

MEMORIES OF JORDANS AND THE CHALFONTS.*

FROM his interest in the Puritan movement and his painstaking research, Mr. Summers is well qualified for the task he has undertaken in the volume before us. The locality to which our attention is directed is full of historical memories. The solitary meeting-house of Jordans, with its burial-ground in the midst of the Chiltern forest, is nothing less than the Mecca of the Quaker. The Chalfont villages were chosen as the resort of eminent Puritans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the greatest of their leaders, the poet Milton, as we know, found a refuge from the plague of London at the humble house of Chalfont St. Giles, which still remains as one of the interesting shrines of Buckinghamshire.

Accounting for the strength of Puritanism, Mr. Summers sees its origin in the fact which he mentions in his introduction. There were few parts of England, he tells us, in which Lollardy had taken a deeper root than in the district on the southern slopes of the Chiltern Hills; and after referring to instances of religious persecution from the execution of certain Lollards of Amersham and Missenden in 1414 to the burning of Thomas Harding at Chesham in 1532, he remarks, "It is not to be wondered at that the whole district became the home of a very advanced Puritanism, which was fostered by the influence of John Hampden and other of the landed gentry." His reference to the rise of Quakerism and the success of the teaching of Fox shows an impartiality and penetration which give additional value to Mr. Summers' narrative. "Various

* "Memories of Jordans and the Chalfonts and the Early Friends in the Chiltern Hundreds," by W. H. Summers. (Headley Brothers.)

reasons," he says, "may be assigned for this success;" and adds, "No doubt, in the stormy days of the Civil War many gentle spirits, wearied with the fratricidal strife of Cavalier and Roundhead, and disgusted with the self-seeking and corruption which existed among all parties, were longing for peace, and felt that the religious zeal which had manifested itself in such disastrous forms might after all be a hideous mistake. Such persons were prepared by the very strife and bloodshed which they saw around them, to welcome a teacher who proclaimed that violence in every form was unjustifiable." It is noteworthy, too, to be reminded that "the Friends suffered much under the Commonwealth," and that "the Puritans had no mind to extend to them the liberty for which they had struggled themselves." It cannot be too clearly remembered that the persecuting age which had so long darkened the history of religious churches and society in Europe, lasted on—though in a modified form—till comparatively modern times.

The chapters in Mr. Summers' book which will probably excite the most interest, are those that treat of Milton at Chalfont St. Giles, of Jordans' meeting-house, and of the death and burial of William Penn. The Quaker Ellwood's autobiography, of course, laid the foundation of much of the earlier part of the work. It is a volume which discloses to us a great deal of valuable information as to the condition of society, particularly among the middle classes, as to the administration of justice, and the state of the gaols, that it is to be regretted it is not more widely known.

Much new matter, however, in Mr. Summers' work is the result of his researches at the Bodleian, the Record Office, and the Lambeth Library; but he has not been unmindful of the importance, and which is too often neglected, of ascertaining the knowledge that may be gained by investigation in the locality of which he is treating. He tells us of the loan of a MS. by an inhabitant of Wycombe, of the name of Steevens, the descendant of an ancient Quaker family. It comprises a journal by Rebekah Butterfield, presented to one of the Steevens'. This journal embraces a period from 1724 to 1797. It appears to have been continued for up-

wards of twenty years after the death of the original writer of the journal. The interest of this journal is that it gives an account of prominent Quakers who were distinguished as "Publick Friends," and who came from distant parts of these islands, and from America, to minister from time to time at Jordans, and it is also a record of the marriages and burials of Friends at this secluded but chosen spot of their Society.

Ellwood's intercourse with Milton, taken from his autobiography and narrated in Chapter XIII., who had chosen for the great poet a "pretty box" at Chalfont St. Giles, gives important incidents relating to the manuscript of "Paradise Lost," lent by Milton to Ellwood, and recalls the latter's impression that he had originated in the poet's mind the idea of composing his "Paradise Regained."

The burial-ground at Jordans would, in any case, have an interest of its own as the resting-place of eminent Quakers, such as Pennington and Ellwood; but when we reflect that the body of one so remarkable as Penn, the Governor of Pennsylvania, revered, as Mr. Summers reminds us in the Keystone State of five millions of people, lies there, Jordans becomes at once an historic spot. Thither the American pilgrims journey with a devotion which reminds one of the spirit of the Middle Ages, and the pilgrimages to the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury.

"It is well known," Mr. Summers remarks, "that a few years ago an offer was made by the State of Pennsylvania to remove Penn's remains to a mausoleum to be erected at Philadelphia, where the New City Hall, the second highest building in the world, towers to the height of 537 feet, and is surrounded by a colossal statue of Penn, thirty-six feet in height, though it is said that the sculptor has made him more like a courtier of Louis Quatorze than a plain Friend."

The Trustees of the burial-ground very wisely refused to entertain the proposal, and so Jordans continues one of the numerous spots of interest in the old country, and in the county which has taken so conspicuous a part in the political and religious struggles of England during the seventeenth century.—ED.