BURNHAM BEECHES.

By ANNA J. BUCKLAND.

"There at the foot of yonder nodding beech,
That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,
His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
And pore upon the brook that babbles by."
—*Gray.*

THE beech is one of the largest and handsomest of the woodland trees, and lives also to a great age; there is one in the forest of Windsor which is said to have been a tree of note in the early Saxon times, before Harold lost his life and crown at the battle of Hastings. Perhaps no trees form of themselves alone a more beautiful grove or wood than the beeches. In the early spring the tender green of the beech wood is the most exquisite colour in nature, and few trees present in autumn a greater number of rich tints, varying from pale gold to brilliant scarlets, crimsons, and deep full browns. The finest group of beeches in England are those at Burnham, of which the following description is given in Knight's "Old England":—

"Within five-and-twenty miles of St. Paul's, the Great Western Railway will place us in an hour (having an additional walk of two miles) in the heart of one of the most secluded districts in England. We know nothing of forest scenery to equal Burnham Beeches. There are no spots approaching to it in wild grandeur to be found in Windsor Forest; Sherwood, we have been told, has trees as ancient, but few so entirely untouched in modern times. When at the village of Burnham, which is about a mile and a half from the railway-station at Maidenhead, the beeches may be reached by several roads, each very beautiful in its seclusion. We ascend a hill, and find a sort of table-land forming a rude common, with a few scattered houses. Gradually the common grows less open; we see large masses of wood in clumps, and now and then a gigantic tree close by the road. The trunks of these scattered trees are of amazing size; they are for the most part pollards, but, not having been lopped for very many years, they have thrown out mighty arms, which give us a notion of some deformed son of Anak, noble as well as fearful in his grotesque proportions. As we advance, the wood thickens; and as the road leads us into a deep dell, we are at length completely embosomed in a leafy wilderness. This dell is a most romantic spot; it extends for some quarter of a mile between overhanging banks covered with the graceful forms of the ash and the birch, while the contorted beeches show their fantastic roots and unwieldly trunks upon the edge of the glen in singular contrast. If we walk up this valley we may emerge into the plain of beeches from which the place derives its name. It is not easy to make scenes such as these interesting in description. The great charm of this spot may be readily conceived when it is known that its characteristic is an entire absence of human care. The property has been carefully preserved in its ancient state, and the axe of the woodman for many a day has not been heard within its precincts; the sheep wander through the tender grass as if they were the rightful lords of the domain. We asked a solitary old man who was sitting on a stump whether there was any account as to who planted this ancient wood. 'Planted!' he replied, 'it was never planted: those trees are as old as the world!' However sceptical we might be as to the poor man's chronology, we were sure that history or tradition could tell little about their planting."

The beeches of Burnham, long as they have lived, have seen but little of the stir and change which have for centuries been going on around them. Shut out from the busy world of progress and civilisation, they remain untouched in their secluded, calm existence. Generations of men have come and gone, rejoiced and suffered, great deeds have been performed, revolutions have taken place in thought, religion, and government, but the Burnham Beeches have taken no part in any of those things which have been done under the sun, since that springtime, ages ago, when they first shot up above the dark earth. There is only one name of note with which they stand associated, and that is the poet Gray. After the death of his father, Gray resided with his mother and two aunts at Stoke Pogis, and here he first turned his attention to English poetry, and wrote his best poems. Burnham Beeches was one of his favourite resorts, and he describes the forest in a lively letter to his friend Horace Walpole. "Both vale and hill are covered with most venerable beeches. At the foot of one of these squats me I (*il penseroso*), and there grow to the trunk for a whole morning." In the solitude and silence of this retreat, Gray no doubt composed, if he did not actually write, many of his poems; the "Ode to Spring" refers more especially to the scenery of the forest, and owes its suggestion to the Burnham Beeches.

'Lo! where the rosy-bosomed Hours,
Fair Venus' train, appear,
Disclose the long-expecting flowers,
And wake the purple year!
The Attic warbler pours her throat,
Responsive to the cuckoo's note,
The untaught harmony of spring:
While whisp'ring pleasure as they fly,
Cool zephyrs through the clear blue sky
Their gathered fragrance fling.

"Where'er the oak's thick branches stretch,
A broader, browner shade;
Where'er the rude and moss-grown beech
O'er-canopies the glade,
Beside some water's rushy brink
With me the Muse shall sit, and think
(At ease reclined in rustic state)
How vain the ardour of the Crowd,
How low, how little are the Proud,
How indigent the Great!

"Still is the toiling hand of Care;
The panting herds repose;
Yet, hark, how through the peopled air
The busy murmur flows!
The insect youth are on the wing,
Eager to taste the honied spring,
And float amid the liquid noon;
Some lightly o'er the current skim,
Some show their gaily gilded trim,
Quick-glancing to the sun.

"To Contemplation's sober eye
Such is the race of Man;
And they that creep, and they that fly,
Shall end where they began.
Alike the busy and the gay,
But flutter through life's little day,
In Fortune's varying colours drest:
Brushed by the hand of rough Mischance,
Or chilled by Age, their airy dance
They leave, in dust to rest."

The clear sight which could perceive the shortness and nothingness of a life of frivolous pleasure, and the absence, at the same time, of that faith which, in uniting the soul to Christ, makes human life a solemn victory of love and duty, give to Gray's poetry an element of melancholy hopelessness. Even the "distant prospect of Eton College," with its crowd of boys in all the "lively cheer of vigour born," soon to do their work in the world and fight life's battles, awakens in this poet only the dreariest reflections over the sinful passions and miserable sufferings which he foresees as their future lot.

"Alas! regardless of their doom,
The little victims play!
No sense have they of ills to come,
Nor care beyond to-day;
Yet see, how all around 'em wait
The ministers of human fate,
And black Misfortune's baleful train!
Ah, show them where in ambush stand,
To seize their prey, the murd'rous band!
Ah, tell them they are men!

"These shall the fiery Passions tear,
The vultures of the mind,
Disdainful Anger, pallid Fear,
And Shame that skulks behind;
Or pining Love shall waste their youth,
Or Jealousy with rankling tooth
That inly gnaws the secret heart;
And Envy wan, and faded Care,
Grim-visaged comfortless Despair,
And Sorrow's piercing dart.

