

Hughes Thomas

The Scouring of the White Horse



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Содержание

OLD AND NEW	5
PREFACE	6
CHAPTER I	9
CHAPTER II	14
CHAPTER III	23
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	29

Thomas Hughes
The Scouring of the White Horse / Or, The
Long Vacation Ramble of a London Clerk

OLD AND NEW

See how the Autumn leaves float by, decaying,
Down the red whirls of yon rain-swollen stream;
So fleet the works of men, back to their earth again;
Ancient and holy things fade like a dream.
Nay! see the Spring blossoms steal forth a-maying,
Clothing with tender buds orchard and glen;
So, though old forms go by, ne'er can their spirit die.
Look! England's bare boughs show green leaf again.

Kingsley.

PREFACE

The great success of the festival (or “pastime,” as it is called in the neighbourhood) which was held on White Horse Hill on the 17th and 18th of September, 1857, to celebrate the “Scouring of the Horse,” according to immemorial custom, led the Committee of Management to think that our fellow-county-men at least, if not our countrymen generally, would be glad to have some little printed memorial, which should comprise not only an account of the doings on the Hill on the late occasion, but should also endeavour to gather up the scattered legends and traditions of the country side, and any authentic historical notices relating to the old monument, of which we west-countrymen are all so fond and proud.

I had the good or ill luck (as the case may be) to be the only member of the Committee whose way of life had led him into the perilous paths of literature; so the task of compiling and editing our little book was laid on my shoulders.

Installed as chronicler to the White Horse, I entered with no ill will on my office, having been all my life possessed, as is the case with so many Englishmen, by intense local attachment, love for every stone and turf of the country where I was born and bred. But it is one thing to have zeal, and another to have discretion; and when I came to consider my materials, I found that the latter quality would be greatly needed. For, what were they? One short bright gleam of history from the writings of old monks a thousand years ago; traditions and dim legends, which I and most Berkshire men have always faithfully believed from our youth up, and shall go on believing to our dying day, but which we could hardly put before general readers in serious narrative; a dry notice here and there by some old antiquary of the seventeenth or eighteenth century; stories floating in the memories of old men still living; small broad-sheets from country town presses, with lists of the competitors for prizes at rustic games, newspaper articles, remarks by Committee-men and umpires, scraps of antiquarian lore; abuse of the Great Western Railway for not allowing the trains to stop, bits of vernacular dialogue, and odd rhymes. What could be done with them all? How out of the mass could a shapely book be called out, fit to be laid before a fastidious British public, not born in Berkshire?

Not exactly seeing how this was to be done, the only honest course which remained, was to follow the example of a good housewife in the composition of that excellent food called “stir-about” – throw them altogether into the pot, stir them round and round with a great spoon, and trust that the look of the few great raisins, and the flavour of the allspice, may leaven the mass, and make it pleasing to the eye and palate; and so, though the stir-about will never stand up in a china dish by itself, it may, we hope, make a savoury and pleasant side dish, in a common soup tureen.

The raisins, and those of the best quality, have been furnished by the great artist¹ who has kindly undertaken to give us pictures; the allspice has been contributed by the Committee and other kind friends, and I have done the milk and meal, and the stirring. The responsibility therefore rests with me, though the credit, whatever it may be, rests with others. But let me insist here, at once, that if there be any failure in the dish, it is the fault of the dresser and not of the subject-matter.

For, suppose an intelligent Englishman to be travelling in France, and to find the whole population in the neighbourhood of Tours turning out in their best clothes for a two days’ holiday on a high hill, upon which the rude figure of a huge hammer is roughly sculptured. On inquiry, he finds that the figure has been there long before the memory of the oldest man living, but that it has always been carefully preserved and kept fresh; and although there is no printed history of how it came there, yet that all neighbouring men, of whatever degree, associate it with the name of Charles Martel and his great victory over the Saracens, and are ready one and all to rejoice over it, and to work and pay that it may go down to their children looking as it does now. Or, to come to much later times, let

¹ Doyle.

our traveller find an eagle cut out on a hill in Hungary, similarly honoured, and associated with the name of Eugene, and the memory of the day

“When, the old black eagle flying,
All the Paynim powers defying,
On we marched, and stormed Belgrade.”

Should we not all thank him for giving us the best account he could of the figure, the festival, and all traditions connected with them; and think he had fallen on a very noteworthy matter, and well worth the telling when he got back to England?

Well, here we have the same thing at our own doors; a rude colossal figure cut out in the turf, and giving the name to a whole district; legends connecting it with the name of our greatest king, and with his great victory over the Pagans, and a festival which has been held at very short intervals ever since the ninth century. Rich as our land is in historical monuments, there is none more remarkable than the White Horse; and in this belief we put forth this little book in his honour, hoping that it may perhaps fix upon him, and the other antiquities which surround him, the attention of some one who can bring science and knowledge to bear upon the task to which we can only bring good will.

For, alas! let me confess at once, that in these qualities our book is like to be sadly deficient. The compiler has no knowledge whatever of the Anglo-Saxon tongue, or of Saxon or other antiquities. There is indeed of necessity a semblance of learning and research about the chapter which tells the history of the battle of Ashdown, because the materials for it had to be collected from a number of old chroniclers, whose names will be found in the foot-notes. But any fifth-form boy, with industry enough to read about 200 small pages of monkish Latin, may master the whole for himself in the originals in a week; and for those who cannot do this, there is the jubilee edition of the chroniclers, put forth by the Alfred Committee in 1852, where a translation of the old fellows will be found in parallel columns, together with much learning concerning them and their times, in foot-note, preface, and appendix. This translation I have followed in all but a few passages, in which the text used by the translators has probably differed from the one which I have seen. For the Saxon Chronicle, I have used Ingram's translation.

But while we do not pretend to be antiquaries, or historians, or learned men, we do claim to be honest average Englishmen, and will yield to no man in our love for our own quiet corner of the land of our birth. We do think, that whatever deeply interests us cannot fail in a degree to interest our countrymen. We are sure that reverence for all great Englishmen, and a loving remembrance of the great deeds done by them in old times, will help to bring to life in us the feeling that we are a family, bound together to work out God's purposes in this little island, and in the uttermost parts of the earth; to make clear to us the noble inheritance which we have in common; and to sink into their proper place the miserable trifles, and odds and ends, over which we are so apt to wrangle. We do hope that our example will lead Englishmen of other counties, to cherish every legend and story which hangs round any nook of their neighbourhood, connecting it with the times and the men who have gone before; to let no old custom, which has a meaning, however rude, die out, if it can be kept alive; and not to keep either legend or custom to themselves, but (like us) to put them in the best shape they can, and publish them for the benefit of their countrymen; we of the White Horse Committee, at any rate, hereby pledging ourselves to read all such publications.

I must here take the opportunity of specially thanking three of my fellow Committee-men, and two other friends, for the trouble they have taken in various ways to lighten my work. If this book at all fulfils the objects for which it has been written, the thanks of my readers, as well as my own, will be due to

E. M. Atkins, Esq., of Kingstone Lisle.
Mr. William Whitfield of Uffington.

Mr. Heber Humfrey of Kingstone Farm; and to
John Y. Akerman, Esq., Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries; and
Mr. Luke Lonsley, of Hampsted Norris, Berks.

And now, without further preface, we commend our “stir-about” to Englishmen in general, and
west-countrymen in particular.

CHAPTER I

“Richard,” said our governor, as I entered his room at five o’clock on the afternoon of the 31st of August, 1857, running his pen down the columns of the salary-book, “your quarter-day to-day, I think? Let me see; you were raised to £ – a-year in February last, – so much for quarter’s salary, and so much for extra work. I am glad to see that you have been working so steadily; you’ll deserve your holiday, and enjoy it all the more. You’ll find that all right, I think;” and he pushed a small paper across the table towards me, on which my account was stated in our cashier’s hand, and looked at me over his spectacles.

My heart jumped at the mention of my holiday; I just ran my eye down the figures, and was glad to find the total a pound or two higher than I had expected. For I had lately learnt shorthand, and had been taking notes for our firm, for which I found they allowed me extra pay.

“Quite right, Sir,” I said; “and I’m sure I’m much obliged to you, Sir, for letting me do the extra work, because – ”

“Well, never mind that,” said he, with a little laugh; “I shouldn’t give you the extra work, Richard, if it didn’t suit me, or if I could get it better done anywhere else; so the account’s all square on that point. There’s your money.”

And he pushed over to me a very nice sum of money. I dare say you would like to know what it was, reader. Now, I’m not going to tell you. Why should you know just what my income is? I don’t owe you or any one else five shillings, and have a very tidy account at the savings’ bank, besides having paid for all the furniture and books in my room, not very far from Lambsconduit Street, which I reckon to be worth fifty pounds of any man’s money; so you see my income is enough to keep me before the world, and I wish more of you could say as much.

“I’m very much obliged, Sir,” said I again, as I wrote a receipt over a stamp which I took out of my pocket-book, and stuck on to the bottom of the account.

“No, you’re not,” said our governor, quite short; “it’s your own money, fairly earned. You’re not obliged to any man for giving you what’s your own.” He is such an odd fellow about these things. But mind you, I think he’s quite right, too; for, after all, no doubt each of us earns a good penny for him over and above what he pays us, else why should he keep us on? but, somehow, one can’t help thanking any one who pays one money; at least, I can’t.

“Now, as to your holiday,” went on our governor. “There’s Jobson went for his fortnight on the 30th; he’ll be back on the 14th of September, at latest. You can take any time you like, after that.”

“Then, Sir,” said I directly, “I should like it as soon as possible.”

