



Wolverhampton.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF A POPULAR NOVELIST.

BY "DARBY STAFFORD."

(WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR.)

SEVERAL writers of late have proved to the reading public that romance is not incompatible with murkiness of atmosphere, and that the "Black Country" is not as black, physically or otherwise, as it appears to the cursory observer. Particularly has the authoress of that most successful book, "A Double Thread," laid this for-

her new book, "The Farringdons," has boldly laid the principal scene and very centre of the story even more thoroughly within the "Black Country" than is the "Silverhampton" which figures so prominently in "A Double Thread."

Silverhampton—that is to say, Wolverhampton—is the extreme outpost of that district of coal and iron which lies to the north-west of Birmingham. To the mere traveller it is mainly suggestive of smoke and dirt; yet the quick transit from the murkiness which overhangs that part of the town bordering on the railway into the clear atmosphere resting on spreading field and nestling wood should teach even the unobservant that the borders of the dark land had been reached when the train stopped at Wolverhampton



SEDGLEY VILLAGE.

bidding-looking part of Staffordshire under contribution, and in so doing has done justice to the many really lovely spots which fringe—some even lying within—the district which has such an unenviable reputation among lovers of the picturesque, who have only seen it through the windows of a railway carriage. And, out of sheer love for the district which she knows so well, Miss Fowler, in



A DISTANT VIEW OF SEDGLEY.



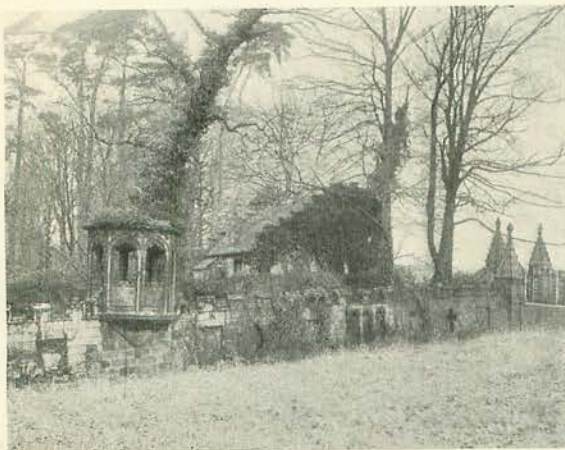
TONG.

on its way westward or northward. A walk of a mile in a westerly direction will carry him into regions of loveliness and peace amid which it is difficult to realise the vicinity of a huge industrial centre.

All this the authoress of "A Double Thread" has abundantly demonstrated, dwelling with loving touch on her charming descriptions of the country bordering on Silverhampton. And, indeed, from the heart of the town itself may be had visions of beauty and fair promise of what the westward-bound traveller will find awaiting him; for, as the book has it, speaking of



TONG VILLAGE.



ENTRANCE TO TONG CASTLE.

the centre of the town, "The streets slope away from the square, and gradually die away into the country, which is bounded by a distant rim of low blue hills." Concerning the country lying on the Silverhampton side of those same "blue hills," and beyond them, one may well grow enthusiastic, for a bonnier stretch of pastoral scenery it would be difficult to find, while of the stately beauty of "The Old Church," and the old-world charm of the residence of Camilla Desmond in the town itself, not one word too laudatory is spoken by the writer of "A Double Thread."

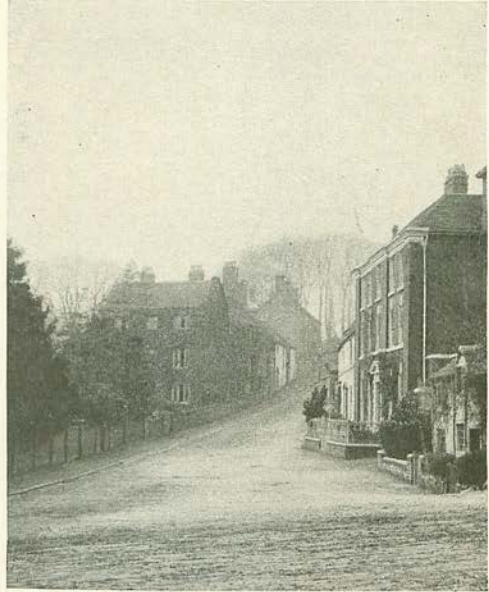
The walks and drives around the town are sketched in the book in a manner only possible to one who knows intimately every inch of the ground and who has an eye for its manifold delights. The "Tetleigh," for instance, of the story is almost unique among villages so near a great centre of industry. A pleasant tram-ride, or a still pleasanter walk, brings one to a village green and a churchyard worth going far to see; and while the cyclist, especially, breathes a benison on the engineers of the new road up "The Rock"—which is steep enough in all conscience—

he is glad that "The Old Hill" has been left in its original picturesque condition, to fill his vision with quaintness as he peddle past its foot on his way up the easier incline.

De Quincey's 'Dream of Jean Paul Richter.' The front door has a reserved and dignified aspect, as all right minded front doors are bound to have which open right on the

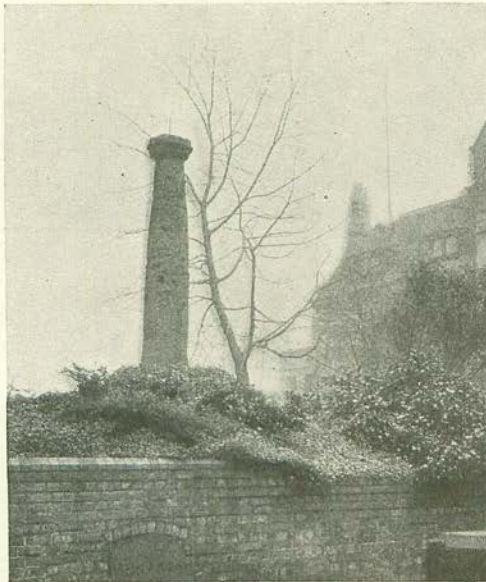


"THE HOLLOWAY," COMPTON.



