

CHAPTER XXVI.

General notice of England.—Decay of towns.—Growth of villages.—Ports.—Coal trade.—Building.—Paving in London.—Sewers.—Highways.—Conduits.—Washing-grounds.—Lighting of London.—Watermen of London.—Burying in towns.—Wholesale traders.—Foreign trade.—Fairs and Markets.—Inns.—Insecurity of travelling.—Frauds.—Increase of luxury.—Moral and intellectual progress.—Various forms of Church Service.—Dissensions and scoffings.—Holidays.—Popular Sports.—Prohibited Books.—Popular Reading.—Mysteries and Miracle Plays.—The drama.—Education of the young.—Schools.—Universities.—Physicians and Surgeons.—Barbers.—Surgeons.—Empirical remedies.—Painting.—Holbein.

WITH the unquestionable evidence that the industry of England had been rapidly advancing in productiveness from the beginning of the sixteenth century, there is nothing more startling than the systematic averment of the decay of towns. A statute of the 3rd of Henry VIII. (1512) providing for a difficulty which had arisen out of a statute of Edward II., that no victualler should fix the assize during his term of office, says that "the most part of all the cities, boroughs, and towns corporate, within the realm of England, are fallen in ruin and decay, and are not inhabited by merchants and men of such substance as at the time of making that statute." Bakers, vintners, fishmongers, and other victuallers are the chief inhabitants, and there remain few others to bear the offices. This theory of the decay of towns assumes a more distinct shape, in acts of parliament of the later years of Henry VIII. In four statutes passed from 1540 to 1544, the preamble is uniformly in these words: "Forasmuch as there have been in times past divers and many beautiful houses of habitation within the walls and liberties of the cities, boroughs, and towns of [reciting names], and now are fallen down, decayed, and at this day remain unreedified, and do lie as desolate and vacant grounds." The difficulty of giving credit to this distinct complaint is not wholly solved by the statement of a quarter of a century later, that, in past times, "stately building was less in use. For albeit that there were then greater number of messuages and mansions almost in every place, yet were their frames so slight and slender, that one mean dwelling-house in our time is able to countervail very

many of them."* The statutes of Henry VIII. only provide that if the owners of the decayed houses do not rebuild within three years, the lords of whom they are holden, or the mayors of the towns, may reconstruct them. If it had been profitable for the "men of substance" to have remained within the "cities, boroughs, and towns corporate," their "beautiful houses of habitation" would not have fallen into ruin. The corporate privileges had become as oppressive as the old feudal services. Those who had capital bought land when the ancient difficulties of purchase were removed. They fixed themselves in the country with their flocks. A home-manufacture grew up around the grazier's domain. Cottages were built by the side of the mansion, where the shuttle was thrown and the spinning-wheel went round. These in time became populous villages; and acts of parliament were passed, but passed in vain, to confine the clothing industries to their old seats, or to make the smaller places dependent upon those seats. Yarmouth and Lynn had adopted the worsted trade; but no one in Norfolk was to dye, shear, and calendar cloth but in Norwich.† The woollen-cloth manufacture had extended from Worcester to Evesham, Droitwich, Kidderminster, and Bromsgrove. The statute which attempts to control its further extension tells the whole history of this alleged decay of towns: "Divers persons inhabiting and dwelling in the hamlets, thorpes, and villages adjoining to the said city, boroughs, and towns within the said shire, for their private wealth singular advantages, and commodities, &c., have not only engrossed and taken into their hands divers and sundry farms, and become farmers, graziers, and husbandmen, but also do exercise, use, and occupy the mysteries of cloth-making, weaving, fulling, and shearing within their said houses, . . . to the great decay, depopulation, and ruin of the said city, towns, and boroughs." The manufacture in the hamlets, thorpes, and villages, is therefore forbidden under penalties.‡ An act of 1542 declares that none shall make worsted coverlets except in the city of York; apprentices withdrawing themselves from the city, and other persons inhabiting in neighbouring villages and houses, having intermeddled with the same craft.§ These statutes, and many others, were ineffectual attempts of the corporate towns to retain a monopoly of certain great branches of manufacture. At this period, Manchester, an unwall'd town, had asserted the vigour of its com-

* Harrison, p. 212.

† 25 Henry VIII. c. 18.

‡ 14 & 15 Henry VIII. c. 1.

§ 33 & 34 Henry VIII. c. 10.

mercial industry, as "a town well set a work in making of cloths, as well of linen as of woollen." A special statute was therefore passed to protect its manufactures from depredation, by the abolition of sanctuary there. "Cottons" are mentioned in this act; but they were woollen garments. The age of cotton, properly so called, was two centuries distant.

