

THE LEGENDS, FOLKLORE AND
DIALECT OF LEICESTERSHIRE
WITH AN INTRODUCTION ON
THE GENERAL HISTORY OF
THE COUNTY

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General Introduction

THE county of Leicester is in almost all respects a typically English area, which may fairly be described as a microcosm or representative sample of our native country. Without engaging in any unbecoming dispute with our neighbours in Warwickshire as to the precise position of the centre of England, a subject upon which they are generally credited with very decided views, we can, at all events, claim that Leicestershire occupies a very central position in the country. The backbone of England runs through it. The intersection of the two great Roman roads, the Watling Street and the Fosse, lies on its south-western boundary; and in its scenery and the elements which make up its country-side, its pursuits and the life of its people, most of the characteristics are to be found which we have in our minds when we speak of "England". The scenery of the county, though constructed on a modest scale compared with that of some areas of the country, displays nevertheless a notable variety of character and landscape. The level ground of the valleys of the Soar and the Wreake and the rolling uplands of the southern and eastern parts of the county contrast sharply with the wholly different structure of the tract of country in the north-west, known as Charnwood Forest. Here is to be found an area small but quite distinct, and shewing features which recall rather the mountainous country of North Wales or Cumberland than the lowlier landscapes usually associated with the Midlands. The rolling pastures of the rest of the county here give place to little rocky hills, the summits of some of them clothed in woodland, and to a type of landscape which speaks in unmistakable terms of a volcanic origin in the remote past.

Historically also the county may claim something of the same representative character which it owes to its position and scenery. To go no further back than Roman times, though there are not wanting British remains, the city of Leicester can trace its origin to the Roman station of *Ratae*, which marks the place where the Fosse crossed the river Soar. This great road, which crosses the south-west border of Leicestershire at High Cross,

passed through its centre and left it on its way to Lincoln at Six Hills on the Nottinghamshire border. In Saxon times Leicester was the seat of a missionary bishopric in the kingdom of Mercia, removed afterwards to Dorchester on the Thames at the time of the Danish invasions.

After the Conquest, the honour of Leicester and the sheriffdom of the county were conferred by King William upon Hugh de Grentemaisnil, who had fought at Hastings and was high in the king's confidence. He founded the original (probably wooden) castle of Leicester, where—as to this day—courts were held for criminal and civil business, and with the garrison of which he kept the surrounding country in order.

During the 12th century the earldom of Leicester was held by Robert Beaumont, count of Meulan, who built the older part of the present castle, and his descendents Robert the Hunchback, Robert of the Whitehands and Robert FitzParnell; during the life of the latter an assemblage of barons took place in Leicester which was the first overt step in the process which ended in Magna Carta. It was through the sister of FitzParnell that the earldom descended to the famous Simon de Montfort, whose parliament of 1265 was the first to include burgesses from the cities and towns.

It was at the battle of Bosworth field that the Middle Ages came to an end and modern England may be said to have been born. For some days before the battle, Richard III had his headquarters at the Blue Boar, in Leicester, and to the Grey Friars' church his body was brought at the end of the day.

The stormy life of that illustrious statesman and ecclesiastic Cardinal Wolsey ended at Leicester Abbey, where his remains lie buried.

At Bradgate Park, six miles north of Leicester, on the edge of Charnwood Forest, was born and grew up the girl who as Lady Jane Grey was famous among her contemporaries for her learning and her piety, and who as England's nine days' queen became afterwards the victim of the ambitions of her family.

It would perhaps not be inappropriate to make mention here of a very different event, which has given Bradgate Park a notable position in the present-day life of Leicestershire. Some four years ago this most beautiful piece of ground, 850 acres of deer-

park lying round the ruins of the house in which Lady Jane Grey was born and lived her short life, was purchased from the branch of the Greys to whom it had descended and was presented in trust for the benefit, in perpetuity, of the city and county. It is to the princely generosity and enlightened public spirit of the late Mr. Charles Bennion that we are primarily indebted for this truly noble gift, and we remember with grateful appreciation the helpful and sympathetic attitude of those from whom he bought it. His example has inspired other generous donors, who by successive gifts of woodlands and other ground adjoining and near the park have increased to between 1100 and 1200 acres the area in the hands of the trustees.

This area, to much of which the public have access with no restrictions other than those which are essential in order to preserve its beauties and to secure good behaviour and the welfare of the deer and birds, has thus been preserved for all time in its natural state, under the control of a body of trustees representing the councils of the city and county, and the original donor.

Of the struggles between king and parliament in the 17th century the county has not a few striking remains, among the most interesting of which may be mentioned the richly embroidered saddlery left at one of the older country houses by Charles 1st, when he paused there in his escape from the field of Naseby.

