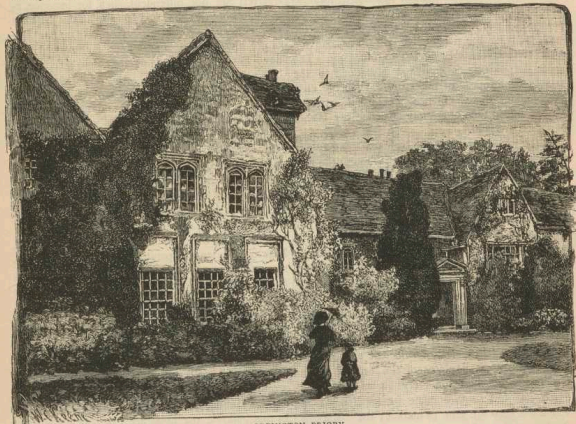


What vineyards or vineyard scenes of the Continent can surpass in beauty the scenes and merry groups collected in our hop-gardens? Here lively and picturesque knots are gathered together beneath the luxuriant bines. The very atmosphere seems pregnant with the rich perfume of the hop. The tall poles, heavily laden with their vine-like leaves and hanging clusters of golden fruit, standing in green masses on fair slopes, or borne in triumph to the pickers at the bins, are objects of

haply on that cheapest and surest-footed of steeds, "Shanks's pony." On arriving at the grounds they are joined by cottagers of the neighbourhood, and picking commences. But for this industry it would be almost impossible for the poor Irish who abound so much in East London to support themselves and their families.

The following description of a Kentish hop-garden appeared a few years ago in a contemporary:—"Let the reader whose acquaintance



ORPINGTON PRIORY.

rural beauty, full of happy and pictorial suggestion. Contiguous to most of the hop-gardens small huts or sheds are erected for the accommodation of pickers from a distance, many coming from London, or even farther. A hop-garden early in September in a good year is one of the most beautiful sights in Nature. Then their vine-like clusters make perfumed avenues of scented foliage, and the golden fruit loads the waving tendrils. Then the Irishmen from St. Giles's or Seven Dials, and the impoverished and pale-faced "East-Enders" from London, bethinks him of the surest method of regaining both health and wealth, and forthwith sets his course to the south, haply by one of those early trains devoted to his class at that period,

with hops is limited to a suspicion of them in the decoction supplied by his brewer, or at most by a sight of the article shrouded in canvas, and in immense bales piled up and rocking in great waggons—let him imagine a great tract of level land, stretching as far as the eye can reach, and planted throughout with rows of flourishing hops, trailing vine-like up slender poles about nine feet high, and forming endless walls of foliage and flowers, with paths about six feet wide between. Looking down such an avenue, with the slanting sun flushing the golden-headed hops and throwing the path into dense shade, except where the rays find loopholes to dart through, forming bright and fantastic devices on the dull, dry soil—you get a