Eccentric Characters of Berkshire.

By A. L. Humphreys, F.S.A.

I have not written this paper to prove that Berkshire is the special breeding ground of eccentrics. I have not indeed written it to prove anything. I have no axe to grind. Each county in Great Britain has produced characters who have developed strange and curious tendencies as well as mental idiosyncrasies and abberrations. I am hoping to be able to arouse interest in a few of those who have been born or who have lived their strange lives within the limits of this county in which we now are. For obvious reasons I have chosen Berkshire, and have limited this paper to some remarkable characters in Berkshire, because I believe that there is latent in all of us a special interest in things that have happened near our own homes, and this home-loving tendency is surely a thing to be encouraged. The Englishman, though so often insular in spirit, is always in his tastes a travelled person, and he goes forth to Eastern places or to remote Colonies, and his love of his home is not only retained but it is increased, and when far away he may perhaps pick up a stale newspaper and sees by chance an account of some happening in his native town or county, his blood is fired. He feels homesick at once. He reads every detail with zest. That is *au fond* the Britisher's love of home, and is a good thing.

The various counties claim certain peculiarities worth study and worth remarking upon. There are many features common to all. But supposing we were to make a study of the distribution of men and women of genius through the Kingdom we should get some valuable data. Then again the counties remote from the capital may be said to retain longest the old country superstitions and what we call folk lore. The counties with a wide seaboard, such as Norfolk and Devonshire, produce heroic characters and spirits of great enterprise and adventure. Those who have been brought up amid the mountains have their imaginations stirred and often become poets or great writers.

As far as I am aware, there is no science of eccentricity whereby we can bring eccentrics within psychological laws. Nature is not illogical, but she often seems to be so in the case of eccentrics, and it is eccentrics that I beg you

to consider. I am not wishing to present to you a valhalla of county worthies: our local historians and our national biographies well ensure the memories of all these being perpetuated. I am hoping rather to give a brief record of individuality and character, both of which may be regarded as worth careful study. It would be a dull world if all of us were cast into one uniform mould. There is already far too much sameness in our thoughts, and fashion's decrees are certainly tyrannical. We accept too many things without thinking, and thereby sink our souls to one dead level of uniformity. It is here that eccentricity steps in, and we are now and then presented to someone who has the courage to dress as he pleases and act as he chooses regardless of conventions. The merit of eccentric people is that they resist conformity, which is often a very good thing.

The eccentric person sees those around him doing things which he knows are done because the doers are afraid to do otherwise. He sees them wearing clothing which he would despise, for instance. Whatever motives eccentricity may be attributed to, whether it be vanity or perversity or rebelliousness, I beg you to regard it indulgently as a thing worth preserving. There is often some sound reasoning and good sense in the mind and heart of the eccentric, and taken altogether I believe that eccentrics have done much to broaden the paths of freedom. There is one aspect of the matter which gives them claims to be studied, I could almost say to be made pets of. No two are alike. Eccentricity springs up unaccountably in families who pride themselves upon being normal and having their hair (if they are fortunate to have any) regularly cut.

There are eccentrics who rouse our pity and others who make us laugh. There are those who reveal points which we may well admire, and there are yet others of whom we are obliged to feel critical. I hope to be able to give diverse instances, some of which we may regard with feelings of mingled pity and amusement. In making a study of eccentrics it becomes obvious before one gets very far that eccentricity turns upon three subjects more than upon any others, and these three subjects are love, money and vanity.

Of all the eccentric characters that ever lived in Berkshire the most strange was a miser, and it is a notable thing that

Berkshire has produced more than one notorious miser. In case this fact is hard to bear, I say at once, as a counter irritant, that Berkshire has produced as well an equal number of eccentric lavish persons, details of whom I intend briefly to give you. Only a few of them can be classed as worthies. We have to remember that the web of our life is of mingled yarn, good and ill together. Let us also keep before us the idea that every singular character merits some notice from posterity.

The first eccentric character of whom I shall speak is John Elwes, the miser. Details of his life have been printed again and again, but no book about him contains a tithe of the remarkable things that can be related of him. Had it been possible for any one of us to encounter John Elwes for five minutes amid his real surroundings, we should have a clearer and more vivid idea of his personality than any printed page can ever give us. We will make the best of what materials are at hand. First of all, there is the setting. Where did Elwes live in Berkshire? Environment counts for much. It assists our imagination. At the other end of the county there is a mile or so beyond Abingdon a village called Marcham. No one would claim that it is a beautiful village. To me, as I pass through it, it seems a very woebegone place, and in the 18th century, the period when John Elwes lived, it was probably far worse, and not unlikely it was a nest of beer shops. It was here that John Elwes lived the greater part of his life. Elwes came of a family of misers, and this is unusual. The miser just happens in family history now and then. Occasionally, after a run of spendthrifts, and when the wealth of a family has nearly flowed out there appears a timely and almost wholesome miser, who not only stops the outflowing current, but turns its course back.

Elwes' uncle, Sir Harvey Elwes, from whom the great miser derived the greater part of his wealth, was a perfect picture of human penury. His mother left one hundred thousand pounds, and literally died of starvation. According to all the laws of chance in our own time, one would have supposed that Elwes, after being brought up as a child in such surroundings, would turn out a bit of a 'Knut.' But no, he kept up the full purse and the empty stomach to the last, escaping all the temptations of youth, he withered into a genuine Elwes, and

died of extreme wealth. He was possessed of large London estates, as well as much property in Berkshire, all of which brought in a big revenue. This and the fact that the Lord Craven of the day got him made a Member of Parliament (his election expenses amounted to eighteen-pence) caused Elwes to frequently journey to London. This journey was accomplished on a poor lean horse, the route chosen being always the one whereby he avoided turnpike tolls. He put a hard-boiled egg in his pocket, and midway on his journey he would sit under some hedge and eat his egg or sleep. At this time of his life Elwes was worth at least half a million. When he reached London he would visit the neighbourhood of Marylebone, where his London property lay, and seek out a house of his own which was temporarily unoccupied. A couple of beds, a couple of chairs, a table, and an old woman were all his furnishings. Of these moveables the old woman was the only one that gave him trouble. She frequently took colds because there were never any fires and often no glass in the windows.

