

grandparents, who do not put themselves in the places of the young father and mother, and merely give way to their own feelings of the moment without any regard to the future or to the child's welfare.

A widow who had lost every one of her own six children, found after a few months that the little boys of her two dead daughters were entirely dependent on her, their fathers having been lost at sea. She said it was an extremely strange experience to begin again almost at the beginning, without any one to speak to about her young charges or herself; but she did her duty unflinchingly, and had her reward, for the lads obeyed her implicitly, and seemed to love her with a double love, as if it were their own and their mother's too. "Granny" also became young again, at least in heart, for their sakes, and would go on long excursions with them, spend whole days on the seashore, or toil slowly along a mountain path while they scaled the rocks and unpacked the provision basket, and made a meal ready by the time she and the maid made their appearance. Of course this grandmother was an unusually strong woman, or at all events she rose to the occasion, for in her youth she had been considered delicate.

A sympathetic widow frequently has dear young friends not of her own kith and kin, but who love and reverence her, and sit metaphorically at her feet, as they never do at those of their own mother. Parents and children do not invariably understand one another, and an outsider can sometimes render valuable aid to both, because not being personally concerned, she can judge dispassionately of situations that blind the actors in them by excess of emotion. Then there are always orphans and friendless ones to be mothered, and those who are wealthy often need an old woman's kindness and guidance quite as much, and even more than the actually destitute.

How deeply widows feel for widows may be seen by the conduct of our beloved Queen. She has known what it was to lose an ideal husband in the prime of life, while her sons were young, and several of her children mere infants; and her sympathy is never so vivid as when her friends are widowed. Then her deeds and her letters are from "heart to heart," and we feel that in the depths of sorrow and regret she is a woman among women. No higher title could she wish; and, indeed, in well fulfilling every phase of woman's life is our Sovereign's chief glory.

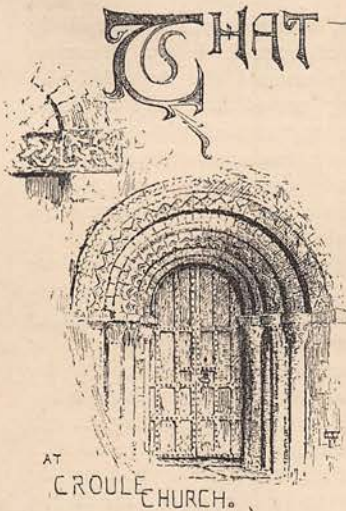
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## AN ISLE OF OUR ISLAND.

BY ALICE PRICE.



—if euphony does not forbid it—seems to me the best way of introducing the particular spot called "Axholme" to our readers—a spot so little known that it is said, out of some hundred and odd candidates at a recent Civil Service examination, only one (and he, by good hap, a native of the part) could answer to its whereabouts, or even knew of its existence. And yet it is thoroughly well

worth knowing: a locality abounding in interest, a region on which every step of our country's civilisation has left clearly-defined footmarks for those who have eyes to see, and just enough imagination to enjoy the story of this tiny bit of our great kingdom's growth.

Axholme, then—presuming that our readers, like the majority of our student friends, exclaim, "Where on earth is the place?" and presuming further that they wish to know a little more about it than the name—

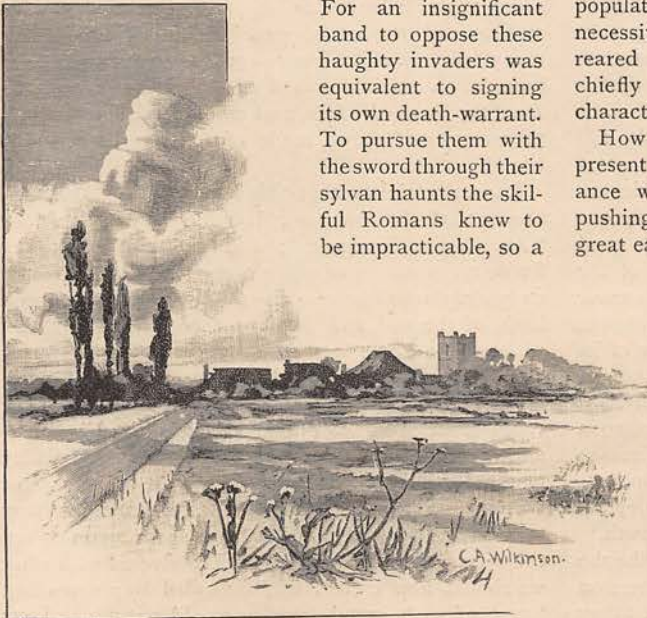
Axholme is the north-west corner of Lincolnshire, which county is not divided from Yorkshire in that direction by the river Trent, as some of us may have been erroneously taught in our childhood, but owns a seventeen-mile-long strip of land west of that wide stream, and this strip, some five miles broad, had many and many a year ago for its westernmost boundary a sinuous course of sluggish streams—the Don, the Torn, the Idle, and others, which completed the watery girdle, and made of Axholme a veritable island.

