

COUNTY FAMILIES

OF

Lancashire and Cheshire.

BY

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CHAPTER I.

THE STANLEYS.



AMONG the COUNTY FAMILIES OF LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE the Stanleys during many long centuries have held a proud pre-eminence. Descended from one of the fierce fighting men who followed William the Bastard to the Conquest and the spoil of England, they have, by strength of arm and power of brain, forced their way to the very front rank of the English nobility; from age to age they have borne their part in the memorable events and stirring scenes that go to make up "our rough island story," and have given to their country many courageous, astute, brave, and singularly successful men, whose influence has been strongly impressed upon the nation's annals.

The first known ancestor was a certain Adam de Audleigh, or Aldithlega, so named from the paternal estate of Audithlegh, in Normandy, who came over with William the Conqueror. Acquitting himself bravely on the field of Hastings, he was

rewarded with large estates in the newly-conquered country. This Adam was accompanied in the expedition by his two sons, Lydulph, or Lyulph, and Adam de Audleigh. These sons married, and in due course a son was born to each—grandsons of the old Norman warrior—both of whom married into a Saxon family of noble rank and ancient lineage, which had been fortunate enough to retain possession of its estates, while confiscation had been the lot of those around. The family derived its name from the Manor of Stanleigh, or Stoneleigh—the stony lea or stony field according to the Anglo-Saxon meaning—an insignificant hamlet about three miles south-west of Leek, in Staffordshire, a place which Erdswick, the old topographer, remarks, “seems to take its name of the nature of the soil, which, though it be in the moorlands, is yet a rough and stony place, and many craggy rocks are about it.” One of the grandsons, Adam, the son of Lyulph de Audleigh, became in right of his wife, Mabella, daughter and heir of Henry de Stanleigh, lord of Stanley, and was ancestor of the Lords Audleigh, or Audley of Hegleigh, of ancient times, and is represented through the female line by the Touchets, Lords Audley of the present day. Of these Audleys was that chivalrous soldier, Lord James Audley, who at Poitiers “broke through the French army,” and, though “sore hurt, fought as long as his breath served him.” Of his interview with the Black Prince, at the close of that memorable day, Froissart has left us in his chronicles a graphic and touching description.

The other grandson of the valiant old Norman, William, son of Adam de Audleigh, acquired with his wife, Joan, daughter and sole heir of Thomas Stanley, of Stafford, the lordship of 'Thalck, better known as Talk, or Talk-o'-th'-Hill, in the same county. This William seems to have conceived a liking for the Stony-lea, before referred to, for he gave his Manor of Talk, together with that of Balterley, to his cousin Adam, in exchange for it. Thenceforward he made Stanleigh his seat, and, as the old chroniclers tell us, in honour of his wife and of the great antiquity of her family, assumed her maiden name, and became the imme-

diate founder of the Stanleys, a race associated with the most stirring events in English history, and which at the present day comprehends, in addition to the baronetcy enjoyed by the elder line—Stanley (now Errington), of Hooton-in-Wirral—the Earldom of Derby, of Knowsley, in Lancashire, and the Baronies of Stanley of Alderley, in Cheshire, and of Stanley of Preston, in Lancashire, besides the offshoots, the Stanleys of Dalegarth, in Cumberland, of Cross Hall, in Lancashire, and of Staffordshire, Sussex, Kent, and Hertfordshire.

Sir William Stanley, the fourth in descent from the William who settled at the Stony-lea, and first assumed the name, gave an impetus to the fortunes of his family by one of those matrimonial alliances to which the House of Stanley owes so much of its prosperity. He took to himself a wife in the person of Joan, the youthful daughter and co-heir of Sir Philip Bamville, master forester of Wirral, and lord of Storeton, a place some few miles south of Birkenhead.

THE STANLEYS OF STORETON.

Associated with this match is a love story that, in its romantic incidents, is scarcely less interesting than the one related of the fair heiress of Haddon, Dorothy Vernon. The daughter of the House of Storeton had given her heart to young Stanley, and to escape the misery of a forced marriage with one for whom she had no love she determined to elope. While a banquet was being given to her father, she stole unobserved away, and, being joined by young William Stanley, rode swiftly across the country to Astbury Church, where, in the presence of Adam Hoton and Dawe Coupelond, the anxious lovers plighted their troth to each other. Six hundred years have rolled away since that scene was enacted, but it requires little stretch of the imagination to picture the anxious but resolute maiden hastening with tremulous steps from her father's house, the exciting ride across country, and the hurried joining of hands and hearts in the old Church of Astbury; and forgetting that all this occurred long ages ago, we wish from