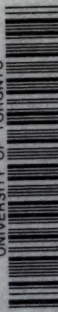


UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



3 1761 01004838 7

WESSEX

C·G·HARPER



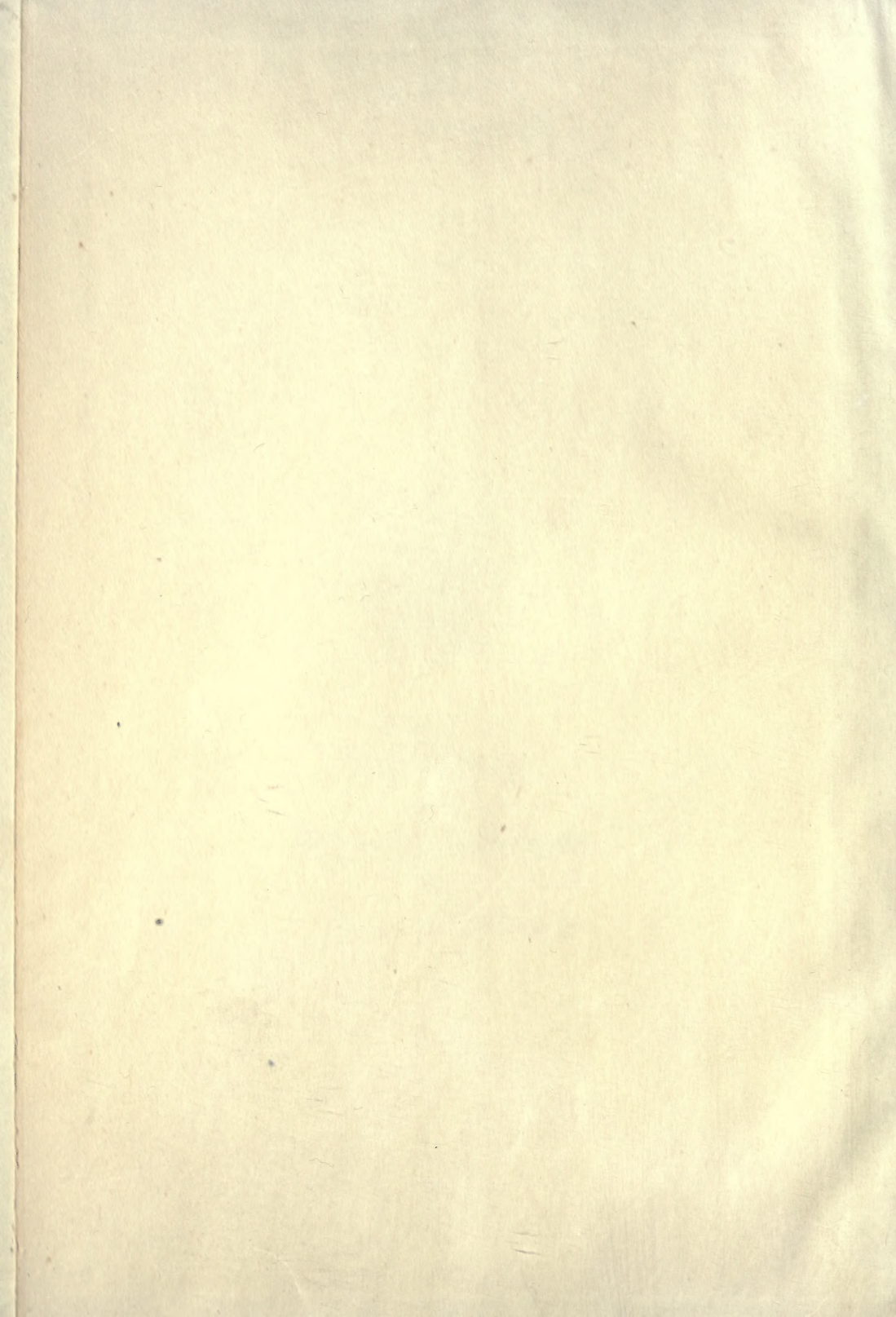
BEAUTIFUL BRITAIN

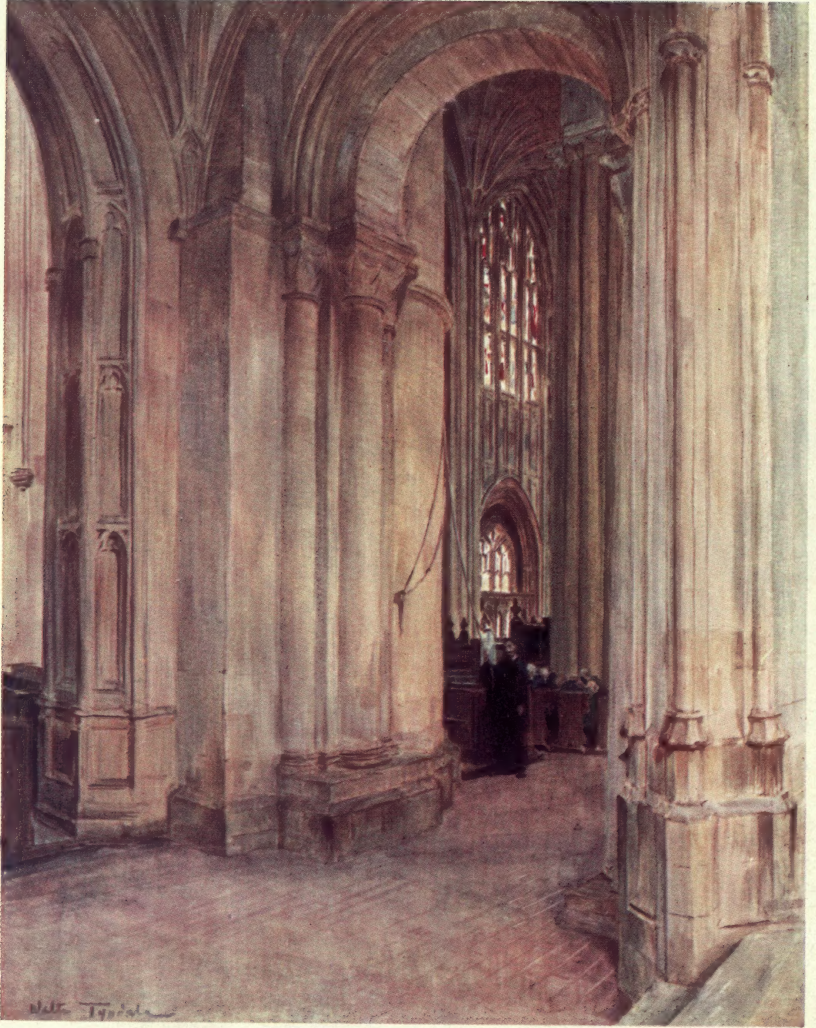
From
1931

Edith. A. Adlam
58 High St
Wells
Somerset



Presented to
The Library
of the
University of Toronto
by
Miss J.L. Gillespie





Beautiful Britain

Wessex

By

Charles-G-Harper



London Adam & Charles
Black
Soho Square W
1911

Harper
Copyright
1911



DG
670
WA&H3

642722
24.9.56

PREFACE

THIS is a modest, gossipy and allusive sketch of a delightful part of England, designed rather to arouse the interest and the curiosity of those not already acquainted with what I will call the "Middle West" than to fully satisfy it. If in this connection you choose to regard the author of these pages as a commercial traveller in the interest of Wessex, displaying samples of the picturesque wares the West of England can offer the tourist, it will entirely fit the humour in which they were penned. To aid the medium of words is added a feast of colour in the accompanying selected views, which show the lovely golden russet interior of Sherborne Abbey, the misty rich blue haze of Blackmore Vale, the architectural majesty of Wells, and much else that awaits the traveller in Dorset and Somerset.

C. G. H.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. WAREHAM—BERE REGIS—THE HEATHS	5
II. CORFE CASTLE—SWANAGE	12
III. WOOLBRIDGE HOUSE—CULWORTH COVE— OWERMOIGNE—WEYMOUTH	16
IV. "UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE"—DOR- CHESTER—MAIDEN CASTLE—BRIDPORT— WEST BAY	24
V. CERNE ABBAS—THE VALE OF BLACKMORE— SHERBORNE—SHAFTESBURY	34
VI. YATTON—CHEDDAR CHEESE AND CHEDDAR CLIFFS—WELLS—GLASTONBURY—THE ISLE OF ATHELNEY—DUNSTER	43
VII. NORTON ST. PHILIP—BATH—CORSHAM —CASTLE COMBE	54
INDEX	63

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. SHERBORNE ABBEY CHURCH	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
2. CORFE CASTLE	9
3. BERE REGIS	16
4. WAREHAM CHURCH	25
5. NEAR MAIDEN CASTLE, DORCHESTER	27
6. FORDINGTON, DORCHESTER	30
7. BLACKMORE VALE FROM SHAFTESBURY	32
8. THE BRIDPORT ARMS	43
9. THE ALMSHOUSES, CORSHAM, WILTSHIRE	46
10. THE MARKET-PLACE, WELLS	49
11. DUNSTER CASTLE AND YARN MARKET	56
12. CASTLE COMBE, NORTH WILTSHIRE	On the cover 59

WESSEX

CHAPTER I

WAREHAM—BERE REGIS—THE HEATHS

THE Wessex of which I shall treat in these gossiping pages is that Wessex of romance and of the great dairy-farms, which has been little touched by the influence of railways. Hampshire and Wiltshire—Winchester and Salisbury—have become too closely in touch with London to stand so fully upon the ancient ways as does Dorset, with the greater part of its north-western neighbour, Somerset. But in these rural territories the countryman still talks the old broad Do'set and Zummerzset speech, in which the letter "o" in every possible circumstance becomes "a," as you will perceive in that old rhyme beginning :

Wessex

A harnet zet in a holler tree,
A proper spiteful twoad was he.
And thus he zung as he did zet,
“My sting is as zharp as a bagginet.”

