

# Other Days: Other Ways.

*Being some Reminiscences of a long life*

BY

G. F. BOMFORD,

of ATCH LENCH.

Assisted by

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PRICE - ONE SHILLING

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Evesham :

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## NOTE

These Reminiscences appeared in the antiquarian column of the "Evesham Journal" (Nov., 1929—Feb., 1930). They have been prepared for publication by E. A. B. Barnard, F.S.A., F.R.Hist.S., the Editor of the column.

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Last week in our "Old Days In and Around Evesham" column was started under the title of "Other Times, Other Ways," a series of reminiscences by Mr. G. F. Bomford, of Atch Lench, who has now passed his ninety-second birthday. Born in the year in which Queen Victoria ascended the throne, Mr. Bomford can look back to a period before the use of steam became general, when the subsequent achievements of science would have been considered as "such stuff as dreams are made of." Since his youth the countryside has changed enormously, and his description last week of the vanished woodlands of the Lenches is of great interest to us to-day, who are now watching the rapid encroachment of market gardening and fruit growing into that attractive, if rather bleak, remote and erstwhile wild upland country. Yet Mr. Bomford can tell of still earlier times, for his immediate ancestors lived in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and he must have often conversed with people whose memory carried them back well into the eighteenth century. It seems hard to realise that anyone alive to-day should have spoken with those who could recollect the times when the weird clanking of chains on the gibbet kept persons at night from crossing the wilds of Dunnington Heath. Mr. Bomford's reference to the thunderstorm which occurred on the day when George IV. died in June, 1830, is interesting to us, because we well recollect being told of this by the late Mr. William Smith, founder and editor to the date of his death in 1906 of this Journal; for although Mr. Smith did not remember this event, being only six months old at the time, tales of that terrific storm when, it is said, affrighted bullocks in the river meadows broke pasture and rushed bellowing into the town, were current for years afterwards, so awe-inspiring was it in an age more superstitious and less sophisticated than the present. Mr. G. F. Bomford himself is, of course, a member of a very old and well-known local family, of which there are several branches in the neighbourhood, though the family seems principally associated with the Lenches and the country between Evesham and Alcester. For several centuries Bomfords have farmed some hundreds of acres in this locality, for they belong to a sturdy race of agriculturists. Coming thus of good yeomen stock, the Bomfords have for the most part remained true to their hereditary vocation alike through good and bad times (although some have naturally strayed into other walks of life), and their reputation as farmers has always been high. Nowadays, when families seem to disintegrate and to leave, often for ever, their ancestral homes, it is pleasant to reflect that, still constant to the traditional and important calling which its members have chiefly followed, the Bomford family shows no signs of decay. We trust that this great clan of agriculturists will continue to grow, and in the future, as in the past, to take a high place among those whose business is the most ancient, most essential, and most natural of all occupations—that of the tilling of the soil. We cannot conclude without expressing the hope that the venerable member of this long-established family, whose reminiscences are the occasion of this note, may yet have years of health and happiness ahead of him.

## OTHER DAYS: OTHER WAYS.

SINCE I completed my ninetieth year several people have expressed an interest in my reminiscences. I am therefore, with the assistance of my daughter Frances, now attempting to set down some of them.

### THE LENCHES.

My father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Bomford, settled at Sheriff's Lench on their marriage in 1834, and the out-going tenant, Mr. William Sargeant, originally from Suffolk, went to the Old Court Farm at Lenchwick. I was their second child, and was born on August 19th, 1837.

Except for a few short periods when I was at school, I have spent my entire life at Sheriff's Lench, and Atch Lench. My first home was at Sheriff's Lench, but Atch Lench was almost as familiar to me from childhood, as my grandfather (Joseph Bomford) lived in the house I now occupy.

The Lenches have always cast a spell over their inhabitants. If strangers have ever settled here, they have become attached to the neighbourhood, while natives have rarely left except under considerable pressure. The numbers of houses and inhabitants in Atch Lench and Sheriff's Lench have varied very little during my lifetime, though some derelict dwellings have been demolished and a few new houses built from time to time. At Church Lench there have been rather more changes, even before the building of the County Council houses. I remember the Rectory being built. The old Rectory had stood on the site now occupied by the School.

### THE VANISHED WOODS.

The main cause of difference in the landscape of the Lenches to-day from what it was eighty years ago is the great reduction of the acreage of the woods. Now the Atch Lench Wood is only fifty acres, Old Yewell at Church Lench is much reduced, and at Sheriff's Lench the woods are practically negligible. When I was a boy, at Sheriff's Lench there were several small woods, such as James's Brake (about three acres), which was grubbed up and its site became part of the New Barn Ground; Lucas's Brake, between the field called Lucas's (named after a family living at Sheriff's Lench in the 18th century) and



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the Little Leys Meadow—this was done away with and the former field increased thereby—and the Spring Wood (14 acres) also on our farm, which was grubbed up and the arable acreage increased. Near Badger's Hill was Fox-hole Wood, which was grubbed up when Mr. Smithin took the farm from Mr. Winnall. This occupied the ground now planted with plum-trees and small fruit.

At Church Lench there used to be a small wood—the Grove Wood—near the Arch Bridge Hill on Mr. T. Y. Tovey's farm, which often afforded good lying for a fox.

The Atch Lench Woods covered about 300 acres, comprising Woodcockthorn, Balloe Hill Wood, the Hundred Pound Wood and the Lower Waste, while the Territ (probably Tear-it, originally) and Salford Coppice in Salford parish joined one another.

From Iron's Cross to Rous Lench, on the Ragley Estate, stretched the great Wood of Bevington Waste, occupying above 500 acres and extending from the Atch Lench Woods and the boundary of Church Lench on the one side to Weethley on the other, and no doubt in earlier times it was linked up with the Forest of Arden. When the Atch Lench Woods were grubbed up, or stocked—to use the local term—in the 'sixties and 'seventies, in addition to the local men employed there were also a number of men from Bickmarsh and Bidford, besides one or two from Harvington.

The land that had been occupied by these woods is now under cultivation except for a small area of pasture.

In the days when the Lench Woods were so extensive it was customary for the landlord to hold an annual sale of a varying number of plecks, which were bought as a rule by Lench men who were experts with the bill-hook. This applies to my grandfather's woods and also those on the Rous Lench Estate.

Bark-peeling was an important occupation in our woods for many years, in the month of May—the bark being sold to the Tannery at Evesham. The loads were always taken across Bevington Waste and by way of Iron's Cross to the high road.

Large numbers of hazel rods cut in the woods used to be made into flakes; in these days none are made in this district.

#### NAPOLÉON BONAPARTE AND INVASION.

In my boyhood if there was a heavier thunderstorm than usual it was compared with "the storm on the night the King died," in reference to the terrible thunderstorm on June 26th, 1830, when George IV. lay dying.

The chief topic of old men when talking to the rising generation was the widespread anxiety that prevailed

when Bonaparte or "Boney," as he was then popularly called, was expected to land in England.

Tommy Hunt, who worked for my uncle (Mr. Heming Bomford) at Dunnington, where I frequently stayed, used to tell of a fright that he and his companions once had when they saw a crowd of dark figures advancing along the road. Being sure that it was Napoleon's advance guard, the men hid under the arch of the bridge near by, but they were shortly afterwards much relieved to find that their alarm was caused by a herd of cattle being driven along the road on the way to the grazing grounds of Northamptonshire!

#### SCARCITY OF FOOD.

The scarcity of food and the cruel straits to which many were reduced are supported by the testimony of William Huxley, who in my boyhood lived at Atch Lench and worked for my grandfather. He was, I believe, a native of Kersee, and on his marriage early in the 19th century he walked ten miles to buy—at an exorbitant price—a peck of beans to have them ground with a peck of wheat, already procured, for his wife to make into bread. On this walk someone gave him a graphic description of a man who had died on the wayside from sheer starvation.

