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A  
REVIEW  
OF THE  
**Statements,**  
CONTAINED IN A TREATISE  
ENTITLED,  
**Anecdotes**  
RESPECTING  
**CRANBOURN CHASE,**  

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**BY WILLIAM WEST.**

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## Preface.

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It may be seen by the Introduction to the History of Cranbourn Chase, published in 1816, that this Chase in its smallest or undisputed dimensions extends over a large tract of country on the North eastern side of Dorsetshire, and that the proprietors have also claimed the privilege of preserving and killing Deer on some adjacent parts of Wiltshire and Hampshire; which claim, though resisted more or less by the landholders, is still in some measure existent, and occasions frequent and expensive disputes between them and the proprietors of the Chase.

That a disafforestation of the Chase, by mutual agreement, would be at once beneficial to all parties and highly so to the community, can scarcely be doubted. Several thou-

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sands of acres of woodland and pasture now almost unproductive to the owners and to the public, might conveniently be spared for tillage, and the remainder, together with the lands now in cultivation, might by the removal of the Deer, be greatly improved and released from much damage. It may be seen in the History above mentioned, that some endeavours have been used to accomplish this disafforestation, but that various circumstances have prevented its completion; among which the difficulty of ascertaining the lands liable to payment of quit rent or ransom was not the least. To place in a connected form the various records heretofore produced, and to account for some seeming contradictions, was a principal object of the writer of the History; and no confutation of his statement has appeared. From the talents of the Author of the Anecdotes, and his long acquaintance with the Chase, his work could not fail to be interesting, and some material elucidation was expected; but of his success in this respect the reader may form his own judgment by a view of the work in question.

*NOTE.—In the following Review the orthography is made conformable to that of the Anecdotes, respecting the words Cranbourn Chase, in order to preserve a consistency of appearance amidst the quotations. The modern usage is perhaps more generally “Cranborn Chace”.*

A  
REVIEW  
OF  
ANECDOTES &c.

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**T**HE "Anecdotes" commence with an assertion, that "The earliest account of Cranborne Chase that can be taken in these days, seems to be from the æra when King John, or some other Royal Personage, had a hunting-seat at Tollard Royal, in the county of Wilts:" but this by no means ascertains the æra, as it does not appear on record that Tollard was ever held by the Crown, or that any Royal Personage had a hunting seat there. The writer continues

“And there are vestiges in and about the old Palace, which, to an accurate observer, clearly evince that it was once a Royal habitation;” but he afterwards says more cautiously, that they “seem to confirm” this supposition. These fancied vestiges are, “the large cypress trees growing before the house,” “the relics of grand terraces,” “the park to which some of them lead, and the gate at the end of the park.” These cypress trees are two in number, with no stamp of Royalty upon them, the supposed relics are some old banks in and near the garden, the existence of a park implies that it was not in the Chase, and the gate has nothing unusual in its appearance. This gate, it is said “is now called *Alarm Gate*, being the place where the horn was blown to call the Keepers;” but this is a mistake, as the name arises from its being the entrance of a well-known liberty or district in Wiltshire, called Lavermere or Larnere. The gate is on the line of boundary between the counties of Wilts and Dorset, and



at "the entrance of the supposed Royal Chase;" which is an evidence in favour of the small bounds, The epithet of "Royal" is misapplied; as the Chase was only held by the Earls of Gloucester, except that King John retained it for a short period after his accession to the throne; but that tenure was in right of his wife Isabella, and he was soon divorced from her. "A small farm-house," which from tradition is sometimes honoured with the name of "King John's house," is adduced as a farther proof of Royalty; but we are not informed whether the personage thus alluded to, had a temporary abode, or a mere lodging at Tollard; or whether it was John *Sans Terre*, or John Baliol King of Scotland, or John of Gaunt King of Castile, or John of France, who was a prisoner in England under Edward III. The character of John King of England, affords no sanction to any pretensions founded solely on his authority, and his afforestations were set aside by the *Charta de Foresta*. If any traces of the Royal

possession of Tollard had been found, the documents would doubtless have been produced in favour of the claims of Chase; but it does not appear that any such ever existed.