And they think, too, the olden thoughts.

Nothing can give one a greater sense of the difference between the exploited modernized coast-line and the real old Wessex than the journey from up-to-date Bournemouth to Poole, that olden nest of smugglers, and thence across to the untamed heaths and to Wareham. In this way, then, we will begin our exploration of Wessex.

Wareham is a little town which has been left to drowse peacefully in its old days. Nothing has happened in Wareham since its almost complete destruction by fire (1762), an event which here as distinctly marks an era as does the Great Fire of London in the City. It not only rubricates the local table of events with a glowing finger, but the rebuilding necessary after it has set a specious stamp of modernity upon the place, to which its long and troubled history and its two ancient churches give an emphatic denial. Mr. Hardy styles Wareham “Anglebury,” and it is a name which well befits a town whose story is so greatly concerned with the settlement of the

The Walls of Wareham

Anglo-Saxons in Dorset and the fortunes of the older kingdom of Wessex. The original founders of Wareham, who were probably antecedent to the Anglo-Saxons, were very properly afraid of overseas rovers, who might sail into Poole Harbour and attack them, and they raised around the place those huge ditches and embankments which remain to this day to astonish the stranger, and are known as the "walls of Wareham." Covered with grass, the summit of them forms an interesting ramble. But these defences never did confer upon Wareham the desired security. Its early story is one of continual capture, and it had been burnt so often that the inhabitants had at last feared to rebuild it and live there again; and it was a deserted place William the Conqueror found. He caused a castle to be built, but that fortress in its long career again and again invited siege and plunder, until it was at last destroyed in the troubles between Charles I. and his Parliament. The last pitiful scene was in 1685, when three rebels in the Monmouth rising were hanged on the famous walls, at a corner still known as "Bloody Bank." The chief architectural interest is centred upon the ancient church of St. Martin, a curiously - proportioned building, standing

Wessex

piquantly beside the road outside the town, to the north, on a little bank or terrace. The antiquary perceives by a mere glance at its stilted narrow and lofty proportions that it is Saxon, and the interior discloses a lofty nave of stern unornamental appearance, with characteristic Saxon chancel arch, the whole closely resembling the interior of the Saxon church of Bradford-on-Avon. The Church of St. Mary, at the other extremity of the town, possesses a hexagonal leaden font, one of the twenty-seven leaden fonts in England.

Six miles north-west of Wareham we come to Bere Regis, a place very notable in the Hardy literature, for it is the "Kingsbere" of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and the "Kingsbere-sub-Greenhill" of *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Before ever it acquired the kingly prefix or suffix, it was merely "Bere," a word which explained its situation amid underwoods and copses. I have all the will in the world to describe Bere Regis as "picturesque"; but it is not that. It is an old rather grim and grey village that has had troubles—not romantic troubles, please to understand, but economic ones. It has a "past"—neither scandalous nor noble, but just the past of a place that has seen better days and has suffered—suffered,



CORFE CASTLE.

The massive ruins of the great castle of Corfe owe their present appearance to the blowing-up of the fortress by gunpowder, in 1646, after its capture by the Parliament.

Dorsetshire Thatch

truly, in the peculiarly Dorset way, from fire. How many times the dry thatch of the cottages has gone up in flame and smoke I know not; only I know—and all may see—that experience has not made the villagers wise, for it is a long street of thatched cottages yet; and here and there is the ruin of one more recently burnt in like manner. The scattered heaps remain untouched, for it is not worth the while to rebuild in Bere Regis. That is why the heavily-thatched roofs, with little bedroom windows peering out like weary-lidded eyes, look to me grim and sad. The church is fine, and owes much of its beauty to the ancient Turberville family, something to the Abbey of Tarent, and most of all to Cardinal Morton, a native of this parish. He is said to have given the noble—indeed, the extraordinarily noble—elaborately carved, painted and gilded roof of the nave, which by itself would make the artistic reputation of a church. It is really not a West of England roof at all, but distinctly of the East Anglian type, and there are legends that explain the bringing of it here. However that may be, it is a bold and striking object; the hammer-beams carved into the huge shapes of Bishops, Cardinals, and pilgrims, with immense

Wessex

round faces carved on the bosses, which look down upon you with fat, complacent smiles. Add to this the fact that the figures are painted with flesh-tints and the costumes vividly coloured, and it will be guessed that this is a remarkable work. Here are interesting carved fifteenth-century bench-ends, and on two of the Transitional Norman pillars extraordinary sculptures of heads—one tugging open its mouth, the other with hand to forehead. They are popularly said to be "Toothache" and "Headache," but were probably intended to symbolize the divine gifts of speech and sight. Battered old Purbeck marble tombs of the bygone Turbervilles are seen here.

Bere Regis is a fine point whence to explore into what Mr. Thomas Hardy styles "Egdon Heath." By that name the wild stretch of moorlands marked on the maps as "Bere Heath," "Hyde Heath," "Decoy Heath," etc., is understood, chiefly between Wareham on the east and Dorchester on the west, and roughly bounded on the south by the River Frome. It is not merely a wild, but also a very beautiful, region, on whose borders the novelist himself, the creator of so many alluring rustics, and the true begetter

The Heaths

of the Hardy Country, was born, at Upper Bockhampton, 1840. Nature reigns, unchallenged, on these swarthy moors of brown and purple. He tells us, truly, how this country figures in Domesday. "Its condition is recorded therein as that of heathy, furzy, briary wilderness—'Bruaria.'" Leland, writing in the reign of Henry VII., describes this tract as "overgrown with heth and mosse"; and as it was in the eleventh and in the sixteenth centuries, so it remains in the twentieth. In these untamed scenes the sombre novel of *The Return of the Native* is set.

CHAPTER II

CORFE CASTLE—SWANAGE

FROM Wareham we cross the Frome by an ancient bridge, and enter the Isle of Purbeck. The road runs a straight four miles to Corfe, across a heath in which the activities of clay-cutters will be observed. Soon Corfe Castle appears ahead, the mighty upstanding ruins of ancient keep and surrounding walls rising from an abrupt hill curiously situated in a gap of a great range of heights. The stony little town of Corfe comes only after we have swung round by the curving road under the castle hill, and it is well it should be so; for thus, with but the frowning steeps, crested by the military architecture of the medieval times, for company, we obtain the true romantic touch which the little domestic details of the townlet itself would destroy.

It is a romance of cruelty and blood, for which the great castle of Corfe stands. It arose in the

The End of Corfe Castle

great fortress-building era that followed the establishment of the Conqueror's rule, upon a site already bloodstained and ominous with the murder of King Edward "the Martyr," A.D. 978, by his stepmother, Queen Elfrida, and it was no sooner built than besieged. King John imprisoned in its dungeons twenty-four knights, adherents of Prince Arthur, captured in Brittany, and either caused them to be starved to death or ended by foul and midnight assassination. And so through the centuries it stood, with constant additions, until there came at last a time when even these stout walls of from ten to fourteen feet thickness were shivered. That was when the castle surrendered to treachery in 1646, after a long siege by the Parliament's forces. It had withstood a fortnight's siege in 1643, when the gallant defender, Lady Bankes, beat off horse and men, cannon and siege-train; but now the ancient place was undermined, and gunpowder laid in its foundations. Matches were applied, and the fortress was blown into ruin. As it was left in this process of "sighting," as the Cromwellians termed their new way with old castles, so it remains to-day.

The gaunt ruins rear boldly up above the stony little town—an impressive sight; and as

Wessex

you go onwards toward Swanage, a backward glance now and then shows how far they dominate the landscape.

