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THE SOMERSET COAST

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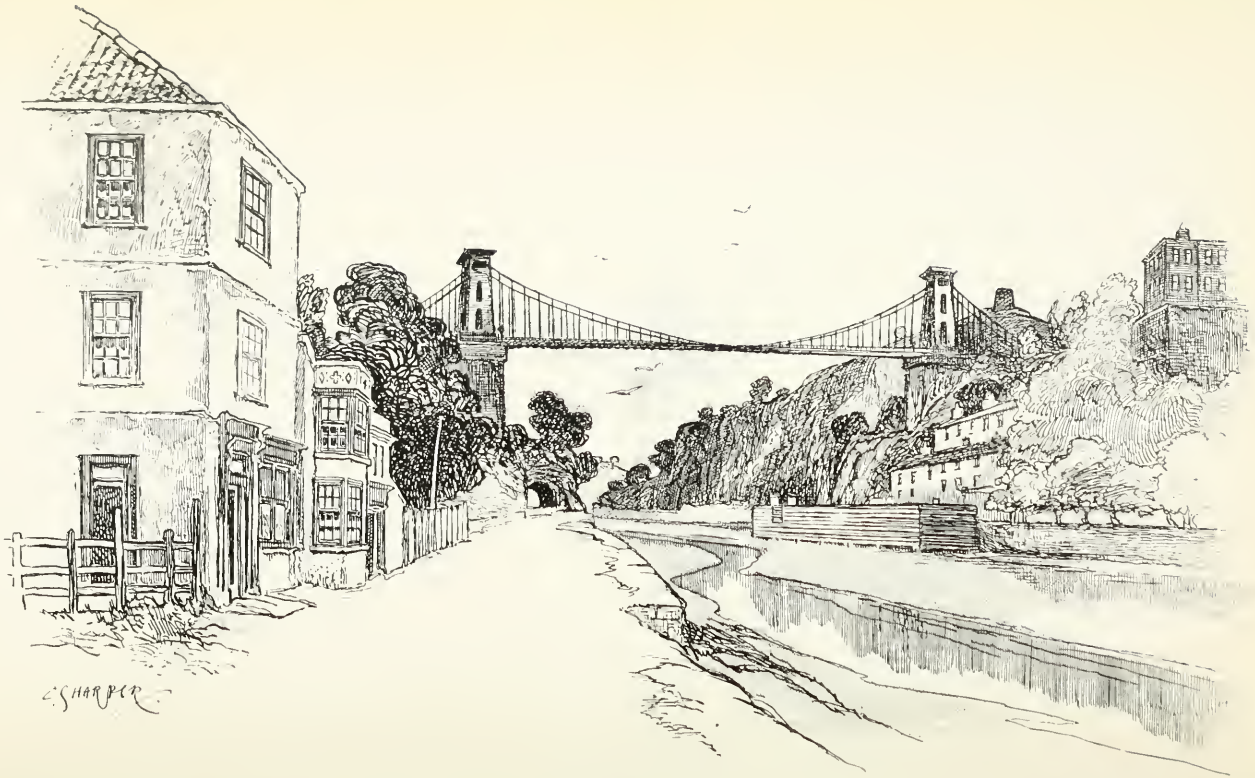

CLIFTON BRIDGE

THE SOMERSET COAST

BY

CHARLES G. HARPER

"Somerset, that pleasant londe which rennith to the Severn Se."—FULLER.

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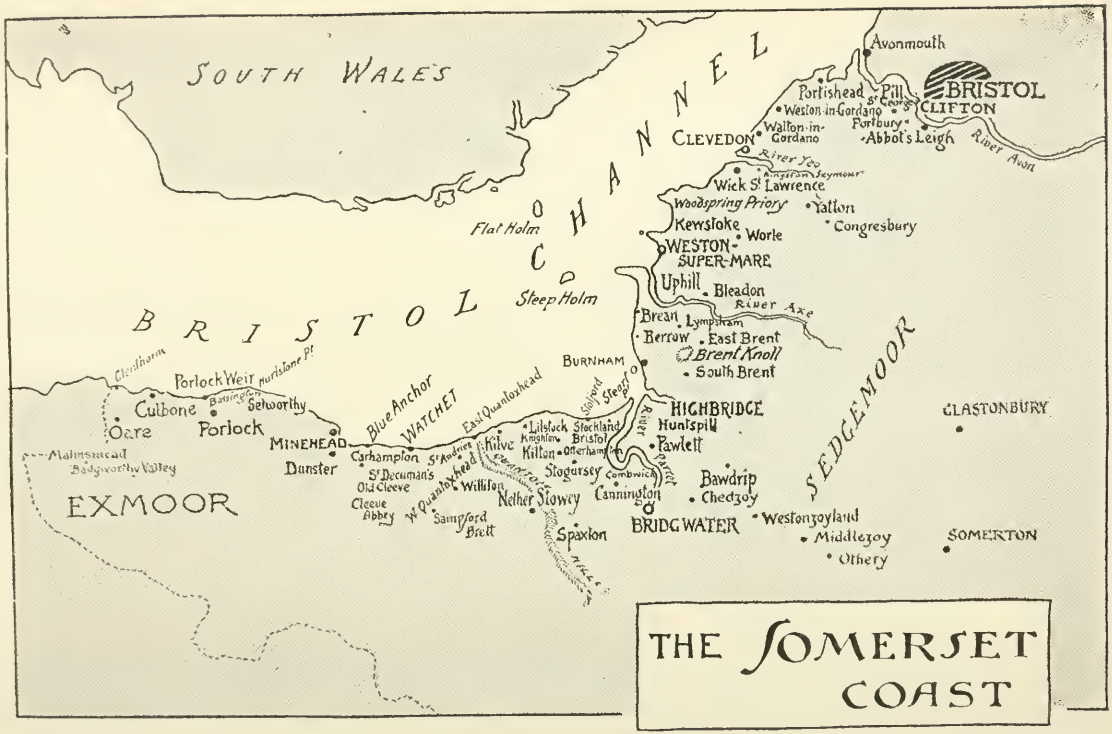
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THE SOMERSET COAST

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

On confiding to personal friends, journalistic paragraphists, and other Doubting Thomases, professional sceptics, chartered cynics and indifferent persons, the important and interesting literary news that a proposal was afloat to write a book on the Somerset Coast, the author was assured with an unanimity as remarkable as it was disconcerting, that there is no coast of Somerset.

This singular geographical heresy, although totally unsupported by map-makers, who on all maps and charts show a very well-defined seaboard, seems to be widely distributed; but it is not shared by (among others) the inhabitants of Clevedon, of Watchet (where furious seas have twice within the last few years demolished the harbour), of Weston-super-Mare, Burnham, Mine-

head, or Porlock. The people of all these places think they live on the coast ; and it would be really quite absurdly difficult to persuade them that they do not, or that they do not live in Somerset.

This singular illusion, that there is no coast of Somerset, is, however, but one among a number of current fallacies, among which may be included the belief that :

> Essex is a flat county.
> London is dirty.
> The virtuous are necessarily happy;
> The wicked equally of necessity miserable.
> All Irishmen are witty.
> Scotsmen cannot see a joke.

And so forth. Essex is flat, and London grimy, only comparatively. Natives of Huntingdonshire (which is an alternative term for flatness) no doubt think of Essex as a place of hills ; and although London may seem grimy to the eyes of a villager from Devon or Cornwall, it is as a City of light and purity to the Sheffielder, the inhabitants of Newcastle, and the people of other such places of gloom.

The coast of Somerset, then, to make a beginning with it, opens with the great port and city of Bristol, on the navigable estuary of the river Avon, and ends at Glenthorne, where the North Devon boundary is met. The distance between these two points is sixty miles. Throughout the entire length of this coastline, that of South Wales is more or less clearly visible ; the Bristol Channel being but four and a half miles wide at

Avonmouth ; seven and a half miles at Brean Down, by Weston-super-Mare, and fifteen miles at Glenthorne.

The foreshore of a great part of this coast is more or less muddy ; the Severn, which you shall find to be a tea or coffee-coloured river, even at Shrewsbury a hundred miles or so up along its course, from the particles of earth held in suspension, depositing much of this, and the even more muddy rivers Avon and Parret contributing a larger proportion. The "Severn Sea," as poetical and imaginative writers style this estuary, known to matter-of-fact geographers as the "Bristol Channel," is therefore apt to be of a grey hue, except under brilliant sunshine.

