

A HOLIDAY VISIT TO PENSHURST.



THE pretty village of Penshurst is built in the midst of trees, which overshadow its picturesque cottages and screen its fine old church. The situation is elevated, and hence the origin of the name, "pen" being an old British word for height, and "hyrst" mean-

ing a wood. At one time it was called Penchester, from the vicinity of a camp or fortress, probably Penshurst House in the days of its first inhabitants.

The chief interest of Penshurst is naturally centred in this ancient house, the home of the Sidneys.

"Thou art not, Penshurst, built to envious show
Of touch or marble, nor canst boast a row
Of polished pillars, or a roof of gold.
* * * * *
An ancient pile,
Thou joyst in better marks of soil, of air,
Of wood, of water, therein thou art fair;
Thou hast thy walks for health as well as sport.
Thy mount, to which the Dryads do resort."

Penshurst House is an assemblage of irregular buildings bounded by a general square outline. The dimensions on the north front are immense, and in the Tudor style. There is a fine entrance, but it has been spoiled by those Italian dressings that were introduced about the time of Elizabeth. Part of the buildings to the left of this entrance have been taken down, and the materials carried to Tunbridge, where it is said they are re-constructed into a dwelling-house on the old plan. The west front is divided into five large parts, also Tudor disfigured by innovations. The central erection projects beyond the rest, and was probably intended for a chapel. Its proportions are plain, and it appears to be of an older date than its surroundings. On the south is a variety of square and octangular towers, buttresses, and battlements, which have suffered materially from the taste of its owners in the time of George II. The same diversity is presented by the eastern front, but here its picturesque effect is fortunately unmarred by any *improvements*. The parterres and terraces lie on this side of the mansion, and at some distance from the main building stands a large square tower, formerly one of those intermediate outworks which at certain distances served to connect exterior defensive walls.

The fortified house of Penshurst is said to have

existed before the advent of William the Conqueror. The family who resided in it when the survey for Domesday was taken, were called Penchester, and the estate appears to have been handed down from father to son until the time of Edward I. Sir Stephen Penshurst, or Penchester, possessed the property in the beginning of this reign. He was knighted by Henry III., made Constable of Dover Castle, and Warden of the Cinque Ports, which offices he retained after the accession of Edward I. Upon the death of his widow, the manor of Penshurst was divided between his only children, Joan and Alice, who do not seem to have had a great affection for the place, for shortly after they came into possession they and their husbands assigned it to Sir John de Pultney, a rich citizen of London.

Sir John de Pultney was remarkable for his wisdom, piety, and benevolence, as well as for his great wealth. King Edward III. held him in high esteem, and he was four times elected Lord Mayor of London. His acts of public charity and munificence were innumerable. He founded the church of St. Lawrence Pountney, where he was buried, the church of Little All Hallows, in Thames Street, and a chapel or chantry to St. Paul's Cathedral.

Penshurst is supposed to have been much improved and enlarged by Sir John de Pultney. He had licence to "crenellate" or fortify it from the Crown, and the decorative work of the great hall is of his time.

This hall, the most important feature of the original house, is almost unaltered. A writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for December, 1805, describes it thus: "The entrance is on the north side, through a porch flanked with an octangular tower. Above the windows are receding arches, the whole design set forth with butterflies and embattled. The tracery to the window over the porch is most beautiful, and by the remnants left of the tracery of the windows of the hall, they must have been most exquisite. It is painful to observe these latter traceries have been cut away in part to introduce the clumsy sash-frames, *temp.* George II., and the lanthorn in the roof of the hall has been at the same period modernised into a bell-turret. At entering into the hall, directly above the head is the minstrels' gallery. On this side of the hall is a double archway, leading to the kitchen and buttery, &c. The front or screen of the minstrels' gallery is richly finished, and in many of the open compartments are placed wood-carved figures, originally put up as supporters to the springings of the timbers of the open-worked roof. Against the wall above the gallery are hung various armours and weapons made in the time of Elizabeth. Among them is a suit of armour worn, as it is said, by Sir Philip Sidney when he was killed in Flanders. This famous relict of heroic adornment," adds the writer indignantly, "is foully disgraced by having attached to the knee-pieces a pair of jack-boots, *temp.* William III." He also complains of the

"shamefully neglected" condition of the whole collection, which he says "is suffered to be purloined away piecemeal," and in conclusion he hurls a dart at the bad taste which permits a scenic painting representing a continuation of the hall to be hung at the upper end. This painting is now removed, and the present owner of Penshurst, Lord d'Isle, has done all in his power to restore the hall and rearrange the armour and weapons of his ancestors.