On the coldest day of winter Elwes would sit fireless at his meals, saying that eating was exercise enough to keep him warm. His existence may be truly said to have been carried on in houses sacred only to the worm, the mouse and the rat. The roofs had given over all disputes with the wind, and the rain and the snow in the winter time found his residences a more comfortable lodging than usual. In the country he would pick up bones, chips and sticks, and he would abuse the crows for their prodigality in building their nests. Towards the end of his life he grew feverish and restless, and hoarded small quantities of money in different places, visiting continually all the places of deposit to see that they were safe. Just before his death he would go to sleep in the miserable garments he wore during the day. He was discovered one morning fast asleep between the sheets with his tattered shoes on his feet, an old torn hat on his head, and a stick in his hand, and in this condition he died. It sounds all very miserable, but there is a pleasant side to tell. Elwes' manners were gentle and engaging. No rudeness could ruffle them nor ingratitude break their observance. He retained these fine courtly manners to the last. With regard to his Parliamentary career, no more faithful or industrious or incorruptible representative of a county ever

entered the doors of the House of Commons. It is said by his biographer, who knew him intimately, that he never asked for or received a favour, and he never gave a vote, but he could solemnly lay his hand on his heart, saying that he was doing what was best for his country.

The psychology of the miser is not easy to understand, but one may readily believe that the controlling idea in the mind of the miser is the fear of poverty. Artists, Dramatists and Novelists have taken the subject, and dealt with the miser each in his own way. Quentin Matsys, the Flemish Artist, specialised in misers, and his misers are types of physical degeneracy, and at their best they wear a look of never having known a day's happiness. Molière also drew a picture of a miser very agreeably in his drama 'L'Avare.' Balzac, in 'Eugenie Grandet,' elaborated a portrait of a miser, and in more recent times Zola, in 'L'Argent,' repeated with almost equal success the same. No miser has, I believe, ever written his autobiography, but there is in existence a miser's prayer, written by a miser, and found amongst his papers after his death. It runs as follows :—

> 'O Lord thou knowest that I have nine estates in the City of London, and likewise that I have lately purchased an estate in the County of Essex. I beseech thee to preserve the two counties of Middlesex and Essex from fire and earthquakes; and as I have a mortgage in Hertfordshire, I beg of thee likewise to have an eye of compassion on that county, and for the rest of the counties thou mayest deal with them as thou art pleased. O Lord enable the Bank to answer their bills, and make all my debtors good men. Give a prosperous voyage and return to the 'Mermaid' sloop, because I have insured it, and as thou hast said the days of the wicked are but short, I trust in thee that thou wilt not forget thy promise, as I have purchased an estate in reversion which will be mine on the death of a profligate young man. Preserve me from thieves and housebreakers, and make all my servants so honest and faithful that they may attend to my interests, and never cheat me out of my property night or day.'

I now proceed to deal with a very different person. Everyone will remember an old book, which is still reprinted and often given as a school prize in certain quarters—a book called 'Sandford and Merton.' This book has lived for one hundred and thirty years, and still lives notwithstanding the jibes that are constantly hurled at it. In itself the book is a protest against the habits of luxury and effeminacy which were creeping in upon English Society at the close of the 18th century, and which in the opinion of the philosophical school were undermining the robust and masculine character of the nation. I am not intending to further analyse the book, but I wish to refer to the author, Thomas Day, as a most eccentric character, who lived near Reading, and was one of the most remarkable characters in a great century. It is not very generally known how eccentric was Thomas Day, the author of 'Sandford and Merton.' Day was born in 1748, and lived at Bear Hill, near Wargrave, for many years. He must have been a familiar figure in Reading, accompanied by his close friend, the gay, irresponsible Irishman, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, who then resided at Hare Hatch, very near to Bear Hill.

There was so much that was fine and admirable in Day's character that we must overlook the drawbacks. When we read details of his youthful character he seems to be almost too good for a schoolboy—too prudent, too safe, too benevolent. Stories without end are related of Day, which reflect the highest credit upon his good feelings. I will relate but one of these. Day was a man of great physical strength, and was a good boxer. He fought William Seward, the author, and when finding his antagonist had no chance to win, he shook hands before inflicting a definite defeat. The picture of Day, painted by the artist we know as Wright of Derby, shows Day as a man with a heavy jaw, dark and abundant hair. Edgeworth says that when he lived at Bear Hill he seldom combed his raven locks, and always washed in the open air by a flowing stream. It is in his love affairs and in his search for a wife that Day showed such strange ideas. His first love appears to have been a lady called Laura. Laura was, I believe, the fashionable name for an adored one in the 18th century. Day would at an early period in his life go off on solitary tramps. He would put up at wayside inns, make himself agreeable to

the host, and even more so to his daughters. It was thus he found Laura in Dorsetshire, and he at once addressed her in verse, thus :

"Thee Laura, thee by fount or mazy stream,
Or thicket rude, unpressed by human feet,
I sigh unheeded to the moon's pale beam,
Thee, Laura thee, the echoing hills repeat."

This is drivel, of course, and Laura could not stand it. She receded, if not at the church doors, not far from them. Day was wounded, and began to reflect upon the heartlessness of women, tracing it all to their defective education. Day thereupon avowed a contempt for all refined society. He was, however, more than ever determined to marry, and resolute to find a wife who should be trained specially for him. Day was bent upon his experiments. At this point I think it is necessary to repeat the statement that no one has ever urged anything against Day's moral character. In this he was above reproach or suspicion. His eccentricities, which we have hardly yet reached, were symptoms merely of a fine character too deeply in earnest to submit to the ordinary compromises of society.

