

THE "HOLE-BOURNE."

BY JOHN GREEN WALLER, ESQ.

There are three great brooks, rising from the Hampstead and Highgate hills, which pass through London on their way to the Thames, viz. the "Hole-bourne," the "Ty-bourne," and the "West-bourne." It is the first of these which will at present occupy our attention. I use its most ancient name, such as is given to it in old records, and which well describes its physical character. It is strictly, throughout its course, the brook or "bourne" in the "hole" or hollow. But it has other names: John Stow speaks of it as the "River of Wells," this also is a very appropriate appellation. The "River Fleet" is that by which it is best known. But the term "fleet," the affix to so many names on the Thames and Medway and other southern rivers, can only be properly applied where it is influenced by the tidal flow of the Thames. A "fleet," in fact, is a channel covered with shallow water at high tide. Turnmill Brook is another name: this also was local in its application.

It would be but a dry record, were I merely to point out the course of this stream through the miles of houses which now obliterate it. But it passes many spots belonging to our social history. Our city's development and growth, the customs, habits, and amusements of its inhabitants, all that makes up the true history of a people, are exemplified on the banks of this stream. No better gift could have been conferred upon a city than a supply of pure water in abundance, as was here given by Nature's hand, yet never was such a gift so abused. In defiance, or in ignorance of physical laws, it became, in our hands, a "pestilence walking in darkness." We endured it as a nuisance for six centuries, in the heart of London. I shall show you what is said of it in the thirteenth century, and how many fearful scourges of epidemical diseases have we not recorded since? Yet was it, actually, an open, foul, pestilential sewer, after we had had the cholera twice amongst us, within a short distance of the spot whence arose complaints at the time alluded to!

I will now ask you to follow me, in imagination, whilst I perambulate its course. All the springs arise within the semicircle formed

by the heights of Hampstead and Highgate. Walking from the latter place towards Hampstead, we turn on our left by the grounds of Lord Mansfield at Ken Wood.* Immediately we are in a scene of considerable beauty. On our left the crested hill of Highgate, on the right the grounds of Ken Wood. The landscape slopes from us, and dips in the centre, showing the vast metropolis in the distance, the noble cathedral of St. Paul's crowning the whole. There are plenty of fine trees to form a foreground and frame to the picture; the place is quiet and retired, not a hum to be heard from that largest and busiest of all human hives which lies before us. A path leads by a winding course until you reach where "a willow grows ascant a brook," † and beneath its roots, in the bank, gurgles forth rapidly a limpid stream, which, from the colour of the objects about it, shows it to be in some measure impregnated with iron. It passes across the road into Lord Mansfield's inclosures, and helps to form the first of a series of five ponds, in which it is assisted by another spring within the grounds. These are the first of the sources on the Highgate side. The course of the brooklet is now in the succession of artificial reservoirs, formed one after another, in a line, at descending levels. Continuing down the lane (Milfield Lane), we come to a gap, where, a few years ago, grew a very picturesque ash tree, now gone, leaving only a decaying stump. Here other sources from the fields nearer Highgate are united, and pass under the road to the third pond, and those succeeding receive small rilllets here and there. From the last, the outfall takes a bend and crosses the road of Highgate Rise, and, proceeding parallel to Swain's Lane, it receives a rillet from a field by the cemetery, and turns southwards in a meandering course. A few years ago, a footpath by its side made a pretty rural walk, through undulated fields, and the broken banks of the stream were full of picturesque "bits," some of which I did not fail to record with my pencil. In places it passed through inclosures, and was of avail to make ornamental pieces of water, and it "babbled" over little dams, made here and there to keep it back for the use of cattle. Pursuing this course, it at length bent round again, and re-crossed the high road of Kentish Town, near the three-mile stone. The section of the stream here, above the bridge, at flood was thirteen feet. The

* See fig. 1 on the Map facing the preceding page. On this plan are references to the more important places mentioned in the text.

† Now gone.

whole of this portion is now dry, and drained off into the main sewer, and the fields, for the greater part, are covered with houses. After passing the road, it makes a sweep around the new chapel of Kentish Town, erected in 1844. The ancient chapel was built in the reign of Elizabeth, not on this site, but a quarter of a mile south of it.

After passing the chapel it proceeds southwards, keeping nearly parallel to Kentish Town, until it reaches a point a little to the north of the Regent's Canal, at the junction of what is now Exeter Street with Hawley Road. And here we must at present leave it, and make our way to Hampstead, to trace the course of that branch which at this point forms a union with that just described.*

Here the spring arises in the Vale of Health, forming the large square pond south of that spot. Leaving this, it winds along at the base of the heath, receiving another supply from a spring on the east, where a large bridge is erected over a gap between rising ground, and also other rillets from the heath. It then forms a succession of three ponds, like those previously noticed, artificially constructed for the Hampstead Waterworks.

The overflow from these then passes east of South End, a little green, with a few houses around it, and in a broken course, fringed by very old picturesque willows, which have often found a place in artists' sketch-books, it moved southwards until it effected a junction with the branch from Highgate at Hawley Road. At a short distance, however, from South End, there was a straight cut directly across to Kentish Town, in union with a small arm which bent southwards, and united with the Highgate branch a little to the south of the new chapel. None of this appears in old maps, and it is obviously artificial, probably for the purpose of diverting the stream, as the branch from Hampstead, from the point where it meets this straight cut, has for many years been entirely concealed. Now the whole is dry, drained off into sewers, and at present it is the boundary of London which, in compact streets, reaches up to this point, though only a few years ago there were extensive meadows between Kentish Town and Haverstock Hill.

Near the junction made by this cut, within a space marked out by a bending of the brook, where it forms the boundary of the parishes of

* None of this course is now visible.

Hampstead and St. Pancras, stood an old oak, known as the "Gospel Oak:" its memory is well maintained in the large district erected about the site, and in a railway station, which one would always desire should be the case; such landmarks are memories of the past. But what is the meaning of "Gospel Oak?" for there are others in different parts of the country—one notably by Birmingham. It has been suggested to me by a friend that Whitfield, the follower of John Wesley, preached beneath it, and it may be that such an origin may apply elsewhere. But the association of this noble tree with religious observances, it is unnecessary to say, is of extreme antiquity, and not confined by any means to one system of worship. Domesday Book gives us a name in Shropshire of Cristes-ache, "Christ's Oak," now Cressage, and one would like to be sure of the origin of such a term as "Gospel Oak." The term sounds modern, but may not the tree have had an earlier veneration in connection with religion?