In its modern life the county displays the same varied and representative character to which reference has already been made. Though it cannot claim any pre-eminence in arable farming, such as belongs, for example, to the great agricultural counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, it nevertheless contains, along with substantial areas of mixed farming, some of the most notable grass-land in the country. It was at Dishley Grange, near Loughborough, that Robert Bakewell laid the foundation, towards the end of the 18th century, of that peculiarly English branch of agriculture, the breeding of pedigree stock, and it is to that same art of stock rearing, together with the allied industry of milk production, that the agricultural community of Leicestershire has up to the present owed its escape from some of the worst of the calamities which have befallen those who depend upon the land in other parts of the country.

The industrial activities of modern Leicestershire are of the most varied kind and, with the exception of shipbuilding, they include most of the principal branches of manufacture for which this country is famous. The hosiery industry of Leicestershire has had a long and distinguished history; it originated in the Tudor times, when the old arable farming gave place so largely to the rearing of sheep. In the 18th and early 19th centuries the frame-work knitters of the county carried on an extensive and flourishing manufacture.

Second only in importance to hosiery is the manufacture of boots and shoes, which is carried on, like the other, both in the city of Leicester and in not a few of the large manufacturing villages for which the county is distinguished, villages which in many parts of the country would be regarded as small towns.

The engineering trade is well represented both on its heavier and lighter sides. Structural, heavy mechanical and electrical engineering, the manufacture of machine tools, of machinery for the making of hosiery and of boots and shoes, of ventilating and heating plants, and of high class scientific and optical instruments and typewriters are all to be found in active operation in the city of Leicester and in Loughborough. Here also many thousands of persons are employed in woollen and worsted spinning, in elastic weaving, in printing, in book-binding, and in a variety of other specialised industries, while if you are looking for a peal of bells for a cathedral, a church or a carillon tower, the county will be happy to supply your wants.

Nor is the county without that mineral wealth which is so characteristic a feature of our national economic life. The Leicestershire coalfield in the north-western part of the county has been worked for 300 years or more. To the existence of this coalfield is due the association of the county with the early history of the railway system of the country. In the late 18th century, in connection with a canal between the coalfield and Loughborough, a railway worked by horses was laid down, in the construction of which occurred one of the earliest if not the first instance of the use of flanged wheels on a plain rail, which afterwards became the universal railway pattern. In 1832 the first length of the Leicester and Swannington railway, connecting the Leicestershire coalfield with the county town, was

opened and worked, George Stephenson himself driving the first train. In 1841 the first public excursion train ever run was organised in the county, by Thomas Cook, and conveyed 570 people from Leicester to Loughborough and back for a shilling a head.

The ironstone deposits of the north-eastern part of the county supply the raw material for an extensive range of blast furnaces. The blue lias lime measures of Barrow-on-Soar have been known and worked over a long period of years; Leicestershire bricks go far and wide through the country; and last, but not least, the outcrops of igneous rock which surround the hills of Charnwood Forest are the seat of a road-stone industry larger than that to be found in any other county of England.

No survey, however general, of the life of the county would be in any sense complete without an allusion to one of its most notable features, the hunting of the fox. It is now some 150 years since Hugo Meynell and his hounds ranged at large over a "country" which apparently included about half of Leicestershire. For most of the intervening time Melton has been the centre and headquarters of this most characteristic of English sports. And though reduced incomes and high taxation have told their tale here as elsewhere, the Quorn, the Cottesmore, the Belvoir, the Pytchley and Mr. Fernie's Hounds are names still as honourable as in those bygone years when Alken and Ferneley painted the forbears of the hunters and the hounds of to-day.

Nor has Leicestershire been without its contribution to the non-material side of our National history.

It was at Lutterworth that John Wycliffe laid one of the foundation-stones of religious freedom; Hugh Latimer, not the least distinguished of our English martyrs, was the son of a yeoman farmer of Thurcaston; the name of George Fox, born at Fenny Drayton, is connected indissolubly with the history of another school of English religious thought, while William Carey, once the minister of Harvey Lane chapel in Leicester, has an honoured position in the record of early work in the mission field, and as an Oriental scholar and philologist.

Of later developments in the history of Leicestershire, mention may be made of the establishment during the last 10 years of the bishopric of Leicester, following the division of the

diocese of Peterborough, and of the conferring by His Majesty upon the county town of the honour and status of a city.

The Cathedral Church of the new diocese is the parish church of St. Martin, distinguished in the last century by the work done in his parish by the Rev. David Vaughan for the education of the working classes.

I should like, before I conclude, to express my grateful thanks to Mr. Skillington, the author of the well-known history of Leicester, and to Mr. Purt, Secretary of the Leicester Chamber of Commerce, for many helpful suggestions given to me during the compiling of this inaugural statement.