There is a descent from the hall into a crypt which was probably built in the days of the Penchesters. It consists of a double aisle divided by columns, which support arches and groins. The proportions are perfect, and the masonry is still unimpaired by decay. There is also an ancient stone staircase ascending in an octangular figure, with fine tracery in the windows.

On the decease of Sir John de Pultney, Penshurst passed to his son William, who died a few years after he attained his majority. It was then conveyed by the trustees to Sir Nicholas Lovaine, second husband of Lady de Pultney. Their son Nicholas was the next possessor, and he had no children. After his death, his widow Margaret, the eldest daughter of John de Vere, Earl of Oxford, remained at Penshurst, and took for her second husband Sir John Devereux, the first of that name who was created a peer. He was distinguished for his military achievements in the reign of Edward III. and Richard II. Both of these kings loaded him with honours, and the latter gave him permission to improve the battlements and fortifications made by Sir John de Pultney in his manor-house of Penshurst.

When Lady Devereux was dead Penshurst became the property of Margaret Lovaine, the sister and heiress of her first husband. She was twice married: first to Richard Chamberlayn, of Sherburn, in Oxfordshire, and secondly to Sir Philip St. Clere, of Aldham St. Clere, Ightham, both of whom seem to have held the manor of Penshurst in the right of their wife. The son of the latter inherited the estate, and sold it to John, Duke of Bedford, Protector of England during the minority of Henry VI. On his death Humphry, Duke of Gloucester, became his heir. He died without issue, and the king, his nephew, was found to be his next of kin.

But the manor of Penshurst did not long remain the property of the Crown. It was granted the same year to Humphrey Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, as a recognition of his services. He was slain at the battle of Northampton, and his son, a child five years old, inherited his title and estates.

This young Duke of Buckingham was afterwards active in the promotion of Richard III., but ultimately he deserted that king to support the claim of Henry, Earl of Richmond. Unhappily he was made prisoner by his old master, who showed him no mercy. He was taken to Salisbury and beheaded without even the show of a trial. The son, who succeeded to his titles and estates, suffered the same fate. He was accused of a conspiracy to take away the life of Henry VIII., and executed on Tower Hill. His

eldest son Henry was generously allowed to assume his father's title, but his inheritance was made forfeit to the Crown.

Four years after the accession of Edward VI., Penshurst was granted to John, Earl of Warwick, but he shortly afterwards returned it in exchange for other premises. Sir Ralph Tane then held it by knight's service, but his interest in the affairs of the Duke of Somerset brought him to the gallows before he had been master of Penshurst two years.

It was immediately conveyed by the king to a gentleman of his Privy Chamber who had honourably filled several offices of importance in his household. The translation is recorded over one of the principal gateways in the following inscription:—

"The most religious and renowned Prince Edward the Sixth, Kinge of England, France, and Ireland, gave this house of Pencester, with the manors, landes, and appurtenaynces there vnto belonging, vnto his trvstye and welbelovved servant Syr William Sydney, Knight Banneret."

The venerable Sir William died at Penshurst a few months after his royal master, and his son Sir Henry took possession of the old mansion with his bride. He had just married the eldest daughter of the Duke of Northumberland, but prudence prevented his participation in the ambitious designs of his father-in-law. The tragic deaths of his wife's relations disturbed the tranquillity of his seclusion at Penshurst, but he managed to escape without suspicion, and was afterwards elected a Knight of the Garter, admitted to the Privy Council, and made Lord Justice of Ireland four times. He died at the Bishop's Palace at Worcester, and Queen Elizabeth had his body conveyed to Penshurst for interment, but his heart was sent to Ludlow, in Wales.

The eldest son of Sir Henry Sidney was the celebrated Sir Philip. At the time of his birth Penshurst was a house of mourning. The blood of his mother's relations was scarcely dry upon the block, and the corpse of her brother, John Dudley, had only just been carried out of the grand porch. With strange and mingled feelings Sir Henry Sidney must have gone forth to plant the oak which was to commemorate the birth of his son.

Sir Philip Sidney's youth was spent at Penshurst, amid the scenes which he afterwards described in his "Arcadia." When he was old enough he was sent to Shrewsbury, and from thence to Oxford. At eighteen years of age, in 1572, he went to Paris, and after three months' sojourn was a witness of the terrible tragedy of St. Bartholomew's from the house of Sir Francis Walsingham, the English ambassador. During his stay abroad he made the acquaintance of Hubert Lanquet at Frankfort. Sir Philip records the influence on his after-life of this celebrated man in the following lines:—

"The song I sing old Lanquet had me taught—
Lanquet the shepherd best swift Ister knew,
For clerly reed, and hating what is naught,
For faithful heart, clean hands, and mouth as true;
With his sweet skill my skilless youth he drew
To have a feeling taste of Him that sits
Beyond the heaven, FAR MORE BEYOND OUR WITS."