Another statement in the Anecdotes is, that “there can be no doubt but at a time in ancient days, when the Chase was in the hands of Royalty, it was an immense tract of Woodlands, without any roads or passages through them.” On the contrary, it appears from Domesday Book, that in the time of William I. the King held the Manor of Ashmore and other lands in Dorsetshire, that many other possessions in that part of the County were held by some of the Nobility and Clergy, and that a considerable portion of land in all those places, was in a state of cultivation, having arable, meadow and pasture, with husbandmen &c. thereon. The History of Dorsetshire also mentions sundry lands belonging to the Abbey of Shaftesbury in the time of King John, at various places both

in Dorsetshire and Wiltshire, within the large bounds. The descriptions of these lands, by hides, virgates, &c. also implies cultivation. The lands which remained uncultivated doubtless had passages through them, and the conjecture "that they were afterwards, by Royal commandment cut into commodious Ridings, through the whole of the Chase, and those Ridings planted on both sides with various evergreens" is destitute of foundation. The Ridings or paths were rather the work of time and of casual usage; and the evergreens, intermixed with hazels and other deciduous Shrubs and Trees, are the natural produce of the soil.

The next assertion requiring notice is, that "after these great improvements were made," viz. the formation of Ridings, &c. "the whole of the Chase was portioned out into eight distinct Walks; viz. Alderholt, Fernditch, Cobley, Staplefoot, Rushmore, West Walk, Bursey Stool, and Chettered." This enumeration is contra-

dicted by records of the time of King James I. which mentioned only six Walks, viz. Cobley, Staplefoot, Rushmore, Burse Stool, West Walk, and Chettered." Alderholt is only denominated a Park, in several records of Edward II. and of succeeding Kings; an assertion therefore that "Alderholt walk was the largest and most extensive in the whole Chase, lying in the three Counties, Hants, Wilts, and Dorset," is inadmissible. That it "contained a numerous stock of the finest Deer, which did much damage to the young timber Trees growing in Lord Shaftesbury's immense Woods "and that" Lord Ashley purchased the Chase of the Earl of Salisbury, with the intent as is supposed of dismembering it and discharging the whole of the great walk of Alderholt, is unsupported by any authority. No "proof appears that the Earl of Salisbury did alienate Fernditch to the Earl of Pembroke," or that the former ever possessed it. Fernditch probably came to the Crown on the dissolution of the monasteries, under Henry

VIII. and no account of it afterward is produced, anterior to the grant of the Chase to the Earl of Salisbury. It was expressly mentioned in the perambulation of the Commissioners in VIIth. of Edward I. whereby, the grove of Fernditch to wit, all that was in Wilts, and to the Avon, were to be disafforested: i. e. all in Wiltshire and Hampshire, that had been claimed to the Chase, by Gilbert de Clare earl of Gloucester and his predecessors†. Rushmore anciently belonged to the Abbey of Wilton, and is said to have been a lodge for the Abbess's Woodwards, though afterwards occupied as a lodge to the Chase, being near the small bounds. The situation of Rushmore lodge, and of those of Cobley, Staplefoot, Burseystool, and Wes lodge, indicates the limits of the Chase,

† It is observable that in Speed's and other old Maps of the Counties of Wilts and Dorset and in those of Camden's Britannia, the words "Cranborne Chase," and the figures of Trees, are delineated on the Dorsetshire side of the boundary line.

being all within or near the small bounds. The latter four were, it is said, in Dorsetshire.\* Of Chettered little is known from ancient times, except that it was described as a separate Forest. "A grant from Gilbert de Clare Duke of Gloucester," which mentions "Chettered walk" as "adjoining West walk" is of no validity in this case; as his pretensions to a right of Chase on the out grounds were defeated in the time of Edward the I. That "the boundary of this southern Walk", of Chettered, "must be the river Allen," because "if it extended farther it must have broken upon the ancient Forest of Holt," is rather an extraordinary inference, and is contrary to the evidence of several records, which mention that some places within that boundary, were at certain distances from the

\* Staplefoot lodge has been burnt down, by accident and a new lodge has been formed, at a small distance, in Wiltshire. Another lodge has been made in Dorsetshire, by purchase of a Cottage formerly built upon the waste. These circumstances indicate the case with which the older lodges may have been formed.