Amongst the ancient decayed places, the towns of the Cinque Ports are enumerated in the statute of 1541-2. Of the coast towns, Portsmouth, Plymouth, Poole, Lyme, Southampton, Yarmouth, are also mentioned. It seems clear that the decay of these ports had been produced by the neglect of the fisheries; and, in some degree, by the monopoly of foreign commerce by a great company of merchants in London. Thomas Barnabe, who writes to Cecil in 1552, complains of the small number of mariners on the English coast, compared with those on the coast of France: "I have seen come out at one tide in Dieppe five hundred and five boats, and in every boat ten or twelve men; the which was a marvellous matter to see, how they be maintained by fishing, and what riches they get by the sea, and how they maintain their towns and ports. And as for us, let us begin at Sandwich, and go to Dover, Hythe, and Hastings, and to Winchelsea, and see how they go down for lack of maintenance, and, in a manner, no mariners in them, which is for lack of good policy to set them a work."* He had a scheme for their employment. It was to fetch Newcastle coals to the coast of Kent, and there make a staple, for the king's benefit, to supply them to France, which "France can live no more without than a fish out of water," for the manufacture of everything "that passeth the fire." It appears from this that Norman and Breton ships carried on this trade; buying coals at two shillings and two pence a chaldron at Newcastle, and selling them at an enormous profit. For three centuries the exportation of coals to foreign countries was almost prohibited by excessive duties, lest the mines should be exhausted, and our own manufacturing superiority endangered. England, at this period, had very little employment for this great source of her wealth. There were no machines to raise the water out of the pits, or to lift the coal to the surface. Iron works were few, and chiefly confined to the wooded districts. Pottery there was none. The varieties of the woollen manufacture were of the simplest character, and performed with the rudest mechanical power. The linea fabrics

* Ellis, 2nd Series, vol. ii. p. 198.

were chiefly of domestic production. But there were skilled artificers in London and the principal towns; although factories were unknown. These were principally connected with the arts of building and of clothing. Elaborately carved fronts, in which each story of the timber houses overhung the lower for protection, still attest the ingenuity of the joiner. "Our workmen," says Harrison, "are grown generally to such an excellency of device in the frames now made, that they far pass the finest of the old." Throughout the country there was a more solid mode of building than in previous periods, and oak had taken the place of the less durable woods. The ambitious citizens of London raised high towers of brick, at which Stow is indignant; for he holds that they were constructed that the owner might overlook his neighbours. The plain brick work of this period may still be seen in the gateway of Lincoln's Inn. The progress of improvements in towns was necessarily most rapid in London—the chief city of commerce, the seat of government and of law—with a population estimated at a hundred and fifty thousand.* The paving acts for the metropolis in the time of Henry VIII. indicate something of the vigilant superintendence of the general government; but they also show the chief cause of local neglect. The common highway between Charing Cross and the Strand Cross is very foul and jeopardous, and the owners of lands are required to pave the same under a penalty of sixpence for every square yard not sufficiently paved by a certain day.† Holborn, which is described as the common passage from the west and north-west parts of the realm, is full of sloughs, from the same neglect.‡ The highways from Aldgate to Whitechapel; in Chancery Lane, Shoe Lane, Fetter Lane, and Grays-inn Lane, are in the same dangerous condition.§ At a later period, numerous streets in London and Westminster, recited in the statute, are perilous to all the king's subjects passing on horseback or on foot.¶ But to remedy these evils no system of co-operation is proposed. There is no general rating to accomplish at once, and effectually, what every owner of property could only slowly and imperfectly accomplish. The principle of equal assessment for public objects was not then understood. Until that principle was fully applied in the relief of the poor, the people of England were not familiarised to a system which was especially adapted to their parochial and municipal organisation; and

* Micheli. † 24 Henry VIII. c. 11.

‡ 25 Henry VIII. c. 8.

§ 32 Henry VIII. c. 17.

¶ 34 & 35 Henry VIII. c. 12.

there were fairs throughout the land. "There is almost no town in England but hath one or more such marts holden yearly in the same."* The constant resort to markets and fairs made the inns flourish, especially on the great high roads. They were under better regulation than those of the continent. The host was not a despot amongst his guests. Every man might have what he called for, and be lodged in a clean chamber, of which he kept the key. The rooms were abundantly furnished, especially with linen. If the traveller lost anything while in the inn, the landlord was responsible. But it was believed that although the host was honest, the tapsters and chamberlains had a private understanding with thieves.† The robber on the highway was the terror of the solitary traveller; and he was glad to ride in company, however doubtful of the stranger who rode by his side. There is no more curious picture of the insecurity of the country and the town, than is presented in the narrative of Holinshed, of the circumstances which attended the murder of Arden, of Feversham, in 1551.‡ Alice, the wife of Arden, desired to take away the life of her husband. She first attempted to poison him; and then openly proposed to one Green, a serving-man, who had a cause of hatred against Arden, to procure his death. Green had business in London, where Arden was staying; and having to ride thither, with valuables about him, desired a neighbour of Feversham to accompany him to Gravesend; and so they rode on together. "And when they came to Rainham Down they chanced to see three or four serving men, who were coming from Leeds [a village with a castle, in Kent]; and therewith Bradshaw espied, coming up the hill from Rochester, one Black Will, a terrible cruel ruffian with a sword and a buckler, and another with a great staff on his neck." Bradshaw knew the ruffian, for he had served with him at Boulogne; and when he described his villainies to Green, the revengeful serving-man thought that he had now found one to his purpose. At an inn at Gravesend at night, the business was arranged over "sack and sugar," for a promise of ten pounds. They reached London; and there the victim was pointed out to the blood-seeker, walking in Paul's. He would have met his death in the churchyard there, but for the crowd of friends who surrounded him. Arden's servant conspired against his master; and agreed to let Black Will into the house where they slept. But his heart

* Harrison.

