

John P. ...

# TRAVELLERS' TALES

OF

## WIGAN.

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IMPRESSIONS LEFT ON OLD TIME VISITORS.

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WIGAN :

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# TRAVELLERS' TALES OF WIGAN.

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Wigan stands on one of the great roads, and has had a long succession of visitors. The earliest extant map which portrays within its scope any part of Lancashire is one preserved in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and may probably be dated about 1300 A.D. The one road that it shows running through the county, on its way from London to Carlisle, appears to be the road by which we journey from Warrington to Preston, through Wigan. There is little doubt that this highway is one of the oldest in the country and goes back to the Roman occupation, and even beyond it to British times.

## WIGAN AS A "PORT OF CALL."

From very early days, therefore, Wigan must have been a "port of call" for passers-by to other centres. Not only was there the coming and going of townsman and neighbour to kirk and mart and fair. But the stranger from afar arrived, and looked round inquisitively before he journeyed on. Sometimes, but far too rarely, he recorded his impressions. A strange silence seals the lips of travellers about Wigan until the sixteenth century. Was there nothing to see and nothing to say? A veil lies over the land, and is not lifted. This applies not only to itineraries, but to surveys. Domesday Book may allude to Wigan, but does not name it. The Great Inquest of 1212 is dumb. Wigan might be the name of a god that men shrink from mentioning. In 1199 it is pronounced in the world of records for the first time, and then in connection with the Church. For long afterwards, apart from the Church and the Charters, it has no prominence.

## WHAT WE SHOULD LIKE TO KNOW.

There are some things we should like to have had: What Agricola thought of the natives gathered round his fort!—the Roman view of the Wigan collier! And Edward the Second's private journal, if he kept one, when in 1323 he stayed at Upholland, and traitors were tried before him in Wigan. Dignitaries, merchants, soldiers came by, from London to Lancaster, from Chester to Carlisle; but until the time of Leland nobody cares to tell us what he thinks of us. Even then the traveller's comment is somewhat scrappy. We lament this; but are glad to be noticed at all; for even a brief note by a passer-by may furnish a valuable contribution to the story of the town.

## HEYDAY OF HORSEBACK RIDING.

In the seventeenth century the visiting pilgrim grows somewhat more loquacious; and in the eighteenth there is a growing inclination for "Rural Rides," as Cobbett called them, and Descriptive Tours. It is the heyday of horseback riding, and inquisitive people go out to see the sights and tell others about them when they return. Burns thought it would be a good thing to see ourselves as others see us. In some degree it is helpful for towns as well as people to look in the glass. The eloquent patriotism of our civic functions is weightier and wiser when tempered by the judgment of outsiders. The native knows and loves his town, but the traveller may have a truer perspective. Would that we had attracted more shrewd observers and patient chroniclers among those thousands who have been our town's guests for an hour or a day in the age-long procession north and south. Some have given us more than a hasty glance as they rode through; and their kind greeting redeems from dulness many a page of our past story.

## LELAND'S PICTURE OF WIGAN.

We begin with John Leland, the antiquary, whose short breathless notes are valuable in default of information more extensive and coherent. Few were interested in topography in the days of Henry VIII.; roads were difficult,

and travel dangerous ; consequently little is known about the smaller northern towns. John Leland visited Wigan on his travels about 1536 ; and this is how the town impressed him :—

“ Wigan paved ; as big as Warrington and better builded. There is one parish church amid the town. Some merchants, some artificers, some farmers. Mr. Bradshaw hath a place called Hawo (Haigh), a mile from Wigan. He hath found much cannel like sea coal in his grounds ; very profitable to him ; and Gerard of Inco dweloth in that parish.” (Leland, *Itin.* vii., 47.)

That is all we got. One comprehensive glance from a trained observer ; and the traveller hurries on. But we are thankful for small mercies. Especially as he has given us one of the earliest references to the mining of cannel. About this, other travellers will tell us more.

#### “ SUMPTUOUS INNS ” BUILDED IN TOWNS.

There is a widespread belief, often quoted, that Raphael Holinshed, the chronicler, upon whose stories of knowledge Shakespeare drew, praised the hostelrys of Wigan. This rests on no sure ground. His description of inns and thoroughfares, about 1578, applies to England in general. “ Those towns which we call thoroughfares,” he begins, “ have great and sumptuous inns builded in them, for the receiving of such travellers as pass to and fro.” Then he describes the good inns, with their clean sheets and reasonable charges. The traveller on horseback pays nothing for his bed, the foot-passenger pays one penny. Each guest is given a key for his room. Then Holinshed portrays the bad inns where the master and his servants are rogues. He proceeds to furnish a list of the best thoroughfares and towns of greatest travel in England where there are inns (presumably good ones) such as he has described. Giving the way from Cockermouth to Lancaster and London, he mentions the mileage from Preston to Wigan, and from Wigan to Warrington. So that in his appreciation of good hostelrys he cannot truthfully be said to single

out Wigan for special commendation. (*Holinshed, Chron.* (ed. 1807) i., 414-5.)

