

ART. IV.—THE ISLE OF WIGHT OF LEGH  
RICHMOND'S NARRATIVES.

THE "Victoria History" of the counties of England mentions four clergymen, closely connected with Hampshire during the nineteenth century, whose writings exercised an influence far beyond the range of the Diocese of Winchester. These four are John Keble, Charles Kingsley, Richard Chevenix Trench, and Legh Richmond, whose narratives of "The Dairyman's Daughter" and "The Young Cottager" were, it rightly says, "at one time the most popular religious works in England." Indeed, it is difficult to exaggerate the favour with which these works were received. With the Bible and the "Pilgrim's Progress" they became the Sunday reading of numberless Christian households. Appearing originally in the columns of the *Christian Guardian* during the years 1809-1811, they were afterwards published separately in the form of tracts, and finally issued, together with "The Negro Servant," in one small volume under the appropriate title, taken from Gray's "Elegy," of "The Annals of the Poor." The little book at once became immensely popular. Within a few years it was translated into almost all the European languages, and successive editions were published in America. Altogether it has been estimated that millions of copies have been sold, and it has found its way alike into the hut of the Red Indian and into the palaces of kings. And, curious though it may seem, the interest excited by the narratives still continues; new editions are frequently published, and every year numbers of visitors, including many Americans, make a pilgrimage to the cottages of Little Jane and of the dairyman's daughter, and gaze on their respective tombstones in Brading and in Arreton churchyards.

These facts present a literary problem of considerable interest. After all, the "Annals" are only tracts, and of a religious complexion no longer so predominant among Christian people as was the case a hundred years ago. But in one important particular they differ from the great bulk of Evangelical writings once eagerly read and now totally forgotten. We allude to their deep sympathy with Nature, and to the beautiful descriptions of local scenery which they contain. In this respect the writings of Legh Richmond stand in striking contrast with those of the school of thought to which he belonged. Strange as it may appear, there can be no room for doubt that to many of the Evangelical teachers the beauties of Nature were regarded as a snare to the religious mind. Indeed, in the "Memoir" of Legh Richmond,

published in 1833, the editor thinks it necessary to warn his readers against this appreciation of Nature so conspicuous in the "Annals." He writes in the preface: "Delightful as was the use which Mr. Richmond made of the beauties of Nature, the present editor would still remark that delight in those beauties may be a snare and temptation to the mind. The line between lawful pleasure in created things as leading us to God and joy in them for themselves is difficult to discern." Yet there can be no reasonable doubt that the "Annals" owe their popularity, and hence their usefulness, to this very feature which has been regarded with suspicion by many good people. This recognition of "delightful scenery" is the secret which separates the writings of Legh Richmond from those of contemporary Evangelicals whose works are now buried in oblivion.

For some eight years only did Legh Richmond reside in the Isle of Wight, but short though his ministry was, it left an abiding impression on the neighbourhood. Every detail of his work is now regarded with interest, and the spots connected with his narratives are sacred ground. It was in the year 1797 that he was ordained to the curacy of Brading, which at that time included within its bounds what were then the obscure fishing hamlets of Bembridge and Sandown. He also had charge of the small parish of Yaverland, with its beautiful little Norman church delightfully situated on rising ground about two miles distant. His Vicar, one Miles Bopple, being after the manner of the age non-resident, the curate took up his abode in the old Vicarage, a small and inconvenient house which has been since pulled down. A print of it, however, hangs in the vestry of the parish church, and is eagerly scanned by visitors as the house in which "The Annals of the Poor" was written. A companion picture shows the interior of the church as it was before restoration in 1864. There is the eighteenth-century "three-decker"—now rightly removed—from which Legh Richmond delivered his gospel to the poor. An unsightly gallery will be noticed stretching across the west end of the building. The Early English nave is crowded with high-backed square pews, and the Oglander chapel is boarded up. In this chapel, now beautifully restored, are piously preserved the Communion chair and the Church Office-Book which Legh Richmond used, and within the chancel rails will be noticed the small font which in his time stood in the church, and at which he baptized the village children.