#### DANGERS OF THE ROAD.

In this civilised age the weekly record of deaths upon the road is appalling, but a century ago there were some dangers to be encountered by the few whose duties compelled them to journey along the King's Highway. At that time banking was in its infancy, and practically all produce (cattle, corn, etc.) sold at market was paid for in cash. It was almost common knowledge when a farmer would be returning home with the money for a load of wheat or some other commodity in his pocket. This fact gave encouragement to the foot-pads who in some localities had become almost a menace. Owing to this state of things it was considered expedient for farmers to return from market by a different route, if there was an alternative practice of taking this precaution.

On one occasion, when riding along the high road near Lencwick Bottom, he observed two men, one on each side of the road, evidently waiting for the return of someone in whom they were interested. It was a common thing to hear of someone or other in the neighbourhood being robbed when riding home by night.

An attack of this kind was made in the Leys Road, Harvington, near what is now the Coppice Ground. At that time—in the 'thirties—there was a wood by the side

of the road which afforded shelter for the miscreants. The person robbed was Mr. John Edwin, of the Manor House, Sheriff's Lench, as he was returning from Alcester market. My father told me this.

A similar incident is connected with my uncle (Mr. John Hughes), who had a considerable dairy farm near Alcester. Every week a trusted servant drove to Birmingham to deliver butter and other produce. On one occasion he confided to some one in a shop, where he had business, that he was in haste to start home in order to get down Gorcott Hill before nightfall, as he had collected more money than usual. The result of his naïve confidence was that he was met on Gorcott Hill by men who relieved him of all his takings!

Many people used to be afraid to travel alone in the darkness of the night, as certain places were believed to be haunted, Bevington Waste being one of them. I have heard my grandfather (Joseph Bomford) say that he remembered the time when travellers avoided crossing Dunnington Heath after dark as there was a gibbet there, and the chains clanked weirdly.

#### CORONATION OF QUEEN VICTORIA.

On June 28th, 1838, the Coronation Day of Queen Victoria, my parents entertained all the work-people and their families on the lawn, a sheep being roasted whole for the occasion. At a certain point in the festivities the children were grouped on the front door steps, and in the words of one of them, Charlie Meadows (later of Crab Farm): "The Missis gave all the boys a glass of 'wined' apiece to drink the Queen's health."

Among the seniors, John Sparrow, the ancestor of all the Sparrows now in the district, with one exception—an excellent workman, leader of the string of mowers, a skilled reaper with the sickle, and a first-class user of the flail—was elected to propose "The Queen," and, at the close of his speech, unconscious of the implication, he said cheerfully in his pleasant Suffolk voice: "Please, God, we shall have a coronation every year."

#### THE LENCHES SCHOOL.

From 1841 to the end of 1844 I was sent with my brother Joe, my senior by two years, as weekly boarder to Miss Corbitt's school at Church Lench. Miss Betsy Corbitt lived with her parents and a younger sister at The Butts, near the Town Pool. Mr. Corbitt was the village shoemaker, and held the office of constable.

This was then the only school in the Lenches, and it was carried on for thirty years. Though it fell far short of modern requirements, it served a very useful purpose

in its day, and was patronised by various well-to-do farmers and others in the district.

It was arranged for us to begin our week on the Monday evening, being escorted to Church Lench by William Holder, as he was returning home from his day's work on our farm. During those walks he used to tell us tales of the battle of Waterloo and other incidents in the Napoleonic War in a most graphic manner.

There were usually about eight boarders and a few day scholars, consisting of about equal numbers of boys and girls. A big girl named Ellen Firkins, whose home was at The Larches, Bishampton, was my "school-mother," and it cannot be denied that I often needed a friend to help me in extremity.

Mr. Corbitt, too, showed me wonderful indulgence, and frequently fetched me from the schoolroom to play in his shop with wax-end and bits of leather. He used to lend me his constable's belt, with which I was encouraged to hit at my seniors, but they were not allowed to retaliate!

The learning I acquired was exceedingly slight, mainly consisting of spelling out letter by letter a certain chapter in the New Testament, which I can still repeat in the same manner. Writing I did not even begin.

#### VILLAGE PASTIMES.

When I was a child various incidents that happened in this parish and the immediate neighbourhood prove to me now that the moral standard was very low. Among the amusements of those days were cock-fighting and wrestling. I believe Bevington and Cleeve Prior were somewhat noted for their cock-fights. There was no cock-pit in this parish, but I remember the pleasure with which the rustic mind regarded the occasional conflict between two strong birds, and the carters and boys would carefully avoid parting them until a definite decision was reached.

With regard to wrestling, this was a common amusement, and a frequent form of entertainment at wakes, etc. Young active men who had opportunity and practice acquired much skill, and won various trophies given as rewards at open contests, of which they were justly proud.

Sometimes these wrestling bouts became very rough, and the results more dependent on brute force than skill. To my knowledge some of the men who indulged in this pastime paid a big price for their rewards, as they not infrequently carried marks on their legs to their dying day—caused by kicks.

A young man in the Lenches I knew well by sight was present at one of these exhibitions of wrestling in an

adjoining parish. He was of very powerful physique, but had been taking no part in the contests. The champion of the day pressed A. to try conclusions with him, and after much persuasion he consented. In the struggle that ensued—probably brief—A. threw the champion down and, without any such intention, broke his neck.

Another incident of those times is connected with B. and C., two other Lench men whom I knew by sight as a child. They were friends, and had gone together to the next parish. When they had had some refreshment, a cause of difference arose, and they began to fight. This ended in a tragic manner, as C. had a knife in his hand with which B. was stabbed and killed. C. was found guilty of manslaughter, and was transported for fourteen years. It proved to be a life sentence, for he did not live to return.

Randy was sometimes played by village boys, the sticks being cut out of the hedges, and the ball consisting of a gnarl (called locally a "gnerl") from a crab tree.

#### A WHIT-SUNDAY CUSTOM.

In the villages of this district the chief holiday of the year was Whitsuntide. On Whit-Monday all work was begun earlier than usual, the horses being geared at four o'clock instead of 7 a.m., and work ceasing at noon. The younger men and boys repaired to Evesham to the Whitsuntide Fair, where the usual forms of entertainment were to be found.

At Atch Lench, Whitsuntide was marked by a custom that I have not heard of elsewhere. On Whit-Sunday the three farmers in the village, i.e., my grandfather (Joseph Bomford) and two brothers (Thomas and Benjamin Bomford), each of whom had a dairy of four or five cows, gave the whole of the morning milk to the villagers. When this practice was begun I do not know, but it seemed an unwritten law, and the people brought their cans as a matter of course.

#### PLACE-NAMES IN THE LENCHES.

Badger's Hill (Sheriff's Lench), Garfield's Hill (Church Lench), and Salisbury's Hill (Atch Lench) are named after the three men who lived in cottages on the respective hills, and I remember them well.

John Badger was one of Mr. Edwin's regular men, and later worked for Mr. Smithin, until sudden death stopped his labours. John Garfield I knew well by sight, but I do not remember any particulars about him. His cottage has now disappeared, but the garden is still cultivated. Edward Salisbury lived at the bottom of Atch Lench, and worked for my great-uncle (Thomas Bomford). He was a man with a very powerful voice, and

in consequence was sometimes sent to shout to distant workers when they were required to return home. His cottage, just on the crest of the steep hill, was demolished more than twenty years ago, as it had got beyond repair.

Franklin's Barn, near the Rous Lench road, and Franklin's Pasture, a piece of ground at the other end of Rough Hill, and also on the Ragley estate, were so called because a smallholder named Franklin used to occupy them. His name is also sometimes given to the lane along which the county boundary runs. I remember the man, but I never knew where he lived. He used to make a practice of encasing his legs in strong gaiters, when coming to his ground near the woods on Rough Hill, because, so he said, he dreaded "the attacks of reptiles."

#### ALLOTMENTS AND SMALL HOLDINGS.

From my early boyhood I have known allotments in this locality. Perhaps the first that were familiar to me were those on the top of Fladbury Hill; and in Atch Lench, those in the lower part of Potato Piece, which were let out by my great-uncle, Thomas Bomford, to Thomas Young, Joseph Newman, George Day and John Smith. William Huxley occupied one on my grandfather's farm at the bottom of Woodcock Thorn, as well as the garden in the Hand Road, to which reference is made elsewhere.

