

## CHAPTER XIV

### MISCELLANEA

#### I. OLD CUSTOMS.

Most of the old Milton customs have ceased to be, but it is still possible to glean from various sources some account of what used to take place in our village. Elderly people retain vivid memories of what they did as children, and scattered about the pages of the old school Log Book we find references to various happenings.

Plough Monday, for instance, is not now observed by the farm labourers of Milton, but sixty years ago it was recognised to the full. From the Log Book we find that January 9th, 1865, the first Monday after the Epiphany, is entered as "Plough Monday," presumably a holiday, while against January 13th, 1868, is the note: "Plough Monday; usual visitation of coloured faces."

St. Valentine's Day was well kept by the youths and maidens of the village up to fifty years ago, and the school-children usually had a half-holiday, when they went about singing and collecting money. Again from the school Log Book we find in 1868: "Feb. 14th. Valentine's Day. Usual half-holiday," and on February 26th: "Distributed the money collected on St. Valentine's Day. Thirty-nine children

received 3d. each. Many of them bought slates." In 1871, however, there was no holiday and the observance of the feast of St. Valentine seems to have fallen gradually into disuse. Some elderly people remember going in their young days to the bigger houses for pippins and gingerbread, which were given away every year to the children on that morning.

The Shrove Tuesday bell is dealt with in Chapter VIII.

A custom popular in Milton from ancient times and still observed, is the eating of figs on "Fig Sunday," the name by which Palm Sunday is sometimes called. This custom is based on the incident of the Fig Tree, when Our Lord wished to eat of the fruit.

"Garland Day," as it used to be called at Milton, according to the old Log Book, was kept on Old May Day, the 12th of the month, until 1906, but from that year this link with the past was severed and the day was changed to May 1st. The school-children choose a Queen of the May and go in procession around Milton, singing appropriate songs, afterwards visiting other villages.

"Tander's Day," St. Andrew's Day, was the lace-makers' festival. As is mentioned in Chapter XIII, the lace-makers made an ornamented cake and the bellringers rang peals in the early morning. Besides this, the children used to "go Tandering," as it was called—they would visit a lace-maker's house and be regaled with games and sweets.

The "Ringers' and Singers' Supper" is a very

old institution, and takes place on New Year's Eve, when the choir and bellringers meet. After the supper, games and songs are indulged in, and as midnight approaches the assembled party proceed to the belfry, where the Old Year is rung out and the New Year ushered in with a peal on the bells.

Cricket and football have long been popular at Milton, as may be seen from the Log Book :

“ 1865, May 23rd. Cricket match kept some away in afternoon,” and again on the 30th a note to the same effect.

“ 1867, Monday, March 18th. Boys gone to see a football match between Milton men & Patchell (11 a side). Patchell won.”

## II. QUAIN T SAYINGS, DIALECT, SUPERSTITIONS, ETC.

Many quaint sayings are based upon observations of the weather. One, often quoted by an old inhabitant, runs :

“ If there's ice in November that will bear a duck,  
The rest of the winter will be slush and muck.”

Another Milton saying to the same effect is :

“ If the ice will bear a goose in November, it won't bear a duck afterwards.”

A Milton variant of a well-known weather proverb is :

“ February fill dyke,  
Be it either black or white.”

Black or white means, of course, rain or snow. One more rhyming forecast tells us :

“ If it rains on Easter Day,  
Much good grass, but little good hay.”

Another saying is: "When Milton Feast comes, you can shut your door." This alludes to the practice of allowing the cottage doors to stand open during the summer. When Milton Feast comes, after September 14th, the weather is appreciably colder, necessitating the doors being closed. The days, too, are shorter, which accounts for the saying: "On Milton Feast, shut your door at six."

"A Sunday moon brings a flood before the month is out." A new moon falling on a Sunday will be followed by heavy rain during the next four weeks.

An expressive phrase is: "As cold as a clat," a clat being one of the bits of manure that are spread over the field.

Another descriptive saying is: "When mice fight rats, the rats get the best of it." A poor person will have little chance of success if he goes to law against a rich and influential person.

When being "Churched" after child-birth, a woman was said to be "given her liberty."

A "hundred-to-one" pudding consists of a hundred pieces of potato to one of meat, covered with pastry and cooked in a basin. It was an excellent stand-by during the Great War.

Almost every county or district in England has some dialect peculiar to itself, that is, the use of words or phrases representing survivals from the older English speech, and not usually found in an ordinary dictionary.

