring season continually breaks forth in his verse, has in his *Flower and the Leaf* described the rapture of one who, rising ere the sun some mild May morning, goes forth into the clear scented air and paces the wet grass beneath an avenue of oak—

“Wherefore I mervaille greatly of my selfe,
That I withouten sleepe so longe lay ;
And up I rose three houres after twelfe,
Aboute the springing of the day ;
And on I putte my geare and mine array,
And to a pleasant grove I gan to passe,
Long or the brighte Sonne up-risen was ;

In which were okes greate, streight as a line,
Under the which the grasse, so fresh of hewe,
Was newly sprong ; and an eight foot or nine
Every tree well fro his fellow grew,
With branches brode, lade with leves newe,
That sprongen out ayen the sunne shene,
Some very red, and some a glad light grene ;

Which, as me thoughte, was right a pleasant sight;
 And else the briddes songes for to here
 Would have rejoyced any earthly wight;
 And I that couthe not yet, in no manere,
 Heare the nightingale of all the yeare,
 Ful busily, herkened with hart and eare,
 If I her voice perceive could any where."

The only criticism I have to offer on these lines is on a technical point. It is doubtful whether great oaks could grow if only eight or nine feet apart. This pitch is altogether too small.

Keats also has a very fine passage in *Hyperion*, in which a grove of venerable oaks in the stillly night is used for a noble simile. The voice of Thea, sympathising with the fallen Saturn, is thus described:—

"As when, upon a tranced summer night,
 Those green-robed senators of mighty woods,
 Tall oaks, branch-charmed by the earnest stars,
 Dream, and so dream all night without a stir,
 Save from one gradual solitary gust
 Which comes upon the silence, and dies off
 As if the ebbing air had but one wave;
 So came these words and went."

A striking picture of a grove of storm-battered oaks is given in a charming letter written by Dorothy Wordsworth to Coleridge, and it is the more interesting in that it reveals the impressions created in the mind of her immortal brother by the sight of such rugged and forlorn objects—

"In the morning William and I had so much enjoyment that regrets forced themselves on us continually that you were not with us, at least had not seen the place where we were. Mary is to go to-

morrow. William found it out by himself. It is a little slip of the river above Rydal that makes the famous waterfalls, about two hundred yards in length. It is high up towards the mountains, where one would not have expected any trees to be, and down it tumbles among rocks and trees—trees of all shapes, elegant birches and ancient oaks, that have grown as tall as the storms would let them, and are now decaying away, their naked branches like shattered lances, or the whole tree like a thing hacked or dismantled, as William says, to impale malefactors upon. On one of them was an old glead's nest. With these are green hollies and junipers, a little waterfall, endless, endless waterbreaks, now a rock starting forward, now an old tree, enough to look at for hours, and then the whole scene in a long prospect. It is a miniature of all that can be conceived of savage and grand about a river with a great deal of the beautiful. William says that whatever Salvator might desire could there be found."

It is held by some that you may judge a man by the company he keeps; others will ask who is your favourite poet, and will estimate your character according to your answer. Some people of an artistic temperament will judge you by the pictures hanging in your home; whilst others will inquire very closely as to your attitude to the amber-tinted glass, or your faith in a resurrection. I apply none of these tests; but if I desired to try the adoption of a friend—a mighty foolish thing to do—I would take him to the woods, and pointing to the denizens there, I would ask him to declare his favourite tree. If he

said the oak, I would lend money to him if he asked me. If he chose the elm, I would respect him, though I would not perhaps go so far as to lend money: and truly, were my energies not devoted to the welfare of the oak, I should wish them to be directed to the elm, which I consider to be the second best in England's woods and forests.

There be some that object to the oak on account of his shaggy, uneven look, and his sometimes whiskered bole. They do not love to see the grisly black arms which he is wont to thrust in angry protest to the winds and lightning which have done him scath. Yet, when you know him, you will the more esteem him for these rugged characteristics. He is not a tidy fellow, I grant you: but who prefers the insipid features of mere respectability to the countenance of an old warrior or sailor, all scars and corrugations?

As they stand stark and black in the frosty air of winter, there is no other tree that vies with the oak in the witchery of its effect. Stand and gaze at a single lusty specimen against a cold, blue-grey sky, and at a distance of about three hundred yards from the bole. Then the threadlike spray appears as a mist softening the outline of branch and bole, shading with fine effect the jet black of the boughs into the dreary tint of the sky. Again, if you would obtain another fine aspect of the oak, observe a line of vigorous young fellows some three hundred years of age. Take your stand at a point about two hundred feet from the last of the line, and look down the rank at an angle of about fifteen degrees. The effect of the multitude of twigs is weird. A dim vista of

mighty branches, like gigantic snakes writhing in all directions, appears arising from a blue-grey smoke.

Have you ever paced the solemn woods in the weird twilight of a still, frosty, winter afternoon, and, as you have approached the western fringe of the forest, seen the form of a massive oak silhouetted against a ruddy sky? It is a fine sight. The venerable form seems to exude blackness. Look to the skeleton of the beech or birch between you and the glow, and without comparing it with the oak, you may say here is absolute blackness. Turn now to the noble tree, and you will see that what you considered ebon before is not the true thing; for the tree on which you now gaze shows perfect no-light, and none other.

In accordance with our resolution, Pontiflunk and I passed the greater part of Thursday in idling about the village and the meadows. Pontiflunk's ablutions were duly performed and three acorns were carefully planted. I also succeeded in enlisting the sympathies of my landlord in behalf of storied oaks. Late in the afternoon I assisted in the capture of a wily horse that objected to the halter, and in the fruitless search for a large, vicious, black rabbit, which had escaped from the hutch of one of my village friends. These important and strenuous exertions induced a mighty thirst, which my good host assuaged by a pleasing mixture of liquors. At night we walked over the hill to listen to the nightingales in the Trent valley. On our return I witnessed an ale-drinking contest. There were three competitors who, at a given signal, drank from full quart pots. The last man to put down his empty pot paid for the liquor consumed by

the more expert swallows, and of course that drunk by himself. These men were great and rapid drinkers, and the winner downed his ale in twelve and two-third seconds, and the loser was nearly two seconds behind him. I noticed that the winner, in drinking, concentrated his whole attention on the ale, but the others glanced over the rims of their pots at their opponents, and thus lost time.

This inn, I learned, was the scene of many interesting competitions. A week before my arrival the landlord offered a half-crown prize to the man who brought in the largest ivy leaf. The winner produced a leaf six and a quarter inches across the broadest part, which he found growing upon the trunk of a withered oak near Oxton Bog. These diversions, I think, are very good things. They add variety to the life of sequestered villagers, and render a rather monotonous existence tolerable. In heavy winter days the memory of past contests affords an ever-pleasing theme of conversation, and the anticipation of coming events cheers the innocent villagers when snow lies deep in field and hollow.

"Pontiflunk," said I on Friday morning, "we shall not go to Nottingham to-day. I have changed my intentions. Our estimable but inexorable friend has again threatened a cessation of supplies, and in accordance with his instructions we shall this day take up a position on the south bank of the Trent. Thou lucky dog! thou hast found another friend in this stern man, who, if I fall upon evil days, will offer thee a not altogether uncomfortable home. I am somewhat perplexed, Pontiflunk, as to the date of thy nativity; for by the law of my country, which I deem

it my duty to obey, however much I dispute the justice of it, if thou hast seen six moons I must contribute certain moneys to the national treasury for the privilege of having thee dangling at my heels. When I look upon thee in thy serious moods, which praise be are neither so frequent nor profound as erstwhile, thou dost seem to carry the weight of years; but when thou art joyous I feel thou art but of tender age; and in this I am confirmed by the examination of thine ivory. But this uncertainty must trouble me no longer; so let us to the village postman and procure a certificate, making our relationship lawful in the face of man. 'Tis less than a week since we began to share our fortunes, and yet I already observe that thy slim angularity doth gradually give place to a comfortable rotundity; but I must take heed that the process doth not continue until thou art swollen with gross adiposity. Thine eyes, too, have acquired new lustre, and no more do they send dark, melancholy rivers of tears down thy dear, foolish face."

About eleven of the clock we set out, and climbed the southern ridge, on the top of which we spent a pleasant hour. The sight of the brimming river below set me pondering on the origin of its well-sounding name, and I realised what supreme word-artists our ancestors were in the designation of the rivers of this country. With a few exceptions the names are poetry—a sure sign of the affection of the inhabitants for the streams near which they lived. Is there a sweeter word in language than Severn? Our friends in America have not risen to the occasion in this respect, and except where the aboriginal name has been retained, their vast streams bear either

commonplace or bizarre names. The energies of the early settlers have been too strenuously devoted to taming the wild and to the pursuit of material wealth to leave them the requisite leisure to find euphonious syllables for the stately currents of their spacious country. They lavish no harmonious accents, but choose the first name that suggests itself, whether it be that of a bold pioneer, an animal which the early squatter finds on its banks, the tinge of its waters, or simply the name of the district through which the river flows. With us it has been far otherwise. A long acquaintance with our charming streams has, I believe, fostered a great affection which has found expression in such names as Wensum, Swale, Thames, Teme, Tweed, Waveney, Welland, Witham, Conway, Lune, Derwent, Medway, Mersey, Ribble, Avon, Frome, and others. Such words make it a pleasure to pore over a map of England; and for my part, if I am weather-bound in some inn or cottage, without access to literature, I can always pass a cheerful hour by studying a good map of the country.

To my mind, the very shape of these islands is pleasing, and I believe no such fascinating outlines mark the ocean limits of other lands. It would seem that some artistic providence has shaped our coasts; for let a map of the British Islands be drawn with but slight deviations from the correct figure and the beauty is gone. Place an inlet at Flamborough Head, a promontory at the Wash; weaken the bold rotundity of Norfolk; give Cornwall and the Llyn Peninsula a deflection northwards; smooth the rugged grandeur of the west coasts of Scotland and Ireland, and then see the ghastly result.

It is when confined to a lonely house, under stress of weather, and one is thrown entirely on the resources of meditation, that the delights of literature are most strongly realised. Happy is he who, after a few hours' confinement under these conditions, discovers in some neglected corner a precious volume which he has known as yet only by repute : an enchanting excursion into the realm of letters is before him. I well remember wandering some years ago, late in September, on the pleasant range of hills that overlooks the wide tract of plain between Liverpool and Southport, and commands a view of the distant sea. The day had opened with an ominous brightness, and before noon dark clouds came sailing from over the Irish Sea, and poured themselves in angry, drenching gusts over the stubbled fields and darkening woods. Seeking shelter from the tempest, I found a lonely inn on the hillside, and entered a dreary, musty parlour. With a little persuasion the people consented to make a fire, and the cheery blaze almost reconciled me to the ugly room. A local newspaper lay upon the table, and I passed some time without discomfort ; but the serious little journal was soon read, and I began to chafe at my imprisonment. The weather was hopeless, and the inn suffered an utter lack of company. The landlord was abroad, and his poor, faded wife was deep in the miseries of washing. In my desperation I prowled into the kitchen and asked the busy woman if there were any books in the house. She paused in her toil over the foamy wash-tub, and pointed with wrinkled, dripping finger to a small row of battered volumes arranged in careless fashion on a shelf between the fireplace and

the door, and with eagerness I inspected the ragged books. The first glance was disappointing. A treatise on mensuration, a first French course, Euclid's Elements, an English Grammar adapted for the use of schools, and several pious tales with morals were peevishly thrust aside; but at last I struck a vein of gold in the dross, and with a grunt of deep satisfaction I seized a copy of Johnson's *Journey to the Hebrides*, and hurried with the prize to the parlour. I drew up the chair before the fire, and recked not of weather or time. No book I have ever read has such a place in my affections as that delightful volume of travel found on the lonely hills that wild September day.

These thoughts passed the time as we descended to the village on the bank of the Trent, and on our arrival there we obtained dinner at the inn hard by the river. I afterwards procured three more bottles, and inserted acorns exactly in the manner already described, a note being enclosed in each. We then arrived at the stream, and I cast one of the bottles into the water. Afterwards we sat on the river bank for a little time, whilst I endeavoured to arrive at a decision as to whether we should make our way up or down the stream to obtain a crossing. After careful consideration of the question I finally decided to walk up the stream; and casting the second bottle into the river, we resumed our journey. Our path lay through open country, which formed the flat bottom of a broad valley, and in about half an hour we came to a ferry. We crossed by the assistance of a merry soul with a blue complexion and a boisterous whisper, who had, he told me, been ferryman here for thirty

years. He appeared to ignore Anno Domini, and marked time by the Trent floods, which have in past times caused great damage, and covered the country for miles. In flood times a red tinge denotes that the river is drawing its waters chiefly from Leicestershire and Warwickshire by way of the Soar, the Wreak, and the Anker; but a grey tint shows that the Derbyshire tributaries, the Dove and the Derwent, are supplying most of the current. As we reached the centre of the stream I placed the third bottle on the limpid flood, and watched it drifting to its unknown destiny. Before us, and apparently at a distance of about a mile, stood a solitary, massive church tower, towards which we directed our steps, until we came to one of the quietest villages I have ever beheld. The Trent at this part of its course sweeps in the form of a semicircle about two miles in diameter, and the church and village are situated centrally between the extremities of the semicircle, and are therefore about a mile from the river in every direction except the south, where, of course, the stream does not flow. It is this sweep of the Trent which renders the village so secluded. The land within the semicircle of the river is flat, and in past times there is no doubt that the river wandered over this tongue of ground; for I observed what I took to be an old river bed running close by the village, whose name, Shelford, would seem to indicate close proximity to a stream. Beyond the village the land rises gently to the ridge of a hill, which I estimated to be about two hundred and twenty feet higher than the river, and the distance from this ridge to the one above the village we had left is some four or five miles.

We entered this obscure Nottinghamshire village, and established ourselves at a small inn, under the care of a good, motherly old soul. I then wrote home, and sent the following despatch to my esteemed friend :—

“SHELFORD, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE,

“4 *p.m.* Friday, 11th May 19—.

“Acting on your instructions, we this day left our former quarters, and have advanced south of the Trent. The movement was executed with entire success, and we are now well entrenched in our new position. Our passage of the river was not contested; the inhabitants appear friendly, and pursue their usual avocations. We have advanced into the country entirely without opposition, and we shall apparently have no difficulty in obtaining supplies. To-morrow we hope to commence a flanking movement of great importance.

“I am pleased to state that our casualties in executing this movement are *nil*.

“I take this opportunity of recording my appreciation of the manner in which my orders were carried out by Pontiflunk. To his entire devotion to duty much of the success of this rapid advance is due.”

In making this obscure village our halting-place, I had executed a very crafty move. It was with sincere regret that I received orders to move on, for I was by no means tired of the Trent valley. I determined, therefore, to comply with the letter of the command, but not with the spirit. I had observed this little village from the hills north of the

river, and it occurred to me that by a series of half-truths I could convey to my noble friend the impression that we had made a very considerable advance. I felt sure that he would not be able to locate our exact position, for the village is not mentioned in Bradshaw, and is altogether too insignificant to appear on an ordinary map of the country; and although my friend is the owner of an ordnance sheet of the district, he lent it to me before I set out on my travels. This map I had not returned, but had stored away in a desk along with other papers and plans. Here, then, we could hope to remain for three or four days, until the patience of my noble friend became exhausted, and he issued marching orders. As it was, we were not more than five miles south of our previous resting-place. The contemplation of my adroitness afforded me infinite satisfaction, and on the Friday night of my arrival in Shelford I was more hilarious than is my wont. Towards evening a few callow youths, ranging in age from fifty to one hundred years, assembled at the little inn to discuss the weighty affairs of state. I endeavoured, with some success, to lead the conversation into less serious channels; and I had the pleasure of introducing the excellent game of cottam to their notice, which they warmly admired and played with surprising zest. Before nine o'clock they became mellow, and we had many a ponderous jest. We dispersed at ten, with unanimous expressions of undying friendship.