The Legend, Folklore, and Dialect of Leicestershire

In dealing with the subject of the folklore of any area in a civilised country such as our own, we are almost necessarily driven to begin the consideration of it by harking back to a period antecedent to all written history. It is, indeed, probably true to say that some of the beliefs—not to say superstitions—which constituted the body of folklore up to comparatively recent times, had their origin in ages as remote as those, for example, in which the whole art of agriculture was but in its very infancy.

The old tradition, mentioned by the medieval chronicler, Geoffrey of Monmouth, that Leicester was founded by a certain king Lear some centuries before Christ, is one instance of this primitive origin of current beliefs. Recent researches have shewn that the whole story probably has its origins in the fact that the river Soar was known in early times as the Leir, a name derived almost certainly from the word *Ler* or *Llyr*, the Celtic name for a water-god; corresponding more or less to the Greek god Poseidon and to the Latin Neptune. The Celtic name for the settlement by the Leir would probably have been *Caer-leir*, of which the Saxon name for the town, *Legra-ceastar*, was merely a translation.

An interesting analogue to this naming of the river after the Celtic water-god is afforded by the river Loire in France, whose name has a similar derivation.

In addition to the Celtic origin which underlies the name of the county town, there are a few other names of natural features in the county which go back to the same period in our national history; High Tor, Pelder Tor and High Cademan are hills on Charnwood Forest, and have names Celtic in origin, as also have the streams known as the Tweed, the Devon and the Avon. The most picturesque, perhaps, of these Celtic names is that of the brook which flows through Ashby-de-la-Zouch and is called Gilwiska. This word, which is undoubtedly Celtic, contains the same root as that of the names of the rivers Usk, Esk, Exe and Isis, while the first syllable is akin to the word *ghyl*, found in Yorkshire in connection with the moorland streams. Both these roots mean water, and the second of them is the same as that of the word whisky.

Another example of the survival of primitive beliefs in more modern folklore is afforded by the old story of Black Anna's Bower, the name current in the Middle Ages, and surviving well into the 19th century, for a small cave excavated in the soft stone of the Dane Hills, a stretch of rising ground which lay on the west of the town of Leicester, between it and Leicester Forest. A variety of rather gruesome stories used to be told about the supposed inhabitant of this cavern, who was said to be a savage woman addicted to cannibal habits, and especially to the capture of any children who were so incautious as to wander near her cavern after dark.

We are almost certainly here in the presence of another survival from very primitive times.

Among the deities of the Celtic mythology was a goddess named *Ana*, *Danu*, *Anu* or *Don*. This goddess, who corresponded to Demeter in the Greek mythology and Ceres in that of the Romans, was regarded as the Mother of all their gods and in particular the presiding spirit of the earth and the crops that grew on it. In her honour, and in order to propitiate her, and so ensure good seasons and fruitful crops, a variety of observances were current, including almost certainly the sacrifice of human victims. Such ceremonies were common among the religious rites of primitive peoples in many parts of the world. In Irish folklore is to be found a character named *Aine*, originally a goddess and degenerating in later times to a banshee,

to propitiate whom a certain ritual used to be performed on the eve of St. John's day. She also was regarded as the goddess of prosperity and abundance, and there are two mountains near Killarney still named after her.

In view of these facts, it would appear that the tradition of Black Anna is a faint survival in the beliefs current among the Celtic inhabitants of primitive Leicester and its surrounding district.

For the same reason it has been conjectured that the "Dane Hills" were originally called the "Hills of Danu"—one of the alternative names of the goddess *Ana*.

On the same Dane Hills on which Black Anna's Bower was situated, there used to be held up to the latter half of the 18th century a curious celebration known as Hare-hunting. This piece of ritual, which was attended by the mayor and councillors attired in their scarlet gowns, and accompanied by the officials of the town, which took the form of a mock-hunt; in place of the hare originally hunted, the body of a cat drenched in aniseed was trailed before a pack of hounds who were followed by a crowd of horsemen, across country in the first instance, and afterwards through the streets of the town up to the door of the mayor's house, where, as is very usually the case in our country and with our people, the observances concluded with a dinner provided by the mayor.

Until comparatively recent times, a fair for merrymaking was held on the Dane Hills annually on Easter Monday—the successor of the more exciting proceedings which I have just described. It will be noticed that the traditional victim of the hunt shews that it belongs to the considerable body of superstitions and beliefs centering round the hare, an animal which, as many people will remember, has long been regarded as being particularly associated with witchcraft and kindred practices. Another interesting case of the association of the hare with a traditional observance is to be found in the "Hare pie scramble and Bottle kicking" which still takes place at Hallaton in the eastern part of the county. This celebration is also held on Easter Monday and consists of two parts, the first being the scramble for two hare pies cut up in pieces and thrown among the spectators, and the second the kicking of the bottle.