And so into Swanage. Time was when such a thing as a brick was a strange thing here and a brick house practically unknown, for the building-stone for which Purbeck is famous was and is the natural material, cheap and plentiful. But things have indeed changed since the coming of the railway into Swanage, and the old stony fishing village is now in great measure a red-brick town, and there are hotels on the seashore that glow like geraniums. There are strange expatriated things in and about Swanage—strange in these surroundings, but ordinary enough in London, whence they came. The great figures in Swanage some forty years ago were Mr. Mowlem and Mr. Burt, of the London contracting firm of Mowlem and Burt, and thus many of the miscellaneous discarded things that found their way into the firm's yard came at last to a resting-place here. Thus the Town Hall frontage was formerly that of Mercers' Hall in Cheapside, and the Gothic clock-tower that stands on the shore was formerly on the south side of London Bridge, where it was erected as a memorial to the Duke of Wellington. The lamp-posts in

On Durlston Head

the streets once served the same office in the streets of Westminster and other districts of London, and still bear their old distinctive marks. But the handiwork of the amazing Burt did not end here. He conceived the idea of developing Swanage in the direction of Durlston Head, a stony promontory about one mile to the west, and marked out many roads along what he was pleased to call the "Durlston Park Estate." The whole thing remains at this day a derelict affair, the text for a sermon on the Vanity of Human Wishes. Nobody ever wanted to live on those steep gradients of the Durlston Park Estate. The roads end at the headland, where, among other manifestations of the Burt whimsies, adjoining the old Tilly Whim caves, on a platform overlooking the sea, is a thing quite famous, locally, as "The Great Globe." This is an enormous stone globe some ten feet in height, engraved with representations of the seas and continents of the earth. Behind it, on large tablets, is inscribed a mass of astronomical information, in which most of the family secrets of the solar system are laid bare; and, with a care for the weaknesses of human nature, there are slabs on which those visitors who feel they *must* carve their names are invited to do so.

CHAPTER III

WOOLBRIDGE HOUSE—LULWORTH COVE— OWERMOIGNE—WEYMOUTH

THE seventeen miles between Wareham and Dorchester, through Wool and Warmwell Cross, traverse pretty country and encounter interesting places. Passing the "Pure Drop" Inn, we come to the hamlet of East Stoke. Half a mile to the left, across the River Frome, which runs parallel with the road thus far, are the scanty remains of Bindon Abbey, in a dark situation amid dense trees, and with black and stagnant moat. The stone sarcophagus of some forgotten Abbot of Bindon, resting on the grass, figures in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* as that in which the sleep-walking Angel Clare laid Tess. We now come suddenly upon a delightful scene, as the road to Wool is resumed. There, on the right, on the other side of the sedgy Frome, rise the steep roofs and clustered chimneys of such a romantic-looking



BERE REGIS.
The "Kingsbere" of Thomas Hardy's "Tess of the D'Urbervilles."
The church contains a carved, painted, and gilt roof that
is worth travelling all Wessex to see.

Woolbridge House

Elizabethan manor-house as those that were used years ago to make the fortunes of Christmas numbers, in tales of ghosts and hauntings. This is Woolbridge House. The bridge by which one crosses the Frome to it is much more ancient than the house itself, and is a fine, stone-built Gothic structure, with pointed arches and cutwaters up and down stream. The mansion, now a farmhouse belonging to the Erle-Drax family, was once the property of the Turbervilles, who became possessed of some of the lands of Bindon Abbey; and it is therefore with every warranty that Mr. Hardy made the old place figure in his greatest novel, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Moreover, it does not merely look as though it should be haunted, but actually has, or had, that reputation. It is a particularly creepy and full-flavoured ghost-story that belongs to Woolbridge House—none other, indeed, than that of a passionate Turberville who murdered one of his guests when out for a drive in the family chariot. Unfortunately, this inhospitable deed was perpetrated “once upon a time,” which is the nearest thing the serious historian can make of it; and it will be conceded that this presents some difficulties for the inquirer. The guest, it appears, was one

Wessex

of the family. For many generations the awful apparition of the Turberville coach was believed in, but we do not hear so much of it in these times. It was accustomed to drive up at nights to the house, in every detail of ghastly horror. Ordinary persons—plebeian rustics and the like—might hear it, but only those in whose veins coursed the old hot Turberville blood might actually see the apparition; and as there is not anyone locally known to be of kin to that ancient family, it follows of necessity that ghostly manifestations have long since ceased. But in his novel Mr. Hardy has made splendid use of the old house and of the two life-size portraits of women, supposed to be Turbervilles, that are painted on upstairs walls.

The immediate neighbour of Woolbridge House, on this side of the Frome, is Wool railway-station, and on the left again is the village of Wool. The coast is reached in four and a half miles, at Lulworth, where those who do not feel equal to thoroughly tracing the wild and solitary and extremely beautiful coast-line of Dorset can at least sample it at one of its most delightful spots. There are two closely-neighbouring Lulworths—East Lulworth, inland, where

Lulworth Cove

the curious castle, built about 1599-1650 by Lord Bindon and his successors, the Weld family, is seen ; and West Lulworth, through which one descends to the Cove. This is an almost perfect circle, eaten out of the limestone rock by the sea, and surrounded on the landward side by bold treeless downs. Summer at Lulworth is a sheer delight for those who like quiet holidays. The Cove, with its light blue waters, looks a veritable bath of the Naiads, and should be, if such things were, the watery boudoir of mermaids. Here the cliffs rise up to sheer dizzy heights on the western horn of the tiny bay, with wildly contorted strata and truly awful chasms at Stair Hole. The like upside-down condition of the local geology may be observed at the romantic spot, some two miles farther west, called Durdle Door, where the cliffs plunge into the sea with their stratification perpendicular and streaked with the loveliest tints. The "door" of Durdle Door is a natural archway in the cliffs. If time and energy permit, there is a splendid field for exploration eastwards, past East Lulworth and on to Arishmill Gap, Worbarrow Bay, and Kimmeridge.

But to resume the inland road to Dorchester. From Wool we come in some four miles to

Wessex

Owermoigne, a rustic village of thatched cottages which figures as "Nether Mynton" in that diverting short story *The Distracted Preacher*, a tale of smugglers and their quaint ways with lace and brandy-tubs and the old church, founded on the actual doings of the "free-traders" who were accustomed to hide their contraband in the church tower, in the pulpit itself, or in the tombs of the rude forefathers of the village. At the cross-roads beyond Owermoigne, known as "Warmwell Cross," a ready way lies into Weymouth, through Poxwell, Osmington, and Preston, a route with its own especial features—such, for instance, as the charming old manor-house of Poxwell, the "Oxwell" of *The Trumpet Major*, with the tall walls enclosing its grounds and the pretty architectural detail of a porter's lodge. The mansion is now a farmhouse. From Osmington steep ways lead down to a favourite excursion from Weymouth, the romantic Osmington Mills, near the sea. Here one may observe on the steep grassy sides of the hills the martial equestrian effigy of George III., whose making is described so humorously in *The Trumpet Major*: "The King's head is to be as big as our mill-pond, and his body as big as this garden; he and the horse will cover more than an acre."

Weymouth

Descending steeply through Preston, Weymouth is reached along some two miles of level, skirting the curving shores of Weymouth Bay.

Weymouth, created for all practical purposes by George III., just as Brighton arose under the patronage of his son, George IV., is a likeable place, and not at all out of touch with the real Wessex. For it is of the Weymouth of *The Trumpet Major*, that delightful end-of-the-eighteenth-century love-story, that one thinks as the town is entered. It is as "Budmouth" that it finds mention in those pages, and the "Budmouth" of the Georgian period it in all essentials remains, with the staid red-brick houses of that time still lining the curving shore, which enthusiasts liken to the curving shores of the Bay of Naples. And, indeed, the sea in Weymouth Bay is often of a wondrous opalescent blue, rare enough off our coasts. The inhabitants of Weymouth did well to raise a statue to "Farmer George," as an acknowledgment of benefits received. It was unveiled in 1810, and has since that time aroused the mingled amusement and contempt of all sorts and conditions of men. For my part, I keep all my contempt for the public statues erected in London yester-year, and cherish a liking for that statue and its

Wessex

surroundings. It is at least a composition, and one ought to feel grateful to the sculptor, who represented the King in the ordinary dress of the age, instead of in an impossible Roman costume.

Behind this statue is St. Mary's Street, narrow, with a congeries of narrower alleys leading out of it. This is the most picturesque corner of the town, and gives upon the harbour, past a house in whose gable wall still rests the cannon-shot fired in the siege of 1644. The harbour is really the sea-estuary of the River Wey. The old original Weymouth is on the other side, with the beautiful backwater on the right, reaching to Radipole.

The chief scenic asset of Weymouth is, of course, the great rock of Portland, the Gibraltar of Wessex, the "Isle of Portland," tethered to the mainland only by the long shingly spit of the Chesil Beach. Thence comes the famous Portland stone, and there is the equally famous Portland Prison. There, too, are forts with heavy guns, the great breakwater, and various other appointments and developments that render this a strong naval rendezvous. A great assemblage of battleships in Weymouth Bay is not the least among the many attractions that Weymouth has to offer.

