

**NOOKS AND CORNERS
OF OLD ENGLAND**

Queen Eleanor's
Cross at Geddington

**NOOKS AND CORNERS
OF OLD ENGLAND**

BY

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"SECRET CHAMBERS AND HIDING PLACES" "PICTURESQUE
OLD HOUSES"

"FLIGHT OF THE KING" ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

BY THE AUTHOR

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TO
MY OLD FRIEND
SEYMOUR LUCAS, R.A., F.S.A.
THIS BOOK
IS AFFECTIONATELY
INSCRIBED

A recent glance over some old Ordnance Maps, the companions of many a ramble in the corners of Old England, has suggested the idea of jotting down a few fragmentary notes, which we trust may be of interest.

Upon a former occasion we wandered with pencil and camera haphazard off the beaten track mainly in the counties surrounding the great Metropolis; and though there are several tempting "Nooks" still near at hand, we have now extended our range of exploration.

We only trust the reader will derive a little of the pleasure we have found in compiling this little volume.

A. F.

CONTENTS

[Nooks in Huntingdonshire and North Northants](#)
[Some Suffolk Nooks](#)
[Nooks in Norfolk](#)
[Nooks in Warwickshire and Borderland](#)
[Some Nooks in Worcestershire and Gloucestershire](#)
[Nooks in Northern Wiltshire](#)

Eastern and Southern Somerset
In Western Somerset
In Devon and Dorset
Here and There in Salop and Staffordshire
In Northern Derbyshire
Nooks in Yorkshire
Index

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Queen Eleanor's Cross at
Geddington
The Bell, Stilton
Kirby Hall
Wothorpe Manor-House
Doorway, Kirby Hall
Gateway, Kirby Hall
Erwarton Hall
Walsingham
Walsingham
East Barsham Manor
Font Canopy, Trunch
Wymondham
Hautboys Hall
Chastleton
Pirton Court
The White House, Pixham
Severn End
Severn End
Ripple
Stanton
Stanway House
Stanway House
Postlip Hall
Stocks, Painswick
Nailsworth
Beverstone Castle

Gate-house, Spye Park
Lacock
Lacock
Bewley Court
Lacock
Lacock Abby
Corsham Almshouse
Corsham Almshouse
Corsham Almshouse
Castle Combe
Yatton Keynell Manor
Bullich Manor-House
Sheldon Manor
Sheldon Manor
South Wraxall Manor-House
South Wraxall Manor-House
The George, Norton St. Philip
The George, Norton St. Philip
Charterhouse Hinton
Wellow Manor-House
Old House near Croscombe
Beckington Castle
Croscombe Church
Croscombe
Lytes Cary Manor-House
Lytes Cary Manor-House
Ancient Screen, Curry Rivel Church
Fireplace, Lytes Cary
Barrington Court
Hinton St. George
Sandford Orcas Manor-House
Montacute House
Montacute Priory
Crowcombe
Old House, Crowcombe
Combe Sydenham
Combe Sydenham
Crowcombe Church
Dunster
Bindon

Bindon
Wylde Court
The Golden Lion, Barnstaple
Mapperton Manor-House
Melplash Court
Waterstone
Athelhampton
Athelhampton
Athelhampton
Monmouth's Tree
Servants' Hall, Chirk Castle
Servants' Hall, Chirk Castle
Market Drayton
Market Drayton
Blackladies
Great Hall, Haddon
Great Hall, Haddon
Courtyard, Haddon
Drawing-Room, Haddon
Withdrawing-Room, Haddon
Withdrawing-Room, Haddon
Doorway, Haddon
Interior Courtyard, Haddon
Great Hall, Haddon
Hardwick Hall
Garlands, Ashford Church
Gateway, Knowsthorpe Hall
Tomb, Darfield Church
Leathley Stocks
Stocks at Weston
Middleham Castle
Swinsty Hall
Queen's Gap, Leyburn "Shawl"
Bellerby Old Hall
Bolton Castle
Askrigg
Nappa Hall
Richmond
Easby Abbey