We must now picture Day travelling down to Shrewsbury, accompanied by a barrister friend, with the object of going through the Foundling Hospital in the Shropshire town to select a girl and train her, so that she should in time be fit to be the ideal person he had visualised for a wife. He chose a flaxen-haired girl of twelve, whom he called Sabrina. He then returned to London, and from the Foundling Hospital in London he selected a brunette, whom he called Lucretia. He undertook that eventually one of these girls should be his wife, or, if he changed his mind, he would give her a marriage dot, and he promised to maintain the one he did not marry until she obtained a husband or became independent. He took both girls to Avignon in the south of France, where he avowed his intention of educating them in the severest principles, so as to acquire strength of mind. The two girls gave Day much trouble. They began to scratch and fight, and their tempers became unbearable. On his return from Avignon, Day volunteered the statement that Lucretia was invincibly stupid, so

he placed her with a milliner as apprentice, and she eventually married a linen draper. Sabrina was still on his hands, and he began a series of experiments to see whether she fell below his ideal of stoicism. His scheme included dropping melted sealing wax on her arms to see if she could bear it. He also fired pistols at her petticoats, at which she screamed, and so she was at once considered to have failed as a candidate. He then tested her reticence, and found that she was no better than any other. She could not keep a secret.

These things put Sabrina out of the running as a wife, and she was sent to a boarding school, and Day then began to make love to a famous beauty, called Honora Sneyd, who was of a family renowned to this day for their good looks. He proposed to Honora in a document of portentous length, and, as usual, the scheme of life which Day suggested was not one likely to be accepted by a high spirited girl. It included a calm and secluded life, and a total and absolute submission to her husband's will. No doubt this would have been good for Honora, but she could not be got to see it. Honora gave him a flat refusal. Day at once fell into a fever, and had to be bled. But a better remedy was at hand. Honora had a sister, Elizabeth, and to her Day at once turned his attention. She, being a lady of taste, said she was unable to marry a man who was knock-kneed. Day's appearance had some drawbacks, although his biographers tell us that he was tall, and with a voice clear and full of character. He talked like a book, and always thought in the same full-dress style which probably rendered his society rather oppressive.

When Elizabeth Sneyd told Day that she could not marry him because of his physical defects, he at once set off with the ever-cheerful Edgeworth to a foreign town, where he gave himself up to physical exercises with the idea of remedying his infirmity. Upon his return, and after presenting himself afresh to Elizabeth, she replied that instead of liking him more she now liked him less. In the end a wife was found for Day by a practical friend. As soon as the subject was mentioned to Day, the first question he asked was what was the measurement of her arms round the biceps. Other questions being answered to his satisfaction, he said that the only objection to this new lady was that she had a large fortune. It was always my wish,

said the idealistic Day, to give to any woman whom I married proof of my attachment to herself by despising her fortune. To this one of his friends replied that there was nothing to prevent him despising the fortune if he really wished to marry the lady. So Day at last got married, and the lady, who was called Esther Milnes, accepted Day's code. All that the world calls pleasure was to be given up at once and for ever. Esther complied, and Day found a wife after his own heart. Self-sacrifice began at the church door. No carriage, no servants, and the harpsichord, which Esther had hitherto played very well, was to be silent, for to love music was trivial according to Day. Day made experiments upon Esther's temper and docility. He made her walk bare-footed in the snow. She wept but murmured not, and that was what he appears to have wanted.

Day's end was tragical, but all of a piece with his eccentricities. Having made so many experiments to break the female spirit, he began a fresh series of experiments upon animals, and started to tame a young horse upon a plan of his own. The horse resented Day's plan at once, just as Honora and others had done. The gee plunged and swerved, went sideways and backwards, and in a few minutes Day was thrown on his head, and died in a quarter of an hour. Although Day was so absurd, I think it possible that his good points are worth studying. The great popularity at one time of the book which he wrote has obscured a great deal else in his character which, if fully known, would have made Thomas Day go down to posterity as one of the finest characters of the 18th century. His whole career may be summed up as that of an eccentric idealist minus the saving grace of humour.

I wish still to keep your attention fixed on the village of Wargrave. This peaceful little place has in the past given refuge to other strange characters besides Thomas Day. Richard, the seventh Lord Barrymore, succeeded his father in 1773. He was a precocious child, and he had been educated privately by the Reverend John Tickell, who was a tutor living at Wargrave. As a small boy under Tickell's tuition, the beauties of the riverside village obtained such a hold over him that he regarded the place as he grew up always as his home, and when he went to Eton he would return for his holidays,

bringing his brothers with him. His predilection for the place and the strange happenings, which I shall tell you of, arose from his boyhood memories. So strange and wild was the career of this eccentric peer that it would be impossible to omit him from any chronicle of odd characters of this neighbourhood. There were many idiosyncracies in the Barrymore family, and from their erratic ways Lord Barrymore's brothers and sisters had various names bestowed on them. One sister was familiarly known as ' Billingsgate ' from the extreme vigour of her language. The family, though possesed of gifts, do not present a creditable record, and I fear that one must look in vain for any episodes deserving of imitation. At the end of the 18th century the whole countryside buzzed with excitement, caused by this strange and eccentric young man, Lord Barrymore. As a boy, when spending his holidays at Wargrave, he would start out at midnight, accompanied by kindred spirits, and make a tour of all the surrounding villages. One prank was to visit the inns and wayside hostelries, and change the inn signs, so that when the landlords woke up they found their sign was the Rose and Crown, whereas when they retired to rest it had been the White Hart or the Green Dragon. Barrymore soon got a reputation throughout the neighbourhood for wild escapades, many of them not unlike those practiced by the mad King Ludwig of Bavaria. Before he was 18 years of age, Barrymore began to live at Wargrave in the greatest splendour. He had stables at Twyford, where were kept a marvellous display of gorgeous chariots and horses. All his servants were known in Reading by their sumptuous liveries. The young man had great fascination, and the most demure folk fell in with his eccentric whims, and could not resist his wiles. Barrymore was a good whip, but a wild one. A favourite freak performance of his was to take some of his guests back to London at midnight. Midnight was a great time with him. None of the suggested occupants of the coach would be informed who was to be the driver until they were safely locked inside. The vehicle would then start off on its wild career with Barrymore as driver. The passengers became sick with fright, and they were bumped and bruised, and nearly jolted out of the windows. He had hundreds of visitors coming and going, but they were not allowed to go to bed till five

