EDMUND SPENSER AND THE EAST LANCASHIRE DIALECT.


(Read 10th January, 1867.)

EDMUND SPENSER was born in London during A. D. 1552 or 1553. Where he spent his infancy and boyhood does not appear to be well ascertained; but it is not improbable that it might be with his parents at Spensers, or Hurstwood, both places being situated near Burnley. The registers at Cambridge afford proof that he was entered as a Sizar at Pembroke Hall, on the 20th May, 1569. He graduated as Bachelor of Arts in 1572, and proceeded to his Master's degree during 1576. Some of his biographers state that he then left Cambridge, owing to a quarrel with Dr. Perne, or to an unsuccessful competition for a Fellowship, in which he was beaten by Lancelot Andrews, afterwards Bishop of Winchester; and that he then "went to reside with some friends in the north of England." It was during this retirement that he perfected himself in the dialect of the district and composed his first work, "The Shepheardes Calendar," and fell in love with Rosalind, the heroine of the poem.

Various conjectures have been formed as to the precise locality intended by "the north;" but the most probable one is that urged by Dr. Craik in his elaborate work on Spenser and his Writings. In a communication to the Gentleman's
Magazine for August 1842, Mr. F. C. Spenser, of Halifax, "produces such evidence as can scarcely leave a doubt "that the branch of the Spensers from which the poet was "descended was that of the Spensers, or Le Spensers, of "Hurstwood, near Burnley, in the eastern extremity of "Lancashire*; and that the family to which he immediately "belonged was probably seated [here, or] on a little property "still called 'The Spensers,' near Filly Close, in the ancient "Forest of Pendle, about three miles to the northward of "Hurstwood." [This may perhaps account for the fact of his being entered as a Sizar at Cambridge, since this designation implies that his parents were not in very affluent circumstances.] "He may not have been a son of this "particular family. His having been born in London would "seem to make it more likely that he was an offshoot from "these Spensers; but that they were his near relations may "be held to be established by a very remarkable circumstance. "It appears from a pedigree of the poet's descendants, "attested by Sir William Betham, Ulster King of Arms, "to have been compiled by him from the public records of "Ireland, that Spenser's own Christian name of Edmund "was perpetuated in his posterity of the elder branch, being "borne by his grandson, and again by his great-great-grand- "son, descended from his eldest son Sylvanus, who had "another son, to whom he gave the name of Laurence. "It may be fairly assumed, then, that Edmund and "Laurence were favourite family names. They are both "rather uncommon names in England generally; but it so

* In 2 Edward II, A.D. 1308-9, Worsthorn was granted by Henry de Lacy, last Earl of Lincoln, to Oliver de Stansford, Constable of Pontefract Castle, who was buried at Burnley, and among the persons who owed "homage and service "to him" was Adam le Spenser. The Hurstwood property would therefore be in the family at that early period. After a lapse of 250 years, 2 Elizabeth, A.D. 1569-60, the name of Edmund Spenser appears in a list of freeholders in the same district; as also does that of "John Aspdene, Chaplain." (See Whitaker's Whalley, first edition.)
"happens that they are the prevalent names of the family of
the Spensers of Hurstwood, and that from the middle of
the sixteenth down to near the middle of the eighteenth
century, as recorded in the various parochial registers.
Thus in the Register of Baptisms at Burnley, from 1564
to 1703 there are twenty-nine entries in which occur the
names of either Edmund or Laurence Spenser. One
Edmund Spenser signs the register as Churchwarden in
1617, and either the same or another Edmund Spenser
filled the same office and signed the register in 1649.
Among the designations we find Edmund Spenser of
Hurstwood; Laurence, son of James Spenser of Extwistle" [an adjoining hamlet and township]; "Laurence Spenser of
Pendle; Laurence Spenser of the Ridge" [a farm now belonging to the Grammar School, Burnley]; "Laurence "Spenser of Bolton; Laurence, son of George Spenser of
Marsden; Edmund, son of George Spenser of Filly Close;
"Edmund, son of Richard Spenser of Briercliffe" [a town-
ship adjoining Extwistle]; "and Laurence, son of George
"Spenser of Ighten Hill Park" [near Gawthorpe, the seat of Sir James Kay Shuttleworth, Bart.]. "In the Register of
Burials we find Edmund Spenser of Hurstwood, yeoman,
"September 28th, 1554" [the year after Spenser's birth.]
"The register at New Church, in Pendle Forest, contains
entries of the burial of Laurence Spenser in 1584; whom
"Mr. F. C. Spenser considers to have been the grandfather
"of the poet; and the baptisms of three other Laurence
"Spensers in 1592, 1631 and 1666. Finally, in the registers
"at Colne, we find the baptisms of four Edmunds and three
"Laurences between 1622 and 1723. Among the fathers of
"these children are Spenser of Colne; Spenser of South
"Field; Spenser of Marsden Parva; and Spenser of Waterside. Mr. F. C. Spenser's grandfather is entered as 'Blakey,
"son of John Spenser of Waterside, baptised May 4th, 1719,'
"Waterside is close beside The Spensers," [and both were genteel residences at the period named.]