BIG BEN, DANBURY PARK

If I had to choose where I would live in Essex I think it would be Danbury. From broad green stretches of plain the ground rises 365 feet above the sea level. In Essex this is considered a mountain; and indeed, having no compeers, the height is impressive. The views from this breezy upland are majestic. To the east the indented coast can be traced for miles. To the west, at a distance of 5 miles, lies Chelmsford, and beyond the town are seen dim blue ridges of distant wooded hills, probably the heights of Epping Forest. A man told me that the estuary of the Thames could be seen on clear days, but I imagine he was taking advantage of my innocent appearance. Men that live on such isolated hills as this are to be envied by dalesmen and dwellers on the plain of their ampler, intense, and inspiring skies.

It seems that Danbury Park was purchased by the ecclesiastical commissioners in 1845, as a residence for the bishops of Rochester. I do not greatly venerate the ecclesiastical mind, but I do admire the ecclesiastical eye. As a residence for bishops of Rochester I have only one objection to make: the men would be too far from their job. This no doubt dawned on the foolish commissioners, for the place has passed into other hands; and to its present owner, Lieut. Col. the Hon. A. Greville, the author is indebted for the opportunity of obtaining the picture.

Big Ben has a circumference of 33 ft. at a height of 5 ft. above the ground. He is a singularly well-preserved and healthy specimen. Scarcely a branch is decayed; and, viewed from a short distance, the trunk has quite a tender, juicy appearance; but on a near approach vast wrinkled knobs and bosses covered with hair-like twigs are found on all sides. If there is a finer English oak in full vigour I have never seen it. Several faces may be discovered on the trunk, but the handsome profile above the figure seated on the ground is very conspicuous.

The illustration was taken in a sunny interval between snowstorms on the afternoon of Tuesday, 27th December 1910. A strong breeze whistled through the branches, and though the music was fine to hear, the violence and rigour of the wind increased the difficulties of obtaining a satisfactory negative, and rendered the detail of the finer branches a little indistinct.

Big Ben, Danbury Park.

CHAPTER X

THE BUSY HUM OF MEN

I HAD arranged with my late host to send forward my clothes by carrier to Shelford, and at nine o'clock on Saturday morning they duly arrived. We had breakfast, and I then put on the new garments; retaining, however, heavy boots, which are absolutely necessary for comfort in a prolonged walking tour. We set out for Nottingham a little after ten o'clock. We kept as close to the river as possible, and soon passed through a wood overhanging red clay cliffs abutting the stream. We then passed through a large village, and descended to some rich level pastures bordering the south bank of the Trent. I was pleased with the prospect, and stood by a hedge admiring the scenery, whose charms lay in the vivid freshness of the grass (though I doubt if it equalled the marvellous verdure of the Lincolnshire meadows) and the distant view of richly wooded hills. Fortunate indeed are they who live in sight of hills, to which they can make a temporary retreat from the weariness of everyday life and anxiety. I do not mean in the midst of a vast assemblage of hills or mountains, which close the view in all directions, but where their stately forms

are seen through an azure of distance, and the imagination can picture the details of their slopes to its own fancy. An ineffable charm for weary men lies in their outlines, and the suggestion of repose that rests upon their summits. Their moods are manifold. They beckon, they frown and repel, they glow and glisten. Sometimes they appear near, and sometimes far away. At times they seem of vast height, and anon they shrink to insignificance, according to the state of the atmosphere and the feelings of the beholder. Their hues vary as the sky or the sea. There is no silence like the silence of lonely hills; and nowhere save on the sea does the tempest sound its essential note but around their desolate summits.

When I had stood a few minutes by the hedge I saw a slightly bent figure approaching, which I soon perceived to be a parson. His air, though sad, was most kindly and venerable, and I greeted him, whereat he returned my salute with an old world grace.

"You are a stranger to these parts, I think?" said he.

"Yes," I replied, "I am a bird of passage, but a very slow one. I have walked from Lancashire, through the Derbyshire wilds, and I am bound for the south of England, and possibly Devonshire."

"I see you do not choose the direct route: the main highways from north to south run some miles east and west of our present position.

"Oh," said I, "I avoid the highways as much as possible, and seek the most unfrequented paths."

"Has your little dog been with you in all your wanderings?" said he, stooping to caress Pontiflunk,

who politely licked his hands. "I will be bound you have found him good company."

I then told him how I had met my companion. "A dog," I said, "is in some respects an ideal companion for a tour such as mine. He never argues the best course to pursue or the distance to be covered, and he never worries about food or lodgings; and to one who is whimsical in his wanderings these are great boons."

I then showed him a few acorns, and gave him an account of some of my experiences, at which he seemed greatly interested, and readily accepted a few seeds to set in his garden. We then talked of the river, and he described the wild aspect of the country when the stream was in flood. When it overflows the banks, the land for a wide stretch on each side is submerged, only the tops of trees and hedges appearing above the waste of waters. The heights of the most remarkable floods in recent years are marked, he said, on Trent Bridge, Nottingham; and I afterwards found this to be the case. It appears that, owing to the impounding of the head waters of some of the Derbyshire feeders, disastrous floods are now of rare occurrence; and more attention than formerly is given to the construction of banks to confine the stream during heavy rains. At Shelford they extend for a considerable distance, and effectually shield that low-lying village.

The old man was very interesting on the antiquities of the district. He described an ancient building on the top of one of the hills, which was built for or inhabited by the dissolute John, before he became King of England. This building is now occupied as

a farmhouse, and I had noticed it on a previous day, and admired the sturdy architecture, and the excellence of the brickwork, though I had no idea that it was so ancient a building as it is reputed to be.

"The house you can just see there through the trees," said he, "was a favourite haunt of Byron's in his youth. It was Mary Chaworth's home. It is an hotel now, and the sombre woods round it have been cleared to give more air. Whilst you are in this part of the country you should visit Belvoir Castle. It is a beautiful place, charmingly seated on a wooded mound."

I thanked him for his interesting conversation, and bid him adieu, and he stroked Pontifunk kindly as we left him and resumed our journey to Nottingham.

Before long our approach to the town was denoted by unmistakable signs. I could hear the distant shrieking of engines, and the rattle of shunted wagons. The country, too, wore a draggled look, and scraps of paper, orange peel, and banana skins littered the road and hedges. Large flocks of sheep and herds of cattle were grazing in closely nibbled fields. This is an ominous sight near a large town, and to those who think, brings home the grim facts of existence. These creatures were already sold to early murder, and in these condemned fields awaited, mercifully ignorant, their bloody end. Butchers aver that their methods are painless. If this be so, these creatures, in dying, are in better plight than man, whose highly nervous system is often wracked with fierce pangs ere the breath leaves the body. But I do not believe that their death is painless, and in the case of sheep I am certain it is agony. I look forward to a time

when the present mode of slaughter will not be permitted, and no man may strike or bleed a creature without first rendering it utterly unconscious by an anæsthetic.

Pursuing our journey, we at length came in sight of a fine bridge spanning the river, on whose surface plied many small craft. We soon reached the bridge, and I obtained a fine view up and down the stream. I then strolled along the embankment, and found chiselled on the stone abutments of the bridge the flood-marks mentioned by the parson. Nottingham lies wholly on the north bank of the river, and from Trent bridge we passed through a long, uninteresting street, which gradually developed into a fine, broad, well-paved road, full of traffic of all kinds, and lined with handsome shops. Then we passed some small houses on the left-hand side, standing pleasantly back from the road under the shade of trees, then a monument or fountain, and a little further we arrived at a picturesque old church standing near a fine open space formed by the junction of several streets. Walking still on, we came at last to the great market-place, when a striking scene was before us. The spacious ground was covered with stalls and bustling people, and gay with the colour of flowers and the bright dresses of well-dressed women. Poor Pontiflunk was bewildered, and often looked entreatingly at my face, as if imploring me to return to our quiet retreat by the river. "Courage, Ponty," said I, "we shall come safely through this hubbub, and enjoy our seclusion the more by the contrast." We then walked through the market, and I afterwards looked at some of the shop windows that surround it. I was

much struck by the ostentatious wealth which I saw about me, and at the beauty, stature and fine dresses of women who paraded under verandas in front of the shops. It was a sight I shall long remember, for many weeks had passed since I had seen a crowd.

"This is a fine market-place," said I to a very sprucely attired old man, with a view to making a little conversation.

"Yes," he said, "it is the finest and biggest in the country."

"I will not dispute its beauty," I replied, "but it is certainly not the biggest."

"Why, where is there a bigger?" said he.

"At Wigan, a town in Lancashire. The market square there is much larger than this, but in other respects it is altogether inferior."

"I have heard of Wigan," said he; "do you know the place?"

"Oh, fairly well," I said. "The town is grim and dirty, and the climate is of a soupy nature; but the inhabitants, fortunately, think it is a mighty fine place. North and west of the town the country is very beautiful."

"Are not these Wiganers very violent people—about half civilised?"

"No, no, this is a libel," I replied. "They are uncouth, broad-spoken, and of a fiery, quarrelsome nature; but a stranger is handsomely treated, for they are as hospitable as they are contentious. If you are ever in Wigan visit the library there; it is one of the choicest in which you can turn a page: and when you have seen this fine collection of books, walk up the main north road to a little place called

Boar's Head and you will see some respectable timber."

Pontiflunk and I then made the entire circuit of the market-place, and as I was looking up a side street leading from the square, I caught sight of a quaint old building, occupied as a butcher's shop. There was a large sign over the door, and I crossed the road to examine the picture, and behold, it was a portrait of young Kirke-White, the unhappy Nottingham poet, and this building was his birthplace! As I stood looking at the little old building, a man with a long white beard approached with short, leisurely steps, and noting the object of my gaze, he said—

"A fine poet, sir."

"Do you think so?" said I. "I do not care for his poetry myself; it is too stilted. It is the work of an immature Pope, reared in a wretched lawyer's office. But for all that, he was an observant youth, whose intense ambition shortened his miserable life."

"Have you read *Clifton Grove*?" he asked.

"I have, and I like it not: but Nottingham need not fret over the merits of this precocious lad; she has reared another poet of higher genius."

"You mean Byron, I suppose?" said he.

"No, I don't mean Byron at all; I mean Philip James Bailey, the author of *Festus*."

"I have heard of him," he said. "He died a few years ago. If you care to go a little further up this street, and turn to the left, you will see a tablet built in the wall, to show where he was born. He lived in Nottingham all his life."

"This ground is fruitful of poets," said I. "But you have evidently not read *Festus*."

"No, I have not. What is it about?"

"It is the story of a mind, falling temporarily from high estate, but regaining its nobility after struggle and all but despair. I should think you could get a copy from any Nottingham bookseller, and there is sure to be one in the public library. Now can you recommend me to a place where I can get a good dinner?"

"I don't think you can do better than that hotel," said he, pointing to an old-fashioned rambling inn nearly opposite Kirke-White's birthplace.

"Thank you, I will try it," said I; "good-morning. Come, Pontiflunk, let us fill a long-felt want. This Flying Horse seems a very likely animal; let us make its early acquaintance."

"In faith, Pontiflunk," said I when we had finished dinner, "our friend in the market-place knew something, and we owe him thanks. They have done us well here. Let us rest awhile in this cheerful room, and then to the castle, O!"

About half-past two o'clock we left the Flying Horse and started for the historic Nottingham Castle. We passed up a narrow, tortuous lane lined with old-fashioned buildings. It was very steep and ill-paved, but we were soon out of the gloomy shade, and in less than five minutes we stood before the castle gates. Here was a difficulty, for a conspicuous notice stated that dogs were not allowed in the grounds. I approached a policeman at the gates, but he said the law must be obeyed. I then asked him if he would take charge of the harmless Pontiflunk during

my visit to the building, and to dispel the monotony of his duties I begged him to examine the really exquisite drawing on a silver coin that I showed him. I told him that if he collected such things he might keep that one, as I could come by others like it when I wanted them. This banter secured him, and I bade a short adieu to my faithful companion, who remained with his newly found keeper in the cosy ticket-office. I then passed through the charmingly laid grounds, and approached the grim fabric.

This some-time ruin, which the wise inhabitants of Nottingham have secured for themselves and their heirs and successors for ever, stands in a romantic position on the top of a vast rock, which rises some two hundred and fifty feet sheer from the boulevards at the base, and commands a wide sweep of country. Truly the old builders had a good eye for a site. The rock is honeycombed with passages and dungeons, and I secured a guide who led me to the grim depths below. I did much marvel at the rat-like habits of our ancestors, who had been at such pains to carve out these chambers and tunnels in the living rock, and I was glad of the great advances in kindness and tolerance made since wretches were cast into these abominable pits, and lay blanching and withering whilst their captors above held high revel in the sweet air and starlight. I was shown the chambers where this and that illustrious captive languished; but I soon grew tired of these clammy, subterranean regions, and ascended to the daylight. Then I made the circuit of the castle by means of a pleasant terrace, and at length entered the building by the west door, between busts of Byron and Kirke-White.

The lower rooms are used as a museum, wherein objects relating to lace and its manufacture predominate. After a hasty survey of these portions of the building, I ascended the wide staircase leading to the picture galleries above, and lo! at the head of the stairs was a magnificent painting of the Major Oak of Sherwood, all in his winter grandeur. The noble artist MacCallum, of his great affection for the oak, England, and the inhabitants of Nottingham, presented the picture to the city. It is a large, impressive work, wherein the characteristic bough formation is well brought out against the frosty glow of a winter afternoon, and I was well content to spend some time in obtaining the best view point; and when I at last left the picture I felt a greater affection for the oak than ever, and I deemed my present enterprise entirely laudable. We are fortunate when we can stand before the works of genius and reflect on our own pursuits with complacency.

I then passed on, and admired various pictures, of which, however, I retain no vivid recollection, until I came upon a portrait of the author of *Festus* in his mature manhood, and close beside it, his bust as a young man. The portrait showed a fine presence. The eye was clear and piercing, the head shapely, not particularly massive for the size of the face; the complexion fresh, the hair and beard grey grizzled. Truly a countenance worthy of the mind which had conceived and expressed in fitting words the lines--

“ We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
 In feelings, not in fingers on a dial.
 We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives
 Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best: ”

or who could say—

“We talked of studies ;

Poetry only I confess is mine,
And is the only thing I think or read of :—
Feeding my soul upon the soft, the sweet
And delicate imaginings of song ;
For as nightingales do upon glow-worms feed,
So poets live upon the living light
Of nature and of beauty.”

Thus the time passed pleasantly along as I gazed on the pictures, and when I had made the round of the galleries I rested on a seat at the front of the castle, overlooking the town below, and I thought that although there are few cities in which I should be reconciled to live, Nottingham was one of them. It was now wearing on towards late afternoon, and I began to think of returning with my innocent companion to our secluded retreat by the river. Watching for a favourable opportunity, I managed by a little stealth to set, unobserved, two acorns on the east side of the castle ; and making a final circuit of the building, I returned to the gate-house. I was pleased to find that Pontiflunk was on good terms with St. Peter at the gate, the ardent collector of modern British coins. Then down the steep, narrow street we went, back to the noise and bustle of the town.

“I will just buy a few fishy dainties,” said I to Pontiflunk, “and then we will be off, lest old Charon at the ferry hath ta'en himself and his whisper to bed. By acorns ! Pontiflunk, I am glad to be alive.”

We set off, therefore, about a quarter after five, and returned along the north bank of the Trent, through country of only middling quality, and soon

after eight o'clock I was comfortably seated in my little tavern, with an elegantly tinted crustacean duly set before me. After a hearty meal I led Pontiflunk to his straw, and then sat writing late into the night. About eleven o'clock, as the landlady was making preparations for retiring, I told her to leave the latch open, as I wished to take a short stroll before going to bed; and when all was quiet I passed out into the black night.

