On some Somerset Chap-Books.

BY EMANUEL GREEN.

THE following list of little pamphlets, or chap-books, is selected as having a purely local interest. They were not printed for Somerset people only, but are specimens of a class of literature which formed, it must be remembered, at the time of issue, the chief, or perhaps the sole, reading, available to our ancestors in rural places. They were carried through the country by chap-men, or pedlars, themselves then almost the only means of communication with distant parts, and by them were either sold, or exchanged for some of the many things those parties are always ready to take. Some of them bear on the title "Price one penny, or exchanged for linen rags." One, printed at Norwich, was curiously marked, "Price one penny, but a halfpenny not refused." By the Germans they are expressively called Folks-books. Although extremely simple to us now, when studied collectively they teach some lessons, and aid in working out the social condition of the people of their time.

The first to be noticed is a very early and very curious one. It is entitled—and the title of these things is by no means the worst part of them,—

A True and most Dreadfull discourse of a woman possessed with the Deuill, who, in the likenesse of a headlesse Beare fetched her out of her Bedd, and in the presence of seven persons, most straungely roulled her thro three chambers and downe a high paire of staiers, on the fower and twentie of May last, 1584. At Dichet in Sommersetshire. A matter as miraculous as euer was seen in our time. (Wood block of the headless bear.) 4to, 1584.

This tells, that upon the ninth day of May, 1584, there was a yeoman of honest reputation dwelling at Dichet, three miles from Bruton, the "most auncient Towne within Somersetshire," who, being sick, had sent his wife into Gloucestershire to see to a farm which he had there, where she "staied one daie and some-

thing more." On her return she found her husband somewhat recovered, but for herself the visit seems to have produced a bad effect, as she began "to use very much idle talke," both about the farm, as well as "concerning an old groate which her sonne, a little boy, had found abought one weeke before." She thus continued until Tuesday, at night, when towards the morning she began again with "much vaine speech to disquiet her husbande." He, seeing her in such a troubled state, persuaded her to pray with him; but the "deuill, who alwaie doth builde his chappell so neare as hee maie to vexe God's Church," began to "put her in minde" to call "in most fearfull sorte," for the old groate, as also for her wedding ring. The husband, taking no notice of this, continued to pray that her spirit might be quieted; but the more he prayed, the louder she called; and he continuing to neglect her cries, she began to look on him "with a sterne and staring countenance." This so frightened him that he called for her sister and others, and these held her down, whilst she, struggling and foaming at the mouth, shook the bed and the chamber "in most straunge sorte." Recovering from this, she said she had been "to beat awaie a Beare, which to her thinking had no hed." After being fairly quiet for a week, on the Sunday, about midnight, it happened that the candle burned out, when suddenly she called to her husband that she saw "a strange thing like a snail, carrying fire in most wonderful sort." He then called in "his brother and her sister," who brought a candle, when the wife "waxed very fearfull," crying loudly, "Don't you see the Deuill." She was again desired to pray, that her faith might vanquish that troublesome party, but she only replied, "Well, if you see nothing now, you shall see something by and by." And so it happened that soon they saw a thing come to the bed "much like unto a Beare, but it had no head nor no taile." The husband seeing it, took a stool and struck it; but the blow sounded as if it were upon a feather bed. Then the apparition went to the wife, took her out of bed, "thrust her hed betwixt her legges, and so roulled

her in a rounde compasse, like an hoope, through three other chambers, and downe an high paire of staires into the hall," where he kept her a quarter of an hour. Whilst she was thus below, the husband and the others "durst not come down." There was, too, such a horrible stink in the hall, and such "fierie flames," they were glad to stop their noses with cloths. Suddenly the woman cried, "Now he is gone," and came upstairs again. She was put to bed, but it was noticed that the candle burned so very dimly that the room was nearly in darkness. In this obscurity, without warning, the window mysteriously opened, the woman jumped from her bed, and her "legges, after a marveilous maner," were thrust out and clasped about the post dividing the window, then her feet were knocked "as it had been upon a Tubbe," and all saw a great fire, the "stinke whereof was horrible." After this the candle burned brightly, and the woman cried for forgiveness of all her sins, &c.

Many learned men went to see the case, amongst them being "Maister" Doctor Cottington, parson of Ditchett, and "Maister" Nicholles, preacher of Bruton, with others, chiefly preachers from the places near. The conclusion declares that the story is not a "fained fable," but a warning against all wickedness. As with most of these little things, there is a moral attached, that intended here being that, the "beloved and curious" reader should remember how ready Satan is to take hold of us.