Before we proceed further on our course, let me direct your attention to the acute angle of land embraced within the space formed by the junction of the two arms of the brook. Remember, Kentish Town is a corruption of "Cantlers," or "Kantloes," the name of the prebend of St. Paul's, and parcel of the parish of St. Pancras. Now, the word "Cantlers" allies itself with roots most familiar to us in our Saxon tongue, such as "Cant," "Cantle," signifying an oblique angle, and the meaning of "Cantlers" probably points to this angle of land, contained within the boundaries of the two streams. Perhaps they form the boundary of the prebendal manor, which contains 210 acres. Comparing the inclosed space with the proportion of land in the parish (2716 acres), it appears to be as nearly as possible of the size stated. But this is a point doubtless quite capable of being set at rest, as the boundaries of the manor must be well known.

Continuing our route, we now encounter a succession of works of engineering of more than Roman magnitude. They have effaced old landmarks, by the alteration of levels, to an extent that must be directly studied to comprehend their vastness, and these works meet us and interfere with us throughout the whole of our way to the Thames. But I must pass them with scarce a mention, except when they serve to point out the way we are pursuing. From the junction of the two arms the course bent again across Kentish Town Road, a little above the Regent's Canal, and here the flow had gained so considerable an

accession of power, that, after it had passed under the bridge, at flood, the section was no less than sixty-five superficial feet.* It then proceeded a short distance till it approached the canal, *beneath* which it is carried, a test of the vast changes made in the levels. It continued its course nearly parallel to the canal, for some distance, crossing Great College Street, towards Kings' Road, and then, between it and Great College Street, behind the Veterinary College, in many a bend, it found its way to the corner of the road last-named, by St. Pancras Workhouse, and hence to King's Cross it followed the course of the road, on its south side, and for that reason we find its windings controlled to suit the convenience of the public way.

We must now, however, throw ourselves back into earlier times, and forget the vast works of engineering skill about us—the dense neighbourhood—and try and imagine that St. Pancras' mother church, to which we have now arrived, was once a desolate, neglected spot, secluded from and also forgotten by the world, and this, too, not much more than a century ago. Norden, writing at the end of the sixteenth century, thus speaks of it: "P. C. standeth all alone as utterly forsaken, old, and wetherbeaten, which for the antiquitie thereof, it is thought not to yeeld to Paules in London: about this church have bin manie buildings now decayed, leaving poor Pancras without companie or comfort: yet it is now and then visited with Kentish Town and Highgate which are members thereof: but they seldome come there, for that they have chapels of ease within themselves, but when ther is a corps to be interred, they are forced to leave the same in this forsaken church or churchyard, where, no doubt, it resteth as secure against the day of resurrection as if it lain in stately Paules." In this condition, remote from the metropolis, out of the great highways, having only an approach by a miry lane, often deeply flooded, it remained until about 150 years ago, whilst its children of Kentish Town and Highgate became the centres of increasing neighbourhoods. But we must go still further back to understand the state of things. Wherever we find a place known by no other name than that of the patron saint of its church, I think we may conclude that, when the church was first erected, there was neither township nor village, but a sparse and scattered population.† This condition prevailed in the adjoining

* These facts are taken from a Report on the Bridges of Middlesex. Lond. 4to. 1826.

† Mr. Black disputes this hypothesis, but it is certainly most usual in England,

parish of Marylebone, Saint Mary at the Bourne, built in the fourteenth century. Its antecedent church of St. John the Baptist, which stood near where Stratford Place now is in Oxford Street, was also in a lonely spot far away from habitations, and this isolated condition, exposing it to depredation, caused it to be taken down; yet this, remember, was on the great Roman highway to the West. The proofs of the existence of the great forest round London in which, in early times, ranged wildly the deer, the ox, and those formidable animals the boar, the bear, and the wolf, may be found in many local names in Middlesex, and in the fact that game abounded in the immediate vicinity late in the seventeenth century. It was not until 1218 that disafforestation took place, and in the Visitation of St. Pancras in 1251 there were but forty houses; the parish stretching from Highgate Hill to Clerkenwell, nearly four miles in a direct line, and, most likely, these were mainly the farmsteads with their cottiers, attached to the prebendal manors. We cannot estimate this population beyond 250 souls, yet now it is 200,000! It is clear that, in the thirteenth century, the parish could have had but a small portion under tillage, but consisted chiefly of pastures in the low-lying lands, whilst the upland was entirely covered with wood. In the same Visitation the church is said to have a small tower, and it was doubtless just such a structure that came down to our times, if not the same, having only a nave and chancel, with tower at the west end. Besides the church two *arcæ* are mentioned, the one nearest to it, probably the vicar's house, surrounded by a moat.* Indications of this moat remained until recent times, and served to delude Dr. Stukeley into the idea of it being the *prætorium* of a Roman camp. The gradual formation of hamlets at Kentish Town and Highgate, with chapels of ease for their convenience, must gradually have conduced to the neglect of the mother church; and the proof of this neglect the old church exemplified in a powerful degree. It seemed to have been patched up so often, as to have lost all its original architectural features; especially as the work appeared to have been done anyhow, and with any materials. The prints of Toms, Chatelaine, and others declare its mongrel character. What, indeed, could be expected, when, as elsewhere, for a town or village to receive its name on account of some local distinction.

* At the reading of this Paper, one of the members stated that the vicarage-house was in another part of the parish, but he forgot I was speaking of the thirteenth century.—J.G.W.

down to the present century, service was only performed in it once a month?

We can easily imagine, then, that to be Vicar of Pancras was not, formerly, a very coveted ecclesiastical benefice. But, if we are to believe the dramatist Thomas Nabbe, "the parson of Pancrace" must have been in the seventeenth century a sort of "Sir Oliver Martext," as in "As you Like it." Shakespeare, without question, painted from the life, when he makes Touchstone tell Audrey, "I have been with Sir Oliver Martext, the vicar in the next village, who hath promised to meet me in this place of the forest and to couple us." Jaques dissuades him from being so married, much to the disgust, however, of Audrey, who says to him afterwards, "Faith, the priest was good enough for all the old gentleman's saying." Audrey knew "delay is dangerous." A dialogue in Nabbe's play of "Totenham Court," 1633, runs thus:

1. "And yet more plots, I' sure the parson of Pancrace hath been here.
2. Indeed, I have heard he is a notable joyner.
1. And Totenham Court ale pays him store of tithe;
It causeth questionless much unlawful coupling."

