

MASTER JOHN SHORNE.

The village of North Marston, which has lately become somewhat celebrated for a memorial window, raised by the Queen to John Camden Neild, who bequeathed to her Majesty his ample property, was once far more celebrated for the memorials which it contained of Master John Shorne. This notable personage, though not to be found in the Roman Calendar, was once an acknowledged Saint, as clearly appears even from the few disjointed notices of him which still remain. He is sometimes called Sir John, and Saint John, but more commonly Master John Shorne. Having previously been rector of Monks Risborough, he was presented to North Marston, in the year 1290, and continued to hold this rectory till his death. While at North Marston he became renowned, far and near, for his uncommon piety and miraculous powers. In proof of his sanctity, tradition informs us that "his knees became horny, from the frequency of his prayers;" and in proof of his miraculous powers, two great facts, in particular, are recorded. There is still at Marston a "Holy Well," which, by virtue of his benediction, is said to have been endowed with healing properties. But the principal achievement of his faith—the one great act of his life—was the imprisoning the devil within one of his boots. This was the astounding miracle which raised him to the dignity of a Saint, and won for him the veneration of centuries. How he accomplished this extraordinary feat;—how long he retained his prisoner in "durance vile;"—and how far sin and crime were diminished, during the captivity, neither record nor tradition informs us. Of the fact itself, or rather of the general belief in such an occurrence, we have abundant evidence. It is alluded to in almost every written and traditional notice of Master Shorne, and was commemorated in sculpture, on rood-screens, and in painted windows. There was formerly a representation of "the Miracle" in the chancel window at North

Marston, as we learn from Willis, who says: "Mr. Virgin, ^p ultimate Vicar there told me that at his first coming, [in 1660] there was the picture in glass of Sir John Shorne, with a boot under his arm, like a bag-pipe, into which he was squeezing a moppet, representing the D."* Similar representations of him were introduced into churches in distant parts of the kingdom. Two of them, one at Gately, the other at Cawston, both in Norfolk, still exist, and are described by the Rev. James Bulwer, in an interesting paper, which is published in the *Journal of the Norfolk Archæological Society*. "The attention of the Society," says Mr. Bulwer, "was lately called to a remarkable figure on one of the panels of the screen in the Church of the village of Gately. This Saint—for such his situation, as well as the glory round his head, shows him to be—holds in his left hand a boot, in which may be seen the semblance of an imp or devil: whether in the act of ascending or descending may be doubtful. The legend, to be presently noticed, would lead us to suppose the latter. The right arm of the Saint is extended, and the thumb and two first fingers of his hand raised towards the boot.† When this painting was first noticed, the lower part of the panel was hidden by the stairs of the pulpit; but letters of an early form being clearly marked on the pedestals of other figures not concealed by the stairs or pews, it was suggested that a name might possibly still be legible at the base of this panel also. An interest was thus created about it, which was strengthened by the recollection that a similar figure on the screen at Cawston had baffled all the ingenious guesses of our ecclesiologists. Inquiries were made; and a member of the committee, acquainted with the parish of Gately, undertook the temporary removal of the obstructions. This enquiry was rewarded by his distinctly reading, on the label, "Magister Johes Schorn." This was indeed an important discovery; for it showed beyond a doubt for whom this curious portrait was intended. Mr. Bulwer has given an illustration of this painting, and also one of the painting at Cawston; and, in speaking of them, he says: "It is clear, from inspection, that both are intended to represent the same per-

* Willis's MSS. in the Bodleian Library.

† It is worthy of remark, that the thumb and fingers appear in an impossible attitude.

sonage. The caps, cloaks, and hoods are of similar form and colour—the dress of a Doctor of Divinity—and the same cast of features is, I think, observable in both. The imp in the Cawston painting differs from the same object in that at Gately, but it is equally significant of the spirit of evil, over which the Saint appears to be displaying his power.” While it is evident, as Mr. Bulwer observes, that these two paintings are intended to represent the same person, and to display the same act for which he was celebrated, yet the difference between them, as represented by Mr. Bulwer’s illustrations, is sufficient to show that they could not have been copied the one from the other; nor does either of them exactly agree with Mr. Virgin’s description of the same personage, as formerly represented in the window at North Marston Church; for in this last instance the Saint is described as holding the boot under his arm like a bag-pipe, whereas it is represented in the Gately and Cawston figures as grasped by his hand, and hanging down in front of his person. On the Cawston screen the portrait of the evil spirit bears no resemblance to the same object on the Gately screen; and the Saint himself in the latter instance stands on a bracket, but in the Cawston screen he stands on a pavement. These diversities show that the artists must have allowed some licence to their own imaginations.

