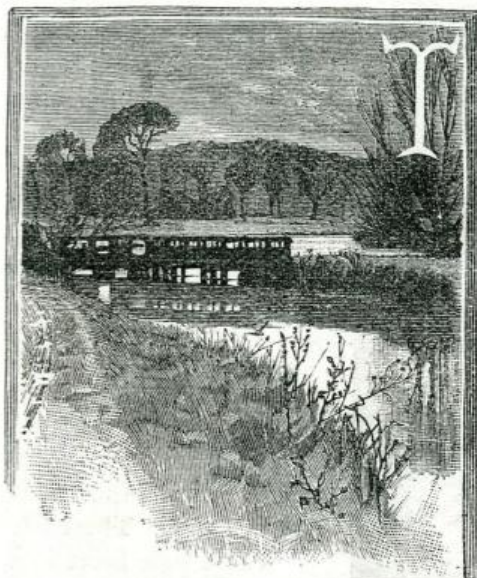


A Pilgrimage to Harefield

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A PILGRIMAGE TO HAREFIELD.



COLNESIDE.

THE other day, having a few hours to spare, and finding myself at the quaint old country-town of Uxbridge, I heard that I was within reach of a pretty village—not Chalfont, nor Horton—yet one with which the muse of Milton once had dealings; so I resolved

to devote an autumn afternoon to a pilgrimage to it.

Harefield is a long and scattered village, bounding the parish of Uxbridge on the north, and stretching in that direction as far as the borders of Hertfordshire. It consists chiefly of pleasant uplands, from which a wide view of the long broad meadows on either side of the Colne is obtained. Of the early history of the place, Lysons tells us that in the time of Edward the Confessor it belonged to the Countess Goda, and that at the Domesday survey it was held by Richard, the son of Gilbert, Earl of Briou. It afterwards passed into the hands of the Bacheworths, and from them by marriage to the Swanlands, and from them in the same manner to the Newdegates; but was alienated by them to the Egertons. Having belonged to sundry other families intermediately, the estate was re-purchased in 1675 by Sir Richard Newdegate, and so came back to a squire whose ancestors have held it, with only a temporary interval, for nearly 600 years—a fact without parallel in Middlesex.

But it is not on this account, but for its historical and literary associations, that Harefield is worthy of a pilgrimage. When Milton was living at Horton, only three miles south of Uxbridge, the old Manor House of Harefield was the residence of the Lord Keeper Egerton, and of his wife the Countess of

Derby, whom Queen Elizabeth once at least honoured by a visit of three days, in the course of one of her royal progresses. The courtly knight and his lady survived the costly visitation. The avenue of elms through which her Majesty rode from Dew's Farm to the house is gone, though several were still standing in the time when Lysons wrote, and one or two even as late as 1814-15, if we may believe "Sylvanus Urban;" but, alas! they are now no more, though vigorous successors have taken their place. The house too is gone, but its site can still be plainly seen in the rear of the church, where the old garden walls still attest its former grandeur. A view of it as it was in the last century may be seen in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for January, 1815.

The old manor house must have been well off for the accessories of shady trees in Milton's time, if he wrote of it, as there is little doubt that he did, without exaggeration—

"O'er the smooth enamell'd green,
Where no print of step hath been,
Follow me, as I sing
And touch the warbled string,
Under the shady roof
Of branching elm star-proof.
Follow me;
I will bring you where she sits,
Clad in splendour, as befits
Her deity,
Such a rural queen
All Arcadia hath not seen."

And the whole demesne must have had beauties and charms, which have disappeared with the old mansion, if he could write with truth—

"Nymphs and shepherds, dance no more
By sandy Ladon's lilyed banks;
On old Lycæus, or Cyllene hoar,
Trip no more in twilight ranks;
Though Erymanth your loss deplore,
A better soil shall give ye thanks.
From the stony Mænalus
Bring your flocks and live with us;
Here ye shall have greater grace,
To serve the lady of this place."

