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[A. Allsebrook.

DOLLIS HILL HOUSE, LOOKING TO SOUTH-EAST, SHOWING GLADSTONE'S BEDROOM,  
ALSO WINDOW OF LIBRARY BELOW.

## A NEW PLEASURE-GROUND FOR LONDON:

### DOLLIS HILL AND ITS MEMORIES OF GLADSTONE.

BY E. T. SLATER.

**T**HE other day a Dutchman, leaving this country after a visit to London, felt troubled in spirit, and, longing to unburden his mind, he managed to button-hole an English friend. "Why, this great city of yours," he said, "has a population as great as the whole of the population of Holland, where we think we are overcrowded enough! What is to become of you?" The Englishman could hardly give him a satisfactory answer, for the Dutchman had observed only too well. The population of London is going up by leaps and bounds, every year the overcrowding problem becomes more acute, and nowhere is the growth more visible than in the suburbs, where a greater London is eclipsing the London within the county area. It is high time to see that while the great city stretches out its arms wider and wider the building is to some extent controlled; and, above all things, it is necessary that before the land has reached a prohibitive price, proper provision should be made for the preservation of parks and open spaces.

One of the most interesting movements in this direction is that now on foot in the Willesden District to secure the Dollis Hill Estate as a Gladstone Park. No part of London is in greater need of breathing

spaces. At the Doomsday survey the parish contained 200 souls; in Edward the Sixth's day, according to an augmentation roll, there were in the parish "of house-lying people" 240, and at the beginning of this century still less than 800. But mark the rise during Queen Victoria's reign. In 1841 there were nearly 3,000 inhabitants; in 1871 over 15,000; in 1881 over 27,000; in 1891 over 60,000, and with a bound the population has gone up during the last eight years to over 100,000. No wonder the Willesden District Council thinks that the time for action has come, and that open spaces should be secured before it is too late. Already two good parks, Queen's Park and Roundwood Park, have been opened in different parts of the parish, and now the opportunity has come for providing a noble pleasure-ground in the northern region.

Just at the time when millions were mourning the death of Gladstone, last year, it was found that the owner of Dollis Hill, a spot linked by many associations to the great statesman, was ready to sell the house and estate of nearly one hundred acres for £50,000, a sum reasonable enough, considering the value of the land for building purposes. Efforts were at once made to raise the amount required, and it was urged that the estate should be

acquired, not only for its associations, but as a great public improvement. So strong was the case that the Middlesex County Council was induced to vote £12,500; Hampstead Vestry promised £1,000; Hendon District Council, £500; and an influential deputation waited upon the Parks Committee of the London County Council, with the result that the full Council sanctioned a grant of £3,500 on the ground that the park would be easily accessible to Londoners by 'bus or train. Then Willesden rose to the occasion and

started by a few aggrieved ratepayers, who, thinking little of the ultimate saving in life and health, object to so large an expenditure of public money. But the obstruction has met with little success and is condemned by all the more public-spirited residents in the district. It is hoped, too, that the owners of land adjacent to the new park will come forward and help, and then very soon the Gladstone Park will become an accomplished fact.

Dollis Hill, with its lilled pool, its fair lawns and noble trees, is beautiful enough in itself. From the breezy hill where the house stands the eye wanders away westward over a richly wooded country, southward to Willesden, Brondesbury, and Kilburn, where long rows of brick and mortar are advancing dangerously nearer every day and threaten to cover the whole neighbourhood with an unbroken phalanx of houses. Eastward the view is bounded by the northern heights of London, where the flag-staff and the houses on the Heath can be plainly seen. To the north-east the view stretches away to Finchley, while behind to the north the view is shut in by the summit of the hill which on the other side slopes down to the Welsh Harp. But the spot will, above all, be interesting and will be the resort of pilgrims from many lands for its associations with one of the greatest names of the century.

