



PATRIXBOURNE.

JUST as it stands off the main tracks of the country, in a bye-way between Littlebourne, on the Canterbury and Sandwich road, and Bridge, on the Canterbury and Dover road, so the little village of Patribourne is a place by itself—silent, beautiful, rural. There is an atmosphere of antiquity about it, although there are no tumble-down dwellings, mean thatched cottages or signs of poverty. Quite the reverse—you feel that the inhabitants are well fed, well clothed and certainly well housed. For the buildings are substantial, if old, and were erected when good Kentish timber was solid and seasoned when used, and when the mason and the bricklayer took pride in their work.

In this cosy spot the artist could fill many pages of his sketch book and up in the churchyard the poet could revel in his dreams—rather melancholy ones perhaps, for the host of pyramidal yews look sombre under the shade of the taller trees around them. There is foliage everywhere, save in one gap where one of the two fine sentinel trees that guarded the churchyard gate has fallen off at the trunk and his fellow is hanging dangerously over the road, for his life's span is nearly finished. The church itself appeals to our emotions and calls forth our admiration too. Its ancient quaint tower with entrance beneath, its perfect specimen of the Norman stonemason's work and its Decorated windows all recall us to the fact that some seven hundred years have passed since it was built. And everything is so still and peaceful on this little bit of God's acre; the song of birds alone disturb the silence.

And the village itself—that, too, is charmingly free from turmoil. It is a place where you might sleep—and dream when awake. No public-house, with the exception of a general shop where beer can

be obtained but drunk only off the premises, no post office, no school with noisy youngsters—you have to trudge to Bridge, or close to Bridge, a mile or more away, for such luxuries. And yet Patribourne is the mother of Bridge, for is not the church of the latter village but an appendage of the former? And here there is a Vicarage and a parson, but none at Bridge.

Patribourne derives its name, like its neighbours—Littlebourne, Bekesbourne and Bridge—from its close proximity to the stream—the famous Nailbourne—that comes through its domains. Sometimes the bed of the river is quite dry, but as I write it is running wildly along towards the Stour and roads and gardens are flooded. It was from this river that Patribourne took its original name of Bourne, and then some great landowner named Patrick prefixed his own name to the village of his possession and it henceforth became Patribourne, or Patricksbourne, as I find it more generally used until within the past few years.

You plunge into the place from three distinct roads, but whichever way it may be you are struck by the winding roads that would make a model for the town planner of the twentieth century. And as you traverse each graceful curve picturesque houses meet your eye one after the other. Coming from Bridge you notice the beauty of the creeper-clad dwelling known as Waterfall Cottage, whose Tudor chimney stack denotes its age. Before and behind runs the swirling Nailbourne, dashing over tiny cataracts that give the house its name. Then comes a half-timbered house with projecting upper storey; the church wreathed in ivy; the Vicarage, which is another timbered house; further along an old brick-built residence with Elizabethan gable at the back and covering of timber in front. Close by the rapid stream is undermining the gnarled roots of a tall fir tree and small boys try their luck with rod and line for eels, for which the Nailbourne is famous. Some little distance beyond are cottages with corbels of weird figures, male and female, half human, half beast, some struggling in awful agony, others grinning in ecstasies of delight. Those buildings and their ornamentations are quite modern, having been erected from drawings of the Marchioness of Conyngham. Near by are oasthouses, but alas! useless today. Flanking one side of the village is Bifrons Park, and it is remarkable that the land on the opposite side of the street is in Bekesbourne parish, while to show the peculiar division of parishes in this part of Kent, we find that the so-called Bridge elementary

schools are built on land in Patribourne. All this is confusing, but not so remarkable as many would imagine, for the neighbouring parishes of Littlebourne and Ickham overlap in a similar way.

The church of St. Mary is mentioned in Domesday in 1086, when Patribourne was chiefly owned by the famous Odo, Bishop of Bayeux. Here is the quaint extract:—"There is a church and one servant and four mills of sixteen and eight. A fishery of sixpence. Pasture of which the foreign tenants have ploughed six acres of land. Wood for the panage of four hogs." In 1258 the church of Patribourne and the chapel of Bridge were given to the Priory of Merton in Surrey, on condition that three canons should reside in the place, and there appears but little doubt that they carried out this injunction. But previously the church was re-built, as the fine specimens of Norman architecture are of the twelfth century.