Its real claim to that title is now gone. Drainage has settled that matter; but the name "Ax-" or "Axey-holme" remains; and scattered about its fertile acres scores of other names remain which tell us plainly who, for two thousand years, have been lords of the soil, and dwellers thereupon. In "Ax" we have the Celtic form for *water*, in "ey" the Anglo-Saxon for *island*, in "holme" the Danish form for *island*, which philological tautology being not yet comprehended of later folk, "the isle of" was super-added, the better to describe the physical peculiarity of the territory alluded to. Taking it at its earliest time, then, when it was "Ax," with probably some termination now lost sight of, we seem again to see this narrow strip of Britain thickly covered with what we should now call "bush," occupied by a spreading forest of such grand trees as would put most of our woodland giants in these later days to shame; for one

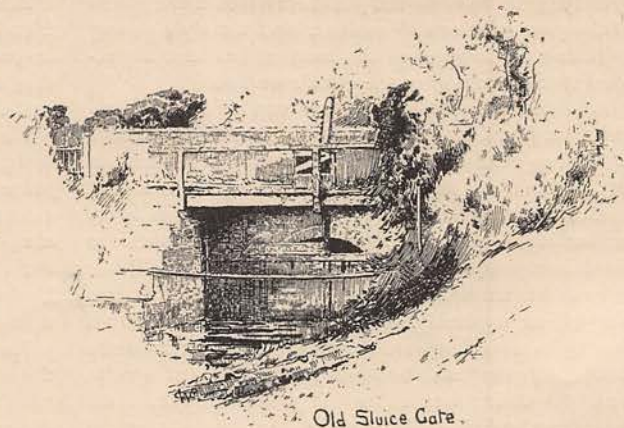
Abraham de la Pryme, a careful chronicler of the seventeenth century, then measured some oaks and firs just disinterred from their peat graves, and found that many trunks of the former must have been from sixty to eighty yards in length; of the latter, from thirty-five to fifty yards. That this is not exaggeration a boat lately discovered at Brigg testifies, this antique and curious vessel—a wooden gem to archaeologists—having been hewn solely out of one monarch of these ancient glades.

Among the interlacing arches, the dim lights, the solemn stillness of these forest depths, we naturally look for traces of those mystic rites which the earliest known dwellers in the island called religion. At once place-names point out to us chapter and line. In that region, where leafy woods must once have been most dense, we come upon a group of words seemingly the last surviving shrine of the old Druidic god: *Belton*, Temple *Belwood* (because afterwards belonging to the Knights Templars), *Belshaw*, *Beltoft*, the *Belgraves*, and *Belgathome Hill*. These villages, hamlets, or dwellings—all within a very circumscribed area—appear to denote plainly a locality consecrated to that great "Bel" whom, as we know, our Celtic forefathers worshipped. But this god, and the groves wherein his weird ceremonies were perpetrated, were doomed alike to fall. In the early centuries of Christianity the world's great schoolmaster came that way. From the Celtic "*Lindun*," or *hill fort by the pool* (Latinised into *Lindum*), to *Danum*, or *Doncaster*, the Romans desired an open, unmolested road, and this was not to be had while unconquered Celts could herd together in the adjoining forest, and thence

issuing at will, harass the foreign intruders. For an insignificant band to oppose these haughty invaders was equivalent to signing its own death-warrant. To pursue them with the sword through their sylvan haunts the skillful Romans knew to be impracticable, so a



MEADOW LAND—AXHOLME.



