

CHAPTER VII

HEORTLEA IN THE 11TH CENTURY.

Now we will take a peep at, the Village as it existed in the 11th century. We have for this period some actual historical record as the groundwork of our story.

"Some woman owned it," so says the Norman Survey of 1087, speaking of our village in the, days of Edward the Confessor.

There must have been a very long line of Thanes and Over-lords of Heortlea during the 600 years of Saxon rule, but we know nothing about them, not even their names. No doubt there were great men among them, able administrators, valiant soldiers, just and considerate landlords to their tenants, but history and tradition alike are silent in regard to their biographies. We do not even know the name of this last one of the long line of Heortlea landowners under Saxon rule, the "woman" who held the manor in the reign of King Edward the Confessor.

But we do know something about the village at this time and the manner of life of the inhabitants.

The chief features of the village I have tried to set out in the accompanying map. This is not all guess work for we have the Domesday statistics, the old

field names, the roadways, and data from various records. The boundaries of the demesne, the forest, the pasture and cultivated areas as here shown, we may assume, then, to be approximately correct.

Within the demesne, and on the site where perhaps for thousands of years one altar and shrine and sacred edifice had succeeded another, stood the Church. This was a stone building, but had probably replaced a previous structure of wood. There are indications which seem to show that the foundations of the present building were laid in Saxon times.

Let us look at the Squire's house, which we may assume to have been somewhere near the site of the present Court. It is built of timber, with stone foundations, and roof of tiles. Entering through the porch we find ourselves in a large hall. The floor is strewn with rushes. Tapestry hangs on the walls, and arms and armour. Smaller apartments on either side of the hall are formed with wooden partitions for sleeping accommodation and other purposes. The hearth is in the centre, wooden benches are against the walls and there are sheep skin rugs. At meal times the trestles are set up and the boards laid thereon for the table. There are baskets for bread, wooden platters, bowls for soup and horns for ale and mead.

The Squire takes the seat of honour. He is clean shaven except for his well trimmed beard. He wears a tunic of wool or linen, bright coloured stockings, and black pointed shoes. On occasion he dons a fur-lined cloak. The ladies wear loose flowing gowns, over tight fitting bodices.

In the winter evenings we may imagine the household round the glowing hearth. There are songs and story-telling. The harp is passed round from one to another, while the mead flows freely.

Outside the demesne were the homes of the villagers. In some of the better houses lived the free tenants or soc-men as they were called. Lower in rank there were the Ceorls and the Cotters. Then, somewhere in the village we should find the house of the reeve, the meadow-man and those other indispensable members of the community the blacksmith, the carpenter, the builder, and the furrier.

Pig keeping was an important industry and the most was made of the oak glades where the swineherds took the pigs to feed on the acorns.

This village also we may be sure, like all others in Saxon times possessed many beehives. Diligent search was made besides for the honey of the wild bees, for there was no other sugar in those days.

The village was, to a great extent, self-supporting. Little shopping was done outside. But there

were journeymen traders or pedlars who came from time to time and set up their tents on the village green. And, on the occasion of their visits, high day was usually kept by the people with sports and games.

Journeys beyond the immediate neighbourhood were seldom taken in those days. Travelling on foot was tedious, and it was even worse by waggon, for the roads were ill adapted for wheels. Few were rich enough to ride on horseback, and it was at all times necessary to travel well armed.

The only roadside inns too were the cold-harbours and caldecots, and it was but poor comfort they provided for weary travellers.

The cold-harbours were chiefly found on the old Roman roads. The name still remains at Sutton-at-Hone, Wrotham, Northfleet and many other places in Kent. They provided nothing but the shelter of bare walls, and were often only the ruined remains of some deserted Roman-British habitation.

The sites of these old wayside shelters usually show traces of the innumerable fires that were lighted on the floors. In Roman times such resting places for travellers were erected on many of the most frequented routes.