

VILLAGE SKETCHES X

A VISIT TO SOUTHPORT AND A CHAT WITH AN OLD "EARBYITE"

I must confess to an interest in Southport which amounts almost to fascination. How well I remember my first visit, in the days of my boyhood, nearly forty years ago. For weeks and even months, I had been saving pennies received for running errands, and when Earby Feast came I was the proud possessor of four or five shillings.

The morning of the Feast Tuesday was gloriously fine, and a large company of villagers made their way to the station in high glee to go on the Feast trip to Southport. What a pleasing experience was that first long railway journey.

After passing through the East Lancashire towns we glided along through the cornfields and then came into view the red-bricked houses of the seaside town. Now we were at the station, and in a few minutes we would behold the sea for the first time. Oh, how pleasing are the delights of expectation. Realisation, and even disillusionment can never rob us of the pleasures of hope and the joy of looking forward.

Though there was no swelling tide and foaming billows, yet beyond the wide stretch of sand there was the sheen of the silvery sea and the natural instinct of reverence and wonder which it called forth has never vanished from the mind of this beholder.

How the events of that day come back again. The sail to the cockle beds in a rowing boat ; the bare-legged sailor carrying his passengers for a dozen yards through the shallow water ; the donkey ride, strolling along the promenade with a penny cane, the drive in a wagonette in the afternoon, to the "Botanic Gardens," that wonder world then in its pristine glory with its trees and flowers and ferns, its aviary and its lake ; and to crown all, a day of sunshine when everyone felt it was grand to be alive. Aye, it was a red-letter day indeed ; but when the night shadows fell we were all glad to return home and nestle in our beds in dear old Earby.

Many a pleasant holiday have I spent at Southport since those early days, but that is another story, and my present intention is to record a most interesting chat I had with a former Earby resident a week or two ago. I had never met him before, and after our introduction he suggested a walk, so on a fine afternoon we found a nice sheltered spot in the shrubbery's on the promenade, when he recounted the following recollections of his early life :

The name of this venerable old Earby resident is

JOHN SANDERSON

"I was born at hill top, Earby, in 1848, and I was named after my father. My mother was a daughter of John Pickles (who has been previously referred to in these sketches) My fathers occupation was that of a wheelwright, and his shop was at Lane Ends. My first recollection dates back to 1851, when there was an excursion to London for the

GREAT EXHIBITION

The fare to London and back was 5s., and my father was accompanied by James Dodgson the village blacksmith, and a few other friends. When my father came back home he brought me

a present from the exhibition.

A STARTLING INCIDENT

I remember when I was playing in the street with a lot of other lads, and we so annoyed a woman by “striking fire” on the flags in front of her house, that she ran after us, and struck one of the lads to the ground. She was filled with horror when he lay on the road like someone dead, and my uncle Tom (Tommy Pickles) came running out of his cobbler’s shop to see what was up, and he saw that the lad had got his neck knocked out. Fortunately he was able to put it in. We were quiet enough for a time after that!

THE MILL

I recollect the building of Victoria Mill, and its being started by the Bracewell family. My mother was a weaver at the Old Shed, and when I was seven years old I was passed for half time, to learn weaving. We were expected to salute Mr. Christopher and Mr. Henry in the street, and Mr. Christopher once complained to my father because I had, consciously or unconsciously, failed to give the desired salute. My uncle, Henry Pickles, the musician, who kept a grocers shop, also had two hand looms upstairs, and as a young lad I used to wind the bobbins for him.

THE DOFFERS

Were a rough set of lads, and when they had finished doffing the bobbins, and there was no work for them to do, they used to roam about the village and on the farms around, doing all the mischief they could. Their ring-leader was Bill Smith, and his nickname was “Feed ‘Em,” and he was a terror to many people. It is a pleasure to note that “Bill Smith” became Mr. William Smith, and is now one of the most respected and prosperous tradesmen in Burnley, and has a branch shop in Earby.

JOE O’ TIBBIES

Was a quaint character, he recalled. He used to get the lads into a corner at the bottom of Earby, near James Brown’s shop, and tell them tales about “King Ludd and the plug drawing.” The introduction of machinery was resented very much by the working classes, as was the application of steam power for factory purposes. Gangs of men who belonged to a secret society went up and down the industrial districts smashing the machinery, and the

PLUG DRAWING RIOTS

Were the last act in the campaign of destruction. The “Plug Drawers” came to Earby in 1846, and after they had drawn the “plug” in the Old Shed boiler, they went on to Skipton, where they were put to flight by the soldiers.

The country passed through a terrible time of suffering after the Napoleonic Wars ; and the distress of the workers became more acute in the first stages of the industrial revolution ; but public opinion recognised that there was no justification for resorting to destruction and terrorism to defeat what was really a public benefit.

As a boy I attended

BENTLEY’S SCHOOL

And my particular friends were William Dodgson and Joseph Cowgill. Mr. Morris (Rev.

Canon Morris) used to visit the school, and he inspected their work and patted on the head by way of encouragement.