The "Arcades" was performed here, as we learn from Milton's Life, in 1635, and the worthy "lady of the place" did not long survive. Her fine marble monument in the chancel of the church, with her recumbent figure under a canopy, supported by figures of

her daughters, Lady Chandos and the Countesses of Bridgewater and Huntingdon, bears the date of her death, 1637. That one at least of these ladies did not forget Milton, nor Milton forget her, in another home, is shown by the preface to the Masque of "Comus," which was "presented at Ludlow Castle, in 1634, before John, Earl of Bridgewater, then President of Wales."

What would one not have given to have seen with his own eyes the poet brushing the morning dew, as he sauntered through the meadows along the bank of his favourite river, the Colne, with its "brimming waves," or quietly trudging along the road through Uxbridge, on his way from Horton to Harefield Place, which doubtless then was, in his own words—

"Bower'd high in tufted trees."

The elms and beeches and evergreens behind the site of the house are still fine, but few, except one stately cedar, would seem to be able to recall the look of the poet. The house in which his dramatic poem was recited was burnt down—it is said, by Sir Charles Sedley, the profligate companion of Charles II., reading in bed—and its successor was pulled down towards the end of the eighteenth century.

The visit of the virgin queen to Harefield in the summer of 1602, within a year or two of her death, and when she was upwards of seventy, is fully described from the Newdegate MSS. at Harefield by Mr. J. G. Nichols, in the third volume of his "Progresses of Queen Elizabeth." In that book the curious reader will find how she was met near the dairy-house by a dairy-maid and a bailiff, who celebrated her praises in alternate verse, whilst the royal personage herself sat on her horse beneath a tree on account of the rain. In another part of the grounds her Majesty was entertained by a "dialogue of welcome" between some fanciful characters, called "Place" and "Time;" and again on the next morning she was serenaded as—

"Beauty's rose and virtue's book,
Angel's mind and angel's look."

It should be added that the queen was addressed in the same style of fanciful and fulsome flattery at her departure.

"It has been said," observes Mr. Thorne, in his Handbook of the Environs of London, "that the Lord Chamberlain's company was brought down to Harefield to play 'Othello' before her, Shakespeare himself being present probably to direct the performance." But this statement he sees reason to distrust, both on other grounds and on account of the silence of the Newdegate MSS. as to the play. Still, the Egerton Papers, published by the Camden Society, under date August 6th, 1602, give us the following entry among the steward's expenses during Elizabeth's visit to Harefield: "Rewardes to the Vaulters, Players, and Dancers, £64 18s. 10d.;" and it is known that Shakespeare was one of this company. One would like to be certain, however, that the eyes of Shakespeare as well as those of Milton once looked on these scenes.

We gather from the Life of Milton that during the five years of his early manhood, which he spent mainly at his father's house at Horton, he was a frequent visitor at Harefield; and the heading of his "Arcades" tells us that it formed "part of an entertainment presented to the Countess Dowager of Derby at that place by some noble persons of her family." As her ladyship was then advanced in years, it is more than probable that these "noble persons of her family" were her little youthful grandchildren. One would have liked to have been there to witness their graceful appearance on the scene "in pastoral habit, and moving toward the seat of state" as they sang the first stanza of "Arcades," probably alluding to Queen Elizabeth's previous visit—

"Look, nymphs and shepherds, look,
What sudden blaze of Majesty
Is that which we from hence descry?
Too divine to be mistook,
This, this is she
To whom our vows and wishes bend
Here our solemn search hath end."

From the soft lawns and green groves which, with a few fish-ponds, mark the site of the old manor house, it is but a stone's-throw to the parish church, which we find open. So far as can be discovered through the veil which has been thrown over the fabric by the hand of the "restorer" some thirty or forty years ago, it would seem to be of the "Decorated" or "Edwardian" period, and consists of nave and chancel with long aisles on either side. On the north side of the chancel is a parclose, screening off the chantry and burial-place of the house of Brakespears. The rest of the walls of the building are covered in every vacant space with monuments, mostly of the "Jacobean" era, and belonging to the Newdegates and their relatives; but the finest of all perhaps is that in the chancel, denoting the burial-place of Alice, Countess of Derby, Milton's friend above-mentioned.