"Ambition this shall tempt to rise,
Then whirl the wretch from high,
To bitter scorn a Sacrifice,
And grinning Infamy.
The stings of Falsehood those shall try
And hard Unkindness' altered eye,
That mocks the tear it forced to flow,
And keen Remorse with blood defiled,
And moody Madness laughing wild
Amid severest woe.

"Lo! in the vale of years beneath
A grisly troop are seen,
The painful family of Death,
More hideous than their queen.
This racks the joints, this fires the veins,
That every labouring sinew strains,
Those in the deeper vitals rage;
Lo! Poverty, to fill the band,
That numbs the soul with icy hand,
And slow consuming Age.

"To each his sufferings: all are men—
Condemned alike to groan;
The tender for another's pain,
Th' unfeeling for his own.
Yet, ah! why should they know their fate,
Since sorrow never comes too late,
And happiness too swiftly flies.
Thought would destroy their paradise,
No more;—where ignorance is bliss
'Tis folly to be wise."

Whatever may have been said by the enemies of religion against its sadder views of life, few even of a fanatical asceticism could have drawn a darker and more hideous picture of the pathway lying before these vigorous, light-hearted boys. There is no glimpse in it of a Father's love, no sound of the Saviour's voice, calling the young to

Him, and announcing that "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." No hint of the joyfulness of trust, the victory of love's endurance, the honest work to be manfully and cheerfully done in the world for the good of others, the upholding of justice and right, and the alleviation of suffering. It is the view of life taken by a man, who has lived with those that look to it only for pleasure, fame, or ease, and missing these, or the perpetual enjoyment of them, can see nothing but the disappointments and misery which are the results of a selfish grasping of the world for their own ends. To all who would use the world for themselves alone, it must ever present a dark picture of frustrated purposes and unattainable desires; but through the Redemption of Christ, it becomes to all who live in Him the training field for immortal glory, the ground for the victorious conflict with temptation, the sphere for love and duty to find reality in exercise. In Gray's best known poem, the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," we see much of the same mournful realisation of the nothingness of

earthly desires, even when obtained, and the absence of any other than a negative bliss in the simplicity of a village life. The elegy was written in the churchyard of Stoke Pogis, and, in the concluding lines, where he imagines himself to have died, and that his own epitaph has become the subject of inquiry to a "kindred spirit," he refers to his favourite haunt among the Burnham Beeches, and to the melancholy tone of his reflections at the foot of these magnificent trees.

"For thee who, mindful of th' unhonoured Dead,
  Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;
If chance, by lonely Contemplation led,
  Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate,—
Haply some hoary-headed swain may say,
  'Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn
Brushing with hasty steps the dews away,
  To meet the sun upon the upland lawn;
'There at the foot of yonder nodding beech,
  That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,
His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
  And pore upon the brook that babbles by.
'Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,
  Mutt'ring his wayward fancies would he rove;
Now drooping, woeful-wan, like one forlorn,
  Or crazed with care, or crossed in hopeless love.
'One morn I missed him on the 'customed hill
  Along the heath, and near his fav'rite tree;
Another came; nor yet beside the rill,
  Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he;
'The next, with dirges dire in sad array,
  Slow thro' the churchyard path we saw him borne.
Approach and read (for thou can'st read) the lay,
  Graved on the stone beneath yon aged thorn.'"

Gray did not die at Stoke Pogis; the latter years of his life were spent at Cambridge, where he had been made Professor of Modern Languages and History. Here he gave himself up to preparing for the duties of his position, but ill-health prevented him from commencing his lectures, and in 1771 he died from an attack of the gout, from which he had long been a sufferer. His friend Mr. Temple said of him—"The world and mankind were shown to him without a mask, and he was taught to consider everything as trifling and unworthy the attention of a wise man except the pursuit of knowledge and the practice of virtue in that state wherein God has placed us." His writings reflect the spirit of his age, which was keen to detect the folly of frivolity, and to lay bare its vanity and emptiness, but which was wanting in that faith and love that alone can waken men to earnestness and noble deeds.

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

EDUCATIONAL.

JANETTE.—There are new and cheap editions of Mr. Francis George Heath's books entitled "Where to Find Ferns," and "Burnham Beeches." You will be sure to like them, for they have been found so useful already to many, and have become standard works on the subjects of which they treat.

B. M.—Hildesheimer and Faulkner's Christmas cards are in every way excellent this year, and are certainly the best we have seen. Should you need a little Christmas gift for your younger sisters and brothers, perhaps you would care to buy a little book entitled "The Children's Christmas," with charming music unusually suited to infants, and written by Mr. Myles Foster.

ALWAYS DISSATISFIED, and KATTIE S.—Your verses are certainly above the average standard of amateur writing, but not quite up to the mark for publication in general magazines.

DWARF.—We recommend you to study the Eton Latin Grammar; and to acquire a good method of learning any language you should procure a few lessons from a master.

DOMESTIC SERVANT.—There is a College for Working Women at 7, Fitzroy-street, Fitzroy-square, W., open every evening except Saturdays. Prospectus given free. Membership fee, one shilling the term. Also the Brompton Evening College for Women, 1, Queen-street, Brompton. Fee, one shilling a term; classes from 2s. to 4s. per term.

LEONIE.—You could procure a second-hand book of elementary arithmetic for a trifle. We do not mean to spoil their sale by teaching the ordinary rules. You write fairly well.

YORKSHIRE GIRL.—Write your real age on the paper when you have finished your essay, and your class will be decided for you. It is quite impossible for us to tell you what magazine would receive, still less pay you for, your verses. Those you send as a specimen could not be styled "poetry," and would have no marketable value. They are merely "prose" in rhyme, and contain no new and original ideas.

A DISTRESSED GIRL.—Why do you not study medicine, or become a medical practitioner for India? We see no difficulty, however, in your going into the Post or Telegraph Office.

LUCY, MIDSHIPMITE, and Others.—We should advise you to write to the Secretary of the Marine Society, 54½, Bishopsgate-street Within, E.C. No recommendations are required. The training ship of the society is the *Warspite*, off Charlton Pier, Woolwich, where boys are trained both for the Royal and the Mercantile Navy.