"Another little circumstance may serve to confirm the inference that has been drawn from the prevalence of these Christian names. The poet always spelt his surname with an s; and it appears from the registers that it was spelt in the same manner by the family at Hurstwood; not only in the reign of Elizabeth, but for a century afterwards; while even at Kildwick, near Skipton, only about ten or twelve miles distant, it is spelled with a c, in the manner as did, and do, the Spencers of Althorpe. Although they are called 'yeomen' in the registers, I find them associated with the Towneleys of Towneley, and all the first gentry in the neighbourhood, in the parish business. The property called 'The Spensers' was disposed of by John, son of Edmund Spenser, in 1690;" [and the Hurstwood property* has since merged, by purchase, into the Ormerod estate, and forms a portion of the extensive possessions of the Rev. William Thursby and General Scarlett.]—Craik's *Spenser and his Writings.*

The peculiar dialect which Spenser puts into the mouths of his rustic shepherds has long since attracted attention. His earliest annotator, "E. K.,” apologises to the reader for the introduction of so many, to him, "uncouth and obsolete words," and undertakes to prove the propriety of this course when all the circumstances under which the *Shepherd's Calendar* was written are taken into consideration. Dryden, too, in the dedication of his translation of Virgil’s *Pastorals* to the Lord Clifford, has taken notice of the mastery of "our northern dialect" shewn by Spenser in this poem; but there is no conjecture as to the locality to which it most probably

* Fox Stones—a farm originally reclaimed from the waste-lands near Hurstwood—is generally understood to have been granted by Queen Elizabeth to the poet. The original deed is supposed to be in the possession of a solicitor in Burnley, from whom I had this information.
belonged. The Rev. William Gaskell, in his two Lectures on the Lancashire Dialect, has ventured to suggest that "it is interesting to read this poem (Shepherd’s Calendar) with the knowledge gained a few years ago, that the author spent the earlier part of his life in the northern part of this county; and this may account for the introduction of some words that are strongly Lancashire." In a note to his Dream of Nature, Mr. Philip Gilbert Hamerton proves that the house occupied by the Spensers was not really Hurstwood Hall; for this was built by Barnard Towneley. He gives a beautiful vignette of Hurstwood and a portion of Spenser's house on page 150 of his Isles of Loch Awe, and adds that

"if Spenser ever visited Hurstwood, he must have crossed the Brun, which is there a beautiful rivulet about four miles from its source." This is indeed a most picturesque portion of its course, and agrees well with the local allu-
sions in the Calendar. Robert Chambers, also, in his interesting Book of Days, vol. I, p. 57, asserts that when Spenser tells of a ewe that—"she mought ne gang on "the green," he uses almost the exact language that would be employed by a Selkirkshire shepherd, on a like occasion, at the present day. So also when Thenot says— "Tell me, good Hobbinol, what gars thee greete?" he speaks pure Scotch. In this poem Spenser also uses tway for two; gait for goat (?); mickle for much; wark for work; wae for woe; ken for know; crag for the neck; warr for worse; hame for home; teen for sorrow—all of these being Scottish terms.