A tablet has lately been placed on the south wall of the church by the grandchildren of Legh Richmond, to commemorate his ministry at Brading; and it is worth remarking

that the inscription, after duly mentioning his Christian virtues, speaks of "his graceful descriptions of the beautiful scenery of the Isle of Wight." These descriptions are chiefly confined to the corner of the island in which his ministry was cast. The "Annals" contain no mention of the romantic scenery of the Undercliff, nor of the magnificent chalk cliffs of Freshwater. The beauties of Bonchurch are not alluded to, nor the quiet charm of the old village of Shanklin. But every detail of the country around Brading was familiar to our author, and finds expression in his writings. Little Jane's cottage is situated in the village itself, and the lane past it leads to Ashley Down, which he named his "Mount of Contemplation." The picturesque approach to the church of Yaverland, where he learnt to preach extempore, is more than once noticed, and the fine old Jacobean mansion close to the churchyard. Brading Harbour and the view from the Culver cliffs are graphically described; and in "The Dairyman's Daughter" we are introduced to the neighbouring village of Arreton, and to the pleasant country beneath the south slope of Ashley Down.

There have been many changes in the Island since the time of Legh Richmond. Steamboats and railways have rendered it easy of access, and considerable towns now flourish where only a few fishermen's huts were to be seen at the close of the eighteenth century. In those days, so we learn from John Wilkes of "North Briton" fame, who had a little "villakin" in Sandham Bay, it not infrequently took two hours to cross the Solent from Portsmouth to Ryde. The latter place was then a hamlet within the bounds of the parish of Newchurch. The towns of Ventnor and Sandown did not exist. Shanklin, and Bonchurch together contained only thirty-two houses. Bembridge, now a flourishing little seaside resort, consisted of a cluster of cottages at the entrance of the haven, which then stretched for three miles, almost as far as Brading church. But in spite of the railways which now traverse the island in every direction, and the vast upgrowth of towns consequent upon the increase of population, the beauty of the landscape is but little impaired. Now, as when Legh Richmond reclined upon the turf beneath the "triangular pyramid" on Ashley Down, a delightful panorama meets the eye from that "lovely mount of observation." To the north "the sea appears like a noble river," with the distant towns of Gosport and Portsmouth on the opposite shore and the Portsdown hills beyond. Eastward is "the open ocean bounded only by the horizon." Southward, now as then, a rich and fruitful valley lies immediately beneath. "A fine range of opposite hills, covered with grazing flocks, terminate with a bold sweep

into the ocean, whose blue waves appear at a distance beyond. Several villages, hamlets, and churches are scattered in the valley. The noble mansions of the rich and the lowly cottages of the poor add their respective features to the landscape." The parish church of Godshell is seen crowning a little eminence which rises out of the valley; while to the south-west, some ten miles away, is dimly discerned the remains of an ancient chantry, once occupied by a solitary hermit, on the summit of St. Catherine's Down.

Little Jane's cottage, which is annually visited by large numbers of persons, is still in the same condition as when she died there in the summer of 1799. For many years it has been owned by a pious and cultured lady who venerates the name and teaching of Legh Richmond, and who regards its possession as a sacred trust. She will allow no alterations to be made, no modern "improvements" to be carried out. The cottage is still thatched with straw, and the original lead casements of the lattice-windows remain. Inside, upstairs and downstairs alike, nothing has been changed; and the "mean despised chamber," with its "sloping roof" and "uneven floor," remain as when the good pastor administered the Holy Communion to the dying child more than a hundred years ago. The little garden, too, is practically unchanged. A high bank, starred with celandines in early spring, still faces it, and the cottage is covered with yellow jasmine and fragrant honeysuckle, while a large shrub of *Lycium barbarum*, or the tea-plant (doubtless planted since), forms an evergreen porch over the doorway. Last summer several tall hollyhocks were blooming in the cottage garden, and the little bed in front of the parlour window was filled with *Sedum Telephium*, or livelong, a plant which still grows wild in the neighbourhood.