#### THE COMMENT OF CAMDEN.

William Camden, the eminent antiquary, whose memory is perpetuated by the Camden Society, visited Lancashire several times when collecting materials for his famous survey of Britain. There is some evidence that his mother was a Lancashire woman, Elizabeth daughter of Giles Curwen of Poulton Hall. When a schoolmaster at Westminster he spent his holidays travelling about England; and in 1582 journeyed to Yorkshire returning through Lancashire. This was four years before the first edition of the "Britannia." Again in 1600 he travelled north as far as Carlisle. His second visit to Blackburn took place in 1603. He mentions his secret reluctance to visit the county, but without assigning any reason. He fears he will give little satisfaction to himself or his readers, so little encouragement did he receive when he surveyed much the greater part of this county, since time had so completely destroyed everywhere the original names of places. However he praises the cattle and the people of the county. You may determine the goodness of the shire, he says, by the temperament of the inhabitants, who are extremely comely, and also from the cattle; and he goes on to describe the latter. Camden commends also the frugality of the northern gentry. While in the south families deriving their names from a local manor have died out, largely through their dissipation and extravagance, he notes that in Lancashire, Ashton of Ashton, Standish of Standish, Bold of Bold, and other local families still continue. His comment on Wigan is: "The river Douglas glides along here, on whose banks our Arthur, as Ninnius reports, gave the Saxons a memorable overthrow." He states that according to some Wigan was anciently called Wibiggin "Of this I have nothing to observe but that biggin is a Lancashire word for houses," he adds. The town is neat and populous, says Camden, and a Corporation consisting of the mayor and burgesses; and the rector of the Church was, as he had been told, lord of the town.

Two of the items in Camden's account are worth a moment's thought; his reference to King Arthur and his note on the name Wigan. As to King Arthur: Nennius in his "History of the Britons," speaks of twelve victories which Arthur won, four of them being on the banks of the Douglas. There are other rivers of this name; but as early as the fourteenth century Higden said that the Wigan Douglas was the stream referred to by Nennius. Such a story is intriguing, especially when we remember how many British place-names there are in the locality. But the whole subject is enveloped in great obscurity, and King Arthur himself belongs to the realm of legend, rather than to that of ascertained history. Camden was a pioneer in the study of place-names—a study which yields probable, rather than certain results. Some of his conjectures in this field were undoubtedly wide of the mark. His report that the ancient name of the town was "Wibiggin" must be rejected. No ancient document is known to give that form, which arose perhaps from the misreading of a deed. People will go on guessing at the origin of the name Wigan. The most probable meaning to my mind is just "buildings," from the Latin "vicus," Welsh root "gwig" and Anglo-Saxon "wick." This simple significance, if true, attests the ancient foundation of the place. (Camden, *Brit.* (ed. Gough) III., 27, 128, 129.)

#### VISIT OF THREE GENTLEMEN OF NORWICH.

A journey into the North of England was undertaken by three gentlemen belonging to Norwich in the year 1634. They were officers of the Military Company in Norwich, and although their journal has a pretentious title beginning "A Short Survey of Twenty-six Counties," it is evident that they were sightseers out for a good time, rather than scholars concerned in collecting careful information. Still the informal and lively account of their adventures is welcome and useful. Near to Wigan they were benighted and lost their way in a place where there were many coal pits (probably Standish or Shevington). Of the presence of the pits they were warned by the snuffing of their horses. Which-

ever way they looked they were led to those Tartarean cells. At last the melodious sound of a sweet cornet arrested their ears, and they were guided through woods from this darksome haunted place by the sound thereof to a stately fair house (probably Standish Hall) belonging a gentleman who was High Sheriff of that good rich shire this year. Into whose custody the three travellers would have committed themselves, but they understood that his house was that night full of strangers. So they went on to Wigan. They got a guide to direct them over a small river into the town, where they arrived late and weary and rested that night. They had fair quarters afforded them by a fat honest host, an alderman and a jovial blade. His own castle, so the travellers wittily describe it, was full; we are not told whether it was a hostelry or a private house. But he billeted the travellers at his neighbour's over the way, in two sumptuous chambers, where they all slept soundly after that day's "enchantment."

