

## TRIPS ABOUT STROUD. WHITESHILL.

From the top of George Street one can, by looking straight over to the north-west, get a bird's-eye view of a church set amongst cornfields, beyond that, a populous village of irregular clusters of cottages spread over the face of the hill a mile or so away. This is the White Hill, or, as unpoetic modern topography calls it: Whiteshill. It is rather a pity this discarding of the pictorial description for the less agreeable possessive, for if ever ancient wisdom has been justified in her children it is in this instance of christening the White Hill by its apt and proper name. Not so much in the fact that the houses are mostly white, the roads white, and, in the absence of crops, the fields approach a certain whiteness as well; but rather that from its open position it is nearly always in the sunlight, and rarely, it seems, does a cloud loiter on its way across the sky to screen it from the sun. This, without a doubt, is the reason why people of past generations gave the White Hill its name, long before houses or roads were there.

The shallow soil, so shallow that in many places the outcropping rock provides a rude kind of pavement to the roads, affords no anchorage for trees of any considerable size, and their absence gives the place a rather bare appearance in comparison with the surrounding scenery.

The Plain, where the church is situated, is a shoulder of the main hill and affords the pedestrian some respite before ascending the upward road through the village and beyond to the Edge Hill, overlooking the vale of Gloucester.

Hitherto the usual way of reaching Whiteshill has been by means of shanks' pony up a long series of rough unsheltered paths; but now, thanks to petrol and the National 'Bus Company, it is possible to get there comfortably and cheaply. The church, at which the 'bus journey ends, is a modern structure, squat and heavy in style, but quite in keeping with such a position, where the south-westerly gales sweep over with violence and the cold, blustering east winds blow fierce and strong when, as the natives say, the Bisley gates are open.

Whiteshill is a parish in which there are no manorial rights, and on the principle of "They shall take who have the power, and they shall keep who can," the owners of adjoining manors and others have pushed their claims up to the last inch on every side, leaving only the bare rock and steep hill-sides to the natives. This bare-faced stripping of all wealth producing capital, together with the refusal of all the historic obligations which should pertain to land tenure have left Whiteshill one of the poorest of Cotswold villages. The grand old cottage residences which form the chief picturesque features of the Cotswold are here entirely absent. The freeholder, driven to get a living from the bare rocks, has not been able to afford buildings for posterity but only for himself. But even without any architect-

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There are people still living who remember its bad reputation, its heavy drinking, even for those drunken times, its poachers, desperate free-living men who spent their time almost equally between the game covert and rabbit warren, the pub., and the county gaol; and its hand-loom weavers who worked early and late to finish a "piece" of cloth and spent the wages received for it in a week's drinking bout at the "Star" or the "Beehive." At election times it was said that Whiteshill could furnish as choice a collection of roughs to be found anywhere; bruisers and bullies warranted to quell or make a disturbance wherever such was needed.

But "*Tempora mutantur et nos mutamur*" or, as ordinary folk like ourselves would say, "Times change and men change with them," and Whiteshill of to-day is just as sober, respectable and law-abiding as any other village in England.

It has gathered to itself most of the adjuncts of 20th century civilisation. It possesses a healthy, vigorous corporate life rather above the average of country villages, whether expressed in the municipal activity of its Parish Council, its religious organisations or its institutions for sport and entertainment.

But in this connection it is a pity that one black spot exists, and that is the discreditable condition of one of its most conspicuous places, that wretched remnant of what was once its village green. It is too late to complain of the vandalism which in the past robbed it of its spaciousness. That was done long ago. But leaving out any of the sentiment which may cling to a spot belonging to the social life of the village in the past, its prominent position ought at least to secure, if even only on the point of decency, some sort of tidying up. Happily there is no Maypole, that symbol of the old Merrie England, its festive meetings, with flowers and song and dance would be sadly out of place in this untidy triangle shorn of its green turf and littered with unsightly heaps of road material.