

THE RIVER PARRET.— ITS SOURCE AND COURSE — TRADE OF THE PORT — THE BATH BRICK INDUSTRY — RIVER POETRY.

THE Parret rises at South Perrot, in Dorsetshire, and enters Somersetshire at North Perrot. It runs to South Petherton, and near Muchelney receives the river Isle, near the town of Langport it receives the Yeo, (or Ivel); passing to the towns of Yeovil and Ilchester, it receives the Tone near the Isle of Athelney, and afterwards the stream called the Carey. Its course is then to Somerton, Boroughbridge, and Bridgwater (its chief town), from which point it runs in a very serpentine, course to Combe, and it enters the Bristol Channel by Burnham. At each tide there is what is termed a "bore"—a wave or head which rushes up the river very swiftly, and is sometimes (especially at spring-tide) several feet high. This head is simply the first wave of the tide; it is common to but very few rivers.

The River Parret is navigable for vessels of 300 tons burden as far as Bridgwater, and for barges by its branches to Glastonbury, Taunton, Langport, and Ilchester. The influence of the tide is felt as far as Langport on the Parret and Creech St. Michael on the Tone.

As a sea-port, Bridgwater has some claim to importance, its trading connection (home and foreign) being a considerable one. The navigation dues amount to about £1,000 yearly; between three and four thousand vessels enter the port yearly, the tonnage ranging from 200,000 to 250,000. The imports are coal, grain, timber, linseed, valonia, gypsum, esparto, hides, potatoes, &c.; whilst the exports are principally brick-yard goods and timber.

In 1845 an Act was passed for improving the navigation of the River and the bay, for maintaining the Bridge and extending the Quays, when regular dues and tolls were fixed for vessels entering the Port.

Bridgwater is renowned as the seat of the Bath brick industry. A peculiar slime or mud is deposited on the banks of the River near the town after every tide, which is gathered and prepared and made into the well-known "Bath bricks" familiar in every household as a valuable aid to cleanliness. It is curious that only within a certain distance of the town (up or down the River) can the mud be gathered—the action of the salt water on the mud when it meets the fresh water giving it remarkable and peculiar properties. There is much speculation as to why the name "Bath"

should be applied to these bricks; one story is that they were called Bath Bricks, because, when first brought into notice, at a date which was contemporaneous with Bath buns, the manufacturers thought they could thus secure a better sale than if they were named after "*such an obscure place as Bridgwater!*" Others, again, hold that the name was given them because they somewhat resemble Bath stone.

The following lines are certainly worth reproduction here; they are from the pen of Mr. E. H. Burrington:—

APOSTROPHE TO THE PARRET.

Upon the soft brown pillow of thy shore,
No shells lie scattered, such as childish hands
Delight to gather, yet thy sandy store
Is richer than the gems of Cashmere's lands,
So prettily described by Thomas Moore.
Parret, thou art Old Ocean's lawful daughter,
And to her breast thou rushest down with glee!
I cannot praise the blueness of thy water,—
Less blue than Baltic waves or Ægean sea;
But thou flowest ever beautifully thick,
Leaving thy filthy slime to make Bath brick!
I've seen thee gentle as a child asleep,
I've seen thee rushing wild from either shore,
Bringing back health and freedom from the deep—
Yet men have called thy swift return a bore!

It is considered by some that the estuary of the Parret once extended over the plain west of the Polden range. In proof of this it is pointed out that the trunks and branches of trees, the horns of the forest deer, and the bones of the ox and the horse, have been found at considerable depths in the clay pits of the neighbourhood, in some cases as deep as thirty feet.

Mr. W. Baker in 1851 communicated to the Somersetshire Archaeological Society the fact that a hawk's bill turtle (*Chelonia imbricata*) had been captured alive in the Parret just previously.