"OLD THREE LAPS"

At Laycock, two miles west of Keighley, at a farm called "The Worlds" lived a closefisted yeoman named Sharp, at the end of last century and the beginning of this. He carried on a small weaving business in addition to his farm, and amassed a considerable sum of money. The story goes that on one occasion old Sharp brought a piece of cloth to the Keighley tailor and told him to make a coat for him out of it. The tailor on measuring the farmer pronounced the cloth to be insufficient to allow of tails to the coat, and asked what he was to do under the circumstances. "Tho' mun make it three laps "— *i.e. any way*. The expression stuck to him, and till the day of his death the name of "Three Laps" adhered to him, when it passed to his still more eccentric son.

This son, William Sharp, for a while followed the trade of a weaver, but was more inclined to range the moors with his gun than stick to his loom; and the evenings generally found him in the bar of the "Devonshire Inn" at Keighley, the landlord of which was a Mr. Morgan. Young Three Laps was fond of chaffing his boon companions. On one occasion he encountered a commercial traveller in the timber trade, and began his banter by asking him the price of a pair of mahogany "laithe" (barn) doors. The traveller, prompted by Mr. Morgan, drew him out, and booked his order.

After some weeks the invoice of mahogany barn doors, price upwards of £30, was forwarded to William Sharp. Young Three Laps was beside his wits with dismay, and had recourse to Mr. Morgan, and through his intervention the imaginary mahogany barn doors were not sent.

The barmaid of the "Devonshire" was a comely, respectable young woman, the daughter of a neighbouring farmer named Smith. William Sharp fell desperately in love with the girl, proposed, and was accepted. The day for the wedding was fixed, and the young man went to Keighley Church at the appointed hour to be married. But the bride was not there. At the last moment a difficulty had arisen about the settlements. Mr. Smith could not induce Old Three Laps to bestow on his son sufficient money to support him in a married condition, and the two old men had quarrelled and torn up the settlements.

The blow was more than the mind of William Sharp could bear. He returned to "The Worlds" sulky, went to bed, and never rose from it again. For forty nine years he kept to his bed, and refused to speak to anyone. He was just thirty years old when he thus isolated himself from society and active life, and he died in his bed at the age of seventy nine, on March 3rd, 1856.

The room he occupied measured nine feet long and was about the same breadth. The floor was covered with stone flags, and was generally damp. In one corner was a fireplace which could be used only when the wind blew from one or two points of the compass; the window was permanently fastened, and where some of the squares had been broken, was carefully patched with wood. At the time of his death, this window had not been opened for thirty eight years. The

sole furniture comprised an antique clock, minus weight and pendulum, the hands and face covered with a network of cobwebs; a small round table of dark oak, and a plain unvarnished four post bedstead, entirely without hangings. In this dreary cell, whose only inlet for fresh air during thirty eight years was the door occasionally left open, did this strange being immure himself. He obstinately refused to speak to anyone, and if spoken to even by his attendants would not answer. All trace of intelligence gradually faded away; the only faculties which remained in active exercise were those he shared with the beasts.

His father by his will made provision for the temporal wants of his eccentric son, and so secured him a constant attendant. He ate his meals regularly when brought to him, and latterly in a very singular manner, for in process of time his legs became contracted and drawn towards his body, and when about to eat his food he used to roll himself over and take his meals in a kneeling posture. He was generally cleanly in his habits. During the whole period of his self-imposed confinement he never had any serious illness, the only case of indisposition those connected with him could remember being a slight loss of appetite, caused apparently by indigestion, for two or three days — and this, notwithstanding that he ate on an average as much as any farm labourer. He certainly, physically speaking, did credit to his food, for though arrived at the age of seventy-nine years, his flesh was firm, fair and unwrinkled, save with fat, and he weighed about 240 lbs. He showed great repugnance to being seen, and whenever a stranger entered his den he immediately buried his head in the bedclothes. About a week before his death his appetite began to fail; his limbs became partially benumbed, so that he could not roll himself over to take his food in his accustomed posture.

