

THE RHYNE TOLL OF CHETWODE.

Ἐν δὲ τῇ αὐτῇ χρόνῳ τούτῳ, ἐν τῇ Μυσίᾳ Οὐλύμπῳ σὺν δὲ
 χορῆμα γίνεται μέγα ὁρμεώμενος δὲ οὗτος ἐκ τοῦ οὔρειος
 τούτου τὰ τῶν Μυσῶν ἔργα διαφθείρεσκε. πολλὰκι δὲ οἱ
 Μυσοὶ ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἐξελλόντες, ποιέσκον μὲν οὐδὲν κακόν,
 ἔπασχον δὲ πρὸς αὐτοῦ.

Herod. Clio. sect. XXXVI.

As it is the province of the Society to collect notices of local customs and privileges tending to throw light upon the history of our county, I shall offer no excuse for drawing attention to the Rhyme Toll of Chetwode, an ancient and singular right exercised by Sir John Chetwode, Bart., and his ancestors. The Rhyme commences at nine o'clock in the morning of the 30th of October, when a horn is blown on the Church-hill at Buckingham, and gingerbread and beer distributed among the assembled boys. The girls present are not admitted to a share in the bounty, but no reason has been assigned for this partiality save that of immemorial custom. When a sufficient quantity of these viands has been disposed of, the bearer of the cakes and ale proceeds through the village of Tingewick to the extreme boundary of the county towards Oxfordshire, in front of the Red Lion Inn near Finmere, three miles distant, where the horn is again sounded, and a fresh distribution of provisions takes place, also limited to the boys. At the conclusion of these formalities, the Rhyme is proclaimed to have begun. One toll-collector is stationed in the town of Buckingham, and another in the hamlet of Gawcott, a mile and a half distant, each empowered to levy a tax, at the rate of two shillings a score, upon all cattle or swine, driven through the townships or hamlets of Barton, Chetwode, Tingewick, Gawcott, Hillesden, the Precint of Prebend End in Buckingham, Lenborough, and Preston-cum-Cowley, until twelve o'clock at night on the 7th day of November, when the Rhyme closes. For a long time the farmers and occupiers of land in these parishes have been accustomed

to compound for immunity from this toll by an annual payment of one shilling each. It has however happened that persons, not thus compounding, have passed their cattle, and refused the customary charge; but in every case the toll has been ultimately recovered, either by the commencement of legal proceedings, or the more summary process of detaining one of the animals. Before the opening of the Buckinghamshire Railway, the proceeds of the toll have been known to amount in one year to upwards of twenty pounds, mainly owing to large droves of Welch and Irish cattle; but as this stock is now sent by train, the receipts are much diminished, and at the present time the Rhyne Toll is rented by Mr. Superintendent Giles, of Buckingham, at twenty-five shillings annually.

The date of the commencement of the Rhyne Toll is buried in obscurity. The Chetwodes, originally deriving their name from the place of their residence, have been seated there since the twelfth century, and the estate has passed onwards in direct male succession from Robert de Chetwode, temp. Henry II. Tradition speaks of the right as existing from time immemorial, and granted to the head of the Chetwode family and his heirs for ever, in reward for his having killed a fierce wild boar, long the terror of the farmers of these parts; but whether the privilege was acquired by Royal Grant, or by Charter from the grateful inhabitants of the district, confirmed by the Lord of the Fee, seems now impossible to be ascertained. Another tradition relates that Boarstall, in the vicinity of Chetwode, owes its origin to a somewhat similar event. Here, as the legend runs, Nigel the Forester, like the elfin child at King Arthur's Court,

Stoode

Looking out a dore

' And there as he was lookinge

He was ware of a wyld bore.

He was ware of a wyld bore

Wold have werreyed a man :

He pulld forth a wood kniffe,

Fast thither that he ran :

He brought in the bore's head

And quitted him like a man.

For a service of this nature Edward the Confessor is said

to have rewarded Nigel with a grant of one hide of land, on which he built a mansion, naming it Boarstall, to commemorate his own exploit and the royal bounty. Hearne, the antiquary, it should be said, questions the legend, suggesting with great probability that the name is derived from the Saxon Burgh-Stall, "a seat on the side of an hill." The true derivation of the name is however comparatively unimportant for the present purpose, since the existence of the tradition is sufficient to show that wild boars must have once abounded in the woodland district between Chetwode and Brill, a favorite hunting ground of Henry III. The portion near Brill of this tract of country was anciently the Forest of Bernwode, while that around Chetwode was called Rookwoode, and the privilege of the Rhyne extends over an area supposed to be conterminous with the boundaries of the latter forest. Dr. Lipscombe, in attempting to fix the date of the Grant or Confirmation of the Toll, refers to a Charter of 1283, which however appears to be nothing more than the Grant of a Fair at Chetwode. The earliest certain notice of the Rhyne the writer has met with, belongs to the reign of Elizabeth. Sir Richard Chetwode died in 1561, and his widow, Agnes, heiress in her own right of Warkworth in Northamptonshire, re-married to Sir George Calverley. A suit was instituted, apparently between herself and her husband on the one part, and the trustees of Sir Richard Chetwode, her son by her first husband, on the other part, to ascertain whether Lady Calverley had a life interest in the Chetwode estates; and among other things in the Rhyne Toll. The pleadings in this cause supply some curious information:—