A really fine collection of helmets, casques, gloves, and other funeral armour, once belonging to the Bacheworths and Swanlands and Egertons, but now taken down from the walls, lies heaped together, dusty and uncared for, in the sedilia to the south of the Communion table.

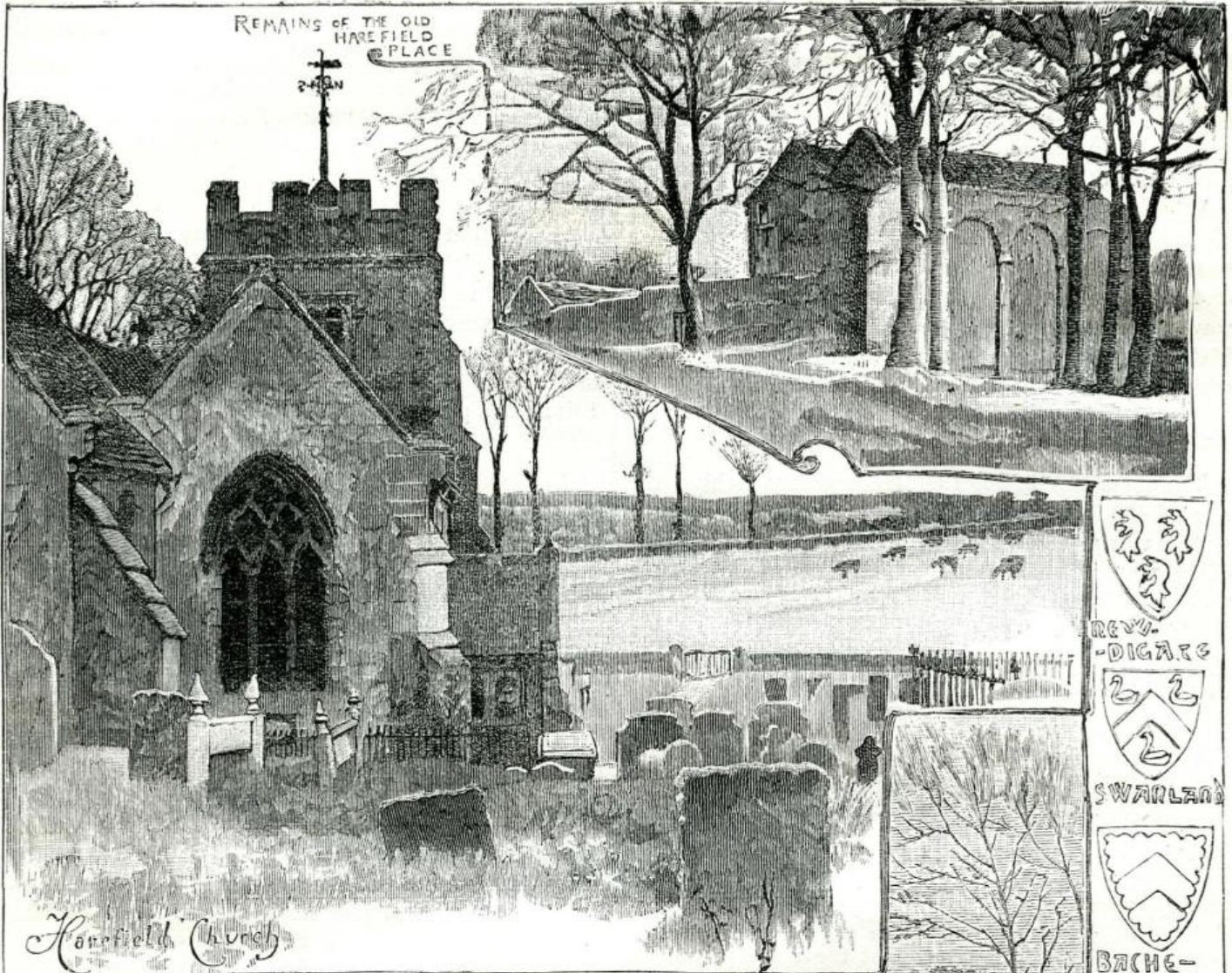
On the outside of the north wall of the chancel is one of the most curious monuments and epitaphs which it has ever fallen to my lot to see. It consists of a medallion, with a portrait, in rather slight relief, of a gamekeeper with his dog and gun, passing through a background of trees. Beneath it is the following inscription, which I believe has never been printed in any collection of epitaphs, though its quaintness well merits such an honour:—