"THE OLD HILL," TETTENHALL.

Concerning this same Tetteigh—the Tettenhall of actual geography — Philip Cartwright might well say: "I was born at Tetteigh, a village about two miles from Silverhampton, and the sweetest village in the whole world"; at least, one who could boast of having been born there might pardonably thus speak of it. And of the house in which he first saw the light, situated on the hill "which is now too steep for vehicles," he warmly says: "A dear old house, built on so steep a slope of the hill that upstairs is downstairs and downstairs is upstairs, as in



ANTIQUE PILLAR IN CHURCHYARD OF THE OLD CHURCH, WOLVERHAMPTON.

(See "A Double Thread," page 102.)

street, with no gardens to chaperone them; but the back of the house belies its stern exterior, and is gay, and bright, and sunny, with tiers of grassy little terraces commanding a fine view of Silverhampton, which is a city set on a hill. And the terraces all come to an untimely end in a little wood, where you will find in the spring the bluest bluebells to be found in all England. There are none bluer anywhere, and, to my mind, half so sweet.

That is the house where I was born."

Concerning the ridge of hill above Tettenhall and Compton—of the steepness of

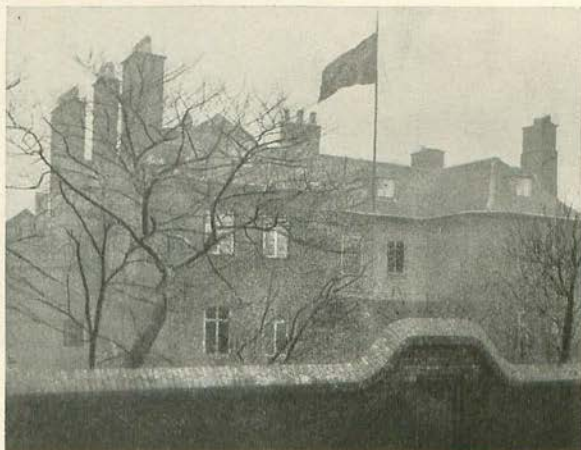


THE HEROINE'S HOUSE.
("The Farringdons.")

whose "Holloway," Ethel Harland, you remember, complained—it is truly remarked that "one can see the whole panorama of three counties spread out before one," and any one even moderately acquainted with the district will heartily endorse the assertion that "the drives are many and beautiful in that part of Mershire." Of the lanes, too, in which, in the spring-time of their engagement, Jack and Ethel so happily wandered together, where in all the land will you find so much quiet beauty near a large town?—a question which more than one artist well known to fame will promptly echo. Those lanes are behind "Woodthorne," Sir Henry Fowler's residence. The photograph of Miss Fowler which appears at the end of this article was taken in the porch of that house. Miss Fowler's companion in the picture is Miss Edith Fowler, the



THE HERO'S
HOUSE.
("The Farring-
dons.")



MISS CAMILLA DESMOND'S HOUSE.
(See "A Double Thread," page 104.)

authoress of "A Corner of the West."

Waxing bold in her appreciation of the district, the writer of "The Farringdons" has made her story to centre at Sedgley, which she calls "Sedgehill"—a place of strange contrasts in the matter of scenery. In "A Double Thread" only one of the principal characters resides at Silverhampton; but in "The Farringdons" both the hero and the heroine live at Sedgley, which is a village even more "set

on a hill" than is Silverhampton, for it stands on a high ridge, from which an extensive view may be had in all directions, and which, by the way, is of exceptional interest to the geologist, inasmuch as the famous Wren's Nest, with its remarkable outcrop of peculiar limestone, full of fossils, is part of the ridge.

Sedgley Beacon is said to be the



"WOODTHORNE": MISS FOWLER'S HOME.

highest cultivated land in England. Whether that be so or not, it is high—as, on a windy day, the visitor knows full well. Perhaps nowhere in the kingdom is there a more complete contrast of outlook than that from Sedgley Beacon. Turning to the east, the blackest part of the "Black Country" lies before one. Now turn round and look westward, and you shall see as fair a landscape as you could desire to feast your eyes upon. Valley after valley, the rising ground between crowned with thick woods; fair pasture-land, green and peaceful; snug cottages amid their gardens, and mansions richly set in park and lawn; and, in the distance, the picture is framed by the Cleve Hills, the Wrekin, and many another giant of benign aspect, while, if it be a very clear day, far away you may see, looming up, the more rugged and frowning mountains of Wales. This is a place of contrasts indeed, as readers of "The Farringdons" have by this time discovered. With the charms of Baggeridge Woods, Penn Common, and many another delightful spot, they will also have been made acquainted. Special mention should be made of the description in the book of a drive from Sedgley to Tong

(the "Pembruge" of "A Double Thread"), in which the reader is conducted by an appreciative guide through some of the most beautiful country within reach of Sedgley and Wolverhampton.



THE MISSES FOWLER.