in the morning. Lord Barrymore's own bedroom was arranged in a way that was original. His valet's first duty was to sew the sheets to the blankets, because he feared contact with the rough blanket. The servant had then to cover every window with blankets three or four thick. These were fastened against the window panes so as to exclude every ray of light. To keep his various guests within bounds a mock court of justice was created, before which anyone was arraigned who had been so indiscreet as to wish to retire before midnight, for instance. These trials in this mock court were held at 2 a.m., and the punishments upon conviction were summary and ludicrous. In the year 1788 Barrymore built, opposite his house at Wargrave, a theatre modelled upon the opera house at Covent Garden. Upon this he expended about £60,000. Connected with the theatre was a luxurious saloon, where refreshments were served between the acts by six footmen dressed in liveries of scarlet and gold. Many companies of Reading players went over to perform at this sumptuous theatre. At the Crown Hotel, in Reading, not so many yards from here, Barrymore gave a dinner to a large number of electors, when turtles, weighing 150 pounds, were used for the soup. Numerous clubs were started by Barrymore in this neighbourhood, each having some strange eccentric features. There was one convivial association, founded by him, which had some show of wit in its rules. One rule was :—

> Every member who has as many as two ideas in his head shall be obliged to give one of them to his neighbour.

Another :

> Every man who is more ugly than his neighbour shall pay a fine of threepence, to be expended in tobacco, unless his wife, if he has one, swears that he is a better man than he appears to be.
>
> No member of this Club shall presume to eat garlic unless it be proved that he likes it better than any other vegetable.
>
> Resolved that no member of this Club shall marry until he comes to years of discretion, and as that is a most desperate hope it is recommended to all to live bachelors.

Barrymore himself had married the daughter of a Sedan chairman, and on June 6th, 1792, he started off with that lady for Gretna Green. Let us hope he was not the driver of the coach.

Barrymore's death was caused by a tragic accident. He was conducting some French prisoners from Rye to Dover when the whole party halted at the top of Folkestone Hill. After taking some refreshments he again seated himself in his carriage when a gun which he had with him for the purpose of shooting seagulls accidentally went off, and he was shot through the head. He died in a few moments, and thus ended a short and dissipated life.[1]

The villagers of Wargrave could not have felt sorry when, in 1793, Barrymore was put under the earth. He is buried at Wargrave close to the other chief eccentric of the place, Thomas Day.

This same village which harboured during his short life the expensive and erratic Barrymore was also the home of a remarkable person in very humble circumstances, Jack Fletcher, the famous Wargrave fool. There is much that we should like to know about him that has not come down to us. Luckily there is in existence a good contemporary portrait painted about 1735, and from this a print was taken and published. It is rare and few are acquainted with it. Jack Fletcher is depicted in the print as a person of jovial and happy temperament, wearing a storm coat and a slouch hat, and he has a tankard of beer by his side. He is sitting in the kitchen of a parson of the neighbourhood. Jack Fletcher was a remarkable type of what in later days we should have called the village idiot. A few generations ago the intermarrying of members of the same village families caused idiocy to increase.

Jack Fletcher was, to put it charitably, a type of eccentric fool not without some gifts. A native of Wargrave, he declined to learn any craft or trade. He was very well known throughout this neighbourhood, and he was allowed the free access to the kitchens of any house. As far as it known he was not allowed beyond the kitchen. He was a clever mimic and his favourite amusement was on Sundays to visit a church at a

[1] See *History of the Royal Berkshire Militia*, by E. E. Thoyts (Mrs. Hautenville Cope).

short distance, and when he returned he would imitate in a gifted and amusing way the mannerisms of the parson he had listened to. One special characteristic of Jack Fletcher was to treat all women with great deference and respect, addressing them always as 'Madam' or 'My Lady.' Not so with their husbands or sons. All members of his own sex of whatever rank in life he always addressed by their Christian names.

I now ask you to journey with me across the downs to that village hoary with age and mellow with the works of time—the village of Blewbury. To that small place there came as parson in the year 1781 John Keble, the father of a more famous John Keble, the author of 'The Christian Year.' The elder Keble held two livings and he elected to appoint as his curate in charge of Blewbury, Morgan Jones, who became very famous as the Blewbury miser. He was only a trifle less notorious than Elwes from whose life I have related episodes. For forty-three years Morgan Jones sojourned at Blewbury, and wonderful are the stories told of him. Although Parson Jones lived severely along without servant, or dog or cat or canary, he was never above going to visit neighbours if he could secure a free meal. Like all misers, he had a large appetite. Bacon and tea were his sole extravagances. Bacon he purchased from a neighbour hard by. On the day he ordered his four pounds or so of bacon, he would visit the house of the farmer and remain to tea and supper. A day or so afterwards he went to fetch the bacon and again remained to tea and supper. Later in the same week he would go—and this must have been a painful visit for him—to pay for the bacon and again get two free meals.