Mr. Gladstone never lacked thoughtful and loving friends, and few were more devoted than the Earl and Countess of Aberdeen, at whose invitation he often came to Dollis Hill for week-ends and frequently for long periods. His friend Sir Andrew Clark sent

him there under two conditions—one when he had serious writing to do, the other when he was down in health; and the great physician would say in his pawky way, "The expedient never failed." Here the aged student diverged into various branches of learning—archæology, theology, and political meteorology are all said to have claimed his attention, and the fruits of his studies could be seen in the magazines of the time. During his visits there were held those historic receptions when the *élite* of this and many other countries were welcome,

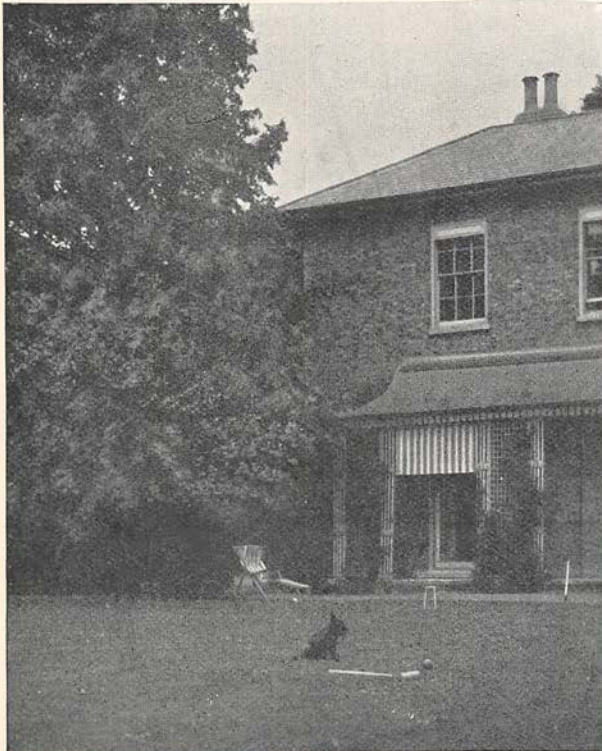


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[W. H. Bennett.

TREE BENEATH WHICH MR. GLADSTONE FREQUENTLY TOOK HIS MEALS.

voted £30,000, and private subscriptions were promised amounting to about £500. This left some £2,500 to be provided; but rather than lose the opportunity a few public-spirited promoters of the movement came forward and furnished the necessary guarantee, and the agreement to purchase was forthwith completed. It is true there is something still to be done—a few thousands will be needed to lay out the estate as a public park; the £2,500 required to make up the purchase money has still to be actually subscribed, and some opposition has been

irrespective of party, creed, or nationality. The gatherings on Saturdays have been well described by Mr. Escott.

"Many of the younger generation," he writes, "in the clubs, lobbies, and drawing-rooms of to-day owe something of the knowledge of their departed chief's scholarship, wisdom, and experience to those Saturday meetings in the hospitable grounds of Lord and Lady Aberdeen." And they came from many lands, too. On Saturday, May 14, 1887, the day on which the Queen opened the People's Palace in the East End, Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone gave a garden party at Dollis Hill to the delegates to the Colonial Conference. Lord Granville, Mr. Childers, and others who have since passed away, were present on the occasion, as well as delegates from New-



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[A. W. Dron, *Londresbury*.

THE FRONT DOOR, DOLLIS HILL HOUSE.

foundland, Western Australia, the West Indies, and other Colonies. A few weeks later, on another Saturday, the aged statesman was receiving a deputation of Americans from New York, headed by Mr. Pulitzer, of the *New York World*, who came to present a silver trophy, in the shape of a casket three feet high, in recognition of Mr. Gladstone's services to the Irish cause.

Among those present were Earl Spencer, Lord Herschell, Sir Charles Forster, and a number of his old friends, many of whom have since passed away.

Very pleasant descriptions have been given of his manner of life here. Always when it was fine meals would be taken in the open air. The small group of trees can be seen beneath which the table was spread, and between two fine elm trees hard by was strung the hammock where he would rest, not often day-dreaming, we may be sure, but



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[A. W. Dron, *Londresbury*.