The sudden change from light to dark rendered my steps uncertain until my eyes became accustomed to the gloom. It seemed at first a night of absolute stillness: the sky was overcast, not a star was visible, and the air was heavy with the scent of bloom. A waning moon was due to rise later, but as yet her light was not seen. It was now that I first realised the sensation that suggests the word velvety as applied to night. Hitherto I had regarded the term as a weak and far-fetched expression; but I now felt the justice of the epithet. The air seemed like a muffling substance laid upon the land, and unconsciously I found myself rubbing my fingers together as if to feel its texture. This, I thought, is absolute silence, and I paused to listen; but in such stillness the ear becomes highly sensitive, and I was soon aware that I did not stand in perfect quietude. I could here a faint rumbling—so faint, indeed, that it was some time before I could decide whether the sound arose from a defect in my ears; but at last I felt certain it was not, and I set it down as the sound of a train in distant Nottingham. I listened again, and I could hear the steady beat of my pulse, and a low, regular tapping which puzzled me for a

little time, until I found it was the ticking of the clock in the old church tower. Then I could detect faint rustlings in the fields and hedges about me, as a hare, hedgehog, or weasel went about its nightly business. Then came the startling yelp of a fox, or the hoot of a melancholy owl, and very faintly, like the ghost of a song, I could hear the nightingales in the vale some three miles away; whilst overhead bats made their rapid flight, but the beat of their wings was not heard. Oh, it was delicious, standing there in the scented gloom, the village around me wrapped in profound slumber. My thoughts flew homewards, and dwelt fondly there for a time: then the events of my journey—even the most trivial details—passed through my mind with great rapidity and vividness. In my beatitude a kindness and fulness of heart came upon me, and even my enemies were regarded with mildness. A heavy breathing seized me, and my eyes became moist. . . . I turned sharply round, walked briskly to the tavern door, quietly raised the latch, and stole off to bed.

OAKS IN DANBURY PARK

In the depth of winter, unless snow lies upon the land, there is little beauty in the country apart from the naked trees; and when their fascinating skeletons do not form a feature of the landscape, we look eagerly for animated nature to distract attention from the weird russet, grey, and sable tints. Perhaps the finest sight the country can offer at this season is a clamouring flock of light plumaged sea-birds following the furrows of a singing ploughman.

This and the two succeeding Plates illustrate oaks in Danbury Park. The one opposite shows a time-honoured veteran with a splintered stag-headed trunk; but, notwithstanding the shattered condition of the hollow bole, most of the branches are quite vigorous, and put forth a goodly crop of leaves. This tree stands a short distance from the palace, and the remnant of the trunk measures 28 ft. 3 in. in girth 5 ft. above the ground. If Big Ben deserves his title, I think we may appropriately name this Walloping William.

The Plate at the beginning of Chapter XII. is an interesting example of a lightning-riven oak. In Lancashire this tree would be irreverently referred to as having suffered a dirty drop. Apart from the interesting effect of the lightning, the bough formation is exceedingly fine, whilst the background adds a charm to the view, and suggests sun and wind playing over a wide space of grass. The circumference of this tree is 24 ft. 4 in. at a height of 5 ft. from the ground. It is adorned with a brilliant green lichen on the lower part, which has the effect of giving a peculiar sad hue to the remaining portion, well according with the blasted part of the trunk.

The plate at the beginning of Chapter XIII. shows a type of oak of which the park contains several examples. The characteristic of this tree is the insignificant size of the branches compared with the trunk. The girth of this tree is 22 ft. 3 in. at a height of 4 ft. In all probability the trunk is hollow, though outwardly it appears sound. There is a certain rugged grandeur about this style of oak, but the object of presenting the picture is not so much as an example of beauty but to give another illustration of the infinite variety which oaks assume.

A Stag-Headed Oak.

CHAPTER XI

PLEASANT DAYS

THE village where we now rested is, as I have said, one of the most secluded I have ever seen. The cottages have red-tiled roofs, which contrast harmoniously with the green tints of the surrounding country. The church is ancient and interesting, and stands conspicuously in a green churchyard on a slight elevation above the surrounding village. It contains the tombs of some of the Stanhopes, Earls of Chesterfield, whose present descendants appear to have some interest in the surrounding country. If there is one defect in this otherwise delectable spot, it is the absence of trees of large size; and it gave me no little pleasure to reflect that, if circumstances proved favourable, the course of years would see a number of stately oaks lifting their lofty heads and stretching giant protecting arms over the plain, as a result of my visit. What a charm such an oak as White has described would add to the attractions of this village!

On Sunday morning the rain, which had been for some time threatening, fell in copious showers, and I remained indoors reading and writing before an open window, cheered and refreshed by the sweet

smell of the soil mingled with the scent of blossom, and the joyous songs of the birds that carolled all unrepressed by the drenching rain. As I looked over my notes that quiet Sunday morning, I felt that I had made scant efforts to convey some impression of the glories and delights of the season which was passing over me; and I felt that perhaps some of the matter I have set down might well have given place to words suggesting the breath of an English spring blowing across my pages. However, I leave something to the imagination. For my part, I have in times of sickness or anxiety found great consolation in reflecting that somewhere in the world a sunrise is flushing the mountain-tops, waves are breaking on a rock-bound coast, majestic rivers are flowing through grassy valleys, and wild woods are tossing their branches in the breeze.

Among the advantages which I have gathered from my tour, I count as not the least the proficiency I have acquired in the gentle art of strolling. I can now perform a feat which I believe few town-bred men could accomplish with ease or grace: that is, to walk a good English mile in an hour. This is not quite so easy as it may appear. I therefore set down a few observations on what is fast becoming a lost art.

The first essential to success is that the stroller must free his mind from all thoughts of time, ambition, money, over-drafts, assignments, leases, bonds, agreements, formulæ, loans, interests, and such tricks of commerce, and from all peevishness whatsoever. He must be prepared to pass the time of day with hawkers, beggars, parsons, squires, haughty

dames, tramps, unfortunates, and bottom dogs generally; and when he receives a surly answer or a stony stare he must smile and pass on. I consider it good form to be an attentive listener to long, incoherent accounts of fearful ailments and afflictions told by garrulous old ladies; and I do heartily approve of carrying a small stock of nuts or wholesome sweets for distribution amongst juvenile friends that may be met on the way. The great secret is sympathy both with humanity and nature, and this sympathy will open the eye and the ear to sights and sounds that the indifferent would miss. A rambler in the proper frame of mind can see a complex world in each clear pool of a brook; or he can regard the tumbling ocean as a mere moisture covering a portion of a whirling atom of dust. The moving of a dead leaf in the grass, the swaying of a twig, the faintest hum, squeak, or scratch are, in the opinion of a proficient stroller, worthy of investigation; and the effect of sunshine falling through a leafy shade, the tints and forms of passing clouds, the changing hues of distant hills as day wears to evening, the fly of pollen and winged seeds, the gambols of timid mammals, the absurdities of aquatic insects, the shiver of quiet pools under the inconstant breeze, the winging flight of birds high in the empyrean, and the splendours of sunset will all claim attention from a quick, sympathetic eye. But Shades of Sherwood! this is a subject as fluent as the oak, and to set down all that is likely to arrest attention would require the compass of a cyclopædia. In due time, when eyes and ears have been adjusted and attuned to catch the significant signs and sounds of nature, I am much

mistaken if a speed of one mile an hour is not found altogether too rapid, and the resentful stroller will cry, "Be hanged to this scurrying pace. I am going to take my time!" Consider my own case. Here I write some hundred miles from my home, and I estimate that, inclusive of deviations from the main track, I have tramped some three hundred miles in fifty-four days, thus making the average speed a little more than five and a half miles a day. "Indecent haste!" the expert stroller will exclaim; but to this charge I have to say that I have a mission which demands some activity; and further, I have been hustled on two occasions by the stern command of my noble co-operator, otherwise I could have shown a much better result. Now, if to all the delights of strolling which my brief reference has merely fringed, as it were, the Rambler would add a crowning grace, I would suggest that he carry a few healthy acorns to deposit in favourable places; and thus, whilst he is enjoying the charms of the country, he is storing happiness and wealth for generations to be.

In his outfit the pedestrian should be careful to select strong, square-toed, hand-sewn boots, which should be well greased from time to time. Light boots are unsatisfactory. He should also carry a light waterproof cape, which can be rolled up and carried in a pocket when not in use. The kind of clothes is unimportant, provided the wanderer adopts an old suit with capacious pockets, comfortably creased to his usual attitudes. A cap, in my opinion, is the best headgear. Except in the strongest sunlight or rain, it will, of course, be carried in one of the aforesaid capacious pockets. Beyond a tooth-

brush, a small towel, shekels, acorns, and toffee, all of which are easily carried in pockets, other gear is superfluous. In a prolonged tour, changes of clothes should be sent from home as requested by a wire despatched from the village near which the night is passed; and, when proper arrangements are made, the supplies are to hand early next morning, and discarded garments can be returned in the box that contained the fresh linen.

Some experienced strollers maintain that field-glasses are a necessary item of equipment, whilst the botanist will insist on carrying a microscope. Others, again, will carry a map of the district they wish to explore. Under certain conditions these impedimenta are admissible, but in the style of strolling I affect—the highest branch of the art—these things are not desired, the traveller relying on the unassisted eye, his own meditations, and the chance company that crosses his path. As to whether a stick should be carried, that is a question of personal inclination. In respect of books, I hold it derogatory to the art to peruse them in the open; and as the true stroller will not tolerate luggage, he is content with the papers and books he may find at his inn. All genuine wandering is solitary. Winter is no season for the practise of this gentle art: when we are in the country we should then scamper or walk briskly.

For the guidance of those who are inclined to take up the culture of oak, a few notes on the varieties of the tree, and hints on planting, will no doubt be of interest.

There is only one species, and only two varieties

of oak indigenous to England; whereof one variety has stalked leaves and stalkless acorns, the other, stalkless leaves and stalked acorns. There is also a further slight difference in the leaves; the stalkless ones being downy on the underside only when young, whilst those having stalks remain downy till they fall from the tree. The trees of each species exhibit small variations, according to position and locality. As an instance, the old oaks in the New Forest are peculiar in respect to the colour of the acorns, but they are of the same variety as many of the trees in Sherwood Forest, and doubtless owe their singularity to some element in the soil. There is said to be a difference between the timber of the two varieties; the trees bearing stalked leaves and known as sessile-fruited oaks being held to have inferior timber, but a nobler appearance than the pedunculated oaks, by which I suppose is meant a more orderly arrangement of boughs. As to the difference between the timbers, I cannot speak from personal knowledge, the opportunity of comparing and testing not having presented itself; but with regard to their appearance, I must say that I have met fine specimens of each kind; and considering that it is impossible to distinguish between them at a distance of fifty paces, except under peculiar conditions of light and wind, and that differences between individuals of the same variety are frequently greater than differences between two specimens of opposite variety, we need not greatly concern ourselves as to their respective merits and peculiarities, leaving such details to technical treatises on timber, and to expert botanists. Both kinds are of an heroic nature, and both have

done good service for England. But although it is a minor matter which of the two varieties be chosen for cultivation, it is well to distinguish them from alien species, which are inferior in appearance and tradition to the indigenous varieties, and not so worthy of cultivation in the eyes of an Englishman. The Turkey Oak is distinguished by its long narrow leaves, having deep serrations; it is inferior in size to the English species, and its timber is not so durable: all of which particulars are very gratifying. Then there is the Holm Oak, a fine tree in its way, but lacking the excellence of the indigenous species. It has glossy leaves resembling those of the rhododendron, with insignificant serrations, and it is said (I know not with what truth) to suffer undue nodosity in its timber. America has her own species, which include several varieties; and the country contiguous to the river Vistula is noted for a particular kind with a very beautiful grain. The acorns of these foreign varieties, however, are not met with in our forests, and it will therefore be unnecessary to enter upon a minute dissertation on their idiosyncrasies.

I have previously described, with some detail, my method of planting acorns; and I would now supplement those remarks by recommending that the newly planted seeds be protected from the ravages of rats, mice, squirrels, rooks and other creatures that are partial to them before germination takes place. This is best effected by sprinkling the adjacent soil with powder which seedsmen sell to repel the attacks of such beings. Weeds are a great enemy to the young oak shoot; and seedlings should be carefully weeded from time to time, otherwise they are liable

to be choked in infancy. I have taken note that the acorn sprouts from the narrow end; that is the end remote from the cup; and I usually set them with the thin end downwards, so that the root may strike deep before the seedling shoots through the ground. Nevertheless I sometimes depart from this practice, so that in case the method of setting has any effect on the appearance of the grown tree, there may be a variety of forms for the admiration of succeeding generations.

When a newly fallen acorn is stripped of its glossy leathern jacket, it will sometimes be found that hidden under the tawny rind lie the most beautiful and delicate crimson tints in nature, rivalling in brilliance the ethereal hues which at evening hang in the wake of the descended sun. When the acorn begins to sprout, this crimson hue is seen on the little tail which protrudes from the small end—a tiny forerunner of the latent glories hidden in the wonderful seed.

The scent of oak timber is too well known to require much comment. It is usually associated with sad occasions, and I think on this account it is not so pleasant as it would be to our senses were it connected with less solemn events than death. To me the smell of coniferous wood is more pleasing, and I believe it is so with most people. But apart from its melancholy associations, the oak has a fine, wholesome smell, suggestive of strength and prolonged endurance.

It hath been well established, beyond all controversy, that if a country be denuded of trees a change in the climate of that country is inevitable. If it be a tropical land, the climate becomes dry, arid,

brassy ; or, if the country be situated in a temperate zone, cold, bleak and lean. My noble co-operator, who is deeply read in ancient lore, hath explained to me that many passages in ancient writings are obviously untrue if the climate and general aspect of certain countries were then what they are at this day, and particularly is this the case with Egypt ; but the chain of circumstantial evidence, that in olden times some countries were pleasantly wooded which are now howling deserts, is unbroken.

Now with respect to Egypt, it appears to me that the people of that country, having foolishly neglected or destroyed their woods and forests, Nature, who never forgives an offence against her until she has exacted full reparation, has replied by advancing her deserts ; and mainly as a result of this, and a toleration of dynasties of despotic monarchs, the nation has degenerated to a subject race ; and the ruins of her monuments of past glory are now an object of luxurious study by the descendants of savage Goths who roamed half naked through the gloomy pine forests of northern Europe, what time the lust of Cleopatra was the gossip of her admiring subjects ; and now it comes to pass that a successful fat and tallow merchant of this country, on holiday tour, may jokingly poke his stick into the ribs of an ancient king, whose descendant, may be, has, for a few miserable coins, led the insolent alien to the tomb of his mighty ancestor. A consideration of these things will show that he who plants the waste spaces of his native land with trees does honourable service to his country, and is entitled to a portion of the respect we accord to one who leaves a sturdy

race of sane children, or who dies fronting his country's aggressor.

Beneath an oak it was that the frail, eloquent Wilberforce succeeded in enlisting the support of Pitt in sweeping away the stain of traffic in human flesh, thereby adding another sparkle to the fair fame of this land; and who can deny that the tree may have shed a subtle influence of power upon the inspired pleader, and imbued his words with fire and conviction as he flashed his eye upon the emblem of freedom above him?

"It was the condition of the West Indian slaves," he declared, "which first drew my attention, and it was in the course of my inquiry that I was led to Africa and the Abolition." Diligently did he pursue his inquiries amongst the African merchants throughout the year 1786. "I found them at this time," he states, "willing to give me information freely, the Trade not having yet become the subject of alarming discussion. I got also together at my house from time to time persons who knew anything about the matter. Several of us met at breakfast at Sir C. Middleton's; also at Mr. Bennett Langton's, and at my own house. When I had acquired so much information, I began to talk the matter over with Pitt and Grenville. Pitt recommended me to undertake its conduct, as a subject suited to my character and talents. At length, I well remember, after a conversation in the open air at the root of an old tree at Holmwood, just above the steep descent into the vale of Keston, I resolved to give notice on a fit occasion in the House of Commons of my intention to bring the subject forward."

This old tree, stayed with many a clamp and tie-rod, is fast falling to decay, but still puts forth a scanty crop of leaves. I know not whether it yet bears acorns, or, if this be the case, whether they have sufficient virility to develop into a well-grown tree, but the attempt should be made to rear a descendant near the site of the historic parent.