These assurances of verity cannot now be questioned; but it happens that this same story was reprinted in 1614, with some omissions to make the relation appear recent. The title also differs, being now—

A Miracle of Miracles, as fearfull as euer was seene or heard of in the Memorie of Man, which lately happened at Dichet in Sommersetshire, and sent by diuers credible witnesses to be published in London. (Woodcut of the woman in bed, the headless bear appearing.) 4to, 1614.

This consists of five leaves, including the title, and is the same as that of 1584, the date, and names of the parson and preacher being omitted. There are, however, seven witnesses, that "it

is most true." This habit of attaching many names as witnesses is curious, and well noticed in the Winter's Tale. "I love a ballad in print," says Mopsa; "Is it true, think you?" "The ballad is very pitiful and true," is the pedlar's answer; "Five justices' hands to it, and witnesses, more than my pack will hold."

Next is a story which has the appearance of truth, and which evidently circulated well :

A true report of certaine wonderfull ouerflowings of Waters, now lately in Summerset-shire, Norfolke, and other places in England; destroying many thousands of men, women, and children; ouerthrowing and beating downe whole townes and villages, and drowning infinite numbers of sheepe and other cattle. (Black letter.) 4to, 1607. Woodcut frontispiece, representing the flood, cattle swimming, &c.

Another account runs—

More strange newes of wonderfull accidents hapning by the late ouerflowings of Waters in Summersetshire, Gloucestershire, Norfolke, and other places in England: with a true Relation of the Townes' names that are lost, and the number of persons drowned, with other reports of accidents that were not before discouered, happening about Bristow and Barstable. Frontispiece, representing the flood, and labelled—Behold the miserable estate of these poor drowned creatures. (Black letter.) 4to, 1607.

A third, of the same size and date, is—

God's Warning to his people of England. Wherein is related His most VVonderfull and Miraculous Works, by the late ouerflowing of the Waters in the Countryes of Sommerset and Glovcester, the Counties of Mvnmoth, Glamorgan, Carmarthen, and Cardigan, with diuers other places in South Wales. Wherein is described the great losses, and Wonderfull damages, that hapned thereby, by the drowning of many Townes and Villages, to the Vtter Vndooing of many thousandes of People. (Black letter). 4to, 1607.

From these accounts it is learned that, by the breaking of the bank at Burnham, some thirty villages were utterly overflowed, and their cattle destroyed, besides men, "wemen," and children. Suddenly, without notice, the country, for twenty miles by five, was flooded to the depth of eleven or twelve feet; the deepest part being at Kingston Seymore. At Huntspill twenty-eight were drowned, the place being quite covered, as also was a great part of Barrow, Marke, Limpsham, South Brent, East Brent, and Vole. Brean was "swallowed up." Of nine houses there,

seven were destroyed, and with them twenty-six persons lost their lives. It was the same with Alstone Marris, Yatton, and the hamlet of Puxtone. Of Combsbury, a great part was "hidden in the sea." Besides these, Worle, Cewstocke, Banwell, Wieck, Clyvedon, Portshed, Portbury, Weston-super-Mare, Saint Georges and Stauenge, all suffered. At Uphill eleven were drowned. Ken was "almost out of Kenning." In this parish stood a "fair large building," belonging to the Lady Straunge, into which all were invited to shelter. The horses stood in the hall, above their middle in water. It happened to one, "a man of good estate, but no gentleman, his name John Good of Breane," to have five children and his wife all cast away, and all his servants, nine or ten in number. In Berrow, a maid coming from milking was "round about beset," and climbing up a bank, remained there twenty-four hours; the rats, mice, and "wants" being in swarms about her to save their lives. All this blew profit to some, as seafaring men came in boats, and went richly laden away. Others, "sheep byters," killed the sheep for their tallow only, leaving the carcasses. The oxen, as they swam about, looked like whales, and the noise they made was like a tempest. Conies sought safety on the backs of the sheep, but at last were drowned with them. As soon as possible, five hundred men, at twelvepence a day, were put to work at Burnham, and the whole district began to repair damages, the justices helping, not with their eyes only, but also with their hands.