IN THE PARK.

most likely either eagerly scanning a book or asleep, for there were few day-dreams in a mind so full of energy as his. It was on this spot that Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Chamberlain took what must have been their last meal together in those troublous days when the Home Rule scheme was coming to birth and both politicians hoped to adjust their differences; but thereafter each went his way politically, and who shall say how much history was made on that day in the quiet, shady garden beneath the trees?

In the little library, the window of which

Dollis Hill, the more did he seem to enjoy and appreciate the place. The prospect of resorting to this retreat—for instance, at the end of a busy week—was evidently looked forward to with pleasant anticipation, and it was characteristic that the sense of relaxation appeared to commence as soon as the drive from London had begun.

“He used to watch with interest, among other features of the journey, the number of omnibuses which were observed on the road, and amused himself by guessing beforehand the exact number that would be seen, the estimate varying according to the time of

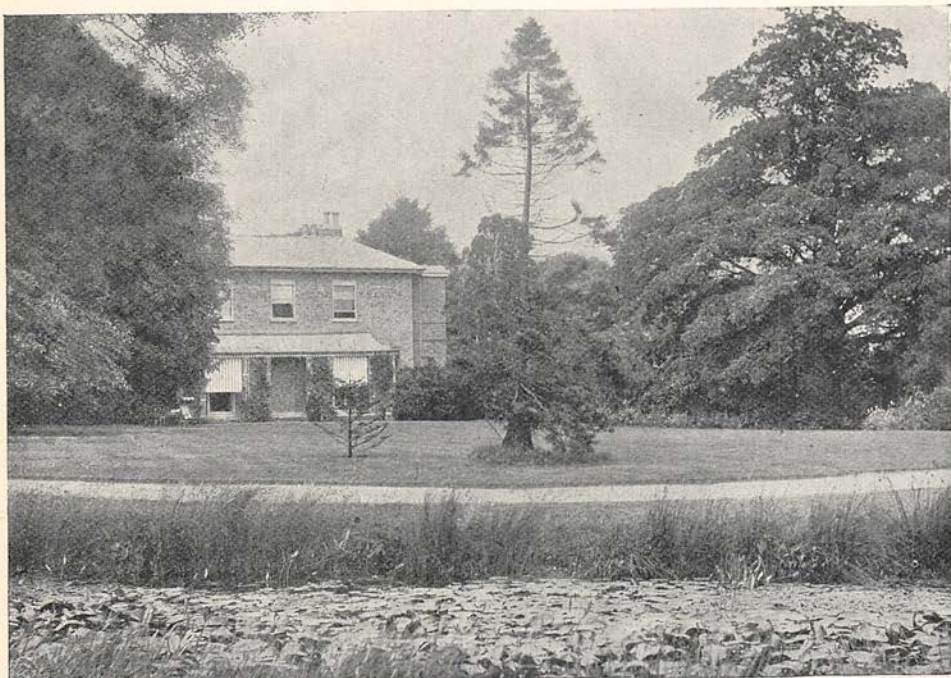


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DOLLIS HILL HOUSE, SOUTHERN PROSPECT, WITH THE GLADSTONE TREE IN THE FOREGROUND.