In the matter of the clothes that he wore Jones may certainly be included among eccentrics. It is related that during the whole period of forty-two years while he remained at Blewbury he wore the same hat and the same coat. The hat was rapidly falling to pieces, so coming one day across the fields from Upton, he found an old hat stuck up for a scarecrow. He gleefully carried it home and sewed the brim of it on to his old one. A repulsively dirty proceeding and much on a par with Elwes who, finding someone's old discarded wig in a hedge, picked it up and wore it for years after. Morgan Jones' coat was tacked together with his own hands and was covered with

patches. I am told that the coat is still preserved in a glass case as a relic of this remarkable miser. His expenses were 2s. 6d. a week and his income was about £50 a year. Nevertheless, when he died, he had amassed about £18,000. In the depths of winter he rarely indulged in a fire.

We most of us know or can realize what bleak winters are experienced on the Blewbury Downs. In 1746, when John Wesley preached at Blewbury, he rode across the Downs from Reading, and arrived at Blewbury in such a half-frozen condition that he says he hardly could feel his hands or his feet. To get a fire Parson Jones collected sticks all round the churchyard at Blewbury, and lopped any trees he could. But more often he adopted the true miser's method, and went to bed when he felt the cold unendurable, and as soon as it got dark he found another reason for seeking his bed, because he would not require to light a candle. It is almost superfluous to say that Jones never married. No woman would thus have faced death by starvation.

What we would like to know is, did Morgan Jones ever meet Elwes on the road, and what was their conversation. It does not require much imagination to realize their close bonds of sympathy and how they would compare notes upon weekly expenditure. Jones' sermons were written upon any old scraps of paper—scraps of brown paper, grocer's paper, and even the backs of sand-paper sheets were stated to have been used by him.

Mr. Auberon Herbert, M.P., who died a few years ago, was a brother of the late Lord Carnarvon, so well known in connection with Berkshire. Mr. Herbert was a very singular character. I remember him very vividly as a person who wore strange garments. They were all, I believe, made at home, and I imagine by his own hands. There was no attempt at fitting his figure in any way. In a recently published book, written by Mr. W. H. Mallock, there is a character sketch of Auberon Herbert, which brings home to my memory many curious episodes. Mr. Herbert's residence was in the heart of the New Forest among the woodlands. It was a small farm house bisected by a flagged passage giving access to four rooms. On the right as one entered was a kitchen, on the left was an apartment which he dignified by the name of a museum, its

sole contents being fragments of broken pottery, carefully arranged on a large disused mangle. His wife shared, though she perhaps silghtly tempered, his opinions, and when they first set up house together they insisted that all the household (the domestics included) should dine at the same table. After a week's experience, however, of this régime, the domestics all gave warning, and the establishment had to be reconstructed.

In the early decades of the last century London was amused and vastly entertained by the exhibition of a freak of a woman from Wantage. Long before the days of Barnum's show these strange creatures were a source of much amusement in London, and at the great local fairs in the country. Unlike Barnum's freaks, many of them were genuine physiological curiosities. Such a one was Mrs. Farmer, who came from Wantage. The original bill announcing Mrs. Farmer's attractions reads as follows :—

GREATEST WONDER OF THE AGE.

Now exhibiting at 194, Strand, opposite St. Clement's Church, and near the Crown and Anchor, from 10—9 daily, the wonderful woman, Mrs. E. Farmer, of Wantage, Berkshire. The highest authorities in physiological science have pronounced her to be absolutely the largest woman in existence, and assuredly the most gigantic lady ever known in any age or country. Forty-three years of age. Weighs 42 stone or 338 lbs. Size round the waist, 58 inches; round the shoulders, 72 inches; round the arms, 32 inches. Mrs. Farmer is in perfect health, active, and is the mother of six children. Her health and activity have astonished the leading medical men of the day. She is considered by them the greatest physiological phenomenon of the day. Mrs. Farmer is well known among the private families of Berkshire. Admission, sixpence.

These details remind me of a passage in the Life of Sidney Smith, one of the best biographies ever written, when Sidney Smith was at Combe-Florey, the quiet country living which he held for so many years. Someone mentioned one day that a young man of the neighbourhood was about to marry a widow double his age and of considerable dimensions. 'Going to

marry her,' he exclaimed, bursting out laughing. 'Going to marry her. Impossible—you mean a part of her. He could not marry her all himself. It would be a case not of bigamy but of trigamy. The neighbourhood or the magistrates should interfere. There is enough of her to furnish wives for the whole parish. You might people a colony with her, or give an assembly with her, or perhaps take your morning walks round her, always provided there were frequent resting places and you were in good health. I once was rash enough to try walking round her before breakfast, but only got halfway, and gave it up exhausted. Or you might read the riot act and disperse her; in short, you might do anything but marry her.'

I wish for a moment to ask your attention to one or two odd notices printed by village characters in the past. Life in our villages, even as late as the early years of the 19th century, was a very different thing from now. Opportunities of getting about were few, and were expensive. The village, therefore, had to be self contained and self sufficient. If one looks through the parish registers of any parish one sees a number of occupations mentioned which are now extinct.

The following has been taken from an old sign near Reading. It is printed in the Harcourt Papers, Vol. VI, final page.

ISAAC FACTOTEM.

Barber, Periwig maker, Surgeon, Parish clerk, Schoolmaster, Blacksmith and man midwife.

Shaves for a penne, cuts hare for too pense, and oyld and powdird into the bargin. Young Ladys genteely edicated. Lamps lited by the hear or quarter. Young Gentlemen also taut the Grammar Language in the neetest maner and grate kear takin of their morels and spelin. Likewise makes and mends all sorts of Butes and shoes. Teches the Hoboy and Jewsharp. Cuts corns, bledes and blisters on the lowes Terms. Cowtillions and other dances taut at home and abrode. Also deals holesale and retale perfumery in all its branchis. Sells all sorts of stationary wair, together with blackin balls, red herrins, gingerbred, coles scrubbin brushes,

treycle, mouce traps and other sweet metes. Likewise Godfathers cordiel, red rutes Tatoes, Sassages, and all other garden stuff. N.B. I teches joggraphy and those outlandish kind of things. A Bawl on Wensdays and Frydays. All performed, God willin, By me.