NOOKS IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE AND NORTH NORTHANTS

At Huntingdon we are on familiar ground with Samuel Pepys. When he journeyed northwards to visit his parental house or to pay his respects to Lord Sandwich's family at Hinchinbrooke, he usually found suitable accommodation at "Goody Gorums" and "Mother" somebody else who lived over against the "Crown." Neither the famous posting-house the "George" nor the "Falcon" are mentioned in the *Diary*, but he speaks of the "Chequers"; however, the change of names of ancient hostelries is common, so in picturing the susceptible Clerk of the Admiralty chucking a pretty chambermaid under the chin in the old galleried yard of the "George," we may not be far out of our reckoning.

But altogether the old George Inn is somewhat disappointing. Its balustraded galleries are there sure enough, with t

[Pg 2]

he queer old staircase leading up to them in one of the corners; but it has the same burnished-up appearance of the courtyard of the Leicester Hospital at Warwick. How much more pleasing both would strike the eye were there less paint and varnish. The Inn has been refronted, and from the street has quite a modern appearance.

Huntingdon recalls the sterner name of Cromwell. Strange that this county, so proud of the Lord Protector (for has it not recently set up a gorgeous statue at St. Ives to his memory?), should still harbour red-hot Jacobites! According to *The Legitimist Calendar*, mysterious but harmless meetings are still held hereabouts on Oak Apple Day: a day elsewhere all but forgotten. Huntingdon was the headquarters of the Royalist army certainly upon many occasions, and when evil days fell upon the "Martyr King," some of his staunchest friends were here secretly working for his welfare.^[1] When Charles passed through the town in 1644, the mayor, loyal to the back-bone, had prepared a speech to outrival the flowery welcome of his fellow-magistrates: "Although Rome's Hens," he said, "should daily hatch of its preposterous eggs, chrocodilicall chickens, yet under the Shield of

Faith, by you our most Royal Sovereigne defended and by the King of Heavens as I stand and your most medicable councell, would we not be fearful t

[Pg 3]

o withstand them."^[2] Though the sentence is somewhat involved, the worthy magnate doubtless meant well.

It was the custom, by the way, so Evelyn tells us, when a monarch passed through Huntingdon, to meet him with a hundred ploughs as a symbol of the fruitful soil: the county indeed at one time was rich in vines and hops, and has been described by old writers as the garden of England. Still here as elsewhere the farmers' outlook is a poor one to-day, although there are, of course, exceptions.

At historic Hinchinbrooke (on June 4, 1647), King Charles slept the first night after he was removed from Holdenby House by Cornet Joyce: the first stage of his *progress* to the scaffold. In the grounds of the old mansion, the monarch, when Prince of Wales, and little Oliver played together, for the owner in those days of the ancient seat of the Montagues and Cromwells was the future Protector's uncle and godfather. Upon one occasion the boys had a stand-up fight, and the commoner, the senior by only one year, made his royal adversary's nose bleed,—an augury for fatal events to follow. The story is told how little Oliver fell into the Ouse and was fished out by a Royalist piscatorial parson. Years afterwards, when the Protector revisited the scenes of his youth in the midst of his triumphant army, he

[Pg 4]

encountered his rescuer, and asked him whether he remembered the occurrence.

"Truly do I," was the prompt reply; "and the Lord forgive me, but I wish I'd let thee drown."

The Montagues became possessed of the estate in 1627. Pepys speaks of "the brave rooms and good pictures," which pleased him better than those at Audley End. The Diarist's parental house remains at Brampton, a little to the west of Huntingdon. In characteristic style he records a visit there in October 1667: "So away for Huntingdon mightily pleased all along the road to remember old stories, and come to Brampton at about noon, and there found my father and sister and brother all well: and here laid up our things, and up and down to see

the gardens with my father, and the house; and do altogether find it very pretty, especially the little parlour and the summer-houses in the garden, only the wall do want greens up it, and the house is too low roofed; but that is only because of my coming from a house with higher ceilings."