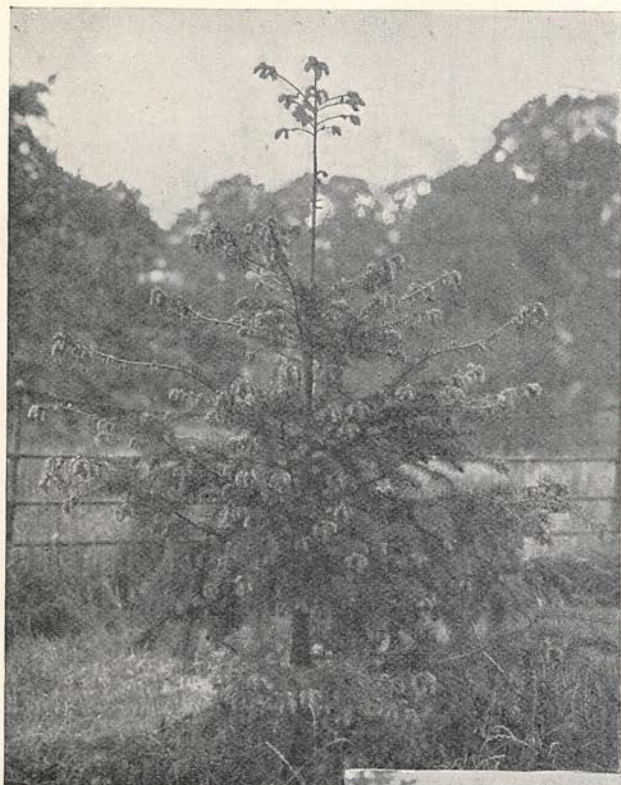
is shown in one of the illustrations, Mr. Gladstone would write and study, and when unwell a bed was set up in the room, where he could rest. The window above the library window, looking east, shows the bedroom which he used.

Sunday, of course, was strictly preserved as a day of rest. The house party would go to Willesden Church or to Harrow School Chapel, and very rarely, of course, would the service be missed. A very interesting light is thrown upon Mr. Gladstone's ways and habits in some notes which the Earl of Aberdeen has very kindly sent to us.

“The oftener that Mr. Gladstone went to

day. It need hardly be said that Mr. Gladstone quickly discovered and noted all the points of historic and other interest in connection with Dollis Hill—as, for instance, at the little church of Kingsbury-cum-Neasden, there are, as he maintained, Roman bricks in the wall of that extremely old edifice.

“The reason why Mr. Gladstone took to attending this little church instead of the parish church of Willesden, towards the end of a rather prolonged stay at Dollis Hill, is rather characteristic. The fact that he was in the habit of attending the parish church of course soon became known, and a con-



TREE PLANTED BY MRS. GLADSTONE.

siderable number of people used to congregate outside the church at the close of the service, so that he and Mrs. Gladstone, with the rest of their party, used to proceed through a sort of lane of people, all manifesting respectful salutations. On one occasion, as Mr. Gladstone was entering the carriage, there was a more audible demonstration in the form of a cheer. This kind of notice and publicity on Sunday, and in connection with his private attendance at church, was not agreeable to Mr. Gladstone, and was the original cause of his resorting during the remainder of that summer to the secluded and charmingly situated little church of Kingsbury-cum-Neasden. It is quite a considerable distance from what is now the centre of the village.

“The parish church of St.

Mary's, Willesden, however, was one where Mr. Gladstone had so often worshipped that the parishioners placed a handsome brass memorial tablet within the church, with a very appropriate and gracefully worded inscription.

“The references to his habits in the matter of church attendance suggest another reminiscence. On a Sunday afternoon friends would frequently drive down from London to spend an hour or two in the grounds; Lord Spencer and other distinguished colleagues were frequent visitors. It often happened, however, that at about six o'clock, when the party were probably conversing on the lawn, it would be discovered that Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone had somewhat mysteriously disappeared. This merely meant that they had slipped away to evening service, great care being taken to avoid attracting any



Photos by

[W. H. Bennett.

TREE PLANTED BY MR. GLADSTONE.

attention to this proceeding, partly in order to avoid interrupting the social converse that was going on, and also to avoid the natural purpose of the host and hostess to provide a carriage in the event of Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone deciding to attend the evening service; but it need hardly be said that in such a case there generally happened to be a carriage waiting at a convenient spot on the way home, which was always utilised with appreciation.

"Amongst the numerous illustrations which appear in the memorial numbers of various journals after Mr. Gladstone's death, there is one which shows a very characteristic

to that in the opposite direction. The sense of business and responsibility seem, as it were, to be present as soon as the start for the day's work was made.