John Young, of Atch Lench, was a small-holder, and lived in a cottage on my grandfather's farm. He kept a horse and cart, and used to convey the grist to the mill for my grandfather (Joseph Bomford) and others, and do various odd jobs. He was allowed the right of mowing my grandfather's roadside grass, in return for which he gave two days' work at haymaking. Young occupied a piece of good-working land at the Oaks, Church Lench, and also a pike of poor arable ground at the bottom of Rough Hill, in Salford parish, called Co-pitts Corner. He used to attend the Wood Sales, and generally bought a peck or two. He and his brother, Thomas, always wore the old-fashioned smock-frock. Many Lench men occasionally appeared in this fine old garment, but I believe that the last in this parish to wear one regularly were Thomas Harwood, of Atch Lench, and Henry Sparrow, of Church Lench.

#### POULTRY FARMING IN THE 'FORTIES.

From 1845 to the end of 1848 we had a resident governess from London, who had charge of my education and also that of my brother Joe and my sisters.

As we were now at home it was arranged for my brother and me to manage the poultry formerly looked after by my the cook, Betsy Merrick, afterwards Mrs. Sam

Lyes. There were no pure-bred fowls then in farmyards, and at this time ours were exceedingly poor ones. So, to improve our stock, we obtained sittings of eggs from Mr. Edwin's at the Manor House and from Alcester Park; and later on we procured pure-bred birds, such as Black-crested Game, Cochin China and others. In this way our poultry became quite up to the average of the district. We received a certain remuneration for these duties, but, remembering the scale of payment, the poultry industry, from the employee's point of view, was at a low ebb. We were paid one penny for every score of eggs we collected, and one penny for every chicken reared.

#### WASHERWOMEN.

To give an idea of some of the domestic arrangements in vogue in my boyhood, I will say a few words about the work of washerwomen.

Washing days came once a month, but in the interim small "buckings" took place in order to carry over. After the evening service at Atch Lench on the Sunday prior to the monthly wash, one washerwoman went in the family conveyance to Sheriff's Lench to be ready to prepare the lye at 4 a.m. on Monday, beginning washing at 5 o'clock; she was joined later by a helper from the village. The second woman was at the tub by 8 a.m. Naturally the wash for a large household was a stupendous affair, and as white stockings were usually worn in those days, they added greatly to the number of articles to be dealt with. On one occasion, when no less than seventy-two pairs of white stockings had passed through her hands in the tub, the leading washerwoman exclaimed, "I'm reg'lar saded of washin' white stockin's!"

#### MY GRANDMOTHER'S FUNERAL.

In May, 1848, my grandmother, Mrs. Joseph Bomford, of Atch Lench, died after a long illness, and her funeral was the first I ever attended. At that date people did not go to funerals unless invited. As I was only a small boy the occasion made a deep impression on my mind, and for it my brother and I wore our first silk hats and suits of fine broad-cloth. A large party of cousins and second-cousins of my father, besides other relations, assembled at my grandfather's house and were fitted out with hat-bands, scarves and gloves of the deepest black. The four pall-bearers, all first cousins of my father, viz., James Smith (Astwood Bank), Thomas Bomford (Westmanacote), Benjamin Bomford (afterwards of Pitchill), and William Hopkins (Henley-in-Arden), all over six feet in height, and decked out in every article of mourning that the undertakers could devise, made a pompous dis-

play, calculated to strike awe into a child's mind. They made an ineffaceable impression upon me.

This funeral was very typical of the period, and similar to the Chuzzlewit obsequies which had been so vividly described by Charles Dickens a few years earlier.

#### ROADS AND SURVEYORS.

In the 'forties all the roads in the parish were bad, there being deep ruts in places. As there were no gravel pits or stone quarries in the immediate neighbourhood, the only material available was pebbles, and these were usually insufficiently broken, so that they did not set well.

Near Huxley's garden (now owned and occupied by Mr. J. E. Clarke) the Hand Road was particularly bad and very dangerous for a top-heavy two-wheeled vehicle. When we were returning home in the Sociable after the evening service at Atch Lench, my father used to give repeated warnings to my brother Joe, who was driving: "Joe, if you get the wheel into that deep rut, we shall be over-turned."

Two facts told me by my grandfather, which show that in the earlier times this road had been even worse, are:—

(1) My grandmother, when attending Mr. Sargeant's sale at Sheriff's Lench in 1834, was obliged to go in a broad-wheeled waggon from Atch Lench as the road was too bad for the gig.

(2) When my grandparents were coming along this road to Atch Lench after their marriage in 1810, their post-chaise was absolutely stuck in the mire near what is now Brick-kiln Meadow, and they were obliged to walk the last half-mile to their new home—just built—in their wedding finery, my grandmother being ill-shod for the walk, as she was wearing white satin slippers.

There were no Highway Boards and every parish was responsible for the upkeep of its own roads. Thus Sheriff's Lench, Atch Lench, and Church Lench acted independently. At an earlier date most minute instructions were given to parish road surveyors, who were appointed by Justices of the Peace. I have in my possession a pamphlet containing this information, in connection with the appointment of my grandfather in 1816. I think that the methods described were subsequently simplified and the cart of the roads left almost entirely in the hands of the leading parishioners.

It was customary for the farmers to arrange among themselves who should be surveyor, and the others supported him and perhaps later on filled the office in turn.

The surveyor arranged for necessary repairs to the best of his ability, securing all the pebbles picked up on



the arable land during the winter, and engaging a man to work on the road when required.

At Sheriff's Lench, my father and Mr. Benjamin Smithin (who took the Manor Farm in 1848) acted as surveyors alternately. As their farms occupied the whole area of the hamlet, over one thousand acres, there was no one else to be consulted, and they shared the expense.

At Atch Lench the responsibilities were shared and the expenses divided in like manner by my grandfather (Joseph Bomford) and his brothers Thomas and Benjamin, and, as in the case of Sheriff's Lench, no one else contributed to the upkeep of the roads.

At Church Lench very much the same method was employed. There the chief occupiers of the land were Mr. John Tovey, maltster, and his three sons, Messrs. Nathaniel, John, and Thomas Tovey, and later Messrs. T. Y. and William Tovey. In earlier times Mr. "Nathan" Tovey was very energetic and useful in taking his share and carrying out business connected with the parish, and after his untimely death the duties often devolved upon his brother Thomas.

#### GREEN HILL, EVESHAM.

Green Hill, Evesham, to-day is a beautiful approach to the town from the north, and is deservedly admired by all visitors, but naturally many changes have taken place since I first remember it eighty years ago. Then it was a lovely spot, almost rural in character, the houses being in large gardens surrounded by orchards and open fields. The Lodge plantation was especially the haunt of nightingales, while many other shy birds nested in the trees and hedges in this quiet neighbourhood.

In my early journeys to Evesham, when I accompanied my father in the gig, Mr. John Dingley lived at Twyford—for, although it is in the parish of Norton, I always associated the house there with Green Hill. Mr. Dingley and my father were on friendly terms, and both were included in the Loxley, New, and Applebee circles. After passing through the turnpike gate, the houses on the right-hand side were as follows:—

(1) Battlewell House, which stood back from the road—almost opposite to The Lodge gates—with a small orchard before it. A Mr. Lee (or Lea?) lived here, and for several years in succession he let the grass-keep of his orchard—about two or three acres—to my father, re-servicing the fruit. Among others there were some cherry trees, and Mr. Lee was always very apprehensive lest the haymakers should help themselves to the fruit. At the end of the first year, my father paid the rent for the keep on the appointed day, and when he asked Mr. Lee if he

would let it again he received the reply: "Yes, Mr. Punctuality, for prompt payment is what I like."

At a rather later date a small school for boys was kept here, and among others who attended it—at least for a time—were Horace Haynes—afterwards, as Dr. Horace Haynes, so well known in Evesham and its neighbourhood—and several of the Fosters, sons of the druggist then in High-street.