“Very well,” said he; “Tuesday the 16th to Tuesday the 29th of September, both inclusive;” and he made a note in another book which lay on his desk. “Good evening, Richard.”

“Good evening, Sir,” said I; and away I went down to our room in as good spirits as any young fellow in our quarter of London.

Of course all the other clerks began shouting out at once to know how much money I’d got, and when I was going to have my holiday. Well, I didn’t tell them what money I had, any more than I’ve told you, because I like to keep my own counsel about such matters. Besides, there are several of our clerks whose ways I don’t at all like; so I don’t do any thing I can help which might look as if I liked them. No! hands off, is my motto with these sort of chaps.

I’m sure there’s no pride about me, though. My name’s Easy, and always was; and I like every fellow, whatever his coat is, who isn’t always thinking about the cut of it, or what he has in the pocket of it. But, goodness knows, I can’t stand a fellow who gives himself airs, and thinks himself a chalk above everybody who can’t dress and do just as he can. Those chaps, I always see, are just the ones to do lick-spittle to those that they think have more in their pockets than themselves.

But I must get on with my story, for you don't all want to know my opinions about the clerks in our office, I dare say.

Well, when I got down, as I said before, we were all just on the move, (business hours being from nine till six in our office,) taking down coats and hats, and clearing desks for the night, so I just sidled up to Jem Fisher, and little Neddy Bailly, who are the two I like best, and told them to come up to my room to supper at eight o'clock, which they of course were very glad to promise to do, and then I went off to get ready for them.

Jem Fisher and I are very fond of a dish which I believe very few of you ever heard of. One Sunday in May, a year or two back, he and I had been down beyond Notting Hill, listening to the nightingales; and coming back, we walked through Kensington Gardens, and came out at the gate into the Notting Hill Road, close to Hyde Park. We were late, for us, so we hailed a 'bus, and got on the box. The driver was full of talk about all the fine people he had been seeing walking in the gardens that afternoon, and seemed to think it hard he couldn't enjoy himself just as they did. "However, gentlemen," said he at last, "there's some things as the haristocracy ain't alive to. Did you ever eat cow-heel?" Perhaps Jem, who had all his best clothes on, didn't mind being taken for one of the aristocracy; at least just for a minute, for he's too good a fellow to like being taken for anybody but himself when he comes to think of it; at any rate, he and I took to eating cow-heel from that time. So the first thing I did, after going home and locking up most of my money, and speaking to my landlady, who is the best old soul alive if you take her in her own way, was, to set off to Clare Market, and buy some cow-heel and sausages; and on my way back through the Turnstile, I thought, as it was so hot, I would have some fruit too; so I bought a pottle of plums and a piece of a pine-apple, and got home.

They came in sharp to time, and I and my landlady had every thing ready, and two foaming pewter pots full of bitter beer and porter. So we had a capital supper, and then cleared it all away, and sat down to eat the fruit and have a quiet pipe by the time it began to get dark.

"And so," said little Neddy, (he is only just eighteen, and hasn't been in our office a year yet; but he's such a clever, industrious little chap, that he has gone over the heads of half a dozen of our youngsters, and hasn't stopped yet by a long way,) "you're off on the 15th! wish I was. Well, here's luck any how," said he, nodding to me, and taking a bite out of a slice of pine-apple.

"Gentle Shepherd, tell me where?" said Jem Fisher. (Jem is very fond of quoting poetry; not that I think half that he quotes is real poetry, only how is one to find him out? Jem is a tall, good-looking fellow, as old as I am, and that's twenty-one last birthday; we came into the office together years ago, and have been very thick ever since, which I sometimes wonder at, for Jem is a bit of a swell – Gentleman Jem they call him in the office.) "Now, Dick, where are you bound for?"

"Well, that's more than I know myself," said I.

"Then," said he, taking his pipe out of his pocket and filling it, "I vote we settle for him, eh, Neddy?"

"Aye, aye, Sir," said Neddy, stretching over for the pottle; "but, I say, Jem, you haven't finished all those plums?" and he poked about in the leaves with his fingers.

"Every mother's son of them," said Jem, lighting a lucifer; "if you come to that, Master Ned, hand me over some of that pine-apple. But now, about the tour; how much money are you going to spend on it, Dick?"

"Well, I haven't quite settled," said I; "but I shouldn't mind, now, going as high as four or five pounds, if I can suit myself."

"You may go pretty near to Jericho for that now-a-days," said Neddy. "As I came along Holborn to-night, I saw a great placard outside the George and Blue Boar, with 'to Llangollen and back 15s.' on it. What do you think of that? You'll be turned out at the station there with £4 5s. in your pocket."

"Where's Llangollen?" said I.

"Not half-way to Jericho," shouted Jem, with a laugh. "Where's Llangollen? Why didn't you ever hear the song of Kitty Morgan, the maid of Llangollen? You're a pretty fellow to go touring."

“Yes, fifty times,” said I; “only the song don’t tell you where the place is – where is it now?”

“In Wales, of course,” said he, thinking he had me.

“Yes, I know that; but whereabouts in Wales,” said I, “for Wales is a biggish place. Is it near any thing one reads about in books, and ought to go and see?”

“Hanged if I know exactly,” said Jem, puffing away; “only of course Wales is worth seeing.”

“So is France,” struck in Neddy; “why, you may go to Paris and stay a fortnight for I don’t know how little.”

“Aye, or to Edinburgh or the Lakes,” said Jem.

“I want to have the particulars though,” said I; “I’m not going to start off to some foreign place, and find myself with no money to spend and enjoy myself with, when I get there.”

“I’ll tell you what,” said Neddy, jumping up, “I’ll just run round to the Working Men’s College, and borrow a Bradshaw from the secretary. We shall find all the cheap excursions there;” and away he went before we could say a word.

“I say,” said Jem to me, “how fond he is of bringing up that place; he’s always at me to go and enter there.”

“So he is at me,” said I, “and I think I shall, for he seems to pick up a lot of things there. How sharp he is at figures! and he knows more history and geography ten to one than I do. I’ll bet he knew what county Llangollen is in, and something about it too. Let’s ask him when he comes back.”

“Catch me!” said Jem; “he’ll look it out on the map on his way back, or ask one of the lecturers.”

“Here you are! look here!” said Neddy, tumbling in with two Bradshaws and a great atlas under his arm; “unprecedented attraction, pleasure excursions,’ let me see – Return tickets for Ireland, available for a fortnight. Waterford, 1*l.* 16*s.*; Cork, 2*l.*”

“Nonsense!” cried Jem, who had got the other Bradshaw; “listen here: ‘Channel Islands, (remarkable as being the only remaining Norman possessions of the British crown,) second class and fore cabin, 21*s.*”

“London to Dieppe, return tickets available for fourteen days, second class, 21*s.*,” sung out Ned, from the other Bradshaw.

And away they went, with Brussels, and Bangor, and the Manchester Exhibition, and Plymouth and Glasgow, and the Isle of Man, and Margate and Ramsgate, and the Isle of Wight; and then to Gibraltar and Malta and New York, and all over the world. I sat and smoked my pipe, for ’twas no use trying to settle any thing; but presently, when they got tired, we set to work and began to put down the figures. However, that wasn’t much better, for there were such a lot of tours to go; and one was a bit too short, and the other too long, and this cost too much, and that too little; so all the beer was gone, and we were no nearer settling any thing when eleven o’clock struck.

“Well,” said Jem, getting up and knocking the ashes out of his third pipe, “I declare it’s almost as good as going a tour one’s self, settling it for Dick here.”

“I just wish you had settled it,” said I; “I’m more puzzled than when we began.”

“Heigh-ho, fellows never know when they’re well off,” said Neddy; “now I never get a chance. In my holiday I just go down to the old folk at Romford, and there I stick.”

“They don’t indeed,” said I; “I wonder to hear you talk like that, Ned. Some folks would give all they’re worth to have old folk to go to.”

“Well, I didn’t mean it,” said he, looking hurt. And I don’t believe he did, for a kinder hearted fellow don’t live; and I was half sorry I had said what I did say.

“Further deliberation will be necessary,” said Jem, lighting his fourth pipe; “we’ll come again to-morrow night; your bacchy’s nearly out, Dick; lay in some bird’s eye for to-morrow; real Bristol, do you hear?”

“Time to go, I suppose,” said Ned, getting up and gathering the Bradshaws and atlas together; “are we to come again to-morrow, Dick?”

“To-morrow, didst thou say? methought I heard Horatio say to-morrow. Go to; it is a thing of naught,” and Jem clapped on his hat and began ranting in his way; so I broke in —

“I wish you’d hold that noise, and talk sense,” said I.

“Shakspeare!” said Jem, stopping short and pulling up his collar.

“Gammon!” said Neddy, bursting out laughing.

“That’s right, Neddy,” said I; “he’s always going off with some of his nonsense, and calling it poetry.”

“I didn’t say it was poetry, did I?” said Jem.

“What is it then?” said I.

“Blank verse,” said he.

“What’s the difference?” said I.

“Go up the mill-dam, fall down slam, dat poetry; go up the mill-dam, fall down whoppo’, dat plank verse,” said he. “Go along nigger – had him dere, nigger,” and he turned in his knees and grinned, like one of those poor beggars who black their faces and go about the streets with red striped trowsers, white ties, and banjos.

“You ought to be a nigger yourself, Jem,” said I, “and I should just like to have the driving of you. There, tumble out with you; it’s time for steady folks to turn in.”