"On this particular occasion, too, there would be the consciousness that the taking of the photograph was involving a delay, but no outward sign of impatience would be manifested, the photograph having been arranged for by the host, who stands in the doorway, apparently enjoying a complete immunity for the time from any official cares."

Once, indeed, we hear of the Sunday's rest being broken into, but the cause was a special

one. On his way back from church, early in the summer of 1887 (April 6), he was buttonholed by an enterprising journalist in the Edgware Road, who cleverly drew him out on the new Closure rules, which had especially excited his indignation. The leader of the Opposition halted on his way, and in no unmeasured terms denounced the new rules. The question of Home Rule for Ireland, he declared, was not involved, nor anything else, but it was the dignity of the Chair. "The Chair! the Chair! the Chair!"

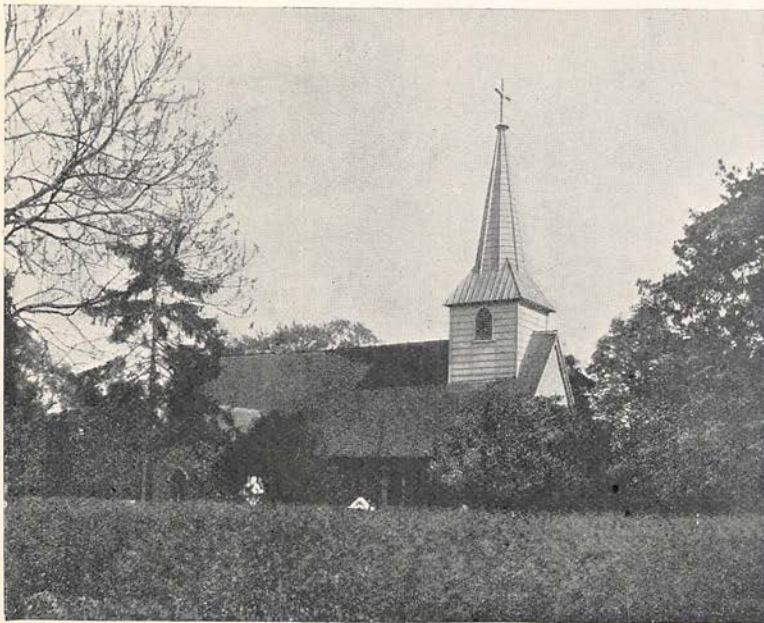


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KINGSBURY-CUM-NEASDEN CHURCH, WHERE GLADSTONE ATTENDED SERVICE.

scene at Dollis Hill. The picture represents Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone in an open carriage, on the point of starting for London; the hour would be about 9.30 or 10.30 a.m. On the carriage arriving at the door at the appointed moment, Mr. Gladstone would probably be entering the hall to put on his hat, and perhaps calling at the same moment to Mrs. Gladstone to let her know that the carriage was ready. Mrs. Gladstone would certainly not have caused more than a moment's delay.

"The expression in Mr. Gladstone's face in his photograph is somewhat firm and set. The remark about the attitude of relaxation on the journey from London does not apply

he cried, and no doubt arrested the attention of passers by. These words, uttered with such feeling, caused some sensation at the time, and drew some severe comments from the *St. James's Gazette*. The incident well illustrates the reverence felt by the Old Parliamentary Hand for the traditions of the House, and we can be sure it was no light matter in Mr. Gladstone's estimation that would thus induce him to stop and pour out a flood of indignation on a calm Sabbath morning.

Among the many characteristic incidents told by his friends there is one that will bear repeating. Calling one morning, and entering the hall, a friend heard the sound of music.

Telling the servant not to disturb him, he glanced into the drawing-room. Mrs. Gladstone was seated at the piano. Standing by her side, with one hand placed gently upon her shoulder, stood the venerable Premier, while they sang together, with evident delight, the old hymn, "Abide with me"; and as the scene imprinted itself upon the memory of the on-looker the closing words came, "The darkness deepens, Lord, with me abide." Fortunate, indeed, would be the artist who could depict the whole pathos of the scene.