ADA.—"Pitman's System" is the best for learning to write shorthand. We have answered this question so often, that we waste our space in doing so again. You would improve your handwriting by crossing the "t's."

STELLA.—The reason why the great majority of stars are termed "fixed stars"—although, as you say, they seem ever moving, while the planets are apparently still—is this: Their enormous distance from the earth is such that they produce no perceptible change of relative positions to an observer on the surface of the earth; and thus, for any practical purpose, they are said to be "fixed." Their apparent position is unaltered by the parallactic change of view caused by the motion of our earth in her orbit, although she changes her place by about 180 millions of miles in the course of the year. The nearest of all the "fixed stars" to us, Centauri, is at a distance of about 93 millions of miles, which is calculated to be some 200,000 times further off from us than our sun. The moon is said to be "gibbous" when it is between half and full. Mars, Mercury, and Venus present the same appearance.

A COUNTRY LASSIE.—Write for the printed circulars respecting the examinations to the Secretary of the Civil Service Commissioners, Cannon-row, London, E.C.

MISERABLE MISSY.—If your education be so limited, and you cannot undertake a situation in a shop, nor work as a dressmaker or milliner, and can neither teach nor earn money by accomplishments, we do not know how you are to increase your means. Perhaps you might obtain instruction in some "Kindergarten" establishment, and to that end might make inquiries at the Notting Hill High

OLD ENGLISH TREES AND WHAT THEY HAVE SEEN.

By ANNA J. BUCKLAND.

THE GLASTONBURY THORN.

"And ever 'gainst that blessed night,
Those snowy blossoms, pure and white,
Puts forth St. Joseph's holy thorn,
To mark the day our Lord was born.
By all who list, this may be seen,
In that far valley, fair and green
Of Avalon, where Arthur lies,
The stainless knight who never dies."

Caerlyon.

No other natural objects can gather around them so many solemn and tender thoughts as trees, for there are none which have been so closely associated with the history of nations, or with the lives of those individuals whom we hold in reverence, and for whose sake we cherish every trifle which has any connection with their history. There are some trees, the very name of which calls up the remembrance of persons and events of the deepest and most enduring interest. Such are the oak tree of Mamre, the olive trees of Gethsemane, the elm tree at Worms, the oak upon the battle-field of Lutzen, and many others. But leaving those associated with events which have occurred in other lands, we may find in our own country a number of trees which have been connected with some of the most important events in its history, or with some of the best and greatest of England's heroes and heroines. It would be very interesting to visit these, and to conjure up the bygone scenes of which the old trees have been the witnesses, or if we could only make them tell their own stories, what a valuable record we might add to history and biography. But perhaps we are obliged to stay at home and be satisfied with what others have to tell us of the old trees of England, and the parts they have played in the past.

GLASTONBURY ABBEY.

The Glastonbury thorn must be among the first to be introduced, because the story it has to tell relates to a very early period in the history of our country. It is necessary to say, however, that too much credit must not be given to its stories as actual facts; they belong rather to the world of poetry and legend than to history; yet a legend, though false as a fact, may be true in the witness it bears to the beauty of self-sacrifice, the joy of victory over evil, to the nobleness of steadfast work done for the good of others, to the power of truth and right, and the sweetness of gentleness and purity. These are things which are true in every age, and they need again and again to rise to life and teach their lessons to the world. To this class of legends belong those of King Arthur and his knights, and the old poets who just told them felt something of this when they used to conclude the stories of Arthur by saying that their hero, the ideal of noble manhood, could not die, but only passed away, and came back again whenever the world needed to be reminded of a higher life than that which is spent in material enjoyment and selfish cares. Thus we find our most earnest and thoughtful poets have turned in different ages to the legends of King Arthur when they desired to set before the world the high ideal of nobleness of character and life. Spenser chose Arthur when he wished to represent a hero in whom every virtue found its place, in its due balance and measure, and whose life was devoted to the glory of God. Milton, whilst seeking his work—"by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out His seraphim, with the hallowed fire of His altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom He pleases"—thought first of making Arthur the subject of a great spiritual poem! And in our own day, Arthur has risen to life again to teach the same old lessons to the world in Tennyson's Idylls, calling on men

"To reverence their conscience as their king,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To go abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity."

For the foundation of the Arthurian legends it is not necessary here to search; they all point to a time, soon after Christianity was first introduced into Britain, and while as yet a large portion of the country was still under the power of heathen chiefs. The first idea of a nobler character, more pure and self-devoted than ordinary humanity, was no doubt derived from the teaching of the Gospels, and from the impression produced when first the sublimer character and life of our highest and best example, the Lord Jesus Christ, was made known to the people in this island. All the legends also of Arthur, both of earlier and later date, have much in them that is intentionally allegorical, so that the facts of his history are still matters of question.

The legend of the Glastonbury thorn dates from a period shortly preceding the coming of Arthur. The story runs thus. Joseph of Aramathea, being in constant danger of his life from the enmity of the Jewish priests, on account of his testimony to the resurrection of Christ, was advised by St. Philip to take refuge in the island of Britain, then one of the most distant parts of the Roman empire, and where the Gospel might be more freely preached. Joseph of Arimathea therefore set sail for Britain, accompanied by some of his friends, who had become Christians; they landed on what was then the Island of Avalon, off the coast of Somersetshire. This is now the valley formed by the Avalonian hills, but it is said that at that time the sea ran up into the land, and at high tides surrounded the elevated portion. Remains of an embankment still exist, which in the ancient map is called the sea wall. On ascending the hill Joseph of Arimathea, it is said, stuck his staff into the ground, as a sign of his having claimed the country for the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The staff, which was a thorn stock, took root, and ever afterwards when Christmastide drew nigh, and the birth of the Saviour was commemorated, the Glastonbury thorn put forth blossoms. These first preachers of the Gospel in Britain were favourably received by the king or chief of that part of the country. They were allowed to teach the people, and to build on the island of Avalon a little chapel for the worship of God. This was said to be the first Christian place of worship erected in Britain. From the island of Avalon Joseph and his companions crossed frequently to the surrounding country, and the legend tells us that many of the Britons from the hills of Mune-depe, or Mendip, were converted to the Christian faith. On the death of Joseph, he was buried in the little chapel he had built, and on this spot was afterwards erected the Abbey of Glastonbury, where there was a chapel dedicated to St. Joseph, and a splendid tomb raised over his grave.

