TRINITY 26 AND 27 GEO II.

(397.) William Saxon *and* John Collins and Mary, w, John Blanchard and Ann, w, and Martha Northcroft, spinster; houses in Newbury. £200.

(398.) William Reddington and Henry Isherwood *and* Roger Jenyns, Esq., and Elizabeth, w; house, etc., in New Windsor. £60.

(399.) John Bostock, clerk *and* Richard Wingfield and Thomas Wingfield; house, etc., and land in Bradfield. £60.

(400.) Joseph Sedgwicke, gent *and* Elizabeth Sergrove, widow; a moiety of houses, etc., and lands in Stanford in the Vale of the White Horse. £60.

L. J. ACTON PILE.

(To be continued).

The Yew and the Bow.

By Ernest W. Dormer.

"The eugh, obedient to the bender's will."

Spenser.

AS Professor Boulger has truly said:—"The Yew is a tree which in its varied surroundings reflects many aspects of our history, religion and social life." From very early times the tree has been held as one of baleful influence, and Statius, Livy and others refer to it in this connection. It is a tradition also that beneath the dense shade of the Yew the Druid dispensed justice and wisdom to his clan and enjoyed those mystic rites peculiar to his belief.

The presence of the Yew tree in and near our old parish churchyards has been a subject of no little conjecture. When and why these gnarled and knotted denizens of centuried growth were introduced as in keeping with religious edifices appears to be very uncertain. There have been many suppositions, the two most feasible of which would appear to be that the yew was planted to protect the churches from storms and to furnish the parishioners with bows. Allowing that their dense foliage would afford considerable protection, it would seem that the slow growth of these trees rendered them unsuitable for the purpose. There is a

record in the "Observations on the more ancient Statutes," which states that upon felling the yew trees in a country churchyard in Wales, the roof of the church suffered excessively. An old Statute of Edward I., which defines the property of trees in churchyards, mentions that they were often planted "to defend the force of the wind from hurting of the church." Evidently the builders of those days knew not their own ability.

Whatever the purpose for which they were planted—and in this respect it is argued that the yew is a truly indigenous species—there is no doubt about the purpose for which they were used, and in this prosaic age it stirs the blood to recall the stern fact that it is to the yew that we mainly owe the victories of Crecy and Poictiers. The church and its yard were the centre of local ecclesiastical and often civil administration in early times, and it is conceivable that bows made from yews sanctified by their growth in the hallowed "acre" were looked upon as possessing a charm for the warrior which the more mundane article failed to possess. This may have induced the authorities—although there is no record to the author's knowledge that they did—to order and encourage the cultivation in a common centre of each locality of the then much needed sinews of war.

Robert Turner in his "Botanologia" has it thus of the Yew:—"The Yew is hot and dry, having such attraction that if planted near a place subject to poysonous vapours, its very branches will draw and imbibe them. For this reason it was planted in churchyards, and only on the west side, which was at one time considered full of putrefaction and gross oleaginous gasses exhaled from the graves by the setting sun. This gass, or will o' th' wisps divers have seen, and believed them dead bodies walking abroad. Wheresoever it grows it is both dangerous and deadly to man and beast; the very lying under its branches has been found hurtful, yet the growing of it in churchyards is useful."

The old laws for the encouragement of archery—and in the aggregate they are legion—are full of mention of the bowstaves with which our forbears did such goodly service in the days long past. The side of the "butts" that used to abound in every town of note, are now in many instances the imposing thoroughfare. That archery for sport as well as for war was popular is shown by the grumblings in musty deeds and documents reciting the scarcity and dearness of suitable bowstaves. In the 12th year of the reign of Edward IV., a statute enacts that the King had noticed, by the Commons' petition, the great scarcity and excessive price of bowstaves, and

ordains that every merchant stranger that shall convey into this land any merchandise of the city or country of Venice, or of any other city, town or country from whence any such bowstaves have been before this time brought, shall bring at the same time four bowstaves for every tun of such merchandise. In the reign of the third Richard the want seemed to be more keenly felt for, every merchant as aforesaid had to bring ten good bowstaves with every butt of Malmsey and with every butt of Tire. Queen Elizabeth in the 13th year of her reign orders the Statute of Edward IV. to be observed and commands its application to all merchant strangers from the East as well as to those of the seventy-two Hanse Towns.