Hares being out of season at Easter, pies of mutton and veal have latterly been substituted, but on one or two occasions the stuffed skin of a hare has been mounted on the top of a pole and carried in the procession. The second part of the proceedings consists of a sort of Rugby football scrummage, in which the inhabitants of Hallaton and those of the adjoining village of Medbourne form the two sides. The place of the football is taken by two large wooden bottles hooped with iron and containing ale; these the respective sides do their best, and a pretty vigorous best at that, to kick, urge or somehow convey over the boundary towards the one side or the other. It need scarcely perhaps be added that the contents of the bottles eventually find their way down the throats of the victors.

These Easter-time celebrations had in all probability their first and ultimate origin in the primitive ceremonial of remote antiquity associated with the Spring of the year, and the ending of the dark days of Winter.

Two material relics of primitive worship and belief were until comparatively recent times to be seen in the neighbourhood of Leicester. These were two sacred stones, the Holy Stone near Humberstone, and St. John's Stone in the fields adjoining Leicester Abbey. Up to about 100 years ago both these stones stood up well above the surrounding ground, though they are now covered with soil. St. John's Stone used to be visited on June 24th, the day sacred to that Saint, and of both this and the stone at Humberstone it used to be believed that they were the resort of fairies and that it was as well to leave their neighbourhood before dark.

Among other remains of primitive beliefs are the Holy Wells of which there are a number in the county, to which were attributed medicinal qualities or other super-natural attributes. The well at Sketchley is even credited with the power of brightening the intellects of those who may be described in the language of the county as being "about 9½d. in the shilling".

Up to the last two or three generations, there were survivals in the county of other customs which almost certainly had their origin in pagan times. Among these may be mentioned the occasions of licence or misrule, usually occurring in the Spring and often round about Shrove Tuesday. At Hinckley, for

example, on that day anyone used to be allowed, by paying 1d., to go into the belfry and tingle the bells. At Frisby-on-the-Wreake, the school children were accustomed to bar their master out of school, re-admitting him only when he had promised to give a half-holiday, a suggestion which was conveyed to him by their shouting in concert, the following distich :—

“ Pardon, Master, pardon,
Pardon in a pin,
If you don't give a holiday,
We won't let you in ”.

A particularly striking incident of this kind of survival of the old pagan periods of licence, of which the Roman feast of the Saturnalia was the best-known example, was afforded by the celebration which used to take place every Shrove Tuesday in the Newarke at Leicester. This was known as the “ Whipping Toms ”. It began with the primeval game of hockey, played between two crowds of men and boys armed with sticks having a knob or a hook at the end, and was played with a wooden ball, the ends of the Newarke forming the goals. At about 1 o'clock in the day appeared the “ Whipping Toms ”; three of them were in blue smocked frocks and carrying long wagon whips, with whom were three men carrying small bells. They proceeded to drive out of the Newarke the crowd of men and boys who had been playing the game of hockey. This proceeding, as may well be imagined, soon resulted in what would be described in more modern language as “ a certain liveliness ”, and the disorder became so great that about the year 1846, the corporation obtained parliamentary powers to bring it to an end.

The ceremony of Beating the Bounds, which survived well into the 19th century, probably had its ultimate origin in pagan times; the administration thereof of corporal punishment was a pale survival of the human sacrifices, originally associated with the primitive ceremonial.

In Leicestershire, as in other counties, there was a considerable body of folklore connected generally with the subject of Divination. An interesting specimen of this type was afforded by the following story, which was told to me some years ago by a farmer who had in his boyhood known well the man to whom

the incident occurred, and by whom my informant was told it. The hero of the story was an old forester, who was born and died in a little house on Charnwood Forest, which is still standing though considerably altered during recent years; he may have been known to some of my readers; it was the late Mr. John Whitcroft of Ulverscroft. He lived to a great age, and was the last survivor of those who remembered the Forest before the Enclosure in the 20's and 30's of last century.

I will tell the story in the words employed in the introduction to Mr. Farnham's *Charnwood Forest and its Historians*.

It happened upon a day that John Whitcroft's father found that two of his heifers were missing. He searched for them without success, and on the following Sunday he said to his son: "John, you'd better take the pony and go round the forest, and see if you can make out anything o' them heifers". So John took the pony and rode from Copt Oak to Woodhouse Eaves and Swithland, enquiring without avail for the missing beasts. From Swithland he went on to Rothley, and as he rode down the hill to the gates of the Temple he met a man in a top hat, who said to him: "You're John Whitcroft of Ulverscroft, and you're looking for two heifers". "That's true", replied John, "though it beats me how you know it. May be you can tell me where I shall find them". "No", said the man, "I can't do that; but you'd better go on into Belgrave, and into such and such a court; at the top of the court you'll find a house with a ring beside the door; hitch your pony up to the ring and knock at the door; my brother lives there, and he may be able to help you". "Any port in a storm", thought John, and he rode on into Belgrave; he found the court and the house, and when he knocked a man came out. "You're John Whitcroft", he said, "and you're here to ask me about some heifers; tie up your pony and come inside".