Next comes a good and interesting specimen—

The Charitable Farmer of Somersetshire: or, God's Great and Wonderful Work. Being a True Relation of an Honest Godly Man, that lived at Welling, within three miles of the City of Wells, which sold his Wheat to poor people at Six Shillings a Bushel, when the market price was Ten and Eleven Shillings, for which he was much derided and scoft at by his Rich Neighbours; but was recompenced by an extraordinary Crap of Wheat, the like never before heard of, each Stolk of Straw having divers full large Ears, some Seven, some Eight, Nine, and Ten, so to Thirteen; but generally Ten ears on every Straw throughout the Field, which was Ten Acres and upwards, of which divers Ears are to be seen at divers

Coffee houses in the City of London. Likewise a pattern for all Covetous Greedy-minded men to be Charitable unto their poor Neighbours, from the consideration of so Remarkable an Example. 4to, 1674.

Here it is told that in 1673 there was a great scarcity of corn. The poor were obliged to make bread of peas and beans; but this was so hard, a hatchet was necessary to chop it to pieces. In their great distress and trial they went into the markets, cut to pieces the sacks of the farmers, and filled their own pockets with the grain. It was this great privation and misery which prompted the action of the Somerset farmer, and produced to him such a bountiful return. Some of the ears of his crop were shown in the coffee houses, as many "be more like Jews than Christians, and will believe only what their eyes do see."

This was also published as a single sheet ballad, consisting of twenty verses, black letter. The title is then—

God's Great and Wonderful Work in Somerset-shire, the charitable Farmer miraculously rewarded. Happening at Welling, within three miles of the City of Wells this last Harvest, where an Honest Godly Farmer, having sold most part of this last Summer and Winter great quantities of Corn to the poor in their distress at five or six shillings the Bushel, when the Market price was ten and eleven shillings; for which he was much derided and scoft at by his Rich Neighbours, he was recompensed by an extraordinary crop of Wheat, the like was never before heard of; each stalk of straw having divers full large ears, some nine, ten, and thirteen, but generally ten ears on every straw throughout the field, which was ten Acres and upwards; of which ears are to be seen at divers Coffee houses by the Royal Exchange, and at other places in London, Published as a grateful acknowledgment of the goodness of Providence, and to stir up all into Faith in God, and charity towards their poor Neighbours from the consideration of so Remarkable an example. The tune is, Aim not too High. (Woodcut, showing the field.)

One-fourth of the sheet is occupied by the woodcut and one-fourth by the title, the lower half being the ballad; which tells us that—

> In Somersetshire an honest man do dwell,
> Who always loved poor people very well;
> When some beguile widow and fatherless,
> This man relieved many in distress.

For this same man had such a crop of wheat
The like no mortal man before did reap;
Nine, ten, eleven, and thirteen ears it yield
On every stalk or straw throughout the field.

Hundreds of people round about there came
To see this wonder that heard of its Fame;
Both old and young, both rich and poor doth cry,
The like was never seen with mortal eye.

So to conclude of this here I have pen'd,
Hoping the truth does no body offend;
But keep in mind still what to you I say,
The king and beggar both are lumps of clay.

In 1674, too, apparently by the same author, and evidently intended to create a wide interest, came out—

Strange and True News from Lincolnshire, Huntingdon-shire, Bedford-shire, Northampton-shire, Suffolk, and Norfolk, with Wiltshire, and Summersetshire, and many other places. Being a true Relation of the Great and many Floods and Inundations that happened in England in December, and January, and March, 1674. The Smothering of People in Snow, the Drowning of many Cattel, the beating down of Bridges and Houses, the washing up of Corn by the Roots, and drowning of many People. To the Great Loss and Grief of many Hundreds in this Nation. Also an account of many great Waters, that happened in the Reigns of Henry the 3rd, Edward the 2nd, Henry the 4th, Henry the 6th, Richard the 3rd, Henry 7th, Henry the 8th, Queen Mary; and the unmercifull Waters that fell in King James's Reign: as the Book within doth largely make mention. 4to, 1674.

So far as this concerns Somerset, it is simply a revival of the flood stories of 1607.

Monstrous births form a frequent subject for these issues. In 1576 there was printed—

The Description of a Monstrous Female Childe borne at Taunton, 8 Novemb, 1576.

This was licensed to Hugh Jackson in the year named, and is thus the earliest known of these things relating to Somerset. Another, very similar, appeared in 1681—

A True Relation of a monstrous Female Child, born at Ile Brewers, near Taunton Dean in Somersetshire.