So I turned them out and held the candle, while they floundered down stairs, that wretch, Jem, singing, “There’s some ’un in de house wid Dinah,” loud enough to be heard at the Foundling. I was glad to hear my landlady catch him at the bottom of the stairs, and give it him well about “a respectable house,” and “what she was used to with her gents,” while she opened the door; only I don’t see what right she had to give it me all over again next morning at breakfast, and call Jem Fisher a wild young man, and bad company, because that’s just what he isn’t, only a little noisy sometimes. And as if I’m not to have who I please up to my room without her interfering! I pay my rent regular every month, I know. However, I didn’t mind much what she said at breakfast time, because I had got a letter from the country. I don’t get a letter once a month, and it’s very odd this one should have come on this very morning, when I was puzzling where to go for my holiday; and I dare say you’ll think so too, when I tell you what it was about. Let’s see – here it is in my pocket, so you shall have it whole: —

“Elm Close Farm, Berks, August 31, 1857.

“Dear Dick, – You know you owe me a visit, for you’ve never been down here, often as I’ve asked you, since we was at school together – and I have been up to you four or five times. Now, why I particularly want you to come this month is, because we’ve got some sport to show you down in these quiet parts, which don’t happen every day. You see there’s an old White Horse cut out in the side of the highest hill hereabouts, (a regular break-neck place it is, and there ain’t three men in the country as’ll ride along the hill-side under the Horse,) and many folks sets a good deal of store by it, and seems to think the world’d come to an end if the horse wasn’t kept all straight. May be I’m a bit of that mind myself – anyhow you’ll see by the paper inside what’s going on; and being a scholar, may be you’ll know about the White Horse, and like to come down to a scouring. And I can tell you it will be good fun; for I remember the last, when I was quite a little chap, before I went to school, and I’ve never seen such games since. You’ve only got to write and say what train you’ll come by, and I’ll meet you at the Farringdon-road station in my trap. So, as I ain’t much of a penman, excuse mistakes, and remember me to Fisher and the others I met at your place; and no more at present from yours truly.

“Joseph Hurst.

“P. S. – You must stay as long as you can, and I’ll mount you on my young bay colt to see a cub killed.”

I shouldn’t print Joe’s letter whole, (and as it is I’ve put a good deal of the spelling right,) only I’m quite sure he’ll never read this book, and I hope it may serve as a warning to young fellows to keep up their learning when they go and settle down in the country. For when Joe left the Commercial Academy at Brentford, he could write just as good English as I, and if he had put “many folks seems to think,” or “you’ve only got to write,” in a theme, old Hopkins would have given him a good caning. But nothing wears out learning so quick as living in the country and farming, and Joe came into his farm when he was nineteen, and has been at it ever since. And after all, perhaps, it doesn’t much signify, because nobody makes himself better understood than Joe, in one way or another; and if he wasn’t a little behindhand in his grammar, he wouldn’t think much of me perhaps – and one don’t mind being taken for a scholar, even by those who are not the best judges in the world.

Well, thinks I to myself, as I finished my breakfast, this seems like business. If I go down to Joe’s, and stay there all my holiday, the fares will be only seventeen shillings; and, say a pound for expenses down there; one pound seventeen shillings, say two pounds in all. I shall put three pounds into my pocket, and please an old friend, which will be much better than any thing Jem Fisher and little Neddy Baily will hit out for me in a week from the end of Bradshaw. Besides, it will look well to be able to talk of going to a friend in Berkshire. I’ll write to Joe, and say I’ll be with him in good time on the 15th.

So I went down to the office and told Jem Fisher and little Neddy, that I had made up my mind to go and see my old friend Joe, in Berkshire, before they had had time to get their office coats on.

“What? that jolly fellow with the brown face and red whiskers,” said Jem, “who came up and slept in your room last Christmas cattle-show, and wanted to fight the cabman for a gallon of beer, who charged him half-a-crown from Baker Street to Gray’s Inn Lane?”

“Yes,” said I, “that’s the man.”

“I remember him well,” said Neddy; “and I’m sure you’ll have a good time of it if you go to see him. But, I say, how about supper to-night? You won’t want us and the Bradshaws any more, eh?”

“Oh, he isn’t going to get out of it like that,” said Jem, as he settled to his desk, and got his work out. “I say, Dick, you’re not going to be off now, are you? I know better.”

“I never was on that I know of,” said I; “however, I don’t mind standing supper at the Cheshire Cheese; but I won’t have you fellows up in my room again to-night, kicking up a row on the stairs. No! just catch me at it!”

So I gave them a supper that night, and another the night after I came back from my holiday.

They seemed just the same, but how different I felt. Only two short weeks had passed, but I was as much changed as if it had been ten years. I had found something which I never could get rid of, day or night, and which kept me always in a fret and a struggle. What a life I led with it! Sometimes it cast me down and made me ready to hang myself; and then, again, it would lift me up, and seem to fill me with warmth and sunshine. But, somehow, even when I was at the worst, if an enchanter had come and offered to wipe it all out, and to put me back just where I was the night before my holiday, I should have said “No;” and at all other times I felt that it was the most precious part of my life. What was it? Ah, what was it? Some of you will smile, and some of you will sneer, when you find out, as you will (if you don’t skip) before you get to the end of my story. And I can’t see the least reason why I should help you to it a minute sooner.

CHAPTER II

Now I do pity all the lords and great gentle-folk with nothing in the world to do except to find out how to make things pleasant, and new places to go to, and new ways of spending their money; at least, I always pity them at the beginning of my holiday, though perhaps when one first comes back to eleven months' hard grind in town the feeling isn't quite so strong.

At any rate, I wouldn't have changed places with the greatest lord in the land on Tuesday morning, September 15th. I was up as soon as it was light, and saw the sun rise over the Gray's Inn Lane chimney-pots; and I declare they looked quite beautiful. I didn't know at all before what a fine outline they make when the rays come flat along the roofs; and mean often to get up in time to see them by sunrise next summer; but just now it's very cold of mornings, and I dare say they don't look so well. When I put my head out of window it was quite clear and fresh, and I thought I could smell the country.

I hadn't much to do, for I had packed my bag over night; but I went over all my things again, and changed the places of some of them in my old bureau, (which belonged to my father, who was clerk for forty years in one of the oldest houses in Clement's Inn,) and locked up all the drawers; and then I set to work to lay breakfast for three, for I had asked my two friends to come and see me off, and they had made it all up with my landlady. So about six o'clock they came in, and we had a capital breakfast; and then we started off to walk up to the Paddington station, carrying my bag between us. I had settled to go by the 7.30 train, because if I hadn't they couldn't have come with me; besides, it is the first train which stops at Farringdon-road; and I was very glad when we got into the bustle of the station, for they were rather low, and I felt almost ashamed of being so jolly, though certainly they had had their holiday earlier in the year. But when I saw their faces out of the window of the second-class carriage, just as the starting-bell rang, I should like to have paid their fares out of my own pocket, if they could have gone with me.

However, by the time we got past Wormwood Scrubbs, (which looked so fresh and breezy with the gossamer lying all over it,) I could think of nothing else but the country and my holiday. How I did enjoy the pretty hill with the church at top and the stream at the bottom by Hanwell, and the great old trees about half a mile off on the right before you get to Slough, and the view of Windsor Castle, and crossing the Thames at Maidenhead, with its splendid weeping willows, and the old Bath-road bridge, and the reach beyond with the woods coming down to the bank, and the great lords' houses up above. And then all the corn-fields, though by this time most of them were only stubble, and Reading town, and the great lasher at Pangbourn, where the water was rushing and dancing through in the sunlight to welcome me into Berkshire; and the great stretches of open land about Wallingford-road and Didcot. And after that came great green pasture-fields, and orchards, and gray-stone farm-houses, and before I could turn round we were at Farringdon-road station, and it was a quarter past eleven. As I got out and gave up my ticket, I couldn't help thinking of the two lines Jem Fisher would go on saying when we went out walking in Combe Wood and Richmond Park one Sunday this last May —

How beautiful the country do appear
At this time of the year.

I know he was laughing, and made them out of his own head, though he declared they were in Chaucer; but they are just as true for all that, whether Jem Fisher or Chaucer made them, though the English isn't as good as the sense.

There I found Joe waiting for me, with his trap, as he called it, at the door, and the inn ostler standing by the head of the horse, which was a bright chestnut, and looked very fine. I own I very much enjoyed going off in that dark-green high-wheeled carriage.

“In with you, Dick,” cried out Joe, as he took hold of the reins, and patted the horse on the neck. “There, shoot your bag in behind; look alive, she don’t stand well. That’ll do,” he shouted to the ostler, who jumped back and touched his hat just as if Joe owned half the parish. If the horse couldn’t stand well, at any rate she could step out, and away we whirled down the white road; Joe red in the face with holding on, his feet well out to the splash-board, his chest thrown forward, and his elbows down at his side, hauling the chestnut’s head right back, till her nose nearly touched the collar. But for all that, away went her legs right straight out in front, shooting along so fast that I began to feel queer, not being used to horses, and took tight hold of the seat with my left hand, so that Joe shouldn’t see; for the cart jumped sometimes enough to pitch you out.

“Gently there, gently, my beauty,” said Joe, as the chestnut dropped into a little quieter pace. “There, now, ain’t she a pictur’?” said he to me; – “ever see a mare lay down to her work like that? Gently, my beauty! if it wasn’t for the blaze in her face, and the white feet, the Squir’d give me one hundred pounds for her to-morrow. And I won’t sell her under. It’s a mortal shame to drive her. Her mouth’s like a kitten’s.” How Joe could talk so, when he was pulling fit to burst himself at the reins, I don’t know; I thought once or twice where we should go to if one broke, but I didn’t say any thing. I found out afterwards that Joe meant a great white mark, when he talked of the blaze in her face. I suppose men can’t see any faults in their own horses, any more than they can in their children.