On the last day of May, 1575, Philip Sidney returned to England. He was just in time for the festivities at Kenilworth, where his handsome person and mental qualifications recommended him to the queen. When she departed he attended her to Chartley Castle, the seat of the Earl of Essex, and there he first saw Penelope Devereux, the "Stella" of his sonnets. Elizabeth soon employed her new servant as an ambassador to Germany, and such was his wisdom and prudence in the performance of his mission, that William the Silent pronounced him "the ripest and greatest statesman that he knew of in all Europe."

The renewal of the French marriage project sent Philip Sidney in disgust from court. He went to Wilton, the home of his sister Lady Pembroke, and was persuaded by her to solace himself with the composition of the "Arcadia." At the same time his hopes of a union with his beloved Penelope Devereux were disappointed by her enforced marriage with another. This wound, however, was ultimately healed by the daughter of his old friend Sir Francis Walsingham.

In 1583 Philip Sidney was recalled to court and knighted by the queen. The following year he went to Parliament as the county member for Kent. Queen Elizabeth then employed him in several important missions, and his success induced her to make him Governor of Flushing, when war was raging between Spain and the Netherlands. The next year Sir Henry Sidney died, and Sir Philip became the Lord of Penshurst, but he was doomed to "tread the groves of Arcady" no more. On the 22nd of the succeeding September, the Battle of Zutphen was fought, and the poet-commander was dangerously wounded. While he lay upon the field, parched with thirst, water was brought to him, but he handed it to a dying soldier, saying, "Thy necessity is greater than mine." His death took place at Arnheim a few days later, and just before he breathed his last, he said to his brother, "Love my memory, cherish my friends: their faith to me may assure you they are honest. But above all, govern your will and affections by the will and word of your Creator. In me behold the end of this world and her vanities." His body was brought to England, and interred in St. Paul's Cathedral, amid a general lamentation.

Sir Robert Sidney was the next Lord of Penshurst, and he also succeeded his brother in the governorship of Flushing. On the accession of James I., he was made a baron by the title of Lord Sidney of Penshurst, and a few years later he was created Earl of Leicester. His only surviving son, Robert, succeeded to his title and estates, and was employed as an ambassador by King James. He was also nominated Lieutenant of Ireland, but never went thither.

Of his six sons, Philip, the eldest, inherited Pens-

hurst; and Algernon, the second, became famous from his complicity in the Rye House Plot.

The portrait of Algernon Sidney hangs in the long gallery at Penshurst. "The face is stern, but noble and enthusiastic in expression, the eyes full of the calm resolve of melancholy thought; the head is slightly turned in profile to the left, the arm and form lean lightly but firmly on a thick book, on which is inscribed the single word 'Libertas,' in Roman character. In the background rises the Tower, and there is also the executioner's axe."

While a young man Algernon Sidney served in Ireland, and won a reputation for spirit and resolution. In the Civil Wars he sided with the Parliamentary army, but afterwards he opposed the policy of Cromwell. When all opposition was useless, he retired to Penshurst, and wrote "Discourses on Government." At the Restoration he was on a diplomatic mission in Copenhagen, and the fate of his friend Sir Harry Vane determined him to remain abroad. The wish of a dying father to see his face once more brought him back to England in the summer of 1667. He remained in seclusion at Penshurst until the dissolution of Parliament, and he was then persuaded by his friend, William Penn, to stand for Guildford, and afterwards for the Rape of Bramber, near Penn's seat at Worminghurst, and where Penn's interest was paramount. Dishonest means were adopted with success to prevent his return on both occasions, and Penn and Sidney were alike disgusted. The former sailed in the autumn of 1682 to found a better government in the newly discovered world, and the latter remained at home to watch for an opportunity to restore justice to England, and purity to the court. His concern in the Rye House Plot brought him to the scaffold.

"Are you ready, sir?" said the executioner, when he laid his head upon the block. "Will you rise again?"

"Not till the general resurrection," answered Sidney; and in another moment his head rolled in the dust.

Philip, Earl of Leicester, died in 1698, leaving an only son, Robert, who succeeded to his titles and estates. Robert was the father of fifteen children, six of whom, four sons and two daughters, were living at the time of his death. The four sons were successively Earls of Leicester, and at the decease of the last the title became extinct.

Penshurst Church stands close to Penshurst mansion. All the Sidneys who have died at Penshurst have been interred within its walls, and many have been brought hither from other places. Algernon Sidney is said to have been buried in the family chantry after his execution. Sir Stephen de Penchester, the original owner of the Sidney estate, has a monument in the church, and there is a brass to Paul Iden dated

1514.





The Church
From the village into the
Churchyard
The House - from the
avenue