My own attention had been directed to this matter before I met with the preceding extracts; and it had occurred to me that the Calendar might contain some distinctive marks by which the particular locality in which Spenser resided during its composition might be ascertained. The Folkspeech* of East Lancashire is somewhat peculiar, both in words and pronunciation, and many of its oldest terms and phrases have a close affinity to the Lowland Scotch. Both contain an admixture of words derived from the Danes and Northmen who conquered and colonized the district; and hence was suggested the possibility of fixing the locality of Spenser's sojourn by an examination of the dialectic peculiarities &c. of this his first poem. I now venture to presume that the examination has not been made in vain; since of the following list of forty-five words and phrases, all of which are still in use around Hurstwood, only a very few are found in the South Lancashire dialect, as given by Collier (Tim Bobbin), Bampton, Heywood, Gaskell and Picton.

* I owe this term to my friend John Harland Esq., F.S.A., of Manchester;—it is much more appropriate and comprehensive than "dialect," which it will, no doubt, soon supplant.
ABYE ; (bie Danish ; abidan A.S.) ; probably a contraction of "abide" in the sense of "to let alone," or "lay aside." The word is locally pronounced "abee," as in "let me abee."

"Both Pype and Muse shall sore the while abye:—
So broke his oaten Pype, and down did lye."

(Shepheardes Calendar, Eclogue I, l. 71-2.
Mitford's Edit. Pickering, London, 1839.)

BALK ; (bialka Norse) ; a bar, or beam; and hence the verb "to balk," to hinder; to stop the way; to prevent &c.; as "I cud ha wun but he balked me."

"They never sette foote in that same troad,
But balke the right way and stayen abroad."

(Ecl. IX, l. 93-4.)

BIN, or BENE ; a local pronunciation for "be;" as "brunt," is for "burnt." "Han" is also a colloquialism for "have," as "we han no an for yo."

"Or privie or pert if any bin,
We han great bandogs will teare their skin."

(Ecl. IX, l. 162-3.)

BRAG ; BRAGLY ; (brag Danish); proudly; haughtily; boastingly.

"Seest how brag yond bullock beares,
So smirke, so smoothe, his pricked eares."

(Ecl. III, l. 71-2.)

"Seest not thilke same Hawthorne studde,
How bragly it begins to budde?"

(Ecl. III, l. 14-5.)

BRERE. The common briar.

"There grewe an aged tree on the greene,
A goodly Oake sometime it had beene."

* * * * *

"Hard by his side grewe a bragging Brere."

(Ecl. II, l. 102-3; 115.)

It is significant, as to locality, that the Poet should select this shrub to hold converse with the oak. The reason may
probably be that he was then residing at Hurstwood, and the
townships of Extwistle-cum-Briercliffe, as they are now spelt,
were not far distant. Extwistle has been defined by Dr.
Whitaker as “the boundary of oaks;” and Briercliffe as
“a steep overgrown with briars;” for both the oak and the
briar were most abundant in the district when Spenser wrote.
The Parker family then resided at Extwistle Hall, and the
whole country abounded with timber. The oak and the briar
would therefore naturally suggest themselves, and hence, pro-
bably, the selection.

CHIPS; (cyp A. S.); fragments cut off. The term “chippins”
is also particularly applied to the parings from potatoes
before being boiled.

“Their sheepe han crusts; and they the bread;
The chippes, and they the cheere.”
(Ecl. VII, l. 187-8.)

CLOUT; (klede Danish; klutr Norse; kluyte Belg.); a term
applied to any worthless fragment of cloth; a patch; a
blow with the flat of the hand; a person of no conse-
quence. Hence, probably, “Colin Clout,” the shepherd’s
boy; and the designation of the poem “Colin Cloutes
“come home again.”

CONNO; a common contraction of “can not.” I am not
aware that “con” is ever used in the folkspeech of this
locality in the sense of “to look over,” “to learn,” or
“to know.” The poet here, however, uses the word
“conne” in the sense of “know.”

“Of Muses, Hobbinoll, I conne no skill.”
(Ecl. VI, l. 65.)

COUTH; could; know how to do a thing.

“Well couth he tune his Pipe and frame his stile.”
(Ecl. I, l. 10.)
CRAGGS; (kræghe Belg.; kragen Teut. See Skinner's Etymologicon); necks, including the head. Hence also “scraggy,” bony and lean, like the neck of an animal when killed and dressed by the butcher.

“Thy Ewes that wont to have blowen bags, Like wailefull widdowes hangen their crags.”
(Ecl. II, l. 81-3.)