Notwithstanding the similarity of title, this was not the same. It was simply a double birth, joined at the breast, and was a fact, as it is noticed in the *Philosophical Transactions* of that date.

Next in order of time comes—

Strange and Wonderful News from Exeter: giving an account of the Dreadful Apparitions that was seen by Mr. Jacob Seley on Monday, September the 22th, 1690, who gave the full account to the Judges the next day, who were going the Western Circuit.

The traveller, going to Taunton, stopped at an inn and called for a pot of beer and a noggin of brandy. Proceeding on his way he met a country-like farmer, whom he was persuaded to accompany three miles, on the promise of good lodging. Presently the farmer and his horse vanished away, and immediately there appeared a hundred or two—men, women, and children; "some like judges, some like magistrates, some like clergymen, and some like country people." The last made at the stranger with spears, upon which he adjured them in the name of the Trinity. Of this they took no notice, but covered him with a net. Then he alighted off his horse, and when he let go the bridle the horse disappeared, and he never saw him more. In this plight he waited till four in the morning, and, being constantly attacked, thrust at his assailants with his sword, finding nothing but shadow, though he presently perceived a "man was cut, and his four fingers hung by the skin, and a woman was cut in the forehead, leaving blood upon the sword." After this came along ten funerals, one after the other; then two bodies were dragged along, both apparently just slain. In the morning the traveller got away, and happening to meet the Judges on their way to Wells, he gave them an account of his adventure.

If anyone wished to be satisfied of the truth of this story, he was to go to Mr. William Brown, next door to the Windsor Castle, Charing Cross.

Omitting to notice the consumption of beer and brandy, the narrator suddenly remembers, "'tis remarkable" that on the sign post of the inn one of Monmouth's men was hanged, and that about there several were buried who had been either killed or executed.

This class of publication seems to have increased towards the year 1700. At that time we have—

Dreadful News from Taunton Dean. God's Judgments against Jealous Persons: being the whole account of the most Horrid Murder, committed by Sir William Watts, who most cruelly murdered his Lady and two small children; for which he was tried and cast at the last Assizes, and executed for the same. With the solemn declaration he made at the Place of Execution, and the substance of a Sermon preached by the Rev. Dr. Russell. 8vo, 1700. Reprinted, 12mo, 1815.

In the parish of Milverton lived Sir William Watts, of good estate, about twenty-eight years of age, who, having married a lady of the neighbourhood, lived happily with her and their three children, until "the devil raised such a spirit of jealousy in him that he could not rest, day nor night." His love thus turned to hatred. As he was walking in the fields, meditating how he could murder her, the devil appeared to him in the form of a nobleman, and asked him his trouble, adding, without apparently waiting for a reply, that he knew he thought his wife unfaithful, and her children not his, which, said he, "I know to be true," for "mine were the very same, but I went home and murdered them all." Mutual sympathy being now established, the devil assures him that he lives happily beyond seas, thus opening a prospect for his friend. Watts then goes home, murders his wife and children, and eventually is hanged at Taunton. Moral: Had he gone to hear more good sermons, and avoided jealousy, his end might have been different. This relation is "certified to be true," by Sir Henry Betterton, Sir John Farrington, Humphry Broom, Samuel Fisher, Robert Ashford, James Jeffries, and John Bentley, Esqrs.

In the same year, 1700, was also published—

A Strange and Wonderful (Yet True) Relation of the Cursed and Hellish Design of Abraham Mason, a pretended Quaker, to give himself to the Devil, with the manner how he would have done it, and how strangely he was prevented. Also an account of his behaviour afterwards, and of his strange death.

This tells that in Chard there lived one Abraham Mason, who, being unsettled in his religion, at last joined the Quakers. By trade he was a bookseller, also a confectioner, and a practitioner in physic and surgery. His wife hated his religion, and, being