Chase. The assertion, "that the great Western Road passing between this Walk and the others," and that "the Parishes of Pimperne and Tarrant Hinton having been built in later years, and much land broken up for tillage to support them, the communication between the Walks was in some measure obstructed" is contradicted in Domesday Book, which describes a great number of tenures under the general head of Tarrant, of which Tarrant Hinton was a part. The name Pimperne also occurs in that Book, and each place had a considerable portion of cultivated land. Chet-tered is separated from the Walks of the Chase, by arable lands and sheep pastures, and if there is now any "intercourse, and the Deer pass from one to the other" as the writer intimates, it may be imputed to the gradual extension of the Deer's range southward, in modern time. The similarity of the Ridings and evergreens to those of the Chase, arises from the nature of the soil, and from the identity of oc-

cupation for a long period. The variation in the measure of Wood Lands, implies a radical difference in the constitution of the two Forests or Chases; sixteen and a half feet only being allowed to the Rod Perch in Chettered, whilst in the Chase the usual measure in the Coppices is eighteen feet. The obvious inference is that Chettered had a different origin and establishment.

The assertion that "we know not in what manner the Chase came into possession of an Earl of Salisbury" is a proof of the little attention paid to the ancient Records. The Chase was granted in fee by James Ist. to Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, and on his decease soon afterwards it came to his Son William, who succeeded to the title. A new grant was taken out by the latter with remainder to the Crown, but this was only a pretence; the Chase being afterwards sold in fee.



The Writer says "the Lodge" (of Alderholt) "being in the Parish of Cranbourn, and all the Chase Courts held at the Manor House there, where also was a Prison for offenders against the Chase Laws, the whole Chase took the name of Cranbourn Chase, which it never bore till it came into the possession of the Earl of Salisbury." \* On the contrary the Chace bore the name of Cranbourn, under Richard de Clare Earl of Gloucester, in the reign of Henry III. when the Earl endeavoured to unite its jurisdiction, with the hundred of Cranbourn; though these were distinct tenures. The Prison was an appendage to the hundred Court of Cranbourn, which had jurisdiction in certain cases; but was not legally used "for offenders against the Chase Laws." The name of Cranbourn was

\* The Writer says respecting this passage, "This is from oral tradition only, and was the received opinion for ages; but old records say otherwise," and he makes similar observations on other passages; which in fact involves a contradiction to his own statements.

improperly continued to the Western Chase; the out-grounds in which Cranbourn is situated, had been released from the claims of Chase, by virtue of the charter of Forests, but that name continued to be used for some time; whilst the woodlands in the vicinity of Cranbourn were described in various records by the names of "the Chase of Blakedon and Chettell," "Blakedon Park," "Blagdon Woods," "Blagdon alias Cranbourn Park," &c. but we do not find them under the appellation of Alderholt,

The assertion that "the very extensive Bounds of the Chase, appertained only to the two great Walks of Fernditch and Alderholt," that "when these Walks were destroyed, these oppressive boundaries, as they were deemed to be, became mere nonentities," and "that the expensive litigations which have lately passed, were for the shadow of a substance long extinct," are novelties in the dispute: and the recent

pleadings respecting the Chase make no such distinction. The statement that "the Eastern Boundary of Lord Rivers's Chase extends no farther than the parishes of Berwick, Alvediston, Ebbesbourne, Fifield and the Chalks,"\* and that "the rivulet which runs through those villages, hath been the boundary line for time immemorial," is a similar novelty.† Though the Writer thus disclaims the pretensions to a privilege of Chase, on the lands between the rivulet abovementioned and the streams of Semene and Noddre, he contends for the whole extent on the opposite side; where he says concerning the Chase, "the river Stower must certainly be its utmost bounds to the West, and ever was so, as the least cursory view will clearly

\* The Chalks were not in Lord Rivers's Chase, but in Lord Pembroke's, that is as far as the Chase or Walk of the latter at Fernditch extended in those parishes.

† This statement of the boundary is inconsistent with the demand of chiminage at Harnham bridge.

evince ; and that the Parishes of Sutton Waldron, Fontmell, Compton, Melbury, &c. are the boundaries North Westward ;” but this is only the old claim of the large bounds, a view of which will rather evince the improbability of the existence of such a tract of Chase or Forest as they would comprehend.