By the kindness of the Rev. J. Smith, the Vicar of Gately, I am enabled to give an illustration of the screen in his Church, by which it would appear, from the bracket on which the Saint stands, that the portrait has been copied from a statue or image; and such an image, as will shortly be noticed, once existed in North Marston Church. Indeed there still exist, at the east end of the south aisle, vestiges of an altar which was probably dedicated to Sir John Sherne. On each side of the space occupied by this altar there still exists a niche, evidently designed for an image or statue; and the bracket of one of these niches resembles that represented on the Gately screen; whence we may not unfairly conjecture that the Gately screen still exhibits a copy from the original image in the Church at North Marston.

“The figure on the Cawston screen,” says Mr. Bulwer, in a letter to me, “is upon paper, glued perhaps over an earlier embellishment. Since I mentioned the fact of its



MASTER JOHN SHORNE,
From the Rood-screen in Gately Church.

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being on paper, I am sorry to say that he is gradually disappearing. The curiosity of visitors is not satisfied with the clerk's account, but they will test the accuracy of my statement with their fingers." I have also ascertained from the present rector of Cawston, that the portrait of Sir John Shorne is now almost obliterated, so that had not Mr. Bulwer prudently preserved a copy of it, this curious portrait of our Saint would even now have been past deciphering.

There appears also to have been an image of Sir John Shorne at Canterbury, or some other object designed to excite veneration towards him. This is gathered from some curious lines, which Mr. Bulwer has taken from an old poem, by John Heywood, who flourished in the sixteenth century. The poem is called "The Play of the Four P's;—a very merry interlude of a Palmer, a Pardoner, a Poticary, a Pedder." The Palmer says:—

"I am a Palmer, as you see,
Whiche of my life muche 'part have spent
In many a far and fair countrie,
As Pilgrims doo of good intent.
At Jerusalem have I been,
Before Christe's blessed sepulture;
The Mount of Calvary I have seen—
A holy place, ye may be sure.

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• At Saint Davies, and at Saint Denice,
• At Saint Mathew, and at Saint Mark in Venice.
• At Maister John Shorne, in Canterbury.
• The great God of Kateward, at King Herry."

From another curious notice we learn that his reputation had reached into Northumberland. Mr. Payne Collier, in his extracts from the Registers of the Stationers' Company, gives the following:—

"1569—70. Rd. of Thomas Colwell, for his lycence for the pryntinge of a ballett intituled 'Newes to Northumberlande,' yt skylles not where, To Sir John Shorne, a churche rebell there—IIII^d." This ballad, which probably was intended to expose or ridicule the legend of Sir John Shorne, shews, by its title, that his fame had reached Northumberland. But while his fame had apparently spread from Kent to Northumberland, North Marston, as might be expected, retained the chief attractions to his votaries. Here it was that he had imparted

wonderful healing properties to his "Holy Well." Here he had performed that astounding miracle which had filled the country with his fame. And here, apparantly, he died and was buried; for in his will, a copy of which is given in Lipscomb, he describes himself as "Rector of the Church of Northemaston," and directs his body to be buried in the Chancel, before the High Altar, in a tomb which he himself had prepared for the purpose. His will is dated May 8th, 1308, which was eighteen years after his presentation; but, as his successor was not presented till 1314, he probably held the Rectory of North Marston about twenty-four years. After his death, but how soon is not known, he appears to have been raised to the dignity of a Saint, for his remains were enclosed in a shrine, and became the object of numerous pilgrimages. Nothing is known of the embellishments or peculiar construction of this shrine; but, from the general veneration in which it was held, and the value of the offerings presented to it, it became an object of such importance that Richard Beauchamp, Bishop of Salisbury, who was appointed Dean of Windsor, in 1478, obtained a license from Pope Sixtus V. to "remove it wheresoever he pleased," and accordingly he removed it from North Marston to St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. Consequently, among the expenses for works done at this Chapel, the following items occur:—"For making and carving thirty feet of crests, thirty feet of trayles, eight lintels for the enterclose of the chapel of Master John Schorne."*

Again, in an Indenture dated 1506, for roofing St. George's Chapel, at Windsor, it is covenanted "That the creastes, corses, beastes, above on the outsides of Maister John Shorne's Chappell, bee done and wrought according to the other creastes, and comprised within the said bargayne."†

Willis gives a different account of the removal of the shrine. He says—

"Before the time of Hen. the 4th, the Vicarage was appropriated to the Convent of ———.