#### "A WHISKIN OF WIGGAN ALE."

Next morning they went to the Church to hear Morning Prayer, and the musical instrument described as "their fair organs." They looked round the Church, which they describe as now built by the Bishop of that See (i.e., Dr. Bridgeman) who was incumbent. And "a good parsonage it is," exclaim the travellers, for it is worth £600 a year. It will be remembered that Dr. Bridgeman had rebuilt the Church in part. There the visitors inspected some ancient monuments belonging to the Bradahagh family. After which they hastened home to their host, "our jovial alderman." But he intercepted them in the fair market-place, and accompanied by a "noble boone parson" (that is, a bountiful or merry parson, a boon companion), another honest gentleman, and the organist. These four representatives of Church and borough kindly invited the travellers to join them in their morning drink. This is called "A whiskin of Wiggan ale, which they as heartily and merrily whiskt off, as freely and liberally they called for it." A whiskin is a shallow drinking bowl. The scribe makes the comment that better

ale and better company no travellers could desire; then he returns to the subject of the noble parson, and attempts to make a joke about him. "I dare say he was no ordinary parson, neither in his condition nor calling." The seal he carried was evidence that he was an archdeacon, so much for his condition or rank. And as to his calling, quoth the scribe, what he called for he freely paid for. There were other men of his coat, he adds, gonorous like himself—surely some of his neighbours into whom he had infused such a courteous spirit.

#### CANNEL PLATE AS A PRESENT.

We may surmise that the archdeacon so described was Dr. Snell, rector of Waverton, a friend of the Bridgeman family. Customs have changed since the three travellers joked about the dignitary's calling, when they saw him "calling" for drink at a tavern.

The company got on so well that they decided to have breakfast together. They also visited the organist's house, playfully called his "palace," and heard his domestic organs and viols, to the accompaniment of which the whole merry company sweetly sang. Afterwards they all visited the Haigh Hall estate, sweetly situated on the top of a hill, and worth the viewing for its gardens, walks and other strange contentings. They were urged to stay longer at Wigan, and would have consented, but had arranged to put up at Chester. At the farwell the honest parson is again in evidence. He would not let the strangers go without a special token and badge of his love. It was not, however, this time, a whislin of Wigan ale, but a piece of cannel plate. This is perhaps the first mention of the local custom of carving cannel coal into ornaments. (Lansdowne MSS. *Brit. Mus.* No. 213.)

#### CROMWELL'S ACCOUNT OF WIGAN BATTLE.

The jovial side of Wigan life, which so deeply impressed the Norfolk officers, could be amply illustrated from other records. But serious days were at hand. The very next year the town was deep in controversy about the Ship Money. In



less than a decade the Civil War broke out, with famine and plague in its train. The most familiar travellers now were those that came armed; among them we single out Cromwell, because of the memorable things he said about the roads and the town. It was the second chapter of the war. The Presbyterians aided by the Scots rose against the Independents in the army. In the cause of the captive King the Duke of Hamilton came south with an immense army; near him at Preston was his ally, Sir Marmaduke Langdale. Cromwell made his "lion spring" as Gardiner puts it, across the hills from Yorkshire, caught them unawares, and cut their host in two. The battle lasted for three days and extended from Longridge to Warrington. It began on the 17th August, 1648, and it was on the next day that Cromwell, sword in hand, flogged his beaten foes to the confines of Wigan; rested awhile at night in the fields outside, then on the 19th came through and caught up the Royalists at the Mersey, finishing a running fight of thirty miles. Writing from Warrington on the 20th, to give the Speaker of the House an account of the battle, Cromwell said:—

"Our horse still prosecuted the enemy, killing and taking divers all the way. At last the enemy drew up within three miles of Wiggon, and by that time our army was come up, they drew off again, and recovered Wiggon, before we could attempt anything upon them. We lay all that night (18th August) in the field close by the enemy, being very dirty and woary, and having marched twelve miles of such ground as I never rode in all my life, the day being very wet. We had some skirmishing that night with the enemy near the town."

#### "A GREAT AND POOR TOWN."

Cromwell mentions the names of officers captured near Wigan, and says that the Duke left his kinsman Colonel Hamilton wounded at Wigan, and sent a letter to Cromwell asking for civil usage towards his relative. "The next morning," he proceeds, "the enemy marched towards Warrington, and we at the heels of them. The town of Wiggon a great and poor town, and very malignant, were plundered almost to their skins by them." We note

Cromwell's criticism of the roads. This bitter cry of all travellers went up for centuries before there was any determined attempt to remedy the wrong. The "greatness" of Wigan also impressed Cromwell, one supposes its size and extent exceeded what he had heard. But it was great and poor. No wonder! Its position on a main road, made it a thoroughfare for armies, which in those days lived by levies and raids on the country through which they passed. Cromwell also observes that though the place was very malignant, by which he means excessively Royalist in sympathy, yet it was plundered almost to the skin by the retreating Scots. They were, in fact, bound to take from their friends as well as their foes, or starve. (Cromwell, *Letters*, ed. Carlyle, II. 34.)