† Harrison. The chapter on inns is very curious.

‡ Chronicle, vol. iii. p. 1062.

failed him; and the ruffian in vain tried the bolted door. Arden was then to have been murdered as he rode home by Rainham Down; but a third time he was saved by meeting with acquaintance, who rode with him; and he reached home safely. Black Will, who had followed Arden, was to have accomplished the murder the next morning, and was up betimes to way-lay him; but he missed him as he went forth, and again missed him at night, for he returned not "by the broom close," for it was late. Arden is at last killed in his own house, by his wife and her paramour, assisted by the persevering ruffian. From the extreme minuteness with which the chronicler tells this story, we may conclude that such premeditated guilt was not common. The English were too prone to deeds of violence in moments of passion; but crimes like this were foreign to the character of the people. The murderess was burnt, and some of her accomplices were hanged. Green and Black Will fled; but they eventually met the doom of the shedders of blood.

As wealth extends, and the commercial relations of society are more complicated, fraudulent offences gradually become more common than the violent assaults upon property which belong to an earlier period. We can trace this principle in the statute-book of Henry VIII. The deceits of manufacturers are again and again attempted to be prevented by special enactments. The preacher descants on the wickedness of those who put a strike of good malt in the bottom of the sack, two strikes of bad malt in the middle, and a good strike in the sack's mouth.* He exposes the cloth-maker who stretches his eighteen yards of cloth to twenty-seven, and then thickens it with "flock-powder" †—the "devil's dust" of modern times. But crimes of a new character were developing themselves. Those who stole property knew the penalty of death which awaited them. They devised a mode of obtaining goods which a law, made expressly to meet the offence, only punished with the pillory. Evil persons, says this statute, "not minding to get their living by tuth," have of late deceitfully contrived "privy tokens and counterfeit letters in other men's names, unto divers persons their special friends and acquaintances, by colour whereof the said evil-disposed persons have gotten great substance of money, goods, cattle, and jewels into their hands." ‡ This was the offence of men who, from the very nature of the crime, must have had some in

* Latimer, 5th Sermon on the Lord's Prayer.

† *Ibid.*, 3rd Sermon before Edward VI.

‡ 13 Henry VIII. c. 1.

timacy with the wealthy—men who kept up false appearances, like the forgers and swindlers of modern times. Such men abound in every age when the middle classes of society are pressing upwards; and are imitating the luxurious habits of those who claim by birth-right the privilege to waste their substance. The extravagant caprices in dress were ridiculed by the satirist, and caricatured by the engraver:

“ I am an Englishman, and naked I stand here,
Musing in my mind what raiment I shall wear;
For now I will wear this, and now I will wear that,
And now I will wear—I cannot tell what.”*

Few of the industrious classes had the sense to dress as the famous clothier, Jack of Newbury, who is represented to have gone before Henry VIII. “ in a plain russet coat, a pair of white kersey slops [or breeches], without welt or guard [lace or border], and stockings of the same piece, sewed to his slops.”† The people lived luxuriously in taverns. Artisans would stake a crown upon their games. The houses were gay with tapestry and painted cloth. At their banquets the guests pledged each other till they were drunken, and swore that the foreigner should drink with them, out of their silver cups. So writes the French physician, envious and spiteful.‡ One fact he mentions as characteristic of the nation that he abuses:—“ The English are joyous one with another, and they greatly love music.”

Having attempted a brief sketch of the condition of society in the relations of the government to the people, and exhibited some characteristics of the rural and of the urban population, we proceed to complete our account by a notice of those circumstances which influenced the moral and intellectual progress of the nation. And first to the Clergy, and of the state of religious instruction after the great revolution which destroyed the regular ecclesiastics—those who had absorbed so large a portion of the property of the community, and who, to a great extent, had outlived their utility. The religious teaching of the people was now in the hands of the secular clergy—bishops, vicars, and curates. The bishops had all outwardly conformed to the great change in the condition of the Church; but there were several, as will be traced in the course of our historical narrative, who were strongly opposed to the principles of the Reformation. Others were, as men in possession generally are, willing to live in quiet under the existing state of

* Andrew Borde. † Planché, “ Coutume,” p. 312. ‡ Perlin, pp. 22, 24.

things. A few were zealous in the desire to carry forward the movement which had freed England from papal domination, into a very complete abolition of all those ceremonies and beliefs which distinguished “ the old learning” from the new. The parsons, or holders of benefices, and their curates, were, in many respects, in a happier position than before this change. No lordly abbot—no full-fed monks—paraded their abundance as a contrast to the humble means of the working Clergy. Whether in town or country, the “ poor parson”—he who was “ rich of holy thought and work;” whose parishioners “ devoutly would he teach;” who visited rich and poor in sickness and misfortune, though “ wide was his parish;” who “ set not his benefice to hire;” who taught “ Christ’s lore” after “ he followed it himself”—he, so beautifully described by Chaucer, was of the old English growth; and his noble character was unchanged amongst many when the Reformation came. One circumstance, connected with that change, more truly developed the most beautiful points of that character. He became a husband and a father. The act of 1548, “ to take away all positive laws against marriage of priests,” was a timid re-assertion of the rights of nature against the dogma of the church, which had produced, in old times, such perilous contentions. It were better, says this statute, that priests should live separate, and be “ unburdened from the care and cost of finding wife and children;” but, nevertheless, “ all canons, constitutions, and ordinances made by the authority of man only, which do prohibit or forbid marriage to any ecclesiastical or spiritual persons,” should be void and of none effect.* And so to the humble parsonage, covered with the ivy of a hundred years, the priest might bring a helpmate; who would make him “ less intricate and troubled with the charge of household;” who would see that his dairy was kept sweet; his wool converted into useful raiment; his strawberry plants trimmed and watered; and his bees hived in due season. When the dissolution of the monastic houses was going forward, some of the secular clergy thought that the restrictions upon the marriage of priests would naturally be removed. There is a letter from one John Foster to Cromwell, in which he says, that he had accomplished marriage: but he learns that he has done amiss, and has “ sent the woman to her friends three score miles from me.” He states that “ if the king’s grace could have found it lawful that priests might have been married, they would have been to the crown double and double faithful.”† This