Concerning modern times, the writer of the Anecdote says, he has been conversant with all matters relating to this Chase more than seventy years and can prove that during that time, Lord Rivers’s Keepers did exercise his rights there, and kill for his use the Deer which were found in the woods and fields beforementioned ;” viz. in Berwick, Alvediston, Ashcomb, &c. and that “all persons who had been detected in coursing and killing Deer, within the aforesaid boundary, were duly prosecuted and suffered the penalties for so doing.” On the contrary it is well known, that the Deer on the out grounds have at various times been openly hunted and killed

by the landholders, and by the country people when astray in the Vales.

The existence of "a horse path, called *The Shire Rack*, which divides (or separates) the two Counties of Wilts and Dorset," is an evidence in favour of the small bounds, of which that path is a part; and "if a Deer on the Dorset side of the path should take a freak to skip across this path into Wilts," it is in the same state as if it had crossed any other part of those bounds; its liability to be coursed by the landholders, is the question at issue between them and the proprietor of the Chase.

The remark that "the Illuminati of the County of Wilts have *lately* made a grand discovery," &c. needs no reply, except to correct the misstatement. The inhabitants of that County have resisted the claim of Chase on the outgrounds, at various times, when occasion required, as

the annals of Cranbourn Chase evidently shew ; and it does not appear that a Wiltshire jury has ever sanctioned the claim by a verdict in its favour.

Another account is, that “in the Grant of the Chase, it is not only the feed of the Deer that is granted, but the exclusive property of the under game;” and that “the Writer remembers the time when there was no such person as a Game Keeper, throughout the whole Chase,” Undoubtedly there were Game Keepers on the out grounds, and therefore the appellation of “the whole Chase” can only be applicable to the lands within the *Inner* or *Small* Bounds; and thus again the Writer virtually contradicts the claim to the *Large* Bounds. The relation concerning “Mr. Doddington, afterwards Lord Melcombe,” as “the first person who ever presumed to appoint a Game Keeper,” the dispute that ensued, the discontinuance of the appointment for many years, &c. has little connection

with the controversy respecting the bounds of the Chase.

The next occurrence related, is the breaking into the Park at Gunville, belonging to . . . . Harbin, Esq. who it is said, "made an unfair use of it by converting some of the pales on the Chase side of it into a sort of Pitfall, so that the Deer could easily leap in but could not go back again; and to induce them to be thus entrapped, they were enticed by the laying of apple pomace (or refuse of the Cyder Press) of which the Deer are particularly fond, and which they can scent from a distance." Here again the description of "the Chase side" implies the small Bounds, which do not include the Park at Gunville. Whether the action brought against the Keeper on this occasion was discontinued because that "Mr. Harbin made a discovery from some writings he had found," inimical to his views, or that it was dropped at Dorchester

from the Counsel being all engaged on the other side, as related on behalf of the Plaintiff, the account does not afford sufficient evidence.

The next subject is concerning one Roberts of Tollard, against whom a verdict was given for hunting there. This man was not a tenant, and had hunted contrary to the custom of the manor, wherefore he was not countenanced by Lord Arundell. An agreement was made concerning the mode of hunting at Tollard, at the time of holding the Manor Court, but it cannot reasonably be inferred from this temporary agreement, that "all matters in dispute were settled by Lord Kenyon," &c. as is related.

Of the "occurrences which have happened on the Eastern side of the Chase" which the Writer thinks would, if known to the Judge at Salisbury," (in 1816) have "induced him to give very different instructions," the following



is the first instance given, viz. that Lord Castlehaven and other Gentlemen being on a dinner party at Ebbesbourne, many years ago, they killed\* a young deer in the vicinity, for which offence he paid fifteen pounds, (being half the usual penalty), to the poor. Respecting this transaction, it is probable that Lord Castlehaven's politeness or his connexions, did not suffer him to enter into a dispute with Lord Rivers; but this is not a sufficient proof that "Ebbesbourne fields on the Chase side of the Parish, were at that time holden to be parts and parcels of Cranbourn Chase," and the statement is contradicted, by other accounts.