But it would be most unjust to infer from these remarks, that mud, and only mud, is the characteristic of these sixty miles. Indeed, the Somerset Coast is singularly varied, and has many elements of beauty. Between the noble scene of its opening, where the romantic gorge of the Avon, set with rugged cliffs and delightful woods, is spanned by the airy Suspension Bridge of Clifton, and the wood-clad steeps of Glenthorne, you will find such beautiful places as Portishead and Weston, whose scenery no crowds of vulgarians can spoil ; and Dunster, Minehead, and Porlock, which need no advertisement from this or any other pen. I have purposely omitted Clevedon from the list above, for it does not appeal to me.

Mud you have, naked and unashamed, practi-

cally only at Pill and the outlet of the Avon, and again at Steart and the estuary of the Parret, where those surcharged waters precipitate their unlovely burden. Elsewhere, the purifying sea completely scavenges it away or kindly disguises it. Nay, between Weston and Burnham we have even a long range of sandhills, as pure as the sand-towans of North Cornwall or as the driven snow.*

And further, if we turn our attention to the scenery and the churches and castles and ruined abbeys, or to the associations, of this countryside, we shall find it an engaging succession of districts, comparing well with some better-known and more generally appreciated seaboards.

A specious air of eternal midsummer and sunshine belongs to the name of Somerset. Camden, writing in the first years of the seventeenth century, was not too grave an historian and antiquary to notice the fact; and we find him, accordingly, at considerable pains to disabuse any one likely to be deceived by it. He says, in his great work "Britannia": "Some suppose its name was given it for the mildness and, as it were, *summer* temperature of its air. . . . But as it may be truly called in summer a summer country, so it has as good right to be called a winter one in winter, when it is for the most part wet, fenny and marshy, to the great inconvenience of travellers. I am more inclined to think it

* But this depends largely upon the neighbourhood in which it has been driving.

derives from *Somerton*, anciently the most considerable town in the whole country."

True, it did; for Somerton was until the eighth century the capital of the tribe of Britons known as Somersætas. Their kingdom and their capital were finally swept away by the victorious irresistible advance of the great Saxon kingdom of Wessex, in A.D. 710. Hence Somerset, although we occasionally hear of "Somerset*shire*," is not really a shire, in the sense of being a more or less arbitrarily shorn-off division after the fashion of the Midland shires—Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, and many others—but is historically an individual entity; the ancient kingdom of the Somersætas, remaining in name, though not in fact; just as Wiltshire, wrongly so-called, is the ancient country of the Wilsætas; Devon the land of the Damnonians, and Cornwall the home of the Cornu-Welsh.

CHAPTER II

THE RIVER AVON—CLIFTON SUSPENSION BRIDGE

Bristol, whence one comes most conveniently to the coast of Somerset, is among the most fortunate of cities. It has a long and interesting history, both in the warlike and the commercial sorts, and its citizens have ever been public-spirited men, of generous impulses. (It is not really necessary for the discreet historian to go into the story of Bristol's old-time thriving business of kidnapping and slave-trading, by which her merchants grew wealthy, and so we will say nothing about it, nor enlarge upon the wealth-producing import of Jamaica rum.) It has many noble and interesting buildings, and a lovely and striking country-side is at its very gates, while the river Avon, to which Bristol owes the possibility of its greatness, flows out to sea, amid the most romantic river scenery in England, at Clifton.

This immense gorge of the Avon was created, according to tradition, A.D. 33, on the day of the Crucifixion, in the course of a world-wide earthquake accompanying that event. Then, accord-

ing to that strictly unreliable story, the hills were rent asunder, and the ancient British camps at St. Vincent's and at Borough Walls and Stoke Leigh had the newly formed river Avon set between them. Geologists know better than this, but in the early years of the nineteenth century, when Miss Ann Powell sat upon the heights of Clifton and, contemplating the scene, was filled with great thoughts, which she eventually poured forth in the shape of something then thought to be poetry, the tradition was not considered to be so absurd as it now is. In her "Clifton, a Poem," published in 1821, we learn some things new to history, especially as to the year A.D. 33. Then, according to Miss Ann Powell, the Romans were encamped here, in victorious arrogance, and the very day of the Crucifixion chanced to be that which the Roman general had fixed for a reception of conquered British chiefs :

> Our humbled kings upon his levee wait,
> This day appointed as a day of state.

Unfortunately for the poem, the Romans were not in Britain at the time. They had not been here for eighty-seven years, since the last departure of Julius Caesar, in B.C. 54, and were not to land on these shores again until ten years more had passed : in A.D. 43. As a description of an earthquake which did not happen, and an account of disasters which did not befall people who were not here, the poem is a somewhat remarkable production. The authoress herself is so over-

wrought that she mixes past and present tenses. Let us see how Romans and Britons behaved under the appalling circumstances :

Now darkness fast the distant hills surround ;
Beneath their feet, slow trembling, mov'd the ground ;
High tempests rose that shook the stately roof,
Nor was the conqu'ror's heart to this quite proof.
"Sure nature is dissolv'd!" the Roman cry'd.
"Sure nature is dissolv'd!" the guests reply'd.

Now awful thunders with majestic sound,
And vivid lightnings separate the ground ;
The crash tremendous fill'd each heart with fear ;
The sound of gushing waters strikes the ear.
Ah! now destruction's hurl'd thro' earth and sky ;
Men seeking safety know not where to fly ;
They through the ramparts run to make their way ;
The guards lay prostrate there with sore dismay.
The Britons mount their horses—fly in haste :
No time in idle compliments they waste.

How delicious that last line! "No time in idle compliments they waste." It flings us down from the heights of a world in pieces to the inanities of the "How d'ye do's" of afternoon teas.

Clifton Suspension Bridge, opened in 1864, is a bridge with a romantic history. From the early years of the eighteenth century it had been proposed to bridge the Avon at or near this point, by some means, and thus save the descent from Clifton to Rownham Ferry, with the uncomfortable and sometimes perilous crossing of the Avon and the climb up to Abbot's Leigh.

The ferry at Rownham had been the property of the abbots of the Augustinian monastery of Bristol, from 1148, and was of necessity frequently crossed by those dignified churchmen, who in course of time, as the size and trade of Bristol increased, derived a considerable revenue from their rights here, which, at the Reformation, passed to their successors, the Dean and Chapter of Bristol, who in their turn were succeeded by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.

At this point was also a ford, practicable at low water for horsemen, but, as the tide here rises swiftly and to a height of forty-five feet, it was generally of a hazardous character, as seems to be sufficiently shown by the fact that in 1610 one Richard George was drowned in thus crossing, while on December 27th of the same year the eldest son of one Baron Snigge, Recorder of Bristol, met a like fate. On the Bristol side stands, among other houses on the quay, the Rownham Tavern, and on the Somerset shore stood a somewhat imposing hostelry called the "New Inn." The building of the last-named house of entertainment and refreshment remains to this day, but it is now a species of tea-garden and picnic place, with arbours in which on summer days parties may make modestly merry and listen to the murmur of Bristol's traffic borne, like a subdued roar, across the river. In the rear of the old house, the single-track Bristol and Portishead branch of the Great Western Railway runs at the foot of the cliffs and

presently tunnels under them, below the Suspension Bridge.

The first person ever to put into shape the old aspirations of Bristol for a bridge across the gorge of the Avon at this point was Alderman Vick, of Bristol. He died in 1753, leaving by his will a sum of £1,000, to be invested until the capital sum reached a total of £10,000, a sum he imagined would be sufficient to build a stone bridge here. For seventy-seven years this generous bequest accumulated as he had willed, and by 1830 had reached £8,000. It was then felt, as engineering had already made great strides, and as the suspension principle had been tried in various places, successfully and economically, that the bridging of this gulf should no longer be delayed. It had long been evident that £10,000 would not nearly suffice to build a bridge of any kind here, but it was thought that, if an Act of Parliament were obtained for the undertaking of the work and a company formed, the necessary funds could be found to begin the construction forthwith; the company to be recouped by charging tolls. The Parliamentary powers were therefore obtained, the company formed, capital subscribed, and Telford, the foremost engineer of the day, invited to prepare plans and estimates. Telford's plan provided for a suspension bridge with two iron towers, and he estimated the cost at £52,000. Telford was an engineer first, a practical, matter-of-fact Scotsman, and not by way of being an artist.

His fine, but not sufficiently grandiose, scheme was, therefore, rejected, and that of Brunel, who was next invited to prepare plans, accepted, although his estimate was £5,000 higher. Brunel's success was undoubtedly due to the picturesque design he made, and the stress he laid upon the fact that the romantic scenery of this spot might easily be ruined by a mere utilitarian structure. The bridge as we see it completed to-day is in essentials his design, but the two great towers from which the roadway is suspended are plain to severity, instead of being, as he had contemplated, richly sculptured. The towers, he explained to the committee of selection, were on the model of the gateways to the ruins of Tentyra, in Egypt, and would harmonise well with the rugged cliffs and hanging woods of Clifton and Abbot's Leigh.