"About this time, or soon after, the Convent did, in a solemn manner, and with a great deal of ceremony, exchange the Vicarage and Parsonage of N. Marston for

* History of Windsor Castle, cited by Mr. Bulwer.

† From an article by Mr. Thoms, in Notes and Queries, Vol. II, 388.

another Parsonage in N. Hamptonshire, called * * * which was appropriated to the College of Windsor * * * and the Vicarage was very considerable on account of offerings at the tomb of John Shorne, formerly Rector of N. Marston, to the value of £300 per annum.

“ Mr. Sherrier, late Vicar there (who examined the records no farther than to confirm what income he had, or augment it) tells me that the main reason for the exchange of this lordship was the Monks of Windsor more easily to monopolize the wealthy shrine of Sir John Shorn; and the oblations of Pilgrims brought thither allowed the Monks of Osney a good bargain, and indented with their next Minister of N. Marston to give him the whole Rectory and Vicarage, provided they may remove the bones of Sir John Shorn to Windsor, which accordingly was done. The Monks published and bruited abroad what a Sovraign qualified Saint was come among them, against all diseases Spiritual and Temporal, Ghostly and Bodily; but the people of the Chiltern had Saints whose reputations were established there, so Sir John Shorn had no more respect than what he deserved. On this the Monks, weary of their purchase, and the they indented with another Incumbent to give his bones to N. Marston again.”*

The pilgrimages to this Saint were numerous, and, as the few remaining notices of them clearly indicate, were undertaken for different purposes. Bishop Latimer, in the opening of one of his sermons, says—“ I have to tell you, at this present time, of a certain pilgrimage, which may be called the Christian man’s pilgrimage; but ye shall not think that I will speak of the Popish pilgrimage, which we were wont to use in times past, in running hither and thither, to Mr. John Shorn, or to our Lady of Walsingham.”† This allusion to “ running to Mr. John Shorn” clearly indicates that pilgrimages to him were often voluntary acts of devotion; while, from other notices we learn that they were sometimes compulsory acts of penance. When Thomas Harding was martyred at Chesham, persons, who were known to favour his doctrines, were

* From MSS. in Bod. Lib., Oxford.

† Page 474—Parker Society’s Vol.

punished in the following manner:—"Some," says Foxe, "were compelled to bear fagots; some were burned in their cheeks with hot irons; some condemned to perpetual prison; some thrust into Monasteries and spoiled of all their goods; some compelled to make pilgrimages to the great block, otherwise called our Lady of Lincoln; some to Walsingham; some to St. Romuld of Buckingham; some to the Rood at Wendover; some to Sir John Shorne, &c.)* Again—"Isabel Gardener and John Gardener were forced by their oath to detect the Vicar of Wycombe for speaking against pilgrimages in the company of John and Elizabeth Gardener, as he was going to our Lady of Lincoln for his penance enjoined by Bishop Smith. Also the same time as he met certain coming from St. John Shorne, for saying they were fools and calling it idolatry."†

As these pilgrimages were enjoined by the Ecclesiastics, it is evident that the veneration paid to Shorne was not the result of mere vulgar credulity. From other notices we learn that Shorne was famed for curing the ague, and that some pilgrims sought his aid for this purpose.

In Michael Wodde's Dialogue, quoted by Brand, we read—"If we were sycke of the pestylence we ran to Sainte Rooke; if of the ague, to Sainte Pernel, or Master John Shorne."‡

The same fact appears in some curious verses quoted by Foxe, who tells us that Lord Cromwell kept about him "divers fresh and quick wits, by whose industry and ingenious labours, divers excellent ballads and books were contrived and set abroad concerning the suppression of the Pope, and all idolatry." Among these "divers excellent ballads" one was entitled "The Fantastic of Indolatrie," in which occurs the following stanza:—

"To Maister John Shorne,
That blessed man borne;
For the ague to him we apply,
Whiche juggleth with a bote:
I beshrowe his herte rote
That wyle truste him, and it be I."§

From the foregoing notices, then, we learn that these

* Foxe, Vol. IV. 580.