* 2 & 3 Edward VI. c. 21.

† Suppression of the Monasteries, p. 161.

fidelity was assured in many cases by the statute of Edward but it drew a broad line of separation between those who adhered to the old discipline of the church, and those who desired a greater freedom, not incompatible with a holy life.

The "Act for the Uniformity of Service and Administration of the Sacrament throughout the realm,"* belongs not to the transition period of which we are treating. Before the Book of Common Prayer was prepared and issued under this statute of 1548, we learn, from its preamble, that for a long time various forms of service were used; "and, besides the same, now of late much more divers and sundry forms and fashions have been used in the cathedrals and parish churches." In June, 1544, there was a King's Letter to the archbishop of Canterbury, respecting the service used in "processions;" to which "the people, partly for lack of good instruction and calling on, partly for that they understood no piece of such prayers and suffrages as were used to be sung and said, have used to come very slackly." To remedy this, the king writes, "we have set forth certain godly prayers and suffrages in our native English tongue." The learned editor of the volume from which we quote, the Rev. Joseph Hunter, says, "The prayers which accompanied the King's Letter were the first body of public prayers for general use in English published with authority. They may perhaps be regarded as the original of the Book of Common Prayer."† That there should have been the most violent dissensions amongst the clergy and their congregations, previous to the Act for the Uniformity of Service, was a necessary result of the very conditions of ecclesiastical tenure. The priests held their benefices under the ancient tenure of Frankalmoigne, or of Free Alms; by which they were bound "to make orisons, prayers, masses, and other divine services for the souls of their grantor or feoffor, and for the souls of their heirs which are dead." This is the explanation of the tenure by Littleton. The clergy who went along with the principles of the Reformation would naturally hold such prayers as contrary to their doctrines; although their tenure of lands depended upon observing the wills of the grantors. After the Reformation was established, it was maintained that the tenure by which the parochial clergy and ecclesiastical foundations held in Frankalmoigne remained undisturbed; for, says Coke, "the changing of spiritual services into other spiritual service; altereth neither the name nor the effect of the tenure;" which "is now re-

* 2 & 3 Ed. VI. c. 1.

† "Ecclesiastical Documents," Camden Society, p. 91.

duced to a certainty contained in the Book of Common Prayer," the change being made "by authority of Parliament." In the state of transition from the Latin mass-book to the English Common Prayer, we may picture to ourselves the disquiet that must occasionally have afforded cause of exultation to those who were opposed to change, and of grief to those who desired to see the purified worship go peacefully forward. It was a season in which the licentious brought discredit upon religion itself, by indecent scoffings at the ancient ceremonies. Even the honest enthusiasts carried their hatred of superstition into unchristian irreverence. Coarse and profane songs against the mass were heard in streets and taverns. A preacher would ascend the pulpit, and declaim against making the host an object of idolatry, whilst the priest was performing the ancient ceremonies before the altar. Sometimes the magistrate would pull the preacher out of the pulpit. Sometimes the clergy would leave the church, and ancient members of the congregation would denounce him, and cry out "come from him, good people; he came from the devil."* A statute of 1551-2 shows the bitter and contentious spirit of the time: "Forasmuch as of late divers and many outrageous and barbarous behaviours and acts have been used and committed by divers ungodly and irreligious persons, by quarrelling, brawling, fraying, and fighting openly in churches and churchyards."† Latimer complains of indecencies at burials: "In the time of popery, before the gospel came amongst us, we went to burials with weeping and wailing, as though there were no God; but since the gospel came unto us, I have heard say that in some places they go with the corpses, grinning and fearing, as though they went to a bear-baiting."‡ The people rushed from one extreme to the other, as is mostly the case in seasons of change. Some inveterately clung to the old holidays, which was a serious grief to the earnest reformers. They, like their puritan successors, did not make sufficient allowance for the force of long-continued customs; and shut their eyes to the positive benefit, physical and moral, derived from occasional relaxation and merriment. They relied too much upon their power of making men wiser and better by instruction, and nothing but instruction. The good Latimer is not very hard upon those who slept at sermons; and he tells a story of a gentlewoman of London whose neighbour met her in the street, and said, "Mistress, whither go ye?"

* See the account of Thomas Hancock, in Strype's Life of Cranmer.

† 5 & 6 Ed. VI. c. 4.