CRANK; (kranrk Norse); brisk; merry; in good health and spirits.

“And bearen the cragge so stiffe and so state, As Cocke on his dunghill crowing crank.”
(Ecl. IX, l. 45.6.)

CRAWED; CROWED; a term commonly applied to one who is domineered over by another. “To crow over” a person is to boast of having overcome him, or put him in bodily fear. “To pluck a crow” with any one is to quarrel with him, or to find fault with him for some offence.

“But yeelded, with shame and grief adawed, That of a weede hee was over-crawed.”
(Ecl. II, l. 141-2.)

CUDDIE; a local synonym for Cuthbert. This is still a common name in the neighbourhood of Worsthorne and Hurstwood. The compiler of a Burnley Almanac, in the East Lancashire dialect, styles himself “Kester O'Cuddy's.”

DAFFADOWNDILLIES. This term in all its length is still used for the common daffodil. It forms the burden of a nursery song, in which it is pronounced “daffidandillies.” I may here remark that “derk” is also the common pronunciation for “dark;” as is “gilliver” for “gelliflower,” the “July flower,” the single clove pink, the “clove gilofre” of Chaucer (dianthus caryophyllus.)

“Strowe me the grounde with Daffadowndillies, And Cowalips, and Kingeups, and loved Lillies.”
“Diggon, I pray thee, speake not so dirk.”
“Bring hither the Pineke and purple Cullambine, With Gelliflowers.”
(Ecl. IV, l. 140-1; 102; 136-7.)
DAPPER; (dapper Dutch); pretty; smart.

"The dapper ditties, that I won't devise,
To feede youthes fausie, and the flocking fry."

(Ecl. X, I. 13-14.)

ELD. A word commonly used for "age;" as, "he is gettin
"eld now an dotes."

"I deeme thy braine emperished bee
Through rustic elde, that hath rotted thee."

(Ecl. II, I. 53-4.)

GANG; (gang Danish; ganga Norse); to go. A Burnley
landlady was once asleep in Church when the clock struck
twelve. She immediately roused up and exclaimed:—
"T' back perlor bell rings, Billy gang ye."

"Th' elfe was soe wanton and soe woode;
She mought no gang on the greene."

(Ecl. III, I. 55-7.)

GATE; (gata Norse); a road; a way. "Gooin a gaturs,"
means accompanying a friend a short distance on the way
home. "Town-gate" and "Water-gate" are also common
terms for "street" and "river."

"Goe, little Calender! thou hast a free passporte;
Goe, but a lowly gate amongst the meaner sorte."

(Epilogue, I. 7-8.)

GARS; (gare Danish); makes, or causes. GREETE; (greede
Danish; grata Norse; krijten Dutch; gretan A. S.); to
weep; to cry in a whining tone.

"Tell mee, good Hobbinoll, what gars thee greete?"

(Ecl. IV, I. 1.)

GRIDE; (gyrdan A. S.); a sudden griping pain. It is com-
monly pronounced "gerd;" as, "it comes on in gerds;"
that is, in sudden fits; pierced.

"The keene cold blowes through my beaten hide,
All as I were through the body gride."

(Ecl. II, I. 1.)
HARBROUGH; (heeberg Dutch; herberg Danish); a habitation; a shelter; a lodging. Hence "Windy Harbour," the name of a farm in the neighbourhood; also, probably, "Habergham Hall," the residence of the now extinct family of Habergham.

"Forsake the soil that soe doth thee bewitch; Leave mee those hills where harbrough nis to see." (Ecl. VI, l. 18-19.)

HAVEOUR. This is still a common expression for "manners," or demeanour before superiors. "Shew thi haveour and "thank 'em kindly."

"Her heavenly haveour; her princely grace." (Ecl. IV, l. 66.)

KIRK; (kirke Danish; kerk Dutch); a church.

"And home they hasten the postes to dight, And all the Kirk pillours eare daye light." (Ecl. V, l. 11-12.)

LATCH; (letse, letsel, Dutch); the temporary fastening of a door &c. "SNECK" is also used in the same sense, as "door-sneck."

"He popt him in, and his basket did latch." (Ecl. V, l. 290.)

LEVER; LIEFST; (liefst Dutch); rather. "Ideliefstha this" is a very common expression when choice has to be made.

