



MAY DAY, AT GLATTON, Hunts.

1856.

FROM A DRAWING BY

The Rev. E. Bradley, (*Cuthbert Bede*).

Old Customs! Oh! I love the sound.

However simple they may be,

What e'er with time hath sanction found,

Is welcome and is dear to me.

John Clare.

WEATHER AND FOLK LORE OF PETERBOROUGH AND DISTRICT.

(Second Series).



This is a continuation of a Paper on the "Survival of Old Customs" in Peterborough and the neighbourhood which was read at the Royal Archæological Society's meeting in 1898, with an addition of a few more old customs, and more particulars of others, to which I have also added a collection of the quaint Weather and Folk Lore of this district. Being at a point where four counties are almost within a stone's throw, Peterborough possesses the traditions of the Counties of Huntingdon, Cambridge, and Lincoln, as well as Northampton. It is rather difficult to locate these sayings to one particular County, so I have taken those current within a radius of about fifteen miles.

Most of them have been repeated to me personally and only in a very few cases have I copied any which have been printed and then only to make the collection more complete.

The two Northamptonshire Poets, Dryden and John Clare, often notice the phases of the Weather, and John Clare, especially, describes the Rural Customs and weather Lore of this district with a true Poets feeling and amongst his M.S.S., now the property of the Peterborough Museum, are many unpublished poems and also his Diary which, at present, is unknown to the general public. John Clare was well styled the English Burns and his notes and Memoranda on the various local events are most valuable to those who take an interest in the sayings and doings of the early part of the 19th century.

Many charms are used at the present time and, altho' reticent, the villagers, (when you have gained their confidence), will tell you of

their belief in the various whims and of the successful results of their practice.

In almost every proverb where Peterborough is mentioned it is associated with pride, and some people say that they are still applicable.

The first and second of the following rhymes date from before the [Pg 1] Reformation:

Crowland as courteous, as courteous may be,
Thorney the bane of many a good tree,
Ramsey the rich and Peterborough the proud,
Sawtry, by the way, that poor Abbey,
Gave more alms than all they.

Ramsey the rich of gold and of fee,
Thorney the flower of the Fen Country,
Crowland so courteous of meat and of drink,
Peterborough the proud, as all men do think,
And Sawtry by the way, that poor Abbaye,
Gave more alms in one day, than all they.

Peterborough the proud of their ancient See,
Thorney the flower of many a fair tree,
Crowland the courteous of their meat and drink,
Spalding the gluttons as all men do think,
Sawtry by the way, that old Abbaye,
Gave more in one day than all they.

Peterborough poor and proud.

Another version gives Peterborough:

Famous for pride and Stamford for poor.

The next two belong exclusively to Peterborough, and the first I have only just obtained from a lady who remembers the verses, as they were repeated early in the 19th Century:

When the Clock of the Abbey strikes three minutes fast,
There will be a gay wedding before the month's past;
When the Clock of the Abbey strikes three minutes slow,
The river's bright waters will soon overflow;
When the Church Clock and Abbey Clock strike both together,
There will soon be a death or a change of the weather.

The Abbey or Cathedral is dedicated to St. Peter, and the Parish Church to St. John. The Head Verger of the Cathedral until recently had charge of both clocks, and St. John's Clock was always kept slightly faster than the Cathedral Clock. Canon Jones, when Vicar of St. John's, one day met the late Verger, (Mr. H. Plowman, Senr.) and asked him why St John's Clock was always faster than the Cathedral Clock, and the Verger replied:—"Well Vicar, you know, the other disciple did outrun St. Peter on the way to the Tomb, so St. John has always kept in front ever since."

Sometimes the coincidences mentioned in the verses occur and maintain their reputation for veracity:

If in the Minster Close a Hare,
Should for herself have made a lair,
Be sure before the week is down,
A fire will rage within the town

[Pg 2]It is very strange but these two events have sometimes happened.

One fire brings two more.

This too has often occurred and in April of this year (1911) three fires occurred in this district within a week.

These are all I can remember which refer to Peterborough.

Beginning with the County of Northampton we have:

Northamptonshire, more Spires, more Squires, more haughtiness, and less hospitality than any other County in England.

Northamptonshire for Spires and Squires.

Northamptonshire for Springs and Spinsters.

Thack and Dyke Northamptonshire like.

Marholm, a village near Peterborough.

"They held together like the men of Marholm when they lost their Common."

This is used when people are divided one against another.

Caster where the woman is master.

"To lose a hog for a ha'porth of tar." The hog referred to is a yearling sheep.

"To live by the penny." Buying only when anything is absolutely required.

"As cross as two sticks."

"As cross as old Wilks." Who old Wilks was and why he was cross is lost in oblivion.

"As wise as Walton's calf who ran nine miles to suck a bull."

"Black as the pot."

"Topsy turvey Moses Webster." Used when things are in a disorderly state.

"Dance a jig, then come back and buy a pig."

"Go to Farcet." This is a village near Peterborough and the expression is used instead of advising people to go to Jericho or any other place.

"As fat as moles."

"You've gotten hold of the wrong end of the stick," was a common expression when I was a school boy, when anyone was relating something which was incorrect.

[Pg 3]

Come day, Go day, God sends Sunday.
Sunday moon, flood before it is out.
Singing before breakfast on Monday, cry before the week is out.
As Friday so Sunday.
Friday is either the fairest or foulest day of the week.
Sun always shines on Saturday little or much.

Saturday new moon and Sunday full,
Never good and never wull.

January.

On corner walls,
A glittering row,
Hang pit irons less for use than show,
With horse-shoe brightened as a spell,
Witchcraft's evil powers to quell.

John Clare.

The first thing on New Year's morning, open your Bible and the first verse your finger or thumb touches that verse, will betoken what will occur during the year.

On New Year's morning if a sprig of green is placed in the Bible, the verse on which it lies fortells the events of the year.

It is lucky for a dark man to enter the house first on New Year's morning, and I know a man who used to see the Old Year out and the New Year in with a friend who always arranged for a very dark man to wait for him outside his own house until he returned. The man then entered the house first, and after a glass of something warm and good wishes, he left.

It is also a custom on New Year's Eve for some people to hide a sovereign or half-sovereign outside the house and when leaving the house on New Year's morning to pick up the piece of gold which is said to ensure their having gold in their pockets all that year.

Whatever is done on New Year's day, you will do throughout the year.

As the weather is the first twelve days of January so it will be for the twelve months. Each day's weather is taken for the corresponding month.

Plough Monday, First Monday after Epiphany. This custom has almost passed away. Only two lots of men were seen in Peterborough this year, the Stores no doubt not encouraging them as the tradesmen did in the old times. In Northampton, in 1910, I saw numerous groups of children with blackened faces and grotesque dresses going about the streets on this day as Plough witches.

[Pg 4]

When the day lengthens,
Then the cold strengthens,

On Old Christmas day (7th January new style) the day has
lengthened a cock's skip.

January White.

If the grass grows in January it grows the worse for it all the year.

St. Paul's Day, 25th January.

In some verses dedicated To all my worthy Masters and Mistresses, by *John Small*, Bell-man, Stamford, 1850, is the following: —

If Saint Paul's day be fair and clear,
It doth betide a happy year;
If blustering winds do blow aloft,
Then wars will trouble our realm full oft,
And if by chance to snow or rain,
Then will be dear all sorts of grain.

February.

February fill dyke.