Before turning our steps northwards, let us glance at the mediæval bridge that spans the river Ouse, to Godmanchester, which is referred to by the thirteenth-century historian *Henry of Huntingdon* as "a noble city." But its nobility has long since departed, and some modern monstrosities in architecture make the old Tudo

[Pg 5]

r buildings which remain, blush for such brazen-faced obtrusion. Its ancient water-mill externally looks so dilapidated, that one would think the next "well-formed depression" from America would blow it to atoms. Not a bit of it. Its huge timber beams within, smile at such fears. It is a veritable fortress of timber. But although this solid wooden structure defies the worst of gales, there are rumours of coming electric tramways, and then, alas! the old mill will bow a dignified departure, and the curfew, which yet survives, will then also perhaps think it is time to be gone.

At Little Stukeley, on the Great North Road some three miles above Huntingdon, is a queer old inn, the "Swan and Salmon," bearing upon its sign the date 1676. It is a good example of the brickwork of the latter half of the seventeenth century. Like many another ancient hostelry on the road to York, it is associated with Dick Turpin's exploits; and to give colour to the tradition, mine host can point at a little masked hiding-place situated somewhere at the back of the sign up in its gable end. It certainly looks the sort of place that could relate stories of highwaymen; a roomy old building, which no doubt in its day had trap-doors and exits innumerable for the convenience of the gentlemen of the road.

[Pg 6]

A little off the ancient "Ermine Street," to the north-west of Stukeley, is the insignificant village of Coppingford, historically interesting from the fact that when Charles I. fled from Oxford in disguise in 1646, he stopped the night there at a little obscure cottage or alehouse, on his way to seek protection of the Scots at Southwell. "This day one hundred years ago," writes Dr. Stukeley in his *Memoirs* on May 3,

1746, "King Charles, Mr. John Ashburnham, and Dr. Hudson came from Coppingford in Huntingdonshire and lay at Mr. Alderman Wolph's house, now mine, on Barn Hill; all the day obscure." Hudson, from whom Sir Walter drew his character of Dr. Rochecliffe in *Woodstock*, records the fact in the following words: "We lay at Copingforde in Huntingdonshire one Sunday, 3 May; wente not to church, but I read prayers to the King; and at six at night he went to Stamforde. I writte from Copingforde to Mr. Skipwith for a horse, and he sente me one, which was brought to me at Stamforde. —at Copingforde the King and me, with my hoste and hostis and two children, were by the fire in the hall. There was noe other chimney in the house."^[3] The village of Little Gidding, still farther to the north-west, had often before been visited by Charles in connection with a religious establishment that had been founded there by the Ferrar family. A curious old silk

[Pg 7]

coffer, which was given by Charles to the nieces of the founder, Nicholas Ferrar, upon one of these occasions, some years ago came into the possession of our late queen, and is still preserved at Windsor.

A few miles to the north-east is Glatton, another remote village where old May-day customs yet linger. There are some quaint superstitions in the rural districts hereabouts. A favourite remedy for infectious disease is to open the window of the sickroom not so much to let in the fresh air as to admit the gnats, which are believed to fly away with the malady and die. The beneficial result is never attributed to oxygen!

The Roman road (if, indeed, it is the same, for some authorities incline to the opinion that it ran parallel at some little distance away) is unpicturesque and dreary. Towering double telegraph poles recur at set intervals with mathematical regularity, and the breeze playing upon the wires aloft brings forth that long-drawn melancholy wail only to make the monotony more depressing. Half a mile from the main road, almost due east of Glatton, stands Connington Hall, where linger sad memories of the fate of Mary Queen of Scots. When the castle of Fotheringay was demolished in 1625, Sir Robert Cotton had the great Hall in which she was beheaded removed here. The curious carved oak chair which was used by the poor Queen at Fotheringay

until the day

[Pg 8]

of her death may now be seen in Connington Church, where also is the Tomb of Sir Robert, the founder of the famous Cottonian Library.