After a bit, the pace got quite steady, and then I began to enjoy myself, and could look at the famous rich fields, and the high hedges full of great heavy masses of clematis, and sniff up all the country smells, as we whirled along, and listen to Joe, who was going grinding on about, ‘how badly the parish roads were kept up; and that he had set his mind to have them well mended with flints instead of chalk, and to have all the thistles at the side kept down, which were sowing the whole country round, because their vestry was so stingy they wouldn’t put any men on the road to set it right,’ and I could see that Joe was in the middle of a good quarrel with all the other farmers about it.

When he had done his story, I asked him about the White Horse, and he pointed me out the highest of the hills which ran along on our left hand a mile or two away. There, sure enough, I saw the figure quite plain; but he didn’t know much about it. Only, he said, he had always heard tell that it was cut out by King Alfred the Great, who lived in those parts; and ‘there was a main sight of strange old things up there on the hill, besides the White Horse; and though he didn’t know much about how they got there, he was sort of proud of them, and was glad to pay his pound or two, or double that if it was wanted, to keep them as they should be;’ “for, you see,” said Joe, “we’ve lived about here, father and son, pretty nigh ever since King Alfred’s time, which I reckon is a smartish time ago, though I forget how long.” And though I think Joe, and parties in the counties generally, set too much store by such things, and hold their noses much higher than they’ve any need to do, because their families have never cared to move about, and push on in the world, and so they know where their great-grandfathers were born, I couldn’t help feeling there was something in it after all.

And the more I thought of this strange old White Horse, the more it took hold of me, and I resolved, if I could, while I was down in the country to learn all about it. I knew, you see, that if I could only get people to tell me about it, I should be able to carry it all away; because, besides having a very good memory, I can take down every thing that is said as fast as most people can speak it, and that’s what gives me such an advantage over Jem Fisher and Neddy, who spent all the time it took me to learn shorthand in reading poetry and other rubbish, which will never help to get them on in the world, or do them a bit of good that I can see.

Presently we came in sight of a house with farm buildings behind, which stood some way back from the road; and Joe pulled up opposite a gate which led into the field before the house.

“Here we are, then,” said he; “just jump out, and open the gate, Dick; I’d do it, only I can’t trust you with the ribbons.”

It was a beautiful great green pasture-field which we drove into, with a score of fat sleek cows feeding in it, or lying about chewing the cud; and Joe was very proud of them, and walked the chestnut

along slowly while he pointed out his favourites to me, especially one short-horn, whose back he said was like a kitchen-table, though why she should be any the handsomer for that I can't say. The house was an old brick building, with tall chimneys and latticed windows; in front of it was a nice little flower-garden, with a tall, clipped holly hedge running round it, so thick that you couldn't see through; and beyond that, a kitchen garden and an orchard. Outside the enclosure stood four such elms as I never saw before, and a walnut-tree nearly as big as they, with queer great branches drooping close to the ground, on which some turkeys were sitting. There was only a little wicket-gate in the holly hedge, and a gravel footpath up to the front door, so we drove into the farm-yard at the back; and while Joe and his man took care of the chestnut, I had time to look about, and think what a snug berth Joe seemed to have fallen upon.

The yard must be sixty yards across, and was full of straw where the pigs were lying with nothing but their snouts out; lots of poultry were scratching and pecking about before the barn-doors, and pigeons were fluttering down amongst them, and then up again to the tops of the barns and stables, which ran all round the yard. The rick-yard, full of long stacks of hay, and round stacks of corn, was beyond. A terrier and spaniel were sleeping in sunny corners, and a grayhound was stalking about and looking at the pigs; and every thing looked sleepy and happy, and as if life went easily along at Elm Close Farm.

Presently Joe came out of the stable, carrying his whip, and took me into the house, calling into the kitchen as we passed to send in dinner directly. There was nobody in the parlour at first, but I saw that the table was laid for three; and, before I could look round at the prints and samples on the wall, Joe's mother and the dinner came in. She was a good-looking old lady, dressed in black, with a very white lawn cap and collar, and was very kind and civil, but a little deaf. Joe bustled about, and got out I don't know how many bottles of home-made wine, clary, and raisin, and ginger; all of which he made me drink, besides beer, for he said that no one in the vale had such receipts for wine as his mother. And what with the dairy-fed pork, and black puddings, and a chicken almost as big as a turkey, and the cheese-cakes and tarts afterwards, and the hearty welcome and good example which Joe gave me, I don't remember when I have made so good a dinner.

The old lady went off directly after dinner, and I could see that Joe wanted to go and see after his men; so I told him not to mind me, for I should enjoy loitering about the place better than any thing. And so I did; first I went into the flower-garden, and watched and listened to the bees working away so busy in the mignonette, and the swallows darting up into their nests under the eaves, and then diving out again, and skimming away over the great pasture; and then round the kitchen-garden, and into the orchard, where the trees were all loaded with apples and pears, and so out into a stubble-field at the back, where there were a lot of young pigs feeding and playing queer tricks, and back through the farm-yard into the great pasture, where I lay down on the grass, under one of the elms, and lighted my pipe; and thought of our hot clerks' room, and how Jem Fisher and little Neddy were working away there; and watched a flock of little shiny starlings hopping up on to the backs of some old south-down wethers who were feeding near me, and flying backwards and forwards into the old elms and walnut-trees, talking to one another all the while.

And so the time wore on, till a stout lass in a blue cotton print came out, and called the cows in to milking; and they all went trooping slowly by into the farm-yard, some of them just stopping to stare at me with their mild eyes, and smelling so sweet, that I hadn't the heart to go on smoking, and let my pipe out. And after a bit, I followed into the line of sheds where they were being milked by the lass and a man, who balanced himself on two legs of the milking-stool, and drove his head into the cow's side; and I thought I had never heard a sweeter sound than the tinkling sound which the milk made in the bright, tin pails.

I soon got into a talk with the lass, who was very pleasant and free spoken; and presently, when her pail was full, I lifted it out for her, all frothing up, and looking not a bit like our London sky-blue; and I told her I didn't think I had ever tasted real new milk; so she got me a long straw, and while

she went on milking, I went down on my knees, and began to suck away through the straw. But I had hardly begun, when I heard a noise behind, and looking round, there stood Joe, laughing all over; and by his side a young woman in a broad, straw hat and a gray jacket; and though, for good manners, she didn't laugh out like Joe, I could see it was all she could do to keep from going off too.

Why was I ashamed of being caught? I don't know, but I was ashamed; and as I stuck there on my knees in the deep straw with the pail before me looking at them, the blood rushed up to my head and made my ears sing, so that I couldn't hear a word that Joe said. But I could see he did say something, and then went off into another great roar of laughter; and the lass and the man left off milking and began laughing too, till I thought they would have dropped off the stools. Then the young woman who was with Joe said something to him, and I thought I heard the words "What a shame!" and "your oldest friend;" and then she caught up a straw, and came and knelt on the opposite side of the milk-pail, and began to suck away herself without looking at me. In another moment Joe plumped down too, clapping me on the back.

"I say," said he, "start fair! Here, make room for me; you and Lucy ain't going to have it all to yourselves," and he began sucking away too; and then I recovered myself, and we all went on for a minute, when Joe took his straw out of his mouth, and said, "This is my sister Lucy, Dick; there, shake hands over the pail, and then let's go in to tea."

So she looked up, and blushed, and gave me her hand, her merry blue eyes twinkling with mirth, though she tried to keep grave. But I was all right now, and went off myself, and Joe followed, and then she, with the clearest, brightest laugh you ever heard; and then the man and the lass, and by the time we had done, I felt as if I had known them all for years. But as for Miss Lucy, as we walked away to the house to tea, I felt as if I could have given her my skin, if she would only have had a pair of shoes made out of it for her dear little feet.

The old lady was sitting at the tea-table in great force, with plates of buttered toast and cake, and pots of blackberry and red-currant jam, and the great loaf all set out ready; and after tea, we three walked out again till the sun set, and then came in to supper, at which I was surprised to find myself eating away just as if I had had nothing all day; country air does give one such an appetite. After supper, the old lady sat in her chair knitting and telling stories, till she nodded off and the spectacles fell on to the end of her nose, and her hands into her lap, but still holding the needles; and every now and then giving a catch with her head, and making belief to go on for a stitch or two. And Miss Lucy sat stitching at a patch-work coverlet, fitting in all sorts of scraps of silk in the prettiest patterns in the world, and we on the other side of the table watching her, and talking quite low not to disturb the old lady. But what made it so pleasant was, that I had pretty near all the talking, for they seemed never tired of hearing about London, and how people lived there, and what they thought; especially Miss Lucy, who had never been out of Berkshire in her life. I thought Joe a great fidget, when soon after nine he began to walk about and waked his mother, and got the servants in to prayers, and bustled them off to bed; but I believe it was all because he wanted to have his pipe, which he wouldn't smoke in the parlour. So we went into the kitchen and finished the day there, under half a score of great brown sides of bacon, and tufts of sweet herbs which hung drying from the corners of the rack, and opposite to the dresser with its rows of pewter plates as bright as silver, till I went to bed in sheets smelling of lavender, and dreamt of Miss Lucy.

I dare say that, though I should never be tired of telling about every thing that happened to me at Elm Close, some people may get tired of reading about it. So I shall only begin my story of the next day after breakfast, when Joe had the trap out again, and carried me off to see what was doing up on White Horse Hill.