In 1831 the foundations of Brunel's bridge were laid, amid great local rejoicings. Felicitations on the occasion were exchanged. Sir Eardley Wilmot, first imagining an Elizabethan Bristolian returned to earth, and, coming to Rownham Ferry, finding the place just the same as he had left it three hundred years earlier, then congratulated all and sundry on this reproach being about to vanish, in the proximate completion of the works, and all was joy and satisfaction.

But money grew scarce; the works were more costly than had been anticipated, and the furious riots of 1831 in Bristol rendered capital shy and fresh funds difficult to obtain. In 1833

Brunel was desired to reduce the estimates, and did reduce them by £4,000, at the cost of sacrificing much of the ornamental work. In 1836 another foundation-stone was laid, and a communication opened in mid-air across the river, by means of an iron bar stretched across. Along this the workmen travelled daily, suspended in a wicker basket ; a sight that every day drew fascinated crowds. A demand to cross in this manner at once sprang up among people who wanted a new sensation, and the bridge company earned an appreciable sum by charging for these aerial trips. While the novelty was very new, the fare across was five shillings ; it then sank by degrees to half a crown, two shillings, and one shilling. The total sum thus netted was £125.

Delays occurred in 1836 owing to the contractors going bankrupt, but the company itself then assumed the work. In 1840 the great towers were finished, but by 1843 the bridge was still but half finished, although £45,000 had been expended. Money was again very scarce and work was at last stopped, and in 1853 the half of the ironwork and the flooring that had been delivered were sold to satisfy creditors.

Work was again resumed in 1860, an opportunity shortly afterwards arising to cheaply purchase the ironwork of Hungerford Suspension Bridge, which, built by Brunel in 1845 across the Thames, from Hungerford Market, at the foot of Villiers Street, Strand, to the Lambeth shore, at

a cost of £100,000, was about to be removed to make way for the iron lattice-girder bridge of the South-Eastern Railway, still a feature of that spot.

Meanwhile, the original Act of Parliament for the building of Clifton Bridge had expired, and it was necessary to obtain new powers, to form a new company, and to raise more funds. All these things were accomplished, not without considerable difficulty. The ironwork of Hungerford Bridge was purchased for £5,000, and the new Act was obtained in 1861. This, however, laid an obligation upon the new company to compensate the owners of Rownham Ferry for any loss. It declared that "persons having a right of ferry across the river Avon called Rownham Ferry may, in some respect, be injured by the building and using of the Bridge; and it is fit, in case such Ferry should be injured or deteriorated thereby, that a fair compensation should be made." It is understood that this compensation to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, on behalf of the Dean and Chapter of Bristol, the old owners of the ferry, was estimated at £200 per annum.

At length, in spite of a shortness of funds that always accompanied the progress of the enterprise, the bridge was opened in September 1864, and has, in all the time since then, proved to be a great convenience for traffic making for Clevedon and adjacent parts of the coast. It has also been a favourite resort for persons of suicidal tendencies,

who have, indeed, often come from great distances for the purpose of putting an end to themselves ; being unable to screw up a sufficiency of desperate courage elsewhere. Indeed, instances have been known of apparently sane and contented people, finding themselves on this height, suspended in mid-air, being unable to resist a sudden impulse to fling themselves off, and many others there are who, afraid of losing command over themselves, have never yet dared face the crossing.

Mere figures do not suffice to give an idea of the majesty and sense of vastness conjured up by Clifton Suspension Bridge, viewed either from below, or along its lengthy roadway ; the picturesqueness of the situation has also to be taken into account. But they must needs be given. The suspended roadway between the two great towers is 703 feet in length and some 34 feet wide, and hangs 245 feet above the river Avon. The towers themselves are 80 feet in height. The entire weight of the bridge is 1,500 tons. The toll payable by foot-passengers is the modest one of one penny each. Motor-cars pay sixpence for a single journey, or ninepence returning the same day. A curious privilege was secured by Sir John Greville Smyth, Bart., of Ashton Court, who very appreciably helped on the construction by taking £2,500 shares in the company, and by a gift of a further £2,500. In consideration of his generosity, no tolls were payable by him personally, or any of his horses, carriages, or servants, or by the owner for the time being of

Ashton Court, for a period of thirty years from the opening of the bridge.

Engineers and men of science tell us that suspension bridges and the like structures are safest when they swing most. There can, therefore, at any rate, be no doubt of the entire safety of Clifton Suspension Bridge, which vibrates sensibly to a vigorous stamp of the foot ; alarmingly to those who have not thoroughly assimilated that engineering rough formula of stability. That there can be too much sway or vibration is evident by the traffic across being strictly limited in speed ; while the theory of a sudden application of heavy weights being likely to snap the chains and rods that hold up the roadway is endorsed by companies of soldiers marching this way being always bidden to change step. It should, however, be said that not all engineers support this theory.

The great tower rising massively above the Somerset bank of the Avon bears an inscription carved prominently upon its stonework : a Latin inscription, a belated example of the priggish classicism, beloved by pedants in the eighteenth century, which set up, all over the country, statements wholly unintelligible to ninety-nine out of every hundred wayfarers. "*Suspensa vix via fit*," says this monumental line—that is to say, rendered into English, "With difficulty can a roadway be suspended." The thing is self-evident anywhere, and much more so here, when you gaze from this suspended roadway down upon the gulf, and on to the tall masts of some sailing-

vessel arriving at, or leaving, the port of Bristol. The various attempts made by passers-by at an understanding of the Latin sentence are amusing, but the toll-taker appears to have arrived at the sense of it, by favour, no doubt, of some one learned in the dead languages ; for he was observed by the present writer to answer the inquiries of two ladies in this wise: "Well, you see, it's a bit above me ; but I've always been given to understand it to mean that this yer bridge was made with great difficulty."

CHAPTER III

ABBOT'S LEIGH TO CLEVEDON

It is a hilly road that leads from Clifton Bridge to Abbot's Leigh, through the noble Leigh Woods. Nightingale Valley lies down on the right; a beautiful seclusion, well-named from those songsters of early summer. Looking down upon it is the ancient camp of Borough Walls. An enterprising Land Company has acquired building rights here from Sir H. Miles, owner of these woods and of Leigh Court, and has recently built a number of charming detached residences, irregularly disposed among the glades; and far advanced, in disposition, in planning, and in architectural style, beyond the methods in vogue when the suburban villas built nearer the bridge were erected, from about 1870 to 1890.

Three miles, bearing to the right, bring the traveller down to the Avon estuary again, at the hillside and waterside village of Pill; a queer little place, clinging and huddling closely to the steep banks, and ending in a short quay, where pilots and other strange waterside folk lean and sit on walls and look across to Avonmouth, plainly visible on the Gloucestershire shore, at the meet-

ing of the Avon and the Bristol Channel; a distant congeries of clustered masts, great warehouses, railway signal-posts, and puffs of smoke and steam: all signs of the great series of docks constructed by the somewhat belated enterprise of Bristol, between 1880 and 1908. The delays and dangers attending the progress of modern shipping up and down the Avon, to and from the docks of Bristol city, have long hindered the

AVONMOUTH, FROM PILL.

expansion of the port, and have left Bristol behind in that race for commercial greatness in which Liverpool and Glasgow have emerged foremost; and now it remains to be seen what the expenditure of millions will be able to effect in recovering tonnage and redressing the balance of missed opportunities. There is a ferry across to Shirehampton from Pill and those eager for light on the subject may readily make the passage into Gloucestershire and satisfy themselves on the

spot of the likelihood of Avonmouth's future prosperity. The rise of Avonmouth, at any rate, means loss to the pilots of Pill, in the diminished call there will be for their services in guiding vessels up and down the muddy meanderings of the Avon.

A pleasant land opens out before the traveller who wends from Pill through Easton-in-Gordano (called for short, " St. George's ") and Portbury, to Portishead, where the open coast is first reached.

Portishead is almost wholly delightful. The straggling village is surprisingly unspoiled, considering its nearness to Bristol and the fact that places further removed have been ruined by overmuch building in recent times. There are docks, with an area of some twelve acres, at Portishead, in the level lands below the great bluff of Woodhill and Black Nore, and there is a single-track railway, with a terminus here ; but the brilliant future once prophesied and confidently expected for Portishead docks has not yet been realised ; and now that the great modern docks of Avonmouth have been opened, there is even less prospect of those of Portishead coming into that predicted success.

