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The Largest Parish in England.

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USUALLY speaking, the ecclesiastical parish is a smaller unit than the civil; for very large or populous civil parishes have often been divided for ecclesiastical purposes. From a civil point of view, we believe that Whalley in Lancashire can claim to be the largest in England. It is some thirty miles long by fifteen wide, includes about fifty townships, and has an area of over 106,000 acres.

From an ecclesiastical point of view, however, the parish of Lydford in Devonshire holds the record in point of size. Wales has several parishes of over 30,000 acres, but Lydford's vicar has jurisdiction over 60,000.

Lydford parish includes a large portion of that wild table-land known as Dartmoor—a wild tract of moor and marsh, less known perhaps than any similar area in the South of England. Mere figures convey so little that, to make Lydford's size more comprehensible, a comparison may be instituted. The county of Rutland has an area of 95,805 acres: Lydford parish is, therefore, nearly two-thirds as large as that county, and it is almost equal in area to the county of London, including the City.

It is not only its vast size which makes Lydford a difficult parish to work. There is no other similar area in the South of England which is so badly off for roads: a great part of Dartmoor is absolutely roadless. North from the house of the contributor you may ride more than twelve miles over granite-strewn slopes, deep valleys, peat-bogs, streams, and swamps before coming across any road on which a wheeled vehicle can travel. So bad is the going that, in winter or wet weather, not even a moorman will venture across the top of the moor from Two Bridges or Postbridge to Lydford. It is only in time of summer drought that the bridle tracks can be traversed in safety.

Lydford itself, the residence of the vicar, is thus entirely cut off from the moorland part of the parish, and to reach Postbridge the vicar must either ride or drive a distance of rather over twenty miles by road ; or take train, and travelling via Tavistock change at Yelverton for Princetown, and then from Princetown cover the last six miles by road. At best this journey takes two hours and a half. Huccaby, where there is a school-house in which services are held, is even more distant from Lydford, and there are outlying farms which would take half a day to reach from head quarters.

In ancient days every parishioner had to go to Lydford to church, and carry his dead thither for burial ; but after a time, so intolerable did the tax become upon the moor-folk, that a special dispensation was granted permitting them to attend service and take the Sacraments at the little church of Widdecombe, which lies deep in a fold of the hills about ten miles east of Princetown.

This licence was granted in the thirteenth century, and for more than five hundred years Widdecombe remained the centre of religion for the inhabitants of Dartmoor. Widdecombe Church has, in fact, been called the Cathedral of the Moor. It is famous for its lofty tower, which has often been compared with that of Magdalen College, Oxford. Legend asserts that this tower was built as a thankoffering by miners who had discovered and been enriched by a wonderful vein of tin. The old church contains a number of curious memorials, among others painted tablets commemorating the famous thunderstorm of 1638, a tempest which has since been immortalized by Blackmore. In its course a thunderbolt struck the church itself, doing damage of such an extraordinary and freakish nature that it is worth quoting a portion of the account given by Prince, the author of "Worthies of Devon" :

"In the year of Our Lord 1638, Oct. 21, being Sunday, and the congregation being gathered together in the parish Church of Wydecombe, in the afternoon, in service time, there happened a very great darkness, which still increased to that degree, that they could not see to read ; soon after a

terrible and fearful thunder was heard, like the noise of so many great guns, accompanied with dreadful lightning, to the great amazement of the people; the darkness still increasing that they could not see each other, when there presently came such an extraordinary flame of lighting, as filled the church with a loathsome smell, like brimstone; a ball of fire came in likewise at the window and passed through the church which so affrighted the congregation that most of them fell down in their seats crying out of burning and scalding.

"There were in all four persons killed, and sixty-two hurt, divers of them having their linen burnt, though their outward garments were not so much as singed. . . . The church itself was much torn and defaced. The steeple was much wrent; and it was observed that where the church was most torn, there the least hurt was done among the people."

