A HISTORIC CORNER OF A HISTORIC COUNTY.

THE advice to "know thyself," as a stepping-stone to the acquisition of all other useful knowledge, is frequently in the mouths of our self-appointed modern teachers and philosophers, and is as valuable as it is hackneyed. A somewhat kindred recommendation, which is beginning to be echoed even by voices in fashionable circles, runs: "Know thy own country;" and this, too, is deserving of deliberate acceptance. Foreign travel must always be a factor of immense importance in the scheme of a liberal education, but at the same time it has no legitimate claim to supersede an admiring investigation of the beauties and wonders of our own land. Scores of summer tourists who, as a matter of etiquette have, year after year, and stage by stage, "done" the beaten tracks of the Continent, or perhaps have extended their flight to the prairies of the far West, are awakening, under the influence of a wiser culture, to the hitherto neglected charms of—the British Islands. In this respect the tricycle is helping materially to effect a revolution. It lures its owner, as not even the railway can, to "fresh fields and pastures new;" and in its latest development it seems, like the Duke of Wellington's army, capable of going anywhere and of doing anything.

UP WATLING STREET—STONY STRATFORD.
(From a Photograph by E. H. Speight, Rugby.)

It can certainly run in a day from London to Stony Stratford.

The title of Bucks to be called a "historic" county is unimpeachable. The memories of Hampden, Burke, and Lord Beaconsfield; of William Penn, Edmund Waller, and John Milton—amongst others—are inseparably linked with this southern inland shire. And the little, half-forgotten town we have just mentioned has played its part in famous national annals also.

It lies on the great Roman road known as Watling Street, which, starting from Dover, pierced through the very heart of England, and halted only at Holyhead, in the then truly "wild Wales." It is the course of this noble road—which is wonderfully straight and well-defined—by way of St. Albans, Dunstable, and Fenny Stratford, which our imaginary tricycle will take in its journey from the Metropolis.

But Stony Stratford may likewise be reached by the great railway line which has its terminus at Euston. The London and North-Western station at Wolverton (where are the carriage works of the company, employing some 3,000 hands) is two miles distant, and an omnibus supplies the missing link of vehicular communication.

With the exception of certain districts in the remote West, there is perhaps no section of England which has better preserved the aroma of antiquity, the quaint old-world air which is so delightful to the jaded student, weary of the bustle of great cities, than the northern half of agricultural Buckinghamshire. The long, double-worded names are old-fashioned, and as the names, so are the places and the people. The lover of sylvan quietude, of easy, placid social and material conservatism, of genial and original, if also somewhat ponderous and uncouth, rustic humour, may do far worse than spend a summer's holiday amongst the rolling beech-crowned hills and smiling meadow-lands which lie on either side of the once robber-haunted Chilterns. Pure air, lovely scenery, novel sights and sounds, are here to be enjoyed at surely the minimum of expense, for, speaking of the county as a whole, Bucks has not yet been invaded by that troublesome and unsatisfactory being, the professional excursionist, and hence its inn-keepers are still unsophisticated, and the marvellously infectious complaint of the palm itching for *backsheesh* is all but unknown.

Stony Stratford, although on the extreme northern verge of the county, is a typical Bucks town, and the broad features upon which one lovingly dwells in attempting its description are equally those of the six-miles-distant Newport Pagnell (a great source of vexation to officials of the Post Office, by reason of its liability to be confounded with other "Newports"), of Buckingham, eight miles away; of its namesake, Fenny Stratford, and of more distant rivals.

The town is said to derive its name—and the hypothesis is a very reasonable one—from huge stepping-stones in the bed of the river Ouse, which anticipated the present handsome bridge of three

arches, and in that rude and primitive fashion linked Bucks with Northamptonshire, and the Stratford of our paper with its neighbour-village—given what seems the odd and scarcely defensible distinction of *Old* Stratford. In the opinion of no less an authority than Camden, the site of the Roman Lactodorum was at Stratford. Certain it is that a considerable number of Roman remains have been found in the vicinity. It is, however, worthy of note that in that invaluable register of Norman England, the "Doomsday Book," the place passes unmentioned.

But without any question the identification of Stony Stratford with royal personages, and with affairs of state of more or less importance, commenced at a very early date.

Queen Eleanor, consort of Edward I., and deservedly dear to her husband—if the familiar story of her sucking the poison from an otherwise fatal dagger-thrust received by the king in Palestine be true—died in 1291, in the North of England. The disconsolate monarch, after the removal of her remains to Westminster Abbey, honoured her memory by the erection of a cross on every spot where the bier had rested on its mournful pilgrimage to his chief city. As punning Tom Hood grotesquely said :—

> "A royal game of fox and geese,
> To play for such a loss ;
> Wherever she put down her *orts*,
> There he—set up a *cross*."

And one of these places was Stony Stratford. This Bucks cross has shared the fate of the majority of its fellows, and has long since disappeared. Local chronicles say that it was demolished in 1646.

It was from this town that King Edward IV. went, in 1464, to wed Elizabeth Woodville, ancestress of our present reigning house — a marriage which, like many another romantic union of those stormy days, led to dynastic intrigues and fierce and bloody strife. The oak is still shown under which the lovers are supposed to have first met. Naturally it is known as "Queen's Oak."

Edward IV. died in 1470, and a dark and sinister page opened in English history. His eldest son, a lad of twelve, set out with his uncle, Earl Rivers, from Ludlow Castle to London, to be crowned as Edward V. He reached it a prisoner of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, and, with his younger brother, was committed to the Tower, there to be foully murdered, a little later, by command of the treacherous usurper, who, with blood-stained hand, had already clutched at the crown.