The next anecdote is, that "Mr. John Lawes of Alvediston,† coursed and killed a Buck,

\*The Poor's Book, is still preserved; and no such entry is found; though intimated in the Anecdotes.

†The brother of this gentleman, on a recent enquiry recollected no such circumstance.

which had been lodged in his father's wheat," which he carried privately to Froome, under some wool; and that an Information being lodged against him, he "was duly convicted of the offence in the penalty of £30 which he paid." This account does not state the place where the deer was killed, and in other respects is inaccurate. An anecdote concerning Andrew Penny of Woodcotts, is still more imperfectly related: viz. that an information was laid against him by one Lawrence King, for killing a Deer in Alvediston and bringing it to Woodcotts in the Parish of Handley. Woodcotts is understood to be within the small Bounds, and a person having Venison there was liable to an information; but it does not appear that he was convicted.

The Writer describes the mode of hunting in in the last century, and says "he hath been in the practice of hunting many years with the Rushmore Buck Hounds, and hath been present

at the finding and killing many Deer, in every one of the little chain of Coppices, from Berwick Ivers to Eatscomb in the Parish of Ebbesbourne" &c. and at Ashcomb; and that "there never was a doubt, but that all the Woods here recited, belonged to the Chase, and were parts and parcels of the same" &c. but this is contradicted by the evidence of many persons now living, and by depositions taken at various times. The landholders considered the admission of the keepers, on the out grounds, as an indulgence only, resulting from the friendship and intercourse that formerly subsisted between the owners of the Chase and the neighbouring Gentlemen.

Another subject of the Anecdotes respecting the Chase, is "some account of the very serious affrays and bloody conflicts, which have passed there; attended with some Murders." These are, concerning a very bloody engagement between the Keepers and Deer stealers, in the

Parish of Tarrent Gunville; the Murder of a Keeper of West Walk, by persons unknown, on his way from Fontmell Church, in 1738· the Murder of a keeper in Fernditch Walk, about the same time, for which one Wheeler was executed and other persons absconded: a severe battle on Chettle Common, 16th December 1780, between a gang of Deer stealers armed with flails, and the keepers with staves and hangers, in which one man had his hand cut off, and was taken prisoner\* with several others of the gang, who were afterwards sentenced to transportation, but had their punishment commuted for imprisonment: another battle near Rushmore Lodge, in 1791, each party being ten in number, at the onset of which one of the Deer hunters was killed by a blow from one of the Keepers; and, in conclusion, several of the party were taken, and sentenced to transportation for life.

\* This man's name is mistated in the Anecdotes: it was not "Blandford," but Horlock. One Blandford lost two fingers.

Of these affrays the first is related from tradition only, without reference to any date: the Keeper near Fontmell was found dead, and no certainty appears that he was killed by Deer stealers: of the keeper at Fernditch, no particulars are given to determine the manner of his death, whether in combat with depredators or otherwise. The two succeeding instances remind us of the adventurous disposition that was prevalent in ancient times, and which still continues to be a consequence of the forest system. In these relations concerning the Chase, the difference of description is observable: the Wiltshire Keeper alone is said to have been beaten "*in a most cruel manner,*" though both were found dead, and in Dorsetshire the Man had his skull fractured: in the account of the two severe battles, the men at Rushmore are denominated "*a villainous set of deer stealers,*" who "*infested the Chase;*" whilst the Dorsetshire men at Bursey stool are not loaded with any such degrading epithets.

An affray of later date, concerning four men of Donhead in Wiltshire though of less consequence, is introduced in more indignant terms. The writer alludes to it in Page 32, as "a most atrocious action and bloody event" which had "recently taken place;" and, in Page 40, he imputes it to false notions which had been most industriously disseminated in that neighbourhood," (Donhead) "that Lord Rivers had no rights of Chase in Wiltshire, and that the Deer may be destroyed with impunity." On the contrary, the affair occurred on Ashmore Common in Dorsetshire, and no indication appears of any other than the usual inducements which the Chase affords to Deer hunting. Those men, of whom one was a Carpenter, two others a Sawyer and a youth in his employ, and the fourth a Carter or Labourer in husbandry, going out with a gun and a carbine or pistol, were overtaken by two Keepers armed with hangers or cutlasses, and the affray began. The Carpenter refusing to give up the Gun, was severely