Attempts have been made to popularise Portishead, but as the derelict villas on the wooded crest of Woodhill sufficiently prove, entirely without success, and the beautiful underwoods, traversed in every direction by footpaths, and commanding fine views over the Channel, are

as yet unspoiled. There is great beauty in this outlook upon the narrow Channel; great beauty alike in the outlook and in the spot whence it is obtained. It is not found in the hue of the water, which is here coffee-coloured; but rather in the glimpses across the five-mile-wide estuary to another land—to Monmouthshire—where the misty levels of Caldicot are relieved by a gleam on Goldcliff.

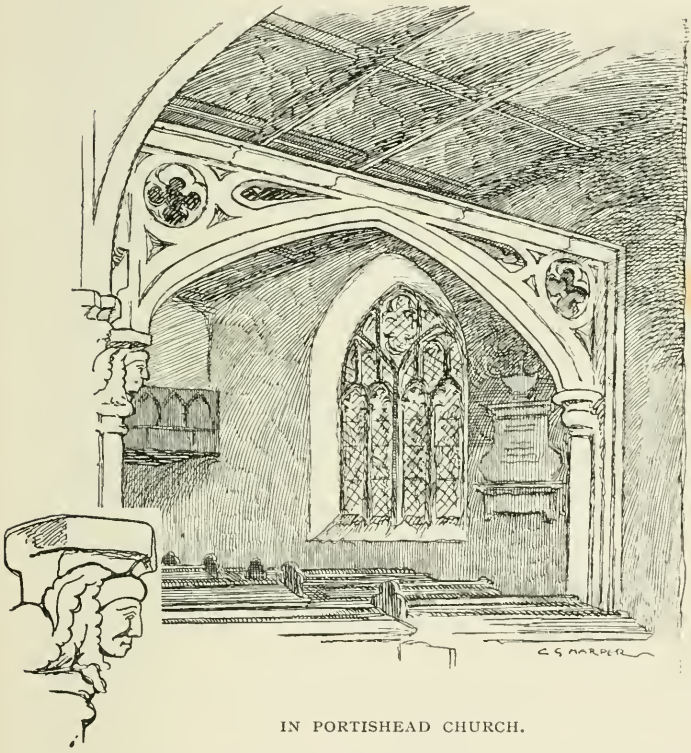
On this side the estuary are the long levels beyond Avonmouth, in Gloucestershire, ending in the sudden rise of cliff at Aust, where the Old Passage across the dangerous Severn was situated in the old coaching days, before railways and the Severn Tunnel were thought of.

This boldly projecting hill of Portishead commands the entire panorama of the shipping that comes to and from the docks at Gloucester and Avonmouth; and every wind that blows beats against it, so that the scrubwoods are closely knitted and compacted together. It is a place of piercing cold and howling blasts in winter, and in summer the most invigorating spot on the Somerset coast. The ivy-clad, storm-tossed dwarf oaks and gnarled thorns reach down to the low, black, seaweedy rocks, and here and there are fine houses, with gardens and conservatories, perched within reach of the spray.

Woodhill Bay, westward of this windy point, is as sheltered as the heights of Woodhill are exposed. Near by is the imposing new Nautical School, which has replaced the old *Formidable*

training-ship that for many years was a familiar sight in the anchorage of King Road.

The rise and fall of the tide at Portishead, ranging from 33 feet at neaps to 44 feet at spring-



IN PORTISHEAD CHURCH.

tides, is said to be the greatest, not only in England, but in Europe.

The old village of Portishead is quite distinct from the modern Portishead just described. A broad straggling street, a mile long, connects the

two. Some very charming old-world houses are clustered around this original inland Portishead, whose noble pinnacled church-tower, rising in four stately stages, is one of the finest in these parts of Somerset. The north aisle has towards its east end a transverse masonry strainer, built in the middle of the fifteenth century to prevent the walls collapsing, owing to a subsidence of the soil. As in the case of the great stone inverted arches inserted to support the central tower of Wells Cathedral, a century earlier, the architects employed have attempted to mask the merely utilitarian addition by decorative treatment. The attempt has here met with a greater degree of success than was possible at Wells, and although the broad arch spanning the north aisle has obviously no ecclesiastical use or purport, save that of shoring up walls that were in danger of falling, it is not the offensive blot it might, with less careful treatment, easily have been made.

At Portishead is the terminus of that quaint short railway, some twelve miles in length with the long many-jointed name, like some lengthy goods-train—the Weston, Clevedon, and Portishead Light Railway; familiarly (for life is short and busy) the "W.C. and P.L.R." This is a single-track line, of ordinary gauge, originally planned for a steam-tramway, when the Parliamentary powers for its construction, as between Weston and Clevedon, were first obtained in 1887. The Act authorising the extension to Portishead was obtained in 1898.

The first portion, between Weston and Clevedon, was opened December 1st, 1897. In the interval between 1887 and 1897 the Light Railways Act had been passed, and the methods of construction were modified in accordance. This was the first line to be opened under the Light Railways Act, and has therefore the interest attaching to a pioneer. The W.C. and P.L.R. has, in the few years it has been opened, conferred many benefits upon a district almost wholly agricultural and hitherto peculiarly inaccessible.

The coast between Portishead and Clevedon is formed principally by the long steeply shelving hill-range known for the greater part of its length as Walton Down, thickly covered with woods. The road on to Clevedon runs in the valley formed between the landward dip of these heights and the rise of other hills yet further inland, dominated by the camp-crested summit of Cadbury Hill. In the pleasant vale thus formed, runs easily the W.C. and P.L.R. aforesaid.

There are two villages along this road, Weston and Walton, both equipped with the "Gordano" suffix, lest they should, perhaps, be confounded with other Westons and Waltons. They are not remarkable villages, and the church at Walton has been rebuilt; so that the place holds no particular interest for the stranger. But the church of Weston-in-Gordano, a small Perpendicular building, retains in its porch an unusual and very interesting feature: a wooden music-

gallery over the doorway, approached by a short flight of stone steps in the thick side wall of the porch itself. This gallery appears to have been used by the church choir in olden times, principally for the singing of the canticle for Palm Sunday, "Gloria Laus et Honor," and for Christmas hymns; but it has, for centuries past, remained unused and is now merely an archæological curiosity.

As the stranger approaches Clevedon, his attention cannot fail to be attracted by a singular castle-like group of buildings upon the skyline, on the right hand. This is the so-called "Walton Castle," built in the reign of James the First by the Paulets, then owners of the surrounding lands, as a hunting-lodge. Castle-building after the mediæval style had long been extinct, but this lodge was designed, for picturesqueness' sake, in that old manner. It is a flimsy and fast-decaying sham.

CHAPTER IV

CLEVEDON—LITERARY ASSOCIATIONS: COLERIDGE

Clevedon is now entered by the modern suburban developments of Walton Park. Suburbs and light railways, and all the things they mean, do not come into the minds of those who have merely read of Clevedon and have not been there. Clevedon to these untravelled folk means Coleridge and Tennyson and Hallam, a certain "quiet cot," a stately Court and a lone church on a hilltop, overlooking the Severn Sea. These are essentials; the rest is incidental. But when you come at last to Clevedon, you discover, with a pained surprise to which you have no sort of a right, that the position is altogether reversed: these literary landmarks and associations are the incidentals, and the essentials—well, *what* are they? It would puzzle even an old-established resident of Clevedon to say. Nothing matters very much at Clevedon—except that half the houses are to let; and *that* is a matter of moment only to the owners of them and to the tradesfolk. How do people make shift to pass the time here?

They don't care for literature : they don't stroll the sands, for there are none ; and they don't walk, for it is a neighbourhood of atrocious hills, except on the way to the railway-station, the dust-destructor, and the gas-works.

What is it, then, they do ? I will tell you. They sit upon the rocks, waiting for the next mealtime and refusing (rightly) to support the miserable creatures who, calling themselves "pierrots," infest the front. In the exiguous public gardens old ladies of both sexes knit impossible and useless articles or pretend to read the newspapers, and wonder why they ever came to the place.

The paradoxical tragedy of Clevedon is that there is at once too little and too much of it : too little sea-front, and a great deal too much of the town in these later times built beside it ; but the place must indeed have been delightful in 1795, at the time when Samuel Taylor Coleridge brought his bride here from Bristol, where they had been married, in the church of St. Mary Redcliffe. He was twenty-three, and a visionary immersed in German metaphysics and the Kantean philosophy ; and had but recently been bought out of the 15th Light Dragoons, in which in a moment of despair and starvation, he had enlisted. Four months of military duties untempered with glory, but strongly savoured with riding-lessons and stable-fatigue, did not make him a more practical man ; and he remained in all the sixty-two years that made up

his span of life, although the most gifted of all the clever Coleridge family, an amiable dreamer.