ISAC FACTOTUM.

John Briggs, the parish clerk of Hurley, had many accomplishments.

'John Briggs, Parish Clerk, Draws all Sorts of teeth in humour plays violin shaves and cuts hair grinds razors scissors and Penknives Takes anything out of Eyes measures land and cures the itch out of hand and many other articles too tedious to mention. N.B. likewise Makes Womans Shoes and Boots and High Shoes and Mens shoes and Translater 1783.'

The meaning of the word 'Translater' is explained as follows:

'A cobbler of a low class, who manufactures boots and shoes from the materials of old ones, selling them at low prices to second-hand dealers. The Cobbler is affronted if you do not call him Mr. Translator."

We are further told that:

'A costermonger will part with everything rather than his boots, and to wear a pair of second-hand ones (or *translators* as they are called) is felt as a bitter degradation by them all.'

At Brightwalton the following appeared over the door of William Sorry:

'Bleeding, Drawing of Teeth and Apothecaries Drugs sold here. Also Dr. James' fever powders. Genuine Daffy's Elixir. Manna. Bateman's and Stoughton's Drops. Godfrey's Cordial. Hooper's Pills. Oils and Tinctures, and Dr. Hitchcock's Rochford Drops and pills. Eaton's Styptic. Friar's Balsam. Gums of all sorts. Best double-distilled Lavender and Hungary Water. Salts. Cordial Cephalic Snuff. Knives, Sissors, Buckles, Button.'

He also sold nails, locks, ironmongery and wooden ware, and among his other accomplishments he measured land and played the bass voil at church.

I have told you so much of misers. Now I will beg you for a moment to listen to what I can say of those who had opposite characters. Two quaint people have occurred to me in Berkshire history as being distinguished for their charity. About 1650 there was living at Sunningwell, between Abingdon and Oxford, a strange but very picturesque person called Hannibal Baskerville. There is something uncommon and attractive about the name, and he had a character in keeping with it. Anthony Wood, the historian of Oxford, drew a word picture of Baskerville, and his life at Sunningwell, which has come down to us and is by far the best character sketch we have. In 1658 Anthony Wood, accompanied by a friend, visited Baskerville in his home. Wood states that he found him living the life of a hermit but devoted to music. Another hobby of his was to entertain wandering beggars. Baskerville built a large barn close to his house, and hung up a little bell at his back door specially for beggars and poor wanderers to ring when they wanted anything. Excellent though Quixotic as Baskerville must have been, the Abingdon authorities and those who had houses in the neighbourhood found the congregating of beggars a great nuisance, and Hannibal got indicted before the Abingdon Sessions for harbouring beggars.

One may well regret that there is not more known of Baskerville. We know enough, however, from Anthony Wood's character sketch of him to be able of our own accord to visualise this benevolent eccentric who lived serenely through the turbulent periods of the civil war, and if he was imposed upon by some of the Wandering Willies of the time, who visited his hospitable barn and rang the bell for second helpings, it may be accounted to his credit that he doubtless brought many a ray of sunshine into the lives of those who were deserving, or at any rate starving.

The other character I place side by side with Baskerville is not so picturesque, and, I fear, not so genuine a lover of mankind, but he falls well within the definition of eccentric. In that wonderful store of curious information, the old-fashioned periodical called 'The Gentleman's Magazine,' there is pub-

lished in the issue for October, 1800, the account of one who went about these parts clothed in sackcloth, distributing money to the poor with a lavish hand. Reading and Newbury are specially named as his field of activity. His name was William Dakin, a religious fanatic, who laboured under the delusion that he was the Saviour of the world. He and his sister had such fits of frenzy that they were at last arrested, so that their mental condition could be inquired into. Dakin must, I fear, be classed with those who labour under the delirium of enthusiasm, losing thereby all sense of fitness and proportion. One of his delusions was that both he and his sister were immortal. He remains as a curious and perhaps less creditable remnant of the wonderful evangelical revival of the 18th century, responsible for so much solid good, but also for much corybantic frenzy.

No list of the remarkable characters of this county could be considered complete without a few words relating to Martin Joseph Routh, the Vicar of Tilehurst and the most distinguished President of Magdalen, Oxford. When Routh died in 1854, aged 99, a connecting link between the present and the past was severed, and with his death an amount of tradition such as had probably never before been centred in any single member of the University. No adequate life of Routh has ever appeared. One can only get glimpses of him from fugitive sources and in character sketches pieced together. In 1810, Routh was presented to the Vicarage of Tilehurst in succession to Dr. Richard Chandler, the traveller. A further link with this neighbourhood was that Routh married Miss Blagrave, a daughter of John Blagrave, of Calcot. Dean Burgon, who was not given to exaggeration, remembered Routh well, and has put together the best account of him. He says that everything connected with Routh was vastly interesting, was, in fact, marvellous—his costume, his learning, his wisdom, his wit and above all his wig. He belonged entirely to the old world, the world of the 18th century, in the middle of which century he was born. Mr. Mozley, who wrote a famous book of reminiscences, has included a picture of Routh written after a visit to him. 'Routh,' he said, 'is more old and wonderful looking than anyone could imagine beforehand. He must always have been below middle-height, but age has bent and shrunk him to

something startlingly short when he walks. The wig, of course, adds to the effect—such a preposterous violation of nature. Mrs. Routh, in her way, is as unusual a person to meet, and harmonises with the scene. She always calls Routh 'my own.' 'Take care my own,' I heard her cry out. Routh was indeed far from ordinary. His mind was planned on a big scale with generous impulses and wide horizons.