#### SEVEN TIMES PLUNDERED.

The misery and confusion wrought by Civil War are nowhere more poignantly illustrated than in the story of Wigan. A petition, when the war was over, stated that the town had been seven times plundered. The very next year after Cromwell came, and that was by no means the last or worst year of Wigan's sorrows, the mayor appealed for the help of London to succour a locality chastened by the three-fold scourge of sword, pestilence and famine. All trade was gone. The plague, carried there by wounded Parliamentary soldiers left in the town for treatment, had raged for three years. There were swarms of beggars, and the starved were dying in the streets. No wonder Cromwell emphasised the poverty of the town.

#### FULLER'S STORY OF FISHES IN THE EARTH.

Thomas Fuller, English clergyman, wit, and historian, was a remarkable personality, and led an adventurous life during the stormy times of the Civil War. For a time he was chaplain to a Royalist regiment, and afterwards curate of Waltham Abbey and lecturer at the Savoy. He had a marvellous memory; and could walk round London, and then repeat all the signs in the city. There is no record of his travelling north, but he may have done; for he describes

Manchester buildings as if he had seen them. In the "Worthies of England," published in 1682 after his death, he tells a curious story:—

"About Wigan, and elsewhere in this county, men go a-fishing with spades and mathooks, more likely one would think to catch moles than fishes with such instruments. First, they pierce the turfy ground, and under it meet with a black and deadish water, and in it small fishes do swim." This sounds like a traveller's tale, and a fisherman's tale to boot!

Edward Baines said that Fuller was referring to the catching of eels in moss ditches, and added that the practice still prevailed (in 1825); and that a trident fork was used for the purpose. The difficulty about this explanation is that surely Fuller had heard of eels, and if he meant them would have said so. Michael Drayton, it appears, and Baines quotes this, has a reference to turf diggers finding "fish living in the earth contrary to their kind."

Fuller closes his anecdote with a homily. After saying that "an unctuous matter" is found round these queer fish, he moralises:—"Let them be thankful to God in the first place that need not such meat to feed upon. And next them, let those be thankful who have such meat to feed upon when they need it." (Fuller, *Worthies* (ed. 1840), ii., 191.)

#### NOTED FOR ITS PIT COAL.

John Ogilby, who rejoiced in the proud title of Cosmographer to His Majesty Charles the Second, made a survey of the roads from London to Carlisle about the year 1670. The whole of this distance was by vulgar computation, 235 miles; but Ogilby measured it and made it 301 miles 2 furlongs—a difference of over 66 miles. No wonder Miss Fiennes afterwards found the local miles so long, they were not measured but computed; or, if measured, they were long miles, estimated by some local standard. The extent of the pole varied even in adjoining townships. Cromwell called it 12 miles from Preston to Wigan; Ogilby made it 16 miles 4 furlongs. Ogilby's map is another witness to the antiquity of our present road. Coming from Winwick one crossed the Douglas at Adam Bridge. North of

Leyland Lane, as we call it, on the way from Wigan to Standish, Ogilby marked "the butts" on his map, and the small squares seem to denote butts for archery. Further north was an inn marked "Roebuck," evidently the predecessor of Cherry Gardens.

Ogilby condenses his account of Wigan into a few words. He calls it a well-built town:—

"Governed by a Mayor, Recorder, twelve Aldermen, and electing Parliament-Men. It has two Markets, on Monday and Friday, but the former is discontinued; with three fairs, and is noted for its Pit Coal, Iron-Works, and other Manufactures."

The term Iron-Works seems to give us a definite date as to the smelting of iron. So much for the King's cosmographer. (Ogilby, *Maps*, ed. 1698, p. 18, map 37.)

#### A LADY IN THE SADDLE.

The next notable traveller whose tale of Wigan we will stop to hear is a lady, Colia Fiennes. Unlike Cromwell and Fuller, she is unknown to fame, except that her diary has been published under the title, "Through England on a Side Saddle in the time of William and Mary." She was the daughter of a Parliamentary officer, and the only date she mentions is 1695. The country was recovering from the Civil War, and had also safely passed the Revolution. Of Manchester Miss Fiennes remarks "This is a busy place," and tells us that Liverpool is a London in miniature. She is interested in buildings and curiosities; but says little of the trade of the northern towns. Approaching Wigan from Knowsley she complains of the stony way, and hints that the Lancashire mile is longer than the ordinary mile. By reason of the "tediousness of the miles for length" she was five hours going fourteen miles, and could have ridden 30 miles in the neighbourhood of London in the same time. She avoided going by Ormskirk, as it was getting dusk, and people believed it hazardous for strangers to approach Martin Mere. Concerning this mere she quotes the proverb that "it has parted many a man and his mare."