In the days when "Little Jane" and the village children, under the guidance of their loving teacher, were wont to learn the epitaphs on the tombstones in Brading churchyard, the haven extended almost as far as the parish church. Legh Richmond speaks of it as "a large arm of the sea which at high tide formed a broad lake or haven of three miles in length." This estuary in former years was a famous haunt of wildfowl, and back in the sixteenth century we are told that Sir William Oglander "when itt wase froste & snowe woolde goe downe to Bradinge Havan a shootinge, where he woolde kill 40 coupell of fowle in a nyght, hee & his man." The haven has now, after many failures, been reclaimed, and large numbers of cattle feed on the rank herbage. At the extreme end of what was once "a large river or lake of sea water" there still stands, "close to the edge of the sea

itself, the remains of the tower of an ancient church, now preserved as a sea mark." This is the tower of the old parish church of St. Helen's, the nave of which has fallen a victim to the encroachment of the sea. It is to be regretted that Legh Richmond was not a scientific botanist, for the sandy spit of land on which the tower stands is remarkable for its wealth of wild flowers. Though not exceeding forty or fifty acres in extent, it is said to yield some two hundred and fifty species of British plants. Most of these the writer has himself identified. Perhaps the most beautiful and interesting is *Scilla autumnalis*, L., the autumnal squill, which in tens of thousands stars the sandy turf with its exquisite blue flowers every August and September. And, strange to say, this plant is nowhere else to be found in the county of Hampshire. But though there is nothing in his writings to show that Legh Richmond was acquainted with the rarer plants of the Island, yet he frequently alludes to the extraordinary number of wayside flowers. In one instance only, so far as we remember, does he mention an uncommon plant by name. In his description of the "stupendously lofty" Culver cliffs, he adds that their "whiteness was occasionally chequered with dark-green masses of samphire which grew there." It is interesting to note that when the writer visited the spot last summer one large mass of samphire was conspicuous against the white chalk about half-way up the "tremendous perpendicular cliff."

The cottage of "The Dairyman's Daughter"—perhaps the most popular of Legh Richmond's narratives—is still standing beside the highroad that runs between Apse Heath and the village of Arreton. It lies back a little from the road, and is approached, now as then, through "a neat little garden" full of old-fashioned flowers, though the "two large elm-trees" which formerly overshadowed it have disappeared. Since Legh Richmond's time the cottage has been roofed with slate and slightly enlarged, and this, unfortunately, has given it a somewhat modern appearance. But otherwise the fabric is but little changed. The gray stone walls are covered with ivy and other creepers, and "the branches of a vine" still trail above the parlour window. The interior of the cottage remains in almost the same condition as when the "good dairyman" lived there. The two corner cupboards occupy their old position in the parlour, and the door of the dairy with the original open lattice-work still swings on its ancient hinges. Upstairs, the room in which the daughter died, with the great brick chimney-stack standing out against the wall, is but slightly altered since the early summer of 1801. The present occupier of the cottage shows with pride a length of

iron chain which formerly belonged to old Wallbridge, and the original chimney-rack from which his bacon was suspended. Hard by the cottage a Wesleyan Methodist church, known as "The Dairyman's Daughter's Memorial Chapel," now stands, built—in part, at least—with the offerings of strangers, whose interest in Legh Richmond's story had led them to make a pilgrimage to the cottage. Numbers of persons still continue to visit the grave of the dairyman's daughter in Arreton churchyard, marked by a headstone bearing an epitaph of much simple beauty from the pen of her pious biographer. Legh Richmond himself officiated at her funeral, and as the procession filed into the church, he mentions that, looking upwards, he observed a dial—one of the few ancient sundials now remaining in the Isle of Wight—on the church wall, which brought to his mind the Psalmist's words, "Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding."