From this legend we can only receive as thoroughly reliable the facts that a thorn, brought from some southern climate at a very remote period, was planted on one of the Avalonian hills called Wirral Hill, close to Glastonbury, and that this kind of thorn has the peculiarity of blossoming in the winter. The stump of the original old tree was visible as late as 1750, it having been cut down in

the reign of Charles I.; but a cutting taken from it was planted in 1660, near St. John's Church, where it still stands and continues to blossom, if the weather be not very severe, about the time of Christmas. Another fact seems probable, and that is that Christianity was introduced at a very early period into the secluded island of Avalon. In all the old legends Avalon is referred to as a land of rest and joy; its culture at that time seemed almost the operation of magic to the barbarous Britons, and so must also have appeared to these wild savages, those fruits of the Spirit which the Gospel called forth on its inhabitants;—love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.

Shut out from the world, a small community of Christians may have long made this sequestered valley, with its great natural beauty and rich fertility, as a kind of Eden in the savage waste of Western Briton, and vague stories about its peace and beauty would reach the bards, and become introduced into their songs. The superstition which was afterwards built upon the truth, so as to hide and crush it, had not then been accumulated, and the doctrines by which these first believers in Christianity lived would be those of the Gospel in its first freshness and purity. Whoever may have planted the southern thorn on the Avolonian Hill, its association with the introduction of a religion so full of blessed fruits and glorious hopes would cause it to be regarded with a tender, though not superstitious, reverence, as coming from that land in which Christ the Saviour lived and died.

The legend of Arthur relates that after the departure of the Romans from Britain, when the laws which they introduced and upheld no longer were maintained in the country, a fearful time of savage lawlessness followed; hordes of the northern barbarians overran the country, and heathenism again was everywhere triumphant. All order and civilisation were broken up, the chiefs "fought like wild beasts among themselves, so that the realm had gone to wrack." Then Arthur appeared, coming no one knew from whence, and, gathering around him, by the force of his great and noble nature, all the well-disposed of his people, he, in twelve great battles, defeated the heathen chiefs, united the kingdom under one ruler, made the religion of Christ the foundation of his government, and strove with the earnestness of a single aim to lead those around him to a better and nobler life. At the revival of the Arthurian legends in the twelfth century, the chivalric ideal of the period was expressed in the stories of Arthur's knights and their adventures. The legend of the Sangrail was also added, as suggesting the higher sacrifice of a nobler love in the Cross of Jesus Christ when He laid down his life for His enemies.

All the legends of King Arthur unite in describing the pathetic disappointment of his high designs and earnest efforts to regenerate his realm at last. He fails to realise his pure and lofty ideal of life through the shortcomings and sinfulness of human nature; and they teach most strikingly the great ever-living truth that man's moral nature is only reached and governed through his spiritual nature, and not through his imagination. The love of beauty and admiration for the ideal of goodness is not strong enough as a principle through which to resist the impulses and temptations to sin; it may raise the character and life for a while, but when the struggle comes religion only has by God's grace the courage and the strength to "fight the good fight of faith." The followers of Arthur are represented as wearying of the attempt to live up to his ideal, however much they admired it at first; some fall away, and others keep up the appearance only before his eyes. At last the end comes. Deceived by his queen and most trusted friend, deserted by his knights, and crushed by the discovery that what he believed to be sound and fair around him was but a hollow mockery of the goodness he had striven to realise in his knights, he goes forth to his last battle, fighting against his own people, who have arisen against him under his nephew, Modred. The "last, dim, weird battle of the West" was fought on the shores of Cornwall, on the day of longest darkness in the year, and there fell one by one King Arthur's knights, and the fair dream of his life was ended. Here he himself received his mortal wound, and was taken from thence by water round the coast to the Island of Avalon.

THE GLASTONBURY THORN.

As Arthur passes from the shore, Tennyson makes him utter, in his farewell to his last remaining knight, noble words, such as every true man might feel on seeing the breaking-up of institutions in which he had trusted, or the failure of his own schemes to benefit mankind. Arthur's work is over, and he has not realised the ideal which he was striving after; but he merges himself and his individual endeavour in the general good, holding fast to the faith that God is ruling the world with a wisdom beyond that of man, and his bringing His purposes to pass out of the darkness and confusion.

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils, Himself, in many ways
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself. What comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within Himself make pure. But thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day;
For what are men better than sheep or goats,

That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands in prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friends?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
To the island valley of Avilion,
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep meadow'd, happy, fair, with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows, crown'd with summer sea."

In the church said to be founded by Joseph of Arimathea, Arthur was buried, within sight of the thorn tree on Wirral Hill. It had always been said that Arthur would pass away to the island of Avalon, and in the olden times, when it was known to be simply a community of Christians, happy in the blessings which the Gospel brings, it may have been the often-expressed wish of Arthur to end his days in the peaceful seclusion of this fruitful valley, or to be interred in this sacred spot; and the more ancient songs of the British bards recorded the fact of his burial in the church on the island of Avalon; but after the death of Arthur the Saxons came over to England in stronger force, the British chiefs were divided against themselves, and Britain was conquered by the Teutonic tribes, while the ancient Celtic inhabitants took refuge among the mountains of Wales, or in the distant wilds of Cornwall, and many crossed the seas and settled on the coast of France, in what was afterwards called Brittany. The marshes around the Island of Avalon were drained, the sea had receded from the land, so that the Avalonian hills no longer formed an island, a monastery was built there, and soon a town sprang up around it. The Saxons called it Gloston, from "glos" (water) and "ton" (a dwelling). The monastery became celebrated, and in the days of the Saxon kings the famous St. Dunstan was its abbot. Later the town became a borough and took the name of Glastonbury. Only the thorn tree remained the same, and still put forth its blossoms at Christmas-tide, in remembrance of the flowering time in its southern native land. It was now regarded with veneration as a sacred tree; for people had begun to pay more regard to the outside things associated with religion than to religion itself, and were more anxious to see with their bodily eyes any wonder regarded as miraculous than to fix the eye of faith on Jesus Christ, their Saviour. The name of Avalon had now passed away, and no one remembered that this was what the valley had formerly been called. When the Saxon gleemen and Norman minstrels used to sing the legends of King Arthur, they used to conclude their songs by telling how Arthur, after the last fatal battle on the Cornish coast, had been carried by magic to the fairy island of Avalon, for they thought there never had been such a place on earth, and they sang that Arthur still lived in fairyland, and would come back again to England some day, when the world had grown purer and wiser, and he could do his work in it.