The dreams in which he and Southey and other friends were at this time immersed were concerned with a fantastic kind of Socialism they were pleased to style a "Pantisocracy," in which ideal state all property was to be held in common, and all spare time was to be occupied with literature; a truly terrible prospect! This ideal community was to be established in North America, on the Susquehanna river, there to live a life of plain living and high thinking, punctuated with washing up the domestic dishes, weeding the potato-patch, and propagating a new generation of prigs. But money was needed for the starting of this pretty and pedantic scheme, and because "Pantisocracy" (Heavens! what a name!) did not appeal, and was never likely to appeal, to any one who was master of any honest coin of the realm, it remained a vision. It failed for want of money; and, human nature being what it is, it would still have failed disastrously had funds been provided.

So our Pantisocrats remained in England; "Myrtle Cottage," Clevedon, remaining for a little while the address of the Coleridges, until they removed to Nether Stowey. We may fairly suppose that here this wayward genius, a brilliant talker, a poet of gorgeous ideas and noble language, but a man constitutionally infirm of purpose, and made yet more inconstant by deep reading of mystical German philosophy that led

to mental blind alleys, lived the happiest time of his life. We obtain an early first glimpse of him—the second day after arrival—in his letter to Cottle, the amiable and helpful bookseller of Bristol, who greatly befriended Coleridge and Southey when they needed friendship most :

To his "dear Cottle" he wrote, October 6th,

COLERIDGE'S COTTAGE, CLEVEDON.

1795 : "Pray send me a riddle, slice, a candle-box, two ventilators, two glasses for the wash-stand, one tin dust-pan, one small tin tea-kettle, one pair of candlesticks, one carpet-brush, one flower (? flour) dredge, three tin extinguishers, two mats, a pair of slippers, a cheese toaster, two large tin spoons, a Bible, a keg of porter, coffee, raisins, currants, catsup, nutmegs, allspice, cinnamon, rice, ginger, and mace."

The imagination readily pictures the essentially unpractical Samuel Taylor Coleridge, certainly not well versed in domestic economy, taking down this list of household small gear from his "pensive Sara"; prepared, with the receipt of them, to open his campaign for existence against an indifferent world.

He sang the praises of that early home in no uncertain manner:

> Low was our pretty cot; our tallest rose
> Peeped at the chamber window. We could hear
> At silent noon, and eve, and early morn,
> The sea's faint murmur. In the open air
> Our myrtle blossomed; and across the porch
> Thick jasmins twined: the little landscape round
> Was green and woody, and refreshed the eye.
> It was a spot which you might aptly call
> The Valley of Seclusion!

You might indeed so call it now, if inclined to poetry, but you would be wholly wrong. The painful fact must be recorded that "Myrtle Cottage" stands beside the road, directly on the busiest route between the railway-station and the sea-front (such as the sea-front is), and that flys, "charleybanks," wagonettes, motor-cars, and all conceivable traffic come this way. Indeed, this cottage and its trim fellow are now almost the only vestiges in the road left of the Clevedon that Coleridge knew. What little remained of the rocky bluff at the back is now being actively blasted and quarried away by the local authority,

in its attempt—highly successful, too—at matching the place with the London district of Notting Hill. Property owners have already filled Clevedon with stuccoed semi-"Italian" villas on the Ladbroke Grove model, that became discredited a generation ago; the kind of property that has dismal semi-underground dungeons called "breakfast-rooms" (by way of a penitential beginning of the day), and long flights of stone steps to the front door, alleged to be ornamental, and certainly excessively tiring. This is a kind of property that never, or rarely, lets nowadays; and Clevedon has many empty villas.

The white-paled, red-tiled trim cottages—Coleridge's and another—are among the pleasantest sights of Clevedon, by reason of their unconventional, homely style, and the fine trees that surround and overhang them. Tiles, you will observe, have replaced the thatch of the poet's description; but the jessamine still twines over the porch. Five pounds a year, the landlord paying the taxes; that was the rent of this then idyllic spot.

It should here be added that doubts have recently been expressed as to the genuine nature of the tradition that makes "Myrtle Cottage" the temporary home of Coleridge. And not only have these doubts been expressed, but very strongly worded statements have been made, to the effect that the real Coleridge Cottage was in the valley at East Clevedon, adjoining Walton-in-Gordano. But the matter is controversial, and

at any rate the legend—if, indeed, it be but a legend—that has attached to the cottage popularly known as Coleridge's, has had so long a start that it will be difficult, if not impossible, ever to demolish it.

CHAPTER V

CLEVEDON (*continued*)—LITERARY ASSOCIATIONS: TENNYSON

But Clevedon has more prominent literary associations than that just considered, and has a place unforgettable in poetry by reason of Tennyson's "In Memoriam," that lengthy poem written by the future laureate to the memory of his friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, who, born in 1811, died untimely, at the age of twenty-two, in September 1833.

Arthur Hallam, a son of that Henry Hallam who is generally alluded to as "the historian"—although it would puzzle most of those airy, allusive folk to name offhand the historical works of which he was the author—would appear to have been *in posse* an Admirable Crichton. He composed poetry and wrote philosophical essays at a tender age, thought great and improving things, and had already begun to set up as something of a paragon, when death rendered impossible the fulfilment of this early promise. There were at that time some terribly earnest young men, ready and willing—if not really able—to set the world right. Prophets and seers abounded in

that dark first half of the nineteenth century, when religion was at odds with the comparatively new era of steam and machinery. Each one had a panacea for the ills of the age, and each had his own little band of devoted admirers, devoted on condition that he should in his turn spare a little admiration for those who hung upon his words and doings. Prigs and prodigies stalked the earth, preaching new gospels. They formed mutual-admiration societies, wherein each protested how vastly endowed with all the virtues and all the intellect possible was the other; and before they had outgrown their legal definition of "infants" and had come of age and become technically men, were ready with criticisms and appreciations of Virgil, Dante, and Shakespeare, and were laying down the laws of conduct in this life, with speculations upon what awaits us in the next. It was a morbid, unhealthy generation; but at the same time, these sucking philosophers were not without the tradesman instinct, and zealously combined to advertise one another. Thus, the early Tennysonian circle at Cambridge was a Society of Mutual Encouragement, with its eyes well fixed on publicity. How valuable were some of these early friendships may well be guessed from the one outstanding fact that it was Monckton Milnes, afterwards Lord Houghton, one of this circle, who at an early date, when Tennyson himself was little more than a hopeful promise as a poet, procured by his influence with Sir Robert Peel, the then Prime Minister, a pension

of £200 a year for his friend. It fortunately proved a wise selection ; but in the case of Tennyson's over-elaborate post-mortem praise of his friend Hallam, we have foisted upon us a very high estimate of one who, although engaged to the poet's sister, Emily, and thus additionally endeared to him, had not yet proved himself beyond this narrow circle. He was, therefore, no fitting subject for the "rich shrine," as Tennyson himself styled it, of "In Memoriam," but should have been mourned privately.

The connection of the Hallams with Clevedon was through the mother of Arthur. She was a daughter of Sir Abraham Elton, of Clevedon Court. Arthur Hallam died in Austria, and his body was brought to Clevedon for burial ; hence the allusion in the poem, in that metre Tennyson fondly imagined himself had originated :

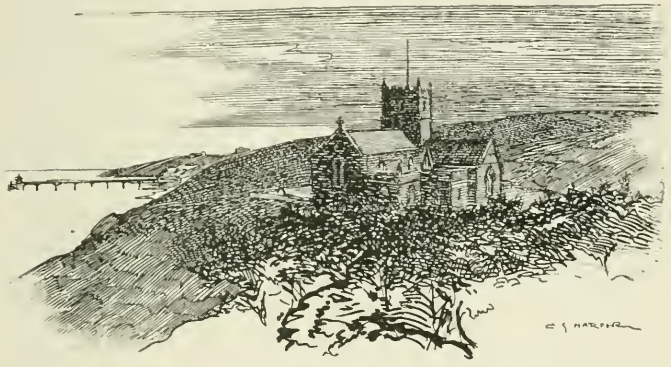
The Danube to the Severn gave
  The darkened heart that beat no more :
  They laid him by the pleasant shore,
And in the hearing of the wave.

There twice a day the Severn fills ;
  The salt sea-water passes by
  And hushes half the babbling Wye,
And makes a silence in the hills.

The Wye is hushed nor moved along,
  And hushed my deepest grief of all,
  When filled with tears that cannot fall,
I brim with sorrow drowning song.

The tide flows down, the wave again
Is vocal in its wooded walls;
My deeper anguish also falls,
And I can speak a little then.