When they got inside the house, the man took something out of a drawer, turned his back and looked at it. He turned to John and said: "Go back out of Leicester by the Ashby road; when you get to Groby, look in the field on the right, as you come to the first houses, and you'll see a mob of cattle. Your heifers are there with them". "I'm very much obliged, I'm sure", said John; "is there anything to pay?" The man

would take nothing, and bade him good day. He rode out by the Ashby road, and sure enough, when he came to Groby, there was the mob of cattle, and his father's two heifers among them.

I make no attempt to explain this story, but it may serve at any rate to indicate the beliefs current among the people of the Forest three generations back.

Leicestershire Proverbs

The proverbs of a nation or race are often the repository of echoes of their past history. It is worth while, I think, for this reason to quote some:—

1. "If you shake a Leicestershire man by the collar you can hear the beans rattle inside him."

With this proverb may be compared the line from the poem entitled *Polyolbion*, written by Michael Drayton in the 16th century: "Bean-belly Lestershire her attribute doth wear".

2. "In and out, like Billesdon, I wot." NOTE.—The main street of Billesdon village is full of twists and turns.
3. "If that happens then I'll thatch Groby Pool with pancakes." NOTE.—The Pool is a 60 acre stretch of water; the proverb, which is quoted by Sir Walter Scott in *The Heart of Midlothian*, means of course that the suggested event is highly improbable.
4. "When he dies there will be wet eyes in Groby Pool." This is an elaborate piece of sarcasm; the only eyes in Groby Pool are those of the fishes, which are always wet.
5. "He's gone over Asfordby Bridge backwards." This is applied to a thick-headed person who puts the cart before the horse.
6. Description of a bow-legged man: "He'd never stop a pig in a passage".

Note on Ancient Roads

THE evidence afforded by the occurrence of the ancient mounds of earth known as barrows, and of primitive objects of manufacture such as bronze implements, seems to shew that in

pre-Roman days Leicestershire was traversed by a considerable number of the primitive track-ways, some of which the Romans straightened and improved during the four centuries of their occupation of this country. The most easily recognisable of these is the route known as the Saltway, which enters the county from Grantham, crosses the line of the Fosse Way at Six Hills and the river Soar at Barrow, passing thence by Woodhouse and Woodhouse Eaves over the southern shoulder of the Beacon, and on towards Copt Oak. Its further progress from here is lost, but its name and its general direction seem to indicate that it formed part of the route by which the salt obtained in the neighbourhood of Droitwich was conveyed to the primeval seaports on the Lincolnshire coast, from which it was shipped.

Of Roman roads, in addition to the Watling street and the Fosse, of which mention has already been made, there are remains of two others. The first ran from Mancetter in Warwickshire, the Roman Station on the Watling street, through Kirkby Mallory to Leicester; the second connected an important Roman villa at Medbourne with Roman Leicester, and is known to this day as the Gartree road. It is interesting to note that a line of archæological remains seems to shew that a primeval track-way followed pretty much the same route as the Gartree road, but some little distance to the north-east.

A study of the trade routes which were in use in Europe in the early Bronze Age suggests that Leicestershire, owing to its geographical position, lay on the route by which the gold from Ireland was conveyed across England to the East Coast, whence it was shipped to Scandinavia and the continent.

The county contains some interesting relics of a later period in the medieval pack horse bridges, the parapets of which were made low and flat-topped, so as to allow the packs to hang over them, and were furnished with recesses to enable foot passengers to stand on one side if they were caught by a pack train, while crossing the bridge. An excellent specimen of this type of bridge is to be seen at Anstey, 4 miles north of Leicester, on the line of the ancient route which ran from Leicester across Charnwood Forest and northwards over the Trent.

An interesting survival of this method of transport might have been seen as late as the first quarter of the 19th century, before the Enclosure of Charnwood Forest.

The coal used in those days had to be conveyed from the pits to Woodhouse Eaves and the neighbourhood in panniers on the backs of donkeys, whose owners would leave home almost before daylight in the morning, so as to avoid the risk of being benighted on the open Forest on their return journey.

Folklore Notions .

THOUGH no doubt many theories and notions of what may be described as the folklore type, which were current in Leicestershire in former days, were to be found also in other parts of the country, there are some recorded which seem to be peculiar to the county and its immediate district.

It was in olden days regarded as essential that the bees should always be told when a death occurred in the family. If this were neglected it was considered that they would regard themselves as slighted, and would forsake the hive. A piece of crepe was sometimes put on the hive until the period of mourning was over.