Contrast with this another scene. Mr. Gladstone is wandering in the garden with Sir Andrew Clark. In the distance Lady Aberdeen can be seen entertaining a number of school children to tea beneath the elms. Suddenly Mr. Gladstone proposes a race to the tea-table. No sooner said than they are both off, and though the issue is at first doubtful, just as they are nearing the goal



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[A. Allsebrook.

## IN THE PARK.

the Grand Old Man spurts and wins. Sometimes the visitor would find him in the midst of a tea-party given to the haymakers, serving them with piles of bread-and-butter and great cups of tea, and thoroughly enjoying his chats with the rustics. Afterwards he would, perhaps, address the assembled company with one of those charming impromptu speeches for which he was famous.

It was the open-air life that he loved above all else, but there were often delightful gatherings in the evening, when a few chosen

friends came to dine with him. "There," says one who was present, "surrounded by old political and personal friends, by business and literary men, by young men just making their figure in Parliament, he led the conversation not on subjects of the day, not on the things that must have occupied his immediate attention, but on the great men of the past."

The roll of eminent personages, by no means confined to his own party, who visited him here



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## A FAVOURITE GARDEN SEAT OF MR. GLADSTONE'S.

would be too long to give. After the operation on his eyes, when he came to Dollis Hill to recuperate, the first to come was Lord Rosebery, soon followed by Mr. Arthur Balfour.

The late Archbishop of Canterbury came out to Dollis Hill once under rather strange circumstances well worth relating. One summer Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone oscillated between Dollis and a house in London in Carlton House Terrace, then, we believe, belonging to their devoted friend, Lady Frederick Cavendish. Mrs. Glad-

stone wrote from Dollis to ask the Archbishop of Canterbury and Mrs. Benson to dine with them. She meant them to dine in London, but omitted to say so, while writing on Dollis Hill paper. When the evening came no Archbishop arrived. Mr. Gladstone, who, with his strict and punctual habits, disliked above all things waiting, yet waited till 9 p.m., saying, "I wouldn't do this for any man on earth except the Archbishop of Canterbury." Eventually the Bensons turned up, having driven all the way to Dollis Hill and back!

We have been supplied on very good authority with another incident of the same period. One evening, when London was beclouded with fog, nothing daunted, Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone set out to drive from Carlton House Terrace to Dollis. The journey was a long one. After much floundering in the fog, when the aged couple no doubt thought themselves well on their way to their country retreat, where fogs would no longer trouble, they found themselves, carriage and all, close to the top of the Duke of York's Steps. They were forced to Carlton House Terrace, and afterwards Mr. Gladstone was heard likening it to the "Retreat from Moscow."

Of course the experienced woodman delighted in the fine tree life to be seen at Dollis. In the late Lord Tweedmouth's time, long before Mr. Gladstone came to stay at Dollis, he is said to have taken an affection for the place, and an old gardener who has

been at the house for thirty years declares that a pine tree on the east side was planted fifteen or twenty years ago by Mr. Gladstone. In the garden, close to a pretty winding pool, covered in the summer with water-lilies, a small fir tree flourishes which he planted immediately before the



Photo by]

JACK SHEPPARD'S HOUSE.

[A. Allsebrook.

rejection of the Home Rule Bill in 1886, and the spade used by the Grand Old Woodman is religiously preserved as a valuable relic. Hereafter its fame will more than equal that of the Boscobel oak. On the edge of the garden to the west is a tree a little older, planted by Mrs. Gladstone and tended with equal care; and in a far corner of the grounds, near the greenhouses, is a rosery, prettily laid out, from which Mr. Gladstone was supplied with the historic buttonhole. When the park is open it will be these associations with the Grand Old Man which will draw pilgrims from far and near to see Dollis Hill. But it has some history apart from Mr. Gladstone. Here George Eliot used to meet her physician and friend, Sir Andrew Clark, and here one of the best scenes in "Daniel Deronda," when Herr Klesmer discouraged Gwendolen's efforts to sing, is laid either in the drawing-room or the garden. Mr. Escott identifies Herr Klesmer with the Herr Joachim of real life, and Gwendolen in the scene is said to be a lady who, in spite of the cold water thrown on her efforts, has by no means failed in her subsequent musical career.