† *Ib.* page 232.

‡ Notes and Queries, Vol. II. 387.

§ Foxe, Vol. V. 406.

pilgrimages were undertaken as voluntary acts of devotion ; as penance for alleged heresy ; and in the hope of being cured of the ague. Each pilgrim probably presented an offering to the Saint, and the annual amount of these offerings appears to have averaged the startling sum of £500, or, according to the present value of money, *from five to ten thousand pounds a-year.*”*

But whether these pilgrimages and offerings were all made to the shrine at Windsor, or partly to that, and partly to North Marston, is doubtful. Certain it is that after the shrine was removed from the Church at Marston, there were other memorials of the Saint left there which continued to attract his devotees. Besides the Holy Well, which will presently be noticed, there was an image of Sir John Shorne in the Church, which Dr. London, one of the Commissioners in 1538 for the suppression of monasteries, mentions in a letter to Lord Cromwell :—“ At Merston, Mr. Johan Schorn stondith blessing a bote, whereunto they do say he conveyed the Devill. He ys moch sawgt for the agow. If it be your lordeschips pleasure, I schall sett that botyd ymage in a nother place, and so do with other in other parties wher lyke seking ys.

Your most bounded oratour and
Servant,

JOHAN LONDON.†”

The image here mentioned, which was evidently the object of pilgrimages, especially by sufferers from ague, appears to have represented the Saint in the act of blessing the boot into which he “ conjured the devil ;” and, as such is the attitude of the figure on the Gately screen, it is another evidence of its having been copied from this image.

Joane Ingram, in her will dated 1519, amongst other legacies, bequeathed “ to Master John Shorny’s light, a pound of wax.”‡ As the shrine had been previously removed to Windsor, this light in honour of Sir John Shorne was doubtless kept burning before the image, which was

* See History of Windsor, p. III., cited by Lysons, who says at least £5,000 ; but money was in the fifteenth century equal to nearly twenty times its present value.

† Letters on the Suppression of Monasteries, by the Camden Society, page 218.

‡ Lipscomb.

probably designed as a substitute for his shrine. Had this image been of stone, Dr. London would probably have contented himself with breaking it into fragments, but most likely it was of wood or some light material, and had something curious or valuable about it; for we find by another letter from Dr. London, that he sent it among other relics to his employers in London. His letter, which appears on page 224 of the work before-named, is supposed to be to Sir Richard Rich, and is so curious and characteristic, that a rather copious extract will, it is hoped, be a pardonable prolixity:—"Right Worshipfull, in my most hartie maner I have me commendyd unto yow, I have pullyd down the image of your lady at Caversham, with all trynkettes abowt the same, as schrowdes, candels, images of wexe, crowches, and brochys, and have thorowly defacyd that chapell in exchuyng of any farther resortt, for even at my being ther com in nott so few as dosyn with imagies of wexe. The image ys thorowly plated over with sylver. I have putt her in a chest fast lockyd and naylede, and by the next barge that comythe uppe it schalle be brougth to my lorde, with her cootes, cappe, and here, with dyvers relykes, as the bles yd knyfe that kylded seynt Edward, the dagger that kylded kinge Henry, schethe and all; and I myssed no thing here butt only a piece of the holy halter Judas wasse hangud withall. Here song a chanon of Notley, wiche hadde conveyd home to hys master as great a relik as any of thees befor I com; but I wyll have hym, and schall send it to my lorde. And thys wek folowing I will send uppe Mr. Johan Schorn, and so as many as I fynde." There must have been something peculiar about the image of Mr. Johan Schorn, as well as that of our Lady of Caversham, or it would not have been sent up, or named among the other curious relics. Dr. London describes it as "standing blessing a bote; and as much sought for the ague." It was therefore, probably, to this very image that that curious stanza referred, which has been quoted from the "Fantasie of Idolatry," and in which the Saint, or rather his image, is described as "juggling with a boot." On this stanza, Dr. Maitland has a remark very much to our purpose. After quoting it he says—"The verse which I have quoted seems as if there was some relic which was supposed to cure the ague, and by which the juggle was

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carried on." Here then, apparently, we have just such a relic in the image at Marston, which "stondeth blessing a bote," and by which boot, doubtless, the juggle was carried on. We all know a curious little toy called "Jack in a box," and by a similar contrivance in the boot held by the image, a figure of the evil spirit might be made to ascend and descend at the pleasure of some cunning bystander who, by thus exhibiting the wonderful miracle of the Saint, to the great consternation of the credulous, might really cure many who were suffering from nervous complaints.