"And of the twaine, if choise were to mee, Had lever my foe than my friend he be." (Ecl. V, l. 166-7.)

LIG; LIGGEN; (liggen Dutch; ligge Danish; liggia Norse); to lie down &c.

"The fat Oxe, that wont ligge in the stall." "Which many wilde beastes liggen in waite, For to entrap in thy tender state." (Ecl. IX, l. 118; Ecl. V, l. 216-7.)
LOPE: (hlaupa Norse); a strong form of "leaped." "Lopes" is now also used as a noun for "legs;" as, "he's varra leet on his lopes."

"With spotted winges, like Peacockes trayne,
And laughing lope to a tree." (Ecl. III, l. 80-1.)

MELLING; a local corruption of "meddling;" it is still in every day use in East Lancashire. "He's awlus mellin "on me." In a worse sense the word sadly puzzled both Judge and Counsel, a few years ago, at Lancaster.

"Now sicker I see thou dost but clatter,
Harm may come of melling." (Ecl. VIII, l. 207-8.)

MICKLE; (mikil, Norse); much; large size.

"And though one fall through heedlesse haste,
Yet is his misse not mickle." (Ecl. VII, l. 15-16.)

MIZZLE; (mystel A. S.); to rain slowly in small drops, as from mist. It now also means "to leave a company one " by one, in a quiet or stealthy manner."

"Now ginnes to mizzle, bye we homeward fast." (Ecl. XI, l. 208.)

NAR; WAR; (nær Danish; værre Danish; var Norse); "nar" and "war" are local contractions of "nearer" and "worse." "He's war nur he wor, un they think he'll nevvur mend."

"A nar cut," is a nearer road.

"To Kirke the nærre, from God more farre,
Has been an old said sawe." (Ecl. VII, l. 97-8.)

PERK; PEARK; brisk; lively; in good spirits. "He's as "peark as a robbin."

"They woonte in the winde wagge their wriggle tayles,
Perk as a Peacocke; but now it availes." (Ecl. II, l. 7-8.)
REEK; REEKING; (reykr Norse; rook Dutch); smoke; smoking.

“For such encheason, if you goe me, Fewe chimnies reeking you shall espie.”

(Eel. IX, l. 116-7.)

RONTS; (runts Belg.; runds Dutch; rints Teut., bos simpliciter, Skinner); young bullocks; sometimes used as a name for young cattle generally.

“My ragged rontes all shiver and shake, As doen high towers in an earthquake.”

(Ecl. II, l. 5-6.)

RINE; a local corruption of “rind,” outside bark or peel; still in use.

“But now the graye mosse marred his rine.”

(Ecl. II, l. 111.)

SAM; (sam Teut.); together. Hence “to sam” is to collect together hastily and without order—“he samm’d um up “aw in a rook.”

“For what concord han light and dark sam? Or what peace has the Lion with the Lambe?”

(Ecl. V, l. 168-9.)

SIC; SIKE; (sulk Dutch); such; such as. Halliwell gives this word as “North;” and not long ago a countryman from Hapton, near Burnley, expressed his opinion that, “sic a mother sic a dowter,” always held good in families.

“But sike fancies weren foolerie, And broughten this Oake to this miserie.”

(Ecl. II, l. 211-12.)

SMIRKE; nice; pert; prim; hence “to smirk” is to smile in a pert or winning manner. “A smirkin hussy.”

“Seest how brag yond bullock beares; So smirk, so smoothe, his pricked eares?”

(Ecl. II, l. 71-2.)

SNEBBE; STUR; (snub; stir.) These words are given by Spenser exactly as they are still pronounced in the district.
The latter word has acquired a wide signification in the dialect, for it now means *anything* about which there is some commotion. A public meeting is "a great stur;" so also is a numerously attended tea-party; &c.

"That on a time he cast him to scolde,
And *snebbe* the good Oake, for he was old."

(Ecl. II, l. 135-6.)

"Never had shephearde so keen a cur,
That *waketh an* if but a leafe stur."

(Ecl. IX, l. 181-2.)

**Sperr**; (*sparre* Danish); a prop; a bar; and hence "to "sperr," to fasten with a prop or bolt. "*Yate*" is also a characteristic local term for "gate." "*Tine t’yate*" means "shut the gate."