It will be noticed, however, that the same proverb is applied to the sands between Kent and Keer, and perhaps to other places as well. So Miss Fiennes comes to Wigan.

#### A PRETTY MARKET TOWN.

"Wiggons," she says "is another pretty market town built of stone and brick: here it is that the fine Channell Coales are in perfection—burns as light as a candle—set the coals together with some fire and it shall give a snap and burn up light. Of this coale they make salt cellars, stand-dishes and many boxes and things which are sent about for curiositys and sold in London, and are often offered in the Exchange in company with white or black marble, and most people are deceived by thom which have not been in those countries and know it. But such persons discover it and will call for a candle to try them whether marble or coal. It is very finely polished, and looks much like jet or ebony wood, for which we might easily take it when in boxes, etc., etc. I bought some of thom for curiosity sake."

#### WELL THAT "BURNT LIKE BRANDY."

Miss Fiennes was also captivated by the Burning Well, which she is one of the first to describe. It lay, she says, two miles from Wigan on the way to Warrington. It looked a sorry hole full of dirt. It bubbled, but was yet cold to the touch. When set on fire, it burnt like brandy. She describes Haigh, Sir John Bradshagh's house, on the declining of a hill in the midst of a fine grove of trees; and mentions the monument to Sir Thomas Tyldesley as a carved pillar surmounted by a ball and bearing an inscription. Concerning Tyldesley's death (she does not name him) she says that the officer commemorated was one whose horse was terrified by the guns during a fight, and threw him, so that he fell on his own sword and was killed. The only other comment which she made upon the locality was the presence of high bridges over low streams. She was told that these streams were subject

to great floods during heavy rains, and that accounted for the height of the bridges. We should have valued the lady rider's observations on Wigan trade, society, and customs; but evidently her stay was brief. She whipped up her steed and hurried on. (Celia Fiennes: *Through England on a Side Saddle*, pp. 153-5.)

#### ROADS PAVED WITH SMALL PEBBLES.

Somebody made a "Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain" and published an account of it in 1724. In a later edition it is assigned to Daniel Defoe the author of "Robinson Crusoe." Whether Defoe or not, this traveller made a smart jest in allusion to Manchester's lack of municipal powers, calling this place the largest mere village in the country. Defoe's description of the local roads exactly agrees with that of Miss Fiennes. There was an ill-kept road for cattle and carts, and also a narrow causeway for horses and pedestrians.

"We are now," says Defoe, "in a country where the roads are paved with small pebbles, so that we both walk and ride upon this pavement, which is generally about a yard and a half broad, but the middle road where carriages have to go, is very bad."

The 1748 edition, which is the most accessible, makes an allusion to the Burning Well; and mentions the local trade in coverlets, rugs, and blankets. Travel books now began to copy one another; and in some details Defoe seems dependent on Ogilby. (Defoe, *Tour*, III, 248.)

#### COAL PITS OF 1751 DESCRIBED.

Some travellers came on pleasure bent, others arrived thirsting for information. To this last class belongs Dr. Richard Pococke, the peripatetic parson, afterwards Bishop of Meath. He was an observant and untiring traveller both at home and abroad, and determined to explore the unknown regions of his own country. Other casual sightseers visited the Wigan collieries and were amused by the bright blaze of the cannel coal or the clever way in which people turned it into

ornaments. But the learned doctor wants to know the methods of working and the prices ; so that all he tells is of permanent value to those concerned in mining.

" We crossed the moors towards Wigan (this was in 1751) and came to the Canal (cannel) Coal Pits ; they told me they were forty yards deep. The work is called a delft or mine, the vein a drift, which is about three feet thick and dips from north-west to south-east about a yard in twenty. What is above the drift they call the top stone, which is of a lighter black colour than the bottom stone. They find some copper mundich in the coal and the drift is something broke by a stone running across, which they call a fould (fault). The water is pumped up and goes off by a channel on that side of the hill, which is called a souk, and they do not look on it as unwholesome."