Old Sluice Gate.

mightier weapon was called into the uneven warfare. The forest was fired, the axe helping in the wholesale destruction, and this hornets' nest of proud Rome's enemies was burnt out. This done, and the miserable isle-dwellers scattered and fled, the conquerors troubled themselves no more with Axholme. Not a name on the island denotes a single Roman settlement, but the scar on its face, long adorned by glorious verdure, was deep indeed, and altered its features, physical and moral, to the present day. The charred trees, pityingly impelled by a strong southwest wind, fell all in huge toppling masses towards the north-east, choked up the lesser river-courses, and those glorious far-reaching glades were changed into mere morass. Boughs, branches, trunks, sank slowly in ages' accumulations of vegetable decay. Swamps, fens, and caves mainly covered the despoiled isle, which now for a long period had only a sparse population of fen-men, or "*gyrvii*," stilt-walkers, by necessity dwelling on the few spots of land that yet reared themselves above the watery waste, living chiefly by fishing and fowling, with the unenviable character of being "rude, uncivil, and curious."

How soon among these rough forbears of our present body politic the Saxons put in an appearance we cannot now tell; but, assuredly, either pushing up from the south, or straggling up from our great eastern water-gates, the Humber and the Wash, considerable numbers must have come and found the island promising enough to induce them to share or seize on such portions of it as the "*gyrvii*" had already proved tenantable, for we find the Saxon stamp more or less on every mile of Axholme. In Epworth we have the *worth*—*manor*, or *close*—of the *aspens*; in Hurst, the *thick wood*; in the "*ey*" of Haxey (the first syllable of which—"Haxa"—signifies, moreover, a Saxon goddess); in *Ham*, the fold, or enclosure, or—sweetest gloss of all—"the home"; and in other names, too many to mention here, we get unquestionable Teuton

derivations. That they prospered fairly many "tons" planted on the driest spots obtainable seem to speak ; and that they forgot not to be rightly grateful we mark by their early acceptance of Christianity. At Croule are yet remains of the Saxon church, dedicated to St. Oswald, the Saxon king, who, for steadfastness to his new creed, was slain by the fierce champion of idolatry, Penda ; and at Melwood were three vast oblong barrows, denoting the burial-place of unnumbered dead, who fell on what was for years the very arena of contention between the two faiths.

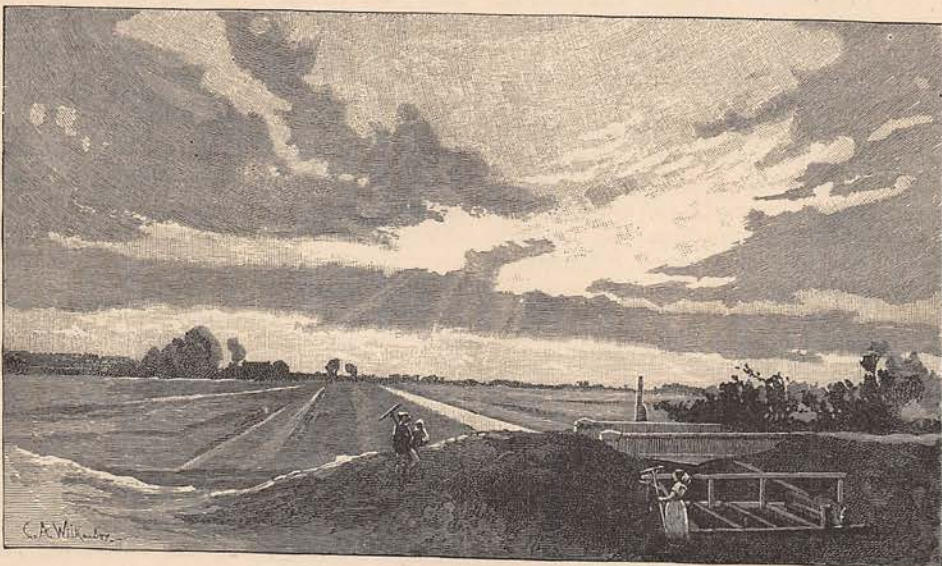
Towards the close of the eighth century our Saxons had, maybe rudely, drained and delved—at any rate, had shaped out their "stocks" and "stows"—and introduced sufficient improvements to make Axholme both habitable and important, for it attracted the attention of certain people who swept our shores just then, on the look-out for anything good to be had for the fighting. In 787, an ancient chronicle tells us, "unknown men came in three vessels to the Lincolnshire coast. A Saxon magistrate went down to the beach, asking who they were. The strangers let him draw nigh, then fell on him and slew him, plundered the neighbourhood, and returned over the sea with great joy." This was the characteristic *début* of the Danes, who for three more centuries paid Lincolnshire frequent visits, now of war, now of peace, the former traceable in Axholme by many a find of murderous weapons, the latter by the titles of numerous villages, bestowed, according to Danish custom, in honour of some hero. Among these we have the "thorpes," or farm-houses, of Hubla, Gunno, Gerulf, Armin, and Ali, now corrupted into Uppertorpe, Gunthorpe, Garthorpe, Armthorpe, and Althorpe ; sundry "tofts," or groves, tacked on to earlier prefixes—Beltoft, Sandtoft, to wit ; Butterwick, "the village of Buthas," a famous Viking ; with "byes," "leams," "nesses," and