This was how the legends of Arthur ended, until the time of Henry II., and then, as the king was going to Ireland, he passed through Wales, and the Welsh bards came before him to sing the stories of their race, when Great Britain belonged to them. They sang of Arthur and his death, and in their songs the place of his burial was so exactly described—between two pyramids, near the altar, in an abbey church—that Henry recognised it at once as Glastonbury. On his return home he told the Abbot of Glastonbury what he had heard, and a search was made for the tomb. One of our old chroniclers, Giraldus Cambrensis, describes himself as an eye-witness of the discovery of Arthur's grave. "Seven feet below the surface a huge, broad stone was found, with a small plate of lead in the form of a cross upon it, and bearing, in very rude letters and barbarous style, the inscription in Latin, 'Hic jacet sepultus Inclytus Rex Arturias in Insula Avalonia'—'Here in the island of Avalon lies buried the glorious King Arthur.' Nine feet deeper was found, in the hollowed trunk of a tree, the remains of Arthur himself, and by his side lay those of his queen Guinevere. The bones of the king were of extraordinary size; the skull was covered with wounds; ten distinct fractures were counted, one of great size, apparently the effect of the fatal blow. The queen's body was strangely perfect; the hair was neatly plaited, and of the colour of burnished gold, but when touched it fell suddenly to dust."

Edward I. had so great a desire to see the body of the British hero that he came to Glastonbury with his queen Eleanor, and had the tomb of Arthur opened again. The skulls of the king and queen were set up in the treasury of the monastery, and Edward caused a splendid monument to be erected over Arthur's grave. This was destroyed at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries in the reign of Henry VIII. One of the sculptured lions, however, which were placed at each angle of the tomb was discovered in 1825 in the crypt of St. Joseph's chapel, and is still preserved. This is the only tangible relic connected with that hero whose character and exploits have fired the love of moral beauty in the heart of almost every English poet, from the days of the Romance singers to the time of our own Poet Laureate, and whose name has been the theme of song beyond that of any other in the world. The Glastonbury thorn still blossoms,

"'Gainst that season comes,
At which our Saviour's birth is celebrated,"

and reminds us of the time when the light of Christ's Gospel was first brought to this island, and of how its rich blessings have spread over the land, so that not in one small, secluded valley only, but throughout the length and breadth of the country, we now enjoy a state of happiness, peace, and prosperity far beyond all that the poets sang of the wonderful Isle of Avalon.

HOME IMPROVEMENT SOCIETIES.

By Dora Hope.

"This way to the exhibition," shouted a boy just in my ear. "Admission on'y sixpence, and child'en 'alf price."

He was an unauthorised showman, and had no business to be disturbing the neighbourhood by his cries; but being exceedingly anxious that there should be a large gathering to see him receive a prize, he had taken upon himself to announce it to the world in this way. He was successful, too, for we should have passed by the place without noticing it, had not our attention been thus called to the doorway wreathed with flags.

"Oh, auntie, do let us go in," begged a little nephew who accompanied me. "Look at the flags; and I can go half price, you know."

It was not an expensive entertainment, and I reflected that he deserved a reward for having, twice over during our walk, gone out of his way to avoid pools of mud, a principle I had long been trying to instil into his mind; so we went in, preceded by the irrepressible boy, who was so elated by victory that he was compelled to use up a little of his superfluous energy by turning a Catherine wheel along the path in front of us, a performance which so filled little Jack with admiration and envy that he produced from the depths of his pocket his best top, which he offered to the youth as a bribe, if he would only teach him how to do it. He reluctantly desisted when I pointed out that if he got his clothes muddy he would have to go ignominiously home again without seeing the exhibition. But little Jack has a secret affinity for street Arabs, and such an accomplished one as this was not to be slighted, so he hovered near us for the rest of the afternoon, and I occasionally overheard scraps of conversation, such as:

"I say, my name's Jack; what's yours?"

"My name's Joe; leastways it ain't; but there's such lots of Bills down our way, so they calls me Joe."

"I have a rocking-horse at home; have you got one?"

"Don't know what that is, but I've got a 'ganier.'"

"What's a 'ganier?'"

"Why, one of them red flowers what grows in pots in the winder; but that's for the next show, that is. We always has a show in the summer for flowers and sech things; and that there set o' furniture's mine, you know. What! not seed it? Here, I'll show it to yer; this way." And he began to elbow his way through the throng who crowded the entrance of the Board school, the use of which had been granted for the show. With such a determined leader we soon reached the part of the room devoted to models, where the boy pointed exultantly to a tiny suite of furniture cleverly carved from old corks.

"Look! William Dubbin! that's me," he explained, pointing out the card marked "First Prize," which was placed in front of the model.

Having duly admired his handiwork, and had all its beauties pointed out, Jack and I proceeded to make a tour of the room, and inspect the very miscellaneous collection of objects displayed there. Behind the first table we stopped at was a placard, inscribed "Class six. Adults. Carpentering for home use." The exhibitors had displayed their skill in carpentering in a great variety of ways. The first prize had been awarded for a three-legged table, made by exhibitor; the second for a pair of engravings cut from some illustrated paper, neatly framed in deal, stained, and varnished. There were a large number of other exhibits, more or less neatly made; a tea-caddy; a pair of footstools; a box-seat, made of a packing case, padded and covered with chintz, and the lid opening with hinges; some fretwork brackets, and many other things.