It was at Stony Stratford that the hapless and doomed boy-king was intercepted. The immortal bard of another Stratford (on Avon) alludes to this in his lurid tragedy of *Richard III.*, act ii., scene 4 :—

> "*Archbishop :*
> Last night, I heard, they lay at Stony Stratford,
> And at Northampton they do rest to-night ;
> To-morrow, or next day, they will be here."

Embalmed thus in the pages of William Shakespeare, the isolated little town, whatever its future fortunes, is assured of age-long remembrance and fame.

In the annals of the great struggle between Charles I. and his Parliament—a struggle which in its earliest phases robbed Bucks of its hero, John Hampden—Stony Stratford wins repeated mention. The Earl of Cleveland held a station here for the king, and more than one engagement was fought in the immediate vicinity. But enough has been written to justify the heading given to this paper, and to show how rich a mine of historic association and interest is open to exploration in this out-of-the-way corner of a fair and diversified county. Attention may be turned, for a paragraph or two, to records of purely local catastrophes, and to details of the wax and wane of the town's individual importance.

It is easy to see at a glance that things are not as they were at Stony Stratford. The town irresistibly reminds the observer of days before the introduction of the railroad and the telegraph.

In a word, Stony Stratford, in decades gone by, was a famous posting station, and to-day the shriek of the locomotive—in spite of spasmodic revivals—has everywhere effectually drowned that cheery blast of the coaching horn which was sweet music in the ears of gentlemen of the elder Mr. Weller's persuasion. Sixty coaches traversed this section of Watling Street daily within the memory of men and women still living. The inns which provided provender for their showy, steaming cattle, and accommodation and food for their

OLD AND NEW—THE MARKET SQUARE AND THE NEW POLICE STATION, STONY STRATFORD. (*From a Photograph by E. H. Speight, Rugby.*)

passengers, remain. The unwieldy and slow-paced vehicles have vanished. A couple of these hostelries, standing side by side, strike the stranger oddly, and, if the received tradition of the town is true, explain the origin of a puzzling popular saying. They are the "Cock" and the "Bull," and it is from their propinquity (say the Stony Stratfordites) that the taunt of "a cock and bull story," as applied to a startling and doubtful narrative, takes its rise. Scandal-mongering raged fast and furious around the portals of these twin inns in the "good old times," and with the growth of a wholesome incredulity in the minds of the gossip-hearers in towns to north and south came the contemptuous branding of the latest improbable rumour as "a tale from the 'Cock' and 'Bull.'" It is only right to add that the learned in such matters offer a choice of alternative derivations. But the good folks of Stony Stratford will stand to their guns, and point to the two companion signs as proof positive of their assertion.

At the latter of these two inns—the "Bull"—originated, on the 6th of May, 1742, a disastrous fire, which swept away no less than 146 houses and destroyed the church of St. Mary Magdalen. The ruined tower of this ancient edifice—built as far back as the reign of the first Edward—still stands, a pathetic and curious monument of the fierce force of these old-time conflagrations. Stony Stratford seems to have suffered in an exceptional manner from the ravages of fire, for some half-dozen years earlier fifty-three houses had been destroyed in a like manner.

The parish church of to-day is that of St. Giles—originally a chantry chapel, and founded about the year 1450. Here, again, the tower is the only part of the original structure which remains, the other sections of the building being comparatively new and uninteresting.

The Stony Stratford of the last decades of the nineteenth century cannot be said to be noteworthy for any large and growing manufactories. There are currying works here, and there is a firm engaged in the slightly incongruous enterprise—considering the inland situation of the town—of building steam-tugs, some of which, we believe, are exported as far as South America.

But the great interest of the town lies in the past, in the thronging memories which the sight of the quaint, picturesque houses, the grotesque signs, and roomy inn-yards conjures up.

For these things, and for the charm of its sylvan setting, Stony Stratford is well deserving of a visit; and on these grounds we beg, with a humble but assured confidence, to urge its claims upon the continually growing constituency of British tourists.

W. J. LACEY.

SWEET CHRISTABEL.

By ARABELLA M. HOPKINSON, Author of "The Probation of Dorothy Travers," "Pardoned," "In a Minor Key," &c. &c.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

RETURNING HOME.

THE letter brought over from Cranmoor by a friend of Mr. Fagby's, which had so engrossed Miss Reynolds, was from no other than Mr. Vanstone, and was, moreover, written from the Abbey.

The explanation of this very astonishing fact was as short and scant as it well could be consistently with courtesy: the writer stated that he had come home, and was entertaining some friends at the Abbey, and that he supposed Christabel was now of an age—though he did not remember what her age was—to see a little society. He would therefore be much obliged if Miss Reynolds would bring her back to the Abbey the next day, when the carriage would meet them at the Kirby Hayes Station.

"Father has not seen me for three years," cried Christabel, after perusing this paternal letter. "I was not fourteen then; I wonder what he will think of me. Oh, Rennie! I am so glad he is come home at last."

Glad as she was, though, her heart began to misgive her when the next day she found herself seated in the train, and steaming back to Kirby Hayes. She loved her father enthusiastically: that is to say, the father of her imagination; but now that he was close at hand, she began to recall him as he really was, and not as during these three years she had idealised him. She dreaded the cold grey eye that would glide over her, making her feel shy and awkward, the satirical smile her blushes would evoke, the indifferent manner that made her feel she was nothing to him. It seemed such a long time too since she had last seen him, when he had come home only to bury her mother, and then go away again; in reality, it was but three years ago, but in those years she had shot up from the child into the girl, and her mind undergoing the same process made the time seem much longer.

It was not a long journey to Kirby Hayes, barely an hour, and already at the station stood the first evidence of the master's return, in the shape of a new brougham instead of the old vehicle which had been considered quite good enough to convey Miss Reynolds and her