Now Tottenham Court was the old manor-house of Totenhall, a prebend of St. Paul's, standing at the corner of Hampstead Road, in after times, as now, the Adam and Eve public house. Deserted by its former tenants, it had become a place of suburban resort for the citizens of London, and so continued far into the eighteenth century. At this time, the place had many attractions. It was extremely rural; no houses nearer than St. Giles Pound; and the neighbouring dairies afforded, in abundance, the materials for syllabubs, custards, and checsecakes. These were some of the staple commodities of its entertainment. Close at hand, reaching nearly up to it, was Marylebone Park, the site now occupied by Regent's Park, but somewhat larger, and a pathway led across the fields to St. Pancras Church, three-quarters of a mile distant. By the play, we learn that, the park was convenient for flirtations, the parson convenient for the unavoidable consequences, and Tottenham Court for the banquet. It ends, indeed, by "Why then to Pancrace each with his loved consort, and make it holiday at Totenham Court." Those who would, the vicar might marry at the Court, those who would be more precise could walk across the fields to the church.

Seventy years later we find an apt analogy in the adjoining parish of Hampstead, as appears in the following advertisement :

"Sion Chapel, Hampstead, being a private and pleasure place, many persons of the best fashion have lately been married there. Now, as a minister is obliged constantly to attend, this is to give notice, that all persons, upon bringing a licence, and who shall have their wedding dinner in the gardens, may be married in the said chapel without giving any fee or rewards whatsoever, and such as do not keep their wedding dinner at the gardens, only 5s. will be demanded of them for all fees."* On the subject of irregular or clandestine marriages I must again speak of in another place; it may be well, therefore, here to give an outline of the history of our marriage law and custom, otherwise very erroneous conclusions may be arrived at from the foregoing. Previous to the Council of Trent (sixteenth century) marriage, all over Europe, was a civil obligation, no ecclesiastical sanction being essential. Of this we have, in the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini, a most atrocious illustration, not redounding to the credit of that great artist, great braggart, and great scoundrel. The Council decrees that marriage is a sacrament, and whoever says it is not, and that it does not confer grace, "let him be accursed." After that, no one within the pale of Roman Catholic communion could marry without the priest and two witnesses. But previously to the pontificate of Pope Innocent III. in 1198, these matters were conducted in the most simple and patriarchal fashion. The man took the woman, with consent, led her from her own to his house, and it was indissoluble marriage. The words "sponsus," "sponsa," "spouse," meant no more than that each had given the response or answer to each other. Before this time no marriage was solemnized in the churches. Banns were first directed to be published in 1200, and in 1347 we find clandestine marriages, as it were, a natural protest against any restriction on the right of the individual. For they are thus spoken of in the Constitution of William la Zouch: "Some contriving unlawful marriages, and affecting the dark, lest their deeds should be reprov'd, procure every day in a damnable manner marriages to be celebrated, without publication of banns duly and lawfully made, by means of chaplains that have no regard to the fear of God

* Vide Park's *History of Hampstead*, p. 235.

and the prohibition of the laws." Clandestine marriages, however, continued thence down to our own times. England did not acknowledge the Council of Trent; so, irregular as these unions might be in ceremony, they could not be undone, the law of the land recognised them, and the parties were amenable only to ecclesiastical censure.* But we will now return to the lonely church of St. Pancras, whose churchyard, in the eighteenth century, had become a favourite place for the interment of Roman Catholics, it is said on account of masses being performed in the south of France, at a church dedicated to the same saint, for the repose of souls therein.

In 1765 there was established, on the north side of the church, a large house, with drinking rooms and gardens, in consequence of the discovery of a mineral spring, and the place became known as St. Pancras Wells. There was a rage for these spas in the eighteenth century, and numbers of them were opened around London, and drinking mineral waters for health's sake soon became one of the established modes, to use a modern advertising phrase, "of spending a happy day." The course observed was, to rise early, drink the waters, then walk about and listen to dulcet music, with songs, often in praise of the wells or springs. It must have been somewhat "tragical mirth" for people to swallow a fluid akin to Glauber's salts, then to walk about and try and make merry; yet, this was what you were enjoined to do, if you would seek health.

One Dr. Soames, who died in 1738, inveighed against the evils of tea-drinking, prophesying, as a consequence, that the next generation may be in stature more like pigmies than men and women, but he specially advised mineral waters. "An hour after you have done drinking," says he, "you may divert yourselves with the diversions of the place," but, he adds, which must have been somewhat depressing to the hypochondriac, that "all who expect to reap any benefit from the use of these waters must be of a merry and cheerful disposition."

An old engraving of the last century exhibits this house and gardens. There was an inclosure, planted with trees, in rows, to form walks, and the view gives us the patients of both sexes solemnly walking up and down. On the other side of the church was the Adam and Eve public-house, also with its garden, which must have been a serious rival. Few other buildings occupied any part of this neigh

* Vide Burn on Fleet Registers, &c., Lond. 8vo. 1833.

bourhood until the end of the eighteenth century, and these became very squalid and dilapidated before the Great Northern Railway began those vast works which have since effaced so much of the primitive character of the place.