‡ Sermon in 1552.

"Marry," said she, "I am going to St. Thomas of Acres to the sermon: I could not sleep all this last night, and I am going now thither: I never failed of a good nap there."* But he is not so placable with what he calls "no laughing matter." He had sent word that he would preach in a certain place, in his journey to London. It was a holiday. When he came there, the church-door was fast locked. "I tarried there half-an-hour and more. At last the key was found; and one of the parish comes to me and says, 'Sir, this is a busy day with us; we cannot hear you; it is Robin Hood's day. The parish are gone abroad to gather for Robin Hood.'" Robin Hood was the chief personage in the ancient celebration of May-day; and the gathering for Robin Hood is duly recorded in old parochial accounts. † When the May-pole was brought in, with morris-dancers and taborers, Robin Hood, and Little John, and Maid Marian, and the Hobby-horse, and the Dragon, were the joy of town and country.

Gradually the first reformers saw the wisdom of not being severe upon these amusements of the people; and they ceased to be associated with the corruptions of the Romish church, except by those who looked with indignation upon all pastimes, however harmless. One of the sports, most popular amongst all ranks, was far more depraving than the boisterous mirth of the ancient holidays—the Whitsun-ales, and Hock-tides, and May-day gatherings. Bear-baiting was the passion of the multitude of this period; as cocking was of a later time; and prize-fighting in our own day." An admirer of bear-baiting thus describes the scene of a bear-garden: "It was a sport very pleasant of these beasts, to see the bear with his pink eyes leering after his enemy's approach; the nimbleness and wait of the dog, too, to take his advantage; and the force and experience of the bear, again, to avoid the assault. If he were bitten in one place, how he would pinch in another to get free. If he were taken once, then what shift with beating, with clawing, with roaring, tossing and tumbling, he would work to wind himself from them. And when he was loose, to shake his ears twice or thrice with the blood and slaver about his visnomy, was a goodly relief." ‡ Burnet has diversified his annals of the Reformation, by a story of Cranmer's danger, in consequence of a paper which he had written against the Six Articles falling into improper hands. He had sent

* Sixth Sermon before Edward VI.

† See Ellis's Brand, vol. i. p. 147.

‡ Letter from a London Mercer; quoted in Andrews' Continuation of Henry, vol. ii.

D. 357.

it from Lambeth by his secretary, to be delivered to the king, who had commanded the archbishop to write down his opinions. The people who were with the messenger in a wherry would go to the Southwark side, to look on a bear-baiting near the river, at which the king was present. The bear broke loose and took to the river with the dogs after her. The passengers in the boat all leaped out except the secretary, and the bear climbed in. The boat was upset; the secretary half-drowned; and the archbishop's book floating on the Thames. A priest got hold of it; and reading a few sentences said that whosoever owned it would be hanged for his pains. The power of Cromwell was called into action to recover the dangerous volume; and so, says Burnet, "Cranmer escaped this hazard."

The "Act for the advancement of true religion," which forbade the reading of the Bible and the New Testament to the "lower sort,"* also declares the expediency of suppressing, by laws dreadful and penal, "all such books, writings, sermons, disputations, ballads, plays, rhymes, songs, teachings, and instructions, as be pestiferous and noisome." † Every printer, book-binder, or bookseller, uttering such books, was to be fined and imprisoned for the first offence, and for the second to lose all his goods and to be perpetually imprisoned. Tyndale's translation of the Scriptures was forbidden; and any commentary in other translations was to be blotted, or cut out. There was a special clause against persons not duly appointed reading the Bible aloud in any church. The man who sought to know the truth might muse over the chained volume; but he was not to read any portion of it to the less instructed by-standers. Noblemen and gentlemen might read the Bible aloud to their families. Ladies might only read it privately; and so, also, might merchants. The qualified permission to read the Scriptures, thus extended to all but artificers, prentices, journeymen, and serving-men, appears to indicate that the ability to read was very general. But we must not hastily assume this; for, in a statute of 1547, the benefit of clergy was allowed to a Lord or Peer of the realm, "though he cannot read." ‡ The opinion of Henry's statute, that "the lower sort," especially, are incapable of comprehending what is of universal application, is an old fallacy still cherished amongst us. There was a Cambridge friar, just before the suppression of the monasteries, who denounced the reading of the Bible by the vulgar; for the baker, he said, who

* See *ante*, p. 459.

† 34 & 35 Henry VIII. c. 1.

‡ 1 Ed. VI. c. 12.

found it written that a little leaven would corrupt the whole lump, would give us bad bread; and the ploughman would be afraid to labour, when he learnt that if he looked back from his plough he were unfit for the kingdom of heaven.* In the statute for the advancement of true religion, we have a glimpse of what was the popular reading which the government tolerated. "Chronicles," Canterbury Tales, Chaucer's books, Gower's books, and Stories of mer's lives, shall not be comprehended in the prohibition of this Act." This was substantial and agreeable nourishment for a people of vigorous minds—history, biography, and the most captivating fictions told in nervous verse; added to the primers, or selections from the Scriptures, which they were permitted to read without restriction. With these materials of knowledge, such a people would be educating itself to become "a nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit; acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discourse."† Some of the books which belonged to this early age of English printing are still read with pleasure and profit. Our Bible is founded with little change upon the translations of Cranmer's time. Those who appreciate the strength of the old homely idiom, prefer Lord Berners' Froissart to the more refined, but feebler, modern version. We still read the ballads of this period with genuine admiration. Sternhold's Psalms are not wholly banished from our churches by daintier rhymes; and many a country congregation still lifts up its voice in the noble verse which Dryden praised.‡