Some peculiarities of Northamptonshire dialect still survive in Milton, but instances of this

nature can, of course, only be obtained by patience.

The almost obsolete word "unkid" is occasionally met with, usually in such a combination as "unkid and dreadful." The word "unkid" means "horrid."

"Don't he look herrikin?" "Herrikin" means wild, unkempt, rough. In Yorkshire this word is "harrygaud."

"I was fair mommered," means "I was quite worried, or flurried." This being a Midland dialect, is frequently heard in Milton, but sometimes the word "moithered" is used, bearing the same meaning.

A "mawkin" is a scarecrow or effigy, a word still in frequent use.

I have heard the junction of the thigh with the body called the "share." The word means "division."

"Mullock" is in general dialect throughout the country, and means any kind of rubbish or weeds.

"Touch" was the name given to the tinder, when flint and steel were generally used instead of matches.

To be "shut of" someone, means to be rid of that person. Met with in other counties.

To "hold" means to borrow.

"Out" is often used for "away." When people have gone away on a visit, they are said to be "out," literally "out of town." Children from other villages who attended Milton School were described in the Log Book as "out-towners."

To "call" is to tattle, gossip, spread reports.

To "call" another person is to speak slanderously of that individual. As one woman philosophically said, "When they call me, they're giving someone else a rest." Also found in Yorkshire.

To "dout" the flame is to "put out." This is commonly met with in the West Country.

"Middling" is to be unwell, practically the same as "indifferent" as applied to health. If a person is "very middling" he is very ill. Found in most counties.

"Dirt" is the term used for loose earth, or mould. It has no reference to a want of cleanliness. This use is found also in Oxfordshire, Hampshire and Somerset. A gardener, when potting, fills his pots with "dirt"—loose earth. On the ridge of a thatched roof the thatcher places "dirt"—again loose earth—to keep the thatch from being blown off.

To "thack" is to "thatch"; so a "thacker" is a "thatcher."

"Jetty" is a term used for a narrow passage between two walls or hedges. The narrow lane between The Manor and Milton House is so named.

"Pap" is a term of endearment for a grandfather.

"Frit" means "frightened." "I was frit to death."

Anything in a dilapidated state, or of flimsy construction, is said to be "tempory," probably from "temporary."

A hen "burks" her chickens when she gathers them under her wings for warmth.

“Whitterish” means poor, bad, very third-rate. A whitterish thing is of little account.

“Muckle” also means something poor or bad. “I’ll keep the good apples and sell the muckles.”

A naughty child is sometimes referred to as “anoointed,” possibly from “annoying.” “That boy is a most anoointed child.”

To “run” is to “chase.” “The dog ran the cat.”

The use of “while” instead of “until” is found throughout the Midlands and the northern counties. “I will stay here while Thursday,” means, “I will stay here until Thursday.” To the unaccustomed ear this use will sometimes convey a meaning totally different from what was intended. Take, for instance, such a sentence as, “I’ll keep my umbrella closed while it rains.” This may be understood to mean that the umbrella would be kept closed during the downpour, though the speaker really meant that it would be kept closed until the rain began. However, there is classic authority for this use:

“We will keep ourself  
’Till supper time alone; while then, God bless you.”  
*Macbeth* III. 1.

The preposition “to” is frequently used for “of” in such a sentence as, “What do you think to it?” that is, “of it.”

Some few instances of pronunciation may be noticed. The bell “clapper” is sometimes pronounced with a long “a” as if spelt “claper.” The word “any” has a broad “a” as if it were “anny.” The double “d” is in some cases soft, for a ladder is frequently called a “lather.”

“ Against ” is often “ agin,” and “ voice ” is sometimes “ vice.” Some of these are survivals of older rules of pronunciation, just as it was considered correct a century ago for “ yellow ” to be called “ yaller.”

There are some quaint beliefs and superstitions at Milton, as there are, of course, in other parts of the country.

It is said that if a “ hardy mouse,” otherwise a harvest mouse or shrew mouse, crosses a foot-path in a field, it will die.

When the “ pink pink ” note of the chaffinch is at its best and can be thought to say “ pincher,” then rain is near.

If a hare runs through the village, a fire or some other disaster will occur within a month.

On the parchment cover of our oldest register can faintly be discerned an old Latin “ square-word,” written probably some two or three centuries ago. It can be read upwards, downwards and across, either way. I transcribe it here :

S A T O R  
A R E P O  
T E N E T  
O P E R A  
R O T A S .