The brook flowed towards Battle Bridge by the south side of the road, receiving an affluent rising from some springs by Tottenham Court Road, on the south side of what is now Euston Road, parallel to which it continued as far as Burton Mews, when it turned in a north-easterly direction and fell into the main stream by the Brill, the position of Stukeley's Roman Camp. The road was often overflowed by it, making what was called "St. Pancras Wash," and was often in this state as far as Battle Bridge, now King's Cross. At times, the inundations were attended with danger, and occasioned much loss to the dwellers around. Indeed, here, the stream had less fall; it was at the foot of hills, and moved sluggishly, spreading itself out as it bent round the end of Gray's Inn Road, which was here carried over the bridge which gave name to the locality. Why the prefix "Battle" was given must, I think, be left unanswered, though imaginative antiquaries have found that it was the scene of the conflict between Suetonius and Boadicea, recorded in the pages of Tacitus. One of the most serious of these inundations occurred at the breaking up of a frost in January, 1809, thus related in Nelson's *Islington*: "At this period, when the snow was lying very deep, a rapid thaw came on, and, the arches not affording a sufficient passage for the increased current, the whole space between Pancras, Somers Town, and the bottom of the hill at Pentonville, was in a short time covered with water. The flood rose to the height of three feet in the middle of the highway, the lower rooms of all the houses within that space were completely inundated, and the inhabitants sustained considerable damage in their goods and furniture, which many of them had not time to remove. Two cart-horses were drowned, and for several days persons were obliged to be conveyed to and from their houses, and receive their provisions in at the windows, by means of carts."

Close to Battle Bridge was another mineral spring of great antiquity, for it was one of the Holy Wells, of which there were many in and about London. This was dedicated to St. Chad, and the name is yet perpetuated in Chad Place, but the well and its establishment has been swept away by the Metropolitan Railway Station of King's Cross. There are many springs or wells dedicated to this saint in different

parts of the country. Shadwell, in the east of London, is but a corruption. He lived in the seventh century, and his life is recorded by the Venerable Bede. Educated in the celebrated monastery of Lindisfarne, he became Bishop of Lichfield, and died of the plague in 673. After his death, his body performed miraculous cures: hence the reason of dedicating to him springs supposed to possess medicinal virtues.

St. Chad's Well had a longer life than most of the other mineral springs that once flourished in the vicinity. It never launched out into dissipation; never, under the guise of drinking the waters, tempted you with tea or brandy and water. It was thoroughly respectable: dull, perhaps, not to say sad. The latter days of its existence reminded you painfully that it had seen better days. The house with its large windows looked faded. The gardens were pining away slowly, but surely, under the influence of London smoke, and decay was visible everywhere. Its waters were drunk hot, being heated in a copper, which certainly did not suggest poetical ideas. You paid 6*d.* a glass—not cheap, but perhaps efficacious. You might compound at £1 1*s.* per annum; but it must have required immense enthusiasm for St. Chad to do that, although, for your money, you had the extra privilege of "circulating" in the gardens. A portrait hung in one of the rooms, which has been thus described: "As of a stout comely personage with a ruddy countenance, in a coat or cloak, supposed scarlet, a laced cravat falling down the breast, and a small red night-cap carelessly placed upon the head, conveying the idea that it was painted for the likeness of some opulent butcher who flourished in the reign of Queen Anne." If you made inquiries, you were answered, "I have heard say it is the portrait of St. Chad." If you mildly expressed a doubt, you were snubbed, of course, and told, "This is the opinion of most people who come here."*

Leaving St. Chad's Well, the brook passed between Gray's Inn and Bagnigge Wells Roads, but soon approached the latter, when it abutted upon the road-side, making another formidable wash, called "Bagnigge Wash." In 1761 it is recorded that, on "Saturday night the waters were so high at 'Black Mary's Hole,' that the inhabitants of Bagnigge Wells and in the neighbourhood suffered greatly. About seven o'clock a coach, with five gentlemen within, and three on the outside, was overturned by the height of the water in the road just by, and with great difficulty escaped being drowned." It sometimes was

* See Hone's Every Day Book; vol. i. p. 323.

cost of 1,500*l.* which gave the name to Lamb's Conduit Fields. Some remains of this system of water supply yet exist. Near to Brunswick Row, Queen's Square, is the Chimney Conduit and its stream, continuing eastward from the boundary of the parishes of Saint Pancras and that of Saint George's Bloomsbury. Lamb's Conduit gave the name to the street in which it stood, and it seemed to have been the head of the several springs, for one from a northerly direction here joined in as well as one from the south-east. The fall of this course into the main stream was by the hollow near Mount Pleasant. Up to this point we have been in the parish of Saint Pancras. Hence, until its exit into the Thames, the brook divides the metropolis into two parts, by a deep depression that no one can avoid remarking who passes from east to west, notwithstanding the vast changes made of late years by the Metropolitan Railway, and improvements consequent upon bridging the great chasm of Holborn Hill. But, before we follow it, there are several places to which we have arrived which call for a notice.

At the south-east corner of what is now the prison, removed by its enlargement in 1866, stood a public-house, with the sign of Sir John Oldcastle, having been so called from the seventeenth century, and formerly used as a place of public entertainment and resort, having large gardens attached to it. Tradition (but I do not know if fortified by anything better,) has made this house to have been originally the property of that unfortunate knight Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham in right of his wife, and who suffered so cruel a death at St. Giles in 1413 for heresy. The sign is so remarkable, and probably the only inn so distinguished in England, that it lends some probability to the tradition, and, if it is a fact that he held property in the neighbourhood, it would tend to confirm it. Opposite is another house, with the sign of Lord Cobham's Head, and the name is preserved in a row of houses, Cobham Row. A little to the south-east of this was formerly a large pond, called a "ducking pond," which is seen in maps of the first quarter of the eighteenth century. This at once recalls to us an old but barbarous sport, once much in fashion with the citizens. Ben Jonson, in "Every Man in his Humour," speaks of the citizens who go "a-ducking" to Islington Ponds. Davenant also alludes to it, and Charles II. was particularly fond of it. A brief description is all that it is worth, for it is now happily obsolete.

A large pond was provided, and the sport consisted in hunting a duck with dogs, the duck diving when the dogs came close, to elude

capture. Another mode was to tie an owl upon the duck's back : the duck dives to escape the burden, when, on rising for air, the wretched half-drowned owl shakes itself, and, hooting, frightens the duck ; she of course dives again and replunges the owl into water. The frequent repetition of this action soon deprived the bird of its sensation, and generally ended in its death, if not in that of the duck also.*

The "Coldbath," which names the prison and locality, is said to have been the first of its kind in England ; it was opened in 1697 ; and attached to it also is a chalybeate spring. Mr. Baynes, previously mentioned, established it and managed it at the beginning of the eighteenth century, as a cure for rheumatism and nervous diseases. The establishment still exists, and has therefore outlived all its competitors. Baynes Row preserves the name of its founder.