Chesil Beach

On the crest of the steep hill at Wyke, as you leave the town for Portland, is the great church of Wyke Regis, the mother-church of Weymouth, with memorials of many sailors wrecked in Deadman's Bay, which extends westward from Portland to Bridport. Here, too, the diligent may seek and find the epitaph of one "William Lewis, who was killed by a shot from the *Pigmy* schooner, 21st April, 1822. Aged 33 years." Lewis was a smuggler, killed in the course of one of his illegal expeditions; but the verses upon his tombstone take no count of that, and call down curses upon whoever fired the shot.

From Wyke the road descends steeply, and, crossing the Fleet Bridge, leads along two miles of flat road across the Chesil Beach. The stranger would hardly expect to see so much shingle in the whole world as he finds here. It is a vast accumulation of pebbles running westward hence as far as West Bay, Bridport. Its total length is eighteen miles, and it varies from a hundred yards to more than a quarter of a mile in breadth, its pebbles ranging gradually in size from Brobdingnagian specimens, about the size of a breakfast-plate, at Portland to the tiniest particles at West Bay.

CHAPTER IV

“UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE”— DORCHESTER—MAIDEN CASTLE—BRIDPORT —WEST BAY

FROM Warmwell Cross the route into Dorchester may advantageously be varied by bearing to the right, through the very pretty village of West Stafford, where there is an interesting church, and an inn with a deprecatory set of verses, beginning :

I trust no Wise Man will condemn
A Cup of Genuine now and then.

Pleasant by-roads lead across tributaries of the Frome and into Stinsford, which is in the heart of the Hardy Country, about two miles from Dorchester. It is a secluded place amid massed woods and at the edge of the fine park surrounding Kingston House. Stinsford is the “Mellstock” of that sweet idyll *Under the Greenwood Tree*.



WAREHAM CHURCH.

The church of St. Martin, perched boldly on its terrace above the road on the north side of the town, has a striking Saxon interior.

Upper Bockhampton

Beyond it we gain the highroad that leads down on the left into Dorchester. The right-hand route conducts up Yellowham Hill to Piddletown; or the stranger may on some summer day be well content to lose himself in the sylvan wilds in the valley of the Frome, through the hamlet of Upper Bockhampton, where the rustic cottage that was the birthplace of Thomas Hardy may be seen on the very verge of the open, under Ilsington Woods. There, where the blue wood-smoke from rustic chimneys ascends amid dense foliage, and where the swart heaths begin, he learned his "wood-notes wild." Piddletown Church, with its monuments of the Martins of Athelhampton, and the fine Jacobean minstrel gallery, is well worth seeing, for its own sake and for its associations in the Wessex novels, in which it figures prominently as "Weatherbury." At Lower Walterstone, about one mile north, is the beautiful Jacobean farmhouse described in *Far from the Madding Crowd* as the home of Bathsheba Everdene.

Coming into Dorchester, the road traverses the water-meadows of the Frome, over the spot called Ten Hatches, and across the little bridges that were the scene of Henchard's despair, in

Wessex

The Mayor of Casterbridge. "Casterbridge," as everyone familiar with Wessex knows, is Dorchester—and an excellent name, too, for this grave town of early British and Roman antecedents. It would be vain to pretend that Dorchester is picturesque. If you expect in it nodding gables, and half-timbered fifteenth-century buildings to be the note of it, you will experience a disappointment in seeing the real thing. For the general aspect of the town is one of Georgian four-square respectability, and sky-lines are apt to be horizontal instead of at acute angles. There are, however, older things by far at Dorchester. At Fordington, for instance, which is an integral part of the town, there have been discovered Roman remains, as, indeed, they have been plentifully unearthed all in and about the borough. The tympanum over the south door of the parish church is exceptionally well worth inspection. It is a very remarkable example of Norman sculpture, and represents the miraculous appearance of St. George on horseback at the Battle of Dorylæum. The figures are full of life and vigour, except those represented as being dead, and they look very dead indeed. St. George is shown in the act of thrusting his



NEAR MAIDEN CASTLE.

The prehistoric earthworks from darkly against the skyline to the west of Dorchester.

Dorchester

lance into the mouth of one of the enemy, who vainly endeavours to pluck it out. At the back are two others of the foe, stricken with fear at this horrible sight, and praying on their knees for mercy. The peculiar interest of this sculpture lies in the fact that all the actors in this scene are represented in Norman chain-mail.

There is an unmistakably "county-town" atmosphere in Dorchester, which is a distinctly urban place, and not now of that thinly-modified rusticity described long ago by Thomas Hardy: "The farmer's boy could sit under his barley-mow and pitch a stone into the window of the town clerk; reapers at work among the sheaves nodded to acquaintances standing on the pavement-corner; the red-robed judge, when he condemned a sheep-stealer, pronounced sentence to the tune of 'Baa' that floated in at the window from the remainder of the flock browsing hard by."

No, modern Dorchester is not like that, and its chief features—the noble elm avenues, that struck the traveller by road into and out of the town with admiration—have had their exquisite nobility qualified by time and change. Those grand avenues extended north, south, east, and west; but to-day they have in some cases dis-

Wessex

appeared, and in others have been obscured by suburban buildings, that have shut out the views of the fields from the pavements. Dorchester, however, is rich in notable things. As you enter it from Piddletown and Ten Hatches, and rise up along High East Street to Cornhill, which is the very centre of the town, you approach the grey old church of St. Peter, and note in the flagged space beneath the tower the bronze statue of William Barnes, the "Dorset poet," 1801-1886, with a verse aptly chosen from his own writings:

Zoo now I hope his kindly fëace
Is gone to vind a better plëace,
But still wi' vo'k a' left behind
He'll always be a' kept in mind.

Thus appropriately, in the olden Wessex folk-speech he did so much to preserve, is the memory of the amiable "Pa'son Barnes" kept alive.

Much else is changed, but still on market-days the country-folk come pouring into what they to this day call "Darchester." They come into it chiefly by carrier's cart, or by dogcarts and other road vehicles, just as of yore; and although the market-day assemblage of carriers' tilt-carts is an astonishing survival in numerous old English towns, there are nowhere to be seen so astonish-

Historic Dorchester

ingly many as here; and the occupants of them are not infrequently such genuine old crusted characters as you read of, and wag the same old Wessex tongue. For the rest, Dorchester has the Roman encampment of Poundbury and the amphitheatre of Maumbury to show; in High West Street is the house, duly marked, where the infamous Judge Jeffreys lodged when on his Assize of Blood in 1685, and in the Town Hall his chair is shown. While some things have changed, other trivial details have remained the same for considerably over a century. Thus, Rowlandson in 1797 made a drawing of King George III. being driven in a post-chaise to the "King's Arms." The "King's Arms" Hotel still stands where it did, and looks in every respect the selfsame place, which is itself a remarkable proof of the abiding nature of our institutions; but what is yet more remarkable is the fact that the selfsame, indubitable individual old flower-pots are on the roof of the portico yet. In the face of the destiny of all flower-pots to be resolved at some time into potsherds, and in view of the many times when the roof of that portico must have been used, on election and other occasions, as a convenient place

Wessex

whence to harangue excited crowds, their survival is strange indeed.

For the rest, a gruesome little cottage will be found by taking the road out of High West Street known as Glydepath Lane, and following it to a fine damp situation near the river. It is only gruesome when you know its old story ; otherwise it is a quite idyllic little thatched cottage, and stands in a nice garden. But it is handy to Dorchester Gaol, and it was the hangman's cottage. In this same street is a mingled grim and stately great early eighteenth-century mansion, known as Colyton House. The hideously battered keystone mask in the blocked-up archway of one of its outbuildings has been appropriated, and made literary capital of, by Mr. Hardy in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. "High Place Hall," the home of Lucetta, Henchard's lady-love in that story, is really a house at the corner of South Street and Durngate Street, but he transfers the unlovely thing from Colyton House to it. He has an extraordinary aptitude for seeing something malignant and inimical in lifeless objects, and you are almost persuaded that there was some malevolence in this that wrought Henchard's ruin.



FORDINGTON.

The village stands upon a steep bank above the Frome, at the eastern extremity of Dorchester, and looks picturesquely out upon the water-meadows.

A Camp of Refuge

Comparatively few are those who explore from Dorchester along the old Exeter road to Bridport, for the scenery is wild and the road lonely and steep. Well, then, what of that? Those places are few indeed where level roads accompany rugged scenery. Explore those fourteen miles. Truly they will reward the amateur of scenery: the lofty ridge whose summit is reached three parts of the way revealing widespreading views out to sea on the left, and over wonderful hills and vales inland on the right. You have a taste of what this route is like immediately after leaving Dorchester and its western avenue behind, for cresting the sky-line of the downs on the left are the giant prehistoric earthworks of Maiden Castle, glooming darkly upon the road. Who delved the deep and lofty ditches and embankments, the amazing concentric and overlapping circles enclosing the vast camp on yonder height? Nay, who among the ancient peoples that warred in Britain from the earliest prehistoric times until the dawn of history did *not* have a hand in that immense fortification and camp of refuge? It was old when the Romans came and added their quota of spade-work to it. But this at least we may deduce from those cyclopean earthworks:

Wessex

that those who made them and added to them must have been horribly afraid, thus to seek the defensive so diligently, instead of going out to battle in the open. Unquestionably, ancient warfare must have raged along this way, for pre-historic tumuli are plentiful along the downs as we progress.