We had a very pleasant drive through the Vale to Uffington, which lies at the foot of the hill, and here Joe put up the trap, at the Swan, and we set off on foot to walk up. It was very hot, and the white road glared as we tramped along it, but very soon we came to broad strips of turf on each side, and then it was pleasant enough; so we plodded up a gentle rise called Sour Hill, and crossed

the Iceldon or Iggleton way, which I've found out since was an old Roman road; and then the ascent became quite steep, and every thing was clear hill and down before us, not a fence to be seen, and a fresh breeze came sweeping over the hill.

The road now became very bad, with ruts in the chalk like water-courses. On our left hand there was a deep, narrow valley like a little bay running up into the hill, on the opposite side of which valley a large wood hung along the steepest part of the hill-side, which Joe informed me was Uffington wood, a well-known meet for the hounds; it made me giddy to look at the places which he declared the huntsman, and any one who wanted to be sure of a good place when the hounds broke cover, had to ride along.

And now the great, green hill seemed to be hanging right over us, as we came to a curious round mound on our right hand, up which Joe scrambled, and I after him, till we both pulled up out of breath on the flat top, some fifty yards across.

"This is Dragon's Hill," said Joe, pulling off his hat and mopping his face with his handkerchief, "where St. George killed the Dragon in the old times. Leastways so they says about here, only they calls him King George instead of Saint George. And this bare place is where his blood ran out, and nothing'll grow on it since, not so much as a thistle."

Of course I knew better than to believe that, but it is a beautiful place; for just below it another little deep valley, like the one on the left, only narrower and steeper at the sides, runs right up into the hill-side. The road we had left winds round the head of this gorge, for any one to drive along who isn't particular about breaking his neck, for the hill is like a wall up above, and down below, with nothing but a little bank between you and the descent.

"Those are the giants' seats opposite," said Joe, pointing across the valley to a set of beautiful great green slopes, like huge ridges and furrows, which went sweeping down into the valley one after another as far as I could see; "and this is the Manger, this great hole in the hill-side, because it lies right under the old Horse's nose. Come along, let's get up to him; there he is, you see, right above us."

So we scrambled down the side of Dragon's Hill, crossed the road, and then started up a row of steps cut in the turf. I'm sure it must be twice as steep as the hill in Greenwich Park, and I don't mind confessing that I shouldn't have liked to look round just at first, and wouldn't have minded giving myself a help with my hands if I hadn't been afraid of Joe's seeing me and laughing. I should think we must have gone up two hundred steps, when all of a sudden Joe stopped just above me, and called out, "Here we are;" and in about four steps I came to a trench cut into the chalk about two feet deep, which ran up the hill-side right ahead of us. The chalk in the trench was all hard and flat, and seemed to have been scraped and brushed up quite lately.

"This is his tail," said Joe. "Come on; look, they're scouring him up above; we're in luck – I thought they'd have done before this; and there's the Squire too with 'em."

So I looked up; and there, some way above, I saw a lot of men with shovels, and besoms, and barrows, cleaning away at the trench, which, now that I began to look at it, certainly came out more and more like a horse galloping; and there amongst them, working away as hard as any one, was a person in yellow leather gaiters, who I saw at once must be the Squire, though I had never seen a squire before. I own I had a great prejudice against a country squire when I went down into Berkshire; which was natural enough, you see, because I had never been farther from town than Twickenham (except by boat to Margate), and had belonged to a debating society near Farringdon-market ever since I left school, where we take in three liberal papers, and once a week have as good speaking as they get in the House of Commons. I haven't been to the debates much lately, myself; but when I was an active member, we used to have a regular go in about once a quarter at the unpaid magistracy. How we did give it them! They were bloated aristocrats, who by the time they were thirty had drunk out all the little brains they ever had, and spent their time in preserving and killing game and foxes at the expense of the farmers, and sending every good man in their villages either to the Bastile (as we called the workhouse), as a pauper, or to the county jail as a poacher.

Joe and I very nearly quarrelled over one of those debates to which I took him, like a great gaby as I was, when he came up to see me at the time of a cattle-show. He would get up to speak, all I could do to stop him; and began, all red in the face, pitching into one of our best speakers who had just finished, calling him a cockney, and asking him what right he had to jaw about squires when he talked about a fox's ears and tail, and didn't know mangold-wurzel from swedes. And then all our fellows began to shout and hiss, and Joe began to swear, and wanted to take his coat off, and fight all who had spoken; "one down, and t'other come on," as he said. I got him out and took him home; but his blood was up, and he would go on at our Society, and call us a set of quill-driving jackanapes. And I couldn't stand that, so I began at the landed interest, and said all the bad of them I could think of, about the Poor-Laws, game preserving, and the Corn-laws. Joe was very near going off in a huff, but we shook hands over it at last, and agreed that we neither of us knew much about the sort of life the other led, and so had better not talk about it as if we did.

Well, this was the first squire I had ever seen, so I looked at him with all my eyes; and if all squires were like him, I don't wonder at Joe's getting in a passion at our talk in Farringdon-market. I should think he must be about forty-five years old, and stands not far short of six feet high; for when he came to stand by Joe, I could see he was the taller of the two; but he didn't look so tall quite when he stood by himself – I suppose because his figure was so good. For you never saw such a clean made man; he was for all the world like a well-rounded wedge from his shoulders down, and his neck and head put on like a statue. He looked just as if he could have jumped the highest five-barred gate in the Vale, and then have carried it off on his shoulders, and run up the hill with it. And his face, which was well browned, was so manly and frank, and his voice so cheery, and he looked you so straight in the face, that you felt he wasn't ashamed of any thing, or afraid of anybody; and so you looked him back and spoke out, and were twice as good a man at once yourself while you were talking to him.

Well, when the Squire saw Joe, he stopped working away with his shovel, and called out to him; and so Joe went up and shook hands with him, and began talking to him, and in another minute the Squire called for his coat – a gray tweed shooting-jacket it was – and put it on, and took up his riding-whip, and told the men to look alive and get their job done, and then to send up to the Castle for some beer and bread and cheese which he would order for them.

Then Joe and the Squire walked away along the hill-side talking, and I went and sat down on a little mound, just above the Horse's ears, and watched the men working, and looked at the view. How I did enjoy myself! The turf was as soft as a feather bed, and as springy as horsehair; and it was all covered with thistle down, which came drifting along like snow with the south wind; and all down below the country looked so rich and peaceful, stretching out for miles and miles at my feet in the hazy sunshine, and the larks right up overhead sang so sweetly, that I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I should have liked to have had a turn at the besoms and shovels with the men, who seemed very good-tempered, only I was too shy, and I couldn't make out half they said. So I took out my pipe and lighted it, and sat looking on at the work, and thinking of nothing.

Presently a gentleman whom I hadn't noticed, but who was poking about the place, came and sat down near me. He was dressed in dark clothes, very quiet; I suppose he was a parson from some of the villages near. And we began talking about the weather, and what chance there was of having fine days for the pastime. He was a very grave, elderly man, but easy and pleasant, and had a keen look in his gray eyes, and a sort of twinkle about his mouth, which made me put my best leg foremost, and take care what I said.

Well, when we had done about the weather, thinks I, "This is just the sort of gentleman to tell me what I want to know about the White Horse and all the rest of it," and you'll see as you go on that I never made a better guess in my life. So I got my note-book out quietly, so that he shouldn't take much notice of what I was about, and began, "I suppose, Sir," said I, "that it's all right about Alfred, and that he really did cut out this figure after winning a great battle up here?"

“Yes,” said he, “I think so myself, because there has always been a tradition in the country side that this was so. And where antiquaries differ, a tradition of this sort may always be pretty safely believed. Country folk hold on to such stories, and hand them down in a very curious manner; but you know, I dare say, that it is claimed by some as a Druidical, or at any rate a British monument, which would make it several hundred years older at least.”

I didn’t know any thing about it, but why should I tell him so. “I shouldn’t like to think so, Sir,” said I, “because one wouldn’t care so much about it if it wasn’t made by the Saxons and their great king. The Druids don’t seem akin to us somehow; and then one would lose all about the great battle, which was certainly fought up here, wasn’t it, Sir?”

“I have no doubt about it,” said he; “there are many signs of it – above all, graves enough to hold the harvest of many battles. You are lying on one.”

“No! am I really, though?” said I, sitting up and looking at the ground; “how do you know?”

“Well, it isn’t very hard when the eye gets used to them,” said he; “there’s another;” and he pointed to a small mound a few yards off, and just like the one I was sitting on. “That larger mound, too, down below, across the road, you were on it just now – ”

“Yes, Sir,” said I, interrupting him, and pointing at it, “Dragon’s Hill.”

“Exactly so,” said he; “that’s another burial-place; a larger and grander affair, you see, than these. Probably a king or other very noble person is buried there.”

“The people say, Sir, don’t they,” said I, “that St. George killed the Dragon there?”

“They do,” said he, “and that his blood made a pool on the top, and ran down the steps on the other side, where the grass has never grown since. This is another curious instance of the tenacity of tradition; but here I think our good folk in the Vale have held on to the name, or a part of it, and forgotten the meaning, just as they have in the case of another village over there in Oxfordshire, the name of which is Stanton Harcourt.”

“How was that, Sir?” said I, when he paused.