Indirectly it was due to the great French wars at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth that Widdecombe ceased to be the centre of moorland worship. The hulks became so crowded with prisoners of war that it was decided to build a new military prison on Dartmoor, and the site chosen was on the eastern side of Hessary Tor, seven miles from Tavistock, a bleak and wind-swept spot fully 1,400 feet above Plymouth Sound.

The great prison of Princetown was begun in the year 1807, and the first part of it completed within two years. There was not another building on the site at the time, the nearest house being Tor Royal, a mile away; but a village soon grew up, and presently it was decided to build a church. The French prisoners were employed for the masonry, which is all of native granite, and the Americans, it is said, finished the interior. The church, which is dedicated to St. Michael and All Angels, is a large and solid, but not beautiful edifice, and since the old war prison was in 1850 turned into a civil prison, it has become the most important church on the moor; its tower is certainly the most conspicuous object for very many miles round, and can, it is said, be even seen from some parts of Plymouth. From the top of Hessary Tor, just above the church, the view is magnificent. On a clear day the Hamoaze and the Sound, with their shipping, seem close beneath one's feet.

Close to the church is the parsonage, where lives the curate-in-charge. His duties include occasional prison work, and consequently a small Government grant in aid is made towards

his stipend. There is probably not a parsonage in England more exposed to the weather than that at Princetown. The windows are double, like those of a Russian house.

Princetown Church is now the centre of worship for a large district on the western side of Dartmoor, and for a century past the dead have been borne to its churchyard from places as distant as Dartmeet and Postbridge; but Postbridge and Huccaby, a mile from Dartmeet, each have their mission chapels, which are managed by a second curate-in-charge, who lives at Postbridge.

Postbridge is six miles from Princetown, on the Moreton Hampstead Road, and recently a burial-ground has been consecrated near the village. In connexion with this a story came recently to the writer's ears. Moormen do not move about much: the old type seldom venture further than Tavistock. It was one of these, a native of Postbridge, who was taken ill last year, and soon became aware that his end was near. To him, as he lay upon his bed, came a friend who, by way of cheering him, told him that he would not have to be carried all that long way to Princetown, he could be buried in the nice new ground at Postbridge.

The dying man was silent a minute. Then he said decidedly: "Rackon I'll not be buried at Postbridge, John; I'll have a grave at Princetown. It'll be a change, like, after living here all my life."

Postbridge is, next to Princetown and Lydford, the largest centre of population in the parish. In and around it are over 200 people. It lies on the East Dart, and is famous for its clapper-bridge, the largest and finest of its kind on the moor. The three flat stones which form the footway are so enormous that one is driven to wonder how in the world the builders ever got them into position. At one time it was supposed that these clapper-bridges, so common on the moor, were built by the same neolithic race who piled the fortifications of Grimspound, and the rings of whose hut-circles are found on almost every hill-side on the moor. But the best authorities now agree that the

clapper-bridges are of much later date, and were probably constructed by the tin-miners who worked so diligently from Norman times onwards.

Treeless and bleak as appear the upper portions of Dartmoor, the country has always had a fair share of inhabitants. From time immemorial tin has been worked on the moor, and in many places enormous gashes seam the hill-sides, showing where a surface-vein of ore has been quarried out. Also the rivers themselves all show marks of "streaming" operations. Here and there the course of a stream has been changed in order to more thoroughly work out its original bed. The mining industry, after languishing for half a century, has recently, owing to the great rise in the price of tin, taken a new lease of life, and several mines have been reopened during the past two years.

The whole of Dartmoor and much of the surrounding country was during the Middle Ages under the sway of the tin-miners, the stannary towns being Tavistock, Chagford, Ashburton, and Plympton, while the stannary prison was at Lydford itself. The ancient parliament of the tin-miners was held on Crockern Tor, a rocky point lying above the West Dart, near Two Bridges.

But Dartmoor's great and never-failing resource is her grazing. All the sultry summer through, when the lowlands are scorched and brown, the moor smiles green with tender herbage, and cattle and sheep in thousands are driven up from below to the cool heights of the great Devonshire tableland. In very dry years cattle are trucked from North Somersetshire and even more distant counties to fatten on the sweet moorland turf, and in such years the Dartmoor farmer may make his rent by the payments received for summering stock. The average rainfall on the moor is nearly 70 inches, or almost treble that of London. These deluges serve to keep the grass growing until cut by winter frosts.