The statute of 1542-3 recognises another, and perhaps the most important, branch of popular intellectual amusement: "It shall be lawful to all and every person and persons to set forth songs, plays, and interludes, to be used and exercised within this realm and other the king's dominions, for the rebuking and reproaching of vices, and the setting forth of virtue; so always the said songs, plays, or interludes meddle not with interpretations of Scripture, contrary to the doctrine set forth by the king's majesty." It was lawful to represent upon moveable stages, and in inn-yards—upon the village green and the city market-place—Mysteries and Miracle Plays founded upon the leading events of Scripture-history. The Creation and the Fall; the Flood and the Israelites in Egypt; the

* Gilpin's Life of Latimer.

† Milton, "Areopagitica."

‡ "On Cherubs and on Cherubims
Full royally He rode,
And on the wings of all the winds
Came flying all abroad."

Salutation and the Adoration of the Shepherds; Christ before Pilate, the Resurrection, and the Ascension; Doomsday,—such were the subjects that occur amongst the "Coventry Mysteries," and the "Chester Plays." We shrink from the apparent profaneness of exhibiting a personation of the Redeemer to the gaze of a vulgar crowd; but we forget that the same incongruity is overlooked when the sublime strains of Handel or Mendelssohn are poured forth by a Judas Maccabæus or an Elijah in a coat of the last fashion. The people of the fifteenth century beheld such exhibitions in the most simple and sincere spirit. They were originally performed in churches; and the great festival days were selected for their performance. The priests were in many cases the performers. Sir Robert Cooke, vicar of Hawgley, in 1537, bequeathes to his brother Robert, "all my play-books."* "Before the suppression of the monasteries," writes Dugdale, "this city [Coventry] was very famous for the pageants that were played therein upon Corpus-Christi day; which occasioning very great confluence of people thither from far and near, was of no small benefit thereto; which pageants being acted with mighty state and reverence by the friars of this house, had theatres for the several scenes, very large and high, placed upon wheels." There were interludes, of a less serious character, which afforded diversion in banqueting-hall or barn. The court plays were probably more dull than those of the people, if we may judge by one acted before Edward VI., and recorded in his journal. It was "a Talk between one that was called Riches and the other Youth, whether of them was better. After some pretty reasoning, there came in six champions of either side." The secular drama, with its "pretty reasoning," or coarse jokes, was still in the weakest condition of its rickety infancy. But, whether before or after the beginnings of the great ecclesiastical change, we may trace from the most authentic sources how completely the charm of impersonation was associated with the amusements of the people. When the dramatic principle had passed out of its religious character into its secular condition—when it became the most potent form of poetical expression—its universality produced a literature unequalled in any country. But we must not forget that there was little more than the interval of a quarter of a century between the "Gammer Gurton's Needle" of William Still, the bishop, and the "Love's Labour's Lost" of William Shakspeare, the actor—one a specimen of meaningless vulgar

* Bury Wills, p. 129

ity; the other of high poetry and refined wit. However we may refer this marvellous progress to individual genius, we may be satisfied that it could not have been accomplished except amongst a people of high capacity and no contemptible acquirements,—a people that had kept their minds fresh under many adverse conditions; for the ancient spirit of liberty still survived, and its fruit was a healthy national intellect.

The education of the young was the business of the Church under the ancient ecclesiastical system of England. There were schools attached to many of the abbeys. "In the town of St. Edmund, the abbot purchased stone-houses, and assigned them for the use of the schools; so that thereby the poor clerks should be for ever free from house-rents; toward payment whereof all the scholars, whether able or unable, were compelled twice in the year to subscribe a penny or an halfpenny."* This good work of the abbot was done about the end of the twelfth century. Many grammar-schools were founded in the reign of Henry VIII. Pious men and women bequeathed small sums for the aid of schools and exhibitions. In 1504, Anne Barrett, by her last will, provides that forty shillings by year "be given among poor scholars, to help them to their exhibition and learning, those that be good and honest."† After the monastic schools were swept away, we find a humble schoolmaster of the same town of Bury, who leaves very little money and few goods, making a contribution to the future service of the school in which he had taught: "I do give for implements, to remain unto the school, the hangings in my chamber, one table, one joined form, one sede, Pline de naturali historia, Virgilius cum commento, Oratius cum commento, Ovidius cum commento."‡ Bury may be taken as an example of the individual desire throughout the land to promote education. The Foundation schools of Edward VI.—the small contribution, out of a large spoil, to public uses—have to be noticed hereafter. One of the most famous endowments of that reign may however be mentioned here, to point out that the condition of the humblest in the social scale was not entirely disregarded. The original object of Christ's Hospital was, "to take the child out of the street, which was the seed and increase of beggary, by reason of idle bringing-up, and to nourish the same child in some good learning and exercise profitable to the common weale." But still, after the monastic institu-

* Chronicles of Jocelin of Brakelond, p. 13, of Tomlins' Translation.

