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**Churchdown in ye XII Century**

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CHURCHDOWN IN Y<sup>E</sup> XII. CENTURY,

BY

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The position of the Decuman gate of an ancient camp, or the right curvature of the moulding of a minster, falls clearly enough within the purview of the archæologist. There is still what some would misname a lower range of subject, not unworthy his attention, on the contrary, closely allied to humanity, namely, what the rough wayfaring man, thought, said, and did, in his every day life. It is this human element which gives the charm to Chaucer's works; for this feature the student minds not the pains of encountering an uncouth phraseology, and mastering a stage of the earlier language, that demands keen and close application. Now much of this kind of knowledge is always floating about unsuspected in country places. It is not for all; but by any who come with patient kindness and tact, much may be gleaned from the memories of the country-people, when in a communicative mood, to illustrate the dead past. Odd words; peculiar turns of speech; folk-lore; fragments of traditionary knowledge—all worth picking up, jotting down, and keeping.

The writer, in conversations with the aged people of the village, remembers when at times their minds turned to the past, hearing them tell that in olden time a supply of water was brought down from its source on Churchdown Hill (whose summit is about 580 feet above sea-level), in leaden pipes through the meadow known as Chapel Haye, where the present Vicarage House stands. These pipes, they declared were for

the purpose of supplying water to the squire's fishponds. Such is the simple story told by some of the old people who have since passed away.

Other stray scraps of information I recall were, that my informants had heard in their younger days of such metal pipes being found: and that they were of great thickness: portions were dug up in Chapel Hays, which seemed to consist of a white, hard, glistening substance. This account would, of course, confirm the story of the country people; for the change of metallic lead into its white carbonate, or oxide, would be a natural chemical alteration. Ancient leaden coffins thus changed have much the appearance of ivory in colour and density; being in fact really changed into the common pigment known as white lead. On a review of the foregoing particulars, we would retain the facts, but are inclined to question the purpose alleged, namely, that the water supply led to the squire's fishponds. That strikes one as a bucolic invention. The country people must, of course, render a reason: for instance, an old geological friend of mine, when on his excursions, always carries a fishing basket for holding his fossils—and this receptacle answers one purpose, at least, admirably, inasmuch as it baffles the curiosity of the country folks; since the passing rustic takes in at a glance what he thinks to be the object of the traveller, and suspicion of the stranger is disarmed; in short, the poor geologist rather rises in his estimation; for is not the taking of fish akin to the snaring of conies? We submit then, that the part about the fishpond is only an after-thought; put in very likely to round off the story. What remains we would now piece on to our other evidence. It will not be thought an undue assumption, if, on sifting these traditionary outlines, we select as worthy of trust, the following portion. That a conduit of leaden pipes was laid down from the hill in very remote times, for the purpose of conveying a supply of water into the village. This being so, we may now go on to try to establish a connection between the bare facts, and certain accounts related by two of our older English Chroniclers, namely, William of Canterbury,

and Benedict of Peterborough, whose annals have only just been edited and published. Their historical statements tally well with the facts adduced, and impart to them both colour and consistency. The Rev. JAMES CRAIGIE ROBERTSON, M.A., Canon of Canterbury Cathedral, whilst editing for the "Chronicles and Memorials" published under the direction of the Master of the Rolls, two works containing incidents that occurred at Churchdown, kindly thought that I might like to read the accounts given about Churchdown by the historians; and so favoured me most considerately with the proof sheets of those parts of the narrative that referred to it.

The works in question are these:—the account given by William of Canterbury is in vol. i of "Materials for the History of Thomas à Becket," edited by the Rev. Canon ROBERTSON: and that of Benedict of Peterborough, is in vol. ii, of the series entitled "Chronicles and Memorials," not yet completed, but at press.\* The learned editor informs me that one of the chief difficulties he has had to encounter in editing these works has been the identification of the places mentioned in them, but that "in the case of Churchdown there can be no mistake." I will now sum together the two accounts given by these writers, and quote what refers to this enquiry.

In the XIIIth century, the parish of Churchdown belonged ecclesiastically to the province of York, and the Archbishop of that see held the diocese of Worcester *in commendam*. The old diocese of Worcester at that time comprised part of the diocese of Gloucester. We are thus able to see how it was that, as Visitor of the Priory of St. Oswald in Gloucester, Roger, Archbishop of York, came to take a *personal* interest in Churchdown; for the church estates at that time, say from A.D. 1154 to 1181,\*

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\*Given in full they are:—

"The Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages. Published by the Authority of Her Majesty's Treasury, under the direction of the Master of the Rolls." Longmans & Co., London.

"Materials for the history of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, (Canonized by Pope Alexander III., A.D. 1173.)

Edited by JAMES CRAIGIE ROBERTSON, M.A., Canon of Canterbury." Vol. I.

"Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, (Canonized by Pope Alexander III., A.D. 1173.)