Some two miles from the cottage there stood in Legh Richmond's time "a large and venerable mansion, situated in a beautiful valley at the foot of a high hill." This was Knighton, the house where he first met Elizabeth Wallbridge, "the dairyman's daughter." It is much to be regretted that this fine old Jacobean manor-house, "the most considerable and beautiful of the ancient mansions of the Island," was pulled down in the year 1820. Standing on an elevated terrace beneath the south slope of Ashe Down, it occupied a position of great charm and beauty. Close by, in a wooded dell, on the margin of a pool of clear water, were to be seen the remains of a medieval chapel, dating back to the time of Edward III. The mansion possessed a massive square tower of great antiquity, and several rooms of considerable dimensions adorned with oak panelling and carved mantel-pieces. In the long gallery beneath the roof there stood "a very large oaken chest, covered with rich niche-work and tracery, of the time, probably, of Henry IV., and possessing the original lock with tracery carved in iron." Nothing now remains of the ancient structure, save a few dilapidated out-buildings, and the massive piers of gray stone some fifteen feet in height which mark the entrance from the road. A portion, too, of the garden wall remains, with its ancient coping of red brick, on which last summer the beautiful ivy-leaved *Linaria* was growing abundantly, with here and there a delicate wall-fern, or a plant of the greater yellow celandine, or the ploughman's spikenard. The spot beside the pool where the chapel stood is now covered with the buildings of the Ryde Water-works, and a farmyard occupies the site of the Jacobean mansion. One wonders what became of the ancient chest of

curious design, and the dignified oak panelling which enriched the rooms. Some of the latter seems to have found its way to a cottage in the village of Brading, where a room may be seen panelled with ancient oak and with a stately Jacobean mantelpiece, which tradition associates with the dismantled manor-house of Knighton. Nothing could exceed the quiet beauty of the scene when the writer visited the deserted site last summer. From one of the gables of the farm-buildings a female kestrel-hawk was calmly surveying the surrounding stubble. Scores of rabbits were feeding and scuttling about at the foot of the noble down. A squirrel was playing in the branches of a magnificent elm-tree. Swallows were skimming over the pool, in which, according to tradition, a former owner of the property, overwhelmed with grief at the sudden loss of his wife and children, committed suicide. In the copse beside the stream which issued from the haunted pool the rare marsh-fern, *N. thelypteris*, Desv., was growing abundantly, and splendid specimens of purple foxglove covered the rising ground. Not a sound was to be heard, save the murmur of innumerable insects, and the notes of a willow-wren in the coppice beyond.

In the quiet beauty of the parish of Brading Legh Richmond found a constant source of refreshment and delight. The wide open downs were dear to him, and the chalk cliffs and the seashore. On his frequent rounds of pastoral visitation, often to distant parts of the parish, his mind would be occupied with the contemplation of nature. "How much do they lose," he exclaims in one of his narratives, "who are strangers to serious meditation on the wonders and beauties of nature?" To his mind "the believer possessed a *right* to the enjoyment of nature, as well as to the privileges of grace." And this feeling, which shows itself in his graceful descriptions of local scenery, still gives interest to "The Annals of the Poor." The attitude of Legh Richmond towards nature finds exact expression in the beautiful lines of Cowper's "Task," with which doubtless he was acquainted :

"He looks abroad into the varied field  
Of nature, and though poor, perhaps, compared  
With those whose mansions glitter in his sight,  
Calls the delightful scenery all his own.  
His are the mountains, and the valleys his,  
And the resplendent rivers. His to enjoy  
With a propriety that none can feel  
But who, with filial confidence inspired,  
Can lift to heaven an unpresumptuous eye,  
And, smiling, say, 'My Father made them all.'"

JOHN VAUGHAN.