Clevedon church was selected as the resting-place of Arthur Henry Hallam, "not only from the connection of kindred, but on account of its still and sequestered situation on a lone hill that overhangs the Bristol Channel."



CLEVEDON.

Much has been altered at Clevedon since 1833, when that decision was made. The village has become a small town, of some six thousand inhabitants, and although the ancient parish church is still at the very fringe of modern boarding-house and lodging-house developments, yet no one could now have the hardihood to describe its position as "lone."

All this, if you do but consider awhile, is entirely in keeping with the change of sentiment

since that time when the poem was written. Everything is more material. We no longer examine our souls at frequent intervals, to see how they are getting on—after the manner of children with garden plants. The practice is equally injurious to souls and to plants. Yes, even in this material age, among those who have not forgotten or denied their God there is a better spirit than that which characterises the "In Memoriam" period. The faith that is demanded of the Christian—the faith of little children—was not in these troubled folk. The assurance we have of Divine infinite goodness and mercy was not sufficient for them. They must needs enquire and speculate, and seek to reason out those things that are beyond research and scholarship. A great deal of mental arrogance is wrapped up in these semi-spiritual gropings and fumblings towards the light. You see the attitude of the consciously Superior Person therein, and all these troubles leave you cold and unsympathetic; and all the more so when it is borne in upon you that they were carefully pieced together and prepared for the market during a space of sixteen years.

The inevitable result of the piecemeal and laborious methods employed is that the belated poem lacks cohesion, and although there are gems of thought and expression embedded in the mass of verbiage, it must needs be confessed that "In Memoriam" is a sprawling and unwieldy tribute. The "rich shrine" erected has indeed

a great deal of uninspired journeyman work, and is, in fact, not a little ruinous. It is safe to conclude that portions only of it will survive, while "Maud," that fine poem of passion, will endure so long as English verse is read.

To the present writer—if a personal note may be permitted—the tone and outlook of this long-sustained effort are alike depressing. This is not robust poetry, and for the already morbid-minded it is easily conceivable that it might even be disastrous.

Tennyson in those early years had what we cannot but think the great misfortune not to possess a local knowledge. He made a personal acquaintance with what was then the little village of Clevedon only when "In Memoriam" was completed, and was thus unfortunately unable to verify some of his most important descriptive details. He visited Clevedon only belatedly, and knew so little of the circumstances, although he publicly mourned his friend so keenly and at such length, that he was not quite sure where they had laid him. We observe him trying twice to place the grave, and failing :

> 'Tis well ; 'tis something ; we may stand
> Where he in English earth is laid,
> And from his ashes may be made
> The violet of his native land.

Or else, he proceeds to say, if not in the churchyard, then in the chancel :

> Where the kneeling hamlet drains
> The chalice of the grapes of God.

Leaving aside that shockingly infelicitous alliterative expression, "the grapes of God," intended to convey the meaning of "communion wine," we know that neither in the churchyard nor in the chancel was the body of Arthur Hallam laid, but in the south transept. But he continues :

> And in the chancel like a ghost,
> Thy tablet glimmers to the dawn,

making another bad shot. This, however, was remedied in later editions, in which "dark church" was substituted for "chancel." But, since Clevedon church is not exceptionally dark, why not the word "transept," which would be absolutely correct and certainly more poetic and less clumsy than "dark church" ?

The white marble tablet to the memory of Arthur Hallam is fixed, with those to his father and others of the family, on the west wall of the little transept. Speaking of it, the poet says :

> When on my bed the moonlight falls,
> I know that in thy place of rest
> By that broad water of the west,
> There comes a glory on the walls :
>
> Thy marble bright in dark appears,
> As slowly steals a silver flame
> Along the letters of thy name
> And o'er the numbers of thy years.

It is the ghastly morbidness of this that at first arrests the reader's attention, and a closer

examination does not by any means impress him ; for surely to describe a moonbeam as a "flame," moonlight in fact, in appearance, and in the long history of poetic thought being notoriously cold and the very negation of heat, is a lapse from the rightness of things more characteristic of a poetaster seeking at any cost a rhyme to "name" than the mark of a great poet.

It has long been the fashion among those who shout with the biggest crowd to point scornfully at the critic who, discussing "In Memoriam" soon after it was published, wrote : "These touching lines evidently come from the full heart of the widow of a military man." This has been termed "inept." Now, if we turn to the dictionaries, we shall find the commonly received definition of that word to be "unfitting." But was it, indeed, unfitting ? The opinion of that critic did not actually fit the facts ; but the morbid tone of the poem, and the singularly feminine ring of such phrases as "The man I held as half-divine," "my Arthur," and the like, seem to many a reader to be a perfect justification of the aptness of the critic's views ; and remind us that none other than Bulwer Lytton once referred to Tennyson as "school-miss Alfred."

> My Arthur, whom I shall not see
> Till all my widowed race be run ;
> Dear as the mother to the son,
> More than my brothers are to me.

There is the critic's ample defence. To a

healthily constituted mind, that verse is more than ordinarily revolting.

The humble little hilltop church of St. Andrew, anciently a fisherman's chapel, has many modern rivals in suburbanised Clevedon; but in it is centred all the ecclesiastical interest of the place. It is chiefly a Transitional-Norman building, with aisleless nave and chancel, north and south transepts, and central tower of Perpendicular date, but plain to severity. The pointed Transitional arch is the finest and most elaborate part of the building and is richly moulded. Hagioscopes command views from either transept into the chancel. Near the chancel arch is a curious miniature recumbent effigy, two feet six inches in length, in the costume of the sixteenth century, representing a woman, of which no particulars are known. It is thought to be that of a dwarf. The Hallam and Elton monumental tablets are on the walls of the south transept; of plain white marble, with characteristically bald monumental-mason's lettering; the very *ne plus ultra* of the commonplace and matter-of-fact, and very trying indeed to hero-worshipping pilgrims. For ornament and display of mosaic and gilding the visitor should turn to the reredos, recently placed in the chancel. Whether he will delight in it, after the severity of the tablets, is a matter for individual prejudices; but he surely will not feel delighted by being approached by a caretaker with pencil and notebook and a request for a gift towards the restoration fund—

which doubtless includes the cost of this theatrical reredos. It has come to this: that the Tennysonian association has been made the excuse and stalking-horse for badgering the visitor for sixpences. The wise visitor, whether he approves of elaborate restoration or not, will leave those who called the tune to pay the piper, and will further leave to the Elton family of Clevedon Court, who draw an excellent revenue from their property here, the duty and the pleasure of footing the bills that may yet be unsatisfied.

Clevedon Court lies away back on the direct Bristol road, over a mile distant from the church and the sea, and removed from the modern developments of the place, which at one and the same time have largely enriched its owners, the Elton family, and have rendered the neighbourhood less desirable as a residence to them. Ever, with each succeeding phase of Clevedon's growth, the sweetly beautiful valley that runs up hither from the sea is further encroached upon by houses, until at the present time a few outlying blocks are within sight of the Court itself. The recently opened light railway also bids fair to be the prelude to further building-operations.

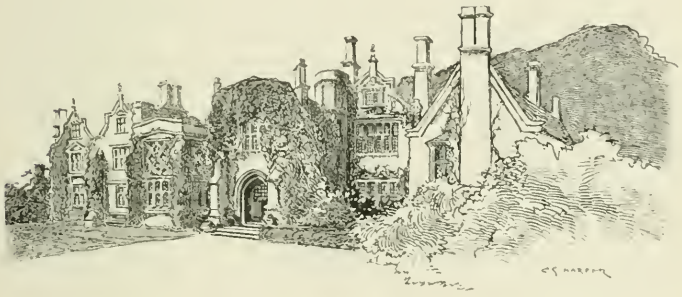
Meanwhile, the grounds of the Court remain as beautiful as ever, ascending to a long and lofty ridge, heavily wooded. The Court itself, of which the interior is not generally shown, stands prominently facing the park wall and the road, only a few yards away, and is quite easily to be seen. It is a long, low mansion, a singular

mass of Gothic gables, chimneys, and terraces, dating originally from the early years of the fourteenth century, when it was built by the De Clyvedons. Court and estates passed with an heiress by marriage to one Thomas Hogshaw, thence in the same manner to the Lovell family, and from them to the Wakes, whose arms and allusive motto, "Wake and Pray," are to be found in parts of the house altered by them about 1570. The Wake family sold their possessions at Clevedon to Digby, Earl of Bristol; and finally the executors of the third Earl sold them to the Elton family in the time of Queen Anne.