I have said that no life of him in any way adequate has ever appeared, and no life of him now ever will appear, but his name has come down for several generations as a great and unique personality, full of wisdom and abounding in the eccentricity of genius. There are many characters that are so elusive and intangible in their numerous mental facets that it would be impossible to transmit them to paper. Routh was certainly one of these. If Tilehurst has forgotten him Oxford will keep green his memory, not for one generation, but, I venture to think, for many centuries. Many distinguished men have come under the spell of Routh's personality, and have collected items and relics relating to him. Several of his remarkable wigs have been preserved. One belonged to Dr. Daubeny, another is in the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford, a third was in the possession of Dr. Fell at Goring. His spectacles were carefully treasured by Dr. Murray. The wig which belonged to Dr. Fell was the one which he was wearing on December 20th, 1854, two days before his death, when, aged 99, he was carried forcibly up to bed clinging all he was able to the bannisters, so as to obstruct his removal.

Eccentric women have hardly come in for a proper share of attention in this paper. I am therefore glad to name one who flourished in the early part of the 19th century, and was devoted to sport, and specially to coursing. Miss Richards, who resided at Compton Beauchamp, near Ashdown Park, in Berkshire, was possessed of considerable advantages of person, connexion, and understanding, and born to the possession of a fine landed estate. It may be imagined, therefore, that this lady was in her youthful days the cynosure of neighbouring eyes, both noble and untitled. But whether from devotion to the sport of coursing and personal liberty, or not wishing to confine to an individual that love of her species which showed itself to all whom she could oblige or serve, Miss Richards

preferred a single life, and passed it at her paternal seat in a manner which a modern fine lady might deem rather monotonous.

The remains of a Wig Avenue, as it was commonly called, still exist at Compton. At its farther extremity, the gay gallants of the vale were accustomed to doff their ordinary riding wigs, and receive from the band-boxes, which their servants carefully bore in those days on the pummel of the saddle, the grand peruques of ceremony, which had been duly prepared for an attack on the heart of the young heiress. In spite, however, of all this setting of wigs, the obdurate lady could be persuaded to set her cap at no man. Not a day passed during the coursing season, fair or foul, on which this indefatigable sportswoman was not dragged in her coach and six to the Downs, where, springing out upon her native turf, she coursed on foot for the rest of the morning, sometimes walking a distance of twenty or twenty-five miles. The rest of her time was passed in the judicious management of her own affairs and the exercise of a substantial hospitality, of which man and horse, rich and poor, partook at all times and seasons. No person came to the mansion-house on any errand without the refreshment of a meal and a tankard of home brewed : an inducement which, when backed by Miss Richards' customary bonus of a shilling to all sick neighbours, considerably increased the list of Sunday patients, who came to be bled by William Carter, the old body coachman, and added to the worthy man's celebrity as a gratis doctor. Honest William's appointments and those of his five brother fixtures, stiff with family lace, were all of the first order.

Miss Richards carried her love of dogs, and particularly of the long-tailed species, to a height which we may be disposed to treat with indulgence. On hiring a cook, her first question was, ' Young woman, do you love dogs? ' The qualified answer would be, ' Yes, please your ladyship, in their proper places.' ' Then,' quoth Miss R. gravely, ' if you are disposed to stay with me, remember, their place in my house is wherever they think fit to go.' In pursuance of this regulation a large ottoman or bed was provided in every sitting room, the exclusive property of dogs of all descriptions and ages, which seldom forgot the ordinary propriety expected of them as a privileged

caste. At her death Miss R. consigned her greyhounds and spaniels, together with her personal property, to an adopted child, directing by her will that the dogs should be taken care of as long as they lived.

This lady wrote an epitaph for her own tomb, somewhat descriptive of her taste, and with a cheerful allusion to the sport which she so ardently pursued; a copy was found among her papers, signed by herself as the authoress.

AN EPITAPH OF MISS ANN RICHARDS, OF COMPTON BEAUCHAMP, WRITTEN BY HERSELF.

Reader, if ever sport to thee was dear,
Drop on Ann Richards' tomb a tear,
Who when alive with piercing eye,
Did many a timid hare descry:
Tattle and tea! she was above it,
And but for form appeared to love it,
At books she laugh'd, at Pope and Clarke,
And all her joy was Ashdown Park.
But Ann at length was spy'd by death
Who cours'd and ran her out of breath:
No shifting, winding turn, could save
Her active life from gaping grave:
As greyhound with superior force
Seizes poor puss and stops her course,
So stopp'd the fates our heroine's view,
And bade her take a long adieu,
Of shrill so-ho! and loud haloo!

I have now reached my last eccentric, and he is perhaps the most remarkable one of all. Sir John Dinely is now forgotten, and I could not feel any surprise if I was told no one here had heard of him. And yet there was a time, more than a hundred years ago, when Reading was, to use a common phrase, tickled to death by his vagaries as they were printed in the *Reading Mercury*. Sir John Dinely lived at Windsor and was daily gazed upon by all who frequented the town. We may picture him mysteriously creeping by the first light of a winter's