A glance at the Saint on the Gately screen will at once shew how feasible is this conjecture. The boot, which he there holds in his hand, with the little imp peeping out of it, forcibly reminds one of "Jack in the box." Certainly this ingenious toy can be nothing more than a modern improvement of "Nick in a boot," and in common justice to Maister John Shorne we ought to award him the credit of the invention.

This famous boot is often referred to, and ridiculed by our Reformers, among other popular relics. "Here," says Bishop Bale, "were much to be spoken of St. Germain's Evil, St. Sithe's Key, St. Uncomber's Oats, Master John Shorne's Boot, St. Gertrude's Rats, &c."*

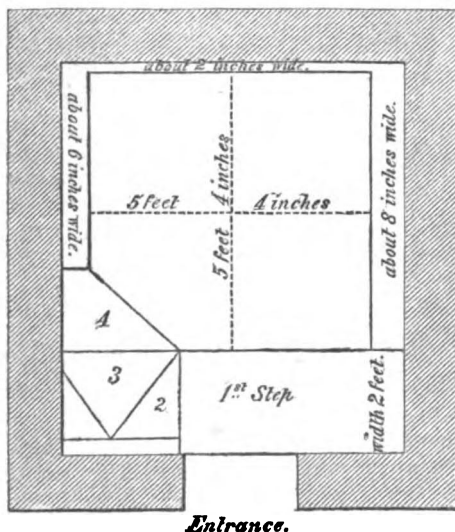
Foxe also relates a curious circumstance which occurred on a Relic Sunday, when all who joined in the procession were required to carry some relic. He says that "Testwood (the martyr) perceiving the dagger in Master Hake's hand, and being merrily disposed, stepped forth out of his place to Dr. Clifton, and said 'Sir, Master Hake hath St. George's dagger. Now, if he had his horse, and St. Martin's cloak, and *Master John Shorne's boots*, with king Harry's spurs and his hat, he might ride where he would.'"†

The Holy Well, which bore Sir John Shorne's name, and was supposed to have derived its medicinal qualities from his prayers and benediction, is situated about one hundred and fifty yards from the Church. It is still known by the villagers as Sir John Shorne's Well, but is commonly called "The Town Well." It consists, as shown in the diagram, of a cistern, five feet four inches

* Select Works of Bale, page 497.

† Martyrology, Vol. V. 468.

square, and six feet nine inches deep. This is walled round with stone, and has a flight of four stone steps descending into the water. This cistern is enclosed by a building, somewhat larger than the well itself, with walls composed of brick and stone, about five feet high, and covered with a roof of boards.



SIR JOHN SHORNE'S WELL.

From the size and construction of the cistern, it was probably occasionally used as a bath, but the sick were doubtless chiefly benefitted by drinking the water. The present building, which is entered at the north end, runs too closely round the verge of the cistern to allow of its being used for bathing. The water, which is supplied by a copious spring, near a footpath leading to Oving, was described in the Gentleman's Magazine, for 1820, as slightly chalybeate, and containing a large portion of calcareous earth. But even since that date, as will presently appear, its medicinal properties have varied. Formerly they must have been very powerful; for its supposed miraculous cures attracted such numbers of invalids to it, that houses had to be built for their accommodation. Browne Willis says that "many aged persons then living

remembered a post in a quinquaviam on Oving hill (about a mile east of the well), which had hands pointing to the several roads, one of them directing to 'Sir John Shorne's Well.'" He likewise says, according to Lipscomb, that "several ceremonies were practised here on account of this gentleman." But Lipscomb's transcripts from Willis are not to be trusted; for instance, he says the miracle of Shorne was "recorded on the wall which inclosed the Holy Well when it was visited by Browne Willis," whereas Willis's own words are, "at the South end of the town is a Well, known by the name of Sir John Shorn's Well, (perhaps so named from the tonsure) which tradition tells us had this inscription on the wall of it—

' Sir John Shorn
Gentleman born
Conjured the Devil into a Boot.' "