† Bury Wills, p. 96.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

tions were broken up, the preacher evermore cried out, "Truly it is a pitiful thing to see schools so neglected, scholars not maintained. . . . Schools are not maintained, scholars have not exhibition."* The course of a poor lad's education is told by Tusser in his quaint rhymes. He was forced from his home at Rivenhall, in Essex, to become a chorister at Wallingford. The school-boy's life was a hard one;—"touzed ears"—"bobbed lips"—"robes how bare"—"bread how stale." He was dragged about from choir to choir; but was advanced to be a scholar at Paul's, and thence went to Eton; "to learn straightways the Latin phrase." At once he had "fifty-three stripes" for a small fault. At last he became a student of Trinity, at Cambridge—where he was in peace. Severe discipline of children was the characteristic of an age in which men, and boys, and even girls, were governed more by terror than by love. Peter Carewe, when he ran away from school, was led home in chains like a dog; and was coupled to a hound in a filthy outhouse.† Lady Jane Grey described to Ascham how, in the presence of her parents, she was compelled to deport herself in every action of life according to the strictest rules; "or else I am so sharply taunted, so cruelly threatened, yea presently, some times, with pinches, nips, and bobs, and other ways which I will not name for the honour I bear them, so without measure misordered that I think myself in hell." The poor lady, however, considered the severity as a blessing, for it taught her to value the exceptional kindness of her schoolmaster; "who teacheth me, so gently, so pleasantly, with such fair allurements to learning, that I think all the time nothing whiles I am with him."‡ The same learned education was bestowed upon young women of high rank, as upon the youths. The daughters of Henry VIII. were as excellent linguists, and as well-informed, as their precocious brother. But female education was carefully attended to, as we know from the Paston and other letters, a long time previous. In the midæ of the sixteenth century the art of Printing had given an impulse to all education. Oxford and Cambridge had made great advances in philological studies. Greek was taught at Cambridge in the latter years of Henry VIII.; and in the statutes of the new cathedrals established in 1541, a grammar-school was to be attached to each, with a head-master, "learned in Latin and Greek. § The

* Latimer.

† "Once upon a time," vol. i. p. 102.

‡ Ascham's "Schoolmaster," p. 11, ed. 1570.

§ Hallam, "Literature of Europe," chap. v.

higher public-schools, and the universities, were mostly filled by the sons of yeomen and traders—themselves very often of “gentle lineage.” The means of most scholars were very scanty. Some did not scruple to solicit alms, after the fashion of the mendicant friars. The statute of 1531 classes amongst vagabonds, “scholars of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge that go about begging, not being authorised under the seal of the said universities.” But, severe as was the discipline, and many the privations, of the lad of humble means who was dedicated to the pursuit of learning, the desire for academical instruction kept the schools and universities always full. Some desired knowledge for its own sake, as the accomplishment of the gentleman. But the Church required a constant supply of new men for its offices, and it readily found them, however scanty the endowments of the greater number of the clergy. The prizes of the clerical profession had become fewer, but there were still rich preferments for the ablest men. The ecclesiastics who were conversant with languages—the lawyers who had acquirements beyond the technicalities of their profession—became ambassadors and secretaries. Whatever were the faults of Henry’s character, and however servile the ministers of his will, he was always surrounded with able men. The solid nature of the knowledge of the period, however narrow, may be collected from the correspondence of the confidential servants of Henry’s long reign. There are few amongst them who fail to display an acute power of observation, a keen judgment of political complications, and a strong common sense, in their official correspondence. That their state-craft was too often a system of ignorant expedients, was a necessary consequence of the contending forces of despotism and popular rights. The tendencies of society were very difficult to understand; and those who saw more clearly than the rest did not always dare to speak their minds. The governing classes were far from a recognition of the principle that the good of the people is the end and object of all government.

During the reign of Henry VIII., the most beneficial application of Science to the welfare of man, the knowledge of Medicine and Surgery, made extraordinary advances. The College of Physicians was founded in 1518. By a statute of 1523 their charter of incorporation was confirmed; and to them was committed the power of examination, not only for London but for the whole realm, except for those who were graduates of the universities, so that the practice of the healing art should be limited to “those persons