“Well,” said he, laughing, “an old man in that village told me that a battle was fought there, which the English were very near losing, when the general rode up to one of his captains, named Harcourt, who was in the thick of it, and called out, ‘Stan’ to un, Harcourt, stan’ to un, Harcourt;’ and that Harcourt won the battle, and the village has been called Stanton Harcourt ever since. Now, as to that mound, I believe it’s right name to be Pendragon’s Hill. Pendragon, you know, is only a name common to those of the kings of the ancient Britons, who were chosen leaders in the time of national distress, and means nothing more than ‘caput regum,’ ‘the chief of kings.’ According to some, ‘Arthur’ is the same or a like word, being ‘Ardh-reg’ or ‘Ard-heer,’ and meaning ‘summus Rex’ (whence the ‘Arviragus’ of Juvenal; but I lay no stress on this). Now we know of at least three Pendragons. There was Cassibelan, who was chosen Pendragon at the time of Julius Cæsar’s invasion, Uter Pendragon, and Arthur Pendragon; which Uter and Arthur were, without doubt, chosen to resist the Saxons, who had won already the eastern part of the island. And if Arthur and Pendragon are the same words, doubtless (as has been well supposed), there were many Arthurs at this time, one of whom was probably slain in battle and buried here.² For in the Saxon annals we find that Cedric,

² E. Martin Atkins, Esq., of Kingston Lisle, has lately been opening the barrows which are nearest to the Horse; and the compiler, hearing that he was about to examine Dragon’s Hill also, wrote to him on the subject, and suggested how desirable it would be (if any ways possible) to find the remains of King Bægseek there who was slain at Ashdown. To which communication the compiler received the following reply. After mentioning the contents of the other barrows, some clearly Saxon, others Romano-British, his letter proceeds as to Dragon’s Hill: —“As for old Bægseek, I should chuck him overboard at once, and assume that our friend Uter Pendragon’s remains had been originally deposited here, but that he had been disturbed in his repose by the decapitation of the barrow, which at some unknown time has undoubtedly taken place. It is unfortunate, however, that a Roman coin of the time of Constans turned up from among the débris, and the fragments of pottery also were chiefly of Roman manufacture, mixed with some of earlier date. It will therefore perhaps be difficult to reconcile these matters one with the other; but on turning them over in your mind, you will, I dare say, *theorize with a very agreeable correctness!*” What is a wretched compiler to do, who gets such letters from those who should be his aiders and abettors?

founder of the West Saxon kingdom, slew Natan-leod and five thousand men in these parts, which Natan-leod (as is shown by Mr. Baxter) is 'Naud-an-ludh,' or 'populi tutela,' the people's refuge; in fact, a kindred word to 'Pendragon,' or 'Arthur.' You see how probable this would be *primâ facie*?" said he, turning round to me.

My goodness! I couldn't make out head or tail of his long words, and was staring at him with my mouth open; but when he turned round I shut it pretty quick, and looked as wise as I could. "Well, Sir," said I, "I hardly know; but it doesn't look unlikely, does it?"

"Of course not," said he, quite pleased; "and as the Britons were not driven from these parts till the middle of the sixth century, I should put the throwing up of Dragon's Hill in the beginning, say the first half, of that century. Now, in the year A.D. 520, according to Gildas and Bede, Arthur gained his twelfth victory at 'Mons Badonicus,' which might very well be Baydon Hill, which you see over there." And he pointed to a hill three or four miles off.

"But then, Sir," said I, "if he gained the victory, he wasn't killed there, I suppose, and so he couldn't be buried here."

"But he was killed in battle at last," said he; "and, as I told you, there must have been many Arthurs or Pendragons just at that time, and many battles fought between this and Bath – why, the Britons gained a battle at Wanborough, over there, as late as A.D. 581."

"But, Sir," said I, "if Pendragon was buried down there, wouldn't they have been very likely to cut out the horse up here just above, as another monument, at the same time; and then what becomes of King Alfred and the Danes?"

"There is no instance of two such monuments over one chief," answered he, quite positive; but I thought I saw him give a twinkle with his mouth, as if he felt I had been pretty near him. "Besides, as I said before, the tradition as to the White Horse is too strong to be upset by conjecture."

"I didn't mean to conjecture, I'm sure, Sir," said I; and I thought, though I didn't say so, it was he who had been conjecturing pretty freely, if it came to that. "The battle of Ashdown, Sir, was a very great battle then," I went on, for I liked to hear him talk about those old times, though I didn't quite understand all he said.

"The greatest battle probably in which Alfred ever was," said he.

"Please, Sir," said I, "I hope you won't think me troublesome, but if you would only tell me about the battle I should be so much obliged to you."

"Sir," said he, looking at me rather surprised, "it is seldom that I can get any of the youth of this day to take an interest in these matters, the study of which would greatly benefit their manners and morals. I shall be pleased to do what you wish. Are you a good listener?"

"Yes, Sir," said I, "you will get tired of talking long before I shall of listening. And you wouldn't mind, I hope, my taking notes of the story?"

"By no means," said he; "I see you are ready with your pen. Perhaps I shouldn't have told you so much about Pendragon and Natan-leod if I had seen that you were taking me down; but now I will be careful to give you nothing which is not to be found in the most trustworthy chroniclers. Are you ready?"

"Yes, Sir," said I; and then he settled himself in the turf, and pulled a couple of old brown books out of his long coat-tail pockets, to which he sometimes referred, and looking out over the Vale, as if he were travelling in his mind far away from me and every thing about us on the hill-side, began as follows.

"As for old Bægseek, I should chuck him overboard at once, and assume that our friend Uter Pendragon's remains had been originally deposited here, but that he had been disturbed in his repose by the decapitation of the barrow, which at some unknown time has undoubtedly taken place. It is unfortunate, however, that a Roman coin of the time of Constans turned up from among the débris, and the fragments of pottery also were chiefly of Roman manufacture, mixed with some of earlier date. It will therefore perhaps be difficult to reconcile these matters one with the other; but on turning

them over in your mind, you will, I dare say, *theorize with a very agreeable correctness!*” What is a wretched compiler to do, who gets such letters from those who should be his aiders and abettors?

CHAPTER III

Nearly a thousand years ago, in the year of our Lord 871, the great battle of Ashdown was fought; but, in order to give you a true idea of its importance, I must begin my story some years earlier; that is to say, in the year of our Lord 866. In this year Æthelbert, king of the West Saxons, died, having ruled his kingdom for five years in peace, with the love of his subjects; and Æthelred, his next brother, who succeeded him, buried his body in Sherborne Minster. In this year Alfred, the younger brother, who afterwards succeeded Æthelred, and was called Alfred the Great, reached his seventeenth year. In the autumn a great army of pagan Danes came over to Britain, and landed in that part of the island which was then called East Anglia, but now Norfolk. These were not the first Danes who had come over to vex England, but none of them ever stayed so long, fought so many battles, or did so much harm (as we should say, speaking according to man's judgment) as these.

A very curious story is told of why they came over here; and as it goes at first sight against a good many of our notions of how the world is governed, and so ought to make us think a little more about the matter, I shall give it you pretty much as it is told by the old chronicler, John Brompton.

"There was a man of royal birth in the kingdom of Denmark, named Lodbroc, who had two sons, Hinguar and Hubba. This man embarked one day with his hawk in a small boat to catch ducks, and other wild-fowl on the adjoining sea-coasts and islands. A terrible storm arose, by which Lodbroc was carried away and tossed for several days on every part of the ocean. After numberless perils, he was cast ashore on the coast of Norfolk, near the village of Redham," (at least that must be the name, as I read it in Brompton, though I have not been able to hear of a village of that name on the coast of Norfolk,) "where he was found having his hawk alone for his companion, and presented to King Edmund. That king, struck with the manliness of his form, kept him at his court, and heard from his own mouth the history of his adventures. He was then associated with Berne, the king's huntsman, and indulged in all the pleasures of the chase, for in the exercise of both hunting and hawking he was remarkably skilful, and succeeded in capturing both birds and beasts according as he had a mind." In fact, Lodbroc was the sort of man to please King Edmund, for the art of capturing birds and beasts was, next to the art of fighting for one's home and country, the art most esteemed amongst the Anglo-Saxons; who acknowledged "that skill and good fortune in this art, as in all others, are among the gifts of God, as we also have often witnessed." But to go on with our story. "The skill of Lodbroc bred jealousy in the heart of Berne the huntsman, who one day, as they went out together hunting, unawares set upon Lodbroc, and having foully slain him, buried his body in the thickets of the forest. But Lodbroc had a small harrier dog, which he had bred up from its birth, and which loved him much. While Berne the huntsman went home with the other hounds, this little dog remained alone with his master's body. In the morning, the king asked what had become of Lodbroc, to which Berne answered that he had parted from him yesterday in the woods, and had not seen him since. At that moment the harrier came into the hall and went round wagging its tail, and fawning on the whole company, but especially on the king; when he had eaten his fill, he again left the hall. This happened often; until some one at last followed the dog to see where he went, and having found the body of the murdered Lodbroc, came and told the story to the king. The affair was now carefully inquired into, and when the truth was at last found out, the huntsman was exposed on the sea, without oars, in the boat which had belonged to Lodbroc. In some days, he was cast ashore in Denmark, and brought before the sons of Lodbroc; who, putting him to the torture, inquired of him what had become of their father, to whom they knew the boat belonged. To this Berne answered," as one might have guessed he would answer, he being a liar and cowardly murderer, "that their father Lodbroc had fallen into the hands of Edmund, King of East Anglia, by whose orders he had been put to death." Now, King Edmund was a wise and righteous man, who "devoutly undertook the government of the East Angles, and held it with the right hand of power, always adoring and glorifying God for all the good things which he

enjoyed;”³ and it is a pity he did not on this occasion remember, that having safely caught a great scoundrel, the best thing to do with him was to see him hung out of the way himself; for, by letting him go, you see, he gave a chance to the devil, who can’t afford to lose such gentlemen as Berne the huntsman out of the world, and has considerable grudges against kings like Edmund.