From this attack he seemed to rally, and no apprehensions were entertained that the attack would prove fatal, till the evening before his death.

However, during the night he rapidly became worse, and expired at four a.m. on Monday, March 3rd, 1856.

Shortly before he expired he was heard to exclaim — “Poor Bill! Poor Bill! poor Bill Sharp!” — the most connected sentence he had been known to utter for forty nine years.

He was buried in Keighley Churchyard on the 7th of March, amidst crowds who had come from all parts of the neighbourhood to witness the scene. The coffin excited considerable attention from its extraordinary shape, as his body could not be straightened, the muscles of the knees and thighs being contracted. It was an oak chest, two feet four inches in depth. The weight was so great that it required eight men with strong ropes to lower it into the grave. It was thought to weigh with its contents 480 lbs.

A gentleman who visited Old Three Laps before his death has given the following account of what he saw:—

"If you chance to go a-skating 'to the Tarn,' and want a fine bracing walk, keep on the Sutton road about a mile, and you will come to an avenue of larch, not in a very thriving state, but sufficient to indicate that some one had an idea of the picturesque who planted the trees, although the house at the top of the avenue has not a very attractive appearance. You have now reached 'World's End,' and save here and there a solitary farm, with its cold stone buildings and treeless fields, there are few signs of life between you and the wide and boundless moors of Yorkshire and Lancashire. On the opposite hill, right up in the clouds, is 'Tewett Hall,' the residence of a Bradford Town Councillor. He alone, in this part, seems to follow Three Laps' ancestors' plan of planting, and in a few years we may expect to see a fine belt of timber on the verge of the horizon, a sight that will cheer the heart of some future Dr. Syntax when in search of the picturesque. At this place Three Laps 'took his bed,' and in a little parlour, with a northern light, the sill of which is level with the field, the floor cold and damp, and meanly furnished, it was my privilege to see Three Laps some twenty five years ago. To gain admission we had some difficulty; but with the assistance of the farmer and a tin of tobacco to the nurse, who was an inveterate smoker, we were shown into his bedroom. As soon as he heard strangers, he pulled the bedclothes over his head, which the nurse with considerable force removed, and uncovered his body, which was devoid of every vestige of body linen. A more startling and sickening sight I never saw. Nebuchadnezzar rushed into my mind. Three Laps covered his face with his hands, his fingers being like birds' claws, while, with his legs drawn under his body, he had the appearance of a huge beast. He had white hair, and a very handsome head, well set on a strong chest. His body and all about him was scrupulously clean, and his condition healthy, as his nurse proudly pointed out, digging her fist furiously into his ribs. He gave no signs of joy or pain, but lay like a mass of inanimate matter. It struck me at the time that his limbs were stiff; but a neighbour of his, who after his dinner stole a peep into his bedroom window, told me that he found him playing with his plate in the manner of a Chinese juggler, and with considerable ability. On my informant tapping the window, he vanished under the bedclothes.

"Such was the life of the strange man who for love of a woman never left this obscure room for nearly half a century."

The case of Old Three Laps is not unique.

In the early part of this century there lived in the neighbourhood of Caen, in Normandy, a Juge de Paix, M. Halloin, a great lover of tranquillity and ease; so much so, indeed, that, as bed is the article of furniture most adapted to repose, he rarely quitted it, but made his bedchamber a hall of audience, in which he exercised his functions of magistrate, pronouncing sentence with his head resting on a pillow, and his body languidly extended on the softest of feather beds. However, his services were dispensed with, and he devoted the remaining six years of his life to still greater ease. Feeling his end approach, M. Halloin determined on remaining constant to his principle, and showing to the world to what an extent he carried his passion for bed. Consequently, his last will

contained a clause expressing his desire to be buried at night, in his bed, comfortably tucked in, with pillows and coverlets, as he had died.