Passing Bridehead Park, a road leads steeply down on the left to Longbredy, where will be found the deserted old manor-house of Kingston Russell, whence the Russells, Dukes of Bedford, sprang from obscurity in 1502, in the person of the courtly and ingratiating John Russell. Admiral Sir Thomas Masterman Hardy was also born here, and under the same roof died John Lothrop Motley, historian of the Dutch Republic, some thirty years ago. Approaching Bridport, a stone at the corner of the hedgerow in Lee Lane on the right commemorates what Fuller styles the "Miraculous Divergence," the escape of Charles II., September 23, 1651, when he baffled his pursuers by turning out of the main road at this point.

Bridport town stands upon its sponsorial little river, Brit, about one and a half miles from the sea, at West Bay. There, on the exposed seashore



BLACKMORE VALE.

"This fertile and sheltered tract of country, in which the fields are never brown and the springs never dry." — THOMAS HARDY.

A Little Port

of what is often styled "Deadman's Bay," the river slides into the Channel. West Bay is the queerest of places. It has a small harbour, formed by locking up the river behind lock-gates, and two parallel wooden jetties start hazardously out from the beach. In and out of this harbour small sailing-vessels make their way; and certain scattered cottages, the Bridport Arms Inn, and some few recent houses, all standing in the sands and minute gravel of the Chesil Beach, which ends here, make believe that West Bay is a sea-side resort. On either side of it the cliffs rise to great heights, and are partly of a friable, earthy nature, yellow in hue.

CHAPTER V

CERNE ABBAS—THE VALE OF BLACKMORE— SHERBORNE—SHAFTESBURY

NORTHWARDS out of Dorchester we come by favour of the long straight old Bristol road into the heart of the great Wessex dairying district of Blackmore Vale ; but before reaching that region of green fatness we pass through the country associated in the minds of all readers of the Wessex novels with *The Woodlanders*. The road goes through the village of Charminster and in the valley of the little river Cerne, under the chalk downs that gradually rise as the decayed town of Cerne Abbas is approached. Just where the shoulders of those lofty chalk hills are at their highest and steepest, the stranger will see with that gasp of astonishment which is the proper meed of such a thing the gigantic figure of a man outlined upon the grass. This is the "Giant of Cerne," who well deserves that name, for he is

A Dead Town

180 feet high. He is represented wielding an immense club, which he flourishes over his head. The history of this singular figure is, like that of the several "White Horses" cut on hillsides in various parts of England, and like the famous "Long Man of Wilmington," on the downs near Eastbourne, unknown. Whether the monks of the Benedictine Abbey of Cerne traced his outlines, or whether, as legends declare, this was a work of the early pagan Saxons, and intended by them to represent their god, Heil, to whom human sacrifices were offered here, must ever be matters for conjecture.

If you would make acquaintance with a dead town, allow me to introduce you to Cerne Abbas. It is a weary, age-worn place, a little off the main road, and rapidly falling into decay. It suffered when the great abbey, of which the noble Perpendicular gatehouse remains, was dissolved; but it experienced a considerable revival in the great days for agriculture, when the Napoleonic wars sent up the price of corn and made the farmers happy. You may see the signs of this in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century houses in the place, with large shop-fronts. Those shop-fronts tell a tale, for they are for the greater

Wessex

part no longer shops, and serve as the immeasurably too large windows for sitting-rooms. The great final causes of the decline and fall of Cerne Abbas were the coming of railways, which rendered so many small towns and rural markets no longer necessary, and the failure of agriculture. So Cerne is dead. You will find no deader townlet in England. Therefore let us pace reverently her empty streets.

We now come between the hills to the pretty village of Minterne Magna, which is the "Great Hintock" of *The Woodlanders*. "Here," says a rustic wag in that story, "you do see the world and life." Not much, though, for although the old Bristol road is still an excellent highway, it is not precisely crowded. Beyond the extremely small village the road reaches the steep escarpment whence the great bastioned mid-Dorset heights go in many places with dramatic steepness down into the far-spreading Blackmore Vale. The road itself naturally descends at the least steep place to the levels of Middlemarsh; but it is very well worth while to explore for some distance along the by-road to the left, which follows the very edge of this ridge. Here is the lofty height of High Stoy, with its great neighbours, Dogbury,

“Cross-in-Hand”

Bulbarrow, and Nettlecombe Tout. Three miles along this byway brings you past the most striking scenery to the lofty down above Batcombe, passing on the way the lonely, mysterious stone pillar called “Cross-in-Hand,” associated with a dramatic episode in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*. It is described rather curiously in those pages as “the scene of a miracle or murder, or both.”

Beyond where Batcombe Church is seen, down in the profound vale, the road goes into a secluded region, where the three Melbury villages and that of Evershot cluster about the noble Melbury Park, seat of the Earl of Ilchester. The great mansion is the “King’s Hintock Court,” of that delightful story, “The First Countess of Wessex,” in *A Group of Noble Dames*. The tiny village of Melbury Osmund, the Hardyean “Little Hintock,” is described, aptly enough, by one of his characters as “such a small place that you’d need a candle and lantern to find it, if you don’t know where ’tis.”

Returning now from these Arcadian recesses, we descend by the old Bristol road into the vale at Middlemarsh, a part of that Vale of Blackmore which has been described with such complete justness as “This fertile and sheltered tract of

Wessex

country, in which the fields are never brown and the springs never dry. . . . The atmosphere is languorous, and is so tinged with azure that what artists call the middle distance partakes also of that hue, while the horizon beyond is of the deepest ultramarine." Dense scrub-woods are at first met as we gain the Marshwood level, and then die away as Holnest is reached—Holnest, with its little church quite dwarfed by the huge mausoleum erected by the late J. S. W. S. Erle-Drax for himself. Near at hand is Holnest Lodge, one of that eccentric squire's residences, still with the tall column in front, crested by a bronze statue of himself, erected by himself to his own honour and glory, since no one else was in the least likely to do so much for him.

In less than five miles we come into Sherborne, that pleasant old town which still bears some considerable traces of that cathedral-city dignity of which it was deprived so long ago as 1078. It is situated in a little vale of its own, the Vale of that *Scir burne*, or clear, sparkling brook, which made the spot seem so desirable to the monks who were settled here by King Ina as early as A.D. 705. That stream originated the place-name, while losing its own, for it is identical with

Sherborne Abbey

the River Yeo, or Ivel, which in turn gives a name to Yeovil town, anciently called "Ivell."

The great glory of Sherborne is, of course, its noble abbey church, standing in its own precincts, reached through a low-browed archway out of the main street, past the beautiful old "Monks' Conduit." This minster-like church—really a minster in the technical sense of the word, it having been the church of a Benedictine monastery—is grouped with the buildings of the Grammar School, itself founded by Edward VI. from the spoils of that dissolved religious house, and having its home in the old domestic buildings of those Black Monks. It is a stately grouping. The great church itself is of the loveliest form and colour. Externally presenting the appearance of a Late Perpendicular building, with architectural details exhibiting the approach of the Renaissance, the interior discloses, particularly in the transepts, the fact that the core of the building is actually in great degree Norman, and that the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century work is practically a refacing in a later fashion. But the choir is a rebuilding, effected after the fire of 1437—a fire which still shows its traces in the reddened patches on the golden-yellow Ham Hill sand-

Wessex

stone, whose lovely tints contribute so greatly to the beauty of the soaring architecture of clerestory and delicate fan vaulting. Sherborne, history will not forget, gave a lead in modern times to the passion for historical pageants, inaugurated here in the great Sherborne Pageant held in the grounds of Sherborne Castle Park, 1905. There, amid the ruins of the ancient Bishop's Castle, the story of the town for over a thousand years was retold.

Some five miles west is Yeovil, that great dairying centre ; that neat and prosperous town, looking so bright and cheerful with its houses of the yellow Ham Hill stone, a sandstone that reveals itself in the wayside cuttings as you descend towards it down Babylon Hill. But Yeovil has little of antiquity to show the visitor, except those two old inns, the George and the Castle, which face one another in High Street, for it has rebuilt itself pretty thoroughly.