This was, in olden times, a well-known square-word commonly used throughout England as a charm against rats. Upon a sheet of paper would be written this square-word, together with a note saying there was plenty of corn or other food on some neighbouring farm or other



premises, and requesting the rats to go there. The paper was then placed in the rats' run, and when the rodents read the polite note it was believed that they would be so charmed by the Latin words that they would act on the hint and leave the house.

In an agricultural district, omens from which a forecast of the weather could be obtained would be anxiously consulted. Hence we find certain rules laid down to guide us by some of the old weather-wise inhabitants. The moon apparently plays a great part, for we are told that the weather on the third day of the moon will be the prevailing weather during that month. One old inhabitant told me that he always went to the cross-roads at 11.30 p.m. on Old Martinmas Eve, November 23rd, and the weather that prevailed during the half-hour until midnight would indicate the weather for the next three months. Where the wind was then, it would generally be in the same quarter for the next three months, and if it shifted during the time of observation, it would be the last wind during that half-hour.

The weather on January 25th indicates the kind of summer for that year.

One old man told me that weather forecasts were inspired by the Evil One and were only sought by hypocrites. On my inquiring his reason he quoted, to my astonishment, "Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky."

Talking of the sky leads our thoughts naturally to the stars. The various shapes of the

constellations remind different people of different things. In the Great Bear, for instance, there is a group of seven stars shaped like a saucepan with a curved handle. In one part of England this is called The Plough, in another Charles' Wain, but in Milton it is Dick and the Wagon, and also the Wagon and Horses.

Another constellation, seen only in winter, is Taurus (the Bull). In the side of the Bull is a cluster of six stars known as the Pleiades, but in Milton it is called the Butcher's Hatchet. This is a name suggested by the shape assumed by the grouping of the stars, but it breathes a different spirit from that of Job when he wrote : " Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades ? "

Death being the common lot and all destined some day to make the great change, we find that Milton is not without its dread portents of this event.

An owl hooting near a house foretells the death of one living there, but the person about to die does not hear it. There is a Welsh superstition to the same effect, except that the doomed person hears the hooting.

If an inhabitant of Milton dies and the body remains unburied over a Sunday, there will be another death within a month. This superstition is also current in Somerset.

If there are two deaths within a short time of each other, there will be a third very soon after.

If a dead body does not " set," or stiffen with *rigor mortis*, before burial, it foretells that the

death of someone very near, both in relationship and place of abode, will occur in a very short time.

It is also supposed to be a portent of death when the church clock strikes the hour in an unusually loud and ominous tone.

For some reason, it is also thought that if the clock strikes during the singing of the last hymn in church at Evensong, some disaster, such as a death, will soon occur.

### III. CHRONOLOGICAL.

In some parts of this book there occur dates that seem indefinite, e.g. Edward Wigan took his degree of B.A. in 1508/9. That means the event took place before March 25th of 1509. Such double dates may be seen on some of the old gravestones within the church. The reason is that until 1752 the civil, ecclesiastical and legal year did not begin on January 1st, though for a very long period the historical year did so. Up to the end of the thirteenth century, New Year's Day, as used by the Church and in all public documents, began at Christmas. In and after the fourteenth century the year began on March 25th. Strange to say, the rubric after the Collect for St. Stephen's Day in the Prayer Book directs that it shall be said until New Year's Eve, that is, December 31st. This is accounted for by the fact that when the Second Prayer Book was compiled, a Bill had been drafted in Parliament ordering that the New Year should begin on January 1st, and not on March 25th, but it was not passed. For centuries the year began on

January 1st in Scotland, and for a very long time the English had unofficially used the same date, so the difference between the legal and unofficial calculations caused great practical inconvenience. When the New Style of reckoning was adopted in England in 1752, all this was changed and the year considered to begin on January 1st. By the New Style in 1752, eleven days were left out of the calendar for that year, the 3rd of September being reckoned as the 14th of September. This caused great uproar in several places, because people thought they were being robbed of eleven days of life.

#### IV. LOW-SIDE WINDOWS.

The reason why a Low-Side Window was inserted in churches remains more or less a mystery. This window is found sometimes in the west end of the north, but more usually the south, wall of the chancel, and often below a larger one. In Milton Church it is in the wall of the north aisle, almost in line with the chancel arch. Various theories have been advanced as to its use.

