

XVIII. *Copy of Mr. Thorpe's Letter to Dr. Ducarel, concerning Chestnut Trees.*

Dear Sir,

Read March 8, 1771. **H**AVING perused the Hon. Mr. Barrington's letter to Dr. Watfon, published in the Philosophical Transactions, I find he lays down three or four general rules to determine whether a tree is indigenous or not in any country, as follows :

“ I. They must grow in large masses, and cover considerable tracts of ground; nor must such woods end abruptly by a sudden change to other trees, except the situation and strata become totally different.

“ II. If the trees grow kindly in copses, and shoots from the stool, it must for ever continue in such a wood, unless grubbed up, nor is it then easily extirpated.

“ III. The seed must ripen kindly: nature never plants but where a succession may be easily continued, and in the greatest profusion.

“ Lastly, many places in every country must receive their appellation from indigenous trees, which grow there, &c. When the instances of this are
“ singular,

“ singular, it will prove directly the contrary, as he
 “ hopes to shew with regard to the chefnut, &c.”

In answer to his objections, and agreeable to these his forgoing rules ; I shall endeavour to prove the chefnut to be an indigenous tree, in this island ; and 1st, Mr. Barrington says, that he examined the woods near Sittingbourn himself ; “ and on a very
 “ minute inspection of them, found those parts which
 “ consist of chefnuts, to be planted in beds or rows,
 “ about five yards distant from each other ; nor are
 “ there any scattering trees to introduce them, &c.”

In what wood or woods, he observed these plantations, I must confess, I am quite at a loss to find, having never observed this regularity in any of the woods I have been in ; and I very lately asked a person who has lived many years in that neighbourhood, deals largely in timber and underwood, and is over all these woods every year, who told me he knew of no such regular plantations in any of them ; that the chefnut grew intermixed with other trees, as in all ancient woods.

Indeed, the amazing distance of the plants from each other, which Mr. Barrington mentions, is somewhat extraordinary ; as the usual custom now, in planting sets of chefnut or ash, for hop poles, is about seven or eight feet distance, as has been lately done by John Cocking Sole, Esq; in his plantation of chefnuts, at Newington.

The woods, called the Chefnut woods, the property of the Earl of Aylesford, which lie in the parishes of Newington, Borden, and Bobbing, abound with these trees, which grow promiscuously with others, both from stubs and stools of a large size ;

twenty acres of which are annually felled for poles, &c.

Cranbroke Wood, belonging to Mrs. Mercer, in Newington, has the chefnut in plenty with other trees, which produce poles in abundance, from old stubs and stools.

The Squirrel Wood, the property of the Hon. Mr. Roper, in the parish of Stockbury; those called Long Tun and Binbury, contain plenty of chefnut, intermixed with other trees, in which are very large chefnut pollards; to appearance some hundred years standing; which grow on a poor soil, and are quite hollow shells, having no nourishment but from the rind or bark; yet throw out plenty of shoots from the roots.

I have a farm in the parish of Stockbury, called Nettlested, forty acres of which are tithe free, which portion of tithes belonged to the great monastery of St. Austin, situated without the walls of Canterbury. They were given in very ancient times to the use of the almonary or almonry of that abbey; as far back as the time of Archbishop Walter, in the year 1193, how long before is uncertain, and are mentioned by William Thorn, a monk of that house, and published by Sir Roger Twisden, in the *Decem Scriptores*; part of these tithes are woodland, and to this day called Almery or Ambry-Tanton. In this wood are very old stools of chefnut, some of which are ten feet circumference, and stand promiscuously with oak, ash, and other trees. These stools yet produce very good poles, which were felled once in my father's time, and have twice since they have been in my possession.

In short, all that vast range of woods, called Stockbury vallies, which extend from Key-street to Binbury Pound, produce the chesnut in common with other trees; the woods formerly belonging to the abbey of Lesnes, founded by Richard de Lucie, chancellor and chief-justice to Henry II. in the parish of Earith, still called the Abbey woods, having great plenty of chesnut, both timber and stub wood, and from the stumps and stools of large timber trees formerly felled, which stools are now quite hollow and decayed, except the outward bark or shell, round the crowns of which arise many stools, and are cut for poles at the proper growth.

Church wood, in the same parish, has the like; and many others in this neighbourhood.

In Wrotham parish above Kemsing, is a wood belonging to a farm, called Cottons, which has chesnut intermixed with other trees.

I could enumerate many more in different parts of this county, was it necessary; and I make no doubt, on due inspection, the like may be found in other counties of this kingdom: it is most certain, the chesnut does not grow in every wood, but in such only, where the soil is adapted to it. Different strata will produce different trees; as for example, the great wood called Jordens, in the parishes of Bexley and North Cray, the woods beyond Ruxley towards Farningham, have some acres nothing but birch, some only hazel, &c. Godden-wood, in the parish of Seal, is intirely birch. The woods on the Cold hills, of Chelsfield and Nockholt, run most upon beech; and those in the Weald of Kent, upon a clayey soil, are chiefly oak.