The course of the brook now lies through a maze of yards, until it reappears at the bottom of Little Warner Street ; crossing Ray Street at Back Hill, it pursues its way towards Clerkenwell Green. No part of London is more singularly marked in its physical geography than this, to which of old the name of "Hockley in the Hole" was given. This must make us pause once more, for here we have another reminiscence of the past, which bears us back to the amusements of our ancestors.

"Hockley in the Hole" derives at least one part of its designation from the hole or hollow formed by the brook at this place. Its traditions are those of the amphitheatre, viz. bear and bull baiting and gladiatorial combats. Bear-baiting, an old sport, once in favour with kings and princes, and, in the sixteenth century, attended by ladies, patronised by Elizabeth, and also by her sister Mary, as well as by the aristocracy and people in general, was sometimes so madly followed as, like modern horse-racing, to bring ruin on its votaries. Among these latter, who would expect to have found the kind old schoolmaster, Roger Ascham ? The Revolution came, and, with it, proscription of bear-baiting, but, unfortunately, things innocent, genial sports, and equally the drama with its noble teachings. So, when the Restoration came, who can wonder riot, in all forbidden things, came back also, and thus again came bear-baiting. Nevertheless, it had had its prestige taken away, and henceforth it was to decline, and be, at best, the recreation of the low and brutal. Here it was that an amphitheatre was erected

* See Strutt's Sports and Pastimes of the People of England.

in the seventeenth century, and bear and bull baiting, with prize combats of masters of fence, took place.* In the early part of the eighteenth century many allusions to it occur in the papers of the day, and Gay, in the *Beggars' Opera*, mentions it as a place in which to learn valour. I shall give you an advertisement of the reign of Queen Anne, which will be quite sufficient to show the character of the amusements here provided :

"At the BEAR GARDEN, in Hockley in the Hole, near Clerkenwell Green, this present Monday, there is a match to be fought by two dogs of Smithfield Bars against two dogs of Hampstead, at the Reading Bull, for one guinea, to be spent; five let goes out of hand; which goes farthest and fairest in wins all. The famous bull of fire-works, which pleased the gentry to admiration. Likewise there are two bear-dogs, which jumps highest for ten shillings, to be spent. Also variety of bull-baiting and bear-baiting, it being a day of general sport by all the old gamesters; and a bull-dog to be drawn up with fire-works. Beginning at 3 o'clock."

But, we will now pass on to something to the citizens' greater honour. We have arrived at the boundary of London of the Commonwealth, and stand in front of the fortified lines made by order of Parliament in 1643, when the dashing Rupert had menaced the environs with his squadrons, and an attack on the city by the King's forces seemed imminent. The ordinance was read in the churches of London, Sunday, April 30, and, on the Wednesday following, says the "Diurnall," "many thousands of men and women (good housekeepers), their children, and servants, went out of the several parishes of London with spades, shovels, pickaxes, and baskets, and drums and colours before them, some of the chief men of every parish marching before them, and so went into the fields, and worked hard all day in digging and making of trenches, from fort to fort, wherebie to intrench the citie round from one end to the other, on this side of the Thames, and late at night the company came back in like manner they went out, and the next day a many more went, and so they continued daily, with such cheerfulness that the whole will be finished ere many dayes," &c. Again, on Monday, May 8, with them went a great company of the Common Council, and divers other chief men of the city, with the

* This spot is marked by a public-house, which must have been close by its side. It rejoices in the sign of the "Pickled Egg," and claims a pedigree to 1663.

greater part of the Trained Bands, with their captains, officers, and cutlers before them, to assist the works, &c. On the following day the good example of the Trained Bands gave such encouragement that many substantial citizens, their wives and families, went to digge. All the porters in and about the city, to the number of 2,000, went together, in their white frocks. Then, Monday, 5 June, went the tailors of the city, to the number of 5,000 or 6,000, and afterwards the patriotic cobblers performed the same duty.

An instance of the value of keeping the old names of streets, or, at least, not lightly altering them, reminds one of the above facts, for I shall show you that Laystall Street, curiously enough, points out the exact situation of the fort which was erected to command Gray's Inn Road. The term "laystall," now nearly obsolete, is applied to heaps of dust and refuse. And here, outside the north of the city, the dust-heaps had for a long time been used to be accumulated, as we shall see by a reference to Ogilby's map, being shifted further and further as the town extended itself. In the King's Library, British Museum, is preserved a map of the fortifications, by Cromwell Mortimer, with MS. additions, made about 1743, when traces of the lines were still visible in many places, and the fort, here called a breastwork, is noted as being then covered by a "laystall." The spot is very remarkable; Mount Pleasant, on its side, leads up to it like a natural scarp, and the hill itself yet preserves an older name, "Tot-hill,"* the elements of which are of frequent occurrence around London, and which has often exercised the ability of etymologists, but into which subject I here refrain upon entering.

After the stream leaves Hockley in the Hole, it turns towards Clerkenwell Green, following the course of Farringdon Road with few bendings to Holborn Bridge, by Farringdon Street and Bridge Street to the Thames at Blackfriars. The banks are mainly steep on both sides, and in some points must, in early times, have almost given the appearance of a ravine. After it passes Fleet Street and nears its outfall, the sides fall gradually, until it enters the Thames, where, on the western side, we have low-lying ground, which must originally

* The meaning of this word is not however doubtful. In a vocabulary of the fifteenth century, edited by Thomas Wright, Esq. F.S.A. and privately printed 1857, "Hec Specula" is Englished "a totyng hylle." In Halliwell's Archaic Dictionary "*Totehill*" is given from the Cheshire dialect to an "eminence." To "Tote" means to look out, to spy, or to "tont," as we now use the word.

have been a marshy delta; it is now called Whitefriars, from the monastery which formerly stood by.