1. As confessionals. In support of this theory it was the practice for a penitent, after a grave sin, not to enter the church before he was shriven, and in several instances such windows had a seat within, as if for the priest. They seem to have been originally unglazed. A letter to Thomas Cromwell from one Thomas Bedyll, clerk to the Council of Henry VIII and one of the commissioners at the visitation made when the religious houses and chantries were sup-

pressed, seems to refer to this use of the window. "We think it best that the place wher thes frires have been wont to hire outtward confessions of al commers at certen tymes of the yere be walled up and that use to be for-doen for ever." The fact that many of these windows in ancient parish churches are now walled up, and that it was apparently done about this time, would seem to support the theory that they had been used as confessionals. Two such windows, north and south, in Blisworth Church are thus closed. However, it must be borne in mind that the passage in the letter was against a certain religious order, and further, as it was an irregular practice, the bishop could direct that these windows should be blocked up. No such mandate has hitherto been discovered, and the windows may quite possibly have been walled up to save the trouble of glazing them.

2. As windows for lepers, during Mass. Against this theory, very few command a view of the altar and very few are splayed. The Milton window is certainly splayed in that direction, but not sufficiently so to see any of the altars. Further, the lepers of the neighbourhood had a chapel for themselves at the hospitals of St. Leonard in Northampton and Towcester.

3. For distribution of alms. The situation of the Milton window is decidedly unsuitable for such a purpose, being behind the church.

4. For the ringing of the Sanctus bell at Mass. I am inclined to this theory, because most low-side windows seem to have been inserted in that side of the church facing the priest's house or

the main part of the village. The ancient Rectory of Milton was slightly north-west of the church, and the main part of the village lies west and north-west. Therefore, since this window at Milton is on the north side of the church and is splayed on the east side, it would be possible to draw a straight line through it to the site of the old Rectory from some point within the church. The window may have been used for some signal, such as the Sanctus bell, for the villagers in general, but, considering its situation here at Milton in connection with the old Rectory, there is greater reason to suppose it was chiefly for the benefit of the Rector when confined to the house through illness.

#### V. ENTRIES OF INTEREST.

##### CHURCH REGISTERS.

1610. "John Reeve, Sheepheard, slayne by a tempest of thunder and lightninge was buried the 13 Daie of July."

1620. "Agnes Stanley the daughter of John Stanley a bedlam man was buried the fffifte day of November."

1634. "Maud Dunkley was buryed ye 23rd of Ffebruary. *Anno ætatis suae (ut aiunt) centissimo.*" i.e. "In the hundredth year of her age (so they say)."

1686. "Elizabeth daughter of Stephen Miles & Elizabeth his wife was baptized 23rd May."

"Elizabeth Miles (ye sd Mother) who dyd inChildbirth was buryd yesame day."

"Ann ye daughter of Will: Burnum & Ann his wife was baptizd 24th May."

“ Ann Burnum (ye mother) dyd in Child-birth & was buryd ye same day ; both w'ch persons yt so dyd was Cousen Germans & was deliverd & sickned of a feavr in ye same manner & dyd just before one another as they were deliverd.”

1771. “ Willm Robinson, Parish Clark (an Honest Man & favourite of His Master) buried Apl. 14.”

1794. “ Oct. 6th. Tax ceases on births, burials &c.”

This is in Book 4, which seems to be a duplicate of Register No. 3. It begins with Baptisms on September 18th, 1785, and Burials on October 22nd, 1785, each space for entries bearing an embossed Government stamp marked III Pence.

The years 1793, 1813, 1817 and 1824 have names of persons entered who are described as “ Cordwainers,” the old name for shoemakers.

CHURCHWARDENS' ACCOUNTS.

“ 1803.	April 10. Pd the Blacksmith for Provideing a Grindlestone . . . .	15	0
	(Some of the old people of Milton still use this term for a grindstone.)		
	Oct: 11. Pd with the Briefs . . . .	1	0
	Do. Pd the Court Fees . . . .	12	0
	(These were the fees paid at the Archdeacon's Court at the Visitation.)		
“ 1804.	April 2d. Pd the Clark is Wagers . . . .	17	0