"Pontiflunk," said I, on Monday morning, as we sat on a bank covered with meadow-sweet, watching the river from a point about a mile from our inn, "we must leave this pleasant valley on the morrow, and hasten on our way. I have been prodigal of time and acorns, and if we do not mend our pace the summer will be over and the acorns exhausted before we reach the next county. Thou hast no conception, Pontiflunk, of the many places I desire to see, and deposit acorns thereabouts. Let us take the places nearest to us first. There is Cambridge, for instance, which I should greatly like to behold; and I wish to visit Ely and Crowland. I am not sure whether we shall strike London or not. Probably not, for I am certain, Pontiflunk, thou wouldst not be happy in that grim and glorious city. Say, then, that after leaving Cambridge we make an eastern course across the broad fenland to bird-thronged, poppy-strewn Norfolk, veined with fat, lazy rivers that swell to misty broads. In due time, bidding farewell to the spired and towered city of Norwich, to wander through Suffolk, sweet region of the life placid, we come to the fair valley of the Stour, beloved of artists, and from the entrancing hamlets on the heights of the north bank of that devious stream, gaze on the fruitful cornfields of Essex, which lie

within view of the noble tower crowning the hill of pleasant and ancient Colchester. Then we should travel westward, and call at Oxford, making merry for a few days in the delicious valley of the Thames. Then on we go to Winchester; through the New Forest; and at length come upon the blue Channel. Ah, we will have some merry games by the sea, Pontiflunk, and sleep at night with the salt sting on our faces! Now for the return journey. Would it not be glorious to wander through the wilds of Dorset to Wells, sleeping peacefully at the foot of the cavernous Mendips? Thou wouldst like Wells, my little friend; it is a rare place for dogs: clear, cool streams run down the streets, which creatures canine may lap at will; but I fear the cathedral would be a little out of thy line. Then on we go to Gloucester by way of the dreamy Cotswolds, where the infant Thames rushes from his cradle in those lonely hills. Then on to famous Stratford; and afterwards, swinging again to the west, enter the rich county of Hereford, where, on scented autumn mornings, the rosy apples fall in the grassy orchards of that happy land. Then northwards we go, the enchanting mountains of Wales on our left, and the pleasant range of Malvern on the right, till we reach storied Ludlow, to rest awhile beneath its grim castle walls. Then on through the fine county of Shropshire to its famous Severn-sitting town; and so homewards across the plain to Chester's walled city standing above the Dee. But Shades of Sherwood! if we do not jog along a little faster than is our wont we shall be years in making this journey; and this neither my family, our noble friend, nor my balance

at the bank will allow. Therefore, Pontiflunk, we must travel; and early in the morning we go over the hills and far away."

After this determined resolution I remained watching the river until noon, when we returned to the village, and I made preparations for departure. I also arranged a meeting at the inn for that evening with a few of my newly found friends. Early in the afternoon I set a few acorns, and then walked down the river about a mile, to a little village called Gunthorpe, where, hiring a boat, I passed a few vastly enjoyable hours. I first rowed up the stream for a couple of miles, and then, drawing in oars, I lay prone in the bottom of the boat, my head resting on my jacket, Pontiflunk sedately taking his station at the prow; and thus we glided down the gently flowing and silent stream. It was fine. Not a ripple disturbed the water, and when I shut my eyes there was not the least suggestion of motion. But when I lay looking up to the sky, on the distant hills, and on the trees that overhung the river, I was enchanted with the sense of absolute rest and peace. The boat sailed on, sometimes with the rudder foremost, and sometimes broad across the stream. Each unfelt change of position gave a new outlook, and the country appeared to be slowly revolving or oscillating round our seemingly stationary boat. Once I looked over the side of the boat into the depths below, which moved slowly under my gaze: a strange world where, amid the streaming weeds and over the pebbled sand, a varied race of creatures fulfilled their destiny, all unmindful of the ten commandments, and all strenuously engaged in a constant endeavour

to defer the life hereafter. Thus did we drift for three delightful hours, until we found ourselves passing a ferry about three miles below Gunthorpe. We had the river absolutely to ourselves; and I do not remember seeing a single human being during our course through the dreamy country that calm, sunny afternoon. My little companion evidently enjoyed the new sensation, for he sat with a placid countenance and moved not at all. At last I seized the oars and rowed back to the starting-point, and then walked home, full of a deep content.

On Tuesday morning, strong in the resolution formed on the previous day, we set off at a swinging pace about nine o'clock, and in an hour we had placed a distance of two miles between ourselves and the little village we had just left. The morning was warm, dull and oppressive, and we advanced through country possessing no striking features or particular beauty. I planted three acorns on the way; and noon found us at a place called Granby, where we obtained food at a labourer's cottage. With renewed energy we again set out on our way, and towards evening we came to the considerable village of Bottesford, lying at the foot of the magnificent mound on which stands Belvoir Castle. It was with no slight satisfaction that I regarded the progress made this day, for we had advanced a distance of twelve miles; and I was hopeful, if this speed were maintained, that we should see most of the places I had mentioned to Pontiflunk on the previous day.

We obtained shelter at a tolerable inn at Bottesford; and, after writing home, I sat with the landlord

and his customers. The conversation was confined to agriculture, and the duke of Rutland and the things that were his. Now agriculture is a very fine subject for discussion; but the subject of dukes becomes tiring when it appropriates an undue share of time, and is discussed with an utter lack of the sense of proportion and the relative importance of things. I was seriously informed that the duke had been offered and had refused the office of Prime Minister of England; and my friends were clearly of opinion that such a station would somewhat diminish the dignity of a duke of Rutland. I was told that certain parts of the castle were thrown open to visitors, and I resolved to avail myself of this generous privilege on the morrow.

On Wednesday morning the weather was still dull and oppressive. I was actively engaged in planting acorns until eleven o'clock, and then I went to inspect the church. Mindful of Pontiflunk's utter lack of soul, I fastened him to the churchyard gate with a piece of string before I entered the building. Bottesford Church is a very remarkable place, inasmuch as it is full of the tombs of forgotten dukes. I viewed with pleasure the exquisite workmanship on many of the monuments, though I saw nothing equal to the incomparable carving in the Chapter House at Southwell. It did strike me that this church was to the greater glory of the Manners than to the poor, noble Carpenter of Nazareth.

"Pontiflunk," said I, after we had enjoyed a hearty meal, "this is like to prove a dull day to thee. I am, by the accident of birth and by gracious permission, about to visit yonder proud castle whose turrets peep

above the top of the climbing wood, and I must therefore leave thee awhile to thine own recourses, for it is unreasonable to expect that a being of thy species and pedigree can be allowed to tread the stately halls of that massive pile. With an extra allowance of milk, therefore, nourish thy philosophy until I rejoin thee."

About three o'clock in the afternoon I presented myself at the castle entrance, and was taken in hand by a pleasant, dapper little man, with a remarkably small head, like a pimple stuck on his shoulders. He told me that there had been a castle on the present site from the dawn of history. I was also told that the ancient custom of keeping watch on the battlements was still upheld. If this be so, I consider it is a degrading occupation for the warders, as the time and ardour of the watch add naught to the safety or welfare of any one. My friend spoke with great affection of the duke, a fine old gentleman, rather unfortunate in his poetic ventures, who was, at the time of my visit, quietly awaiting in the sequestered calm of his ancient home, the close of a long and not ignoble life. My conductor took me to the picture-gallery and explained, without vulgar reference to price or value, the peculiarities and legends of some of the pictures. The collection contains many works by Nicholas Poussin, some portraits by Kneller and Lely, and many others I have forgotten. I thought some of the paintings were very fine, but others did not appeal to me at all; and indeed none was so pleasing in my eyes as a water-colour drawing of a placid English river that hangs in my home in Lancashire. He then showed

me the ballroom, which I thought rather a gloomy place by reason of the dark oak panelling and scantiness of window area: though doubtless the heaviness would disappear under the glow of brilliant lamps shining upon the moving forms of stately women as they danced to lively music. I saw several bed-chambers, which owed their chief charm to the magnificent views obtained from the windows. On the day of my visit the atmosphere was hazy, and I was unable to command an extensive view; but my friend assured me, and I can well believe him, that on a clear day Lincoln Cathedral and Boston Stump could be seen from various points of the fabric.

After leaving the bedrooms we went to the library, a richly furnished apartment, hushed with an ancient peace, sombre, and seemingly well adapted for deep study. But fine surroundings do not always stimulate great thoughts: much of the world's best thinking has been done in garrets. It was not the style of room I should choose for study. My ideal library would be placed high in a lonely turret, commanding a wide view of land and sea and sky. The room would be circular, with an uninterrupted space of glass running the whole circumference, save where broken by the necessary pillars supporting the roof, and the frames of glass doors leading to a balcony making the entire circuit of the library. This balcony would be adorned with such plants as would thrive in that exposed position, and give a pleasing shade to the room within, though not greatly obscuring the prospect from any part of the interior. Round the room would run a deep and luxuriously upholstered seat, interrupted at the four cardinal points to give access to the glass doors

opening upon the balcony. Beneath the seat would be placed the books on shelves protected by sliding glass doors, with tablets thereon clearly indicating the position of the various tomes, so that any volume could be selected with the greatest ease. The room would be about thirty feet diameter, and in the centre would be placed a mighty disc of oak for a table, cut from a monster nurtured in an English forest. The pockets for ink-wells would be sunk in the solid wood, and the disc would be suitably hollowed in places to give comfortable access to the table for the seated student. Cunning recesses would be formed in the circumference of the disc to hold manuscript, paper, and all the necessary equipment of a library. From the lofty coned ceiling, enriched with portraits of great poets and the signs of the Zodiac, would swing gay flowering plants, and a few contented cage birds of low, sweet song. But to leave these impracticable fancies for the description of actualities. My friend next took me to the drawing-room, which is the most magnificent apartment I have ever seen. The views from the well-proportioned windows are splendid, and the apparent spaciousness of the room is doubled by the eastern wall being composed of one huge mirror. My stay in this room was short, and I was so impressed with its general dignity that I made no minute inspection of the details which contributed to the fine effect of the whole apartment. By this time the afternoon was wearing, and as my conductor wished to have some time that day for his own private affairs, I would not remain to see further sights in the castle, so he led me to the exit, where we parted on the most cordial terms—I to my mean

inn and Pontiflunk, he to the magnificence of this ducal home.

On my return I was entertained by the singular spectacle of Pontiflunk exercising his valour on a dusty cloth rug, which appeared to have offered him battle; for I cannot believe my companion was the aggressive party. The rug had no science, however, and the conflict was altogether in favour of the animal; so, after complimenting my little companion on his bravery, I terminated the unequal combat. Then I spent some time meditating upon free will, but being unable to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion on the subject, I abandoned further speculations in order to explain the game of cottam, as played in Lancashire, to a group of interested Bottesfordians.

Shortly before eight o'clock I took a long stroll with Pontiflunk in the rain, in the course of which I planted four acorns, and returned to the inn feeling tired, drowsy, and, I know not for what reason, a little depressed. A dull, wet day in May is indeed dispiriting beyond the common, the result, as I take it, of the loss of sunshine on scenes which are by tradition and experience associated with it. We feel, unconsciously perhaps, that the season which above all others should be bright and sunny is slipping away without yielding the due amount of sunlight and gladness, and we begrudge the loss of glowing days. To me, the song of birds in steamy, dripping May woods, on gloomy evenings, and the dark landscape fading into close invisibility, are unutterably solemn.

In addition to planting the acorns, I freed several lusty oaks from the embraces of insidious ivy, which threatened soon to choke their vigorous growth.

CHAPTER XII

SOUTHWARD HO!

THE following morning we left Bottesford and wandered southwards. The weather, which for nearly a week had been dull and showery, with occasional periods of biting cold, now cleared. The month of June was drawing near, and each day seemed more exquisite than the last. As is my custom, I was entirely given to impulses in my ramblings, and when we set out in the mornings I neither knew nor cared where we should find ourselves at night, provided it was somewhere southward of our starting-point. Our pace fell grievously from the example of the first day out of Shelford; and three weeks after leaving that riparian village we were only about thirty-five miles south of Belvoir Castle: but strolling on the borders of Lincolnshire, Leicestershire and Rutland was too pleasant to be hurried. The chief cause of our delay was haytime, which commenced shortly after we left Bottesford. The memory of the dear delights of that happy time will long remain with me, and I hope the sweet influence of those days will be upon me to the end.

We would sometimes stay at a farm two or three days together, and I generally found that my

A Lightning-Riven Oak.

assistance was acceptable in that active season. When I was busy in the field, Pontiflunk would lie under the shade of trees or the haycocks, stretched out to his full length, his chin resting upon his fore-legs; and it was his wont to blink luxuriously on the busy scene before him. Sometimes, when I grew tired of tossing and raking the hay, I would play a rustic game with the children, and at meal-times I generally sat in the circle jesting with the men and women. Ah, those were sweet days of halcyon weather; and June is the month without peer, the consummation of spring, and the crowning jewel of summer! That never-to-be-forgotten month was a succession of burning days followed by entrancing nights, when the dusky northern hills were crowned by a midnight glory of glowing sky. I went to bed whilst the light lingered in the sky, and when I awoke the sun was strong upon the land. Oh, if I am to die in my bed, I hope it will be in the sweet month of June, and far removed from the hum and gloom of towns. Then, when the pain of my disease has passed away, to give place to that dreamful ease which sometimes precedes the end, let my children carry my couch beneath the shade of some stately oak. There would I lie looking into the depths of umbrageous shade and blue ether until the film of death covered my eyes. Then let them bury me so that the roots of the tree may enwrap me, and let them write above the spot—He Loved the Oak.

As each ridge of country appeared as we slowly drifted along, it was a continued source of delight to form a conjecture as to the nature of the scene which would open before us when we gained the crest and

looked on the other side of the rising ground ; and I realised his joys who, traversing an unknown land, sees a barrier of blue or snow-clad mountains before him, and knows not what mysteries lie beyond their majestic summits. When the Romans first appeared in this country, it must have been a great joy to those hardy pioneers, as they pushed northwards, their rich southern blood quickened by the invigorating climate, to penetrate each range of hills, and behold the solemn distances stretched before them ; for the extent of the island was utterly unknown, and they knew not whether the next day's march would bring them to peaceful plain, tangled forest, gigantic mountain, lonely lake, wild rolling ocean, or the abysmal edge of the world. The applause of Rome spurred them onward, and mystery lured them forward.

All this glowing month the setting of acorns steadily proceeded, and when opportunity offered I extolled the virtues of the oak, not, I hope, altogether without success. The subject, indeed, was never long from my thoughts, for I met many specimens as we journeyed along. One Sunday morning, when a breezy sou'-wester blew huge, white, bulging clouds, whose shadows fled rapidly across the green earth as the foliage danced to a deep song of joy, I set down some notes on the physical qualities of the timber, which I verified on my return to Lancashire ; and as these particulars may be interesting to the enthusiast or the curious, I here set them down.

The ultimate strength of English Oak varies from 12,000 to 16,000 lbs. per square inch in tension along the grain ; and from 8000 to 12,000 lbs. in

compression, whilst its ultimate resistance to shear is about 2300 lbs. In designing oak beams and structures it is usual to allow a factor of safety of 10; hence the actual stresses on the timber should not exceed 1400 and 1000 lbs. per square inch for tension of compression respectively. The coefficient of elasticity of English Oak is 1,450,000 lbs. The elastic limit has been given in some treatises on the strength of materials, but the figure means nothing, for timber differs from iron and steel in that stresses produce a permanent set, and there is no return to the original dimensions when the straining force has been removed. The specific gravity of sound English Oak varies from 0·858 to 0·934, according to the age, condition, and position of the timber in the tree. The timber in the centre of the trunk is known as heartwood, and it is denser, and has therefore a higher specific gravity than the exterior layers or rings which constitute the sapwood. These rings or layers are a very interesting feature, as they form a clue to the age of the tree. Each year, as the sap rises, the trunk puts on a new growth or ring, and if a trunk be sawn across, these rings are clearly seen except near the pith, where they become indistinct. I have examined many specimens of oak, and I find the average pitch of the rings to be about one-twelfth of an inch, and from this the age of a growing tree may be approximately estimated. Take a fellow in good health, with a trunk 6 ft. in diameter at the base. It is safe to say that his age is somewhere about $3 \times 12 \times 12 = 432$. Now this size of trunk is by no means unusual for a well nourished oak, and the calculation will give some indication of

the age of some famous oaks now rotting with the ravage of centuries; but in these cases it must not be assumed that the age increases only in the same ratio as the diameter of the bole, for actual growth may have ceased long ago, and the total age of the monster may include centuries of decay. It is, for instance, assumed with good reason, that the famous Cowthorpe Oak is at least sixteen centuries old, which is more than his bole would denote by taking twelve rings to the inch. Again, the Yardley Oak is by credible tradition said to have been a tree in the Conqueror's time; and well might the gentle Cowper, addressing this grim veteran, have felt a reverence so fittingly expressed in those dignified lines, the highest tribute ever paid by poet to a tree—

“Survivor sole, and hardly such, of all
That once lived here, thy brethren at my birth
(Since which I number threescore winters past),
A shatter'd veteran, hollow-trunk'd perhaps,
As now, and with excoriate forks deform'd.
Relic of ages! could a mind imbued
With truth from heaven, created thing adore,
I might with reverence kneel, and worship thee.
It seems idolatry with some excuse,
When our forefather Druids in their oaks
Imagined sanctity.”