THE BELL, STILTON

A couple of miles or so to the north is Stilton, which bears an air of decayed importance. A time-mellowed red-brick Queen Anne house, whose huge wooden supports, like cripples' crutches, keep it from toppling over, comes first in sight. In striking contrast, with its formal style of architecture, is the picturesque outline of the ancient inn beyond. A complicated flourish of ornamental ironwork, that would exasperate the most expert freehand draughtsman, supports the weather-beaten sign of solid copper. Upon the right-hand gable stands the date 1642, bringing with it visions of the coming struggle between King and Parliament. But the date is misleading, as may be seen from the stone groining upon the adjoining masonry. The main building was certainly erected quite a century earlier. Here and there modern windows have been inserted in place of the Tudor mullioned ones, as also have later doorways, for part of the building is now occupied as tenements. The archway leading into the courtyard has also been somewhat modernised, as may be judged from the corresponding internal arch, with its original curved dripstone

[Pg 9]

above.

We came upon this inn, tramping northwards in a bitter day in March. It looked homely and inviting, the waning sunlight tinting the stonework and lighting up the window casements. Enthusiastic with pleasing imaginings of panelled chambers and ghostly echoing corridors, we entered only to have our dreams speedily dispersed. In vain we sought for such a "best room" as greeted Mr. Chester at the "Maypole." There were no rich rustling hangings here, nor oaken screens enriched with grotesque carvings. Alas! not even a cheery fire of fagots. Nor, indeed, was there a bed to rest our weary bones upon. Spring cleaning was rampant, and the merciless east wind sweeping along the bare passages made one shudder more than usual at the thought of that terrible annual necessity (but the glory of energetic house-wives). But surely mine hostess of the good old days would have scrupled to thrust the traveller from her door: moreover to

a house of refreshment, or rather eating-house, a stone's-throw off, uncomfortably near that rickety propped-up red-brick residence.

With visions of the smoking bowl and lavender-scented sheets dashed to the ground, we turned away. But, lo! and behold a good *angel* had come to the rescue. So absorbed had we been with the possibilities of the "Bell" that the "Angel" opposite had quite been overlooked. This rival inn of Georgian date furnished us with cosy quarters. From our flower-bedecked win

[Pg 10]

dow the whole front of the old "Bell" could be leisurely studied in all its varying stages of light and shade—an inn with a past; an object-lesson for the philosopher to ruminare upon. Yes, in its day one can picture scenes of lavish, shall we say Ainsworthian hospitality. There is a smack of huge venison pasties, fatted capons, and of roasted peacocks about this hoary hostel. And its stables; one has but to stroll up an adjacent lane to get some idea of the once vast extent of its outbuildings. The ground they covered must have occupied nearly half the village. Here was stabling for over eighty horses, and before the birth of trains, thirty-six coaches pulled up daily at the portal for hungry passengers to refresh or rest.

The famous cheese, by the way, was first sold at this inn; but why it was dubbed Stilton instead of Dalby in Leicestershire, where it was first manufactured, is a mystery. Like its *vis-à-vis*, the "Angel" is far different from what it was in its flourishing days. The main building is now occupied for other purposes, and its dignity has long since departed. To-day Stilton looks on its last legs. The goggled motor-fiend sweeps by to Huntingdon or Peterborough while Stilton rubs its sleepy eyes. But who can tell but that its fortunes may yet revive. Was not Broadway dying a natural death when Jonathan, who invar

[Pg 11]

ably tells us what treasures we possess, stepped in and made it popular? Some enterprising landlord might do worse than take the old "Bell" in hand and ring it to a profitable tune. But judging by appearances, visitors to-day, at least in March, are few and far between.