Well, when Hinguar and Hubba heard the tale of Berne the huntsman, they, like good and true sons, according to the notions of piety then current amongst the Danes, hastened to fit out a fleet to invade England, and avenge their father. And their three sisters wove for them the standard, called the Raven, in one day – which flag waved over many a bloody field, from Northumbria to Devonshire, until it was taken by King Alfred’s men, under Odda, the Alderman of Devon, before a certain castle in that county, which is called Cynuit by Asser, and Kenuith elsewhere, (the situation of which castle I cannot identify, or the name,) where were slain King Halfdene, a brother of Hinguar and Hubba, and 840 Danish warriors. It was said, that when the Danes were about to gain a battle, a live crow would fly before the middle of the standard; but if they were to be beaten, it would hang motionless.⁴

So Hinguar and Hubba, as has been said, landed in the country of the East Angles, in the late autumn, bent on vengeance. King Edmund knew nothing of the blood-feud between him and these Danish leaders, by reason of Berne’s lying story, so took no more than the usual measures for preparing to attack them; but whether it was that they found King Edmund too strong for them at the time, or for some other reason, they seem to have wintered there quietly, and to have bought horses, and made some sort of truce with the East Angles.⁵ But in the spring of the year 867, they crossed the Humber, marched hastily upon York, and took it.

The kingdom of Northumbria was just the place for the army of Pagans and the standard Raven at this time; for it was divided against itself. Osbert, the rightful king, had been playing Tarquin in the house of Bruern Brocard, one of his chief earls; so his people had cast him out, and had taken to themselves a king Ælla, of unkingly blood, and the two were warring against one another when the Danes took York. Late in the autumn, however, a peace was made between Osbert and Ælla, and they marched to York; where within the very walls of the city into which the Northumbrians penetrated, was fought a most bloody battle. In that fight fell almost all the Northumbrian warriors, and both the kings, and a multitude of noble men; and the remainder who escaped made peace with the Pagans.⁶ By this time, no doubt, there was small spoil left for Hinguar and Hubba north of the Humber.

Accordingly, in the year 868, the pagan army, leaving Northumbria, marched into Mercia, and surprised and took Nottingham. Then Burhred, King of Mercia, and his witan sent to Æthelred, king of the West Saxons, to come and help them. And Æthelred and Alfred marched to Nottingham with the West Saxon power, and with Burhred besieged the Pagans, there; but they could not force the wall, and there was no great battle, and Æthelred and Alfred went home with their troops. But the Pagans, after wintering at Nottingham, made peace with Burhred and the Mercians; that is to say, such a peace as they loved to make – I mean a peace till it was worth their while to come again; for in 874 they came back, drove King Burhred over the sea, and subdued the whole country – and Burhred went to Rome and died there, and his body lies in St. Mary’s Church at the English School.⁷

In the year 869, “the aforesaid army of Pagans, galloping back to Northumbria, went to York, and there passed the winter;” or, in the words of Huntingdon, “remained there cruelly for one year.” And what sort of a winter was it for the poor Yorkshiremen? “There was again a great famine, a mortality among men, and a pest among cattle.” Such is the fate of a divided people which can only make truces with its oppressors.

³ See Simeon, A.D. 870.

⁴ See Chronicle of St. Neot, A.D. 878.

⁵ See Saxon Chron. and Asser, A.D. 866.

⁶ See Asser, A.D. 867.

⁷ See Saxon Chron. and Huntingdon, A.D. 874.

In this winter, Hinguar and Hubba seem to have got large reinforcements from over the sea, headed by two other kings, Bægseeg and Halfdene their brother, for in the year 870 we find them no longer surprising a city, and from thence defying their enemies and oppressing the neighbourhood. Now they march openly and fearlessly across Mercia; and, the day of vengeance having come, burst upon East Anglia, and take up their head-quarters at Thetford. And then comes the saddest part of a sad story. King Edmund, being a king like Josiah, who believed in God and ruled in righteousness, was not the man to see the desolation of any part of his people, or to shut himself up in fenced cities while the pagan cavalry rode through East Anglia – so the aforesaid King Edmund gathered his men, and “fought fiercely and manfully against the army. But because the merciful God foreknew that he was to arrive at the crown of martyrdom, he there fell gloriously. Of his passion I would fain insert some particulars into our history, that the sons of men may know and perceive how terrible is Christ the Son of God in the counsels of men, and with what glorious triumph he adorns those whom he tries here under the name of suffering, that the saying may be fulfilled, ‘He is not crowned except he strive lawfully.’ (2 Tim. ii. 5.)”⁸ Such is the lesson which the old monk Simeon, præcentor of the Church of Durham, gets out of the death and martyrdom of King Edmund, and I know not where we are to look for a better. Perhaps it may help us when we think of India⁹ to remember with Simeon, how terrible is Christ the Son of God in the counsels of men, and with what glorious triumph he adorns those whom he tries here under the name of suffering. For Hinguar and Hubba took the wounded king on the field of battle, and tied him to a tree, because he chose to die sooner than give over his people to them, and there shot him through the body with their arrows.¹⁰ But his people got the body and buried it at Bradoriesunyrthe, now called St. Edmund’s Bury, or Bury St. Edmunds;¹¹ and many miracles were wrought at his tomb, and he was canonized – at which honour let all Englishmen rejoice, the earth having as much need as ever of many such kings and saints.

And they were rare then as now, and then as now men went their own way, and not God’s way, and cut out their own work instead of taking his. For “when King Edmund was slain, his brother Edwold, dreading the pleasures of the world, and seeing that a hard lot had fallen on himself and his brother, retired to the monastery of Carnelia in Dorsetshire, near a clear well which St. Augustine had formerly brought out of the earth by prayer, to baptize the people in, and there he led a hermit’s life on only bread and water.”¹² Yes! and no doubt thought himself righteous and despised others – and left the kingdom which God had given him to the Pagans, who “subdued all the land and destroyed all the ministers they came to,” which Edmund his brother had built – “and that same time they came to Medeshamstede, and burned and beat it down, slew abbot and monks, and all that place which before was full rich, they reduced to nothing,”¹³ while Edwold, who should have been there with the remnant of the East Angles, to make his last stand, like a true shepherd of his people, was eating his bread and drinking his water in peace, by a clear well near the monastery of Carnelia in Dorsetshire.

And now the Pagan kings, “with a new army, very great, like a flowing river which carries all along with it,”¹⁴ having doubtless been reinforced again from over the sea, where the story of their victories had spread far and wide, were looking about for some new field for plunder and murder. The

⁸ See Simeon, A.D. 870.

⁹ N. B. This was written in October, 1857.

¹⁰ Here is Robert of Gloster’s account of the martyrdom: —“So that atte laste to Estangle agen hym come: Ther hii barned and robbede and that fole to grounde slowe; And as wolves among ssep reulych hem to drowe, Seynt Edmond was tho her kyng, and tho he sey that delvol cas That me morthred so that fole, and non amendement n’as, He ches levere to deye hym-sulf, that such soreve to ysey —He dude hym vorth among ys ton, n’olde he nothyng fle. Hii nome hym and scourged hym, and suthe naked hym bounde To a tre, and to hym ssote, and made hym mony a wounde, That the arewe were on hym tho thycke, that no stede n’as byleved. Atte laste hii martred hym, and smyte of ys heved.” *Robert of Gloster’s Chronicle*, p. 263, *apud Thomas Hearne*. Ed. 1724.

¹¹ See Saxon Chronicle, and Huntingdon, A.D. 870.

¹² See Brompton, A.D. 870.

¹³ See Sax Chron., A.D. 870.

¹⁴ See Huntingdon, A.D. 871.

whole north and east of England was a desolate wilderness behind them; London was in ruins, and Kent had been harried over and over again by their brethren the sea-kings. But some thirty miles up the Thames was a fair kingdom, stretching far away west, down to the distant sea. This was Wessex, the kingdom of the West Angles, over which Æthelred, the brother of Alfred, was now ruling, and entering on the sixth year of his reign. The kingdom had had peace for ten years, and was full of royal burghs, and rich pastures, with cattle and horses, and sheep. Perhaps Hinguar and Hubba remembered the leaguer of Nottingham three years before, and how the West Angles, with their king and his brother, had hemmed them in and watched them there through a long summer.

In the early years of their inroad, the Pagans would not have dared to brave a united people with Æthelred for king; but they had now grown bold from success, and were in numbers so great that “by reason thereof they could not advance together, but went by different roads.” So in an early month of the year 871, with their usual swiftness, they marched up the Thames valley and seized on Reading, a royal burgh, and the then easternmost city of note in Wessex. Reading is situated on the south bank of the Thames and on the north bank of the Kennet, at the confluence of the two rivers; and, while part of the Pagan host made a rampart between the rivers, to protect their camp and the town which they had taken, a large force, on the third day after their arrival, began scouring the country for plunder, under two of their earls.