jealous of him, was "a watchful woman, and would search into all his ways." She thus perplexing him, he was one day in a profound study, wishing he could have some discourse with the devil, when a gentleman entered his shop, and seeing him melancholy, enquired the reason. At first the Quaker answered little, but finding the stranger well read, he told him that he had a mind to see the devil, but knew not how to raise him, and "lay him again." The gentleman persuaded him against such a design, but finding him fully bent on it, he promised to consider the matter, and to help him if possible. On his return home he told the story to his brother, and the two planned that the Quaker should be promised all that he wished. The first of the brothers then walked with the Quaker to Hazlecombe, having sent forward a man with a puppy, to be placed in a bush of curious form there. As they approached the bush the Quaker was bid look in it, and he would see the devil in the form of a puppy. Finding this was true, he was satisfied that his companion could raise him, and agreed to a meeting three nights after, at eleven o'clock, in a stone quarry near, when it was promised he should speak with him. The brothers now got two men to assist them, one as the Devil, the other as a Friar. He for the Devil carried a great ring, having several horses' tails attached, with, on his face a hare's skin, and on his head a lanthorn. The Friar carried a staff and bell, and sprinkled gunpowder and brimstone about the pit. The Quaker being brought to the spot, after some incantation, the smoke of brimstone came up; then, after more words, came up the Friar, and demanded who wanted Beelzebub. "Return, return," said the conjuror, "and tell him it is I who would speak with him." Beelzebub appearing, the Quaker made his requests, asking for power over all women's tongues; for power to make all sick or well, as he pleased, and for the philosopher's stone. In return he promised to give himself, and also a bag which he held in his hand. The latter he was bid throw over his left shoulder, and this he did. Then he was bid pull off his left boot; but now refusing, the

gunpowder was ignited and the chains rattled. Seeing and hearing this, the Quaker bolted, and jumped a stile which at other times he could hardly scramble over. The bag was found to contain forty shillings, which were spent on a merry breakfast. The Quaker, who always refused to believe himself hoaxed, was not seen in his shop for several months. After moping thus for some time, he fell down stairs and broke his neck, so ending the life of a wicked wretch, who, having not the fear of God before his eyes, would have sold himself to the devil.

Next is one which was published both in pamphlet and ballad form—

The Somersetshire Demon; or a Wonderful but True Narrative of the Calamities lately befallen a Farmer in Somersetshire, through Witchcraft: Whose Son is bewitched, as appears by horrible Fits; His House haunted with strange Disorders; His Houses, Barns, Hay Mows, and Stables, at several times in April last burnt down, with many very strange Circumstances attending it. 1704.

Here, the son of a farmer at Wotton, near the antient town of Glastonbury, during his father's absence at church, went to rob the hen roost; but on his return to the house was surprised to find eggs already in the pot, although nobody had been near. Just then the father returned, and learning the story, ordered the eggs not to be eaten. The boy, however, in his greediness, seized one and ate it. Soon he began to vomit bits of glass, iron nails, and a pear stuck full of thorns. The next night his hair was cut off, lock by lock, neither hand nor scissors being visible; and afterwards he was pulled up the chimney. Then the house was stoned, the stones rising by themselves from the ground; some of them were hot. Next the apple trees were split, the doors refused to remain shut, something like a great bear jumped on the bacon rack, the bed cords were cut, and the reaping hooks twisted like screws. Eventually the farm was burned down, nobody knowing how the fire came.

The ballad is entitled—

The Somersetshire Wonder, or late dreadful Judgements which hapened upon the Family of Mr. Pope of Wotton, near Glastenbury, in the said County. To the time of the Bleeding Heart.

It is decorated with three woodcuts, and consists of twenty-four verses, beginning—

> Good people all that round about me stand,
> Pray mind the strange afflictions in this land;
> Such wonders scarce before has ever been,
> In Somersetshire at Wotton they were seen.

So the whole story is told, verse by verse.

In 1723 came a narrative which seems to have been very successful, as three editions were issued. It professes to be sold by, and for the benefit of, the author—

The Great Mercy and Power of God in Succouring the Tempted; Wonderfully Manifested in the Case of Edward Millard, of Langport, in the County of Somerset. Recollected and written by himself, and published for a Memorial of the Glory of God and the Benefit and Instruction of all those who may labour under the like Temptations.

The second edition is undated, but was about 1725—

The Strange and Surprising Case of Edward Millard: shewing the fearful effects of his rash Vows and Promises, under Convictions; how by relapsing into Sin after Repentance he fell into Despair. Wherein the Great Mercy and Power of God hath been manifested in a wonderful manner, in Succouring and supporting him under his inward Terrors and Temptations. Recollected and Written by Himself, and published for a Memorial to the Glory of God; and a Warning to all Carnal Professors, and Profane Scoffers.