As no opposition was raised against the execution of this clause, a huge pit was sunk, and the defunct was lowered into his last resting place without any alteration having been made in the position in which death had overtaken him. Boards were laid over the bed, that the falling earth might not disturb this imperturbable quietist.

CHRISTOPHER PIVETT

Christopher Pivett died at York, in 1796, at the advanced age of ninety three years. He was by trade a carver and gilder, but in early life had served in the army, and been present in several battles — Fontenoy, Dettingen, and the siege of Carlisle.

After he settled at York, his house was accidentally burnt down; and he then formed the singular resolution never again to sleep in a bed, lest he should be burned to death whilst asleep, or not have sufficient time to remove his property, should an accident again occur. This resolution he strictly adhered to for the remaining forty years of his life.

His practice was to repose upon the floor, or on two chairs, or sitting in a chair, but always dressed.

During the whole period he dwelt alone he was his own cook, and seldom suffered anyone to enter the house. He would not tell anyone where he had been born or to whom he was related, and there can be little doubt that the name of Pivett was an assumed one. Among other singularities, he kept a human skull in his house, and strictly ordered that it should be buried with him.

DAVID TURTON, MUSICIAN AT HORBURY

David Turton was born in Horbury, near Wakefield, A.D. 1768, and died August 18th, 1846.

He was by trade a weaver of flannel, and his loom, which was in the upper room of the cottage in which he lived, might be heard by passers-by going diligently from early morn to dewy eve. In this way he supplied his few earthly wants, for he was a man of a very simple and unobtrusive character; and he did not change either his dress or his habits with the growing luxury of the times.

In matter of diet he was frugal, and he always stuck to the old oatcake and oatmeal porridge he had been accustomed to from childhood. “Avver bread and avver me-al porritch” was what he called them, for he spoke the broadest Yorkshire. Alas! the delightful oatcake, thin, crisp, is now a thing of the past in Horbury. There was an old woman made it, the last of a glorious race of avver bre-ad makers in Horbury, some years ago. But she has gone the way of all flesh; and the base descendants of the oatcake crunchers, the little men of today, sustain their miserable lives on bakers’ wheat bread.

David did not, as is the custom with Northerners now, speak two languages — English and Yorkshire, according to the company in which they find themselves; but on all occasions, and for all purposes, he adhered to that peculiarly racy and piquant tongue, both in pronunciation and phraseology, which was so well known to those who dwelt in the West Riding of Yorkshire half a century ago, and which still more or less prevails in that locality. Half a century ago every village had its own peculiarity of intonation, its own specialities in words. A Horbury man could be distinguished from a man of Dewsbury, and a Thornhill man from one of Batley. The railways have blended, fused these peculiar dialects into one, and taken off the old peculiar edge of provincialism, so that now it is only to be found in its most pronounced and perfect development among the aged.

The figure of David Turton was spare, his legs long and lean as clothesline props. He wore drab breeches and white stockings, a long waistcoat of rather coarse black cloth, with a long coat of the same material, much the pattern of that now affected by our bishops.

His features were small and sharp, his eye especially bright and full of life; and having lost nearly all his teeth at a comparatively early age, his pointed chin and nose inclined much towards each other.

Music was his great delight, and in that he spent all his spare time and money. He was a good singer, and could handle the violoncello creditably. All Handel’s oratorios, besides many other works of the classical composers, he knew off by heart, and he was for a long time the chief musical oracle in the neighbourhood in which he lived. He even aspired to be a composer, and

published a volume of chants and psalm tunes. Some of the former, but few of the latter, have survived. His chants have found their way into various collections of Anglican chants along with those of Dr Turton, Bishop of Ely, also a musician and composer of chants. But they have ceased to sound in his own parish church, where they have been displaced by Gregorians. Not one of his hymn tunes has found its way into the most popular collection of the day — "Hymns Ancient and Modern" — which is the more to be regretted, as Turton's tunes were often original, which is much more than can be said for a good many of the new tunes inserted in that collection.

A considerable number of choristers in cathedral and parish church choirs owed all their musical skill to the careful training of old David Turton.