Among prescriptions for the cure of warts were the following :—

1. Rub the wart three times with the rind of stolen bacon. The rind must then be nailed up on some outside wall, and, as it dried up, the wart would dry up also.
2. Get a black snail, rub it on the wart, then stick it on a thorn until it dies.
3. Take a pod of a broad bean, rub it on the wart, and then throw it over the shoulder without looking back, or bury it.
4. Cut an apple in half, rub the wart with the cut parts; bury the apple in a secret place; as it decays so will the wart.

An interesting cure for Whooping Cough :—

Seat the patient on a donkey with his face towards its tail and give him a roast mouse to eat. He must not know what it is he's eating.

Nettle Stings :—

When stung with a Nettle find a Dock and beat the stung place with the leaves, repeating the words " In Dock, out Nettle " —a word with every blow.

Leicestershire Dialect

It is certainly appropriate that some consideration of the subject of Dialect should form a part of such a general survey of the county as this; for these types of local speech have an important place in the history and development of the English language, and the circumstances of the present day, with its facilities for travel, its wide dissemination of reading matter, and in recent years the fact that, in a vast number of households, a broadcast programme forms part of the pursuits of every evening, all combine to lead to a disappearance of distinctive local forms of speech, and to their being merged in what will eventually be a language uniform both in vocabulary and pronunciation.

Whatever views one may hold as to the desirability of this latter development, there will be little disagreement, at least among serious students of our national history, as to the interest, both historical and philological, of our local dialects.

Owing to the geographical position of Leicestershire, so near the centre of the country, it can justly be claimed that the English speech of to-day is predominantly founded upon English as spoken in Leicestershire, and the neighbouring counties, in the early Middle Ages.

It is not possible to-night to do more than give a general indication of the many characteristics of Leicestershire English as it was found in most of the Rural districts of the county up to about 50 years ago.

It is an attractive form of speech, employing many interesting words and closely akin to the English used, for example, by Wycliffe in his version of the Bible and by Bishop Latimer in his sermons.

Among its leading characteristics are the following :—The long " a " in such words as " day ", " way ", etc., is most usually pronounced by a double " e " as in the word " meet ",

e.g., "What's the time o' dee?" and "wee-warden", for the highway official under the old organisation of parish roads.

The short "a" in "grass", "catch", etc., is often pronounced as "e", e.g., "good gress land". The long "e" in such words as "tea", "we", "believe", etc., is sounded like the long "a" as in "bait". The most common instance of this is the pronoun "he" which is always pronounced as if it were spelt "ay". An apparent exception to this rule is the word "sheep", which is often pronounced "ship".

The long "i" is pronounced "oi" as in "soil", e.g., A farmer's wife in a village well known to me one night woke up her husband with the following somewhat disturbing remark: "Sam, there's a rot in bed", to which Sam, not in the least perturbed, replied: "Loy still woman, way'll 'ev 'im jest now".

The long "oo", as in "fool", "soon", "boot", etc., is pronounced as the long "u" in "mute" or like the "eu" in "feud". "Ay moinds 'is buke".

The "u" as in "just", "nut", "come", "some", is pronounced like the "oo" in "foot".

Among the grammatical features noticeable in the old Leicestershire speech, the following points are of interest:—

1. The old Saxon plural in "en", e.g. "They're as loike as two peasen". Many of my hearers will no doubt remember the occurrence of this same plural in the account in the Authorised Version of the Bible of the casting of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego into the fiery furnace.
2. The use of the verb "have" where the word "to be" would normally be employed, e.g., "Well, and 'ow hev ye this morning?" *Ans.* "Well, ah haven't not quoite so well to-dee". This is an idiom peculiar to the county, and is probably Danish in origin, being almost unknown over the Watling street.
3. The multiplication of negatives, e.g., "Ah tell yer—ay would'nt nivver do nought o' the sort". It will be observed that three negatives are employed where in other parts of the country something rather colourless like "he would never do it" would in all probability be

regarded as enough. An even more striking instance was the observation made by a farm servant to a friend of mine :—" There aint not nivver no knowin' "

4. A number of words terminating in "le" are used to convey a frequentative meaning, indicating a repeated process. Such instances are: "Chibble", = to "chip off", to "crumble off"; "Mackle", = to "put together", to "fit up"; "scrattle" and "peckle", two very descriptive words often applied to fowls. I remember many years ago, one who had charge of some fowls saying to me: "They're always scrattlin and pecklin about—they're woonderful 'ens for that".

Other instances are "addle", meaning to accumulate, to pile up, e.g., "Ay's addled a goodish bit of money", and "shackle", meaning to lounge about, to be persistently idle.

4. When the word "such" is followed by "a" or "an", it almost always has an article in front of it as well, e.g., "There's a such a tremenjous lot on 'em".
5. The possessive pronouns "his'n", "her'n", "your'n" were always used, and also "we" and "us" for "our", e.g., "We'll go and get we teas".
6. The use of the word "to", after "I know", instead of using "of". "Not as I know to".