It seems unfortunate that England had to depend principally upon imported bowstaves for her best bows, and this is one of the chief supports of those who argue that the planting of yews in churchyards was not for the supply of bows, or, they say, the cultivation of them would have been enforced. Our archers were the glory of the nation and the terror of its enemies, says an old writer, but the English Yew itself would seem to be of inferior goodness, and consequently the valiant deeds of our forefathers were to a large extent performed with foreign material. The following extract seems to be sufficiently decisive on the point of England's inferiority in this respect. Queen Elizabeth in the 9th year of her reign, in a "Bowyer's Act," settles the price of bows. "Bows meet for men's shooting, being outlandish yew, of the best sort, not over the price of 6s. 8d. each; bows meet for men's shooting of the second sort, 3s. 4d.; bows for men, of a coarser sort, called livery bows, 2s.; bows being English Yew 2s." These sums may appear at first sight rather heavy, especially as the value of money was much greater in those days than it is now. But when one considers that the bows were cut from the heart of the tree and that they were very long, the question of cost is modified considerably. One can readily understand the number of yews that would be required if each and every man had to take a bow in accordance with the King's command.

"It is curious," says Professor Boulger, "to follow with the eye a line of sombre yews winding along the Downs in Surrey or Kent, marking the so-called Pilgrims' Way, a road which leads, not only to many a quaint little sequestered Norman church, with perchance an exceptionally venerable yew shadowing its silent graves, but also to many a far more ancient earthwork." The topiarian art flourishes

among the yews and in the gardens of many old manor houses can be seen the trees cut into birds, pyramids, peacocks, pots and cans, and other fanciful designs. The children eat the luscious and sticky red berries of the yew and cattle have been known to die from the effects of a full meal of the foliage of the baleful tree.

Lysons mentions several old churchyard yews in Berkshire of venerable age and girth, but fails to make mention of what is perhaps the "facile princeps" of them all—the remarkable tree at Aldworth, an old-world village pitched high upon the back of the Berkshire Downs. This immense tree, a veritable forest contortionist, celebrated for its extreme age and remarkable growth, is said at one time to have shaded an acre of ground. That it is no infant among the *taxus baccata* tribe may be gathered from the fact that the girth of its trunk three feet from the ground was the same 150 years ago as it is now, 27 feet. But its growth has dwindled sadly and now only a small portion is alive, securing its succour from a tiny section of living fibre in the herculean and twisted bole. A chain hangs from one of its branches, recalling in some small measure the days when short shrift was meted out to those malefactors who came under the displeasure of the great feudal rulers of those parts, the de la Beches, who are enshrined in stone in the neighbouring church. Many put the age of this huge tree at considerably over a thousand years. Some of the means adopted for calculating the age of the yew tree are, however, not very convincing. De Candolle was of opinion that the diameter of the yew increased a line a year throughout its life, and upon this basis he concluded that a yew of 27 feet and over in girth had reached and even passed the age of 2,000 years. One is not obliged to identify one's opinion with that of de Candolle, but there is considerable opinion to support the theory that the Aldworth yew is coeval with the oldest portion of the present church, which no doubt dates from the earlier part of the reign of the third Henry.

TIDMARSH MANOR.—This manor has been in the possession of the Hopkins family since the year 1798 when Mr. Robert Hopkins purchased it from Mr. Charles Butler. There has recently been a sale of the contents of the house, including some valuable and interesting furniture, fine walnut framed Stuart chairs, Chippendale bookcase, chairs and settee of the Louis XVI period, Empire tables, curios, books and pictures, including Newenham's portrait of Milton.