Lydford itself, the capital of the great parish of the same name, lies on the western edge of Dartmoor, on the little River

Lyd. To-day it is only a village dominated by the ugly, ruinous square keep of its ancient castle. Yet Lydford was once among the most important towns in England. In the eleventh century it was rated, according to Domesday Book, as of equal value with London ; and for long years after the Norman Conquest its great castle, with its dungeons, in which Richard Stride, a member of one of King Henry VIII.'s Parliaments, was imprisoned, dominated the surrounding country.

In Saxon days Lydford even had a mint of its own. It owes the beginning of its decadence to Norman William, who destroyed and burnt a large part of the city on his conquering march into Cornwall.

The present Lydford Church is mainly of the fifteenth century, but there are remains of earlier date in the chancel, and the font is believed to be of extreme antiquity. In the churchyard is the oft-quoted epitaph of George Routleigh, watchmaker, which begins :

"Here lies in horizontal position
The outside case of
George Routleigh, watch-maker."

Lydford's chief claim to interest lies in its famous gorge, which is startlingly unlike anything else of the kind on or near Dartmoor. Here the Lyd has cut for itself through intensely hard rock a passage which, though 80 feet or more in depth, is so narrow that, looking down from above, the river itself, pouring and boiling along the bottom, is often entirely invisible. The precipitous sides of the gorge are a mass of the most exquisite ferns and foliage. A pathway, narrow and slippery, leads along the stream-side, near the bottom of the gorge ; but when the river is in flood, and roaring furiously in the pot-holes which it has scooped in the rocks, this path is not to be trodden by any unblessed with the best of nerves and a steady head.

The population of Lydford parish is now beginning steadily to increase. It is only recently that doctors have begun to appreciate that here, within five and a half hours of London, is an air and climate equal to the finest of any British highlands,

and they are sending patients by the score to Dartmoor. In spite of its heavy rainfall, the moor is never damp. The soil being sand and peat, the water runs off at once, and as the rain nearly always comes heavily when it does fall, and not in miserable mists and drizzles, as in the East of England, the moor rejoices in plenty of sunshine. From April to September almost every farm, house, and cottage in Lydford Parish is full of visitors, and rooms are frequently booked from one year for the next.

Literary Notes.

A MOST interesting presentation was made recently to the University Library, Cambridge, by the Master of St. John's College. It is a collection of 103 block-books, being the sacred canon of the Thibetan Buddhist Scriptures. It is sincerely to be hoped that a transcript of these books will at no distant date be given to the public. There should be much in them of immense interest. These books are somewhat large, measuring one way about 2 feet, by some $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Each volume, if one may give them such a name, contains something like 300 leaves. It is very interesting to note that each of these leaves is printed on both sides and held together with bands of string made from yak's wool. Dr. Rouse brought this valuable collection from Pekin, where it had been taken from Thibet on yaks and mules.

We have just had published a volume dealing with "Ancient Britain and the Invasion of Julius Cæsar," by Mr. Rice Holmes. A volume devoted to this particular period, while much of the book must necessarily be based to a considerable extent upon discreet and careful historical deductions, is bound to have a large proportion of intrinsic value. The study of Julius Cæsar has been ousted somewhat of late by the tremendous number of works dealing with another great, but modern general—Napoleon—which reminds me of an amusing story which I read somewhere the other day. It was to this effect: A person was very much interested in Napoleon, and wrote to his bookseller, asking him to forward all recent books dealing with the Emperor. In the course of a little while there arrived at his house a cart-load of volumes devoted to various sides of Napoleon's life. By the last post there came an invoice, many pages in length, and a polite note, saying that the books which had just been delivered represented but a portion of the consignment; there were more to follow! The Napoleonic student at once countermanded the order. Of course, this was a little piece of satire. But the fact remains that almost every month there appears a book devoted to some portion of Napoleon's career. Only the other day there was published