(2) Further on were two cottages—semi-detached—built by Mr. Marshall, the first Master of the Workhouse, and father of Wilson Marshall, whose name occurs in my list of school-fellows.

(3) At the Cottage, now occupied by Mr. H. B. Pollard, lived Miss Eades. I remember the well-known acacia-tree when it was quite young. One incident connected with this house I must relate.

Once when I was returning home in the dogcart from market, accompanied by my young brothers, Will and Charlie, who then attended the Grammar School on Merstow Green, I had an accident near this spot. I was driving a nervous young mare, and she shied violently at a string of men carrying their tools as they were returning home from work. I made the mistake of touching her with the whip, and she boited, one wheel of the dogcart going over a heap of stones. The vehicle and mare were overturned, and as she was in the ditch on her back with legs in the air, she was unable to stir. Fortunately we were all thrown clear, and though hurt we received no serious injuries. My brothers' heads were driven through the thick hawthorn hedge, and some days passed before all the thorns were extracted. I escaped with a cut face. Passers-by were ready to give help in getting our nag on her feet again, and we had to borrow another trap and fresh harness to complete our journey.

Miss Eades, hearing of the accident, sent her maid to ask particulars, and then came out herself and asked me to go into the house to receive first aid. This was the beginning of our acquaintance, and she gave me a cordial invitation to go and see her any time I was passing and needed refreshment. I availed myself of her kindness once or twice, and each time she gave me beer in a small silver tankard kept for the use of her nephew George, as he assured her that drinking beer out of that metal much improved the beverage. I little thought then how well I should come to know that nephew, George Lavender Eades, ultimately of The Lodge, in after years.

When I was going daily to Evesham Flour Mills—which I did for thirty-five years (autumn, 1876, to February, 1912)—I went by train from Harvington about 8.20 a.m., walking from Atch Lench to the station, a

distance of *at* miles. During a number of those years G. L. Eades travelled by the same train.

(4) Just beyond the Pool was Prussia House, a substantial building equipped with stabling, coach-house, and well-appointed garden. Here lived the Rev. W. B. Bonaker, vicar of Honeybourne. He kept two horses, which he could drive as a pair when required.

On the town side of this residence were situated the market gardens of Mr. John George and others. The path on the high bank was protected by railings, as it is to-day.

Worcester Road—long called the New Road—was made during the period of my school days at Evesham, a little before the railway was opened, I think.

As the first house on the west side of High Street was Almswood, there was a considerable piece of ground for market gardening between the town and the bottom of Green Hill.

At Almswood lived the Rev. Timothy Davis. He and Mrs. Davis were life-long friends of our family, the latter having been bridesmaid—in 1810—for my grandmother, Mrs. Joseph Boniford (née Letitia Butler). Members of our family were always expected to dinner at Almswood on a cattle market day, and the Davises frequently visited at Atch Lench and Sheriff's Lench. The son, the Rev. David Davis, was in his youth a great friend of my father.

On the opposite side of the street was the home of Mr. John New. This was the second house on the east side of High Street—now number 91—and later on was occupied by Mr. Loxley. There was an orchard at the back which I knew well, and of which we frequently took the keep.

(5) Ascending Green Hill, the first house on the right (No. 1, Green Hill) was the home of Mr. Herbert New. This was built by Mr. Caleb New in earlier times, and had been considerably enlarged and altered in 1852. I remember accompanying my father when he called on Mr. New shortly after the alterations were completed.

With its sloping picturesque grounds, terminating in an orchard of over five acres, it was an ideal home for a large family. We took the grass in this orchard for years.

(6) Higher on the hill stood the Croft—as it is now known—with its pleasant garden and well-fruited orchard, where two sisters, the Misses Hiles, lived. Their sister, the first Mrs. A. H. Wright, was well known to me because her sons, my contemporaries, often visited at Sheriff's Lench.

(7) The next house was Lanesfield, the building which was the home of Prince Henry's Grammar School, from 1879 until the time when the new school buildings were opened in 1910. Here lived Mr. Clarke, a man in affluent

circumstances and a magistrate. His son, Humphries Clarke, I believe, lived for some years at The Parks Farm, Aldington.

(8) The commodious square house now known as Eastfields House, the residence of Mr. E. W. Beck, was used by The Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway Company at the time when the line was being laid, the large room on the ground floor being employed as a draughtman's office.

(9) So far as I can recollect the only other house on Green Hill in those far-off days, besides those already mentioned, was The Lodge, with the rustic thatched cottage at its gates. Adjoining the extensive gardens was a pasture field called The Lawn, of at least twelve acres, and containing numerous fruit and timber trees. I remember a whole line of elms in one of the hedges there being blown down one night by a tremendous gale after a period of excessively wet weather. Miss Blayney resided at The Lodge, and an old man in her employ named Price lived in the cottage. My father took the grass keep in The Lawn for about seven years, sometimes grazing it, and sometimes mowing it. Miss Blayney had the trees marked if she wished to reserve the fruit. The hay was always drawn to Sheriff's Lench—five waggons being required—except on one occasion, when it was brought to Atch Lench.

More than once when I was hay-making in The Lawn on a hot summer's day, Miss Blayney kindly fetched me in to have tea with her.

At that time we had a number of intimate friends at Evesham, and when the hay-making of The Lawn was in progress some availed themselves of the opportunity to have hay-parties there. It was esteemed a great treat by the younger members of the families concerned. I remember the Davises, with their grandchildren, the Herfords, Mr. Thomas New's family, the Bults, the Wrights, and others came on these occasions.

One summer night in the 'fifties there was a terrible thunderstorm, accompanied by a torrential downpour. Our men, who had been employed during the day mowing The Lawn, were spending the night in Mr. Collins's barn at the Oxstalls Farm, and so terrified were they lest the building should fall on them that they all dashed out into the storm.

During that same night something of a calamity took place at Birmingham. The caterers had provided huge stores of provisions for the occasion of the visit of Queen Victoria the next day, as thousands of visitors were expected. The night was so excessively sultry that all the meat prepared was utterly spoilt and rendered unfit for food.

### GREEN HILL TURNPIKE.

The turnpike roads were generally well cared for, that between Evesham and Alcester, when under the management of Mr. Wilmott, was excellent, and the admiration of two counties.

Turnpikes were of course familiar to me for a great part of my life, the one I knew best being at the top of Green Hill, Evesham. Charges varied in different localities. I believe the following were made here:—

- One horse, 1d.
- One horse and 2-wheeled vehicle, 3d.
- One horse and a 4-wheeled vehicle, 6d.
- One farm wagon with broad wheels, 1s.
- One farm wagon with narrow wheels, 1s. 6d.
- One cow, 1d.
- One sheep, 3d.
- One calf, 4d.

Mr. Masters, who kept the Green Hill turnpike, encouraged the native sporting instinct by tossing, if there was an odd farthing in the account.

If a man's business required his passage through the turnpike several times in a day, one payment sufficed.

### THE BIRMINGHAM STAGE COACH.

From my earliest years I knew the turnpike road to Alcester very well indeed, as we frequently went there to see my grandmother, Mrs. Hughes. On these journeys we always wondered at what point the stage coach to Birmingham would overtake us. If it happened to be on a slope it seemed to thunder past us, causing us a great thrill.

It always went at top speed from Iron's Cross, and then swung up Limebridge Hill without any slackening of pace.

Besides the stage coaches for passengers there were also heavy coaches for conveying goods from one part of the country to another. On two occasions (when I was eleven years old) I helped to take a load of dressed pork pigs to the Star Hotel at Evesham, where they were put into the coach for London.

### THE PARISH POUNDS.

There used to be a pound in practically every parish. At Church Lench the ground it used to occupy now forms part of the garden at the Post Office.

At Dunnington I well remember that the disused village stocks were for a long time in the pound.

If straying animals were impounded information was sent to their owner. I remember once receiving a note from Mr. Richard Bullock, telling me that my colts had strayed and had been impounded at Harvington.

The Rous Lench pound remained intact until comparatively recent times, and I believe that part of its high fence is still to be seen there.