Edited by JAMES CRAIGIE ROBERTSON, M.A., Canon of Canterbury." Vol. II. (Benedict of Peterborough, John of Salisbury, Alan of Tewkesbury, Edward Grim.)

were owned by the Priors of St. Oswald. More than one Archbishop of York visited Churchdown, and tried to improve the sanitary condition of the villagers in the so-called "dark ages," which as that learned man, Dr. MAITLAND, of Gloucester, pithily observed were called "dark," because people were in the dark about them. Our Chroniclers relate that Roger, Archbishop of York, supplied the people of Churchdown with water brought from its source on the hill; and that whilst leaden pipes for the purpose were being laid underground by workmen, under the superintendence of a foreman of works, William by name, a native of Gloucester, the deep trench cut for the pipes, "colted in," as the country people say, and William of Gloucester, the foreman, was buried, by the earth falling in upon him; his comrades with a shudder throw down their shovels and take to flight, whilst the wretched foreman in his sore distress, abandoned and almost breathless, mentally calls upon the blessed St. Mary for succour; but on receiving no help from his invocation of the holy Mother, he bethought himself in his extremity of Thomas Becket, the newest and most popular Saint of the English Kalendar. William craves the aid of St. Thomas, and is delivered. The words of the prayer to the Saint are thus recorded. "Beate Thoma, homines aiunt, quia potens es apud Dominum tuum et facile, quod rogaris potes impetrare. Si ita sanctus es et tantus ut ore populi, prædicaris adjuva me in extremis constitutum; absolve miserrimè deprehensum; edue me de carcere isto, restituens in gradum pristinum. Eris mihi in refugium et petam locum pretioso sanguine tuo consecratum, ubi pro libertate ecclesiastica vivus decertasti et mortuus ovicisti."

The Chronicler fearing that the literal accuracy of the mental invocation may be questioned, naïvely remarks—"Hæc dicens nequo enim confingimus quæ potuit dixisse, sed dicimus hæc eadem quæ dixit, malentes minus apponere quam præter veritatem loqui." At any rate, relief immediately ensued, but for the adjuncts we would fain quote under the veil of the original. The text is:—"ventum quo distentus intumuerat multis eructationibus efflavit, et vomens alleviatus est. Ex tunc

præstita est spirandi facultas." His breath came, and with it his strength; and this timely deliverance, through the intervention of the newly canonized Saint, was considered so signal and amazing, that a report of the miracle was set forth, for the encouragement of the faithful, and the glory of the martyr, in the form of a letter addressed by the Dean of Gloucester to his grace the Archbishop of Canterbury.

"Venerabili domino et patri suo priori Sanctæ Trinitatis Cantuariæ totique conventui Gaufridus decanus Glocestris salutem.

Sciatis latorem presentium Willelmum in profundo cujusdam foveæ, quæ erat viginti quatuor pedum, sociis suis fugientibus obrutum fuisse, et per unus noctis spatium et, in crastino, usque ad horam tertiam ibi fuisse sepultum et pro eo sicut pro mortuo obsequium totum factum fuisse. Hic autem, sentiens sibi mortem imminere, Deum invocavit, et orabit ut pro amore gloriosissimi martyris sui Thomæ a tali eum periculo liberaret, et votem clamando fecit iturum se ad locum ubi sanctus Thomas occubuit. Quem cum audissent quidam ibidem transeuntes, nunciaverunt toti villæ se vocem humanum in foveâ illa audisse Sacerdos vero et plusquam centum homines. Huc pergentes extraxerunt eum. Sed et alia multa miracula fiunt quotidie apud nos per gloriosissimum Christi martyrem Thomam, quæ vobis in brevi ituras ad vos. Deo annuente, narrabo."

I have not cared to dwell upon the miraculous feature here described, my aim has simply been to call attention to this singular circumstance, scarcely open to doubt, that the thread of tradition, in other words the long current belief among the villagers, that leaden water-pipes were anciently laid down, leading from the hill to the village of Churchdown, corresponds with the historical account that a certain Archbishop Roger of York actually caused such a conduit of water to be made sometime in the XIIth century.

And in introducing to archæologists this slight historical incident, I would refrain from making more of such slender

material than it is really worth. Passing by altogether, any side issues that flow from it ; such as speculating on the exact course of the ancient conduit ; the nature of the strata through which the trench was cut, or the like. Its chief bearing appear, to be on the philosophy of tradition. It also affords a glimpse though only a glimpse into the mental state of the working-man of the mediæval time. A state in which the force, as it were, of unseen presences, whether at home or abroad, was always with him. To such a one, the saints lay aside their visible form like a garment. Such stories, however alien to the puritanical spirit of the present day, vividly convey to us this sense of subtle and remote personal presence working upon the minds of the labouring man of the XIIth century. These truly were ages not of sight but of faith. For those who would wish to know more of the good prelate mentioned in this paper, I would add the following reference, for which I am indebted to his grace the present Lord Archbishop of York, to whom I desire to return my best thanks.

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Roger de Pont L'Eveque, Archdeacon of Canterbury, became Archbishop of York in A.D. 1154, and died in 1181. He was buried in York. His life is written in RAIME'S *Fasti Eboracenses*. Vol. I.