

## CHAPTER II.

England in 1822: A land convulsed by civil strife—Stockport in 1822: A Town of narrow lanes and streets—Birdnesting at Spring Bank—Pumps and Wells—Population of the town in 1822—A Remarkable Record: Four Generations of Mayors—Court Leet and Court Baron—A Prosperous Manufacturing Town—Cotton Mills in 1822—Places of Worship—Games of Long Ago.

IT is difficult for one living and writing in these days to give anything like an adequate pen picture of Stockport as it appeared in 1822, or to realise clearly the problems, the hopes and the fears which surrounded those who were playing their part in the town's history in those early days of the Nineteenth Century, which to all of us are a mere shadow-land to be depicted only through the eyes of others.

GEORGE IV., but two years king, was seated on the throne of a land convulsed from end to end with internal strife, suffering from evils, social and political. The clang of conflict, which had deafened the people of two hemispheres through the best part of the 18th century, was even yet echoing and re-echoing through Europe. At Waterloo, one appalling and sanguinary chapter in the world's history had been closed, and as yet the eyes of the people had not caught the radiance of that century of all but unbroken peace and prosperity which Wellington's victory had ushered in. VICTORIA, that royal lady, under whose beneficent sway England was to reach heights of progression and power undreamed of then, was but a toddling baby, three years old, and though in far off lands English brains and English hands were busy welding together that Empire which was to be the marvel and the glory of the century's closing years, none could foresee, none dared even to hope, that in so few short years we should have recovered from the blow which rent from us our fairest belongings in the New World, and left us robbed alike of possessions and of glory. But while the British were at peace with the world, at home they were a mass of seething discontent, and of restless agitation. Only two years before, in 1820, the notorious Cato Street Conspiracy—a plot to murder the entire British Cabinet—was unearthed, and five of the conspirators were executed, while a year or so prior to that the great historic demonstration took place in St. Peter's Field, Manchester, when the Riot Act was read, and eleven of the demonstrators were killed by the military. It is said, by the way, that a considerable contingent from Stockport was present at that sanguinary gathering. The Corporation and Tests Acts, though almost a dead letter against the Dissenters, were rigidly enforced against the Catholics; while those of the Jewish persuasion were outside the pale of civilisation altogether, so far as civil rights and civil liberties were concerned. Men and women were ruthlessly hanged for trivial thefts, highwaymen lurked on every coach road, and infested the lonely commons through which the turnpikes passed; people travelled in crawling coaches, and shivered with excitement when a speed of 12 miles an hour was reached; the poor starved in their cabins and huts, sunk in an ignorance which was all but bestial; criminals stalked abroad unhindered by a corrupt and antiquated police; jobbery reigned in high places; and yet slowly but surely from this unpromising material was being