"William Ashby of Brakespears, Esquire, erected this to the memory of his faithful servant, Robert Mossenden, who departed this life Feby. 5th, 1744, aged 60 years.

"In frost and snow, through hail and rain,
He scour'd the woods, and trudg'd the plain:
The steady pointer leads the way,
Stands at the scent, then springs the prey;

REMAINS OF THE OLD
HAREFIELD
PLACE

244



Harefield Church



REV.
-DIGBY



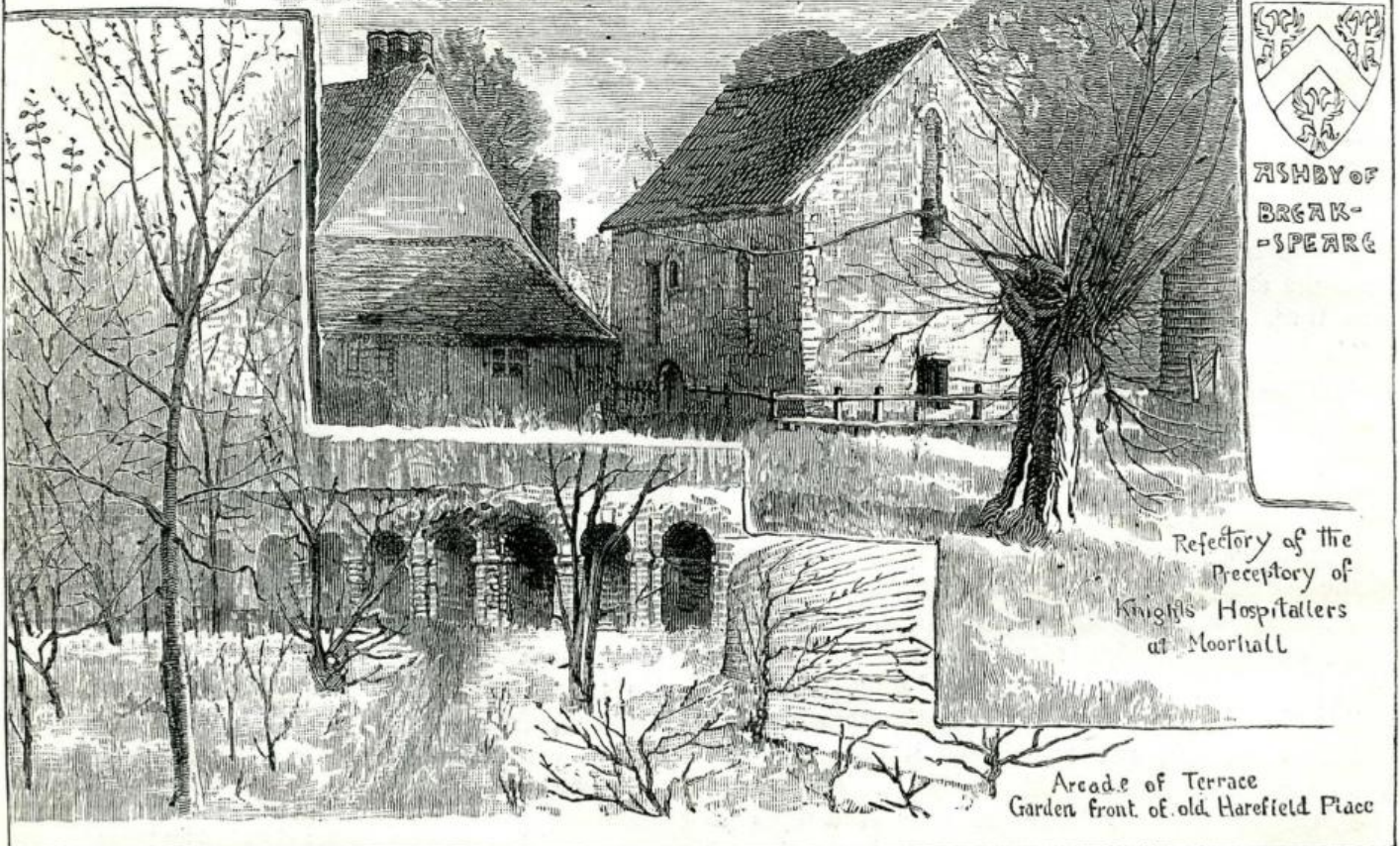
SWARLAND



BACHE-
WORTHE



ASHBY OF
BREAK-
-SPEARE



Refectory of the
Preceptory of
Knights Hospitallers
at Moorhall

Arcade of Terrace
Garden front of old Harefield Place

The timorous birds from stubble rise,
 With pinions stretch'd divide the skys ;
 The scatter'd lead pursues the sight,
 And death in thunder stops their flight.
 This spaniel, of true English kind,
 Who's gratitude inflam'd his mind ;
 This servant in an honest way
 In all his actions copy'd Tray."

But the most charming relic of the past must be kept to the last. About a furlong south-west of the church, abutting on the edge of the meadows of the Colne, opposite the "Fishery" at Denham, stands a little from the road an old farm-house, some parts of the interior of which retain the ancient panelling and large fire-places, suggesting that in the olden time large logs were burnt here in winter time and hospitality was exercised. The house is now cut up into three labourers' cottages. It is still called the Moor Hall, and is the most ancient manor house in the parish. Close by it, indeed almost adjoining it, is an Early English chapel, with lancet windows, externally almost perfect, though quite "gutted" in its interior