His efficiency in music, together with the simple goodness of his character, made him a favourite among musical people in all grades of society, and there was seldom a gathering in the neighbourhood where any good class of music was performed in which his well known figure was not to be seen.

On one occasion he went to Hatfield Hall, then the residence of Francis Maude, Esq., who was a great lover of music, and a friend and patron of old David.

His own account of his *débût* on that occasion is sufficiently characteristic to be given:—

"I went t' other day" said he, "to a gre-at meusic do at ou'd Mr. Maude's at 'Atfield 'All. Nah! When I gat theare, a smart looking chap o' a waiter telled me I was to goa into t' parlour; soa I follows efter him doun a long passage till we commed to a big oppen place like, and then he oppens a doo-ar, and says to me, 'Cum in!' soa I walks in, and theare I seed t' place were right full o' quality (gentlefolks), and Mr. Maude comes to me and says, 'Now, David, haw are ye?' 'Middlin' ' says I 'thenk ye!'. Soa then there comes a smart chap wi' a tray full of cups o' tea, and he says to me, 'Will ye hev sum?' 'Thenk ye' says I 'I'm none particular.' 'Why, then, help yer sen' says he. Soa I taks a cup i' my hand; and then says he, 'Weant ye hev sum sugar and cre-am?' 'Aye, for sure,' says I; soa I sugars and creams it, and then there comes another chap wi' a tray full of bre-ad and butter, and cakes like, and says he, 'Will ye hev sum?' 'I don't mind if I do,' says I. 'Well, then,' says he, 'tak sum wi' thy fingers.' Soa I holds t' cup and t' sawcer i' one hand, and taks a piece of spice cake i' t' other. 'Now, then' thinks I, 'how am I ever to sup my te-a? I can't team (pour) it out into t' sawcer, for boath my hands is fast.' But all at once I sees a plan o' doin' it. I thowt I could hold t' cake i' my mouth while I teamed (poured) t' te-a into t' sawcer, and then claps th' cup on a chair while I supped my tea. But, bless ye, t' cake war so varry short (crumbling) that it brake off i' my mouth, and tum'led onto t' floor, and I were in a bonny tak-ing. Howsomever, I clapt t' cup and t' sawcer onto t' chair, and kneeled me down on t' floor, and sammed (picked) it all up as weel as I could; and then I sups up my tea as sharp as I could, and gave t' cup and t' sawcer to t' chap who cumed round again wi' his tray. 'Will ye hev some more?' says he. 'Noa,' says I, 'noa more, thenk ye.' For I thowt to mysen I had made

maugrums (antics) enough, and all t' quality 'at war theare mun ha' thowt me a hawkard owd chap. Weel! When tea were finish'd we gat to th' music, and then, I promise ye, I war all reet, an' a rare do we had on it."

David was returning through a pasture one day in which was a furious bull, who seeing old David with his red bag, made at him. The musician did not fly; that would not comport with his dignity, and his bass viol that he carried in the bag might be injured by a precipitate retreat over the hedge. The bull bellowed, and came on with lowered horns.

"Steady!" soliloquised the musician; "I reckon that was double B nat'ral."

Again the bull bellowed.

"I am pretty sure it were B," said David again, "but I'll mak' sure;" and opening his bag, he extracted the bass viol, set it down, and drawing his bow across the vibrating string, produced a sound as full of volume and of the same pitch as the tone of the infuriated beast.

"I thowt I were reet" said David, with a grim smile.

At the sound of the bass viol the bull stood still, raised his head, and glowered at the extraordinary object before him. David, having his viol out, thought it a pity to bag it again without a tune, and began the violoncello part in one of Handel's choruses. It was too much for the bull; he was outbellowed, and turned tail.

When David was getting a little advanced in years he was coming home on a dark night from a musical gathering, and tumbling over a large stone which happened to be lying on the road, he fell down with great force and dislocated his hip.

This was a sore trial to him in many ways. In the first place, it quite prevented his going on with his customary means of obtaining his living, and, besides that, it deprived him of the pleasure of going about among his musical friends.