But our way is full of interest—and, first, on the eastern side, we come upon the grounds of the Convent of St. Mary, then, separated only by Clerkenwell Green, the spacious establishment of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem. Now, both these monastic houses had their gardens, orchards, and meadows sloping down to the brook, and, near at hand, their fish-ponds and water-mills. Documents are extant interesting to us as declaring these facts, and also as giving us a positive proof, that the true name of this stream is "Holebourne," and that the etymology "Oldbourne" of John Stowe, and the brook, also, which he makes to run down the present Holborn Street, is nothing more than imaginative. It is time this was definitely settled, when we find one modern writer accusing us of a "cockneyism" for spelling the name with an "H." In the ancient Cartulary* to which I am referring we find meadows described as lying by the "Holebourne" (*juxta* Holeburne); again, on the bank of the "Holeburne" (*in ripam*); and a ditch which supplied the water for the Nuns' Mill is said to be from the "Holeburne;" so that, it is beyond all question, that this is the oldest and the true name of this brook. In one of these documents, there is an early mention of the Skinners' Well, described as in "a vale with the great fish-pond;" and not far distant is another well, not mentioned by Stowe, called "Gode Well."† These springs were clearly upon the slope or bank of the stream. I shall have occasion again to allude to the former.

It may seem strange now to say, when the "vale" described in these deeds is all but filled up by the vast works that have so altered the face of this part of London, when, for centuries, the gardens and orchards have disappeared, that still there are existing memorials of the past. Yet this is true. Turnmill Street reminds us of the water-mills. Pear-tree Court, perhaps, derived its name from a venerable relic of monastic horticulture: and Vine-yard Gardens seem to declare to us an attempt to cultivate the vine. But, indeed, the culture of the vine is associated with the earliest record in which the name "Holeburn" occurs, viz. Domesday Book; for here a vine-yard is spoken of

* Vide *Monasticon Anglicanum*.

† Stow speaks of Todwell, which may be the same, for if he took his authority from MSS. the T and G would be easily confounded. On the other hand there is "Goswell," which might easily be corrupted of "Godewell," or God's-well.

as being at Holeburn (*ad* Holeburn). Vine Street, on the western bank, seems to preserve a memory of it. No place could possibly be more favourable: for this street was almost a precipitous slope until recent changes, and its aspect towards the south-east is that of some of the best vineyards.

But we cannot pass from the eastern bank without speaking of the well, or spring, that gave name to the locality from very early times, I mean the Clerks' Well. Of many mentioned by Stowe, in this neighbourhood, the Skinners' Well and the Clerks' Well have a special importance, being connected with the early history of our drama. They have sometimes been confounded with each other, and it is only the latter whose site can be well identified. The religious plays known under the names of "Mysteries," and "Miracles," grew out of an attempt to supersede secular performances in the early ages of the Church. At one time, they were performed in the church itself, and almost constituted a religious service: but this led to abuses, and it was forbidden to the clergy. It was then sought to be popularised in open spaces. The custom of assembling by a well may possibly have arisen from the occasional performance of religious rites at some holy spring, or these wells being places of resort in the open spaces outside the city; * and Clerkenwell Green was a piece of common land between the two monastic houses. Now, although the Company of Parish Clerks had a speciality for the performance of these plays, yet we know that sometimes the whole of the guilds or trading Companies of a town took part, and had special subjects ascribed to them. So the "Skinners" in London, like those of Chester, may have acted plays, and by the well which bore their name. In London the parish clerks, being more literate, naturally became more efficient actors; and their performances may have obscured, or altogether have rendered obsolete, the acting by the Trade Companies. There was much in this ecclesiastical drama that resembled the religious art of the Church. It dealt in elements of great simplicity, that were calculated to impress an ignorant multitude. It was full of humour, but the dialogue was certainly secondary to the forcible portraying of certain characters and the dramatic situation. Pilate was always given as having a loud authoritative voice: so, to speak in "Pilate's voice" passed into a proverb. Again, Herod (for the "Massacre of the Innocents" was made a sensational piece) was represented as a half-madman, full of extravagance, to the extreme of ridicule; and the rôle was to strike

* Clement's Well is spoken of by Fitzstephen as a place of resort.

him down in the midst of his blaspheming vaunt. Sometimes Death appears to carry him off, prefacing his dialogue with a howl; at other, the demons make sport with his soul. In the Chester Mysteries, the author has shown that the dramatic art had in his person made a step in advance; for he makes Herod to have had his only son sacrificed in the general slaughter. The moral could not have been given more forcibly by the greatest master of the craft. In the comedy, strange to say, the demons had a large share. They were often gross, sometimes obscene, but they must have brought down "the house" with storms of applause, when they carried off the alewife who sold bad ale, and had given bad measure;* especially if, as in the Fairford windows, she resented their want of gallantry in a free use of her nails. The ladies, indeed, come in for satire in many places. For instance, Noah's wife in the Chester Mysteries is very difficult to get into the ark; she wants her gossips to go with her, and at length is forcibly carried in by her son Shem. Then Noah, doubtless bowing low, says, "Welcome wiffe into this bote," at which the irate lady replies, striking him: "Have thou that for thy note." But the "*Massacre of the Innocents*" may be taken as a fair sample of the characteristic treatment of these subjects. And, in the various examples extant, we trace a traditional resemblance to each other, and also to the arts of the Church. For instance, in the Coventry and Chester plays, both, two knights are appointed by Herod to slay the children of Bethlehem. The former names them "Sir Grymbald" and "Sir Lanscler." So, in the sculptures which adorn the west front of the cathedral church of St. Trophime, at Arles, in the south of France, (date early in the twelfth century,) the two knights, habited in long hawberks of chain-mail reaching to their feet, holding their huge swords, already drawn, upon their shoulders, with visages of most truculent ferocity, are proceeding to the work of slaughter. In a very brief and early Latin mystery, the knights do not appear, but we get some stage directions, if one may so call them, which are interesting. This Latin mystery,† however, was of course not for the popular out-door performances, but was rather a service held in the church of some large monastic establishment, as it, indeed, tells us. The opening begins by a procession of the "Innocents clothed in white," and praying to the Lord, saying:

Quàm gloriosum est regnum,
Emitte Agnum Domine.

* Chester Mysteries.

† Published by T. Wright, M.A. F.S.A.

Then the Lamb appears, bearing a cross, and goes before them ; they follow, singing as before. Here we have the symbolism of the Church, prefiguring, by the slaughter, the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. But this has marked peculiarities from the popular plays. We have the children crying out after they are slain, calling upon heaven for vengeance, and an angel comforting them. The simplicity of the whole conception may be tested from the fact of "Rachel mourning for her children" being literally interpreted as the act of an individual ; and the directions tell us, "Then Rachel is led in, and two consolers, and, standing amongst the children, weeps, sometimes falling down," &c. In fact, in this mystery, there is very little that is in any way dramatic ; it is rather, as I have said, a religious service dramatically treated.