Another and later edition, also undated, reads—

A Brief and True Relation of the Surprising Case of Edward Millard, of Langport, in the County of Somerset. Shewing the fearful Tragedy of his Life, and his hard conflict with the powers of Darkness; wherein the Great Mercy and Power of God hath been manifested in a wonderful manner in succouring the Tempted and Despairing Soul. Recollected and written by Himself, and published for a Memorial to the Glory of God, and the Benefit and Instruction of all those who may Labour under the like Temptations.
2nd Edition, with large additions, wherein the causes of his Misery is more largely set forth.

The story told here is of his sinful beginning, his terror and miserable torture and reformation. Sometimes he was tempted to cut his throat, or drown himself; sometimes he beat his head against the wall, and "by that means hurt his skull and brain." Once he was tempted to throw himself out of window, but, on looking down, saw the ground on fire, and flaming as Hell before

him; "whereupon he was filled with fear, and drew back." All of which, "after much wrestling," he considered was from the Lord; and so, being reduced to great extremity by his affliction, he made it known to the world.

Returning to the ghostly, in 1788 was produced—

An Account of the Apparition of the Ghost of Major George Sydenham (late of Dulverton in the county of Somerset) to Captain Wm. Dyke (late of Skilgate, in the county of Somerset also, and now likewise deceased), as it is related by a worthy and learned gentleman, called Doctor Thomas Dyke, a near kinsman of the Captain's.

The Doctor being sent for to the house of the late Major to see a child, on his way, called on, and took with him the Captain, who mentioned to him an argument he had had with the Major about the existence of a God, and a mutual promise that he who died first should return, and give the other a full account of his experiences, adding, "I am come on purpose to night to hear it." During the night the two went to the trysting place in the garden, but nothing was seen. Later, however, when the Captain was at Eaton, having taken there his two sons, the Major came suddenly to his bedside, and of course tells him that there was a God, and that he had better turn over a new leaf. The Captain, being terribly frightened, was never the same brisk and jovial man again, and died in about two years.

A curious little thing, on a favourite subject, was issued about 1790—

The Second Spira; or the Blasphemers Reproved. Setting forth an example of God's Judgments on Six Profane Young Men at Brodney in Somersetshire. To which is added a Sermon preached on the occasion by the Reverend Mr. Simmons.

Of this there are three editions, one of 1810 having a woodcut of the six young men. It consists of two leaves only; one being occupied with the story, the other with the sermon. These young men, having long given themselves to a wild course of life, went into the churchyard at midnight, carrying with them wine and bread, intending to take the sacrament in the name of the Devil. As they were preparing, a voice was heard warning

them to turn and repent. Although all heard it, they were proceeding with their plan, when there arose such dreadful and astonishing cries, bellowings and dismal groans, that Mr. Simmons, living near, was awoke, and got up to see what had occurred. He saw the wine and the bread, but nobody with it, and so went to bed again. But next morning the young men were found lying about in a most deplorable condition, blood running from their mouths and ears, &c.

From Banbury, about 1820, was supplied a "large assortment of Godly books, Patters, and old sheet ballads," &c. One of these was—

The Proud Squire Reformed: being a great example both to Rich and Poor. In a account of one Squire Howard, living near the town of Chard in Somerset. How he was in his Grove, where he saw at a distance a poor labouring man by the side of a brook, eating bread and drinking water, to satisfy his hunger and thirst, and then returning thanks to God for it. Here is likewise an account of the poor man's death, and the strange manner of the Squire's Reformation: when returning homewards, how he heard a noise, and an angel appeared, and told him the richest man in the parish should die that night; and how charitable the Squire is to the poor and industrious people in general. Several respectable Persons in the said parish can testify the truth hereof.

There are four woodcuts—a horse, an angel, Father Time, and the squire kneeling at prayer. It is a ballad of twenty-three verses, beginning—

> Of all the Poems we have read of late,
> To remind us of our charge and future state,
> The subject which I now am to unfold,
> Is worthy to be penn'd in lines of gold.

So it goes on to tell how the proud Squire, looking on all other people with disdain, whilst walking in his grove one day, was watching a poor man thank God for his crust and then go contentedly to his work, when he heard a voice say that the richest man in that parish would die that night. Taking this to mean himself, he went home trembling, told his wife, and went to bed.

> She watched him all night, but when 'twas day,
> Alive in health before them there he lay.

Just then the great bell began to toll, when the squire cried,

Who's dead? go ask and see,
That I may know, who richer was, than me.