In the Marriage Register of North Marston occurs this entry: "It is said that the chancel of this Church of North Marston, nearly four miles south from Winslow, was built with the offerings at the shrine of Sir John Schorne, a very devout man, who had been Rector of the parish about the year 1290, and that this village became very populous and flourishing in consequence of the great resort of persons to a well of water here, which he had blessed, which ever after was called 'Holy Well;' but my parishioners now call it the 'Town Well:' its water is chalybeate. The common people in this neighbourhood, and more particularly some ancient people of this my own parish, still keep up the memory of this circumstance by many traditionary stories." This entry is signed "William Pinnock, September 12th, 1810." Mr. Pinnock has left no record of these "traditionary stories;" nor Browne Willis of "the ceremonies practised" at Marston, on account of Shorne. This is much to be regretted, for now it seems impossible to ascertain what they were. Doubtless the traditions mentioned at the opening of this paper were among the number, and probably an annual festival of decorating the well, as still observed at Tissington, in Derbyshire, was one of the ceremonies alluded to by Willis. There is still a tradition that a box for the receipt of offerings was affixed to the well, but this has not been the case within the memory of any person now living. The building, which enclosed the well when Willis visited it, has been

entirely removed, for the present building, though in a very dilapidated state, is comparatively modern, but probably older than any inhabitant of the parish. The water is no longer used medicinally, except to promote perspiration in colds. Of late years its chemical properties are so minute that its flavour scarcely differs from ordinary spring water. But some old people say they can recollect its being so strongly impregnated with iron as to be considered unfit for ordinary drinking, except by cattle, for whose use troughs were formerly placed round the outside of the building; but these have long since been removed. Now it is used for all domestic purposes, except for washing, for which it is too hard, and is the main supply of the parish, there being but few other wells in it, and those yielding water unfit to drink, being tainted with a muddy or brackish flavour. So copious is the supply of the "Town Well," that it ought to be regarded as a special blessing to the parish. However exhausted it may have been in the most droughty season, by water carts, &c., during the day, and when all ponds are dry, by the next morning the water of this well has generally risen again to its ordinary level. Though sometimes about Michaelmas the water subsides to the lowest step, it has never been known to fail.

This well is said to have first come into general use for drinking in the year 1835, when a fever prevailed in the parish, and the deaths amounted to nineteen, being only seven in the preceding year; since which no fatal epidemic has prevailed. So the general use of this well appears to have had a beneficial effect on the health of the locality. Certain it is that many of the inhabitants of Marston live to a great age, and but few comparatively die in childhood. Since 1835, the year the well came into general use, the births in this parish, containing a population of about 700, have been 486; the deaths, 304—thus in twenty-three years the births have exceeded the deaths by 182.

Sir John Shorne's Well, therefore, though it may have lost its pristine fame, is still exceedingly beneficial to the inhabitants of Marston. And it is to be hoped that, however little it may be prized as an object of antiquity, it will so far be valued on account of its salubrious water as not to be suffered to fall into decay or neglect, but be

speedily repaired and preserved as a blessing to future generations.

The Chancel, which is said to have been built by the offerings at the Shrine of Master John Shorne, is an exceedingly fine specimen of the Perpendicular style. Some old people of Marston can remember a niche outside the Chancel, over the east window, which contained two figures, apparently talking together. One of these figures is said to have been Shorne, and the other the devil with forked tail and cloven feet; but they were commonly called the devil and John Foster. They fell down about sixty years ago, and for some time lay in the church-yard, but all traces of them are now lost.

It is remarkable that Sir John Shorne, although so popular for centuries, should not have been canonised; nor is he to be found in any Biography or Catalogue of Mediæval Saints. Yet he was honoured with all the usual characteristics of one. Why then was the omission? The legend related of him is not more marvellous than those of many canonised Saints. We indeed cannot hear it without a smile, mingled however with pain. For painful it is to think, that in the palmy days of "merrie England" the credulity that could credit so gross an imposture as Shorne's miracle was almost universal; and still more painful is the reflection that the imposture was practised by those whose duty it was to enlighten the ignorant. We may be thankful that we live in an age when both the Civil and Ecclesiastical authorities are using every effort to save the credulous and ignorant from becoming profitable dupes to the deceptions of designing impostors.

For the ground-plan of the Well, and for much valuable information in the latter part of this paper, I am indebted to the kindness of the Rev. Richard Knight, the present Incumbent of North Marston.

W. HASTINGS KELKE.