"garths," scattered freely among older forms of nomenclature.

It was as friends and allies of the Saxons that the Danes were found in Axholme by William the Conqueror. He, with his natural mixture of willness and high-handedness, first bribed these latest settlers to depart, then gave the Saxons and their water-fenced territory—which by now boasted seven manors—bodily over to a follower of his own, one Geoffrey de Wirce. Possibly the gift may have been somewhat of a white elephant, for rather later on it passed into the hands of Nigel d'Albini, the founder of the renowned Mowbray family, who for three centuries retained pre-eminent rank and much land in the isle.

With the Norman rule came abundant, and in some cases abiding, changes, domestic and legal. These the curious can trace for themselves in customs and documents still extant ; but, strange to say, it effected no change whatever in the name of a single village or town in Axholme. One small hamlet only, "Tetley"—debased from "Tête la Haie," a head or rising ground hedged in—bespeaks its isolated origin.

Under the strong wing of the noble family planted in Axholme, ecclesiasticism flourished and grew strong. By gift or bequest much of the land became the property of religious houses, Selby alone having a large share. Many of the endowments, notably Haxey and Croule, are of very early date ; four chapels or oratories were established, and a splendid Carthusian monastery was erected at Low Melwood. But as time swept by, this aggregated wealth, with its attendant benefits and ills, was ruthlessly dispersed. In the general spoliation of the Church, under Henry VIII., a clean sweep was made of all its possessions in Axholme. The benefices became crown property, and the land heretofore attached to them was disposed of by sale among an immense number of



WESTWOOD FROM THE BANKS OF TRENT.

very small freeholders—a class which to this day forms a special and almost unique feature of the isle, one which was further increased somewhat later on by another important change in Axholme.

In the reign of James I., it chanced that his son, Prince Henry, came a-hunting in Hatfield Chase, just over the island's western boundary. In his train was one Vermuyden, a Dutchman, who, having been born and having lived his youth through at the mouth of the Scheldt, may have almost fancied himself back among native scenes when gazing on the low-lying, river-permeated stretch of land on the Lincolnshire border. At any rate, a Dutch-like spirit of engineering stirred within him. He conceived the idea of draining the whole of the "levels," stopping the vagaries of the streams, which overflowed for miles, and intermingled, at their own, or the different seasons' will, bringing their waters under the control of banks, sluices, and pumps, and carrying away all superfluity thereof westward to the Trent. Permission being gained from Charles I., Vermuyden set to work, on the understanding that one-third of the land reclaimed was to belong to the crown, one-third to himself, and the remaining third to those individuals—henceforth to be called "Participants"—on whose property the redeemed acres abutted.