To Articles filed against George Calverley and Agnes his wife in Hilary Term 19^o Elizabeth, they make answer *inter alia*—

"That they have been seized of the Manor of Chetwode with the appurtenances in this Demesne as of Fee in right of the said Anne (or Agnes), and that the Common of that Manor contains by estimation 2000 acres of ground and no man can say to the contrary. The which 2000 acres be in Chetwode, Barton, Tingewick, Gawcott, Hillesden, Prebend End, Lenborough, and Preston cum Cowley; and also to have by the space of three days yearly between the feast of St. Michael the Archangel and St. Martin the

Bishop in winter a Drift of all cattle that shall be found in those three days within the said Commons, called the Rhyne, in Chetwode, Barton etc., by the Bailiff, officers, tenants and other servants in manner and form following, *i. e.*

“ In the beginning of the said Drift of the Common or Rhyne, first at their going forth they shall blow a welkeshell or horne immediately after the sun-rising at the Mansion House of the Manor of Chetwode, and then in their going about they shall blow their horne the second time in the field between Newton Purcell and Barton Hartshorne in the said County; and also shall blow their horne a third time at a place near the town of Finmere in the County of Oxford; and they shall blow their horne the fourth time at a certain stone in the market of the town of Buckingham and there to give the poor sixpence, and so going forward in this manner about the said Drift shall blow the horne at several bridges called Thornborough Bridge, King's Bridge, and Bridge Mill. And also they shall blow their horne at the Pound Gate, called the Lord's Pound, in the Parish of Chetwode.**** And also that the said George and Anne (or Agnes) have all the time been used by their officers and servants to drive away all foreign cattle that shall be found within the said three days within the Parishes, fields, etc. aforesaid, to impound the same in any pound of the said towns and to take for every one of the said foreign beasts two pence for the mouth and one penny for a foot for every one of the said beasts; And further that the said officers and servants have always been used to take all cattle so taken and impounded by them within three days to the Lord's Pound in Chetwode, and if any Cattle shall remain in the Pound at Chetwode and not be claimed at the end of the next three days, then the next day following after the rising of the sun the Bailiff or officers of the Lord for the time being shall blow their horne three times at the gate of the said pound, and make proclamation that if any persons lack any cattle that shall be in the same pound, let them come and shew the marks of the same cattle so claimed by them, and they shall have them, paying unto the Lord his money in the manner and form before-men-

tioned, otherwise the said cattle that shall so remain shall be the Lord's, as strays."*

The claim of the Lord of the Manor to all stray unclaimed cattle is well established in law, and is embodied in the Dialogue of Aura and Modely, in Charles Johnson's play of "The Country Lasses"—

AURA. We have no title to you at all; if you were a couple of stray cattle, all we can do is to bring you to the constable.

MODELy. And what then?

AURA. Why, then he must cry you three market-days, and if nobody owns you, you fall to the Lord o' the Manor.

But the Calverleys appear to have exercised the larger right they possessed under the Rhyne privilege with considerable rigour. As soon as the last-mentioned proclamation was concluded at Chetwode, the animals unclaimed were at once escheated, and if the owner afterwards appeared, he could only obtain his cattle by paying their full market value. But if the owner refused to give the required sum, or none came forward, the cattle were at once driven to Warkworth in Northamptonshire, and sold, whence it became a popular saying at Chetwode that "Cattle that drink of Warkworth water never come back to Bucks."

The tradition, describing the Right of Toll to have originated in the courage of one of the Chetwodes in destroying the wild boar, was remarkably corroborated within the present century. In the parish of Barton Harts-horn, within a mile from Chetwode Manor House, close to the boundaries of Tingewick Wood, a large mound of earth formerly existed, surrounded by a ditch, known by the country people as the "Boar's Pond." It was situated on the right hand side, a few hundred yards from the road leading from Chetwode Manor House to the Finmere and Bicester turnpike, and remained overgrown with gorse and underwood, until brought under cultivation at the enclosure made about 1810. At that time the tenant in occupation levelled the whole of the mound, filling up the greater portion of the ditch, and in removing the earth, discovered the remains of a large boar of

* From the MSS. collections of the late Rev. T. Silvester, Vicar of Buckingham.

enormous size. The animal had evidently been laid at full length on the ground, doubtless on the very spot where it had been killed, and the earth heaped up on it from all sides, thus forming the mound and the ditch. A portion of the bones, which were well preserved, remained under the charge of the occupier of the land until the present Sir John Chetwode succeeded to the estate, when he took them into his own possession, and favoured the Society by their exhibition at the Annual Meeting held at Buckingham in 1855. Two years ago the contributor of this paper visited the spot where they were found. Part of the ditch still remained, trodden in at the edges, and in shape nearly triangular. In length it measured about ten paces from north to south, and about six at its wider extremity, and was said to be from three to four feet in depth. It was stated that the tenant of the land intended to drain and fill up the pond, and throw it into cultivation with the rest of the land, then arable, in which case all traces of the exact locality will be destroyed. The field, however, is still called the "Boar's Head Field."

H. ROUNDELL.