The estate was formerly occupied by Lord Tweedmouth, the father of the Countess of



Aberdeen, who spent much of his time in this rural retreat, taking especial interest in the home farm and the preservation of the old manor house. From 1882 the Earl and Countess of Aberdeen were in possession for some fourteen years, during which the Gladstone visits took place, but in 1897, Lord Aberdeen having become Governor-General of Canada, the property was given up and has since been occupied under a long lease by Sir Hugh Gilzean-Reid, who has made a number of extensions to the house. Naturally attached to the spot by reason of its many associations with his old friend and leader, its natural beauty, and easy accessibility to London, Sir Hugh Gilzean-Reid has yet generously consented to waive his rights in order to further a great public improvement and to aid in securing a Gladstone memorial in the best and most beneficial form that a memorial could possibly take.

One more interesting association should be mentioned ere we leave Dollis Hill. Behind the house, on the other side of the lane, and on the ground which rises to the hill where are now the Neasden Golf Links, stands an old manor, at present turned into a farm. Before the bicycle came, and when London lay miles away, this quaint old house was outside the ken

of the world and was a favourite resort of Jack Sheppard. Hither, after some daring exploit, he could retreat and store his booty; but even in hiding his hands turned to wickedness, and the house is the scene of the murder of the farmer's wife, the story of which is told in Harrison Ainsworth's historic novel. In the room on the left as you enter the hall was a deep ingle-nook with an open fireplace and benches round, but the modern tenants of the house found it "so ugly" that the whole recess has been carefully boarded up. Some old coins were found in the walls lately, and several interesting features in the interior have been carefully copied by artists for the scenery of plays representing life in the days of highwaymen.

It is satisfactory to be assured that this charming spot, with its many associations, will be preserved as a recreation ground for the people for ever, and that there need be now no fear that the speculative builder will ruthlessly destroy the sylvan beauty of Dollis Hill. No form of memorial, we may be sure, would have better pleased Mr. Gladstone himself, for it was to the people that he gave a life's service, and the sorrows and joys of the multitude never failed to stir a sympathetic chord in his heart.

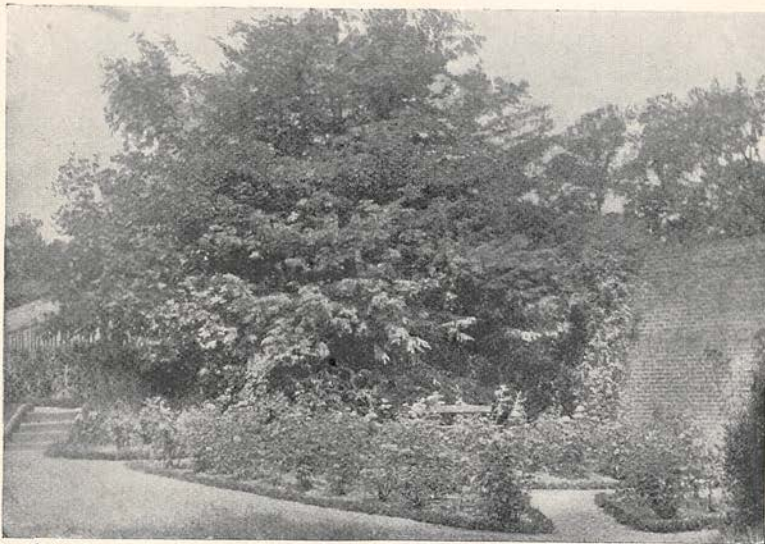


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THE ROSERY, DOLLIS HILL.

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