In answer to the third and last general rule ; that the nuts of the chesnut tree ripen kindly, and in great quantity, is manifest from the numbers of poor people at Earith, and the adjoining hamlet ; going into the woods at the proper season, and gathering some a quarter, others three sacks each, to fat their hogs, especially when pulse and grain are dear. It is true, the nuts are not so large as on trees which stand single and open to the sun, in parks, courts, &c. Even the oak will not produce acorns in a wood, till it becomes an old tree ; and then not so large and in such plenty as on old trees and pollards which stand open in fields and hedge rows. But where the chesnut, as before observed, stands single and planted for ornament, as in the Wildérness park, the seat of Mr. Prat, in Seal ; and in Bradbourn park, the seat of Sir Roger Twisden, Bart, at East Malling, and divers other places, the nuts are large, well tasted, and in great plenty, yielding excellent food for the deer.

It is well known that trees close planted in orchards will not produce fruit so large and fair, as in kitchen gardens, where they stand single, are often digged about, and manured.

Mr. Barrington himself says, Dr. Watson informed him, “ that in Spain the chesnut trees destined to “ produce the best fruit, are engrafted upon the “ wild chesnut ; and that the French call the com- “ mon sort Chataignier, and the improved one “ Maronier.” If so, the latter may be the sort which are annually brought to England, and sold at all the fruit shops, &c. and are called Spanish chesnut. Mr. Barrington says, “ the very name of Spanish, “ seems

“ seems most strongly to indicate the country from which this tree was introduced here.” But why Spanish? I do not know that it is any where here so called, and none of the wood-men know it by that name. The old Botanical writers, John Bauhine, Gerhard, and Parkinson, call it *Castanea Vulgaris*. Caspar Bauhine, in his *Pinax*, *Castanea Sylvestris*, the common or wild chesnut tree. Ray indeed, in his *Synopsis*, the 3d Edit. published by Dillenius, p. 449, has the following, “ in sylvis quibusdam prope Sittingburn Cantii oppidum, & Woburn Bedfordiæ, observavimus an spontaneam, an olim ibi fatam, nescimus.” It is somewhat strange that so celebrated a Botanist should treat of it in so slight a manner, and with seemingly so little attention, as to mention it only in those two places.

Lastly, Mr. Barrington says, “ that many places, in every country, must receive their appellation from indigenous trees which grow there, &c.”

There are many trees which give few, if any, appellation to places. It does not therefore follow that they are not indigenous. In ancient time, England abounded more in woods and forests than at present; and the oak and ash being then two of the most common trees, occasioned the names of the contiguous places and parishes to receive their derivation.

Notwithstanding his trial of the specimens of oak and chesnut, I am well assured many old buildings were, and are, of the latter; especially in places where these trees flourished. When I repaired the old house at Nettlested, in Stockbury, in sawing off the end of the main girder, it was decayed at heart; and

and pronounced by the surveyor and carpenter then present to be chefnut, as are the other timbers.

Cowsted, a very ancient seat in the same parish, is intirely of that wood; and Dr. Stukely, in his letter to the late Lord Hardwick, read at the Society of Antiquaries, and since published in the *Archæologia*, p. 44. says, “the curious roof of the large hall of the mansion house at Lesnes is of chefnut, which no doubt was felled in the abbey woods there.”

In latter times, the seat called Mount Mascall, in the parish of North Cray, rebuilt by Sir Comport Fitch, Bart. about fourscore years since, the girders and large timber of which are, as I am well informed, of chefnut felled in the woods adjoining.

And why should it not have been used in buildings, seeing it is very durable, and grows to a great size? witness the fine trees felled last summer, together with some oak and beech, in the park of Penshurst in this county; possibly in length of time, the characteristick of the chefnut trees decaying inwardly, might be the reason of the oaks being mostly used, as the more durable timber; and the former found to turn to better account for underwood and poles; especially when hops came into use in Henry the Eighth's time, and are the best for that purpose. Even oak, by reason of its scarcity and dearness, is now little used in publick buildings; fir-timber altogether supplying its place.

The chefnut tree yet alive in the court at Tortworth, in Gloucestershire, supposed by Evelyn and Bradley to have been planted in the time of King John, may possibly be the oldest tree of the kind extant in this kingdom; but is no proof of there
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not being chefnut trees before that time : Any more than the famous tree called Bears oak, in the park at Penfhurst abovementioned ; or the well-known tree called Fisher's oak, in the parifh of Farnborough, in this county ; or that in Welbeck park, the feat of the Duke of Portland, were fome of the firft trees of that kind here planted ; the fituation and ornament of thefe trees protected them from the axe.

The common elm, Evelyn thinks not to be an indigenous tree, and it may not as it is feldom, if ever, found growing in woods ; but in road ways, hedge rows, &c. ; and not in the North of England, though, as Mr. Ray obferves, fome trees are only found in the North, fome in the South, and others in the Weft ; neither does the elm, when an old tree, fhoot kindly from the ftool.

I agree with Mr. Barrington, that the box tree is an exotick ; but the yew is certainly indigenous, as I think may be eafily proved, and which he affents to, but doubts whether the euonymus or fpindle tree, and liguftrum or privet, are fo ; moft certainly they are, as no fhubs are more common on dry banks, and in hedges, &c. : but, as he affigns no reafon for their not being indigenous, I fhall dwell no longer on that fubje&t, and conclude,

Dear Sir,

Your moft humble fervant,

Bexley,
Nov. 26. 1770.

J. Thorpe.