Great destruction was caused to the west front of the Court by the fire that broke out in November 1882, but the damage has been so skilfully repaired that, to any save the closest inspection, the building retains the aspect it had long presented. The chief feature of the principal front, of fourteenth-century date, is the entrance-porch, with portcullis, and room over. Here, midway along the irregular front, is a very large square window, filled with curiously diapered tracery. Thackeray, who often visited here, as a friend of the Rev. William H. Brookfield and his wife, Jane Octavia, sister of Sir Charles Elton, then owner of Clevedon Court, has left a somewhat striking pencil sketch of the building, viewed from this point. The house is the original of "Castlewood," in his novel, "Esmond."

Clevedon Court was largely rearranged in the time of Queen Elizabeth, in accordance with the

ideas of comfort then prevailing, considerably in advance of those that ruled when it was originally built, in the reign of Edward the Second. But it was left to the remarkable people who ruled when the nineteenth century was yet young to further modernise the ancient residence, and they perpetrated strange things: painting and graining interior stonework to resemble oak, and the like atrocities; the highest ambition of builders



CLEVEDON COURT.

and decorators in that era of shame being to treat honest materials as though they were not to be shown for what they really were, and to make them masquerade as something else. No one ever was deceived by the plaster of that age, pretending to be stone; and stone that was given two coats of paint and tickled with a grainer's comb, and then finished off with varnish, never yet made convincing oak, any more than "marbled" wall-papers looked or felt like real marble; but those were then conventional treat-

ments, and were followed and honoured all over the land.

At the same time, the ancient oak roof of the hall of Clevedon Court was hidden behind a plaster ceiling.

But the house is not sought out only for its antiquity, or for the beauty of its situation, or even for its Thackeray associations. After all, does any considerable section of the public really care for Thackeray landmarks? Writers of literary gossip, of prefaces to new editions, may affect to think so, but, in fact, Thackeray does not command that intimate sympathy which Dickens enjoys. Sentiment does not attach itself to the satirist, who, in the odd moments when he, too, sentimentalises, is apt to be suspected, quite wrongly, of insincerity. It is for its Tennyson associations that Clevedon Court is sought by most tourists.

CHAPTER VI

YATTON—CONGRESBURY—WICK ST. LAWRENCE

THE main road from Clevedon to Kingston Seymour trends sharply inland, passing the little village of Kenn. Seaward the flat and featureless lands spread to an oozy shore ; Kenn itself, an insignificant village, standing beside a sluggish runnel of the same name. From this place sprang the Ken family, which numbered among its members the celebrated Bishop of Bath and Wells, who owed his preferment from a subordinate position at Winchester to his having, while there, refused to give up his house for the accommodation of Nell Gwynne. Charles the Second was a true sportsman. He respected those who were true to themselves, whether it were an unrepentant highwayman, whom he could pardon and fit out with a telling nickname ; or a Church dignitary whose conscience forbade him to curry favour by housing a King's mistress. So, in 1684, when a choice was to be made of a new Bishop of Bath and Wells, the King declared that no one should have it but " the little black fellow that refused his lodging to poor Nelly."

The Ken family finally died out in the seven-

teenth century, after having been settled here over four hundred years. A small mural monument to Christopher Ken and his family, 1593, remains in the little church, rebuilt in 1861 and uninteresting; but with a pretty feature in the unusual design of the pyramidal stone roof of its small tower.

Beyond Kenn, in a lonely situation midway between Yatton and the coast at the point where the waters of the Yeo estuary glide and creep, rather than fall, into the sea, stands the village of Kingston Seymour. The country all round about is more remarkable for the rich feeding its flat pastures afford the cows than for its scenic beauties. If it were not for the luxuriant hedgerows and the fine hedgerow trees, it would be possible to say, with the utmost sincerity, that this corner of Somerset was tame and dull. But the dairy-farmers who occupy it so largely draw great prosperity from these flat meadows.

Within the beautiful and delicately graceful old church of Kingston Seymour are tablets recording the floods once possible here, and the destruction wrought by two such visitations, in 1606 and 1703. An epitaph records the odd bequest of a certain "J. H.," in bequeathing "his remains" to his acquaintance, and their still more singular joy at the legacy:

> He was universally beloved in the circle of
> His acquaintance; but united
> In his death the esteem of all,
> Namely, by bequeathing his remains.

KINGSTON SEYMOUR.

The centre of this district is Yatton, which now draws all surrounding traffic by reason of its junction station on the Great Western Railway. Here the traveller changes for Clevedon, or for Cheddar and Wells, or for Wrington Vale. Yatton takes its name from the river Yeo, which oozes near by, and itself hides in that form of spelling the Celtic word *ea*, for water, akin to the modern French *eau*. Thus Yatton is really, derivatively, the same as Eton, near Windsor, the water-town beside the river Thames; Eaton by Chester, on the river Dee, and many other places throughout the country with the affix of "ea" or "ay." An alternative derivation, as arguable as the first, makes Yatton derive from the "gate," or gap, in the neighbouring hills, through which the Yeo drains on its way from Wrington. The village itself stands somewhat high, but overlooks a very considerable tract of low-lying country, formerly in the nature of a creek, as proved by modern discoveries of a Roman boat-house and similar waterside relics near by.

The business brought by the junction-station of the Great Western Railway at Yatton has effectually abolished the village-like rustic character of the place. It is more by way of a townlet of one long street, remarkable for the unpleasing prominence of blank walls enclosing the grounds of residents whose desire for privacy appears to be excessive.

The great feature of Yatton is, however, its fine church. No traveller can have journeyed

much on the Great Western Railway without having noticed, as his train approached Yatton, the singular effect produced by the tall tower of this fine building, surmounted by a spire that has lost the last third part of its original height, and has been finished off with small pinnacles. The effect is almost uncanny, but by no means unpleasant, and the proposals that have from time to time been made to complete the spire are altogether to be deprecated. No records remain by which it can with certainty be said that the spire was ever completed when the church was at last finished, after building operations that extended from 1486 to 1500; but the evidence afforded by the Late Perpendicular cresting and pinnacles that finish off the incomplete structure, and are contemporary with it, seems to point to one or other of two hypotheses: that funds finally proved insufficient, almost on the eve of the works being brought to a conclusion; or that the builders were alarmed by signs of their having already placed as much weight upon the tower as it could possibly bear.

It is a noble church, designed in the last phase of pure Gothic architecture, with some few remains of Early English and Decorated from a former building, demolished to make way for this larger and more splendid place of worship. Here in the De Wyke chantry is the altar-tomb of Evelina de Wyke and her husband, *c.* 1337; and near by is that of Sir Richard Cradock Newton, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, 1448, and

YATTON CHURCH.

his wife, Emma, or Emmota, Perrott. The recumbent effigies of the Judge and his lady are very fine. He wears the robes of his office and a collar with links of "S.S.,"—mystic letters generally considered to signify "Souveraigne," and to be a badge of Lancastrian loyalty. This example is considered to be the earliest known. The "garbs," or wheatsheaves of the Judge's coat-of-arms, may still be traced, as also the arms of his wife—three pendant golden pears on a red field, in punning allusion to "Perrott."

Here also is the tomb of the Judge's eldest son, Sir John Newton, and his wife, Isabel Chedder. All these had, in their time, greatly to do with the rebuilding and beautifying of Yatton church.

A curious epitaph in the churchyard, to the memory of a gipsy who died in 1827, reads :

> Here lies Merrily Joules,
> a beauty bright,
> Who left Isac Joules, her
> heart's delight.

Prominent, close by, is the boldly stepped base of a churchyard cross, of which the shaft has long disappeared. Surviving accounts prove it to have been erected at a cost of £18, in 1499.

Yatton church, as we have seen, has a spire, an unusual feature with Somerset churches. Here, however, a small group of spires or spirelets occurs, including also those of Congresbury, Kingston Seymour, Kenn, and Worle. Congresbury spire is the most prominent of all, both

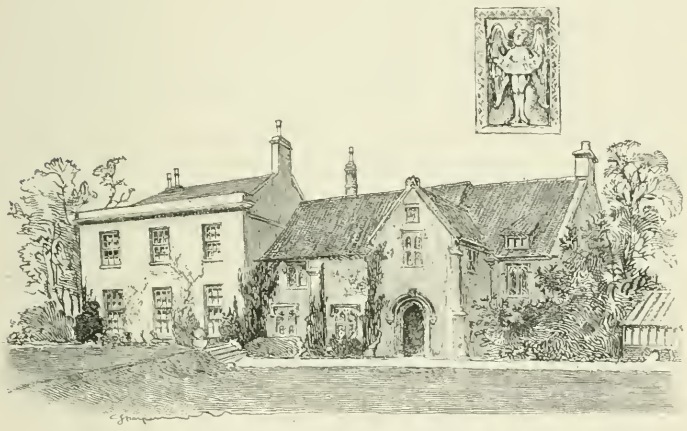
from its own height and from the position it occupies in the vale below Yatton.