The whole poem, consisting of some one hundred and seventy lines, is full of good things, and well worth repeated perusal. That great ruin of an oak in the centre of the little Essex hamlet of Great Yeldham is of unknown age, but it is impossible to look upon this decayed fragment without feeling that there stands an example of extreme antiquity which was in its prime long ere the ancient plastered

cottages of Great Yeldham were planned, or their architects dreamt of.

In Tennyson's whimsical verses, *The Talking Oak*, there are two quaint allusions to the ringed formation. Like most of Tennyson's poetry, they are saturated with the feminine, and, what is exceptional in his verse, the phrasing is a little unfelicitous; but as the poet hath thought well to give them to the world, we must accept them thankfully—

“ I swear, by leaf, and wind, and rain
 (And hear me with thine ears,)
 That, tho' I circle in the grain
 Five hundred rings of years—

Yet since I first could cast a shade,
 Did creature never pass
 So slightly, musically made,
 So light upon the grass.”

Again—

“ Her kisses were so close and kind,
 That, trust me on my word,
 Hard wood I am, and wrinkled rind,
 But yet my sap was stirred :

And even into my inmost ring
 A pleasure I discerned,
 Like those blind motions of the spring,
 That show the year is turn'd.”

There are many happy expressions in this poem which lovers of the oak will read with great approval, and I here transcribe a few—

“ Oh, hide thy knotted knees in fern
 And overlook the chase.”

.

“ Oh, muffle round thy knees with fern,
And shadow Sumner-chase ! ”

“ Step deeper yet in herb and fern,
Look further thro’ the chase.”

“ Knotted knees ” will do.

The annular rings are not concentric with the pith, and I have noticed that they are slightly thicker on that side of the tree which has enjoyed most sun ; that is to say, the pith is generally a little north-east of the central position in the growing trunk.

In the matter of charcoal yield the oak stands second only to the cork, an inferior tree in every other respect. Oak yields on an average 46 per cent. charcoal, beech 44, yew 45, chestnut 36.

The best age for felling oak is believed to be from one hundred to two hundred years ; but far older trees will yield sound timber, though the heartwood may show signs of decay. The approved season for felling is winter, when the sap is quiescent ; and when the timber was largely employed in building the navy, it was the practice to strip the bark one or two years before felling. The curious will find several interesting references under this head in Pepys’ inimitable Diary.

It is a sad sight to see such noble timber put to the base use of veneering, and thus made to stand and act the lie for less worthy material, saying, Behold the solid Oak ! when there is no solid oak. Many a noble fellow hath suffered the axe to be used in this debasing service ; for vast girth of bole is a great merit in the eyes of veneering rascals. Happily, the practice is fast dying out, and it is to be wished that

the good sense of the people will prevent a recurrence of the unrighteous fashion.

If the cross section of a sound oak trunk or bough be examined, it will be noticed that in addition to the annular rings, thin lustrous streaks diversify the appearance of the section. These streaks, which are known as the medullary rays, are seldom more than a fortieth of an inch thick, and often much less. They radiate from the pith to the circumference, and as they intersect the surface of an oak beam or panel, give the beautiful markings which are characteristic of the polished timber. If the streaks meet the surface at a small angle, the yellow shiny markings appear broad, but as the angle increases, the width of the exposed surface of the ray diminishes. In highly ornamental oak work the direction of the medullary rays should be carefully observed, and the timber sawn to give the kind of graining most appropriate to the work in hand.

A certain Wednesday morning towards the end of June saw Pontifunk and me loitering about in rich undulating country steeped in clear sunshine of excessive heat. We had just emerged from a path that led through quiet meadows to a fine broad highway running north and south. The ground rose slightly to the south, and I decided to walk to the ridge of the undulation to gain a view of the surrounding country. We walked leisurely forward, seeking the shelter of wayside trees as much as possible, and when we reached the crest I saw below us, a short distance away, a compact little town remarkable for the number of church spires, and a splendid mansion standing close on the south side of the town in a well-

timbered park. "By acorns, Pontiflunk," said I, "if this be not Stamford, and that Burghley House, I am a footman! I am right glad that we have stumbled upon this famous town; and here we stay a few days, let our noble friend rage as he will."

We then walked down to the town, and I soon learned that my surmise was correct. We found accommodation at The George, a fine old inn on the York and London road. After dinner I wired home for shekels and raiment, and wrote for a further supply of acorns. We then wandered about the pleasant little town; and, seeing a printing establishment, I entered, and gave the order for two hundred gummed slips, with the exhortation to a would-be destroyer of oak printed thereon in red characters. After leaving the press I stood in the market-place admiring a very fine church steeple (I think it was All Saints'), when I was accosted by one of the strangest specimens of human architecture I have ever seen. The man had intensely red hair, wild, wandering whiskers of a similar hue, and his complexion suggested a male stickleback in all its summer glory; he had large blue protuberant eyes, spindle legs, and a fat paunch. He was dressed in an eighteen-penny suit; but he was not one of those melancholy, underfed men who, under our present ghastly system, are cast like wreckage upon the sands of despair. He was a fat, lusty rascal, with laughter in his eye.

"Can you give me a copper, mester?" said he, scratching his whiskers with his forefinger.

"I can very easily do that," I replied, "but whether I will or no is another matter. Why should I give you money?"

"I must live," said the quaint one.

"I fail to see the necessity of your existence," I said. "If we were both struck dead this instant things would go on just the same: nay, if this very town of Stamford suddenly dropped through, it would make little difference to the revolution of the earth, or the ebb and flow of the tide. You have altogether too great an opinion of your own importance. A few elementary lessons in astronomy would correct your perspective."

"You're a hard 'un, guv'nor," said he, not at all despondingly.

"I should be a soft one if I gave you my hard-earned coins for nothing. Why don't you work?"

"I can't get a job in my trade," said he, with a fat smile.

"Why, what is your trade?"

"I am a snow-shoveller in summer, and a hay-maker in winter. There's not much snow-shovelling to be got here this time of the year."

"Right, friend," said I. "I owe you one."

"Sir?" said he.

"It is a mighty hot day," I replied. As I spoke, I saw him wink at a group of three men who seemed greatly interested in us, for they craned their necks as if to hear what was said.

"Friends of yours?" I inquired, nodding in their direction.

"Yes."

"Of the same profession?" said I.

"Rather," said he.

"Now look here," said I, "I can find you all a grand job, with better pay than you ever got before,

unless you have been cabinet ministers, bishops or managing directors. Ask them to come here."

The prospect of work seemed to daunt him, but he beckoned them to approach, nevertheless.

"My Christian friends," said I, as they stood around, "you see these seeds? If you will plant them as I direct, I will give you twopence apiece for every one you set. Who says willing?"

"Where have we to plant 'em?" said a tall, lean man with a melancholy visage. The philosophy he nourished was apparently not of a cheerful kind, and he appeared not to approve of things generally.

"Within five minutes' walk from here," I said.

"We'll take it on," said a blue-faced man, speaking for the rest. By his countenance I judged him to be given to Bacchanalian pursuits. I think he would have made a fitting companion for Bardolph, sometime retainer to Sir John Falstaff, of happy memory.

"Now that's what I call decision," said I, "and as a guarantee of good faith, here's twopence each over and above any sum you may earn by future exertions. Follow me."

I then led the way to a small coppice or thicket, about two acres in extent, which I had noticed when we stood upon the ridge overlooking the town. They followed in straggling fashion, uneasy in the fear of impending exertion. We climbed the fence, and I then demonstrated the method of setting the acorns.

"I have no knife," said a little fat man with black hair, face pitted with small-pox, and thin, twisted legs of unique design.

I therefore lent my own knife to this interesting

person. I then walked round the coppice and indicated the positions in which the seeds were to be set by twigs thrust in the ground. Pontiflunk and I then took up our positions by a large stone overlooking the space of ground, and I spread about fifty acorns on my handkerchief. I gave each man an acorn that, at a given signal, he must plant at one of the marked places, and then return for another. I pointed out that under this arrangement the amount of their earnings depended on the vigour of their exertions; for the more energetic the man the greater his proportion of the whole sum set apart for oak culture. I held a small book in my hand, wherein I marked the amount due to each man; and bidding them get ready, I slammed the book on the stone as the signal to commence.

Shades of Sherwood! what a sight it was to see these curious creatures displaying frantic energy beneath the blazing sky. As each man rushed towards me I held out an acorn, and uttered words of encouragement, warning or banter, as the case required. They began their labours fully dressed, but as they warmed to their work first one garment and then another was cast away, until at the end they were all but naked. For nearly an hour did the tremendous activity continue, until not an acorn remained on the handkerchief. I then cast up the accounts in my notebook, which showed the following scores:—

Red man, 12.

Melancholy man, 16.

Fat man, 11.

Blue-faced man, 13.

On the declaration of the result I paid out the money due, and complimented them on the vigorous manner in which the work had been brought to a conclusion, criticising such of their movements as were irregular. They seemed mightily pleased with the result; and I do believe the profuse sweat and the exertion did them good.

"My good fellows," said I, as they crowded round me, "you are my brothers, and I love you; but in this extreme heat I love you best at a few paces' distance—there—thank you. I have a few coppers left, and I should like to reward some of you still further. Which of you are teetotallers?"

"Me," said the blue-faced and the red man together. I laughed loud and long at their lie.

"Then I am sorry we part company so soon," said I, with sudden gravity, "for I am about to ask my two friends here to come with me to the Red Lion, and quaff a flowing bowl of cool beer, capped with an inch of delicious, creamy froth. I won't persuade you to break your good resolutions. Good-day."

A yell of fierce laughter greeted these words; and the mirth was so infectious that although both blue-face and red man were doleful for a few seconds, they soon joined in the laughter as heartily as the rest of us.

"We were only having you, guv'nor," said blue-face at length. "Let us come!"

"We are straight now," said I to red man, with a grin. "Your sin is forgiven. Come on!"

Now behold me playing Comus to this tattered band of curiosities, the perspiring group duly graced

by the harmless Pontifunk. I led the way to an inn, paid for four pints of ale, and, amid their good wishes, left them cooling.

"Pontifunk," said I, as we gained the street, "this is a mighty fine way of doing business, but it comes rather expensive and does not last long enough. Let us add variety to this day's events by inspecting some of these churches which are so thickly planted around us; but remember thou hast no soul, and if I am desired to leave thee in the street for a time, it is no fault of mine. Let us try this one with the beautifully proportioned spire."

We entered the ancient little church, and found all within as still as death. There was little of interest to be seen except the age-worn stone effigy of a knight in armour, placed in a niche in the wall of the north aisle. No inscription was visible, but I learned later that the body in the vault beneath was that of an unknown knight, who was supposed to have been an old Crusader. His travel-tired bones repose quietly enough now, and should this old world keep up its spinning, the dust of that dark tomb is like to lie undisturbed through all the changes of multitudinous centuries. I had a desire to ascend the steeple, but I found the door commanding the staircase locked. Coming out of the church, I made inquiries for the caretaker, and I found that he lived in a narrow lane within the shadow of the church. The old man seemed of a peevish disposition, and in earthly matters he was not what I should term prosperous. He was very successful as a parent, however; for he told me that he had reared twelve children out of fourteen, but they had all

left him. I told him that this was well done on his part, and that the country was his debtor: at the same time I admired the sagacity of his children in living at a distance. As is usual in church matters, a timely gift of shekels made the path easy, and we returned to the church with a large rusty key. The steps up the steeple were narrow, steep and irregular, so I carried Pontiflunk, to his no great pleasure. After much exertion I reached the top of the winding stairs, and gained the parapet at the base of the spire. The view was very fine. The clear, sluggish Welland threaded through rich meadow-land, by town gardens, and ancient stone houses; and beyond the river the glittering turrets of Burghley House appeared above the stately avenues of the park. I do not think I ever saw a more typical English landscape. We stayed up the tower a long time, until the flying earth began to fling us into the shadow; then, feeling the need of food, I sought my inn.

After dinner I had an interesting talk with an American who was touring the country. He had been in England two weeks, and intended to remain a month longer, which he thought would afford him ample time to see the country leisurely. He said he would then go by way of the Mediterranean, Australia and the Pacific, across America to his home in Boston. He expected to arrive in Boston late in November. I then described my mode of travelling, and we had much merriment in comparing the two systems. The American method is to haste along and cover vast distances by the most expeditious means. His mean speed figured out to

about one hundred and fifty miles a day, and he said he would have been better pleased had it been two hundred miles. Now compare this with my own system. I had made a point-to-point distance of say one hundred miles in some ninety days, or about an average of one and one-eighth miles a day; and yet I was frequently regretting that I had hurried away from places without thoroughly exploring them! If my track, including all the country within range of sight on each side of it, were set down to scale on a map of England, it would appear as a thin winding strip running a fraction of the length of the country; and of this thin strip only a narrow section was intimately known to me: by far the greater portion was merely glanced over from a distance. A parallel track ten miles either east or west would give the traveller different scenery, different people, different adventures.

Another striking contrast lies in the fact that by the American method of travel all is carefully planned out before the journey is begun; and in some cases, each day has its allotted distance and direction. The other method is devoid of all such organisation. The traveller sets out without luggage, knowing not whither he may wander—when or how he may return. The most trivial incident or object may deflect his course, or hasten or delay his devious steps. He taketh no note of time beyond the rise and set of sun and the glorious round of the seasons. Should the chance of an elegant meal present itself he will joyfully embrace it; but he is quite content to sit at a poor farm labourer's table, eat his plain, rough food, discuss the cleverness or ailments of his

children, and do his best to cheer the parents' hard, monotonous life.

We had much talk on the characteristics of the English and American people, and my friend said he found Englishmen in America well able to cope with the Americans. We discussed the commercial methods of the two countries. I instanced the widely known case of a large American company that had established itself in Manchester some years ago, apparently with every feature to ensure success; yet the financial result had been a ghastly failure. During the same period English firms in the same way of business had prospered well enough. My friend suggested the following explanations for the failure:—Under-estimation of the capacity of Englishmen; Over-capitalisation; Unsuitability of American methods of commerce to England. He expressed himself very happily by asking me to consider the effect of living in a tropical climate under a régime suitable for a northern country.

He then spoke in high terms of the quiet, orderly beauty of England; and he remarked that he was so familiar with the appearance of the great show places, through reading and photographs, that he scarcely seemed to be visiting the country for the first time. He had not seen London, yet he could have found his way from Euston to the Embankment, St. Paul's or Westminster, as readily as I. Nay, I believe that if we had gone to London together he would have played guide to my stranger. I here pointed out another singular difference between his method of travel and my own. The one sought well-known paths and notable objects; the other

delighted in untrodden ways ; and the wanderer was never so happy as when buried in some beautiful corner of the land unknown to fame.

The American was to depart on his strenuous travels next morning ; so about midnight we bade adieu, and I retired to bed well pleased with the events of the day.

