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ILLUSTRATIONS.

ANCIENT FORDS, FERRIES, AND BRIDGES IN LANCASHIRE.

BY WILLIAM HARRISON.*

AMONG the symbols devised by a committee of the Society of Antiquaries for use in the proposed county maps of the mediæval period there are included one to denote "ancient bridges," and another to denote "fords." As such a map will, I hope, be prepared for our two counties as soon as the Archæological Map now in the press is fairly completed, it is not too early to be getting together the material upon which it is to be founded. As one step in that direction I propose to collect in this paper what is known in regard to the two items I have mentioned, and to include with them another not provided for in the scheme, but which, nevertheless, in Lancashire, at least, ought not to be left out, viz., the ancient ferries. Fords, ferries, and bridges exhaust amongst them all the possible modes of crossing rivers in ancient times, when there were no Mersey tunnels, and, so far as we are aware, no anticipations of that coming wonder, the flying machine.

*For the illustrations to this paper the Society is indebted to Mr. G. H. Rowbotham.

At the present day it is so rare to find a highway unprovided with a substantial bridge at the crossing of even a small brook that we are apt to forget how much a matter of course it was for our forefathers, in not very remote times, to find constant obstacles to their journeyings in the flowing streams. The brook which runs

> By twenty thorps, a little town,
> And half a hundred bridges,

though it does run on for ever, is not the same brook in its circumstances as the one which our ancestors knew. Their experience led them to think little of fording brooks or, in ordinary summer weather, even the larger rivers in many places. As Jacob of old passed over the ford Jabbok (*Genesis* xxxii. 22); as the fords of Jordan were used by the men of Jericho (*Joshua* ii. 7); as Queen Guinevere—

> A single maiden with her
> Took horse and forded Usk, and gained the wood;

and as Prince Geraint, immediately afterwards, "Came quickly flashing thro' the shallow ford," so did our fathers continue to cross the streams in their journeys until quite modern times. The experience of ages had taught them the most suitable spots for the purpose, where the river was shallow and broad and had a gravelly or stony bottom, and no doubt the foundation of many villages and towns was due to the existence of such convenient places for passing, for, as we shall see illustrated in our own county, the word "ford" often enters as a component part into the names of places. This fact alone is very significant. "Nothing," says Canon Taylor (*Words and Places*, second edition, p. 253), "shews more conclusively the unbridged state of the streams than the

fact that, where the great lines of Roman road are intersected by rivers, we so frequently find important towns bearing the Saxon suffix 'ford.'"

But the fords were not always equally passable. In times of flood, "when the waters were out," as the phrase went, and the stream came raging down, the perils of travel became very real. The expectant maiden of *In Memoriam*, when she found

> Her future lord
> Was drown'd in passing through the ford,

experienced no uncommon sorrow. Nor even in ordinary times were the fords always safe, for excessive traffic sometimes led to their becoming cut up and worn. Of this we have an illustration in the Kenyon papers recently published by the Historical Manuscripts Commission. In 1632 the quarter sessions at Preston made an order levying a tax of two-fifteenths on the hundred of Blackburn towards building a stone bridge over the Calder at Fenysford, near Whalley, voluntary contributions having been made in aid, and its preamble sets forth that the river is "very often (especially in the winter season) soe great that there is no passage for man or horse, and many attempting at such times to passe have been drouned, and almost daylie some persons are there putt in danger of their lives, and have their loades and carriages drowned and lost, and that the said ford is of late years so worne and grounc so rocky that in short time it is thought will become altogether impassable, being almost impossible to be amended by the charge and labour of man."

We need not then be surprised that even in very remote times the provision and maintenance of bridges was regarded as one of the most important social duties.

So early as the beginning of the seventh century we find the repair of bridges placed among the *trinoda necessitas*, the three burdens of such paramount necessity that even the owners of boc land, privileged from all else, were not exempt from them. In the ancient penitential of St. Dunstan the building of bridges is included amongst the duties of charity which the rich owe to the poor (*Transactions*, v. 175). Although we never meet in England with traces of the Bridge Friars or Pontifex Brothers, who in France built bridges, and set up establishments provided with boats on the shores of streams, works of this kind were encouraged here by the grant of indulgences to those who helped by their gifts or by their bodily labour in the repair of bridges. There were also gilds who undertook this duty, the members of the fraternity taking it in turns to attend daily to keep the bridges clean. Sometimes, as at Bow, an endowment was created, though not always was the income properly administered. Sometimes a toll was imposed under a grant made by the king. The right of imposing this toll was called *brudtholl* or *pontage*. Local examples of it we shall find presently. Sometimes voluntary offerings were collected by a priest, who occupied a little chapel on the bridge, where the faithful could halt for a few moments for giving of thanks, and where mass was said at dawn. All those various means, however, proved in many cases ineffectual to secure the proper repair of the bridge. Endowments were misappropriated, the recipients of offerings came to consider receiving as their only duty, and sometimes the funds, even when honestly administered, proved insufficient for the purpose, and so not infrequently the bridge fell into ruin.

Many of the old bridges were built with triangular recesses for the safety of passengers, a very necessary

precaution when the way was so narrow as to barely allow room for a cart. The improvements of the last hundred years have resulted in the removal of many of those old bridges to give place to modern ones, not so picturesque, perhaps, but certainly more spacious and more safe. In Lancashire the number of additional bridges erected since the middle of the seventeenth century must be very great. There was previously a great deficiency. A general Act passed in 1670 makes special provision for Lancashire and Cheshire. It recites that in these counties there are many and sundry great and deep rivers, which run cross and through the common and public highways and roads, which many times cannot be passed over without hazard and loss of the lives and goods of the inhabitants and travellers for want of convenient, good, and sufficient bridges. The justices were accordingly empowered, during the next ten years only, to rebuild new bridges, and to repair or rebuild such as were demolished in the late war. From this latter it would seem that some, at any rate, of the demolished bridges had not up to then been rebuilt.

In time of war fords and bridges have played a great part, as the possession of them has been naturally of great importance. From the earliest times—since Ehud and his followers took the fords of Jordan towards Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over (*Judges* iii. 28); since the Gileadites secured the passages of Jordan in their contest with the Ephraimites (*Judges* xii. 5); and since Horatius kept the bridge at Rome—the possession of fords and bridges has been the key to the defence of many a city and province, for

> If they once may win the bridge,
> What hope to save the town?