Half the charm of Stilton lies in the fact that there is no hurry. It is quite refreshing in these days of rush. For instance, you want to catch

a train at Peterborough,—at least we did, for that was the handiest way of reaching Oundle, some seven miles to the west of Stilton as the crow flies. Sitting on thorns, we awaited the convenience of the horse as to whether his accustomed jog-trot would enable us to catch our train. We *did* catch it truly, but the anxiety was a terrible experience.

Oundle is full of old inns. The "Turk's Head," facing the church, is a fine and compact specimen of Jacobean architecture. It was a brilliant morning when we stood in the churchyard looking up at the ball-surmounted gables standing out in bold relief against the clear blue sky, while the caw of a colony of rooks sailing overhead seemed quite in harmony with the old-world surroundings.

More important and flourishing is the "Talbot," which looks self-conscious of the fact that in its walls are inc

[Pg 12]

orporated some of the remains of no less historic a building than Fotheringay Castle, whose moat and fragmentary walls are to be seen some three and a half miles to the north of the town. The fortress, with its sad and tragic memories of Mary Queen of Scots, was demolished after James came to the throne, and its fine oak staircase, by repute the same by which she descended to the scaffold, was re-erected in the "Talbot." The courtyard is picturesque. The old windows which light the staircase, which also are said to have come from Fotheringay, are angular at the base, and have an odd and pleasing appearance.

Two ancient almshouses, with imposing entrance gates, are well worth inspection. There is a graceful little pinnacle surmounting one of the gable ends, at which we were curiously gazing when one of the aged inmates came out in alarm to see if the chimney was on fire.

Fotheringay church, with its lantern tower and flying buttresses, is picturesquely situated close to the river Nene, and with the bridge makes a charming picture. The older bridge of Queen Mary's time was angular, with square arches, as may be seen from a print of the early part of the eighteenth century. In this is shown the same scanty remains of the historic Castle: a wall with a couple of Gothic doorways, all that survived of the formidable fortress that was the unfortunate queen's last prison-house. As at Cumnor, wher

[Pg 13]

e poor Amy Robsart was done to death in a manner which certainly Elizabeth hinted at regarding her troublesome cousin, there is little beyond the foundations from which to form an idea of the building. It was divided by a double moat, which is still to be seen, as well as the natural earthwork upon which the keep stood. The queen's apartments, that towards the end were stripped of all emblems of royalty, were situated above and to the south of the great hall, into which she had to descend by a staircase to the scaffold. Some ancient thorn trees now flourish upon the spot. The historian Fuller, who visited the castle prior to its demolition, found the following lines from an old ballad scratched with a diamond upon a window-pane of Mary's prison-chamber:

"From the top of all my trust Mishap hath laid me in the dust."

Though Mary's mock trial took place at Fotheringay in the "Presence Chamber," she was actually condemned in the Star Chamber at Westminster; and it may here be stated that that fine old room may yet be seen not very many miles away, at Wormleighton, near the Northamptonshire border of south-east Warwickshire. A farmhouse near Fotheringay is still pointed out where the executioner lodged the night before the deed; and some claim

[Pg 14]

this distinction for the ancient inn in which are incorporated some remains of the castle.

As is known, the Queen of Scots' body was buried first in Peterborough Cathedral, whence it was removed to Westminster Abbey. There is a superstition in Northamptonshire that if a body after interment be removed, it bodes misfortune to the surviving members of the family. This was pointed out at the time to James I.; but superstitious as he was, he did not alter his plans, and the death of Prince Henry shortly afterwards seemed to confirm this belief.^[4]

But there are other memories of famous names in history, for the head of the White Rose family, Richard of York, was buried in the church, and his duchess, Cecilia Neville, as well as Edward of York, whose death at Agincourt is immortalised by Shakespeare. When the older church was dismantled and the bodies removed to their present destination, a silver ribbon was discovered round the Duchess