But the men of Wessex had increased and multiplied as well as their cattle, and Æthelwulf, Alderman of Berkshire, was a man “who raged as a lion in battle.” So Æthelwulf, with what men he could get together, fought with the two earls at Englefield, though he had but a small band of Christians with him. But he cheered his men, saying to them, “though they attack us with the advantage of more men we may despise them, for our commander Christ, is braver than they.”¹⁵ Whereupon the men of Wessex buckled to their work under the oaks of Englefield Chase (afterwards beloved by the great Queen Bess), and there discomfited the pagans very sore, and slew one of the two earls. In one of the old chroniclers, there are a few lines which may partly account for Æthelwulf’s victory; “their two consuls,” says Æthelwerd, “forgetting that they were not on board their fleet, rode proudly through fields and meadows on horseback, which nature had denied them;” possibly therefore these were the new comers, who had just joined the Pagan army and were not used to horses or landfighting.

Within the next three days King Æthelred and his brother Alfred came up from the west, each leading a strong band of West Saxon warriors, and joined Æthelwulf; and on the fourth day they attacked the Pagans at Reading. Those who were outside the rampart they cut to pieces, and at first had the vantage; but the Pagans came out with all their forces, and after great slaughter had been made on either hand, and the brave Æthelwulf had been slain, “the Pagans had possession of the place of death.”¹⁶ Thus the chronicle states it; probably the men of Wessex were grievously beaten, and went back with their king, in confusion, along the chalk hills to the other end of Berkshire, pursued by Bægseeg and Halfdene, the two lately arrived Danish kings, with the strength of the Pagan host. I suppose that Hinguar and Hubba stayed at Reading, to hold the place of safety; for neither of them were at Ashdown.

But every mile as they fell back added strength to Æthelred and Alfred, as bands of men came up from the rear; from the broad Wiltshire plains over the Kennet at Hungerford, and along the chalk hills from Swindon and Ashbury; from the vales of the Kennet and the Thames on either flank; and a few perhaps already from Glostershire and Oxfordshire, where the news was doubtless spreading like the wind. So Æthelred and his host turned to bay at Ashdown, and set the battle in array against the pagan kings.

There is some question between antiquaries as to where the exact site of this battle is. It must however, it seems to me, be somewhere in the western part of Berkshire; for it is quite impossible that

¹⁵ See Simeon, A.D. 871.

¹⁶ See Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 871.

Æthelred and Alfred could have fought at Reading, at Ashdown, and at Basing, as they unquestionably did, within three weeks, if we are to look for Ashdown battle-field either at Ashdown forest, in Essex, or at Ashendon, in the hundred of Bernwood in Buckinghamshire, which are the only sites out of Berkshire claiming this honour, and supported by a tittle of authority. Besides, even supposing these three battles could have been fought in the time, yet the battle of Reading, having gone against the Saxons, (as to which every chronicler agrees,) is it likely that they should have retired *past* the town and stronghold of the Danes, either northeast into Buckinghamshire, or southeast into Sussex, leaving the whole of Wessex open to the enemy, instead of falling back westward into Wessex, and so covering their own homes? It is perfectly absurd to suppose this, Alfred being one of their generals; and how such ancient and venerable persons as Bishops Kennet and Leland can have talked such nonsense, is hard to say; unless, indeed, they were born, the one in Sussex, the other in Buckinghamshire, in which case it is of course excusable, nay, justifiable in them; but of this I know nothing.

As to the Berkshire sites, I don't see any reason for troubling you with their several titles. I am myself satisfied that the battle was fought here; but all the sites are somewhere on this range of chalk hills, of which the old White Horse is king. So now we will turn to the account of the great battle in the old chroniclers.

“About four days after the battle at Reading, King Æthelred and Alfred, his brother, fought against the whole army of the Pagans at Ashdown. And they were in two bodies; in the one were Bægseeg and Halfdene the Pagan kings, and in the other were the earls.” “Now the Christians had determined that King Æthelred with his men should attack the two Pagan kings, but that Alfred his brother with his men, should take the chance of war against the earls. Things being so settled, the king remained a long time in prayer, hearing the mass, and said he would not leave it till the priest had done, nor abandon the protection of God for that of men. And so he did, which afterwards availed him much with the Almighty, as we shall declare more fully in the sequel. But the Pagans came up quickly to the fight. Then Alfred, though holding a lower authority, as I have been told by those who were there and would not lie, could no longer support the troops of the enemy unless he retreated or charged upon them without waiting for his brother; so he marched out promptly with his men in a close column and gave battle.” “He too,” as Simeon says, “knowing without a doubt that victory would not lie with a multitude of men, but in the pity and mercy of God,” and seeing also that, mass or no mass, the Pagans must not be allowed to get between him and his brother. “But here I must inform those who are ignorant of the fact, that the field of battle was not equal for both armies. The Pagans occupied the higher ground, and the Christians came up from below. There was also in that place a single stunted thorn-tree, which I myself have seen with my own eyes. Around this tree the opposing hosts came together with loud shouts from all sides, the one to pursue their wicked course, the other to fight for their lives, their dearest ties, and their country.” “In the midst of the fight, and when Alfred was hard pressed,” – according to Brompton, for the older chroniclers do not mention this, – “the king came up with his fresh forces.” “And when both hosts had fought long and bravely, at last the Pagans, by God's judgment, could no longer bear the attack of the Christians, and having lost great part of their men, took to a disgraceful flight, and all the Pagan host pursued its flight not only until night, but the next day, even until they reached the stronghold from which they had come out. The Christians followed, slaying all they could reach until it became dark.”¹⁷ “And the flower of the Pagan youth were there slain, so that neither before nor since was ever such destruction known since the Saxons first gained Britain by their arms.” “There fell in that battle King Bægseeg and these earls with him; that old Earl Sidroc, to whom may be applied that saying ‘the ancient of evil days,’ and Earl Sidroc the younger, and Earl Osbern, and Earl Frœna, and Earl Harold; who, with their men, choosing the broad and spacious way, went down into the depths of the lake;” or, let us perhaps hope not, old monk Simeon, seeing that they died gallantly in harness, and that, as you yourself add in

¹⁷ See Asser, A.D. 871.

the next sentence, “they knew not the way of teaching nor understood its paths; it was kept far away from their faces.” It is fair to add that Brompton states that Æthelred slew Bægseeg with his spear, and another Pagan of note with his sword, after, he got up to the fight; but the older chroniclers do not mention this.¹⁸

To finish briefly the history of the rest of the year 871, fourteen days after the battle of Ashdown, Æthelred and Alfred fought another battle with the Pagans (probably with that part which had remained in garrison at Reading, with Hinguar and Hubba, and the relics of Halfdene’s army), at Basing, which seems to have been undecided; and two months afterwards another at Merton. After which, in the summer, reinforcements came from beyond sea, and joined the Pagans; King Æthelred died, and Alfred fought before the winter four more pitched battles. So, as the Saxon Chronicle sums up, “in this year nine general battles were fought against the army in the kingdom south of the Thames; besides which, Alfred, the king’s brother, and single aldermen and king’s thanes, oftentimes made attacks on them which were not numbered, and slew of them within the year one king and nine earls.” This was not what the Pagans reckoned on; they liked fighting very much in reason, as an accompaniment of spoiling a country, and did it well; but to be fighting nine pitched battles in a year, hemmed in in one corner of a rich kingdom (for they never got farther than a few miles into Wiltshire), and getting no spoil even there, was not to their taste; so in the winter they made truce with Alfred, and took themselves off to their old haunts in Mercia and Northumbria, and did not return for five years.

This year, A.D. 871, is a year for Berkshire men to be proud of, for on them fell the brunt of that fiery trial; and their gallant stand probably saved England a hundred years of Paganism. For had they given way at Ashdown, and the reinforcements from over the sea come to a conquering, instead of to a beaten army in the summer, there was nothing to stop the Pagans between Reading and Exeter. The other eight battles were skirmishes in comparison with this one; they scarcely occupy five lines each in the chroniclers, and out of the king and nine Pagan earls who were slain within the year, six fell at Ashdown. It was Alfred’s crowning mercy; and so he felt it to be, and in memory of it he caused his army (tradition says, on the day after the battle) to carve the White Horse, the standard of Hengist, on the hill-side just under the Castle, where it stands as you see until this day.

“Thank you, Sir,” said I, when he paused, “what a grand story it makes! And are those the real words of the old chroniclers, as you call them, Sir, which you used?”

“Yes,” said he, “almost every word is simply a translation from one or other of them, but the greater part is taken from the Chronicle of Asser, who was a contemporary and intimate friend of Alfred, and a very learned and pious ecclesiastic.”

“I suppose they were; mostly priests and monks who wrote the Chronicles then, Sir, for they don’t read at all like our modern histories. They seem a much more religious sort of books.”

“Don’t call them religious books,” said he, “it puts one in mind of religious newspapers, – the greatest curse of our times. Yes, people sneer at the old English chroniclers now-a-days, and prefer the Edda, and all sorts of heathen stuff, to them; but they are great books, Sir, for those who have eyes for them; godly books is the name for them, written by God-fearing men, who were not ashamed of the faith which was in them; – men who believed, Sir, that a living God was ruling in England, and that in his name one of them might defy a thousand. Your historians, now-a-days, Sir, believe that Providence (for they dare not talk of God) is on the side of the strongest battalion. There’s some difference, when you come to think of it, between the two creeds, Sir.”

¹⁸ This is Robert of Gloster’s account of the Battle: —“The Kyng and Alfred ys brother nome men ynowe, Mette hem, and a batayle smyte up Assesdowne — Ther was mony moder chyld, that sone lay ther doune — The batayle ylaste vorte-nygt, and ther were aslawe Vyf dukes of Dene-march, ar hii wolde wyth drawe, And mony thousende of other men, and tho’ gonne hii to fle; Ac hii adde alle ybe assend, gyf the nyght n’adde y bee. *Robert of Gloster*, p. 263, *apud Thomas Hearne*. Ed. 1724.”

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