For a long, weary time he was quite confined to his bed, and time hung heavy on his hands, for he had no other resources except his loom and his music. His constant companion in bed was his violoncello, and as he could not for a long time sit up sufficiently to enable him to use the bow, he spent a great part of the day in playing over pizzicato the music which he loved so well.

After some time he got about a little on crutches, and ultimately was able to go by the help of a stick. His little savings had now dwindled away, and poverty began to look him in the face. But at this crisis his musical friends came forward, and gave with great success for his benefit the oratorio of the "Messiah" in the town of Wakefield, and by this means raised for him the liberal sum of £70, of which they begged his acceptance.

He was afraid to have so large a sum in his own charge, and he therefore requested that it might be placed in the hands of the Vicar of Horbury, so that he might draw from time to time just as much as he needed. This was accordingly done, and by his careful expenditure of it, it sufficed to make him quite comfortable during the rest of his life, and to erect the simple memorial stone which now stands over his grave in Horbury churchyard.

He had a married sister living in London who had often invited him to pay her a visit, and when he had recovered from his accident sufficiently to go about pretty well by the aid of a stick, and having now plenty of time at his disposal, on account of his being lame and unable to work at his loom, he determined to embark on the railway to London.

His sister lived in Kensington, and his own account, of his visit, and of what he saw in the great city, was highly amusing: —

"I went up" said he "on a Setterday, and o' t' Sunday morn, while we was getting our breakfast, th' sister's husband says to me across t' table, 'I reckon ye'll goa wi' us to chapel this forenoin,' for ye see they was chapel folks. 'We'll see' says I 'efter a bit.' But I knew varry weel mysen what I were boun' to do, though I didn't say so to them.

"Soa I just watches my opportunity, an' when they was all gone out of the room, I nips out, as sharp as a lark, and goas to t' end o' t' entry. For t' sister's house war not to t' street, but up a bit on a entry like; and away I goas till I sees a homnibus, and I calls out to t' fellow, 'I say, are ye for Sant Paul's?' 'Aye,' says he.

"Why then,' says I, 'ye're t' chap for me!' Soa he oppens t' door, an' I jumps in.

"'How much is it?' says I. 'Nobbut sixpence,' says he. Soa I rode all t' way thro' (from) Kensington to Sant Paul's — and ye know it's a rare way — all for sixpence.

"Eh! And bless ye! We just hed a sarvice! Think nobbut o' me goin to their ou'd chapel, wi' nowt but a bit on a poor snufflin' hymn or two, an' some squealin' bairns and women to sing 'em, and a ram'lin, rantin' sarmon iver so long, when I had t' opportunity o' going to Sant Paul's to hear thinks done as they sud be done. Nay, nay! — I warn't sich a fooil as that nauther. I warn't born i' Yorkshire to know no better nor that, I'll uphou'd ye.

"Howsomever, when I gat back hoame, they was into me weel for giving 'em t' slip, an' turnin' my back, as they said, on t' blessed Gospel invitin' of me. But I let 'em say what they'd a mind to. When a beer barrel begins to fiz out o' t' bung hoil, tha' mun let it fiz a bit, thof't mak a mucky slop, or it'll bust t' barrel. I said nowt; I just set and thowt o' what I'd heard, and I played it ower again on my in'ards.

"T' next day I thowt I sud like to goa and hear t' band of t' Orse Guards. Now t' sister 'usband had a nephy 'at was one on 'em; soa I went wi' him. And after they'd played iver so mony things — eh! An' bless ye, they just did play 'em — he says to t' leader o' t' band — 'Yon ow'd chap' — meaning' me — 'knows a bit about meusic.' Soa t' fellow says to me, 'Is there owt partickler ye'd like?' 'Nay' says I 'owt 'at ye've got'll be reight for me.'