	Dec. 24. Pd for new broom & Churry pint of Ale for cleaning the Church ways			6
" 1805.	March 6th. Pd for Surplus for the Carrage of the Surplus . . . . .	2	12	6
	(According to Canon 58 of the Church of England, a surplice has to be pro- vided by the parishioners for the Rector's use.)		1	0
	May 30th. Pd. the Court Fees . . . . .		11	0
	Do. with the Briefs . . . .		2	6
	(What these particular Briefs were for is not stated, but the fees varied, as is seen from the two already quoted, and also one on April 14th, 1807, when an entry occurs: "Pd. with the Briefs 4s. 10d.")			
" 1806.	April 5. Pd. for 3 Brooms to cleane the Church- ways & Churry 3 pints of Ale to do the same . . . .		1	6
" 1807.	Janry. 28. Pd for Letter from Manchester Direc- ted to the Church War- den . . . . .			11
" 1815.	March 27. Pd. Richd Robinson is wagers for being Clarke one year to Easter 1815 . . . . .	3	3	0
" 1822.	Oct. 3. Paid Mrs. Morris for Ale for the Church . .		5	6
" 1824.	Demr. 3. pd a Letter fire Engin . . . . .			3



	Demr. 11. Bell Windars (windows?) . . . . .	2	0
" 1825.	July 7. paid for Bear . . . . .	5	0
" 1828.	April 8th. Recd. by Two- penny Rate . . . . .	9	8 11½
	July 28. penting the Stov pd Richd Robinson . . . . .	2	6
	Septm. 13. paid Crosby for Reparin the Violincela and a scrue . . . . .	2	6
" 1829.	Jany. 18. one pound of Wax Candls. . . . .	3	6
" 1831.	March 1. a Letter from London . . . . .		9
	July 19. a Letter from the Curte (Archdeacon's Court). . . . .	3	6
	Nov. 5. a hood faget . . . . .	3	0
" 1832.	Jany. 31. a faget of hood . . . . .		3
	March 9. a hood faget . . . . . (Presumably these are fagots of wood.)		3
" 1833.	June 1. Paid Jno Robin- son a oke Beam for the Church . . . . .	4	10 0
	July 4. paid a Letter from London on the Surples (surplice) . . . . .		10
	Septmr. 14. a Leter from London . . . . .		10
	Septmr. 18. paid Mr. Miller the Surples . . . . .	5	5 0
" 1834.	July 17. Confirmation 21 Dinnars . . . . .	1	11 6
	for Bear . . . . .	7	6
" 1838.	Recd. of Mr. Clarke of Col- lingtree for some old Commandments . . . . .	3	0 0

	A Church Rate Collected,			
	1s. 4d. in the pound .	87	18	4
	Paid Men 4s. for finding			
	Church property . . .		4	0
“ 1839.	Paid Men for digging up			
	Nettles in Churchyard .	2	10	0
	(This shows that our			
	God’s Acre had been allowed			
	to fall into a sad state of			
	neglect.)			
“ 1849.	Feb. 28. Mr. Phipps, Black			
	Gown for Clerk . . .	1	9	0
“ 1853.	Dec. 26th. Willm Glead for			
	Playing the Horgin . . .		5	0

## PARISH VESTRY MINUTES.

1822. Mar. 27. “ John Glead to have a fence before his window to keep off the cattle.”
1827. Nov. 5th. “ That the Rector is requested on behalf of the Parish to attend at the Board Room on Thursday next to support if necessary the Publican J. Lilley in the prosecution of certain individuals for making a disturbance on Sunday morning last.”
1828. March 26th. “ A meeting to be held on Apl 3rd for the purpose of taking into consideration the mode of remunerating the Teachers at the Sunday Schools.”
1828. Aug. 7th. “ The Rector is requested to state to the magistrates on Saturday next on behalf of the parish the Publicans James Lilley & John Curran having their houses open for tipling during the hours appropriated for Church service on Sunday last.”

Public-houses were to be closed on Sundays during the times of service in church. They were opened at noon when the Morning Service would be over, or nearly so. After the Reformation, it was against the law for services to be held in any church after dark, so Evensong was ordered to be held in the afternoon. Therefore, public-houses were ordered to be closed on Sunday afternoons, but opened again during the evening, at which time there was no service. In modern times, when Evensong has been generally transferred from the afternoon to the evening, the law as applied to the public-houses has remained unaltered, so that they have been opened during the Evening Service, but closed for Morning Service. The object of this old law was that people should have no excuse or temptation to be absent from service.

## SCHOOL LOG BOOK.

1863. July 10. "Weather during the week has been unusually hot."  
 July 13. "Heat very considerably abated from last week, when Thermom. (in Sun) reached 114°."
1865. April 14. "Mem. Good Friday, Sunday School. Men & some boys at work, others playing about especially in afternoon."
1868. July 22. "Hottest day this year. 130° sun. 104° shade."
1875. Decr. 19-24. "Pig-killing week. Preparation for Christmas—many children away."  
 (The week before Christmas is still kept as "pig-killing week.")