In 1643 the energetic Dutchman brought over a little colony of workers—compatriot Protestants and persecuted French Walloons—a thrifty, industrious horde, who built themselves a miniature church at Sandtoft, and made ready to work diligently, and thankfully to look upon the island as a harbour of refuge. But such they were not to find it: the islanders had yet a taint of their early character—"rude, uncivil, curious"; their lands might be inundated and their crops destroyed by natural causes, which their own weak attempts at engineering had as yet failed to amend; but they were not going to be benefited in this masterful manner by a pack of strangers. Not a bit of it! So where fault could be found with Vermuyden's scheme, it *was* found. His great work was hindered, hampered, often wantonly destroyed, was only carried on and carried out in the very teeth of the angry islanders, who never rested till, after many grievous cruelties, they razed the foreigners' small church to the ground, leaving not a vestige of the imported worship save a fragment of a Bible and a page or two of a sermon; and in 1686 drove the Walloons clean off their purlieus. Since then their quarrels have been purely internecine, bitter and fierce at first, as to whose lands should be wet and whose should be dry, but losing by degrees their intensity of rancour, till by the beginning of the present century they seem happily to have calmed down entirely on the question of those drains, which all who understand such things must acknowledge to be an enormous benefit to the isle.

The shares of regained property apportioned to Vermuyden and the crown were speedily in the market, and greedily bought up by yet more would-be proprietors, in whose families much of it remains to the present day.

The enclosure and sale of commons in 1800 completed the list of what may be called peasant land-owners, so that a labourer, or one who works exclusively for hire, is now almost unknown on the island. The arrangement of these holdings never fails to strike visitors as singular, for instead of little enclosed patches hedged or fenced about, as they would be in other counties, we find here far-reaching "open fields," as they are called, where, with never a ditch or rail between, the narrow strips of property, all variously cropped, run right across, separated only by a furrow, and joining the road without division of any sort.

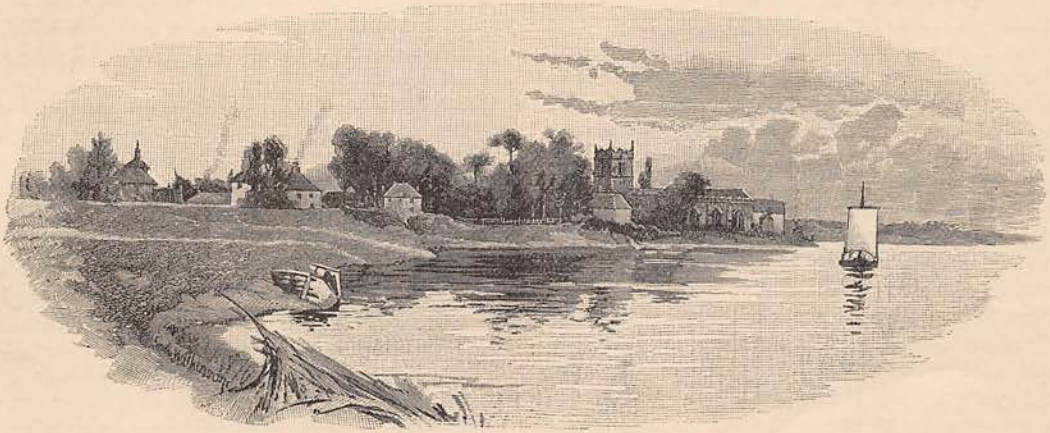
And time was—within living memory, too—when these same roads were non-existent. Before the year 1800 there was no reliable thoroughfare whatever across or along the island; but farm produce being high-priced at that date, land-owners combined and made raised causeways, one "flag" wide, of Yorkshire stone, from one town or village to another; and along these pack-horses carried all goods, corn included, the importance of the service being recognised by the rule that "whosoever should meet a laden horse along the way should step off, into the slush if needs be," and let the animal proceed at ease. Within the last thirty years, however, very excellent roads have been made by the land proprietors, so that the wives and daughters of the isle dwellers no longer need ride pillion, or order out a waggon and stout team if they want to take a cup of tea with a friend a mile off. In fact, drainage, farming, and "warping" have changed the island marvellously in the last century. Where the Idle and the Don, and their companions, once meandered is now only discernible by the extra fertility, and in parts slight depression of their former courses. The "warp," or deposit of the Trent, whose waters are periodically permitted, by a system of sluices, to overflow the land, produces spontaneous crops of white clover and a generally superb fertility; and Axholme, with its wide levels, its pretty villages and hamlets, its singular irrigation, its grassy roadsides, where herds of cows graze peacefully all day, to be driven or tugged home at even-fall, is a spot where any lover of true rusticity might satisfy his taste to the full.