Dialect

It would be impossible within the compass of a short and discursive sketch to mention more than a very few of the interesting words which form part of the old Leicestershire speech, so I will only allude to a few which have come under my personal observation.

The word "strait", meaning narrow, was always pronounced "stret". For instance, a constable giving evidence in a Police Court: "Ah saw this lad your worships, and ah says to him: 'Ello, toight-breeches', meaning stret-trousers your worships".

My readers will not need to be reminded that the word is used in this sense in the Authorised Version of the Bible: "the strait gate".

“Fause”—meaning cunning or artful, e.g. “as fause as a fox”.

“Croffling” and “cratchelty”—meaning infirm or tottering, e.g., “A poor old croffling creature”.

“Nesh”—meaning delicate, tender, e.g., a keeper whom I knew well many years ago was once discussing the difference between little pheasants and little partridges, and remarked to me: “Little pheasants is rether moor nesh nor what little partridges is”.

“Hoast”—meaning a cough; this is applied to both cows and Christians.

“Poike”—meaning the ground which is left over at the end of a long-cornered field, after it has been set out square for ploughing. A farmer of my acquaintance was telling me how he went to night-school after he was well grown up: “An’ ah dessay you’ll woonder what ah went for. Ah wanted to learn about misurin poikes”. A very picturesque phrase for describing the art formerly known as mensuration. The same word is also used in the sense of a turn-pike road.

“Sough”—an underground drain; sometimes employed as a verb to mean that a fox has gone to ground in a drain, e.g. In the days when the late Mr. Coupland was Master of the Quorn, a rider who had got left behind asked one who was following on foot whether he had seen anything of the hounds. His fellow sportsman replied “O ay, you’ll find ’em if you go on; Copy’s fell off and the fox’s soughed”.

Of agricultural terms the following are interesting:—

“Fog”—long grass.

“Goss” and “feen”—gorse and bracken.

Old Mr. John Whitcroft of Ulverscroft, to whom reference was made earlier in these remarks, said to me when describing what the Forest was like when he was a boy: “Ah remember when ah were a lad as the Forest had used to be that high in goss and feen as Ah’ve often enoof been down as far as Loughborough lookin’ for me father’s cows, and they was cluss at ’oom all the whoile”. Speaking of apples which had become withered, an old man whom I had known all my life remarked: “Them apples

is no good, they're all *swizzenifoide*". A most picturesque word this, a sort of compound of shrivelled and wizened. And here are two words descriptive of the insect world. These are interesting examples of what in the study of the classics is known as an "onomatopœia", the formation of words by imitation of natural sounds; they are *Boombly-Booss* for a cockchafer and *Oomble-coom-boo* for a bumble bee; e.g., a small boy eating a raisin cake: "Moother, 'as plooms got legs?"—Mother: "No, my lad, they eent". Boy: "Then, Moother, ah've swallered a Oomble-Coom-Booz".

To "gaup"—a variation of "gape"; to open the eyes and mouth in astonishment.

To "scrouge"—to "crowd", to "squeeze", or "crush".

"Shog"—a variable pronunciation of "jog"—to shake slightly; also to go at a slow trot.

"Gomeril"—a fool.

"Cag-mag". Decayed meat, such as provides bait for fishing.

In order to give some idea of the cadence and rhythm of the old Leicestershire speech, I cannot, I think, do better than quote some extracts from a set of verses published in the *Leicester Journal* in August, 1856, and reprinted in Dr. Evans' *Leicestershire Words and Phrases*. They are entitled "Ar Obadoyer or Muster Cox's Coortin'". The story which they tell is more or less as follows:—

Mr. Obadiah Cox, a Leicestershire farmer, is very anxious that his nephew, Edward Bull, should marry a certain Miss Nancy Drew. Edward is quite of his uncle's mind, having the highest opinion of Miss Nancy, and desiring nothing better than to find himself her husband.

Unfortunately, however, in the preceding year he had proposed to and been accepted by a certain Miss Peggy Beck, and although on further acquaintance he has completely changed his mind, Miss Beck has no idea of allowing him to withdraw, and threatens him with the penalties of the law, if he fails to come up to the scratch.

After recording the conversation between uncle and nephew, in which these facts are set out, the verses go on to describe, in a picturesque and lively fashion, the steps taken by uncle Obadiah to release his nephew from the predicament into which he has got himself, and the eventual happy outcome of his manoeuvres.

OUR OBADIAH

Lines 1—30.