Cecilia's neck upon which a pardon from Rome was clearly written. The windows of the church once were rich in painted glass; and at the fine fifteenth-century font it is conjectured Richard III. was baptized, for he was born at the Castle. Crookback's badge, the boar, may still be seen in the church, and the Yorkist falcon and fetterlock are displayed on the summit o

[Pg 15]

f the vane upon the tower. Also some carved stalls, which came from here, in the churches of Tansor and Hemington to the south of Fotheringay, bear the regal badges and crest. The falcon and the fetterlock also occur in the monuments to the Dukes of York, which were rebuilt by Queen Elizabeth when the older tombs had fallen to decay. The allegiance to the fascinating Queen of Scots is far from dead, for in February 1902, and doubtless more recently, a gentleman journeyed specially from Edinburgh to Fotheringay to place a tribute to her martyrdom in the form of a large cross of immortelles bearing the Scots crown and Mary's monogram, and a black bordered white silk sash attached.

WOTHORPE MANOR-HOUSE.

A few miles to the west of this historic spot are the fine Tudor houses Deene and Kirby: the former still a palatial residence; the latter, alas! a ruin fast falling to decay. Deene, with its battlemented towers and turrets and buttressed walls, is a noble-looking structure, with numerous shields of arms and heraldic devices carved upon the masonry. These are of the great families, Brudenel, Montagu, Bruce, Bulstrode, etc., whose intermarriages are emblazoned in painted glass in the top of the mullioned windows of the hall. Sir Thomas Brudenel, the first Earl of Cardigan, who died three years after the Restoration, was a typical old cavalier afte

[Pg 16]

r the style of Sir Henry Lee in *Woodstock*; and in the manor are preserved many of his manuscripts written during his twenty years' confinement in the Tower. In the great hall there is a blocked-up entrance to a subterranean passage running towards Kirby, and through this secret despatches are said to have been carried in the time of the Civil War; and at the back of a fireplace in the same apartment is a hiding-place sufficiently large to contain a score of people standing up. One of the rooms is called Henry VII.'s room, as

that monarch when Earl of Richmond is said to have ridden from Bosworth Field to seek refuge at Deene, then a monastery.

KIRBY HALL.

Among the numerous portraits are the Earl of Shrewsbury, who was slain by the second Duke of Buckingham in the notorious duel, and his wife Lady Anne Brudenel, who was daughter of the second Earl of Cardigan. Some time before the poor plain little duchess suspected that she had a formidable rival in the beautiful countess, she was returning from a visit to Deene to her house near Stamford, where her reckless husband just then found it convenient to hide himself, as a warrant for high treason was out against him, when she noticed a suspicious little cavalcade travelling in the same direction. Ordering the horses to be whipped up, she arrived in time to give the alarm. The duke had just set out for

[Pg 17]

Burleigh House with some ladies in his company, and, says Clarendon, the sergeant "made so good haste that he was in view of the coach, and saw the duke alight out of the coach and lead a lady into the house, upon which the door of the court was shut before he could get to it. He knocked loudly at that and other doors that were all shut, so that he could not get into the house though it were some hours before sunset in the month of May."^[5] Pepys was strolling in the park and met Sergeant Bearcroft "who was sent for the Duke of Buckingham, to have brought his prisoner to the Tower. He come to towne this day and brings word that being overtaken and outrid by the Duchesse of Buckingham within a few miles of the duke's house of Westhorp, he believes she got thither about a quarter of an hour before him, and so had time to consider; so that when he came, the doors were kept shut against him. The next day, coming with officers of the neighbour market-town [Stamford] to force open the doors, they were open for him, but the duke gone, so he took horse presently and heard upon the road that the Duke of Buckingham was gone before him for London. So that he believes he is this day also come to towne before him; but no newes is yet heard of him."^[6] Many blunders have been made in reference to the duke's hou