The first thing you notice when approaching St. Mary's is its compact appearance, obtained through the remarkable position of the porch—underneath the tower. The nave, tower and chancel are all original Norman work, but the north aisle was built when the church was thoroughly restored in 1824 and the Norman doorway and Decorated window on that side were taken from the old wall and built into the new. The greatest treasures of the church are its Norman doorways. There is a small one on the south side of the chancel, with its mouldings somewhat battered, while a small stone figure is in the same condition. This figure apparently has a crown upon its head and the hands are uplifted, but what it represents cannot accurately be decided. This doorway sinks into insignificance in comparison with the magnificent richly-moulded doorway through which we enter the church on the south side. This doorway—one of the best of its sort in Kent—is cut under the tower. It forcibly reminds one of Barfrestone, although not quite so elaborate. The mouldings are deeply carved, but the principal embellishments are reserved for the tympanum, the subjects being "Our Lord and Majesty attended by angels," while below are carvings to represent foliage and strange birds. The head of the arch contains much ornamentation, including dog-tooth work, and this is surmounted by a tall pointed canopy, with a niche carved with the Agnus Dei. This work dates back as late as 1170.

Entering the church under the tower the outlook is impressive—everything seems much more massive than one is accustomed to find in a village church. There are three pointed arches, one in front

and one on either side, each cut out of the huge square supports of the tower. With the exception of the modern north aisle the roofs are open and timbered; a modern arcade divides the aisle from the nave along the spot where the old Norman wall used to stand. The chancel is approached under an arch which is probably of even earlier date than the south doorway, while the priest's door just inside the chancel is equally ancient. This doorway is surmounted by a statue of the patron saint of the church, St. Mary. There are two aumbries in the chancel as well as the thirteenth century canopied piscina, while in one of the corners is a squint through which the occupants of the private chapel could see the altar; but this hagioscope is now blocked up.

There are several interesting Norman windows, including seven in the chancel. Those on the north and south walls are small without any moulding and contain glass given by the Marchioness Conyngham, in 1849. Over the altar are triplets, the central one being surmounted by a marigold window of eight lights radiating from a central circle. For many years these windows were sealed up, but when the church was restored in 1849 they were opened up and filled by the Marchioness Conyngham with ancient Flemish glass. One of these chancel windows with the Crucifixion as its subject is dated 1532, while the glass containing a figure of Samson with the jawbone of an ass bears the date of 1538. Another window depicting Christ in the garden of Gethsemane is dated 1589, while another has 1602 marked upon it.

The south chapel contains the family pews of the owners of Bifrons, and is known as the Bifrons chapel. It is seldom that an open fireplace is seen in a church but, let into the wall, is an ordinary household stove that throws out its warmth to the worshippers in cold weather. In the window is some more Flemish glass with dates extending from 1550 to 1670. Here are several monuments in memory of various owners of Bifrons, including John Bargrave, who built the mansion and lies with his wife beneath the floor of the south chapel. The Latin inscription on the stone is interesting as being the composition of the Rev. John Bargrave, son of the builder of Bifrons, and rector of Harbledown and Pluckley in the 17th century, while he was also a Prebendary of Canterbury. He died in 1680. Amongst other tablets is one to John Taylor, who purchased Bifrons in 1694 and died in 1729. The inscription states that he "Raised a beautiful garden to Bifrons, gave several