“ Soo Oi says to ar o'd Obodoyer, says Oi—
 Noigh-and all the toime wi' vexetion to croy;
 ' Well ', Oi says, ' this Nance Drew as yo want me to wed,
 Oi mek count as 'er 'airt's joost as roight as 'er 'ead;
 An' shay's woonderful tow'dly an' oyable loike,
 Shay's as roight as moy leg an' as street as a poike ”.

' Well ’, a says, ' een't yo got nothink else for to sey?
 Fur Oi knood all that theer sin' a twe'mon' todee—
 Shay enn't jed, or strook oogly or nothink o' that?'

' Noo ', says Oi, ' but, yo say, Oi cain't wed 'er, that's flat!
 ' Whoy ', a says, ' yo gret gomeril, what do yer mane?
 Wull ye tek tew a doochess or marry the Quane?—
 Whoy, shay's thray 'underd poun' ! Well, Oi'm gormed if Oi
 ivver !

Moy hoys an' o'd limbs ! an' yo says yo woon't hev 'er !'

' Whoy, it happens a-thisn ', says Oi, ' look ye 'ere !
 Oi told Peggy Beck as Oi'd hev 'er last year;
 An' wan man, as Oi tek't, a cain't marry tew,
 Soo Oi've blest if Oi knoo what the O'd un to dew !
 An' what's moor, this 'ere Peggy, shay knoos 'ow it stan's,
 An' sweers as shay'll put it in s'licitor's 'an's.—
 Soo now then ', Oi says.

' Whoy ', a says, ' Yo've a fule !
 Oi med count as you would, when they sent ye to skule !
 An' yo hev !'

' Well ', says Oi, ' but what's best fur to dew,
 Fur Oi mut marry Peggy, an' cain't marry tew?'

' Well ', a says, ' done ye loov 'er?'

‘ Not Peggy ’, says Oi,
 ‘ But the t’other, whoy, yis, that Oi dew if Oi doy !’
 ‘ Whoy, then, yo gret fule ’, a says, viciously loike,
 ‘ Yo cain’t marry at all, an’ may doy i’ the doike !
 Doon’t coom gosterin’ ’ere ! Oi cain’t dew nothink forry !’
 ‘ Well ’, says Oi, ‘ then good mornin’ an’ thanky ! Oi’ve sorry’.

Uncle Obadiah, however, is not so hard-hearted as he appears. When his nephew has departed he proceeds to get shaved, blacks his boots, puts on his Sunday best, and pays a call of state on the Becks.

After some general chaff he electrifies them by intimating pretty plainly that he is thinking seriously of getting married; Miss Peggy displays obvious interest, and suggests that a hearty, not so old a person, of his comfortable fortune, cannot fail to find many a girl willing to take him.

To this uncle Obadiah replies (lines 53 to 56).

‘ Well ’, a says, ‘ yis, Oi’ve ’arty enew, Oi suppoose,
 An’ Oi’ve not quoite a beggar joost yit, as toimes goos;
 But ’, a says, lookin’ solid—moy hoide, what a muve !—
 A says, ‘ It een’t money as does it !—It’s loov !’

At this point the old Becks tactfully fade away, and Mr. Cox proceeds to inveigle Miss Peggy into declaring, in the first place, that his nephew Ned is nothing to her (“ ‘except a’s yoor nevy’, shay says, lookin’ sloy ”), and furthermore that she has become enamoured of the old gentleman himself, and is prepared to marry him. This she affirms with great emphasis, concluding by the question: “ Do you think Oi’ve a loyar?”

Uncle Obadiah then unmask his guns and flattens out Miss Peggy, in the following emphatic lines (87—92).

‘ Well ’, a says, ‘ That Oi doon’t knoo, but wan thing Oi dew,
 An’ that there is this ’ere—as Oi woo’not hev yew !
 An’ Oi enn’t non o’ yourn tho’ yo said it and swoor it ,
 An’ soo if yo loov ma, yo’d better git o’er it !—
 Good mornin’ ’, a says, an’ a oop an’ a roon
 Joost afore shay could ketch ’im, loike shot from a goon.

This, as may be supposed, produces little short of an earthquake in the Beck household, which is graphically described in the next dozen lines, after which the conclusion of the story is related as follows (lines 101—108).

An' ooncle, a left 'em all moytherin' theer,
 An' shogs off to Kit's at the Stag for some beer.
 An' nextus a coom to ar mill an' says a,
 ' Yo coom 'ere, yo gret bif-yead, an' listen to may !'
 An' a to'd me this 'ere joost as Oi'n to'd it yew;
 ' An' now then ' a says, ' yo goo street to Nance Drew,
 An' ahx if shay'll hev ye—Oi count as shay wull !'
 An' shay did—it's as trew as moy neam's Yedda'd Bull !''

Before concluding, I should like to express my grateful thanks for many kind and helpful suggestions to Mr. S. H. Skillington, whose scholarly history of Leicester has been my constant companion during the preparation of this paper.