But we must now turn our attention to the site where these popular plays were performed in London. The Clerks' Well is the only one whose position can be now identified, and is on the north-west edge of Clerkenwell Green. Let us take our stand a little above it, and look westwards, and, even now, when the valley in which the stream ran is almost filled up, we can yet see why this situation was chosen for the performance. The steep and high banks of the brook formed a natural theatre. The stage or scaffold would be erected in the hollow below, with covered seats for distinguished personages, but the large and miscellaneous assemblage of citizens, with their wives and families, would stand or sit upon the grassy slopes, one above the other, and a vast number of spectators could thus see, if they could not hear. The performances of most importance are related to have taken place at the "Skinners' Well:" for instance, one in 1391, before Richard II., his Queen, and many of the nobility, which lasted three days. But in 1409 we have recorded a performance of the whole scheme of the Old and New Testament, as in the Chester and Coventry plays ; and, as it lasted eight days, we can imagine the arrangement to have been similar to that of the Chester Plays, and to have consisted of twenty-four pageants or acts, three being performed on each day. The "Skinners' Well" is mentioned in an ancient deed * specially as being in the valley (*in valle in qua est Skinners Well*), and, having carefully examined the description, I should place its site north of the Clerks' Well, down in the hollow. If I am right, I can see a reason why this was preferred. The banks here bent round in a half circle, which would not only accommodate a larger number of spectators, but

* Vide *Monasticon Anglicanum*.

enable them to witness the performances at greater convenience. I must not here arrest you longer, but to express my regret that the record of the site of the Clerks' Well has been removed. I trust that means may be made to remedy this at an early date.

Looking across the brook to the western bank, we have the site of the palace and gardens of the Bishop of Ely, of which but the chapel, dedicated to St. Etheldreda, now remains in Ely Place. Aggas' map gives us the whole plan of house and gardens, which were on the slope towards the brook, admirably situated for the cultivation of strawberries, and we can well realize Richard III. being moved to ask for some of the Bishop when at the Council in the Tower, as related by the chronicler and Shakespeare. The whole situation must, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, have been extremely beautiful, looking down upon the green valley, with the brook in the midst, crossed by a rustic bridge, at Cowbridge Street, now Cow Lane, a little higher up the water mills of the two monasteries, and all along, on the opposite bank, gardens, orchards, and meadows belonging to the same. Add to this the churches and other buildings of these religious houses rising above all, and no place on the outskirts of London could have presented a scene so charming, and so full of picturesque beauty.

Ely House was ceded to Sir Christopher Hatton through a notable mandate from Elizabeth, that need not be here repeated. Subsequently the whole estate was made over to the *Hatton family*, whose name in Hatton Garden and Hatton Wall, &c. gives us a rough boundary to the property. Its hall was much used for public entertainments. Gondemar, the Spanish ambassador to the court of James I. was here feasted, and on that occasion, it is said, was performed the last mystery in this country, entitled "Christ's Passion." But we ought to remember that the modern oratorio is essentially on the same general principles as the old mystery.

Leaving the sixteenth century, a great change comes over the scene just described, and not one for the better. London was increasing fast in spite of Acts of Parliament and Royal Edicts. Notwithstanding fines inflicted, of which many records are preserved, it went on; but by these records we can trace its progress in this very valley. In returns, made in obedience to a precept from the Lord Mayor in July 1597, several names occur of persons who had erected houses in Chick Lane, Cow Lane, and the neighbourhood. Four new tenements are spoken of as having been built at Sempringham House, where Stowe tells

us that the prior of Sempringham had formerly his London lodging, and there appears to have been a gradual absorption going on. It was later before the Hatton property underwent this change; but in the reign of Charles II. the proprietor paid fines, and received pardons for his violation of the statutes. Many houses of this date may still be seen on that side of Field Lane now remaining.

We cannot pursue this subject in detail, but must now bring ourselves down nearer to our own times, when the valley constituted a densely-packed assemblage of buildings, in narrow confined ways. They crowded closely upon the stream; many of their foundations rising, as it were out of it, though now a noisome sewer, black with filth, and pregnant with disease. The villainy of London made it a favourite haunt; and the records of the Newgate Calendar tell us what this once pretty vale had become. A house in Chick Lane (West Street) had a terrible notoriety, and it must serve as an illustration. The house was once known as the Red Lion Inn; and it must have been one of those erected at the end of the sixteenth century. It was a rendezvous of highwaymen in the last century, and had extensive ranges of stabling, attached to some buildings in the rear, which went under the name of Chalk Farm. Its later history connects it with the burglars, footpads, and receivers of stolen goods; indeed, all those who preyed upon society made it an occasional hiding-place. It stood alongside the brook, whose rapid torrent was well adapted to convey away everything that might be evidence of crime. Dark closets, trap-doors, sliding-panels, and intricate passages, rendered it a secure place of concealment. On one occasion, the police had surrounded the house to apprehend a burglar, who was known to be there, but he actually escaped in their presence. Once, a sailor was decoyed there, robbed, and thrown naked out of a window into the stream, and was taken out at Blackfriars Bridge a corpse. Field Lane, which ran out from Holborn, was also a notorious place, chiefly from the reception of stolen goods. It was curious to peep down it, and see pocket-handkerchiefs hanging out from the door, all of which, perhaps, claimed another and more lawful owner. But let us thank ourselves that it has now gone, and proceed upon our way.

We are now at Holborn Bridge (not the viaduct), but that which was made across the brook. Here we are again upon one of London's historical boundaries, for the Great Fire of 1666 did not advance further northwards at this spot.

The bridge itself, reconstructed after the Great Fire, was of red brick, with stone dressings, and, being uncovered some years ago, the date 1669 was found upon it.

Here we, perhaps, must now give up the name of *Holebourn* for that of "Fleet," for it is possible that it may in early times have been influenced by the tide nearly as far as this spot. Indeed, we have this asserted in an early record, which Stowe alludes to, and in which his great error of etymology in the name of the brook is so prominently set forth.