Adjoining these were the exhibits of the same description, made by children under fifteen. These included a hanging bookcase; plain deal footstools; salt and knife boxes; window boxes for flowers; solid wooden brackets, and money boxes; and one ambitious youth had made a very substantial substitute for a perambulator, with a carefully planed wooden box, mounted on four wheels (bought at a second-hand dealer's), and drawn by means of a long wooden handle.

Then came tables for the display of useful needlework. One prize had been offered for the most neatly-darned stocking; another for button-holes; for a boy's shirt, both the cut and sewing to be taken into account; for knitted stockings, socks, and comforters, with still another prize for any kind of work the exhibitor might choose to send in.

Adjoining this were the competitions for the cookery prizes. These had been offered

WYCLIFFE'S OAK.—GENERAL VIEW.

OLD ENGLISH TREES AND WHAT THEY HAVE SEEN.

By ANNA J. BUCKLAND.

WYCLIFFE'S OAK.

"But riche he was of holy thought and werk
He was also a lerned man, a clerk,
That Christés gospel trewly woldé preche.
His parichens devoutly wolde he teche,
He waited after no pompe ne reverence,
Ne makéd him no spicéd conscience,
But Christés lore, and his Apostles twelve
He taught,—but first he folwed it himselve."
—*Chaucer.*

At Addlestone, near Chertsey, in Surrey, there stands a very ancient oak, which was once considered to mark the boundary of Windsor Forest towards the east, and about which some interesting traditions hang. In former times an open common stretched around it, although it is now enclosed within a railing, and thus connected, for its better preservation, with the grounds of Captain de Visme. This enclosure has been rendered necessary in consequence of its being the practice of the village maidens to peel off its bark, from a superstitious idea of its virtue as a charm. It has the name of Crouch Oak, given to it possibly from the form of its growth, which is somewhat remarkable. At the height of about nine feet from the ground an enormous branch, in itself as large as a tree, extends forward, almost horizontally, to a distance of forty-eight feet (it is said to have once reached the limit of nearly sixty feet). An immense roofing of boughs and foliage is thus formed, spreading shade and protection over a surface of some hundreds of square feet. In this green temple, formed without hands, Wycliffe is said to have preached. Whether the tradition which asserts this fact is reliable or not it is difficult to say, but there is no doubt that the peculiar growth of the tree must have often suggested its use as a place of meeting for an assembly of persons; and during the times when the free preaching of the Gospel was prohibited in the cathedrals and churches of the land, the great truths of God's love to sinners and of the only way of salvation through Jesus Christ, His Son, may have been often proclaimed to eager listeners beneath this leafy roof. Without attaching undue weight to a tradition not verified by historical proof, it is worth while, nevertheless, to look back upon those days when the oak at Addlestone was very likely to have been made use of for preaching God's truth to the people. At that time the mendicant friars swarmed over England, selling to the poor folks in country villages and rural districts pardons for any sins they wished to commit. Chaucer, writing at the very time when Wycliffe preached, describes these men among the group of his "Canterbury Pilgrims," and as this poet draws all his characters from the English life of his own day, and is careful to make each of them an honest picture of his class, there is no doubt but that his "Pardoner" and "Friar" are faithful representations of the wandering priests who every year carried off large sums of money collected from the poor of the country villages and rural districts. Whilst professing a vow of poverty, they practised on the ignorance of the lower classes, in order to extort from them their hard-won earnings and goods, alarming them by coarse denunciations of future punishment, and then offering for sale pardons for their sins. Chaucer's "Pardoner" is described as a Provençal of Rouncevall, who rides along upon his gay horse, singing love songs, and having before him his wallet "brimful of pardons come from Rome all hot." In his box he has an old pillow-case, which he exhibits to the people as "Our Lady's Veil;" another shred of stuff he shows as "part of the sail of St. Peter's boat." Besides these relics he carries also with him, "in a glass," as though too sacred for common touch, "pig's bones," which he affirms to be the remains of some saint. By the sale of pardons and the exhibition of these "relics" he takes more money of the poor in one day than the "parson" receives in two months. The portion of the Church Service in which he had the greatest delight was "the offertory"—

"Well could he read a lesson or a story,
But best of all he sang an offertory;
For well he wist when that this song was sung
He must then preach and well atune his tongue
To win the silver, as he right well could,
Therefore he sung the merrier and loud."

A companion picture is the Friar, who is described as "the best beggar in all his house." He paid so much a year to his order for the right to beg within a certain district, and into this none of his brethren intruded; he thus "farmed" the begging in that part of the country, and so persistent was he in his exactions that he got far more than he gave for the licence. Though "a widow had but a shoe" he would get a farthing out of her ere he went; "he was an easy man to give penance" when he knew he should have a good fee. If a man gave much it might stand him instead of repentance, so he taught,

"For many a man so hard is of his heart
He may not weep, although him sore smart;
Therefore, instead of weeping and preyères
Men might give silver to the poor frères."

Doctrines such as these, so utterly contrary to the truths of God's Word, and so destructive of all true religion and morality, roused the earnest, truth-loving spirit of Wycliffe. Almost alone at that time, he lifted up his voice against them, and began to speak boldly of the errors and abuses in the Church. He published a treatise called "Objections to Friars," and in this book he struck at once the keynote of the Reformation, and of the noble music of his own life. "The Gospel," he said, "in its purity and freedom, with no opinion of man added to it, is the sole rule of religion."

In 1372, Wycliffe began to lecture at Oxford as a Professor of Divinity. He gathered a band of pupils around him, whom he taught from the Word of God, and shewed them the way of salvation through Jesus Christ and the spiritual reality of the Christian life. The hearts of the young men were stirred, the light of Christ's Gospel could not but make manifest the corruptions and false teaching of the Church; and as the practices of the Friars were one great source of the superstition and

the wickedness of the people, so some of these young men determined to travel through the land preaching to the people the pure doctrines of God's own Word. They were called Wycliffe's "poor priests;" they asked for no money for themselves or their Church—freely they had received and freely they gave the bread of life. The light thus penetrated into many a rural district and far-off hamlet, preparing the people for the sunrise of the Reformation. Wherever they could gather a crowd on a village green, in an old country market-place, on the open downs, or by the roadside, these "poor priests," like the Apostles of old, taught in the name of Jesus, for, like them, they felt, in the fresh ardour of new light and love, that they could not but speak the things they had heard and seen.