Sixteen miles eastward of Sherborne stands the hill-top town of Shaftesbury, to which railways do not come, and from whose eyrie all modern developments turn aside. The milestones tell a strange tale of so many miles to "Shaston," and it is not always that the traveller understands

“ Shaston ”

Shaftesbury to be indicated under that disguise, but as such it still remains in rustic speech. The novelist tells us, in one voice with the ascertained history of the place, how Shaftesbury was originally the British “Caer Palladour.” It possessed three mints, twelve satellite churches, attendant upon a magnificent abbey, and many other architectural glories, for which the stucco-fronted eighteenth and early nineteenth century houses which now constitute the main part of the town are a sorry exchange. All those magnificences have disappeared, like the baseless fabric of a vision; and antiquaries to-day, grubbing in trenches and turning over potato-patches, can do little more than retrieve a few shattered stones and broken tiles that hint of the vanished abbey’s former existence. Three parish churches remain, and form a very generous provision for the small place that Shaftesbury long since became. But if, architecturally speaking, the town is so negligible, the distant views, both of it and from it, are grand. Blackmore Vale is disclosed perhaps to its greatest advantage from these heights, in that southward view between St. Peter’s Church and the massive time-stained buttresses on the right hand, which mark the precincts of the long-abolished abbey.

Wessex

The road descends from this point, incredibly steep, and quite impossible for anything on wheels, seeing that it goes down in a series of gigantic sett-paved stairs. Framed in thus romantically, the view across the most beautiful part of the Vale of Blackmore extends far away until it melts in a blue vagueness.

The streets of Shaftesbury have names a good deal more picturesque than the houses that front upon them. That of "Bimport" is an example. In that quiet thoroughfare is the house styled in *Jude the Obscure* "Old Grove's Place." It is easily recognizable by reason of its projecting porch.



THE BRIDPORT ARMS.

The old inn forms part of some scattered groups of houses at West Bay, near Bridport. The place is chiefly a waste of sand.

CHAPTER VI

YATTON—CHEDDAR CHEESE AND CHEDDAR CLIFFS—WELLS—GLASTONBURY—THE ISLE OF ATHELNEY—DUNSTER

THE little town of Yatton, below Bristol, situated on excellent roads and with a convenient station on the Great Western main line, is a very useful point whence to start upon a rambling exploration of Mid and North Somerset, called by Mr. Hardy "Outer Wessex." Yatton is a junction station, its name-board familiar to travellers, with the alluring legend beneath: "For Cheddar and Wells." Whether the place-name be really "Ea-ton" or "Yeo-ton," from the little river Yeo, on which the town is situated, or "Gate-town," from the road or "gate" under the hills on which it stands, will ever remain a problem to give antiquaries something to think about. The church, one of the finest in this shire of fine churches, has a remarkable outline

Wessex

because of its incomplete spire, whose upper part appears never to have been added. It thus wears a truncated appearance, and is crested with a kind of coronet. The effect is distinctly pleasing and gives Yatton a decided individuality. The general appearance of the church is that of a Late Decorated building. The tomb, with red-robed effigy of Chief Justice Newton, of the Common Pleas, 1449, is well worth seeing.

Through Congresbury and Churchill, whence the Churchill family emerged from obscurity to a dukedom and political fame in later generations, we come, through the little town of Axbridge, to Cheddar. There is no need, it may be presumed, to instruct the reader in the two things for which Cheddar is deservedly famous—its cheese and cliffs. Time was, and that until quite recent years, when the tourist who by some strange chance knew nothing of Cheddar cheese might proceed through the picturesque village without a glimpse of its staple product. So modest was Cheddar that no one would deduce or suspect a cheese in the entire district. But nowadays—these being days of strenuous publicity—shops that do nothing else but sell cheeses are a feature of the place. The results are extremely satisfactory, especially

Cheddar Cliffs

in view of the fact that inferior cheese from the United States, known as "American Cheddar," was bulking largely in provision markets, and bidding fair to wholly overshadow the home produce. In these scientific times it is said to be quite possible to produce Cheddar by the cultivation of a bacillus, and that it is therefore the method alone that makes the cheese, which can be produced anywhere. But it would be a bad day for the Somerset dairy-farmer if that doctrine were accepted in its entirety, and it is comforting to believe that it is not likely to win to such acceptance.

Cheddar Cliffs are strikingly formed by huge precipitous rifts in the limestone escarpments of the Mendip Hills, and lead at right angles out of the main road. The most picturesque portion of the village is situated at the beginning of them, beside the fine winding road that ascends between their grey spires and impending fissures, looming in monstrous shapes, like the fabled turrets and bastions of some giant's castle. The old geological theory as to how these huge rifted chasms were produced was of an earthquake that had thus torn the everlasting hills asunder. But a recent school of thought has the view that they

Wessex

were originally immense caverns, and that the gorge effect is caused by the roof having at some time fallen in. The famous caverns, discovered in 1837 and 1893, are cited as examples. These are the chief attractions at Cheddar for the sight-seer, and are not in the least difficult to find, because, in fact, they open upon the road and are rented by rival proprietors who eagerly solicit the stranger's patronage. Whether the cave that belongs to Cox or that which is exploited by Gough is the better, I will not pretend to say ; only the mental impression left by perusing the handbills and advertisements of the competitors is that each is better than the other, "which," as our old enemy Euclid would say, "is absurd."

In another seven miles we come to the slumberous cathedral city of Wells, in its rich vale beneath the Mendips. The population of Wells is about five thousand, and decreasing, or at the most stationary, and thus there are no unhistorical modern suburbs, and the outskirts are quite innocent of notices offering land "ripe for building." It is true that there are two railway-stations at Wells, but they are the product of rival railway politics, rather than called into



THE ALMSHOUSES, CORSHAM.

Built by Lady Hungerford, 1672. One of the finest examples of the post-Reformation Almshouse.

Wells

existence by necessity. I suppose the stranger would deduce a river from the place-name, but Wells knows nothing of the kind. It takes that title from the clear springs that gush forth in the neighbourhood of the cathedral, and form delightful pools at its south-eastern end, serving also to surround the fortified Bishop's Palace with a pellucid moat. The Diocese of Wells was founded A.D. 704 by Ina, King of Wessex. Never have the rude buffetings of warfare disturbed the quiet of the place, whose history is solely ecclesiastical, and is concerned only with the long succession of Bishops and the various rebuildings of the cathedral. As we see it now, within its grassy close, the cathedral is a singularly perfect work, chiefly of the thirteenth century, rich above all other English cathedrals in delicate sculpture, and with sixty carved miserere seats that display the sweetest artistic fancy, the closest study of natural forms, and the most exquisite craftsmanship in wood-carving to be found in England. Here, too, is a curious fourteenth-century clock, still in good going order. The Bishop's Palace, largely an Early English work, is a building beautiful enough, and looking like enough to be the scene of the legend of the Briar Rose and the Sleeping

Wessex

Beauty. Wells is the most cloistral of English cathedral cities. It is the one ideal cathedral city for scholar and poet that England possesses, for the rest are for the most part pushful commercial places, with electric tramways and the like manifestations of modernity. Of these things Wells knows nothing. The most startling thing I ever saw at Wells was the Bishop riding a bicycle, and he ran into me, which perhaps serves to show that, although the mitred know the straight celestial way, their terrestrial route on wheels is sometimes not so forthright as that of the mere layman. Lovely Wells, sweet with the last faint afterglow of the Middle Ages, with ancient houses, and some few comparatively modern, facing the quiet market-place, closed in at its eastern end by the great gate-houses of the cathedral precincts, the towers of that stately church peering up beyond.

From Wells we come in little more than five miles into Glastonbury, standing in the fabled Arthurian "Vale of Avalon" of the poets. I must confess that, many years ago, coming for the first time into Glastonbury, I was disappointed. I had read so deeply of Avalon—the Tennysonian Avalon of apple orchards and mystic Round Table



THE MARKET PLACE, WELLS.

Wells is the nearest approach in England to the ideal Cathedral city of poets and students, and the Market-place is so little disturbed by markets that the plashing of the perennial springs which gives Wells its name is easily heard from the fountain.

Glastonbury

story—that I expected too much. Glastonbury is indeed a commercial little town. Its population is less than that of Wells, but it gives the impression of being larger—perhaps because its people are out and about doing things, while the folk at Wells are engaged indoors in such meditations as befit their ecclesiastical surroundings. Really, you know, the roads into Glastonbury are quite good; and there is gas in the streets and shops, and everything that savours of the twentieth century—things that somehow sink so far into the background of it when reading Arthurian romance, that you are unreasonably inclined to resent them when coming into the town. Yet Glastonbury is rich in relics of medievalism. You may even come to your truly ancient inn here, just as did the pilgrims of old before the abbey was dissolved and the last Abbot and two of his monks were hanged, a good deal higher than Haman, on the lofty crest of Glastonbury Tor in 1539. Abbot Selwood built what is now the George Hotel in 1485 as a pilgrims' hostel, and the ancient frontage is still in existence. The abbey ruins, which include the fine Transitional Norman remains of St. Joseph's Chapel, are situated in lovely woodland grounds, and close by is the

Wessex

even more interesting Abbot's Kitchen, massive and ecclesiastical-looking, dating from about 1420.