#### HOW THE "FIERY DAMP" WAS CLEARED.

He goes on to tell us what extraordinary ways they had of dealing with fire-damp in 1751. " They are much troubled by what they call fiery air. They know when it rises by the smell, and ; send down a person with a candle to try it if it is dangerous they see a blaze from a candle near half a foot long. One man was so burnt with it that he died, and it raised blisters on his body." We marvel at the temerity of those men who looked for an escape of gas with light in hand. It is a miracle that they did not meet with even greater calamities. For another heroic remedy which they employed, in case of a bad rush of gas, was to let down a candle by a rope to set fire to the " fiery damp." Or when first they opened a pit the custom was to let down a round iron grate full of fire to draw out the damp by setting it ablaze.

#### BEST COAL AT 3d. PER CWT.

Then as to prices in 1751. The best coal was sold at 3d. a cwt. ; that which was broken for a shilling per load of twelve cwt. The

Doctor writes of a Golden Age, so far as prices go; and that age will never return. As to the extent of the coal workings, the learned traveller described them as reaching from Kirkle (i.o., Kirklossa) to the south-east about as far as Endley (probably Hindley) Mill; and from the west at Ince to Dr. Kendrick's pit eastward in the same parish. These interesting Travels are published by the Camden Society. (R. Pococko, *Travels Through England*, i., 206.)

**"EIGHTEEN MILES OF EXECRABLE MEMORY."**

Arthur Young, the agriculturalist, whose books raised English farming into a science, included our district in his Tour in the North of England in 1771. He was more interested in fields than in towns; and his visit is chiefly remarkable for his downright criticism of the roads. The Wigan to Preston road and the Wigan to Warrington road had both been turnpiked in 1725. The system had been lavishly praised; but here after half a century it was breaking down. Of the Wigan to Preston highway, Young protested that he had no language sufficiently expressive to describe "this infernal road." He cautioned all travellers in this terrible district to avoid this road as they would the devil. He measured ruts four feet deep floating with mud, as the result of a wet summer only. What would it be in winter? He passed three carts broken down in these eighteen miles of execrable memory. The way to Warrington was also "most infamously bad." Those loud outcries led to some improvement. But reform came slowly. And the problem of the roads, in its now aspects, is still with us.

**"A BOROUGH OF IMPREGNABLE CHASTITY."**

The travels of Thomas Pennant, Welsh zoologist and antiquary, are useful for the revelation they give of unknown regions in Great Britain. They yield the result of fresh close observation. He had a wide range of interests, including churches, halls, trade, art



treasures and natural scenery. He visited Wigan in making his Second Tour to Scotland, undertaken in 1772, and at once strikes an individual note. On approaching Wigan, from Winwick, he observed several fields quite white with thread, bleaching for the manufacture of strong checks and coarse linen carried on in that town and neighbourhood. His portrayal reminds us of the snow fields of linen-making Ulster. "Wigan is a pretty large town and a borough of impregnable chastity." This last statement is probably ironical; for he must have known about the malpractices at local elections. Pennant remarks on the rapid rise of textile trades. Wigan had long been noted, he observes, for manufactures in brass and pewter, "which now give way to that of checks."

#### THE USES OF CANNEL COAL.

Of course we have to hear about the cannal ornaments. "An ingenious fellow here turns cannal coal into vases, obelisks and snuff-boxes; and forms excellent blackamoors' heads out of the same material. . . . At Haigh Hall a summer house is built of it which may be entered without dread of soiling the lightest clothes." Pennant suggests that cannal coal means candle coal, because it affords light for the poor to spin by. He tells us of another local speciality. The best crossbows are also made in this town by a person who succeeded his father in the business, the father having come from Ripon a century before. Pennant recites the legend of Mab's Cross and repeats the tradition that certain battles of King Arthur were won on the banks of the Douglas. He describes Haigh Hall and its pictures; and mentions the monument to Tyldesley about whose death he preserves an anecdote. While he lay wounded during the battle of Wigan Lane, a faithful domestic supported his dying master. The servant was shot by a rebel trooper who was instantly pistolled by his general officer in abhorrence of this act of barbarity done even to an enemy.

## RELICS AT STANDISH HALL.

Pennant rides onward to Standish where he carefully describes the memorials in the Church. Mrs. Townoley (Cecilia Standish) was then at Standish Hall and had a few relics of the Arundel Collection, inherited from her grandfather the Duke of Norfolk. Pennant enumerates among them eight pieces of glass decorated with the labours of Hercules. A large silver square, perhaps an altar panel, with a most beautiful relief of the Resurrection upon it, signed PV 1605; and two trinkets a lion and a dragon formed of large pearls. At Pincock Bridge he crossed the Yarrow, a pretty stream watering a narrow romantic glen, wooded on both sides; rode forward to Preston, and put up at the Black Bull. (Pennant: *Second Tour in Scotland*, pp. 13-18.)