### ALCESTER FAIRS.

As I was often taken to Alcester I was very familiar with the Fairs held there in May and October. May 18th was the date of the greatest Cattle Fair (and Pleasure Fair) of the year. I have still a vivid impression of the large droves of young store cattle, many of them from Wales. A great proportion of these were on their way to supply the graziers of Northamptonshire and other feeding districts.

### GOOD GUARDIANS.

The Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 brought relief to the labouring classes by cheapening bread, but it was not long before this was counteracted by the outbreak of the Crimean War, which occasioned great shortage of foodstuffs.

The duties of Guardians were often very onerous, especially in "the hungry 'forties" and during the Crimean War, when so much outdoor relief was absolutely necessary. The poverty of the labourers was very great, but in this parish all the farmers took a real interest in the welfare of their men, and helped them in various ways, assisting them to buy coal and flour at merchants' prices, etc. Those who were "regular men", of any farmer could, in time of stress, draw upon their future earnings and, as a rule, their credit was good.

As long ago as I can remember my father was guardian for the parish of Church Lench, and after his death Mr. Smithin became guardian. In recent times my brother, John H. Bomford, Aitch Lench, was guardian for this parish for thirty-seven years, and since his resignation my son, John C. Bomford, Sheriff's Lench, has held that office. In about the year 1844 our shepherd, William Clarke, and his wife died within a week of each other. The elder members of their family were grown up, and some of them married, but all the younger ones had to be provided for by the parish. As my father was guardian he had to place the homeless ones, and this he managed to do without sending any of them to the Poor House.

The youngest child, a girl of about six, was sent to live with the eldest brother, George, who was married and living at Dunnington. Fred, the youngest boy, went to live with a married brother, John, at Church Lench; it was arranged for a relative living near Birmingham to take charge of Harry; Tom was old enough to begin work, and after being fitted out with clothes by the guar-

dians went to "live in" at some farm house; while Job came to our house at once and took his place as house boy.

#### JOB CLARKE.

He was a remarkably small boy, and always remained under average size. By degrees his duties changed and after having a spell of grooming the nag and milking, he began shepherding. At about twenty years of age he became head shepherd, looking after two hundred breeding ewes. After some years of experience he became a most valuable shepherd, being a capital shearer and able to dress a sheep as well as a practised butcher, besides being a sworn foe to the fly. On one occasion when Job Clarke had charge of the flock, I heard my father say to the wool-stapler, "There are two hundred fleeces and not one of them is broken."

He remained a friend to his dying day, three generations of our family having had recourse to his knowledge and skill.

#### HARVESTING AND HARVESTERS.

Evesham used to be the centre of a large corn-growing district, the chief crop being wheat. As there were no railways, farmers were dependent on local millers, who were ready to buy their corn at current rates. The sight of farm wagons loaded with sacks, with carter's perquisite of straw on the top, going to the mill, so familiar during the greater part of my life, is now seen no more.

In my childhood all reaping was done with the sickle, which was used skilfully by some women as well as by men. The reapers using the sickle left very much longer stubble than has been the custom in more modern times. There were several reasons for this:—

(1) As all corn was then hand-threshed, the shortening of the sheaves lessened the labour of the thrasher.

(2) Farmers frequently shot over their own farms, and a rough stubble with a well-trained setter made a sportsman's paradise.

(3) Straw being so abundant was of very little value. A little later the bagging-hook came into use. In this neighbourhood it was introduced by men who came from Wychwood Forest. They were always spoken of as "Foresters," and they used to come in gangs when extra hands were required. They slept in buildings belonging to their employer, who supplied them daily with beer or cider in addition to their wages, and on Sundays with meat and vegetables as well.

Men from Herefordshire also came in the same way. At a later date parties of Irishmen came for harvesting,

summer after summer, to the same farm—working with the greatest loyalty, and showing a marvellous devotion to their employers.

In the 'sixties the first reaping machine came into use. Women tied up the sheaves. Binders became general in the early 'nineties.

#### THRESHING AND WINNOWER.

On looking back from these times when so much labour-saving machinery is in use, to those times when all operations were carried out by hand, I marvel that the corn was ever threshed.

I remember when upwards of twenty men in this parish were employed for the whole winter, and also parts of the spring and autumn, threshing on the barn floors.

The flail or threshel was usually a home-made instrument. The part which actually beat out the corn was called the "nyle." This was made of old hawthorn, or sometimes blackthorn, those woods being tough and not easily splintered. The threshers were most observant of weather conditions. When the wind was from a dry quarter the doors of the barn would be flung open, but if the air was damp they tried to stop up every vent and crevice. "Thone" and "dawny" were terms used by threshers to describe the corn, when it was damp and consequently tough.

In these times foreign corn is received in this country prepared for milling almost exclusively by machinery; in those times English corn was delivered to the local mills in as good a condition, but every process was carried out by hand.

Besides the laborious wielding of the flail, there was the right use to be made of the various riddles (or sieves), the caving riddle, the rying sieve, the wheat riddle, etc.

The winnowing machine used contained a part invented by Joseph Gilbert, of Bengeworth, which was considered a valuable improvement. When all processes were completed the corn was put in sacks of four bushels (248lb.). It was the great ambition of the young men to carry one of these sacks up a ladder on to the wagon that was being loaded. I have carried up hundreds.

By degrees the use of machines for threshing became general, the earlier ones being worked by four horses moving in a circle.

In 1852 I remember seeing a rick of Mr. Benjamin Smithin's being threshed (at the Leasow) by steam power, the machine belonging to Mr. Benjamin Bomford, of Fitchill.

One threshing set was so small that two horses could draw the machine, and only one was needed for the engine. On one occasion when this set was being fetched

from Bevington, "Scot," an old mare of ours ran away with the engine, and thus broke every spoke (iron) in one wheel.

At this time many of the leading mechanical engineers were rapidly improving threshing engines. Mr. Edward Humphries, of Pershore, kept pace with his threshing machines. Their use was almost universal with English farmers, and he did a considerable export trade with various countries, including Russia.

#### EVEESHAM CORN MARKET.

I was familiar with Evesham Corn Market from the 'forties to the end of the first decade of the 20th century. During that period wheat was always quoted at per bag, i.e., three bushels, the net weight being 186lb.

In 1846, my father being ill, my brother and I were sent with a sample of red wheat, to interview Mr. Anthony Burrows, of Broom Mill, as he, at that time, bought a good deal of our corn.

After making inquiries we found Mr. Burrows at the Woolpack, Bridge Street, and showed him the sample. He offered 45s. per bag, and ended by saying: "You are very young market men, but remember that the price offered is probably the highest you will ever get if you live to be a good old age." This prediction proved true. He gave us a sample of some fine white wheat, which he had just bought at 46s., to submit to my father. The next morning when we were at breakfast, a boy came up on horseback from Broom Mill with a message from Mr. Burrows that he could not "stand word" as the markets were down. The following Monday my father sold the wheat at 44s. per bag.

From this point prices steadily went down, until some farmers who had held for higher prices were eventually forced to sell 50s. wheat for 20s., and in many cases the deliveries were unsatisfactory because of the staleness of the wheat, and large allowances had to be made.

#### FREE TRADE.

In the 'forties before the Repeal of the Corn Laws (1846), and for several years after, throughout the country, at market or elsewhere, I remember that wherever urban and country districts were represented the one topic of conversation was Free Trade. This led to heated arguments, which were sometimes followed by violent scenes.

The Repeal of the Corn Laws was hastened by the Potato Famine, caused by the disease that killed off all potato crops for several years. I remember perfectly well when potatoes were unobtainable, as the blight was

universal in this country. Potatoes remained very scarce and were exceedingly difficult to grow for many years.

#### EVEESHAM OLD BRIDGE.

In my boyhood I knew Evesham well, as I often went there on market-day with my father, driving in the gig from Sheriff's Lench. The first house in the town then on the east side of High Street was occupied by William Fletcher, a tailor, at that time. We always put up at the Star Hotel, from the windows of which we children had a good view of the cattle market on the cobble-stones below, and also of any excitement which might be caused by an election, etc.