We may with advantage strike across country from Glastonbury to Taunton, across the interesting marshes of Sedgemoor—twenty-two miles. Glastonbury, indeed, took its original title from the Latin *Insula Vitrea*, a name formed by the Romans from the British "Ynys Vitrin," and Englished by the Saxons into "Glaestingabyrig." This was a descriptive name, applied to the still, glassy waters of the shallow inland sea which then covered the whole of Sedgemoor with the exception of a few islands. The town was one of many lake-dwellings in these waters, overlooked by the tall and steep Tor, rising strangely to a height of 500 feet. Now crowned with the fifteenth-century tower of a chapel of St. Michael, this mountainous hill is a weird object in the landscape for many miles.

We pass the boot-making village of Street, and then the village of Greinton. Westonzoyland, with its very large and very fine Perpendicular church, two and a half miles on the right, is really an Avalon, or apple island, and delightful in spring. To the north of the village was fought the Battle of Sedgemoor, July 6, 1685, and the church was

The Isle of Athelney

afterwards used as a prison for some hundreds of captured rebels.

The flat scenery of the moor, with dykes beside the road filled with reeds and water, is varied by strangely sudden hills here and there. One of these is at Boroughbridge, a hamlet where we cross the River Parret and enter the historic Isle of Athelney. The hill, locally called "The Mump," is crested by the ruins of a chapel of St. Michael. Here we enter a district associated with the endearing story of Alfred the Great. "He was England's darling," says the old Saxon Chronicle, and so he remains. It was in this self-same Isle of Athelney that he lay hid amid the marshes, A.D. 879, after the Saxon disasters in battle with the Danes. An obelisk on a hillock records the facts.

I should like to linger in the pleasant old town of Taunton—"Taunton on the Tone," as school primers told us to style it—but I am bound for Dunster, on the Severn Sea, and that is another twenty-two miles distant. The road to it, past Combe Florey, Crowcombe, Williton, and Washford, is Somerset at its best, in every circumstance of rustic beauty. At Washford is the ruined Cleeve Abbey, the most interesting remains of

Wessex

a Cistercian monastery in the West of England. The church has wholly disappeared. The interest lies in the domestic buildings and the cloisters, together with the chapter-house and refectory, all in the Early English style and very beautiful.

I choose Dunster to close this route because it is one of those rare old towns which keep their ancient manorial aspect, and neither increase nor greatly decline. It owes this distinction to the facts of being situated just off the road to anywhere at all, and to being a mile or two away from the sea, which in remote times came up to the outworks of its castle, and made the place a seaport. Dunster is a picture—nay, it is a gallery of pictures, for one meets you at every turn. There is the sleepy town of one broad street, with the castle on its wooded height in the background, and in the foreground the old Yarn Market, a remarkable timber-framed building which seems to be again awaiting the marketing of yarn. It was built, they say, in 1609, and the weather-vane, dated 1647, marks the repairs effected after the siege of the castle in 1646. That the reigning family of Dunster is named Luttrell is evident from the name of the inn, the Luttrell Arms, close by. This was in olden

Dunster

times a house of the Abbots of Cleeve, and still retains some semi-ecclesiastical features, including a fifteenth-century window of great size, with many elaborate oaken mullions, looking upon the courtyard. The fine priory church of Dunster, with its sweet carillons, that play a different air for every day of the week, the so-called "Nun's House," the old water-mill—these are all delights of Dunster. The castle, which is described as "Stancy Castle" in Thomas Hardy's novel *A Laodicean*, is still the residence of the Luttrells.

CHAPTER VII

NORTON ST. PHILIP—BATH—CORSHAM— CASTLE COMBE

THERE are ways from Wells to Bath somewhat shorter than the twenty-four miles by which we shall now proceed, but they take you up weariful heights, over the long, swooping contours of the Mendips. There is not, in fact, any really easy way between Wells and Bath.

We leave the city through the cathedral close, along its north side, and through the beautiful Chain Gate, a work of the Perpendicular period, connecting the cathedral with the Vicars' College. Presently begins the long rise of Horrington Hill ; and so up and again up goes the road, and past the lonely Old Down Inn, coming at length by Kilmersdon to Ammerdown and Norton St. Philip, along a true exemplar of what geography primers style "an elevated plateau, or tableland." The delightful village of Norton St. Philip intro-

The Bells of Norton

duces a welcome change from these keen airs and strenuous heights, for it basks in the mellow atmosphere of a valley. The sweet-toned bells of Norton still charm the ear of the traveller, and are the identical "very fine ring of six bells" that Pepys heard on June 12, 1668, and pronounced "mighty tuneable," ringing from the grey church tower that stands so stately in advance of the village. The George and the Fleur-de-Lis, are both old inns, the first of them historic as well, for it was the headquarters of the Duke of Monmouth when the furious skirmish was fought here, June 26, 1685, between his rustics and the soldiers of King James. His ploughmen won the day, but Monmouth himself had a narrow escape the next morning, when he was shot at while dressing at a window of the George.

This house belonged of old to the Priory of Hinton Charterhouse, whose ruins in the park of Hinton "Abbey," a modern residence, may be seen adjoining the village of Hinton Charterhouse, through which we proceed on the again hilly way to Bath, which is six miles distant from it, through Midford and Odd Down.

Many volumes might be written—and, indeed,

Wessex

have been, are being, and yet will be written—about Bath, which is without doubt a very beautiful and ancient and likeable city, with a long history behind it, a vigorous present, and doubtless a lengthy and prosperous future, so long as its healing thermal springs shall last. The antiquity of Bath is undoubtedly pre-Roman, but to those mighty colonizers the first great development of what they styled *Aquæ Solis*, the “Waters of the Sun,” is due. A rival version of that title is *Aquæ Sulis*, supposed to incorporate the name of Sul, an unknown “early British deity”; but the discovery of a sculptured face of the sun-god, now in the museum, seems to support the first name. Of course, the great traditional founder of Bath, the true discoverer of the medicinal springs, is, according to local patriotism, Prince Bladud. A statue of him in the Grand Pump Room, erected 1669, commits Bath to a belief in the legend of that leprous Prince wandering, 863 B.C., an exile from his father’s Court, and becoming healed in these waters. But Bladud is an absolutely unhistorical personage. The Romans, however, have left very substantial relics of their presence. Does the general reader, it may be asked, ever turn aside from his general-



DUNSTER CASTLE AND YARN MARKET.

The Yarn Market, in the middle of the broad street, no longer witnesses the marketing of yarn or other goods. It is, like Dunster town itself, a picturesque survival.

The Romans at Bath

ties, and particularly consider the great space of time in which the Romans held Britain as a prosperous colony? For nearly four centuries they established themselves in this land, a settled community, with the arts and civilization brought from their native shores. Nay, they did more than this, for they Romanized the Britons and intermarried with them. England, the greatest colonizing power of the modern world, has not done so much. Less than two hundred years covers the establishment of our Indian Empire, and we have not mingled with the races of Hindostan.

The Roman baths at Bath are the best evidence of the solidity of the civilization then founded; and we have also to consider that Bath was then, as it still remains, the premier health-resort in these islands, and the discoveries of Roman villas at Box and elsewhere along the Avon Valley show that the district was what we should now style "residential." The destruction of all these graces after the Roman forces left Britain, in A.D. 410, left *Aquæ Solis* a deserted ruin. It arose again as the Saxon "Akemanceaster," and was a considerable town at the time of the Conquest. The springs find little mention in the Middle Ages,

Wessex

and only seem to have gradually won back to a right appreciation from the time of Queen Elizabeth onwards. It was the Consort of Charles I., Queen Henrietta Maria, who in 1644 began the fashionable vogue of what was then styled "the Bath"—a vogue continued and amplified in the visits of Charles II. and his Court, 1663; of the Queen of James II., 1687; and with the great favour shown the place by Queen Anne. This fashionable and therapeutic reputation was enormously enhanced in her time, the Corporation building the Pump Room in 1704, and appointing Beau Nash "Master of the Ceremonies." Still, however, Bath was a city of merely rustic streets and medieval, or at the latest Tudor, houses; and Bath as we see it to-day only arose when Ralph Allen and John Wood began to build its stately neo-classic streets and crescents of fine houses in the middle of the eighteenth century. For the fine architectural effect thus produced Bath owes a very great deal to the fine local oolite building-stone.

Prominent, however, above all else is the great abbey church, which rises in its midst, and challenges with its display of the last phase of Gothic the Palladian severity of the secular build-





“Go to Bath!”

ings. It is a complete and direct contradiction of that eighteenth-century Bath; but how nobly and effectively it stands forth from that sea of houses which is the picture presented by Bath, lying in its cuplike hollow beneath the great surrounding hills!

“Go to Bath!” says the old contemptuous and derisive saying. “Certainly!” one might well reply. “By all means. Delighted.” And coming to it along the stately curve which the Great Western Railway makes between those lofty heights, what an inspiring picture the city presents! Bath is additionally famed for its Pickwickian associations, and stands sponsor for Bath chaps, Bath buns, and Bath Olivers. It takes no responsibility in the matter of “Bath bricks,” which intimate articles of domestic economy are in fact made at Bridgwater, and obtained their name no one knows when or how.