"And if he channce come when I am abroade,
*Sperr* the *yate* fast, for fear of fraude."

(Ecl. V, l. 223-7.)

**Tickle**; (*kitla* Norse); very uncertain; very easily let loose. "As *tickle* as a mausetrap." The word also means easily set laughing; and in this sense a person is said to be "as *kittle* as owt."

"In humble dales is footing fast,
The trode is not so *tickle*."

(Ecl. VII, l. 13-4.)

**Tooting**; (*toet* Dutch); looking about slyly; peeping cautiously. "Peepin an *tootin* abeaut."

"Long wandering up and downe the land,
With bowe and bolts in either hand,
For birds in bushes *tooting*."

(Ecl. III, l. 64-6.)

**Totty**; (*tonteren* Belg.); wavering, not steady; staggering as if in liquor. "He’s quite *totty*."

"Or sicker thy head verie *tottie* is
Soe on thy corbe shoulder it leans amisse."

(Ecl. II, l. 55-6.)
WIMBLE; (guimblid, British); nimble; active; twisting; able to get out of the way easily. "He's as wimble as a munkey."

"Tho punie stones I hastily bent,
And threw; but nought avuyled:
He was so wimble and so wight." (Ecl. III, l. 88-91.)

WOODE; (woode Danish; woed Belg.; wuten Teut.); mad; wild; frolicsome; full of action and temper.

"PERIGOT. My sheepe did leave their wonted food;
WILLIE. Heigh, ho, seely sheepe!
PERIGOT. And gazd on her, as they were woode;
WILLIE. Woode as he that did them keepe."

(Ecl. VIII, l. 73-6.)

The list of words and phrases still current in East Lancashire might have been much extended; but I have purposely confined myself to some of the most striking and distinctive. All the allusions to changes in Religion, with the opinions of the shepherds on such matters, very closely agree with what was transpiring at the time in this locality; and even the decorating of the Kirk accords well with the annual Rush-bearings and May-day festivities as formerly practised at Burnley. In the third Eclogue the name "Lettice" is introduced as that of "some country lass;" and it is worthy of remark that this is a common Christian name in the district at the present time. There is also a very significant passage in the fifth Eclogue, which, I think, modern editors have failed sufficiently to annotate. "Algrind" has been identified with Archbishop Grindal; and "Morell" with Aylmer, sometime Bishop of London; but with regard to the expression, "Sir John," nothing better has been advanced than that it is "the common name for a Romish priest." Most of the characters introduced into the Calendar are undoubtedly sketched from life, and I am inclined to think that "Sir John" in the following passage is no exception:

"Now, I pray thee, let me thy tale borrowe
For our Sir John, to say toorrowe
At the Kirke, when it is holiday:
For well he means but little can say."

(Ecl. V, l. 309-312.)
“E. K.,” in his annotations, has pointed out that in this Eclogue, “under the persons of the two shepherds, Piers and Palinode, be represented two forms of Pastors or Ministers, “or the Protestant and the Catholic;” and hence the “Sir John” may be presumed to point to some clergyman well known to Spenser in his youth. On referring to the list of Incumbents of Burnley, I find that Sir John Aspdene was chantry priest and also the first Protestant curate, that he had £4 8s. 11d. allowed him as stipend, 2 Edward VI, A.D. 1548, and that he died A.D. 1567. He had lived in troublous times, so far as regards Church matters; but had managed to retain his preferment throughout all changes.

If Spenser resided at Hurstwood during youth, he would probably receive his early education at the Burnley Grammar School, then recently established, and would attend Burnley Church, where he would become well acquainted with Sir John and his character. Spenser was fourteen years of age when this incumbent died; and as he entered at Cambridge two years later, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Sir John Aspdene was the person intended.

The author of the Calendar was evidently well acquainted with the dialectic peculiarities of the population amongst whom he resided. He has been shewn to make free use of these in the various Eclogues of his first work; and hence, taking both his family pedigree and what has now been advanced into due consideration, it appears to me that we have some very strong additional evidence that Edmund Spenser not only spent most of his youth in East Lancashire; but also that he retired into this part of the county when he left Cambridge and went to reside with “some relations he has “in the North of England.”