In 1307 Henry Lacy Earl of Lincoln presented a petition setting forth "that the water course under *Holbourne* and *Fleete* bridges used to be wide enough to carry ten or twelve ships up to Fleet bridge, laden with various articles and merchandise, and some of them passed under that bridge to *Holbourn* bridge, to cleanse and carry off the filth of the said water course, which now, by the influx of tan yards* and sundry other matters, troubling the said water, and particularly by the raising of the key and turning off the water, which the inhabitants of the Middle Temple had made to their mills without Castle Baynard, that the said ships cannot get in as they used and ought to do, &c." In consequence, Roger le Brabazon, Constable of the Tower, together with the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs, were enjoined to make inquiry by means of honest and discreet men, &c. The mills were then removed and the nuisance was abated. This process of cleansing the Fleet was frequently renewed from time to time, at great cost and trouble. In 1502 it was thoroughly scoured out down to the Thames. In 1606, in order to be able to control the waters to the same effect, floodgates were erected upon it, and, after the Great Fire of 1666, great improvements took place: it was widened, and made sufficiently deep for barges of considerable burden to go up as far as *Holborn* bridge, where, at the lowest tides, it had five feet of water. But all to little purpose; the silting up continued, and, what was worse, it became an easy receptacle for filth of all kinds, every day an increasing nuisance. An ancient nuisance indeed; since in the *Rolls of Parliament*, 1290, the prior and brethren of the White Friars complained that the fetid odour arising therefrom had occasioned the deaths of many brethren, and had interrupted divine offices. In this complaint the Black Friars and the Bishop of Salisbury also concurred.

* There were still tan-pits by *Holborn* Bridge when the continuation of *Farringdon* Street was first made.

In 1736, by an Act of Parliament, it was arched over as far as Fleet bridge, and a market opened above it in 1737 (Sept. 30), and in 1764 the rest was treated in the same way as far as the Thames.

But I must not pass a spot on the east bank which possessed some most remarkable physical characters, almost indeed of the nature of a precipice. Before the London Dover and Chatham Railway had made such a sweep of the local peculiarities, a person, passing from the Old Bailey through Green Arbour Court, where Goldsmith is said to have once resided, came to a flight of stairs, which appropriately received the name of "Break-neck Stairs," being excessively steep, leading down to the level of the Fleet bank. It was obviously artificial, for there was nothing in the character of the soil that differed from its surroundings which would account for a natural cliff. Many years ago Mr. Roach Smith wrote to me, requesting I would give it a close inspection, he believing it to have been the site of the Roman theatre. I did so, and became convinced of the extreme plausibility of this theory. London, in Roman times, was of such importance that it would be a very singular exception if it were without a theatre. Granting that such existed, where in its vicinity could there be such a convenient spot? There is literally no other place outside, but near the walls, which fulfils the conditions required so completely as this. Taking advantage, as they always did, of the side of a hill, if possible, in which to excavate the seat, such as is observed at Orange, at Arles, and at Autun, this site had precisely the convenience required. In fact, it is remarkably similar in local peculiarities to that last named.

Why should London be without those accompaniments of the Roman city so continually found in even smaller towns? Why not suppose that the amphitheatre also may have been close at hand, as is usual? There is a large cleared site adjoining, once occupied by the Fleet Prison, of ample dimensions for it. It certainly is an interesting question, incapable indeed now of proof, but so probable that I place it before you, not as my own idea, but as that of our friend, whose acuteness and power of observation led him first to this conclusion.

Some few words before we leave the Fleet Prison. It had a painful history, none more so. If ever there was a place that, had it power, could yield us a story of human misery, it was here. For here, we may say, the law itself was attained. It had a long history, going back to the twelfth century, and was burnt by the rebels under

Wat Tyler, in 1381. Here sighed many a victim of the cruel Star Chamber, and down to our own times even many an unhappy wretch passed away his life for a contempt of the Court of Chancery, from which he had no power to purge himself. As a debtors' prison it became notorious for the exactions, and even the cruel practices, of the wardens, until public indignation vindicated the honour of the law, and the malpractices of the officers came under a Committee of the House of Commons in 1728. Concurrent with this were the clandestine marriages, performed by reprobate parsons, in itself forming a marvellously curious history. Before the Act of Parliament of 1754, scarcely more than a century ago, which made these marriages illegal, touters stood about the prison tempting the passers by thus—"Will you please to be married?" Wives and husbands were occasionally provided when there were particular ends to serve. But this was a small affair compared to forcing marriages upon the unwilling. The papers of the day duly advertised the rascally clergy who profited by this traffic, but I have already shown you that they were not, when performing, fairly, the rite of marriage, acting in despite of the law. Their records have been well digested by Mr. Burn, in his excellent work on the *Fleet Registers*, to which I refer those who wish further to examine this question.

The ancient bridge over the Fleet between Fleet Street and Ludgate, must have been, in Stowe's time, a pretty object. He thus describes it:—

"Fleet bridge, a bridge of stone faire coaped on either side with iron pikes, on y^e which towards the south be also certain lanthornes of stone for lights to be placed in winter evenings for commodity of travellers. On the coping was a device 'Wels embraced by Angels,' it being repaired at the charges of John Wels in 1431. A foot-bridge also crossed the stream between Blackfriars and Bridewell."

The site of the former, after the dissolution, became a favorite residence for some of the nobility, and it was in the precinct of the Blackfriars that a theatre was erected, in which Shakespeare had a share, and where many of his immortal plays were produced.

Bridewell Palace took its name from the well dedicated to St. Bridget, on the east end of the church of the same name. Edward the Sixth ceded the property to the Mayor and Citizens, and it finally became a House of Correction for disorderly people, and has given its name to all places of like character.

As the great brook, now with accumulated waters poured into the Thames, it must in early ages have passed through a small marshy delta on its western side. This, now known as Whitefriars, from the Carmelite Monastery that once occupied it, became in later times a notorious haunt. Also, it was another locality for the performance of the drama, a theatre being erected in Dorset Gardens, called the Duke's Theatre in 1671.

So, you perceive, by a singular coincidence of circumstances, one could really write the history of our drama, of our popular sports and amusements, and much that has influenced our thought and habits, by illustrations taken along the course of this stream. And, although I fear I have occupied too much of your time, I feel that, so wide is the subject, I have been compelled to leave out many details of interest which would have rendered my account more complete.