## "PLEASANTLY SITUATED" ON THE DOUGLAS.

Travel books were now quite the vogue, and in 1772 appeared also "The Complete, English Traveller" by Nathaniel Spencer "The next place we visited" says he, "was Wigan, pleasantly situated on the small river Douglas, over which there is a good stone bridge. It is a considerable town, about half a mile in length, and extremely populous on account of the great manufactory carried on by the inhabitants in making blankets, checks, rugs, and coverlids. Coals are in great plenty here, and there are many forges for making of iron, that brings considerable sums of money to the inhabitants. The streets are paved with small pebbles, and the Church is a most magnificent Gothic structure." After a reference to local government, he describes the houses as extremely neat in general. Wigan lies on the high road to Lancaster, etc., so there are several good inns, and the people are hospitable and polite. Its coal is perhaps the best in the universe. He tells us again about the cannol, how toys are made of it, and it leaves no stain upon the finest Holland and cambric. Haigh is on a lofty mountain from which you may see the Isle of Man and parts of twelve counties. The Burning Well

he describes in much the same way as Miss Fiennes; and gives what he calls a rational account of the phenomenon, to wit, that the ground is impregnated with sulphur, which being confined, when the vapours issue forth the warmth communicates its influence to the water! The waters, he opined, were healing, but investigation had been neglected.

"The New British Traveller" by George Augustus Walpole 1784, is copied, so far as Wigan is concerned, from Spenser's "Complete Traveller," which has just been quoted. George Augustus Walpole describes the same things as Nathaniel Spencer, in the same words; and we cannot believe that he came to Wigan at all. We reject his second-hand impressions.

#### CANNEL PITS IN BACKYARDS.

Mr. Folkard in his account of Wigan Industries quotes from a rare work describing a "Tour from London to the Lakes" in 1791, by A. Walker. This traveller tells us the welcome news that in Wigan "the Corporation feuds have moderated into peace; for the electors, doubtless, have discovered that boating out the brains did not contribute to the honesty or worth of the elected." Walker describes once more the fanciful uses of cannel, but adds that many families have a cannel pit in their back yard, and send down a collier who gets in a few hours as many coals as they require for many months. Walker preserves also the memory of two clever Wigan mechanics, Dick Melling who simplified the steam engine and did other wonders, and Mr. Barker who was for many years the only maker of steel cross-bows and one of the ablest makers of fowling-pieces in the Kingdom.

#### JOHN WESLEY'S VISITS TO WIGAN.

Some of Wigan's guests have praised us for our buildings or surroundings. Their summary judgments linger in our memory. "Better built than Warrington," says Leland. "Neat," says Camden. Miss Fiennes seems to kiss her hand to us in a graceful compliment, and even calls

us "pretty." No traveller so far has appeared to scrutinise deeply the character of the people. But behold, in the 18th century, a moralist and an evangelist arrives. His gaze is not directed to the outward. He estimates not by bricks and stone and money. He looks at the heart. We must prepare for words of warning as well as of hope when we listen to the Rev. John Wesley.

#### IMPRESSIONS OF THE PEOPLE.

On his preaching missions Wesley was a constant traveller in all parts of the kingdom. He journeyed chiefly on horseback, riding with a loose rein, studying as he went along. "History, poetry and philosophy I commonly read on horseback, having other employment at other times." While he rode thus, he scarcely ever knew a horse to fall or stumble. John Wesley seems to have visited Wigan for the first time on the 13th July, 1764 when he came here from Bolton. He describes our town as "proverbially famous for all manner of wickedness," a statement which he repeats in other places in his journal. Because of this he expected some disturbance, especially as his preaching was in the open air; but there was none at all. "A few were wild at first," he says, "but in a little space grew quiet and attentive. I did not find so civil a congregation as this the first time I preached at Bolton."

#### PREACHING IN A WIGAN PLAYHOUSE.

The Wigan rowdies did not, however, let him off without a sample of their powers, for on his second visit two years later he preached near Wigan to a large number of serious well-behaved people, mixed with a few as stupidly insolent creatures as ever he had seen. He rebuked these sharply and they went away. They were quiet and tame indeed compared with the roughs at Walsall who dragged him by the hair and struck him on the mouth. Again in 1768 he preached at Wigan about eleven in a place near the middle of the town which, says he, "I suppose was formerly a playhouse." This was a room in the Wiend (see "Wigan Observer," 11th July, 1903). He goes on to say, that the place was very full and very warm. Most

of the congregation were wild as wild might be, yet none made the least disturbance. Afterwards as I walked down the street they stared sufficiently but none said "an uncivil word." He makes a comparison in favour of Wigan. The pretty, gay, fluttering things, in the congregation at Liverpool the same evening, did not behave with such good manners as the mob at Wigan. He visited Wigan, also in 1770, 1772, and in 1774 when he found all tumult now at an end the lives of Christians having "silenced the ignorance of foolish men."

