

**STRAY LEAVES  
FROM THE  
ROAD SIDE**

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Stray Leaves from the Road Side by J. T. B.

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**J. T. B.**

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STRAY LEAVES FROM THE  
ROAD SIDE.

*ILLUSTRATING COUNTRY LIFE,  
STRANGE EVENTS, QUEER FOLK, ECCENTRIC TALES,  
ETC., ETC.*

BY  
J. T. B.

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## Stray Leaves from the Road Side.

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### FLIRTON CROFT—ITS CHURCH, ETC.

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Fair Flirton Croft! Upon the uplands found,  
By shelt'ring slope of undulating ground,  
Where health-inspiring breezes never fail  
To spread their influence o'er th' encircling vale--  
Near thee, bow'd down by sickness and by pain,  
I pitch'd my tent return of strength to gain.  
Dull winter past, springtide with blossom gay  
Soon put poor health upon improvement's way;  
And ere bright summer came with genial hour,  
My feeble frame resum'd its former pow'r.  
And say, what strikes a deeper, purer chord  
Within a grateful heart than health restor'd?  
When, freed from doubt, anxiety, and fear,  
Hope on its golden wing returns to cheer.  
As bird releas'd from prison-cage or snare  
On lightsome pinion sports on lib'ral air,  
So one from sickness rais'd with grateful sight  
Beholds creation with increased delight!  
With willing steps, and time to call my own,  
I soon commenc'd my wanderings alone,  
To see the customs in inquiring mood,  
As well as beauties of the neighbourhood.

'Twas but four hundred yards from my abode  
To Flirton Croft along the old high road ;  
A pleasant village, with its one long street  
Of varied cottages, and mostly neat,  
With tidy villas standing side by side,  
A squire's mansion with a prospect wide,  
A grand old church, with separate tow'r and spire !  
Each in fine form, with features to admire.  
And just beyond the churchyard pathway gate  
The ancient parsonage preserv'd its state.  
Two maiden sisters once, as legends say,  
Would build a church—'twas in a ritual day,  
Before attacks on screen or candlestick  
Confused archbishop's brain, and made it thick ;  
Or Church Association (bitter fruit  
Of careless days) was form'd to persecute !  
Before the Georges, and that chilling time  
When all attempts to reach the true sublime  
Were shown with common brick, in warehouse style ;  
While underneath, to make a Quaker smile,  
Capacious cellars, well-design'd, were made  
For wine and spirits, to supply the trade !  
With "ways and means" these sisters good would raise  
A sacred edifice for prayer and praise ;  
Both were resolv'd, and with religious fire,  
But Rhoda tow'r would have, and Ruth a spire.  
With wills determined, and with tempers hot,  
Each would consult a favourite swoll, some Scott,  
Or famous Pugin, Street, or Butterfield,  
But neither to authority would yield.  
At last, to settle such a sad dispute,  
The church was built their separate tastes to suit ;  
So, at one end a tow'r its grandeur lends,  
And near the other graceful spire ascends.  
They call'd one Matthew, and the other John,  
And may they there in company hold on,

Like two tried friends, who constantly have been  
 Near to each other through life's varied scene.  
 But, they've ne'er met! and never will, till some  
 Wild special train perchance their way shall come,  
 And, mad with speed, now reeling, rolling past,  
 Crushes their stronghold with terrific blast.  
 Still let us hope till time shall be no more  
 Such friends will stand as they have stood from yore.

Ash-Wednesday came; and with it morning-pray'r  
 At Flirton Croft—occurrence very rare!  
 So few obey'd the bell's impressive call  
 To church and early service; nearly all  
 Were of the labouring class, and few, if one,  
 Had any time that he could call his own.  
 And men in trade and farmers were so low  
 In tone, that they to church would never go,  
 Except on Sunday mornings, now and then,  
 And most Dissenters were, six out of ten.

Some thirty years ago, 'tis freely said,  
 No meeting-house had there raised up its head;  
 But, since, "Bethesda, Salem, Ebenezer,"  
*Cum multis aliis*—the Church to tease her—  
 Have spread around of plaster, brick, and stone,  
 In form and feature happily their own!  
 Ash-Wednesday! and in high back, panell'd pew  
 Sedately sitting, belfry full in view,  
 I watch'd old sexton "Clodpole's" giant's form,  
 In motion like a windmill in a storm,  
 Working and pulling there, with might and main,  
 The ancient bell, to make it speak out plain.  
 Soon was th' approach of clerk and parson heard,  
 To open service, but no "Clodpole" stirr'd;  
 He kept on pulling with a will and power  
 Enough to send the bell outside the tow'r!  
 His look so wild, his person so unclean,  
 He was not fit to be in such place seen.