It was at this time, very probably, that Addlestone Oak acquired the name of "Wycliffe's tree," for its peculiar formation would suggest at once its use as a place of assembly, and whether Wycliffe himself stood beneath its branches, or his "poor priests" preached here those doctrines which at first were associated with his name, there is no reason for doubting that this aged tree is connected with the day-spring of Gospel truth and teaching in England, and that it saw the dawn of that sunrise which we hope, by God's grace, shall never set over this country.

The good seed sown by Wycliffe and his "poor priests" took root, sprung up, and brought forth fruit, notwithstanding the efforts to crush its growth and the disturbed state of the country during the civil Wars of the Roses; for when in Henry VIII.'s reign he established the Reformed Religion by statute, and freed the country from the rule of the Pope, he only put the spirit of the country into the form of its laws. He found the people ripe for the change, and even in advance of his own desires for reform; because though Wycliffe and his immediate followers had finished their work and gone to their rest a hundred years before, yet the truth had worked like leaven among the people, for Wycliffe had left to them the precious legacy of the Bible, translated into the homely, manly speech of the people. The old oak at Addlestone had its share in the joy and festivity of that time when, the struggle being over, a pure, strong faith in God's truth filled men's hearts with a wonderful courage and joyousness. Never at any period were men more full of a simple, firm faith in God and His truth than in the age of Queen Elizabeth, and never was there a more general, widespread, earnest sense of duty in the highest form—duty done for God's service. The devotion, the courage, the sympathy with all that was noble and beautiful, the strength for self-sacrifice, and the firm adherence to duty which are characteristics of this age—all had their source, as they must in every age, in a living, simple faith in God and His truth, for it is from Him alone that we learn what is good and true, and from Him alone that we receive, through Jesus Christ, the strength to lead a noble life, devoted to high aims and free from degrading fears and the miseries of unforgiven sin.

The old oak saw a glimpse of this age when one day Queen Elizabeth herself came with a party of such men as Sir Philip Sydney, Edmund Spencer, and others, and they all dined beneath the spreading branches.

Two centuries later the earnest religious spirit awakened at the Reformation had become frigid and languid. The era was one of a cold formalism and practical infidelity. A certain respect expressed as a sentiment for the laws of God had taken the place of a living faith in Christ and the working of the vigorous spiritual life in duty and service for Christ's sake and to His glory. Then there arose again, as in the earlier time, men called by God to speak to the people, to remind them in earnest, piercing words of the reality of unseen things, and to wake them to a sense of their state before God and need of a personal faith in Jesus Christ the Saviour. And in those days the old oak-tree at Addlestone saw one of the greatest of these men, and heard him speak stirring words to the people gathered round him under the leafy branches, beholding, perhaps, the tears gather in many an eye long unused to weep, and the meeting of many a heart long hardened by sin, as George Whitefield spoke of that love of Christ with which his own heart was filled. The tradition of Whitefield's preaching under Addlestone oak may, like that of Wycliffe, refer to the tree having been used in that time for some of the out-of-door services held by the followers of Whitefield in various parts of the land; but still, as in the former case, this much is no doubt sure, that the story points to the use of the old oak again as a place of assembly in a time of religious revival when the Gospel was freely preached to the people, wherever they could be got together to listen to it.

Later still, the old oak has seen another great preacher stand beneath its branches and preach the same truths, in the same old homely, manly speech of the people. Only a few years ago the announcement that Spurgeon would preach at Addlestone drew together so large a number of persons that the service was held under Wycliffe's oak, and where he or his "poor priests" had first taught Christ's Gospel to the people, a crowd of persons gathered to hear the same good news, simply and freely spoken, with firm faith and fervent earnestness.

WYCLIFFE'S OAK (THE CROUCH OAK).

For more than five hundred years the old oak at Addlestone has stood the storms of many a season of tempest and the drought of many a burning summer, but neither fierce winds, nor scorching sun, nor chilling frost have been able to quench its vitality—it stands as a true type of the Gospel of Christ; and as we look upon the tree in its greenness and age we may learn a lesson of faith and hope.

The old oak at Addlestone may tell us, too, how in times past of doubt and peril, when gross darkness covered the people, or a cold formalism crushed the life out of religion, it was found that the simple preaching of the sin and loss of man, and of the infinite love of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, won its way to the hearts of the people with instant conviction of its truth. Faith was to them but as the natural putting forth of the tendrils of the fallen creeping-plant, as soon as it is directed to its true support; and men believed with their whole heart and soul and gave themselves to the Lord, in spite of all that might be urged against the truth of Christianity or the attacks of hostile philosophers.

ITALIAN COOKERY.

We fear that the most partial of our friends could not yield us the palm in matters of the kitchen—neither in skill nor economy. The French are, by unanimous consent, supreme in both respects, and the Italians certainly rank second, having two invaluable points in common with them—ingenuity at making a good deal out of very little, and a talent—innate one might really say—for frying. They will make a crisp, dry (in the sense of not greasy) *frittura* or *frittata* out of anything, and all, young or old, male or female, trained or untrained can do it. That terrible person, "a maid of all work," has no terrors for us in Italy, for, whatever her other shortcomings may be—and they will not be many—she will put before one a palatable meal. Indeed, much could be said in praise of the Italian serving class; even the least competent invariably have good manners, are good-natured and sympathetic. They force one to take them more as friends than servants, yet very rarely would one meet with forwardness or pertness.

