

shops and public-houses, the latter, by the way, being pretty plentiful for the size of the place, which comprises an area of only some 3,800 acres, with a population of 9,500.

There are chapels for different denominations of Dissenters in the town, and also two or three commodious schools. On the Bexley Road, to the south-west of the town, is a convent for educational purposes. It was erected in 1879, and is owned by the Franciscan Fathers of the Order of La Sainte Union.

According to Lambarde, the "town of Eareth" was once in a flourishing condition; at all events, he speaks of it in the reign of Elizabeth as being then "an ancient corporation, either by reputation or chartre." It had the grant of a weekly market, to be held on Thursdays, and two annual fairs of three days each. Although it can no longer boast of a corporation, and its weekly market has long since ceased, a fair is still held annually on Whit Monday.

The older parts of the town present in places a somewhat picturesque appearance, the effect of which is heightened by occasional glimpses of the river, obtained through openings or side streets. Of late years Erith has exhibited signs of improvement. A Science and Art School has been established in connection with South Kensington. The public hall, built in 1871, is a brick building capable of accommodating some 500 persons, and is used for concerts, public meetings, and assemblies.

Erith is a favourite yachting station, and in the town are the head-quarters of the Erith Yacht Club and Corinthian Yacht Club. In times long gone by Erith was a considerable maritime port, and possessed a wharf used for naval purposes. The navy used to assemble here as late as the end of the seventeenth century. Pepys, in his capacity as secretary to the Admiralty, paid several visits to the fleet here, one of which is thus recorded in his "Diary," under date of November 16, 1665:—"To Eriffe, where, after making a little visit to Madame Williams, she did give me information of W. Howe's having bought eight bags of precious stones taken from about the Dutch Vice-Admiral's neck, of which there were eight diamonds which cost him £4,000 sterling in India, and hoped to have made £12,000 here for them. . . . So I on board my *Lord Brouncker*; and there he and Sir Edmund Pooley carried me down into the hold of the Indian ship, and there did show me the greatest wealth lie in confusion that a man can see in the world—pepper scattered through every chink, you trod upon it; and in cloves and nutmegs I walked above

the knees: whole rooms full; and silk in bales, and boxes of copper-plate, one of which I saw opened. Having seen this, which was as noble a sight as ever I saw in my life, I away on board the other ship in despair to get the pleasure-boat of the gentlemen there to carry me to the fleet."

It is said that Erith was the birthplace of that most famous vessel, the *Henri Grace de Dieu*, though others, as shown in a previous chapter,\* make her to have been built at Woolwich. She measured 1,000 tons. She had four masts, from the great tops of which soldiers shot arrows at the enemy, and is said to have mounted eighty guns, though these were probably of small calibre. She may be taken as a type of the largest ships of the time of the Tudors.

With reference to the building of the *Henri Grace de Dieu* (1512), there are contemporary documents in the Record Office, quoted in Cruden's "History of Gravesend," containing entries for the payments of "wages of divers and sondre persons, as ship-wrightts, calkers, and laborers that wrought and labored in carting and making of a new docke at Erythe, for the bringing in of our soveryn lord the king's reall shipp, named the *Soverin*, in the sayed dock, as for amendyng, raparyng, and calkyng of the sayed ship, as of heving forthe affloate out of the same docke, by the time and space of vij weeks."

The "historical incidents" connected with Erith appear to be very scanty. We may be thankful, therefore, for such trivial scraps of information as the fact that "bluff King Hal" journeyed hither by water from Westminster, on his way to visit Francis I. of France, and that he slept at Erith, hastening the next morning to Gravesend, whence he rode across the country by short stages to Dover, where he embarked for the French coast; or that James II., when providing for the escape of the royal family to France, issued his warrant (Nov. 30, 1668): "Order the *Isabella* and *Ann* yachts to fall down to Erith to-morrow."

The present pier, standing on wooden piles, and upwards of 400 feet in length, was built in 1842. Close by the pier some public gardens, after the style of those at North Woolwich,† were laid out a few years ago. A greater source of prosperity to the town, however, has been the establishment of iron and other factories on the banks of the Thames and in its immediate neighbourhood. These factories have caused a large increase in the population, and consequently added considerably to the business of Erith. On the eastern

\* See ante, p. 15.

† See Vol. I., p. 373.