But, not to weary our reader with more details, we will ask him to take some three or four days, when holiday is peremptory, and a longer trip not obtainable, and journey thitherward for himself. In spring sweet violets and primroses are thick in the hedge-rows; later, bright yellow irises, cuckoo-flowers, and blossoming rushes abound. Wild-fowl have not altogether vanished. At Haxey quaint customs still obtain in the two feasts of Haxey-midsummer and Haxey-hood. In the church are pillars of Stephen's time; and there, upon an ancient cross, are yet visible the arms of the Mowbrays. Epworth abounds with associations of the Wesley family. At Idle-stop (suggestive name) one hears of the "parting cross," now unhappily destroyed, put up in memory of Thomas Mowbray, last earl, who, going into exile, bade farewell thereabouts to the wife he was never

to see again. At Althorpe a goodly church stands most picturesquely upon Trent's bank, its graveyard reaching close out to the water; within, the most beautiful sedilia; without, a series of finely-carved corbels of kings and ecclesiastics, with relics of a yet earlier building in bits of Norman tombstones embedded in the walls. At Amcoats, so thick was the depth of peat some hundred and odd years ago, that the skeleton of a woman was dug thereout upright, clad in garments of the third Edward's time, her life probably lost in the treacherous morass, which kept its fatal secret well. Scattered about with almost comical irregularity are beds of gypsum, of which floors of stone-like solidity are formed. At the church of Croule are a profoundly interesting Saxon doorway, with strange figures carved thereon; a south door of Henry I.'s time, with capitals similar to those of Holy Trinity, Caen; a noticeable string course alternately

plain and carved, and a window in the ashlar tower which shows well the transition from Saxon to Norman.

In fact, philologist, antiquarian, whom you will, all may find amusement after their sort in this aforesaid land of swamps, while yet another taste may go there and be gratified. For when the evening sun goes down, transforming the long drains, all travelling Trentwards straight as a dart, into bars of living gold, rich emerald-tinted lands luxuriously lying in between, a soft tender haze overhanging all, then let any painter watch the scene, and he will assuredly tell you in words, if not on canvas (for those tints are none of the easiest), that a peculiar beauty is not lacking among its other possessions, and that fashion or fancy has often exalted far unlovelier spots on earth than this little-known and seldom-visited region, the "Isle of Axholme."



ALTHORPE.

## AN ENGLISHMAN ON AMERICANISMS.



GLOSSARY is sometimes needed to explain the peculiar phrases, idioms, and colloquialisms in which our American cousins indulge. They display a marvellous fertility of invention in this respect. Their political nomenclature is constantly receiving additions

which English readers are often at a loss to understand. It is impossible to take up an American newspaper without reading of certain persons who are designated by such terms as scallawags, kickers, bolters, mud-slingers, cranks, dudes, bulldozers, dead-heads, loafers, roustabouts, mugwumps, &c. The origin of some of these epithets is purely conjectural, but they have come to possess a greater or less degree

of currency, and some of them are to be found in recent issues of popular dictionaries. Whether the purity of the language is thereby maintained, is open to doubt; but the Americans appear to delight in coining expressive and forcible phrases and epithets, especially for political purposes. Thus, the word "bolter" was freely used a year or two ago in connection with a movement of a section of the Republican party, who, being dissatisfied with the nomination of Mr. Blaine for President, supported the Democratic candidate, Mr. Cleveland. This was stigmatised as "bolting" from the party, just as a horse will sometimes rush away before the signal is given to commence a race. A "mud-slinger" is a man who searches over and rakes through the record of a politician, in order to discover something to his prejudice, which may be thrown at him, and yet without risking an action for libel. It