My Aunt Caroline (Mrs. George Baylis) lived at Prospect House, Bengeworth, and my brother Joe and I frequently visited her on a market day. We were always instructed to hurry over the narrow bridge that then spanned the Avon, and to take breath in each of the two niches provided for the safety of pedestrians.

The terrors of the bridge were less trying than the dread we entertained of the Bluecoat boys, at Deacle's School, who took a delight in frightening us by jeers and gestures, which certainly did us no real harm.

In those days all coal was brought to Evesham by water, being delivered to Bengeworth, where there was a wharf. On occasions when frost was long and severe, coal became exceedingly scarce and correspondingly dear.

#### MARKET GARDENING IN THE 'FORTIES.

Until railways were open, it was impossible to send away garden produce from Evesham, except on a very small scale. Market gardening in the 'forties was in its infancy, as corn-growing was still the most important industry in the district.

Farmers did not grow fruit for sale; their orchards produced enough apples and pears for their own consumption, and sufficient fruit for grinding at the stone cider-mill, then found in almost every village. Certainly there was, even in my grandfather's time—he died in 1858—a fine strawberry pear-tree in the House Ground orchard, the crop of which was often bought by an Evesham man. Of the apples stored, Blenheims were generally used for cooking, while the dessert varieties which seemed to prevail were Gooseberry apples and Sugar and Creams. At all events it was these two sorts that always filled the two oval willow-pattern china dishes, and were ready for us children to attack as soon as we came in to see our grandparents at the close of the afternoon service at Atch Lench chapel.

As we were returning home from school at Evesham about five o'clock on a Wednesday afternoon, at Twyford

we used to fall in with one or two one-horse vehicles, driven by gardeners who were conveying their own vegetables to Birmingham market.

When the reader compares this insignificant output of garden produce with the list published recently in the "Evesham Journal," he will realise the enormous growth of the gardening industry, and form an idea of its effect on the growth and prosperity of Evesham.

The well-known Mrs. John George took a load of home-grown vegetables, etc., every Tuesday to Alcester, and sold them at a stall near Mr. Jephcott's shop. She often had cucumbers and onions for sale in their season, and if customers wished to buy cucumbers only, she would give them an onion, as she did not think it whole-some for cucumbers to be eaten alone. Mrs. John George had a shop near Dresden House, where she sold fruit and seeds; her husband, a leading gardener, occupied a good deal of ground, mostly situated on Green Hill.

#### SCHOOL DAYS AND SCHOOL FELLOWS AT EVESHAM.

In 1849 my brother and I began to go to school at Evesham, walking there and back every day. On Saturday there was a half-holiday. The school was at Oxford House, High Street, the site of which is now occupied by Messrs. H. Fowler and Son's business. I continued attending this school until the end of 1852. The school-master was Mr. Henry John Thomas, M.C.P. There was a good-sized playground, and adjoining were some disused malt-houses, which provided a splendid place for indoor games.

Mr. Thomas had one or two assistants, and when we first went there were forty-eight boys, of whom twenty-eight, including some Evesham boys, were boarders.

Having lived so quietly and having known so few people at Sheriff's Lench, to be plunged into such a large company of boys made a deep impression on my mind. I made a point of learning their names as soon as possible, and I have never forgotten them:—

Class I.—Christopher Hensley, Richard Wheeler (Broadway); William Shackleford, Tom Lewis (Cheltenham); Harry Alden (Oxford); Cornhill (Bourton-on-the-Water); Wilson Whitford, Edward Nicklin, Jack Hubbard (Evesham); Joseph H. Bomford (Sheriff's Lench); Joe Coombs (Pershore).

Class II.—John Hanks, Richard Lane (Charlton Abbots); Edward Comely (Notgrove); John Herbert, Fred Manton, J. Lichfield Stanley, Lewis Williams (Campden); John Griffiths (Eyeford); Arthur Smith (Winchcombe); Pearce Fuller, Kerry Chambers, John Alfred Bomford, James Hubbard, Edward Lawrence,

Edmund Wright, Fred Badger (Evesham); George Frederick Bomford (Sheriff's Lench); Theophilus Jones (Badsey).

Class III.—Eben Haines (Broad Campden); — Harris (London); Thomas Comely (Notgrove); William Hanks (Charlton Abbots); Tom Pearson (Naunton); William Arkless, Oliver Hunt, Wilson Marshall, Frank Laxton, Fred Hockin, Charles Hubbard (Evesham).

Class IV.—George Bomford (The White House, Salford); Joe Hanks (Naunton); — Gibbs (Offenham); Alfred Hubbard, J. Humphries, J. Macefield (Pitchill); Ted Griffiths (Eyeford); — Cook (Offenham).

#### "THE YOUNG MARTYR OF ALLAHABAD."

About a year later one of the new day boys was Arthur Marcus Hill Cheek (the son of Mr. Oswald Cheek), whom I have always remembered with much interest. His heroic death in the Indian Mutiny is recorded on the family memorial near the Bell Tower.

#### SCHOOL GAMES.

Amongst the games which occupied the boys in the playground, marbles were always in season in some form or other, such as "Ring Taw," "Pitch," "Pitch and Nick'em," "Dab," etc. The boys used to sell marbles to each other at eight a penny, and there was a tradition that one boy had made 4s. in the year by selling his winnings.

Chris Hensley, Head of the School, and almost a Steerforth in my eyes, coming from Broadway, was very familiar with the coaches, and he used to spend the whole of the dinner hour driving a four-in-hand of boys round the playground. He tested a number of boys, and finally selected William Hanks and Tom Comely—two smallish boys—for "leaders," and Lichfield Stanley and me, rather older, for "wheelers," and it is no exaggeration to say that we went many a mile at a time round the playground.

On one occasion when I was returning from Broadway with Chris Hensley on the coach, he was allowed by the coachman to drive part of the way to Evesham, which he managed well to my surprise and admiration.

#### BREAKING-UP.

At Christmas there was always an entertainment, consisting mainly of recitations and simple dramatic scenes performed by some of the boys for the amusement and edification of their comrades and relations. When breaking-up for the summer holidays some three or four of the leading boys were expected to make speeches,

which they did in a rather laborious manner. On one of these occasions an impromptu speech was made by John Alfred Bomford, and so apt and ready was it that the boys in the First Class were quite envious of his ability.

On the last day of school "The Holiday Song," was sung, Mr. Thomas coming in with his bass: "Boxes packing, shoes a-blacking," etc.

Mrs. Thomas looked after the boarders with a motherly care; for instance, if any of them had had their hair cut she always insisted on their wearing their caps in school the next day. Glegarry caps were in fashion then.

#### RAILWAY TRAVELLING.

In 1846 I had my first experience of railway travelling, my parents taking me to Weston-super-Mare between haymaking and harvest. We drove to Eckington station and went by the Midland Railway to Bristol, where we had to change. The journey to Weston from Bristol was accomplished in what now seems a strange fashion, for we travelled in a train which was drawn on rails by two horses. After staying a week at Weston we went on to Torquay for a further period.

On our return journey, I was much impressed by the behaviour of a little boy of about ten who happened to travel with us. He was by himself and was equipped with a lunch basket and a small jar of cider, with which he refreshed himself from time to time. Every time the engine whistled or made an extraordinary noise, the boy tried to make a greater noise. In those days the hootings and screams that engines made were prodigious.

#### THE GREAT EXHIBITION OF 1851.

In the summer of 1851, I accompanied my parents, grandfather, and other members of the family to London, on the occasion of the Great Exhibition. We started from Sheriff's Lench at 3 a.m., when the days were at their longest, and drove to Leamington station, seeing the sunrise when we were near Bidford. We travelled by train to Euston and returned by the same route.

We had a great time in London, going to see all the notable sights, as well as visiting the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park. When we went to the Thames Tunnel, silhouettes of my brother and my sisters and myself were made which are still in existence.

One day when we were in Hyde Park, we were thrilled by seeing the Duke of Wellington ride past us. He was the national hero in those days.