morning through the great gate of the lower ward of the castle into the back streets of the town. He wore a large cloak beneath which appeared a pair of thin legs encased in dirty silk stockings. If the morning was wet his cloak was not his only protection from the weather. He had a formidable umbrella, and what was more remarkable, he stalked upon pattens. He was one of the Poor Knights of Windsor, and he would daily creep from his rooms in the castle, carefully locking doors behind him as he went on his morning errands. No human being had for many years entered that house except the eccentric possessor. He held that the wise man was his own best assistant, and so he dispensed with all domestic service. Each morning he went forth to make his frugal purchases—a faggot, a candle, a small loaf, and perhaps a herring. All luxuries, including meat, tea, sugar and butter were renounced. He had objects to be attained and for whose attainment he had laboured for years, and these required money. His regular income did not exceed £60. Regular attendance at the service in St. George's Chapel was his duty as one of the Poor Knights, and when the offices of the morning service had been performed and perchance the sun shone out came another creature. Wherever crowds assembled and the sounds of military music summoned the fair ones of Windsor to a gay parade, there was Sir John Dinely. The old cloak was cast aside and then was disclosed the embroidered coat, the silk flowered waistcoat and nether garments of faded velvet. The wig was newly powdered and the best cocked hat was brought forth. Dinely had dreams of ancient genealogy, of mansions with marble halls and grand entrance gates and of great possessions which the expenditure of some money on his part was about to cause him to inherit. That money for the initial outlay was to be obtained through a wife. To secure for himself a wife was the business of his whole existence. To display himself creditably where women congregated was the object of his savings. He had not one particle of levity in these proceedings. His face bore a grave and intellectual expression. His manner was staid and dignified. He had a wonderful discrimination in avoiding the tittering girls with whose faces he was familiar. But perchance some timid maiden or a buxom matron would gaze upon him for the first time with natural surprise and curiosity. He approached

with the air of one bred in courts, and he made his most profound bow, and taking a printed paper from his pocked reverently presented it and withdrew. What was printed on these bits of paper presents the most remarkable instance on record of a man suffering from the strange monomania of marriage. At the time of which I am speaking, *viz.*, about 1802 or 1803, when all England was so excited about Napoleon's threatened invasion, Sir John Dinley's one thought was how to secure a wife. He therefore inserted advertisements in the *Reading Mercury* as well as in other papers, and these he kept in print, printing them crudely by his own hands and carrying the slips of paper about with him. All England discussed Dinely with indulgence because everyone was vastly amused. I will quote a few of these most remarkable productions :

FOR A WIFE.

'As the prospect of my marriage has much increased lately, I am determined to take the best means to discover the lady most liberal in her esteem, by giving her fourteen days more to make her quickest steps towards matrimony, from the date of this paper until eleven o'clock the next morning; and, as the contest evidently will be superb, honourable and sacred, and lawfully affectionate, pray do not let false delicacy interrupt you in this divine race for my eternal love, and an infant baronet. For 'tis evident I'm sufficiently young enough for you.

'An eminent attorney here is lately returned from a view of my superb gates before my capital house, built in the form of the Queen's house. I have ordered him, or the next eminent attorney here, who can satisfy you of my possession in my estate, and every desirable particular concerning it, to make you the most liberal settlement you can desire, to the vast extent of £300,000. Where is your dutiful parents, brothers or sisters, that has handed you to my open arms? Venus indeed with her bow and quiver did clasp me in her arms at the late masquerade; but give me the charming Venus who is liberal enough to name the time and place for our marriage, as I am so much at your ladyship's command.'

AN ADVERTISEMENT FOR A WIFE IN THE *Reading Mercury*, MAY 24TH, 1802.

'Miss in her Teens,—let not this sacred offer escape your eye. I now call all qualified ladies, marriageable, to chocolate at my house every day at your own hour. With tears in my eyes, I must tell you that sound reason commands me to give you but one month's notice before I part with my chance of an infant Baronet for ever: for you may readily hear that three widows and old maids, all aged over fifty, near my door, are now pulling caps for me. Pray, my young charmers, give me a fair hearing, do not let your avaricious guardians unjustly fright you with a false account of a forfeiture, but let the great Sewel and Rivet's opinions convince you to the contrary; and that I am now in legal possession of these estates, and with the spirit of an heroine command my three hundred thousand pounds, and rank above half the ladies in our imperial kingdom. By your Ladyship's directing a favourable line to me, Sir John Dinely, Baronet, at my house, in Windsor Castle, your attorney will satisfy you, that if I live but a month, eleven thousand pounds a year will be your Ladyship's for ever.'

IN THE *Ipswich Journal*, AUGUST 21ST, 1802.

'To the angelic fair of the true English breed. Worthy notice. Sir John Dinely of Windsor Castle, recommends himself and his ample fortune to any angelic beauty of good breed, fit to become and willing to be a mother of a noble heir, and keep up the name of an ancient family enobled by deeds of arms and ancestral renown. Ladies at a certain period of life need not apply, as heirship is the object of the mutual contract offered by the Ladies' sincere admirer, Sir John Dinely. Fortune favours the bold. Such Ladies as this advertisement may induce to apply, or send their agents (but not servants or matrons) may direct

to me at the Castle, Windsor. Happiness and pleasure are agreeable objects, and should be regarded as well as honour. The lady who shall thus become my wife will be a Baroness, and rank accordingly as Lady Dinely of Windsor. Good will and favour to all ladies of Great Britain, pull no caps on his account, but favour him with your smiles, and paens of pleasure await your steps.'

He finished his career in the still expectation of forming a connubial connection with some lady of property, and the papers announced his death in May, 1808, at Windsor. In many ways Dinely was entitled to consideration for these absurd but innocent delusions. There had been a black page in the history of the family. In 1741 a dismal tragedy had occurred at Bristol when his father had murdered a brother. It was a gruesome and terrible story fit only for the Newgate Calendar and it preyed on Dinely's mind.

One morning he was missing from the service at St. George's Chapel. His door was broken open. His house was without furniture except a table and a chair. In a small room was stretched the poor old fellow on a pallet bed. After all his efforts Dinely died a bachelor in 1808.

Berkshire Local History Record.

The two following articles, ' Hurley Place and Field Names ' and ' White Waltham Worthies,' have been contributed to the Berkshire Local History Recording Scheme, an account of which appeared in the last number of this Journal. We hope that residents in other parishes in our county will join in the work of making lists of the ' worthies ' of their parishes and collect the place-names many of which are passing from our recollection in these days of change. Over and above these subjects there is a great deal of information relating to each parish which should—nay, must be—collected and preserved. We therefore have no hesitation in asking the good folk of our county to assist the scheme.—EDITORS, *Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archæological Journal.*