On finding it to be the poor man he had seen the day before, he cursed all pomp and gaudy rich attire, and vowed

T'was folly to prize earth's fading store,
With great possessions, to be a man that's poor.

From this time he declared,

In mourning I will appear,
Leaving myself but fifty pounds a year
To live upon, the rest I'll daily give
Unto the parish poor whilst I do live.

A few were now printed in Bristol. The three named below are single sheets, and their titles sufficiently explain their contents.

A Particular Account of the singular and melancholy awful Death of Peter Holway, Farmer, at Hemlock, near Wellington, Somerset, whose Wife wished he might break his neck before he returned home, which happened accordingly.

The Truly Melancholy Death of William Brooks, of Berrington, in Somersetshire, who put a period to his existence by cutting his throat with a razor, at the Door of his Sweetheart, just as she was sitting down to her Wedding Dinner.

A True and Particular Account of the Melancholy Death of Josepa Gaskill, son of Mr. Gaskill, of Compton, who was unfortunately Blown to Pieces by standing too near the fire with Gunpowder in his pocket.

But the county of Somerset enjoys a special position in relation to these publications, as two of the earliest stories printed in England relate to it, and afterwards became very popular chap-books. First, there was the *Wife of Bath*, printed by Caxton in 1476, which in ballad form has had many editions; and then, but little later, that of *Joseph of Armathy*, printed by Wynkyn de Worde. This latter was popularised in several editions, beginning about 1740. It is called,

The Holy Disciple, or, the History of Joseph of Arimathea. Wherein is contained a true account of his Birth, his Parentage, his Country, his Education, his Piety, and his begging of Pontius Pilate the Body of our blessed Saviour after his Crucifixion, which he buried in a new Sepulchre of his own. Also the occasion of his coming to England, where he first preached the Gospel at Glastonbury in Somersetshire, where is still growing that noted White

Thorn which buds every Christmas day in the Morning, blossoms at Noon, and fades at Night, on the place where he pitched his Staff in the ground. With a full Relation of his Death and Burial. (Two woodcuts.) 12mo, Newcastle.

Joseph, as a boy, had a good memory and was quick of apprehension. Being appointed to go and preach the Gospel in England, he took shipping at Joppa, and after much difficulty and many storms, landed at Barrow Bay, and then proceeded to Glastonbury.

The Wife of Bath was much earlier in the field. An early, but not the earliest issue, is about the year 1670. It is a single sheet, printed in black letter, and has three woodcuts,—a lady, a walled city, and a man in robes with a sword. The title reads:

The Wanton Wife of Bath. The tune is Flying Fame.

Another edition, of about 1700, is—

The Wife of Beath much better Reformed, Enlarged and Corrected than it was formerly in the Old Copy. With the addition of many other things.

In later editions, the titles occasionally differ, thus, after several others, about 1805, there was—

The Wife of Beith, Reviv'd once more. Giving a new and enlarged account of her Life, Death, and Journey to Heaven, How she miss'd the Road and came to Hell, How the Devil and her were like to fight, Because he would not let her in, How at last she got the better at the flyting, and set off the second time for Heaven, flyting all the way, With the difficulties, torments, trials and sufferings she encountered in her journey. Also the swearing, fighting, blessing, cursing, flyting, &c., &c., &c., she got and gave before she was admitted. Moscow; printed for the Cossacks. (*i.e.* Stirling). 12mo.

All the examples here noticed are extremely rare, and for that among other reasons, are much valued by those who give the subject their special attention. Others could be named, some being designedly omitted as unsuited for remark. Their immediate predecessor was the ballad, printed on one side of a slip, as in Queen Elizabeth's time, or sung only, as up to the time of Queen Mary. Thus their origin must be sought before printing existed, in the story tellers of old. This class is still found in Italy gaining a livelihood by repeating some traditional, or per-

haps classical tale; or one entirely their "own make," based on some trifling event which has come to their knowledge, and which, as may be imagined, does not decrease either in mystery or interest in the telling. Even Chaucer's story of *The Wife of Bath*, the first printed and the most lastingly popular, is founded on a fable of the thirteenth century.

Since the introduction of our modern means of easy and constant intercommunication, this class of literature has declined; the daily press now, for the same price, supplying careful details of the horrible or nauseous, sufficient to satisfy the most morbid curiosity; and noting facts, more wonderful, in their truth, than any invention of the wildest fancy.