The men too, of all callings, have a natural aptitude for cooking. Once the writer and her sister were left for a while to the tender mercies of an individual who here would be called a "washing man"—one who carries the linen to and from a laundry—in this instance his wife's. His cookery was so excellent that curiosity as well as gratitude led us to ask him whether he had ever been a cook. It proved that he had never had a lesson, yet his skill was well known, and more than once he had been offered a cook's place at a hotel. In Italy the class who keep no servants do not seem to portion out the work of the household as it comes quite naturally to us to do. No doubt the men there, as elsewhere, are usually the bread-winners outside, and the women attend to the work indoors; but in their spare hours the males are nothing loth to do whatever comes to hand, let it be cooking, cleaning, washing, or looking after the babies. In this last occupation they excel, and on the Sundays and *festa* days it is quite the exception to see the wife carrying the baby or even leading young children by the hand. Indeed in all classes *babbo* (papa) is far oftener on the lips of the little ones than mamma.

The *frittata* and *frittura* above alluded to are generally cooked in oil, butter and lard being very sparingly used in Italian cookery. It also frequently substitutes butter in pastry—not sweet pastry—but for patties or pies, and particularly for crust for frying. A tablespoonful, or even a little less, of olive oil rubbed in to a half pound of flour will make a very excellent crust, and in these days of expensive butter it is an idea worth imitating. Our dislike to the notion, particularly for frying purposes, is in truth only prejudice. If the oil is sweet and the fry properly drained, even a delicate palate would find it difficult to distinguish the difference of flavour. Omelets—also called *frittate*—are much eaten, and what we should call an economical omelet, in the hands of a skilful frier, is an invaluable aid to any meal, and can be prepared in a few minutes. Two eggs are sufficient—one even will do, the rest is made of flour, a little milk, and the requisite flavouring of chopped parsley or any other herb, or minced ham if at hand. Frequently artichokes cut in six pieces, with the choke removed, are fried in with the egg mixture and make a very nice dish.

Perhaps no one—unless, indeed, she has mixed a good deal with the poor of various countries—can quite realise of what inestimable value an aptitude and general intelligence for cooking, or a little cultivation in the art is. It conduces to a wholesome, even refined taste among a set who in England would be boors with a coarse taste and no palate to speak of. And it does more than that: the difference of good or ill cooking to the wearied bread-winner helps to make or mar the peace of many a household; and no woman, whatever her class, whatever her calling, should forget how much is, in this respect, in her hands.

The institution in a saving household called "hot pot" is nearly unknown in Italy. The frying-pan takes the place of the "pot," and pieces of meat, bones, cold vegetables, slices of stale bread, everything that there may be, fried all together make a dish that generally ends the day and which few would find unsavoury. Poultry is also fried sometimes, the chicken being of course limbed and the body cut in suitable sized pieces. In the Italian markets one can buy half a chicken or even one piece, a leg or a wing, if one wishes. In many parts of Italy, however, the fowls are of a poor quality. Fish one does not see in great quantities, nor is it cheap, with the exception of red mullets, which one gets—usually stewed—to satiety. Soups are made out of everything and nothing, and fish soup (the recipe, with others, will be given at the end) is a favourite one.

Minestra or *zuppa* (soup) is quite a national taste, and everyone—labouring classes included—will begin their dinner, and if possible their supper too, with a basin of *zuppa* or *brodo* (broth). Clear soup is very rare; they always put in vegetables or some sort of *pasta*. This word includes rice, macaroni, vermicelli, and a score of other things of that class, varying in name according to shape, such as *stelle* (stars), alphabets, &c.

Among the nobility and at all the first-rate hotels and restaurants (*trattorie*), French cookery is much adopted, and, strange to say, even a few thoroughly English dishes are much in fashion, such as beef-steak (bifstecka, as they Italianise it) and roast-bif, cooked more or less as we like it, underdone.

The national food, however, varies in the different parts of the country. In Naples and in the South generally, macaroni forms part of almost every mid-day meal, and is largely eaten by the poor. In the Venetian States *polenta* takes its place. This is a kind of porridge, rather thicker in consistency, made from the flour of the Indian corn (*gran Turco*). It should be stiff enough to turn out, which is usually done, on a wooden platter. They do not touch it with a knife, but divide it in slices by a thread of strong cotton. It is very cheap indeed, and more eaten by the labouring than the wealthier classes, and where an English labourer would take a hunch of bread-and-cheese a Venetian one would take slices of *polenta*. In the Apennine districts, chestnut-flour, usually made into large, flat cakes, is almost the sole food of the peasants; and in Florence and higher north beans (*fagiuoli*), are more partaken of by far than *polenta* or even macaroni. They boil them in, or thicken soup with them, they eat them as a vegetable, or dress them as a salad. Chopped parsley is generally added to them when dressed for salad, and eaten with fried fish. At the corners of the streets people can buy a pennyworth of beans—strictly, ten centimes—already cooked, as one can buy chestnuts here, and it is no mean allowance. Meat is not very cheap, and a pound of fish costs the same as a pound of meat. If one does not pay ready money, the custom with the butcher is to count up at the end of the time how many pounds of meat of all prices he has sent, and then he strikes the average. This would vary, according to the locality, from sixty to ninety centimes, but it must be borne in mind that an Italian pound's weight is only twelve ounces. Almost everything is sold by the kilogram (*chilo*) as they say, which is thirty-six ounces or three pounds.

Puddings seldom form part of an Italian dinner; fruit, which is cheap and plentiful, almost entirely takes their place. The word even is not in their language; *dolce* (sweet), and *pasticcieria* (pastry), do duty for every sort of pudding.

Fruit is not so good as it is here; the very best generally finds its way to other markets, also much of it grows with little aid excepting Nature's own. They have all the varieties known in England and a few more. Japanese medlars, a small yellow fruit looking something like our yellow plums, but having the stones of the medlar, is a very refreshing fruit; and in their season, which is often prolonged to the end of August, mountain strawberries are most abundant, and preferred to the garden ones. Their most important produce are grapes, figs, and chestnuts. In the Apennine districts there are miles upon miles of Spanish chestnut woods. In a good year they are sufficiently abundant that a considerable quantity can be stored to help until the next harvest of them. They are made into flour, which in its turn is made into cakes, more than equal to bread in nutritive powers. The general aspect of the inhabitants—whose chief sustenance it is—and more especially the appearance of the girls, is a guarantee of the excellence of this food. The water there too is most pure, and keeps them in good health. People live to a great age there, and a ridiculous story to exemplify this fact is told, of how once an old man verging upon threescore and ten was found crying by the way-