CHAPTER XIII

UNDER THE BEECH TREE

"PONTIFLUNK," said I, when we had finished breakfast on the morning following my discourse with the American, "this post hath brought in some matters which require careful thought. Let us then hie to the shade of those stately avenues in the park yonder, which we saw from our watch-tower yesterday. We will be off betimes, ere the fiery sun climbs high in the sky, rendering travel irksome, for I do believe this day will prove a frizzler." Acting on this suggestion, we gently pricked our way across the sward of Burghley Park, and by ten o'clock we were lying under the shade of a mighty beech tree, one of a long line of stately fellows for which the park is famous.

"The first matter concerns thyself, Pontiflunk," said I, when we were comfortably settled; I with my back against a recess in the knotted bole, he in his favourite attitude, on his belly, with front legs stretched before him. "I had occasion, in a letter I sent home some days ago, to refer to thy forlorn appearance in rainy weather; and here comes a note saying that if I will measure thee in certain directions indicated on this sketch, which represents thee

Crabbed Age.

in a more ferocious attitude than thou hast ever assumed, my good folks will make and send thee a waterproof coat, to protect thy body when the airy vapours become degraded to drops of rain. I shall now put my judgment of distances to test, and measure thee with mine eye; for I am by no means inclined to pace Stamford town in this fierce glare, seeking a tape-measure. Now I can form a shrewd guess at the dimensions of certain articles associated with my strenuous struggle for existence; but truly, Pontiflunk, I have never yet assayed the estimation of doggy distances. I shall assume that thy body is approximately circular, and that the relation between the mean diameter of any given part of it and its circumference is represented by that surd quantity π . I must not be hasty in my judgments, for should the coat fit thee ill I shall suffer much gentle banter when I return to Lancashire and present thee to my mirth-moved family. And yet, Pontiflunk, when I come to think the matter over, I see a way to escape reproach, however gross mine error; for I can say that the dimensions were carefully taken, and that any crumpling or stretching that may appear when the garment is placed upon thee is due to thy alteration of shape since the measurements were taken. My present task is rendered more difficult by reason of thy mysterious lineage. Thou hast grown marvellously since we formed our friendship; but what stature thou wilt ultimately attain is as uncertain as the continuance of this earth as a habitable planet. I must assume a certain further growth; and I shall therefore take a coefficient of future circumferential growth of

0'25, and modify thy present estimated dimensions accordingly, and for horizontal growth I shall take a coefficient of 0'125. Thus, if I consider thou art twenty inches round the belly, I shall instruct thy good friends to make the garment suitable for a dog with a twenty-five inch belly, with provision for tightening up or letting out. Now keep still whilst I measure thee with mine eye—so. That is good business.

“Now to the next question. Our austere friend hath written a lugubrious note saying that the acorns are nearly exhausted; that there remain but a poor three hundred, of which not a few have gone rotten, and some are sprouting. Let us say there be two hundred sound acorns in his possession: I have about forty in my pocket here, and there are some eighty lying in a box at The George. By my reckoning these make a total of three hundred and twenty sound acorns. If these be planted at yesterday's rate my mission will soon be ended, and we must either return, or wander ingloriously through the country without conferring any permanent benefit upon the places we visit. But, Pontiflunk, I must abandon such reckless bursts of extravagance as occurred yesterday; and had my experience of resolutions been at all encouraging, I would now make a firm resolve not to deposit more than one acorn to the square mile from this time forward. But, Shades of Sherwood! I can no more resist dowering a favourable spot for the growth of oaks than a poet can refrain from singing when he has a theme.

“Pontiflunk, as I look upon thee now, and con-

sider thy state and my own, I know not whether to laugh or groan. Thou art generally believed to be absolutely without soul; and, indeed, most men would aver that none of thy species did ever possess one; and as for myself, I am in as sorry a plight as thee; for by the opinion of many who constitute themselves as authorities in such matters my own is lost utterly. Let me see how I stand judged by the Decalogue. On clauses No. 1 and 2 I consider I am fairly sound; but with respect to No. 3 I have to confess to many transgressions, for I have been hardly used at times. Now as to clause No. 4 I have to plead guilty, but I have trespassed in this direction much against my will, being coerced, as it were, and others must answer any awkward questions under this head. On No. 5 I trust I am sound; and to No. 6 I say not guilty, unless chickens, beetles, cheese-mites and similar fowl are reckoned in. No. 7, not guilty; No. 8, slightly at fault, chiefly in the matter of my uncle's strawberries. I am safe on No. 9; but on No. 10 I admit a little failing with respect to fine expressions relating to the noble tree, and a certain west window in my friend's house. This is but a sorry record; and yet by all accounts I might fare well were I repentant; but, wretch that I am, I do not repent, and would plunge neck-deep again did temptation arise; and further—pity me, Pontiflunk—I have committed the unpardonable sin. But upon my word, little friend, this code of laws is an example of the most incompetent draughting I have ever seen. The most dull-witted man could evade the whole bunch and yet be a very fiend. It hath every

appearance of being drawn up in a hurry at the end of a double shift; and was utterly inadequate until supplemented by an eleventh clause, which hath more worth than any of the others, and is the most difficult to obey. Well, I see nothing for it but to jog along, with such faults and failings as have somehow come to us, as happily as this curious world will permit; and as for what are called our sins, since we have had the pleasure of committing them, let us stand manfully by our actions, and not whine and whimper when the time of payment arrives; nor call in the aid of any third party, as many do, to plead for a release from our obligations; for I believe the eternal scheme of things is just; and an unduly severe penalty for any transgression is not permitted. Thou, my friend, hast by some rare fortune become possessed of as gentle and lovable a disposition as ever entered form canine, and the worst thou canst suffer is annihilation. This is happy enough fate for dogs, but imperious man will not have it at all. He is not content with some seventy whirls round a point of light, under a canopy of matchless blue, feasted with the thoughts of a long line of poets, and the sight of many blazing stars. He must have the dance go on for ever, with continually increasing delights. If you venture to suggest that the fun must end, and he must go to everlasting sleep, you will be called hard names. For my part, if I am to have a future existence linked by memory to this present one I am thankful, and accept it joyfully; but if in the scheme of things a continuance of my individuality is neither necessary nor desirable, I am not going to mope and snivel about it. In the meantime, what we must do

is to wait as cheerfully as men and dogs can for the great secret, which we shall either learn or not before we make many more eye-blinks ; and, as far as I am concerned, I shall to the utmost endeavour to obey that strong instinct within me which incites me to live as long as I can.

“ I sometimes think, Pontiflunk, that even supposing eternal existence is beyond man now, he may, somehow, at some distant date, find a means of obtaining it ; for I see no end to the achievements of a race of beings that has arisen from a form infinitely lower in the scale of beings than thine to weigh and analyse the stars. Already the unsatiable creatures are pushing their researches into the unexplored beyond. A few mystic signals have flashed across the barrier to those whose senses are duly attuned to catch the faint manifestations of the spirit world ; and I verily believe we may yet acquire a sixth sense, and demonstrate the absolute eternity of the mind. Let us but learn the code of that other region, which I think we may do by right living and thinking : our joys will be not a whit diminished, and we can meet our troubles with a serenity we cannot attain in our present ignorance. Hadst thou intellect to comprehend, and were it a story fitting for this summer glare, I could relate strange sights seen by these very eyes in the early hours of a winter’s morning, when all, save myself and a witness whom thou wilt in the expected course of time regard with affection, lay warm in their beds and recked not of the ghostly sight.

“ In this extreme heat, Pontiflunk, I can permit a little licence, and thy tongue may protrude at

thy pleasure. I am the more ready to grant this concession because thou hast made successful efforts to reform in this direction. It is obvious to me that thy spirit (if I may apply such a term to thee) is expanding, and, like an opening rose-bud, growing ever more beautiful as it unfolds itself; and I truly believe that before long thou wilt, in a moment of rapture, give vent to a bark, which will be nearly as pleasant to me as the first articulations of my children. To me thou art as delightful a companion for my ramblings as I could wish for. If I say, let us climb this hill, explore yonder wooded glade, linger in that meadow, idle by such a stream, thou dost not demur: thou dost appear to accept all my theories and prejudices without dispute; and when I am garrulous thou art not bored, but seemeth to drink in my words as though I were an inspired apostle. I do often pity thee in that thou art cursed with inarticularity, for thy efforts to make me understand thy thoughts are manifest. I seem to see in thee a sorrow that thou art denied the gift of speech. But courage, Pontiflunk, thou hast compensations. Thou canst never suffer the sly sting of the traducer among thy race; nor canst thou cherish one whom thou regardest as thy true friend, but who betrays thee. Possibly in the lapse of centuries thy tribe may attain to some degree of language beyond whining, growling and barking; and to this end my advice to thy species is to get more knots into their brains, and a larger proportion of brain to body. Now ponder these matters carefully, whilst I consider other subjects."

When I reflect upon the vast benefits the oak

hath conferred upon England, I am astonished that there is so little enthusiasm centred in the tree; or such small efforts made to prevent extermination; which must inevitably occur if the present rates of felling and planting are long continued. This fear of extinction was very forcibly felt by some of our great countrymen years ago, when oak was extensively used in the navy. I know of no more pleasing passages in our island story than those which relate to the right noble Collingwood and his enthusiasm for the welfare of the oak. His name is for ever illustrious as one who fought bravely and successfully for his country, and who was so devoted to her that even in his hours of ease, which were few indeed, he did the best he knew to render her capable of withstanding the affront of an aggressor.

Writing to his dear lady, when he lay off Cadiz, in the year 1806, watching with superb English insolence at the very gates of the timorous enemy, he says—

“It is very agreeable to me to hear that you are taking care of my oaks, and transplanting them to Hethpool. If ever I get back I will plant a good deal there in patches; but before that can happen you and I will be in the churchyard, planted under some old yew tree.”

On another occasion, referring to his children, he writes—

“Tell them, with my blessing, that I am much obliged to them for weeding my oaks.”

Again, when he is writing to his friend Lord Radstock, he remarks—

“What I am most anxious about is the plantation of oak in the country. We shall never cease to be a great people while we have ships, which we cannot have without timber; and that is not planted because people are unable to play at cards next year with the produce of it. I plant an oak whenever I have a place to put it in, and have some very nice plantations coming on; and not only that, but I have a nursery in my garden, from which I give trees to any gentleman who will plant them, with instructions how to top them at a certain age, to make them spread to knee timber.”

It would be interesting to know if any of the Collingwood oaks are still flourishing. If so, they are worthy objects for the consideration of the Royal Commission on historical monuments. That Collingwood was deeply anxious for the welfare of his country and the oak is shown in many of his letters, an extract from one written to his dear wife's father being typical of his concern—

“The scarcity of timber for our ships is daily increasing, and I am afraid my oaks will not be of sufficient growth for the supply of this war. I have written a letter to old Scott¹ to inquire about my trees and garden.”

Excellent as these instances are, there are two more letters which I consider exceedingly tender and worthy of presentation. The letter to his children I present in its entirety—

¹ His gardener.

"MY DARLINGS, LITTLE SARAH AND MARY,— I was delighted with your last letters, my blessings, and desire you to write to me very often, and tell me all the news of the city of Newcastle and town of Morpeth. I hope we shall have many a good laugh together yet. Be kind to old Scott, and when you see him weeding my oaks, give the old man a shilling. May God Almighty bless you!"

The last extract I shall give from Collingwood's letters contains no reference to the oak, but it illustrates the greatness and justness of the old warrior so happily that its irrelevancy to the subject shall not prevent me gracing these pages with the noble sentiments. He is writing to his devoted wife in the year 1806—

"I rejoice to hear that you and all my family are well. I could have been very, very happy indeed to have been with you; but when is that blessed time to come? I received a letter from —— to thank me for the presents I had sent, and I must thank you most heartily for having anticipated me in what I would gladly have done myself if I had been there. Oh, my Sarah, how I admire in you that kindness of heart and generosity that delights to give pleasure to those you love! You will, you do understand me, that if ever I mention the word economy, it is that you should always be enabled to do a kind and a handsome thing when the occasion arises; and none know how to do so better than you.

"I shall never have length of life enough to tell you how I love in you those virtues that are every day my admiration. With respect to that matter

in which we and —— are jointly interested, I cannot but wonder at their unreasonableness in requiring £800 per annum for that which we have hitherto been content to let for £80; but they will outwit themselves, for I would not, for all the collieries in Northumberland, be a party to such an extortion. A fair increase of rent is allowable, but this demand is beyond all bounds. I have written enough about money; and between ourselves, Sarah, I believe there is more plague in it than comfort, and that the limits of our Morpeth garden and lawn would have afforded us as much happiness as we shall ever have. I have lived long enough in the world to know that human happiness has nothing to do with exteriors; then let us cultivate it in our minds. The parliamentary grant is, I own, lessened in my estimation when it is shared by those who laboured in common with those who did nothing. The honour of the thing is lost, and it only becomes a mere matter of money. But they have used us shabbily about the whole business; for the poor seamen who fought a battle that set all England in an uproar, and all the poets and painters at work, have not at this moment received one sixpence of prize-money. I mean those who are here; for I do not know what they have done in England, as I never hear anything about it."

As one reads these kind and generous words, Dekker's beautiful passage, relating to a nobler soul than even Collingwood, is recalled—

"A soft, meek, patient, humble, tranquil spirit,
The first true gentleman that ever breathed."

The learned and courtly Evelyn was apprehensive that our oak supply would become exhausted ; and in his classical treatise on trees he hath well expressed his fears. For instance, he says, shrewdly enough—

“Since our forests are undoubtedly the greatest magazines of wealth and glory of this nation, and our oaks the truest oracles of its perpetuity and happiness, as being the only support of that navigation which makes us feared abroad and flourish at home, it has been strangely wondered at by some patriots how it comes to pass that many gentlemen have frequently repaired or gained a sudden fortune with ploughing part of their parks and setting out their fat grounds to gardeners, etc., . . . while the Royal portion lies folded up in a napkin, uncultivated and neglected.”

Again, in the thirty-first chapter of the *Sylva*, he says, very wisely, I think, when we remember the date the words were written—

“Since it is certain and demonstrable that all arts and artisans whatsoever must fail and cease, if there were no timber and wood in a nation, . . . I say when this shall be well considered, it will appear that we had better be without gold than without timber.”

The worthy diarist solemnly sets forth a list of diseases for which he states acorns are valuable remedies ; but for my part, even if I were so unfortunate as to be afflicted with the ills he names, I should hesitate to employ the remedies suggested, notwithstanding my affection for the tree.

The introduction of iron and steel for shipbuilding hath rendered the concern of the aforementioned worthies no longer pertinent; yet the present utility, beauty and traditions of the tree should make us eager to preserve the species. If those who do me the honour of reading these pages would plant say four acorns each year, and if the number of readers equalled my wishes, there would be an increase in the yield of oak more than sufficient to cope with the present demand; and the country would be adorned with some of the most stately objects in nature.

In the eyes of the shipbuilder oak owed much of its superiority to other woods to that peculiarity of bough formation which produced the valuable knee timber, enabling him to build the ribs of his ships without great waste of material, and to maintain the grain of the wood parallel to the member, thereby greatly increasing the strength of the framework of his vessels. This feature of the oak is looked upon by some as a defect of the tree from a picturesque point of view; but in my opinion it is a vitiated or uncultivated taste that can see any detraction in the feature which forms one of the chief glories of the species. Often in my wanderings I have tried to reconcile the contortions of the boughs to a law, but I soon found that the attempt was hopeless, for each bough was a law unto itself, and I could discover no constant relation between the diameter of the branch and the angle or length of the knee.