ornaments of value to the church, was a strict economist, a just dealer and a friend to the poor." It further states that his eldest son, Brook, died in London in 1731, and was endowed with "many valuable qualities, both natural and acquired." Dr. Brook Taylor was an author and married Elizabeth Sawbridge, of Olantigh, Wye. Another tablet commemorates Captain Bridges Watkinson Taylor, who served in the Royal Navy and was accidentally drowned by the upsetting of his boat off Brindisi in 1814. He fought in the battle of the Nile and later on, when lieutenant on board the *Leander* of fifty guns, was wounded and taken prisoner during a hard contested action between that ship and the French ship *Génévent* of seventy-four guns. Other monuments in the church are to the memory of John and Elizabeth Denne, of Patricksbourne Court Lodge, who died in 1690 and 1680 respectively; also Daniel, a son of the above, who died in 1702, and from whom the Dennes, of Lydd, are descended. There are tablets to the memory of the Rev. Charles Hughes-Hallett and his family; he was formerly vicar of the parish, but died at Higham. The monuments to the memory of the Conyngham family include those of Henry, the first Marquess Conyngham and his wife Elizabeth, the former dying in 1832 and the latter in 1861; Francis Nathaniel, second Marquess, who occupied several public offices during the reigns of King William IV. and Queen Victoria, and died in 1876; Jane, wife of the above, who died in 1876, three weeks before her husband; Lord Francis Nathaniel Conyngham, R.N., and M.P. for Co. Clare, who died in 1881 at the age of forty-eight, and also two sisters of the second Marquess, namely, Elizabeth Henrietta, married to the Earl of Aboyne, dying in 1839, and Harriet Maria, married to Sir William Somerville, dying in 1843.

Bifrons Park lies in the heart of the village and many of the towering trees that shade the churchyard are part of its timbers. The house itself is white and plain in style. Originally built by Sir John Bargrave, member of a Bridge family, in the sixteenth century, it was practically rebuilt at the close of the eighteenth century by the Rev. Edward Taylor, and on the front he placed the following motto in honour of his wife:—"Diruta ædificat uxor bona, ædificata diruit mala." This motto can still be seen. From the Taylors it came into the possession of the Marquess Conyngham.

The whole of the valley watered by the lesser Stour is rich in old Saxon cemeteries, and it is computed that this special district

was more thickly inhabited than any part of Kent in early days. In 1866 a few graves were discovered near the keeper's lodge opposite Patribourne church, but on Patribourne Hill a great many were unearthed in the year 1866. Strangely enough the ground was perfectly smooth and it was only while the workmen of Marquess Conyngham were digging for a new plantation in that part of Bifrons Park that they came upon evidence of the graves. Under the supervision of antiquarians the excavations were carried out and various skeletons discovered, and it is remarkable that most of the men had been over six feet in height. The majority of the bodies were buried nearly north and south, but a few lay east and west, and it is assumed that the latter may have been early Christians, amongst whom a certain position of a dead body was studied just as it is at the present day. Within the graves were discovered a great number of relics, the most frequent being hammer-shaped brooches, a crystal ball and a perforated spoon. One remarkable feature was that the crystal ball and perforated spoon were found close together between the thigh bones of the female skeleton, and it is argued by many that the supposed magical properties of the crystal ball were believed in by the pagans of old. Mr. T. G. Godfrey Faussett, the eminent antiquarian, took a great interest in the excavations, and has given us descriptions of other relics found within the graves. They include, besides what I have already mentioned, a drinking cup of delicate green colour, knives, iron buckles, iron awls, iron shears, keys, pins, ear rings, beads, bracelets, studs, and a great variety of personal ornaments.

One opens the graves of the dead with awe and a feeling akin to remorse. Centuries may have elapsed since those same bodies were consigned to their Mother Earth, and yet time cannot erase the fact that the disinterment savours of sacrilege, and probably the discoverers of this old Saxon cemetery found it rather a gruesome sight as the secrets of the earth were disclosed one by one. We read how in one grave the body of a little deformed child was found; in another where a man who had once had his legs cut off was lying side by side with a stalwart fellow of over six feet perfect in limb; then again the body of a woman lay in a long grave with a space at her head in which the body of a baby had once been buried, but while the latter had fallen to dust the bones of the mother stood the ravages of time. The graves of children were numerous, and in almost every case a string of beads had been placed around

the neck, while similar ornaments were sometimes found with the women, and by the side of most of the men lay a sword.

It was probably the existence of the ancient cemeteries at Patribourne that gave rise to an old tradition of this village that on a certain night of the year a procession of skeletons could be seen slowly wending their silent way around the church. They entered from the gate by the roadside, led by a cowled monk, walked around the building and then disappeared. This story I found in an old manuscript written over a hundred years ago. Possibly human skeletons and bones had been discovered by the inhabitants, and it would be easy in days gone by for the rustic mind to conjure up a ghost story on the strength of so gruesome a discovery. No one in Patribourne at the present time knows anything of the skeletons' church parade. It has gone the way of most ghost stories—choked by the matter-of-fact atmosphere of the present day.