#### THE BUILDING OF THE CHAPEL.

The following year saw the building of a new Chapel for the Wesleyan Methodist Society, and he preached in the shell of the house amid the raging of a thunderstorm. Wesley came to Wigan almost annually at this time and repeatedly claimed that Methodism had helped to reform the town. In 1776 he found his congregation in the new Chapel very quiet and dull, but was thankful when he considered what the town was like some years ago: "wicked even to a proverb." Nine years afterwards he had a very uncommon congregation, but one gentleman behaved as she used to do at Church, talking all the time. Evidently her conversion to the Society had not tamed her tongue, which she would rather hear than even the great Wesley's. At last, in 1790, he gives us the byword at which he has been hinting, and notes that in a place for many years proverbially called "Wicked Wigan" the inhabitants in general have taken a softer mould.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AN EPITHET.

John Wesley makes two affirmations which challenge attention. The one is that Wigan was notorious for its depravity; and the other that the Evangelical Revival brought about a great change. The alliterative byword "Wicked Wigan," may perhaps be traced to the thunderous declamations of Puritan preachers during the Civil War against a town staunch in its loyalty to the King. They were not always careful to distinguish between moral and political offences. One writer, moreover, in 1642, accused the Wigan

Cavaliers of having pulled down the pulpit in Hindley Chapel, played at cards in the pews, and torn up the Bible, leaves from which they stuck on posts in Wigan saying, "This is the Round-head's Bible." The Parliamentarians were certain that such conduct would bring a judgment from heaven on the town. Accordingly when they captured the place from the Royalists in the following year, one pamphleteer described Wigan as the Enemy's pride and presumption, which though believed to be impregnable had been rendered weakest of all towns by the sinfulness of the place.

#### POLITICAL CORRUPTION OF THE TIME.

There was then the Civil War tradition to support Wesley's charge. But that was a century old; and other factors had been at work. One was the political corruption which prevailed in the 18th century. A Wigan magistrate, who does not sign his name, printed a broadsheet in 1753, eleven years before the coming of Wesley, in which he appealed to the rector to behold and remedy the "dopravity of manners that prevails among us." He ascribed it largely to the evil methods of electioneers. Sir John Savillo in particular was accused of giving meat and drink on such a scale as to "make our people boasts." There were scenes of riot, debauchery and drunkenness such as foretokened that many lives would be lost at the approaching election. This writer did not exaggerate; his lament is confirmed by the Whitehouse Manuscript in Wigan Public Library. It is to be feared that election outrages lasted long after Wesley's time. Whitehouse writing about 1825 describes, evidently as an eye-witness, election riots in which numbers of people were killed or maimed by brickbats, slates and stones. In former times, he states, men overpowered and intoxicated with free drink have been bedded up like beasts in the stables of inns, and many have been found lifeless in the morning.

#### INFLUENCE OF THE EVANGELICAL REVIVAL.

The improvement perhaps came more slowly and from a greater variety of causes than John

Wesley believed. But we cannot deny the Evangelical Revival a large share in the reformation of character and manners. Lecky the secular historian, Justin M'Carthy the Roman Catholic, Canon Overton the High Churchman, all agree in testifying that the evangelists Whitfield and Wesley pierced through "the dull, vulgar, contaminated hideousness of low and vicious life, and sent streaming in upon it the light of a higher world." To their direct work upon the masses, must be added their influence upon all the Churches, stirring up a spirit of emulation and infusing a new life. All this contributed to the softer mould which Wesley noticed shaping the wild people of "Wicked Wigan."

#### A TOWN AT THE CROSS ROADS.

Enough, for the time, of our travellers both grave and gay. There are others, of course, and you may add if you will the moderns to those of olden time. Our itinerants have given us the impression Wigan made in the past on those who drew rein and tarried within her bounds. Their gossip excites us in much the same way as the book of a foreigner about our native land. For those, like Thomas Fuller, who love to moralise there is a homily. A town at the cross roads is a host daily entertaining an unending company of guests. Some come from far lands; others from near or distant towns in our own isles. What impression are we making upon them to-day by our shops, our schools, our homes, our Churches, our work and play? We and they are part of the greater life of the empire or the world of men. Ancient—yet not tenacious of old abuses, loyal—to conscience as to King; may the town we love so entertain those who stay within her walls for a little or for long that they will remember her for ever as kind friend, shining example and inspiring teacher.

