



Tom Hughes Country.

By the Hon. A. E. Gathorne Hardy.

A PAPER READ TO THE NEWBURY AND DISTRICT FIELD CLUB.

FROM the first day that you did me the honour of electing me as your President, I have looked forward to the pleasure of visiting with you the scenes described by Tom Hughes, and meeting you in this house where he spent so much of his life. No man took a greater delight in Berkshire and its scenery than did that typical Berkshireman, the whole of whose works are redolent with the spirit of the county that he loved. The entire first chapter of his immortal classic, "Tom Brown's Schooldays," is devoted to a description of the scenes we have visited to-day.

WHITE HORSE HILL.

In it he writes : "What a hill is the White Horse Hill ! There it stands right up above the rest, nine hundred feet above the sea, and the boldest, bravest shape for a chalk hill you ever saw. Let us go to the top of him and see what is to be found there. Ay, you may well wonder and think it odd you have never heard of this before, but wonder or not as you please, there are hundreds of such things lying about England which wiser folk than you know nothing of, and care nothing for. Yes, it is a magnificent Roman camp, and no mistake, with gates, ditches and mounds, all as complete as it was twenty years after the strong old rogues left it. Here, right up on the highest point, from which they say you can see eleven counties, they trenched round all the table land, some twelve or fourteen acres as was their custom, for they could not bear any one to overlook them, and made their eyrie. The ground falls away rapidly on all sides. Was there ever such turf in the whole world ? You sink up to your ankles in it at every step, and yet the spring of it is delicious. There is always a breeze in the 'camp' as it is called, and here it lies just as the Romans left it. It is altogether a place that you won't forget—a place to open a man's soul and make him prophecy, as he looks down on that great vale spread out as the garden of the Lord before him, and wave after wave of the

mysterious downs behind, and to the right and left the chalk hills running away into the distance, along which he can trace for miles the old Roman road, the 'Ridgeway' (the Rudge, as the country folk call it), keeping straight along the highest back of the hills—such a place as Balak brought Balaam to, and told him to prophecy against the people in the valley beneath. And he could not; neither shall you, for they are a people of the Lord who abide there." I might quote the whole chapter, but I will not, as I hope you will turn to it yourselves, and be carried on by the spell of the enchanter and read again with renewed pleasure his enthralling masterpiece. He describes Ashdown House and its surroundings—"It was a wise Lord Craven, I think, who pitched his tent there." Wayland Smith's Cave, "then standing in a little clump of young beeches and firs," now good-sized trees, and "the Blawing Stwun his self," Kingstone Lisle, and "the splendid old cross church at Uffington."

UFFINGTON.

In this village, the old Saxon Uffinga's town, in the house described as the residence of Squire Brown, Tom Hughes was born in 1820, and doubtless imbibed the legends and witnessed the "Veast" which his hero visited on old Benjy's shoulders. Here he lived till his great grandfather died thirteen years later when the family removed to this house. It was from Donnington Priory that he took coach for Rugby in 1833. I have tried to trace his early years spent here in his "Memoir of a Brother," in which he records primarily that brother's children, the life and character of his brother George, who died in 1872, whose abilities were so marked and whose promise was so great, that his schoolfellow, our late neighbour Sir Alexander Arbuthnot, considered him far more clever and brilliant than his brother Tom. He used to bring his school friends home to Donnington, and it curiously illustrates the difference in the facilities of travel between 1836 and the present day when we read how permission is asked to bring a boy home with him who "is going as far as Newbury that day, where he is going to sleep, and go on in the Oxford coach to Winchester, where he stops." No doubt some of you remember when the Hughes family left the priory. They were certainly here as late as 1833, when Sir Alexander Arbuthnot received a letter from his old schoolfellow dated from this house.

I suppose the porch through which you entered was added by his father, as the initials "J.H." and the crest are over the door in

stone of apparently the same date. The oak overmantels in the drawing-room, which I highly value, were collected and placed there by the same hand. One of them bears two inscriptions in Welsh which have been translated to me as "John the son of John the charming faced," and the motto "The truth above the world."

A PROBLEM FOR SOLUTION.

It only remains for me to thank you for your presence here, for joining me in visiting scenes many of which are no doubt familiar to you, but which can never pall on any true lover of rural beauty. I am proud to be living in the house where Tom Hughes spent his childhood, and to have become by adoption a Berkshire-man. I am trying so far as I can to collect and familiarise myself with the past history of this house and its surroundings, and I should be grateful for any light upon it which any of you may be able to supply. Perhaps also some of you may be able to throw light upon a problem in which I am interesten as a fisherman and a naturalist, the utter disappearance of the cray fish from the Lambourne which runs under my window. The Memoirs of Sir Alexander Arbuthnot from which I have already quoted, records how in 1837 he went with Tom Hughes "to the rivet Lambourne which flows through the Priory garden, and we amused ourselves by scooping crayfish out of the river with our hands. We caught a quantity in that way." I do not know why the crayfish have now entirely disappeared. I have made an attempt to re-introduce them by putting in about a hundred live ones last year, but so far I have not been able to trace any satisfactory results of the experiment.

Maylen Smith's Cæbe.

By W. H. Belcher.

THIS is a cromlech, and was formed by the ancient dwellers upon the hills, most probably to contain the remains of a chief. It is built of sarsden stones, and the earth, which at one time covered it, has been removed. Several thousand years may have passed since this monument was raised, and it has, for ages,