As we were starting home in the train, we saw an eager and excited party preparing to liberate a balloon,

but we were disappointed that it did not rise while we were within sight of it. My father cheered us by reciting a rhyme then popular, which showed that aeronautics were still undeveloped:

The car was found at Camden Town,

But what became of Oxford flew,

No mortal ever knew.

#### OPENING OF THE RAILWAY AT EVESHAM.

In May, 1852, the first portion of the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway was opened, connecting Evesham and Stourbridge. In the early days its initials O.W. & W. were said ironically to mean "Oh! Worse and Worse."

I remember there were many difficulties to be overcome, and one part that gave a good deal of trouble was the cutting near the Railway Hotel, which I believe, was not then built. The banks gave way, and in order to support them several thousands of kids (faggots) were used. These were cut on our farm and sold to the contractors.

May 1st, when the railway was opened, was a red-letter day in Evesham. I was at school at Oxford House then, and was among the boys and girls in the town and district entertained to tea in High Street. My father was one of the party who went with the directors and engineers on the first train to Stourbridge, prior to the public opening.

#### FROM SHERIFF'S LENCH TO BIRMINGHAM IN 1853.

On March 31st, 1853, I went to a boarding school at Birmingham, and the following particulars will show that railway travelling had not yet become a simple thing. I drove, with a rather slow horse, from Sheriff's Lench to Spetchley station, a distance of ten miles. At Spetchley I caught the train to Stourbridge, where I changed, took another train, and travelled to Dudley, where I changed again for Dudley Port. At Dudley Port I changed for West Bromwich, where I caught another train—the fifth and final one—for Birmingham.

In December, 1853, my father sold the whole of his flock of ewes—two hundred—on account of the fluke trouble. Mr. George Attwood, of Birmingham, bought them at a very low price, and probably many of them found their way to the tallow-chandlers and soap-makers. According to arrangement, our shepherd, Job Clarke, and his brother accompanied the flock by rail from Fladbury to Birmingham, and eventually the sheep reached their

destination. The men stopped the night in Birmingham, and next day walked home, accomplishing the thirty miles in less time than they had taken to go by rail!

#### SHERIFF'S LENCH AND LONDON.

In 1862, when there was a second Exhibition held in London, the Great Western Railway being then completed, many people from this neighbourhood visited the Metropolis. This trip was undertaken by a party from Sheriff's Lench, conducted by two of my brothers. Among the men who went were Sam Lyes—who was always regarded as a leader—Jack and Charles Stanford, and also George Merrick, of Norton, the brother-in-law of Sam Lyes.

The Exhibition was duly visited, but some of the number found sight-seeing rather tedious, and George Merrick several times during the day was heard to exclaim, "I wish I was a-pitching barley at Norton!" On the way back to Paddington at the end of the day, Jack Stanford was separated from the rest in the crowded streets, and it was not until the station was reached that he was missed. Thereupon Sam Lyes went into several streets near the station, and called out in his wonderfully loud voice, "Jack! Jack!" but answer came there none, and the now dispirited party started homeward by train.

Mrs. Stanford sat up all night awaiting the return of her twin sons, then about twenty years of age, and at the dawn of the day, hearing footsteps, she rushed to the door, where she met Charles, alone. She cried out in alarm, "Charlie, where's Jack?" The reply she received was, "The Lord knows, mother, but I don't."

After about twelve hours anxiety in the Stanford home, Jack returned safe and sound, to the great relief of all in the village. He had been well cared for by a Paddington railway porter, who had taken him to his own home and put him up for the night.

#### THE WEATHER.

Many people say that there is a great change in the seasons. I have always held that these things move so slowly that there is no appreciable difference in the eighty years of my recollection.

#### DRY SEASONS.

The year 1844 was exceedingly dry. The Far Grove—a field on the Sheriff's Lench farm—was planted with bearded spring wheat in May, after which practically no rain fell that summer. When the reaping was done, it was found that some of the seed was still in the ground, having never germinated for lack of moisture. This fact was told me later by two of our men, William Cresswell and William Holder.

The results of the drought were most disastrous. There was no fodder, and there were no turnips; young cattle and nearly all the lambs perished in the winter, while colts and young horses almost famished.

The year 1868 was a remarkable one. The spring and summer were dry and warm beyond parallel. Everything was early. Haymaking in the beginning of June; seed peas carried by June 26th; reaping was general by July 1st. The harvest was completed in July, and on large and well-managed farms wheat ricks were—according to custom—pared and thatched before August. By that time keep was very short. The water supplies were exhausted, no water being left on the Sheriff's Lench farm but a trickle at the bottom of the Round Hill—from the same spring as now supplies Dr. Harthan's residence—and at Atch Lench the much reduced little brook—called Whitsun on the maps—from the spring in Calves' Close, still provided water for the meadow—the Fleet Meadow as it was called in the 18th century.

#### A MEMORABLE HARVEST HOME AT ATCH LENCH.

On August 19th we had the deferred harvest home at Atch Lench, when all the local workpeople were entertained. The extra hands from distant parts, employed for reaping, had left earlier in the month. The drought and heat had continued up to this day. About 6 p.m. supper was served. This consisted of a large supply of hot roast beef, vegetables, and plum pudding, with cider and beer. Pipes and tobacco were also provided. After supper some of the men sang, and occasionally some of the women were induced to favour the company with a song. Some of the ditties then in use, though possibly not sung on this occasion were:—

1.

"Mother, mother, I am married,  
Would that I had longer tarried,  
For my wife she do declare  
That the breeches she will wear," etc.

2.

"I sat me down to write a song,  
I wrote it wide, I wrote it long,  
At every line I shed a tear.

At every verse cried 'Pollic dear,' etc.

Another which was very popular, and was always called for at Sheriff's Lench, was "Will, the Weaver," which John Sparrow, sen., used to sing with great effect. These songs were bought from pack-men.

When we sat down to supper rain had begun to fall, and it continued throughout the evening, becoming heavier as time went on. As was customary, the women



and girls left first, but after a time some returned to say that the brook had overflowed the bridge to Church Lench—a most rare occurrence—and the road was impassable. In consequence the cart (Sammy Wallis) and the boys fetched in two horses, geared them, and with a wagon conveyed all the Church Lench people home. This great rain, and the stormy period that followed, brought up the rainfall to such an extent that it was little below the average at the close of the year. Other dry summers were 1870, 1887, 1911, 1921, and 1929.

#### WET YEARS.

Among the wet years in my lifetime which have proved most disastrous to farmers are 1848, 1852, 1853, 1879, 1880, 1888, and 1912.

I do not think that the year 1848 was wet throughout, but in early autumn heavy rains set in, interfering with the late harvest, and at the end of September there were two whole days when rain fell in torrents, causing a record flood. Its height was marked at the Mill at Evesham and at other places, and was never surpassed until the first day of the 20th century.

All the meadow land from Evesham to Pershore was submerged, and from Craycombe Hill the expanse of water looked like a sea. At the present time it is almost impossible for anyone to realise what it was like.

The early part of 1852 was dry, but in May rain set in, and to the best of my belief there was not another dry day until August. To the end of the year it was equally wet. The hay was spoiled, the corn was practically worthless, no fallows were made, no preparation for the next year's crop, no manure carted. On our farm less than twenty acres of corn were planted, instead of the usual one hundred and eighty, and curiously enough this was in the very field where some of the seed corn did not germinate on account of the drought in 1844.

It was only possible to plant corn by ploughing the ground in the morning, and drilling the corn in the afternoon. If the ploughing had been left one night, a horse could not have walked on it without sinking in over the fetlocks.

Owing to floods the mills on the Avon were all still. I know for a certainty that Fladbury Mill was idle for months, little lots of allotment and leazed corn lying mouldering in the upper storeys, and never ground in sufficient quantities to make any bread. This wet period continued throughout 1853 and consequently brought many disasters in its train.