[Pg 18]

se of "Westhorp." Some have called it "Owthorp" and others "Westhorpe" in Suffolk, the demolished mansion of Charles Brandon,

Duke of Suffolk. The place referred to is really Wothorpe manor-house, the remains of which stand some two miles to the south of Stamford and ten to the north of Deene. The existing portion consists of four towers, the lower part of which is square and the upper octagonal, presumably having been at one time surmounted by cupolas. The windows are long and narrow, having only one mullion running parallel across. Beneath the moulding of the summit of each tower are circular loopholes. It is evidently of Elizabethan date, but much of the ornamental detail is lost in the heavy mantle of ivy and the trees which encircle it.

DOORWAY, KIRBY HALL.

That that stately Elizabethan mansion, Kirby Hall (which is close to Deene), should ever have been allowed to fall to ruin is most regrettable and deplorable. It was one of John Thorpe's masterpieces, the architect of palatial Burleigh, of Holland House and Audley End, and other famous historic houses. He laid the foundation-stone in 1570, and that other great master Inigo Jones made additions in the reign of Charles I. The founder of Kirby was Sir Christopher Hatton, who is said to have first danced into the virgin queen's favour at a masque at

[Pg 19]

Court. The Earl of Leicester probably first was famous in this way, if we may judge from the quaint painting at Penshurst, where he is bounding her several feet into the air; but was not so accomplished as Sir Christopher, who in his official robes of Lord Chancellor danced in the Hall of the Inner Temple with the seals and mace of his office before him, an undignified proceeding, reminding one of the scene in one of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas.

GATEWAY, KIRBY HALL.

Kirby must have been magnificent in its day; and when we consider that it was in occupation by the Chancellor's descendant, the Earl of Winchelsea, in 1830 or even later, one may judge by seeing it how rapidly a neglected building can fall into decay. Even in our own memory a matter of twenty years has played considerable havoc, and cleared off half the roof. Standing in the deserted weed-grown courtyard, one cannot but grieve to see the widespread destruction of such beautiful workmanship. The graceful fluted Ionic pilasters that intersect the lofty mullioned windows are falling to pieces bit by bit,

and the fantastic stone pinnacles above and on the carved gable ends are disappearing one by one. But much of the glass is still in the windows, and some of the rooms are not all yet open to the weather, and the great hall and music gallery and the "Library" with fine bay window are both in

[Pg 20]

a fair state of preservation. Is it yet too much to hope that pity may be taken upon what is undoubtedly one of the finest Elizabethan houses in England? The north part of the Inner Court is represented in S. E. Waller's pathetic picture "The Day of Reckoning," which has been engraved.

Some three miles to the south of Kirby is the village of Corby, famous for its surrounding woods, and a curious custom called the "Poll Fair," which takes place every twenty years. Should a stranger happen to be passing through the village when the date falls due, he is liable to be captured and carried on a pole to the stocks, which ancient instrument of punishment is there, and put to use on these occasions. He may purchase his liberty by handing over any coin he happens to have. It certainly is a rather eccentric way of commemorating the charter granted by Elizabeth and confirmed by Charles II. by which the residents (all of whom are subjected to similar treatment) are exempt from market tolls and jury service.

A pair of stocks stood formerly at the foot of the steps of the graceful Eleanor Cross at Geddington to the south of Corby. Of the three remaining memorials said to have been erected by Edward I. at every place where the coffin of his queen rested on its way from Hardeby in

[Pg 21]

Lincolnshire to Westminster Abbey, Geddington Cross is by far the most graceful and in the best condition. The other two are at Waltham and Northampton. Originally there were fifteen Eleanor crosses, including Hardeby, Lincoln, Stony Stratford, Woburn, Dunstable, St. Albans, Cheapside, and Charing Cross. The last two, the most elaborate of all, as is known, were destroyed by order of Lord Mayor Pennington in 1643 and 1647, accompanied by the blast of trumpets.

[Pg 22]

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