"'Nay' says he 'owt 'at ye've a mind to ax for.' Soa I picks two or three things 'at justs comes to my mind like. And, bless ye! they play 'em like owt at all, and then I menshuned another or two, an' they were never fast wi owt till it was time for 'em to lap up. Soa they says, 'we mun goa now, but ye mun come agean another day!' 'I sall,' says I, 'ye may depend.' And I went reg'lar every day as long as I war i' London; and rared pleased they war wi' me an' all, and so ye mind war I wi' them.

"That, and Sant Paul's, an' Westminster Habbey, war t' main o' what I seed and heeard all t' time I war i' London."

JOHN BARTENDALE, THE PIPER

In the reign of King Charles I. a strolling musician, a poor piper, named John Bartendale, was brought, in 1634, before the Assizes, and was convicted of felony.

He received sentence, and on March 27th was hung on the gallows, outside Micklegate Bar, York. There were no houses there at that time — it was open country. After he had remained swinging for three quarters of an hour, and was to all appearance dead, he was cut down, and buried near the place of execution. The officers of justice had accomplished their work carelessly in both particulars, as it afterwards transpired, for he had been neither properly hung nor properly buried.

Earth has a peculiarly invigorating and restorative effect, as has been recently discovered; and patients suffering from debility are by some medical men nowadays placed in earth baths with the most salutary effects. In the case of gangrened wounds a little earth has been found efficacious in promoting healthy action of the skin. John Bartendale was now to experience the advantages of an earth bath.

That same day, in the afternoon, a gentleman, one of the Vavasours of Hazlewood, was riding by, when he observed the earth moving in a certain place. He ordered his servant to alight; he himself descended from his horse; and together they threw off the mould, and discovered the unfortunate piper alive. He opened his eyes, sat up, and asked where he was, and how he came there. Mr. Vavasour and his servant helped him out of his grave, and seated him on the side. The man was sent for water and other restoratives, and before long the news had spread about down Micklegate that the poor piper was come to life again. A swarm of wondering and sympathising people poured out to congratulate John the Piper on his resurrection, and to offer their assistance. A conveyance was obtained, and as soon as Bartendale was in a sufficient condition to be moved, he was placed in it, covered with Mr. Vavasour's cloak — for he had been stripped by the executioner before he was laid in the earth — and was removed again to York Castle.

It was rather hard that the poor fellow, after he had obtained his release, should have been returned to his prison; but there was no help for it. The resurrection of the piper was no secret; otherwise Mr. Vavasour would doubtless have removed him privately to a place of security till he was recovered, and then have sent him into another part of the country.

At the following Assizes, Bartendale was brought up again. It was a nice point at law whether the man could be sentenced to execution again after the Sheriff had signed his affidavit that the man had been hung till he was dead. Mr. Vavasour was naturally reluctant to supply the one link in the chain of evidence which established the identity of the prisoner with the piper who had been hung and buried for felony; he made earnest intercession that the poor fellow might

be reprieved, popular sympathy was on his side, the judge was disposed to mercy, and Bartendale was accorded a full and free pardon, the judge remarking that the case was one in which the Almighty seemed to have interfered in mercy to frustrate the ends of human justice, and that therefore he was not disposed to reverse the decree of Providence according to the piper a prolongation of his days on earth.

Drunken Barnaby in his "Book of Travels" alludes to Bartendale, when he stops at York:

"Here a piper apprehended,
Was found guilty and suspended;
Being led to t' fatal gallows,
Boys did cry, 'Where is thy bellows?
Ever must thou cease thy tuning,'
Answered he, 'For all your cunning,
You may fail in your prediction.'
Which did happen without fiction;
For cut down, and quick interred,
Earth rejected what was buried;
Half alive or dead he rises,
Got a pardon next Assizes,
And in York continued blowing —
Yet a sense of goodness showing."

After his wonderful deliverance the poor fellow turned hostler, and lived very honestly afterwards.

When asked to describe his sensations on being hung, he said that when he was turned off, flashes of fire seemed to dart before his eyes, and were succeeded by darkness and a state of insensibility.