At that time my father occupied the Long Meadow at the Oxstalls, Evesham, and it was customary to mow it. It was not possible for it to be cut till August. By that

time it had been completely under water no less than ten times since March. The harvest was very poor and late, and much corn remained out until winter on account of the bad season. As I was returning home from school in Birmingham on December 16th I saw pheasants on the stooks of beans in a field near King's Norton, and on my arrival at Sheriff's Lench I found we had some corn out still. Thousands of sheep throughout the land perished as a result of the wet seasons of 1852 and 1853, and it took years for the flocks to be re-established.

In 1879 when conditions were similar, farmers' losses were greater, because more sheep were kept and prices were on a higher level.

It is probable that it was after such a season as this, when he had lost all his sheep from the fluke and was unable to buy any sound ones, that Mr. Stokes—who was tenant of Sheriff's Lench farm in the 18th century—bought a flock of goats from Wales. I learnt this from William Cresswell, who was entrusted by Mr. Stokes to go to Abergele to drive the goats to Sheriff's Lench.

#### SNOW-FALLS.

Just after Christmas, 1853, there occurred the greatest fall of snow I have ever known, and a sharp frost set in. The snow lay for months, some drifts being very deep, and more snow fell from time to time. All operations on the land were stopped for the time being.

On March 1st I came to Atch Lench to stay with my grandfather and to assist him. One of my first duties was to help the cart, Sammy Wallis, to dig out a cart-road in the snow to the Common. When we piled up the snow at the sides it was ten feet high. In the hollow near Knight's Leasow pool we found a man, a stranger, frozen in a snow-drift. He was carried to Church Lench and tended. It was found that his toes were badly frost-bitten.

In many places the hedges and fences were quite obliterated by drifts, and as the frost was very sharp the snow was like rock, and it would bear any weight. I have often known deep snows and sharp frosts, but in all my experience there has been nothing to touch the early months of 1854—the Russian War time—for extreme severity.

#### THE BEST SEASON.

Of all the years I remember, that of 1863 was the best all-round season in this district.

There was an average hay-crop, every bit of which was secured in perfect condition. All grain was a fair crop, of extraordinary quality, and owing to the sunny season barley and wheat were over-weight, a bushel of barley (56lb.) often exceeding 60lb. The whole of the crop of barley was eminently fitted for malting, and its colour was such that I have never seen it equalled.

## JENNY LIND.

I am afraid that those who read these reminiscences will think that I had a very dull time of it, but there were some thrilling moments.

In 1858 I unexpectedly received a ticket for a concert in the Music Hall at Worcester, at which Jenny Lind was the great attraction. What she sang I do not remember, but her marvellous voice and the tremendous reception she was accorded are still a vivid memory. All in the audience clapped and cheered vociferously in order to induce her to give an encore, but all these efforts were without avail, and she adhered to what, I believe, was her custom.

## WOOD NORTON.

After my father's death in 1861, I, as his executor, managed the Sheriff's Lench farm for my mother for several years.

Our farm was almost surrounded by the covers of the Duke d'Aumale, who had bought the Holland estate and lived at Wood Norton. We always took every step in our power to protect his pheasants and partridges, which lived to a great extent upon our land, and in consequence we were always treated with great courtesy by the Duke himself and by his agent, Mr. Charles Randall. At a later date the Duke d'Aumale acquired the shooting on our farm.

## THE DUKE D'AUMALE'S HARRIERS.

By the year 1863 the Duke d'Aumale was well-known in the district, and was very popular with his tenants and all lovers of sport. He introduced a pack of harriers, and hunted not only in this neighbourhood but also on the Cotswolds. In March, 1863, I received the following note:—

Chadbury,

Near Evesham,

March 16th, 1863.

Dear Sir,—

I am desired by His Royal Highness the Duke d'Aumale, to request the favour of your company to breakfast with him at Wood Norton, at 10 o'clock on Tuesday, the 25th instant, on which day a deer will be uncarted before the harriers at Bishampton.

Oblige me with a line in reply, and believe me,  
Very truly yours,

C. RANDALL.

Mr. Bomford.

On March 25th I repaired to Wood Norton to breakfast. Several of the French Princes were present, including the Prince de Joinville and the Duke de Chartres. I sat next to the former, and found him a most agreeable

conversationalist. I do not remember much about the menu, but I do recollect that Strasburg pie was a leading feature, and that it was much appreciated by the guests.

## A FAMOUS MEET.

Mr. Robert Lunn, of Norton—at a later date Town Clerk of Stratford-on-Avon—rode with me to the meet, which took place at Mr. Willetts's Long Meadow at Bishampton, where several hundreds of horsemen assembled.

Besides the Duke d'Aumale and his house party there were present many of the county leaders of Worcestershire, Warwickshire, and Gloucestershire, as well as most of the farmers of the district, and every butcher and baker who owned a horse and could borrow a saddle. Although times were none too rosy for agriculturists in those days, a farmer with a grown-up son generally had a young horse to break in and improve in the hope of selling.

The biggest obstacle in the chase was found at the start, namely, Bishampton Brook. Many who crossed the brook got into trouble through the boggy landing.

My little grey mare came down on her knees, but I managed to keep my seat and get going again. As I looked back I saw quite a line, along the brook, of discomfited horsemen and not a few riderless horses galloping about. The Duke's horse came down owing to being charged by another, but he was soon mounted on his second horse, while the runaway was seized by a sporting follower and ridden for the rest of the chase.

The run was very fast and extremely brief, through Abberton, Flyford Flavel, and Grafton, ending at Dormston.

## THE PRINCE'S VISIT IN 1867.

The visit of H.R.H. Albert Edward Prince of Wales—afterwards King Edward the Seventh—to Wood Norton, in 1867, was a great event in the neighbourhood. The Duke d'Aumale had by that time greatly increased the game on his estate, and was able to give big shooting parties in honour of the Prince's visit. A pheasant battue took place on our farm, and I heard the Prince say to the Duke that there were not many rabbits, and that it was better sport to shoot rabbits than pheasants, to which the latter replied, "Your Royal Highness, my tenants already complain that there are too many rabbits."

The Duke d'Aumale appointed some of the older and more sporting of his tenants each to attend one of his distinguished guests to mark the game killed. Mr. Willetts, of Bishampton Fields, was chosen to attend the Prince. He was a keen sportsman, and consequently was

regarded sympathetically by the Duke, who presented him thus: "Your Royal Highness, this is my tenant 'Villets,' who will shoot or ride against any man in England."

On another occasion H.R.H. Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, was one of the Duke d'Aumale's guests at a shooting party. At that time the house at Wood Norton was not large, and as there was not sufficient accommodation for all the visitors, some, including the Duke of Edinburgh, stayed at Mr. Randall's house at Chadbury.

Some of the other French Princes who used often to be at Wood Norton were the Comte de Paris and the Duke de Chartres.

On many occasions when the Duke d'Aumale was shooting informally, my brother, Albert H. Bomford, who was a very good shot, often joined the party by request.

#### THE PRESENT LACK OF THRIFT.

At I look back over the last 80 years, what strikes me most is the lack of thrift at the present time, compared with the rigid economy practised by all in my boyhood. Many people who were in comfortable circumstances at the end of the 19th century owed their position to the habitual self-denial of their parents. In those far-off days holidays were few, and only a very small proportion of the population ever travelled or visited seaside resorts. Clothes were made of lasting materials, and continued in use for a number of years.

#### CHILDREN IN THE 'FORTIES.

As a rule children had no pocket-money. Very few sweets came their way. It was a rare thing for a child to receive gifts of toys, and it was customary for children to amuse themselves with their own contrivances. Though my brothers and I had some toys, we much more frequently played with pebbles for cattle and sheep on little farms we made for ourselves, and during a winter evening when a story was being read aloud by parent or governess, I should be perfectly happy playing for long spells with feathers I had collected, using them in turns for fowls, cricket elevens, and teams of horses.

#### MODERN CONDITIONS.

My earliest impressions of the condition and clothing of the children of villagers form an amazing contrast to those of to-day. In recent years when I have seen troops of children arriving at, or being dismissed from, the elementary school, I have been much struck by the improved appearance in health and dress.

This is a direct evidence of the amelioration of the lot of the toilers.