that be profound, sad, and discreet; groundly learned and deeply studied in physic.”* The previous act of 1512, “concerning Physicians and Surgeons,” indicates the necessity of some exercise of authority to secure the most skilful practitioners that the state of medical knowledge would allow. It says that a great multitude of ignorant persons—“common artificers, as smiths, weavers, and women”—some of whom “can [know] no letters on the book—daily exercise the science and cunning of physic and surgery.” The remedy for this evil appears to have been very equivocal; for the practitioner was to be licensed by the bishop of London or the dean of St. Paul’s. When an incorporated body of physicians, with Linacre, a man of real knowledge, at their head, gave licences in their own branch, a vast step was made towards lessening “the grievous hurt, damage, and destruction of many of the king’s liege people.”† The Surgeons at this time separated themselves from the Barber-Surgeons, who were a company incorporated by Edward IV. How the barber and the surgeon carried on their operations under the ancient system may be inferred from this extract from a barber’s will of 1558: “Item. I give and bequeath to the said John, my son, six hanging basons of latten, ten shaving cloths, one hone, and my case with knives, whole. Item. I give and bequeath to the said John, my son, my brazen mortar and my leaden mortar, with the pestles; the bed whole complete that he lieth in; three barber’s chairs, a drying bason as it standeth, my case with instruments pertaining to surgery, with all my glasses and boxes belonging to the same.”‡ The Surgeons of London went on in their exclusively scientific pursuits without being incorporated. The Barber-Surgeons shaved, and drew teeth, and bled, and attempted cures, under their corporate privileges. In 1540 the two bodies were united by statute, as the Company of Barbers and Surgeons. But their vocations were to be separate. Surgeons were not to exercise “the feat or craft of barbery or shaving.” Barbers who continued to have shaving-shops were forbidden to “occupy letting of blood, or any other thing belonging to surgery, drawing of teeth only except.”§ Under this act the value of dissection was first legally recognized; and surgeons were empowered to take annually four bodies of malefactors to anatomise. Vesalius, the great anatomist of that age, had run many risks in obtaining bodies for dissection; and the English government wisely permitted this indis-

* 14 & 15 Henry VIII. c. 5.

† Bury Walls, p. 150.

‡ 3 Henry VIII. c. 11.

§ 32 Henry VIII. c. 42.

pensable privilege. The people, as might be expected, placed as much confidence in the wise women who administered decoctions and ointments as in the regular followers of Galen and Hippocrates. By a statute of 1543, the act of 1512 is repealed, as far as it sanctioned the interference of physicians and surgeons with uneducated pretenders; and "divers honest persons as well men as women whom God hath endued with the knowledge of the nature, kind, and operation of certain herbs, roots, and waters," are to be permitted to prescribe for outward sores and swellings, for "the web and pin" of the eye, for scalds and burns, for agues, and even for the most dangerous afflictions, such as the stone, without suit or vexation.* The belief in empirical remedies was not confined to the humbler classes. Lord Audley, in 1553, sends to Cecil, who was seriously ill, recipes for two medicines which he had proved upon himself and his wife. One of these is founded upon the healing virtues of a sow-pig, nine days old, distilled with many herbs and spices. The other is more ample: "Item. Take a porpin, otherwise called in English hedgehog, and quarter him in pieces, and put the said beast in a still with these ingredients: item, a quart of red wine, a pint of rose water, a quart of sugar, cinnamon and great raisins, one date, twelve nepe [turnips]."† If Doctor Andrew Borde was a type of his class, even the learned physician did not disdain to make his knowledge popular by some of the arts of the mountebank. Dr. Borde held forth at markets and fairs, varying his orations with the most bombastic phrases and the commonest jokes. Hearne, the antiquary, ascribes to his facetious practice the origin of the term Merry Andrew. The physicians of the period, after the ecclesiastical revolution, availed themselves of one great relic of the old popular belief,—they became the guardians of the holy wells instead of the monks. Sir William Bassett, one of Cromwell's commissioners, in 1536, "locked up and sealed the baths and wells at Buxton;" and took away the image of Saint Anne, who presided over the healing waters. When Harrison wrote, Buxton was again in fashion; and, of baths and hot-wells generally, he tells us that "no man, especially such as be able to entertain them, doth enter into these baths before he consult with the physician."

The tastes of the general population of England were not carried forward, as in Italy, by a familiarity with the highest works in sculpture and painting. The grand cathedrals, with their massive columns, their elaborate carvings, and their painted windows, were

* 34 & 35 Henry VIII. c. 8.

† Tytler, vol. ii. p. 170.

in harmony with the traditional devotion of a reflective people; but a pleasurable sense of the beautiful had not been cultivated by any native excellence in the arts of design. Yet as Charles V. gave a lustre to his court in appreciating the genius of Titian, and Francis I. paid homage to the greatness of Leonardo da Vinci, Henry VIII. had his favourite painter in a foreigner of eminent merit, Holbein. But this master, in many essentials so admirable, produced few works which could have raised our national taste. His best paintings were portraits; and, as such were seen only in palaces and mansions. At the present day, we know how far more of Holbein's works than the people of his time. We see some of the most curious of them in the gallery of Hampton Court. The men and women of that period are there marshalled before us, with their quaint and picturesque costumes. We behold the king, in his ruddy childhood, and his bluff manhood. We look upon him in his domestic relations, with his last queen, and his son on one side, and his daughters on the other. The Court Fool, with an ape on his shoulders, completes the group—a stern and melancholy Fool. There is a portrait of Surrey—a personage with little poetry in his countenance—hard and repulsive. Elizabeth is there in another picture—not the Elizabeth of ruffs and jewels—superb and wrinkled—but a fresh girl, dressed in a plain crimson gown, with a book in her hand—meek and diffident. Here, too, may be seen the pictorial records of two leading events of Henry's reign—the Field of the Cloth of Gold and the Battle of Spurs. Francis I. is here too, with a coarse, sensual face—the very opposite to our notion of a chivalrous character. From these pictures we may gather images more durable than words can convey, of some of the leading persons of this period. We have endeavoured to speak of the principal figure of these works of art with impartiality. His character and his actions render it impossible for us to love or to reverence his memory. But he must ever fill a prominent position in English history—

"The majestic lord
That broke the bonds of Rome."