As you walk the forest you will notice that, although acorns fall plentifully beneath the parent-tree, yet you will rarely see a healthy sapling under

the shadow of its parent. In this respect the saplings resemble children, who must in due time leave the shelter of home and strike out a career on fresh ground if they are to develop self-reliance and sturdy independence. For some time I was puzzled as to the manner in which the oak is propagated when unassisted by man; for acorns are solid and weighty, and have no flying mechanism, like the fruit of the sycamore, for instance; and except in very high winds they would not be carried beyond the fatal shade in their fall. One day, however, about the middle of June, as I was meditating in a wood on the borders of Nottinghamshire, I observed a few squirrels. I was very still, Pontifunk was winking in his usual contented fashion, and the brisk little fellows seemed quite unaware of our presence. Their actions, which I then observed, convinced me that Mr. Squirrel is a very active agent in the propagation of oaks; for he is wont to hide a number of acorns and beechnuts in the autumn for the following winter and spring consumption. Happily for us, squirrel memory is no more perfect than man memory, and it seems that, keeping no written account of his investments, our friend forgets to unearth all his hidden treasures. But possibly I do him an injustice in supposing defective memory to be the true explanation; the real account of the matter being that he wisely sets aside a margin for unforeseen contingencies; and should his reserve exceed all calls upon it, he leaves his surplus treasures to the gentle care of the seasons. In one point our little friend teaches us a good lesson; for, unlike greedy man, he looketh not to usury for his living,

but is well content with a secure principal. Food supply being the sole object of his labours, he doth not concern himself whether the positions he selects for concealment of his treasures be favourable to oak growth; hence, although he is a prolific planter of acorns, he is not a judicious one, and his exertions are inadequate to cope with the vast inroads on the timber by man. Nevertheless, I have much respect for my brother in the cause; and I compliment him on his merry life, and the admirable taste he displays in the selection of his domain. In consideration of friend Squirrel's autumnal labours, I think we ought to forgive him his spring and summer twig-nibblings; and for my part, I am the more ready to overlook his peccadillos, because he deals more gently with my favourite tree than some others of a more palatable kind. In all his actions I doubt not that from his own point of view he means well; and could we adopt this view to a greater extent than is now customary in our judgment of other creatures besides squirrels, I think this world would be a pleasanter place to live in, and much acrimonious breath would be spared.

Although man in his present ungracious condition is the chief enemy of the oak, he is by no means the only one. A multitude of insects attack bark, bough, twig and leaf; and it is no slight test of the tree's endurance that, in spite of these pests and parasites, it can attain a patriarchal age and imposing bulk. The most interesting effect of insect attack is the formation of galls, which are no doubt familiar to most people. When a twig is pierced by a certain insect big with egg, which it is most anxious to

deposit in a spot favourable to incubation, a kind of inflammation or irritation is set up, and the sap collects and stagnates round the wound and the egg. Safe in this succulence, the embryo, developing in due time into a tiny yellow maggot, sleeps on, little recking of the infinity of mysteries surrounding it; what time the juice hardens to a friable, cork-like brown sphere about an inch in diameter. Pass a few short world-spins, and the tiny creature, feeling the stirrings of ambition, gnaws through the wind-rocked cradle into the vast beyond. Here it passes a few sunny hours, as happily as insect philosophy and its own individual temperament will allow it, until a desire to deposit eggs comes upon it, which gratified, the pangs of death seize it, and end a career of no great brilliance; and, as far as ignorant man can discern, of very little use to the world generally, and certainly of no value to the oak unless to repel the ravages of more insidious enemies. But I suppose there is a value in all things if we could but discover it—even a Stuart king is useful to demonstrate how well a nation can fare that deals sternly with a monarch that prates about the divine right of kings. Other insects attack the buds of growing trees, and produce a resemblance to the artichoke; hence the name artichoke gall applied to this form. Others, again, specialise on the leaves; some on the upper and some on the under side, the result of their activities being oak spangles, which I can best compare to drops of ruddy velvet sprinkled over the surface of the leaf. They have a pleasing effect; but inasmuch as they must be detrimental to the tree I love them not. To what subterranean attacks

the oak is exposed I do not pretend to know. Doubtless a number of creatures make it their business or pleasure to harry him; but whether from a desire to improve their minds, develop muscle, for the sake of entertainment, or merely to satisfy brute or insect cravings for food, who shall say? The insect life dependent on the oak is exceeding complex, and no less than 500 species have been recorded, and of this number some 200 are double parasites living upon the larvæ of others, or drawing their sustenance from the galls produced by other insects. Of enemies of a vegetable kind the oak is exposed to the attack of that worthy parasite the ivy, of which I think many good things might be written; and to the bird-propagated mistletoe, associated with the legends of the astute and cruel Druids. Fungi of various kinds flourish upon his wrinkled skin; and the tempests and lightning fall upon him; yet in spite of these foes the tree doth usually contrive to keep a brave front for many years; until even he becomes weary of the struggle, and is at length compelled to snuff it like the rest of us.

As I lay nourishing these thoughts under the grateful shade of the beech tree, I began to feel myself under the influence of two opposing forces: one to satisfy the cravings of hunger, which began to steal upon me, the other to remain out of the glare, under the cool, umbrageous shade. It occurred to me that the first desire must ultimately prevail; so in order to end the perplexity I arose with a firm and fixed mind, and my little friend and I sought The George by the shadiest paths.

After a tolerable meal I spent some time in writing letters and making entries in my journal. I then left Pontiflunk at the inn, and walked across the road to St. Martin's Church, famous for the tombs of the Cecils. The interior was cool and, as far as churches go, cheerful. I stood by the ornate sepulchre of the great Cecil of Elizabeth's day; a man wise in council and, unless I misjudge him greatly, one whose first care was to enrich himself, the next to please his fickle queen, and then to serve England, all of which objects he duly performed. The carved features of the statesman are executed with great mastery, and well delineate the dignified countenance of a strong, competent man. Another tomb contained the dust of that romantic Lord Burghley who, it is said, under the guise of a strolling painter, wooed and wedded a poor country lass, to her no great happiness. The rest of the tombs are noteworthy with respect to the workmanship, but I do not remember the names carved upon them.

About half-past four I returned to The George for tea, after which Pontiflunk and I strolled on the banks of the clear, sluggish Welland. I conversed with several patient Waltonians and a nervous water-rat, that seemed greatly distressed at the presence of the harmless Pontiflunk. One of the anglers, taking advantage of our innocent appearance, related the following story with unruffled gravity:—

One day late in September 1901, the sky overcast, and a gentle south wind blowing, he was fishing the Witham three miles above Lincoln with wasp grub, when four perch, each weighing quarter of an ounce under a pound, darted to seize the bait at the same

instant from opposing angles, and their noses met at the hook. Momentarily stunned with the impact of the collision, they floated as dead upon the surface of the stream, allowing the voracious angler to gather them in with his landing net. Placed on the bank their senses soon returned, and they expired greedily sucking at each other's nose, which the collision had spattered with the juices of the wasp grub.

Now that the American had left, there was little sociable company at The George, so in the evening I sought diversion in a small tavern near the market-place, where I encountered two iron moulders, or sand rats, as they called themselves, in eager discussion as to the best method of repelling crickets and black beetles. Although I was invited to enter the debate, I declined on the ground that I was unable to contribute any new ideas on the subject. I therefore remained an interested listener. The conversation afterwards drifted to the subject of national finance. One of the sand rats suggested that it would be a good plan if the king were to issue a great many £5 notes for the benefit of the unemployed only, charging them just the cost of printing, paper and postage. I told them this was a new idea to me; and as the king was known to be a sensible, kind-hearted man, I thought they ought to write to him on the subject. They said writing was a difficulty with them, and they asked me to take the matter up in their names. I replied that my head ached and my hand trembled; and ventured to propose that we should all have a drink together. This was readily agreed to, and the talk shifted to other subjects.

Shortly before ten there entered a ruddy-faced man whose laugh was like the bleating of a sheep. He was well in his cups. He had a big wart on his eyelid, and I learned that he was a singer in one of the church choirs in the town. Ale had apparently a genial influence upon him, for he chanted the Doxology in a mighty loud and deep voice, dwelling upon the final words of each verse in fine style. When he had been requested to suspend his melody he spoke at great length on the accomplishments of his grey parrot ; and afterwards he discoursed on the virtues and cleverness of his wife and children with such feeling that he was moved to tears.

A desire to sing again seized him, and he began a parody on "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep," whereof the first two lines ran—

"Locked in the stable with the sheep,
I lay me down in straw to sleep."

This raised a storm of opposition, and a burly cattle-dealer threatened to remove him from the room as a public nuisance. The would-be singer evidently knew his man, and finally desisted.

Suddenly remembering the swift flight of time, and various matters I wished to settle relating to my departure from Stamford next morning, I arose and went to mine inn.

OAK AVENUES.

When planting young oaks it is not an easy matter to select the most appropriate spacing ; and the inexperienced cultivator is apt to set the saplings too close together. The object to be kept in view is to give a judicious distance between each stem for trees of large growth ; hence it follows that an avenue or line of young oaks has a straggled look. Chaucer in one of his poems has given a distance of eight or nine feet as being a fair space between each tree. If he meant this to be the distance between the extreme branches, then we may agree that his judgment was sound ; but if, as I suspect, he meant that the stated distance was from trunk to trunk, he greatly understates the pitch necessary for an effective display ; and the result of such close planting would be that the trees would not have room for full growth ; and in summer their foliage would be so intermingled that the form of each individual tree would be undistinguishable. The interlacing of the branches has a further disadvantage that in high summer winds the foliage of one is liable to be lashed by its neighbour ; since the swayings of no two trees exactly synchronise. By giving a long pitch more variety of aspect is obtained. Gazing at right angles to the line each tree displays its form, whilst the effect of massed foliage is obtained when viewing the trees at a slight angle from the line.

As to the best direction for an avenue or line, the nature of the prevalent winds and disposition of surrounding objects will determine a point of considerably less importance than spacing. The effect of planting parallel with the prevalent winds is to produce an uneven height, the first trees on the windward end having a tendency to be shorter than the others which they shield. If placed east and west the trees are likely to grow unsymmetrically about a line passing through the trunk centres ; and in an avenue the southern row will as a rule grow larger than the one opposite. Other considerations apart, I should choose a direction north-west and south-east for an avenue.

The trees in the opposite picture are spaced about 22 ft. apart, and represent what I deem appropriate spacing. Individually they exhibit nothing remarkable either in form or size. The average circumference of the trunks 4 ft. from the ground is 6 ft. and their height is computed to be 70 ft. In regarding the picture the reader should imagine a wild April morning whereon the gusty wind plays fitful music in the branches, all but drowning the faint singing of a lark hovering high above them. The sap of the trees has barely stirred as yet, and they appear more naked than in January, when withered fragments of foliage often cling to the branches, melancholy survivals of a shattered host of yellow leaves.

Young Natives of English Soil.

CHAPTER XIV

EXIT PONTIFLUNK

THE following morning we left Stamford, and, pursuing a south-westerly direction, were soon in Northamptonshire, the county of steeples and stately mansions. The sky was cloudless, but the atmosphere was heavy and still ; and certain signs seemed to portend an end of the excessive heat. The characteristic aspect of the country at this season of the year is to me very striking, and nature assumes a perfectly fitting stage between the brilliant display of spring and the gorgeous colour feast of autumn. The perils of spring—its early morning frosts, wild, destructive winds and chilling rains—are safely past, and the trees stand secure in the full majesty of summer foliage. The sycamore and chestnut trees in particular are conspicuous objects, and it is a sight to see them standing like solid masses of dark green against the inimitable blue, which by contrast acquires an intenser hue round their dense foliage, bravely drinking in the fierce sunlight which we are fain to avoid. Not a breath of wind disturbs their seeming fixity, for the dancing of the heated air above the grass is too low to disturb the suggestion of solidity. Now the delirious carollings of spring have gone ;

but the year's music is duly attuned to the season, and the sultry air pulsates to the wing-beats of innumerable small flyers of metallic lustre, and the somnific murmur of the assiduous bees. At most seasons of the year it is not enough merely to exist, one must be up and doing; but on such days as I have attempted to describe all exertion seems folly: it is sufficient simply to be.

By midday we had journeyed about four miles from Stamford, and, pleased with such rapid progress under adverse conditions, I called a halt. We obtained a frugal meal at a lonely cottage standing in a patch of shrubby ground, and commanding a good view of surrounding country. As we sat in the little garden of the cottage, resting after our midday meal, I had some talk with Pontiflunk as to his enjoyment of our present nomadic life; and as far as I could understand my little friend, he liked it well enough, and wished for nothing better. I did wonder whether he would chafe under a settled existence in Lancashire, where, except at week-ends, we should only see each other at morning and night; and where his daily excursions would be restricted to the extent of my little garden, and short rambles with the children.

At half-past two we continued our travels; and at five o'clock we found ourselves at a little village called Morcot, where I decided to stay till next morning. We obtained shelter at a blacksmith's neat cottage near the church. I was attracted by this picturesque ecclesiastical building, and we made its early acquaintance. Bidding Pontiflunk amuse himself by philosophical reflections, or in any

other quiet and harmless manner, I entered the cool silence; and, seated in a pew, mused awhile on the question whether I could reconcile myself to a life in such an obscure village as this. I am afraid that, despite its many charms, the life would become monotonous. The ideal existence is to pass a portion of time in some busy city, and retire at frequent intervals to a calm, secluded home near a village. To pass rapidly from one extreme to the other gives a zest to life, the activities of the city enhancing the serenity of the village; and the rural quietude and repose bracing the mind to cope with the problems of the city. If I were free to select the locality for a home, I should choose before all places on earth a spot not more than forty miles from London, on the skirts of a hilly region, if possible near the banks of a clear river, and towards the coast. I regard the city as a place to visit, but the country the fitting abode of a rational being; and in the position I have indicated the pleasures of one can be readily exchanged for the amenities of the other; the delights of the hills are at hand, and the charm and witchery of the sea within easy reach.

My thoughts then glanced in other directions, and I invented several mirthful methods of disposing of acorns to unwitting wights, which I intended to put in action when we reached the next town or considerable village. I also formed schemes for the efficient display of my gummed slips, in which cows, pigs, horses and dogs would form innocent propagandists. I then rose to rejoin Pontiflunk, who was waiting patiently in the little porch. He was pleased at my return, and ran down the churchyard

path, through the gate, and stood in the middle of the road, wagging his tail as I approached him. The road made a sudden turn a few yards from where I stood, and I could hear the panting and hooting of a motor in the near distance. Pontiflunk, his gaze fixed upon me, did not seem to hear, and as the thing swung round the corner into sight he still remained in the same pleasing attitude of welcome. A sudden blast startled him; looking round, he saw the thing close upon him, and was petrified with fear; for he had little experience of traffic in the highway. Believing, doubtless, that the dog would run from the track, the driver of the car did not slacken speed, but hooted loudly; and before I could make a movement to save the poor creature the wheels passed over him, and he lay writhing in the dust. I ran to him and raised his head; but, alas! I saw my poor little companion was done for. His agony was pitiful to see; but he seemed soothed by my caresses, and endeavoured to lick my hand. I was so concerned at his condition that I had not thought of the cause of the accident; but on looking round to see what could be done to ease him, I noticed that the car had stopped, and a man was approaching me with that peculiar gait that comes of much horse-riding.

"Hello!" said he, "is he hurt?"

I answered him not, but gently raised the dog from the dusty road, carried him to the churchyard, and laid him on the grass. The man followed me.

"I am sorry this has happened," said he, "but my man thought he would clear out when the hooter blew. But I'll make it right with you. What's he

worth? I am quite willing to pay any fair price. What breed do you call him?"

I looked at the man quickly and keenly, and I thought a smile hovered round his lips.

"Fair price! breed!" I shouted in great indignation. "What are you smiling at, you heartless rascal?"

"Don't be impertinent," said he; "it was quite an accident."

"You damned villain," I said, grasping him by the collar in a rage, "you smiled; that is the impertinence, and this is the reply." And I sent him reeling violently backward.

His anger was at once aroused, and was perhaps greater by reason that his women friends and his servant had seen the affront I had put upon him. White with passion, he rushed upon me, and we closed in rage. My fury was uncontrollable, and gave me a temporary advantage over my powerful opponent. The conflict did not last long, however, for his man rushed to us, and the women ran shrieking to the scene; men darted from neighbouring cottages, and we were soon parted. We stood there, panting and flashing hateful glances at each other, our faces bloody and dirty.

"This fight must go on," I gasped; "the knave has smiled at my dog's agony."

"I did not," said he.

"Liar!" I replied hotly.

"Damn his impertinence," said he, endeavouring to strike me. "I did not smile!"