“Mr. Sanderson” he once said to my father, “I think your son is getting on very well indeed.”

William Dodgson was always at the top of the school, and I was second. I could never pass William. He had a wonderful memory, and could cast up three columns at once. My father built a corner shop in Water Street, and my mother became a milliner and sold groceries as well.

Then my father was advised by Dr. Parry, of Barnoldswick, to purchase some dental instruments and practice dentistry.

His first patient was Betty Green, and my father gave her a shilling to allow him to pull one of her teeth.

EARBY SEVENTY YEARS AGO

Was quite a small village, with one weaving shed that held about 200 looms ; one public house, “The White Lion,” kept by Mary Edmondson, and two small chapels, the Baptist and Methodist.

Of Earby families the Wilkinsons were the most numerous, and there was no beginning or end of ‘em. The postman came from Skipton one day with a letter for Mr. Thomas Wilkinson. He found the right house, but nobody knew Mr. Wilkinson. He was always known as Tom o’Bill o’Will o’Sally’s. Then there was Will o’John o’Joe o’Dick’s, who kept a grocer’s shop, and had a good number of regular customers.

John o’Quart John’s lived next door to our house, and it was always said that when he brought new butter home from Skipton market they kept the house door open so that people passing could see it on the table !

Then there was a peculiar character known as “Owd Wilkie” Ayrton. When there was an election at Skipton Wilkie sported the Liberal colours, but as he returned home, and passed Mr. Wasney’s house at Fence End, he changed to the Tory favours, and passed through Thornton with great acclamation.

Wilkie used to go to Skipton every week, and he always brought back a copy of “The Illustrated London News.” When he arrived home his house was the rallying ground to get the news of the week. He also kept poultry in the same place in which he lived, and sometimes they perched upon the bread rack.

There was an old woman named

OWD MARY WHITEOAK

Who lived near “Ireland Bridge,” who was a fine character, and she had two sons who were mechanics at the mill. When “Gunpowder Plot” was coming round the village lads went from house to house a-begging for the fire, and “Owd Mary” gave them all her papers and magazines which she saved for them all year round. Not all the papers went on to the fire, and there wasn’t a lad in Earby who wouldn’t have done anything for her.

A DONKEY TRICK

There was an old woman whose name I forget, who lived in the bottom house in "Muck Street," and she kept a donkey. Her house was above a shop which occupied the ground floor, and was approached at the end by a long flight of stone steps with a landing at the top. One night some of the mischievous lads fastened some cockle shells to its feet with "rosin." Then they led the donkey up the steps, and the awful noise that the donkey made nearly frightened the woman out of her wits.

The father of Bill Smith (Feed 'em) was known to everybody as

JAMMY WING

How he got that nickname I couldn't tell. They were connected with the Baptist Chapel, and when they got a new minister he made a call at their house. "Does Mr. Wing live here" inquired the minister.

"Mr. Wing?" inquired Jammy.

"Mr. Wing, is this his house?"

"I'll have you know that my name's Mrs. Smith and not Mrs. Wing," she said in angry tones. The minister apologised, and poured oil on the troubled water as well as he could.

THE DIPPINGS

As the lads used to call them, were always an interesting event to the villagers, when people were publicly received into membership at the Baptist Chapel. The beck which runs near to the Old Chapel was dammed up, and the candidate for baptism went into water from one of the cottages close by. Among the Baptists, Nathan Watson was a particularly fine man. "He minded his own business, and brought up his family in a proper way."

Jack o'Miles (John Bailey) was also a big man at the Baptist Chapel, and his son Thomas was bigger again! They kept a nice shop in Stoneybank Road and Thomas was always gentlemanly in his manners. He married a daughter of Nathan Watson's. My uncle, Thomas Turner, was also a local preacher at the Baptist Chapel.

Our family was connected with the Wesleyans and they had some grand men, Mr. Wilson, of Thornton, James Dudgeon and several local preachers - Edmund Luanda, Robt. Greenwood, Tommy Smith, James Brown, and John Taylor. There was a man from Colne, John Hobson, who was a fine local preacher. He used always to hawk blacking, which he made himself.

TOMMY AT VARGES (THOMAS WILKINSON)

Was superintendent of the Sunday School, and they always liked his addresses at the

CHRISTMAS TEA PARTY.

I can remember him, just as well as if it was yesterday, saying "There are some folks who don't care how they live, and how they carry on. When they go to bed at night they just take their "clooas" off and roll into bed like a pig!" (But no description can reproduce the comical smile and the drawling intonations with which the words were said).

We always had a big "do" at

EARBY FEAST,

Especially with the singing and the playing of fiddles on the Sunday, and walking round on the Monday.

When I was about five years old I can remember walking round with the scholars, and I had on a pinafore frock with white sleeves, and some of the lads taunted me as we walked round!

After walking we had buns and milk, and Mr. Bracewell provided us with a field to play in.

There were also a few stalls in front of Old Mary Edmondson's (The White Lion Inn).

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