of every vestige of its once sacred uses. The timber roof stands sound and good, just as it did in the days of the Tudors and Plantagenets. Some persons consider that the building was not a chapel, but a refectory. The building and cottages are rich in red and grey tints, and have been often sketched by artists.

I may add that, lying as it does so far out of the beaten tracks, this parish is perhaps richer than any other within Middlesex in country seats. Towards the northern end are Harefield Park, the seat of Colonel Vernon ; Harefield House, of Sir John Byles. Nearer to the church, and towards the centre of the parish, is Brakespeares, of Mrs. Drake.

Nearer to Uxbridge are the modern Harefield Place, lately sold by Mr. Newdegate ; and Swakeleys, the seat of Mr. T. T. Clarke. All the game hereabouts is strictly preserved ; and in consequence as you walk along the shady lanes leading to the "Brakespeares Arms" from the church, you may see partridges and pheasants strutting about to their heart's content, and quite secure from harm.

But the autumn day soon closes in upon the most pious and devout of pilgrims ; and the walk back to Uxbridge along the towing-path of the Grand Junction Canal is rather long and tedious, though it runs side by side with the Colne, that Milton loved so well, and whose banks he doubtless haunted in the days when rivers and roads were the only highways. The pilgrim, too, must think, however pious his aspirations, about the need of refreshing the inner man, and this I was able to do just before sunset at the "Old Treaty House," close to the bridge over the Colne which gives its name to Uxbridge.

E. WALFORD.