At this point the women intervened. One spoke to my antagonist, another approached me, and with much entreaty asked me not to rage, and assured me

of their sympathy. The servant ran to the car and returned with a flask of brandy. He diluted some of the spirit, and, with the help of a bystander, poured a little down poor Pontiflunk's throat. My thoughts now returned to my dear companion, and I approached him, and sat down by his side. I felt convinced that he was beyond recovery, and asked the man to give him a strong draught of brandy. I looked up at the company around, and perceived that my antagonist had gone to his car, which stood some distance away.

"This is a sad event for me," I said to the people who stood around, "but you can do nothing. It was purely an accident; but that man enraged me by his smile and the insolence of his wealth."

They protested that I must be mistaken, as he was known throughout the county as a most kind-hearted man.

"Argument is useless," said I, "and cannot undo this accident. I have my own opinion as to whether he smiled or not. Please leave me and join your friend in the car, and tell him in future to be more sympathetic, and less ready in offering a fair price."

They dispersed slowly, and only my friend the blacksmith remained with me and the dog.

"He's done," I said; "there's no doubt about it."

"I think he is, too," said the blacksmith.

"I wish I knew something of surgery; I would open a vein and hasten the end."

"I don't think he feels much," said he; "the brandy has made him dozy. Let me fetch a cushion and we will carry him into the house on it, and lay him on the hearth."

I thanked him for this suggestion and his kindness,

and we carried the dying dog into the blacksmith's house. His wife attended to the little cripple as though he were a child; and I believe his last hour was not passed in extreme pain. He died the same night, about nine o'clock, and the good blacksmith buried him at the bottom of his garden.

Adieu, my affectionate little comrade: I had looked to a happier end than this. My return, which I had so pleasantly anticipated, will be, after all, but a sorry affair, and I know not how to tell them at home of this sad event.

Next morning I arose in a depressed state of mind, and wrote several letters to Lancashire. I then set out, with the rain in my face, from the village which had grown unpleasing in consequence of recent events. I wandered along, sadly missing my late companion, but cheered a little with the thoughts of my mission. I sought relief from depression by rapid walking and planting numerous acorns. Towards night I reached a fairly large village near the county town of Northampton, having covered a distance of nearly twenty miles since morning, and having, in addition, planted some twenty acorns. I spent the early part of the evening in entering up my journal, and about nine o'clock I sat in a little room behind the bar of an inn which stood in the main street of the village; but the conversation which, under happier circumstances, would have diverted me, seemed little better than the spiteful and brainless drivel of gibbering apes. I was gloomy and morose, and my presence was a damper on the company. That night, as I lay in bed, reviewing the past and pondering over the future, a conviction suddenly seized me that all joy

in my journey had ceased, and that I ought to return to Lancashire and get to work with feverish energy. Accordingly, I arose early in the morning, after a restless night, the first I had experienced since leaving home. I wired advising of my return, and walked a few miles to Northampton, and took an express to Manchester.

As the train flew across the smiling country, two men in the compartment discussed dolefully on the late insufficiency of cotton margins, and the impending downfall of the country; but not a thought or a glance did they give to the blue sky and the pleasant country around them. These men, I thought, evidently regard Manchester as one of the best places on earth, and as they are representative of a numerous class, Manchester has not been made in vain.

In due time I arrived in the grim city, and in a little more than an hour afterwards I was seated in my usual chair at home, with my slippers on.

INDEX TO MAP OF ENGLISH OAKS

No. on Map.	Name.	Description.
1	Abolition Oak .	At Keston, Kent, about 12 miles south-east of London Bridge. An old tree of ungainly shape, now falling into decay, but still bearing a crop of leaves. Is carefully railed and trussed; and near by is a seat erected by Earl Stanmore in 1862, bearing an extract from Wilberforce's diary quoted on page 130.
16	Addlestone .	See "Crouch Oak."
62	Apostles, Twelve	New Forest, Hampshire. See "Twelve Apostles."
2	Beggars' Oak .	Blythfield, near Rugeley, Staffordshire. Large tree of symmetrical growth, now decaying. Said to owe its name to the fact that in past times it was supposed to have afforded shelter to many wandering mendicants.
3	Bewdley Oaks .	In Wyre Forest, near Kidderminster. Camden thus alludes to these oaks— <p>"Fair-seated Bewdley, a delightful town, Which Wyre's tall oaks with shady branches crown.</p> <p>Also Drayton, in his "Polyolbion"— <p>"Where soon the goodly Wyre, that wonted was so hie Her stately top to rear, ashamed to behold Her straight and goodly woods unto the furnace sold."</p></p>
4	Boscopel Oak .	Between Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury, and near the borders of Shropshire and

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No. on Map.	Name.	Description.
		Staffordshire. This tree is said to have concealed Charles Stuart in his flight from Worcester; but the present tree is probably a descendant of that which sheltered the fugitive. This oak has given a title to one of Harrison Ainsworth's novels.
5	Bradgate Oaks .	Bradgate Park, about 5 miles north-west of Leicester. Picturesque old oaks forming rather forlorn objects in the wide stretch of open park.
6	Brockenhurst Oak	Brockenhurst, New Forest, Hampshire. Fine oak near the church. An interesting yew tree is also near.
7	Bull Oak . .	Wedgenock Park, Warwickshire. Now a mere hollow remnant of vast girth. There appears to be a number of Bull Oaks in the country, and they are so called because bulls are wont to stand within the cavity of the trunks, with their heads projecting.
8	Cadenham Oak .	New Forest, about 2 miles from Lyndhurst. An old tree having the singular quality of bearing fresh leaves about Christmas time. See page 85.
9	Chandos Oak .	Michendon House, Southgate, Middlesex, 8 miles north of London. Fine spreading tree, but not remarkably large.
10	Chingford Oak .	Near Chingford, a pleasant Essex village between Epping Forest and the sinuous Lee. This huge tree must have been in its prime many years ago. It is now utterly dead. A typical form of pollared oak, whose writhing branches resemble in form the lightning's flash.
11	Conqueror's Oak	Windsor Great Park. A mere lifeless trunk, some 39 ft. girth at the base.
12	Copford Oaks .	Essex, 5 miles south of Colchester. Fine straight oaks in pleasant grassy plain. See Plates 5 and 6.
13	Cowper's Oak .	In Yardley Chase, Northamptonshire, near the Buckinghamshire border. See page 144.

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No. on Map.	Name.	Description.
14	Cowthorpe Oak .	Near Marston Moor, Yorkshire, 6 miles west of York. See page 85.
15	Creeping Oak .	Savernake Forest, Wiltshire, 5 miles south-east of Marlborough. So called because one of the main boughs rests upon the ground and appears to creep along.
16	Crouch Oak .	Addlestone, near Chertsey, Surrey. A huge squat oak on roadside, under which Wycliffe is believed to have preached and Queen Elizabeth to have feasted.
17	Danbury Oaks .	Between Chelmsford and Maldon, Essex. See Plates 9, 10, 11 and 12. Danbury Park contains some of the finest oaks now living.
18	Deane Forest .	Numerous fine straight oaks, but of no great historic interest or gigantic size. Newland Oak is near, but is not in the Forest of Deane.
19	Dropmore Oaks.	Buckinghamshire, between Beaconsfield and the Thames. Two interesting trees, one of which is said to have been planted by Queen Elizabeth. The other is grown from an acorn from the Boscopel Oak.
20	Elizabeth Oak .	Hatfield Park, Hertfordshire. Reputed to be the tree under which Elizabeth sat when she heard that Mary Tudor was dead.
21	Elizabeth Oak .	Huntingfield, Suffolk, 5 miles south-west of Halesworth, and 12 miles south of Beccles, from under whose shade Elizabeth is reputed to have shot a buck. A mere shell now remains, measuring 36 ft. circumference 7 ft. above the ground. Has a huge rift in one side.
22	Fairlop Oak .	The exact site of this vanished veteran is now uncertain, but it was near Chigwell, Essex, and about 6 miles north-west of Romford. Destroyed by fire in 1820 ; or, by other accounts, blown down in that year. Old prints show a vast spreading tree. Here was held an annual fair on

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No. on Map.	Name.	Description.
		the first Friday in July, originated by a man named Day, whose happy custom it was to feast on beans and bacon on that day with a few friends, beneath his favourite tree.
10	Fairmead Oak .	See "Chingford Oak."
23	Fingringhoe Oak	About $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of Colchester. See Plates 3 and 8.
24	Flitton Oak .	About 10 miles east of Barnstaple, Devonshire. Supposed to be 1000 years of age.
25	Fredville Oaks .	Nonington, Kent, 7 miles south-east of Canterbury. Three oaks of large size, named Majesty, Stately and Beauty.
26	Glendower's Oak	At Shelton, near Shrewsbury. From this tree Glendower witnessed battle between Henry iv. and Harry Percy in 1403. Now a hollow trunk about 40 ft. 3 in. girth at the base.
27	Gospel Oak .	12 miles south-west of Ipswich. See Plates 1 and 2 and page 85. Supposed to be the tree under which the Gospel was preached to Saxons, <i>circa</i> 700 A.D.
28	Gospel Oak .	Stoneleigh, 4 miles south-west of Coventry. A large stump with a pulpit-like cavity on one side.
29	Gough's Oak .	In Hertfordshire, near borders of Middlesex, and $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles north-west of Waltham Cross.
30	Great Yeldham Oak	26 miles south-east of Cambridge. See Plate 3 and page 144.
31	Greendale Oak .	Sherwood Forest, $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from Welbeck. A mere ruin supported by props and chains. Has a huge arch through the trunk large enough to admit three horse-men abreast, and through which a coach-and-four has been driven.
32	Grindstone Oak .	Holt Forest, Hampshire. Mentioned in White's "Selborne." A huge dead trunk.
33	Hazlegrove Oak	Somerset, about 4 miles south-west of Castle Cary, which is about $12\frac{1}{2}$ miles north-east of Yeovil.

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No. on Map.	Name.	Description.
34	Herne's Oak .	Windsor Park. Now a mere stump. Bears the following inscription from <i>The Merry Wives</i> .— <p style="text-align: center;">“There is an old tale goes that Herne the hunter, Sometime a keeper here in Windsor Forest, Doth all the winter time at still midnight Walk round about this oak.”</p>
13	Judith Oak .	See “Yardley Oak.” This is the tree immortalised by Cowper. See pages 85 and 144. Called “Judith,” in memory of one of William the Conqueror's children, but why I have not been able to learn.
I 35	Keston Oak . King Oak .	See “Abolition Oak.” New Forest, near Lyndhurst. This, with the adjacent Queen Oak, is fast decaying. See page 85.
36	King Oak .	Savernake Forest, Wiltshire, 5 miles south-east of Marlborough.
37	King Oak .	Tilford, Surrey, about 40 miles south-west of London Bridge. A noble lofty oak, a little past its prime. Stands on pleasant green near Tilford Bridge.
56 38	Larder Oak . Major Oak	See “Shambles Oak.” Sherwood Forest, near Edwinstowe. Hollow trunk, with a girth of about 37 ft. 6 in. at 4 ft. above the ground. See pages 58 and 116.
39	Meavy Oak .	Meavy, 5 miles north of Plymouth, on borders of Dartmoor. Hollow oak of considerable size. Erroneously supposed to have sheltered Charles Stuart after his Worcester flight.
40	Merton Oak .	Norfolk, 10 miles north of Thetford and 12 miles north-west of Attleborough. This oak fell in January 1892. It then measured 23 ft. 4 in. girth at 6 ft. above the ground, and was hollow.
41	Moocas Oak .	12 miles north-west of Hereford, near the banks of the Wye.
42	Nettlecombe Oak	Nettlecombe Court, Somerset, 4 miles south of Watchet.

No. on Map.	Name.	Description.
43	Newland Oak .	Newland, Gloucester, a few miles west of Monmouth. Girth about 47 ft. 6 in. 3 ft. above the ground. Far gone in decay.
44	Pansanger Oak .	Near Hertford. Fine freely-growing tree, now falling into decay.
45	Parliament Oak.	Clipston Park, Sherwood. Shown as the tree under which Edward I. held a parliament in 1282. The oak is carefully preserved, and is supported by props.
20 and 21	Queen's Oak .	See "Elizabeth Oak."
46	Queen's Oak .	Grafton Regis, Buckinghamshire. Edward IV. is said to have first met Elizabeth Woodville, daughter of Earl Rivers, under this tree, and hither, tradition has it, she came to pray for the restoration of her husband's land, lost in the Wars of the Roses.
47	Queen's Oak .	New Forest, near Lyndhurst. Near the King Oak. See page 85.
48	Reformation Oak	On Mousehold Heath, Norwich, under which Ket held his parliament, and on which nine of his followers were hanged after the suppression of the rebellion.
56	Robin Hood's Oak	See "Shambles Oak."
49	Rufus Oak .	Now vanished. The tree from which Tyrrel shot Red-whiskers. The site in the New Forest is now marked with an inscribed stone.
50	Rycote Oak .	9 miles east of Oxford.
51	Rydal Oaks .	Near Rydal Mere. Storm-battered specimens which interested Wordsworth. See page 94.
52	St. Edmund's Oak	Hoxne Woods, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, marked the site of the King's martyrdom. This venerable tree fell in 1848, and deeply embedded in its trunk an iron cusp was found, believed to be one of the actual arrow-heads shot by the Danes at the martyred King.

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No. on Map.	Name.	Description.
53	Salcy Forest Oak	Northamptonshire, near Whittlebury. A mere shell with a huge arch in centre.
15 and 36	Savernake Forest Oaks	See "Creeping Oak" and "King Oak."
54	Selborne Oak .	Selborne, Hampshire. Destroyed by tempest of 1703. See pages 85 and 88.
55	Seven Sisters .	Sherwood Forest, near Welbeck. Only a mere shell now remains. So called because years ago the tree had seven mighty boughs.
56	Shambles Oak .	Sherwood Forest, near Welbeck. A fine relic of a tree. Said to have been used as a larder by Robin Hood.
26	Shelton Oak .	See "Glendower's Oak."
57	Squitch Bank Oak	Blythfield, near Rugeley, Staffordshire.
58	Stamford Oaks .	Burghley Park, Stamford. Numerous fine oaks scattered about the park.
59	Swilcar Oak .	Needwood Forest, near Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire. A huge old oak of typical growth. Dr. Darwin's well-known lines are addressed to this tree— <div data-bbox="370 977 874 1168"> <p>"Hail, stately oak! whose wrinkled trunk hath stood Age after age the sovereign of the wood; You, who have seen a thousand springs unfold Their ravelled buds, and dip their flowers in gold; Ten thousand times yon moon re-light her horn, And that bright eye of evening gild the morn."</p> </div>
60	Sydney Oak .	Penshurst, near Tunbridge Wells, Sussex. Planted on the birth of Sir Philip Sydney in 1554. Memorialised by Ben Jonson and Edmund Waller.
61	Thorington Oaks	Near Thorington, 4 miles from Wivenhoe, Essex. Four grisly stumps, one entirely dead, the others fast decaying. The largest is 29 ft. 6 in. circumference 5 ft. above the ground. These trees are all within two hundred yards from the church.
37	Tilford Oak .	See "King Oak."

196 INDEX TO MAP OF ENGLISH OAKS

No. on Map.	Name.	Description.
62	Twelve Apostles	New Forest, Hampshire. A group of decaying trees of considerable height, and apparently of great age. See page 85.
63	Waller's Oak .	Near Coleshill, Manor House, Buckinghamshire. This oak disappeared within recent years. Believed to have inspired much of Waller's verse.
1	Wilberforce Oak	See "Abolition Oak."
64	Winfarthing Oak	4 miles north of Diss, Norfolk. This oak is in a decaying state, and measures about 40 ft. in the waist of the trunk, but at the ground the circumference is 70 ft.
65	Wistman's Wood Oaks	Near the borders of Dartmoor, 1 mile from Two Bridges. A group of fast disappearing stumps with strange mossy growths on the bark. See page 85.
66	Wooton Oak .	Wooton-under-Bernwood, Oxfordshire.
13	Yardley Oak .	See "Cowper's Oak"
30	Yeldham Oak .	See "Great Yeldham Oak."

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