wounded by a blow from a hanger, but made his escape, with two others; the Sawyer falling down, was taken and carried to Rushmore Lodge. Two of the Party were apprehended a few days afterwards, and three were sentenced to transportation; the Carter absconded. It does not appear that these men had made any attempt on the Deer, though such probably had been their intention; and their own account stated that they were alarmed by some noise of dogs in the adjacent woods, and when on their retreat homewards were overtaken by the Keepers; and that after some angry conversation, the affray commenced, the Carpenter alone appears to have been seriously injured, and no hurt is alledged to have been received by the Keepers in the slight resistance that was made. Thus the men and their families are punished severely, for what the writer stiles "a most atrocious action and bloody event," but wherein they perhaps were the only sufferers. Unhappily the guilt has in many cases been much more evident

than in the foregoing: the Chase affords great temptations to adventurers, and the people in its vicinity have not always the prudence to refrain from attacks on the Deer, of which many instances may be produced. Several of these have occurred of late years: some Men of the Parish of Handley were sentenced to transportation in 1813 or 1814, for resisting the Keepers, and others for a similar offence in the following season. Some persons of Cann have since been fined for night hunting, and two of Farnham imprisoned for having some Deer's flesh in their possession. A labourer of Gunville was imprisoned a few years ago on account of a Deer noose or halter found in his house. These cases were in Dorsetshire; and many others might be added, if any proof were wanting that a disposition to Deer hunting is very prevalent in that County; perhaps even more so than in Wiltshire.



On the remaining part of the Anecdotes, concerning "the Rural amusements which the Chase afforded our ancestors," it is not the design of this review to expatiate. The writer intimates the cruelty of horse racing and pugilism, but his mode of expression does not equally imply a disapprobation of other highly exceptionable practices; and some of his remarks remind us of the early part of the last century, when several barbarous customs prevailed in a much greater degree than at present. With respect to the principal topic of his pages, his predilection for the enjoyments of the Chase in former times, in company with nobles and sportsmen who regarded Cranbourn Chase as "the finest feature of Dorsetshire," has perhaps prevented him from considering the weight of evidence on behalf of the landholders, and the injury which would result from an allowance of the privilege of Chase on the out grounds. The proper object of enquiry, is not whether the sportsman rode over certain tracts of land? but

whether the claim of large bounds was duly set aside under the Charta de Foresta, in the time of Edward I. and the privilege confined within the small bounds alone? To this great question we find no allusion in the Anecdotes, although the legality of later proceedings must in great measure depend upon it, and it was a material part of the History of Cranbourn Chase.

The chief privilege of the Chase being that of feeding and preserving deer *on other men's lands*, in unlimited numbers, the open pastures are accessible to them at all times, the woodlands are preserved from them only a short time after each cutting of the coppice wood, and the cultivated lands are subject to occasional depredations of the deer, notwithstanding an extraordinary expence of fencing and watching. Thus, to ascertain the exact limits to the privilege is of material consequence to the landholders and to the community; and the History of Cranbourn

Chase was written with a view to facilitate enquiry and amicable negotiation, by citing records and other documents, which had been collected on former occasions, with dates and references when attainable; being undertaken without knowledge of any existing dispute, or connection with any party.

The Monthly Reviewers, in a recent number candidly observe respecting the History above mentioned,—“ However interesting to the antiquary, this publication has rather a legal than an antiquarian bearing, and seems drawn up to prepare a compromise of various manorial \* rights,” &c. and farther, “ It cannot be expected that we should discuss in detail the various charters, grants,” &c. &c. “ here accumulated with great industry,” &c. To a special jury of the neighbourhood, or to the arbitration of

\* The privilege is rather forestial than manorial.

contiguous proprietors, questions of this kind rather belong," &c. In this respect, and concerning "precise allotments of indemnity to the hereditary proprietors of such manorial privileges," it may be seen by the History of the Chase that the landholders have not of late been unwilling to treat; but that the demand of lands for a park and the unsettled question of boundary, occasioned difficulties apparently insurmountable on their part, and thus has tended to defer a removal of the evils attendant on the present system of Cranbourn Chase.

FINIS.