

THE TICHBORNE DOLE.

BY MRS. WM. LUNDIE.

The notoriety of the strange claim to the Tichborne baronetcy which has excited so much attention, reminds us of a singular legend which has been current in the family for many generations.

This very ancient family dates the possession of its patrimony, the Manor of Tichborne, near Winchester, as far back as two hundred years before the Norman conquest. It is said to have derived its name originally from the river Itchen, at the head of which its possessions were situated, and thence was denominated De-Itchenborne, which in course of time has been abbreviated into its present appellation of Tichborne.

About the middle of the twelfth century, shortly after the first of our Plantagenet Kings, had ascended the throne, the then head of the family, Sir Roger de Itchenborne married Mabel, only daughter and heiress of Sir Ralph de Lamerston, of Lamerston in the Isle of Wight, by which he acquired considerable estates in that part of England, in addition to his own patrimonial possessions in Hampshire.

After many years of happiness during which the Lady-Mabel became celebrated for her kindness and care to the poor—death now approaching, worn out with age and infirmity, she besought her husband as her last request, that he would grant her the means of leaving behind her a charitable bequest, in the shape of a dole or measure of bread, to be distributed annually on the twenty-fifth of March, the feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to all the needy and indigent people who should apply for it at the hall door, without respect of persons or exclusion of any who made the demand.

The said bread was to be the produce of a certain piece of ground, situated within the present park palings, containing an area of fifteen acres and of known value and worth; but should the applicants be greater in number than the produce, the value of twopence in money was to be given to each person in its stead.

Sir Roger, the husband of the Lady-Mabel, was induced to consent to his wife's request, only on condition of her crawling or walking round the piece of ground demanded, a condition of apparent impracticability from the fact of her having been bedridden for many years previous, and this was to be done, too, while a certain brand or billet of wood, was burning on the fire in the hall at Tichborne.

The venerable dame, however, nothing daunted, ordered her attendants to carry her to the place she had selected, where being deposited on the ground, she seemed to receive a renovation of strength; and to the surprise of her Lord, who began to wonder where this pilgrimage might end, as well as of all who saw her, she succeeded in crawling round several rich and goodly acres within the required time.

The field which was the scene of Lady-Mabel's extraordinary feat, retains the name of the "Crawls," to the present day. As soon as her task was completed she was re-conveyed to her chamber, and summoning the family to her bedside, in order to secure the gift to the poor for whom it was designed, and to render it binding upon her descendants, she proceeded in the most solemn manner to deliver a prophecy respecting the future inheritors of Tichborne, predicting its prosperity as long as the annual dole existed, and leaving her malediction on any