Of its other thousand and one architectural, literary, artistic and social glories and associations, I dare hint only guardedly in this small compass. Of the abbey church, let it suffice to say that its tower is not square in plan, and that the building in general has a somewhat singular history. Large though it be, it is but half the size of a Norman

Wessex

predecessor, begun but allowed to fall into decay. It was begun anew in 1495 by Bishop Oliver King, who dreamed a strange dream of angels ascending ladders and a voice exclaiming, "Let an olive establish the crown, and let a King restore the church." He had proceeded as far as the west front when the Reformation ended his project, and the great building remained derelict for forty years. The work was resumed in 1572, and brought to a conclusion about 1609. Thus we have the unusual spectacle of a great abbey church chiefly of post-Reformation date. The odd reproduction in stone on the west front of Bishop Oliver King's dream, representing angels climbing Jacob's ladders, is more singular than beautiful.

Box and Corsham, respectively six and nine miles from Bath, to the east, along the old coach-road to London, are worth an excursion, for here you may see the quarries whence comes the fine-grained Bath stone. Box Tunnel, on the Great Western Railway, was considered a stupendous work in the early days of railways. It is nearly one and three-quarter miles long, and cost more than half a million sterling. Corsham Regis, to give that pretty village its full title, lies a little

Corsham

way off the main road, and is, of course, a place of stone-built houses and cottages, nearly all with some architectural merit. The old weavers' cottages are still pointed out, the homes of a Flemish community of clothworkers in Elizabethan times. One may also obtain glimpses of Corsham Court, a noble mansion amid gardens rich in enormous yew hedges. It is the seat of Lord Methuen, and was originally built in 1582 by one Smythe, who grew rich in farming the Customs dues. The Elizabethan south front remains. But what will more immediately compel the tourist's admiration is the Hungerford Almshouse, a quaintly beautiful composition, the gift of Lady Hungerford in 1672. It is one of the finest among the post-Reformation almshouses, with curious mingling of debased Gothic and elaborate Renaissance details over the projecting porch, among whose florid sculptures will be noticed the crossed sickles and wheatsheaf badge of the Hungerfords, who have long since died out of the land.

Corsham is pretty, but one of the prettiest villages in England will be found some four miles north at Castle Combe, in a profound valley through which flows the Box Brook. The castle of Castle Combe has disappeared. It stood some-

Wessex

where on the lofty wooded heights that tower above the secluded village. No modern house varies the peaceful old cottage architecture of the street, which follows the windings of the brook ; and the old church and roofed-in market-cross complete the picture of a village unaltered since the spacious times of Good Queen Bess.

INDEX

ARISHMILL GAP, 19
Athelney, Isle of, 51
Axbridge, 44

Batcombe, 37
Bath, 56-60
Bere Regis, 8-10
Bindon Abbey, 16
Blackmore Vale, 34, 36, 37
Boroughbridge, 51
Bournemouth, 6
Box, 60
Bridport, 32
Brit River, 32

Castle Combe, 61
Cerne Abbas, 34-36
Charminster, 34
Cheddar, 44-46
Chesil Beach, 22, 23, 33
Churchill, 44
Cleeve Abbey, 51
Congresbury, 44
Corfe Castle, 12-14
Corsham, 60
"Cross-in-Hand," 37

"Deadman's Bay," 23, 33
Dogbury, 36

Dorchester, 19, 25-31
Dunster, 51, 52
Durdle Door, 19
Durlston Head, 15

East Stoke, 16
Evershot, 37

Fordington, 26
Frome, River, 10, 12, 16, 17,
18, 25

Greinton, 50
Glastonbury, 48-50

High Stoy, 36
Hinton Charterhouse, 55
Holnest, 38

Ilsington Woods, 25

Kimmeridge, 19
Kingston Russell, 32

Lee Lane, 32
Longbredy, 32
Lower Walterstone, 25
Lulworth Castle, 19
Lulworth Cove, 19

Index

Melbury Osmund, 37
Melbury Park, 37
Middlemarsh, 36, 37
Minterne Magna, 36

Nettlecombe Tout, 37
Norton St. Philip, 54

Osmington, 20
Owermoigne, 20

Parret, River, 51
Piddletown, 25, 28
Poole, 6
Portland, Isle of, 22
Poxwell, 20
Preston, 20
Purbeck, Isle of, 12

Radipole, 22

Sedgemoor, 50
Shaftesbury, 40-42
Sherborne, 38-40
Stinsford, 24

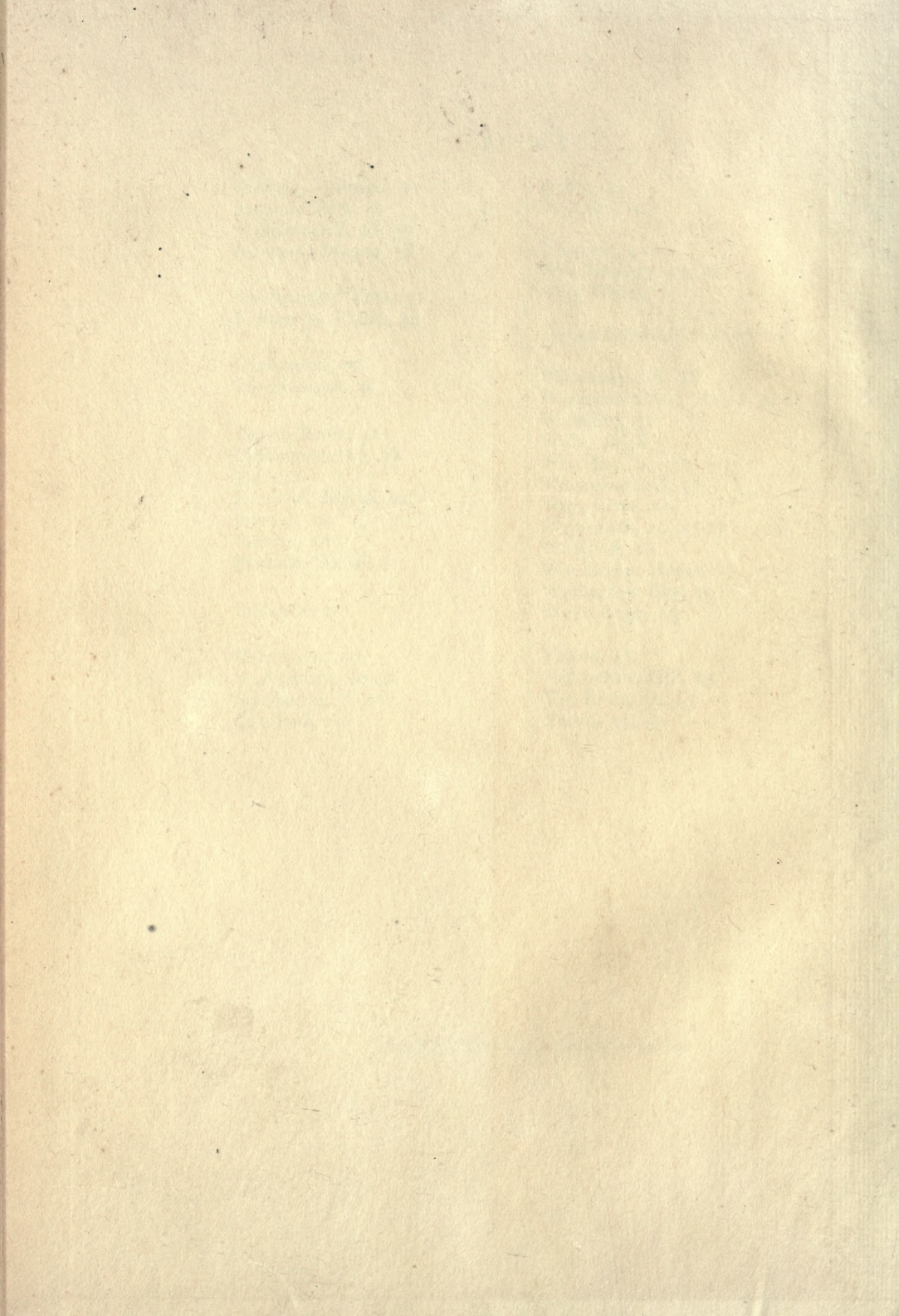
Street, 50
Swanage, 14

Taunton, 51
Ten Hatches, 25, 28
Tilly Whim, 15

Upper Bockhampton, 10, 25

Wareham, 6-8, 16
Warmwell Cross, 16, 20, 24
Washford, 51
Wells, 46-48
West Bay, 23, 32
Westonzoyland, 50
Wey, River, 22
Weymouth, 20, 21-23
Wool, 16, 18
Woolbridge House, 17
Worbarrow Bay, 19
Wyke Regis, 23

Yatton, 43
Yellowham Hill, 25
Yeo River, 39, 43
Yeovil, 39, 40



DA
670
W48H3

Harper, Charles George
Wessex

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

N
13

