

which does not lead direct to it, and looks as if it had formerly belonged to some mansion. I was talking with the clergyman who I found in the church superintending harvest service decorations, and I asked him whether he thought the church had originally been built at a distance from the town, or whether the town had shrunk away. The first I suggested would only be the case if the church were monastic; he told me that although there was a monastery at Stevenage, it was not attached to the existing church, which appears always to have been parochial, and that the latter was the more probable solution of the difficulty, as there was evidence that the "black death" raged there, and a lane called "Dead Lane" may possibly record the fact. The church is a good example of the usual Hertfordshire type with a fine tower crowned by the local "spike." There is a very good brass to Stephen Hillard, a priest, and a fragment of a curious monument to a lady. The upper portion of the effigy alone exists, and the costume is that of the fourteenth century; on one side is a small figure of an angel, and on the other that of a monk. The clergyman explained that the monk was supposed to be attending the lady on her death-bed and the angel was receiving her soul. He told me that this curious piece of sculpture was found face downward and used as a doorstep; he thought it probable that it came from the Abbey, and



THE OLDEST TREE IN ENGLAND, WYMONDLEBURY CHESTNUT.

may have been brought here some time after the Reformation, when that building was pulled

down. There are some very early stalls in the choir, thirteenth century work, which also probably came from the Abbey; a fine niche at the end of the north aisle is of the same rich type as those we have previously noticed at Wheathampstead and Ayot. A series of remarkably pretty lanes lead from Stevenage church to the interesting village of Ippollits, but by taking a cut across the fields at Wymondley a great natural curiosity may be seen; it is a vast and very ancient tree, or we would rather say the "ruins" of a tree, for although it is alive and is surmounted by a fine group of foliage, yet its mighty branches are all lying broken around its vast trunk, and the latter like some old ruined tower is rent in twain and a fairly big tree grows in the gap. The "Wymondleybury Chestnut," is one of the curiosities of the county, and is an ancient landmark. Gilpin in his *Forest Scenery* (writing in 1789) says that it is "one of the largest trees that ever grew in England, and its girth is more than fourteen yards." As it stands on high ground when perfect it must have been visible for many miles round. I was told that it is mentioned in Domesday Book, but I have not been able to verify the assertion. It is pleasant to record the fact that the present possessor of this venerable relic is fully alive to its value, and has shown his interest in antiquarian matters by having the moat which formerly surrounded the old Manor House close at hand excavated.

The cyclist had better proceed direct to Redcoats and leave his machine at the inn, The Hermit of Redcoats, and take the footpath which leads to Wymondleybury; it is only about half a mile from the inn. There was a priory at Wymondley which is mentioned in Dugdale's *Monasticon*, but little if anything of it now exists. A short walk by a path across the fields leads to Redcoats, a small hamlet between Wymondley and Ippollits. This place is remarkable for an eccentric named James Lucas who died in 1874. This strange being obtained the title of the "Hermit of



MINSDEN CHAPEL.