

CHAPTER XXV.

BANSTEAD, WOODMANSTERNE, AND COULSDON.

"I point to Banstead Down,

Thence comes your mutton, and these chicks my own,"—*Pope*.

Situation and General Appearance of Banstead—The View from the Downs—The Downs Famous for Sheep-farming—Geology of the Downs—Roman Coins, &c., found here—Pepys' Notices of Banstead Downs—Races held here in the 17th Century—The Attraction of the Downs—Two Centuries ago—Descent of the Manor of Banstead—Tadworth—Banstead House—Cold Blow Cottage—North House—The Village of Banstead—The Parish Church—Walton-on-the-Hill—Walton Place—The Church—Discovery of a Roman Villa—Woodmansterne—The Church—"The Oaks"—General Burgoyne—His Elopement with Lady Charlotte Stanley—A *Fête Champêtre*—Lord Derby a Resident here—Coulston—The Common—The Church—The Manor—The Bourne Rivulet.

BANSTEAD stands on the windiest point of the windy North Downs—so styled with reference to Sussex—which here nearly reach their highest point. It is, indeed, "a place of prospects." Standing somewhat below the church, the eye has an unimpeded view of a great stretch of country round nearly three-parts of the horizon. In the foreground is the Sutton Lunatic Asylum above described, with its extensive and attractive ranges of buildings, while farther off the eye is caught by the glittering roof and full single tower of the Crystal Palace.

From these downs the view northward is very extensive and beautiful, the pretty church and village of Cheam forming a conspicuous object on the left, over which the prospect extends as far as Hampstead, the heights of Norwood and Sydenham being visible on the right.

Here we may exclaim with Mr. Martin Tupper, an enthusiastic lover of his adopted county, "where are finer panoramic views to be found than those presented by the heaven-kissing hills of Leith and Box, St. Martha's and St. Ann's, Cooper's and St. George's, and Woodmansterne, and chiefly Richmond? Match us where you can the chestnuts, oaks, and beeches of Surrey, the Surrey of 'Sylvan' Evelyn!" "Though in truth we have in pleasant Surrey our share of barrenness and desolation, in many a broad strip of moorland," he writes, "still, how fair and fresh are our downs and healthy and far-stretching lines of hill! how rich and Eden-like our valleys! how stately our ancestral woods! how trim our cottage-gardens! how fertile our soil in grain and roots and luscious fruits! how various in all kinds of beauty and of interest is Surrey!"

On the magnificent sweep of downs it would be strange indeed not to meet with an encampment of the gipsies, parties of which still linger where they were formerly so numerous. The downs hereabouts have long been famous sheep-walks, and for the excellent herbage which they afford for the sheep, which are highly prized for the delicate flavour of the mutton; indeed, the quality

of the mutton produced here has become proverbial—

"Wide airy downs

Are health's gay walks to shepherd and to sheep."

So writes, or sings, Dyer, the author of "The Fleece," a didactic poem, cast somewhat in the style of Virgil's "Georgics," and now forgotten in this frivolous and sensational age. In a few pointed lines he touches on their leading features and geological formation. Thus he writes:—

"All arid soils with sand or chalky flint,
Or shells diluvian mingled; and the turf
That mantles o'er rocks of brittle stone
Be thy regard; and where low-tufted broom,
Or box, or berried juniper arise,
Or the tall growth of glossy-rinded beech;
And where the burrowing rabbit turns the dust,
And where the dappled deer delights to bound:
Such are the Downs of Banstead, edged with wood
And towery villas."

Banstead is not unknown to the antiquarian world; like Wallington, it would seem to have been inhabited under the Roman occupation. At all events, John Evelyn writes thus in his "Diary," under date September 27th, 1658:—"Riding over these Downes, and discoursing with the shepherds, I found that on digging about the bottom, neere Sir Christopher Buckle's, neare Bansted, divers medails have been found, both copper and silver, with foundations of houses, urns, &c. Here, indeede, anciently stood," he adds, "a City of the Romans; see Antonine's 'Itinerary.'"

It may be added here that the house occupied by Sir C. Buckle stood near the Roman road which led from Chichester through Sussex into Surrey, which passed through Ockley and Dorking churchyard. Considerable remains of a Roman building have been found at Walton Heath, a little to the south of this house. Pepys shows that these downs were in his day a solitude. He writes in his "Diary" at Epsom, in July, 1667:—"I walked up on the Downes, where a flock of sheep was, and the most pleasant and innocent sight that I ever saw in my life. We found a shepherd and his little boy reading, far from any houses or sight of