"Coomsbury"—for that is the local shibboleth—is a considerable village, taking its name traditionally from "St. Congar," son of some uncertain "Emperor of Constantinople." This really very autocratic personage endeavoured to marry his son to a person whom the young man could not love, and he fled his father's Court; wandering in wild and inclement lands, until he came at last to this then particularly wild and unwholesome region. We cannot avoid the suspicion that the lady must have been a terror of the first water; or, alternatively, that Congar was not altogether weather-proof in the upper storey. He is said to have founded a hermitage here, A.D. 711, and a baptistry at which the heathen were admitted to the Church; and King Ina, we are told, became his most powerful patron. At last he went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and died there; but his body was conveyed back to Congresbury.

Thus the legend, which has no historical foundation whatever, and appears to be an ancient, but entirely idle tale: the name of Congresbury being really, in its first form, an Anglo-Saxon Königsburg; or, in modern English, Kingston. But "St. Congar," although he finds no place in learned hagiologies, is still a belief at "Coomsbury," and the villagers point to the stump of an ancient yew-tree as "St. Congar's walking-stick."

The church itself is large and fine, but not so fine as that of Yatton. In the churchyard is the base of an ancient cross, and in the village itself a tall shaft of the fifteenth century, with the cross replaced by a ball.

The rectory was until towards the end of the eighteenth century wholly a fifteenth-century building; but the clergy of that time, little dis-



THE RECTORY, CONGRESBURY.

posed towards archæology, and with marked leanings towards a certain standard of stately comfort and display, procured the building of the present large but ugly parsonage, and degraded the old building into a kitchen and outhouse. The expansive (and expensive) ideas of that time have for some generations past proved expensive indeed to the incumbents of Congresbury, for the large house and great lofty rooms cost much

to keep in repair, and the ideas of the present-day clergy are not so nearly as they were like those of the old-fashioned free-handed country squires.

In Congresbury churchyard a lengthy epitaph upon a former inhabitant incidentally tells us that belated highwaymen still troubled these parts in 1830, a period when most other regions had long seen the last of those unknightly "Knights of the Road":

In Memory of
CHARLES CAPELL HARDWICKE
of this Parish
died
July 2nd 1849
aged
50 years
And was buried at Hutton
His Friends
Erected this Monument
To Record
their admiration of his
Character
and
their regret at his
Loss
A.D. 1871

He was of such courage that being attacked by a highwayman on the heath in this parish, Oct. 21st, 1830, and fearfully wounded by him, he pursued his assailant and having overtaken him in the centre of this village, he delivered him up to Justice.

The old rectory, happily still standing, was built about 1446. Its chief interest lies in the projecting porch; the doorway surmounted with

a sculptured panel enclosing the figure of an odd-looking angel with a cross growing out of his head, holding in his hands a scroll inscribed "*Laus Deo.*" The archway is pointed in the manner of an Early English arch, and sculptured with an imitation of the "dog-tooth" moulding of that period. Stone shields bear the arms of Bishop Beckington, and of the Pulteney family.

From Congresbury it is possible to again approach the coast, coming by level roads that run through flat alluvial lands to Wick St. Lawrence, a small and solitary village standing near the banks of the Yeo estuary.

The writer grows tired of writing, and the reader doubtless as weary of reading, of the richness of the land in these parts; but the occasion for and the necessity of this continued allusion are at least proofs of the fertility of Somerset and of the abundance of the good gifts bestowed upon this fortunate county, whose soil even oozes plentifully out at its river-mouths and in the way of muddy deposits conspicuously advertises this form of wealth. There can be no possible doubt of the great importance the dairying business has assumed in these parts. It has already been noted at Yatton, and here again the traveller by road, who thus sees the country intimately, is impressed, not only with the rich pastures, but with the beautiful stock he sees in them or driven along the road; and also with the numbers of carts he observes, with from one to half a dozen milk-churns, driven smartly across country to

the nearest railway-station, to catch the up trains for Bristol or London.

The road to Wick St. Lawrence—*i.e.* St. Lawrence's Creek—after crossing the Great Western Railway midway between Yatton and Puxton, winds extravagantly between high hedges, passing only an occasional farmhouse. Rarely the stranger in these parts meets any other wayfarers than farming folk, and the children of Wick St. Lawrence at sight of him stand stock-still, with fingers in mouths, quaint figures of combined curiosity and shyness, clad in the old rustic way in homely clothes and clean "pinners."

The remains of a many-stepped fifteenth-century village cross stand opposite the church: all steps and not much cross, ever since some village Hampdens in the long ago showed their hatred of superstition by leaving only about a foot and a half of the shaft. The church itself, with tall and rather gaunt tower, is a Late Perpendicular building, with elaborate stone pulpit. Here is an epitaph which would seem to have its warnings for those who might feel disposed to extend their explorations to the mud-flats of the Yeo estuary at low tide:

To the memory of James Morss, of this parish, yeoman, who dy'd November ye 25th 1730, aged 38 years.

Save me, O God, the mighty waters role
With near Approaches, even to my soul:
Far from dry ground, mistaken in my course,
I stick in mire, brought hither by my horse.
Thus vain I cry'd to God, who only saves:
In death's cold pit I lay ore whelm'd with waves.

Beyond the village, the road winds again in fantastic loops, and is crossed, without the formality of gates by the W. C. and P.L.R. This weird concatenation of initials sounds like a mass-meeting of household sanitary appliances, but those readers who have diligently persevered through the earlier pages of this book will understand that the Weston, Clevedon and Portishead Light Railway is meant. Thenceforward, after more windings through a thinly peopled district, the road wriggles on to Worle ; sending off a branch to the left hand for Woodspring, Swallow Cliff, and Sand Bay.

CHAPTER VII

WORSPRING PRIORY, KEWSTOKE

The Augustinian Priory of Worspring, or Wospring, now called "Woodspring," stands in a very secluded situation in this little-visited nook of the coast, projecting abruptly into the Bristol Channel north-west of Wick, and terminated in that direction by St. Thomas's Head: a promontory which owes its name directly to the Priory itself, partly dedicated to the Blessed St. Thomas of Canterbury. The roads of this district are perhaps better to be termed lanes; and they are lanes of old Devonian character: narrow, hollow, with high banks and hedges, stony and winding. The land is purely agricultural. Thus, except for a few farmers' carts and waggons, or for those more than usually enterprising tourists and amateurs of ancient architecture and ecclesiastical ruins who spend their energies in seeking out the remains of Woodspring Priory, the stranger has until now been but rarely seen. A new complexion has, however, been put upon matters by the coming of what is known locally, "for short," as the "W. C. and P.L.R."; *i.e.* the Weston, Clevedon, and Portishead Light Railway, already

described ; and now learned archæologists, enthusiastic, but perhaps not always endowed with the stamina and endurance of explorers, travel hither in the company of picnic parties, to whom any ruin in a picturesque setting is a sufficient excuse for an afternoon afield. "Hither," however, is here a generous term, for the railway does not come within a mile and a half of the spot. But "every little helps," as the trite proverb tells us.

The name of "Woodspring" does not appear in print before 1791, when it is found in Collinson's "History of Somerset." Before that date it was always referred to as "Worspring." The name has puzzled many, but it is really a simple corruption of the original term, "Worle-spring," indicating the situation of the Priory on a rill that descended to these levels by the sea from the neighbourhood of Worle heights.

The Priory was founded in the first instance by Reginald FitzUrse, as a chapel of expiation of his share in the murder of Thomas à Becket. It was in 1210 refounded on a much larger scale by William de Courtenay, grandson, on the maternal side, of William Tracy, another of those sacrilegious knights. Courtenay endowed it as a home of Austin Canons and triply dedicated the establishment in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Holy and Undivided Trinity, and St. Thomas à Becket ; and it was further enriched by lands bequeathed by Maud, the daughter, and Alice, the granddaughter, of the third murderer, le Bret or Brito : Alice expressing the devout hope that

the intercession of the blessed martyr might always be available for herself and her children.

The seal of the Priory is curious. In the lower portion of the usual vesica-shaped device is an allusion to the dedication to St. Thomas of Canterbury, in the form of a representation of his martyrdom: Becket being shown falling by the altar, on which stands a chalice, at the moment of his skull being cleft by Richard le Bret's sword, which protrudes, immensely large in proportion to the figure of the Archbishop, from the border.

After more than three hundred and twenty years of an almost unruffled existence, this obscure religious house was suppressed in common with others, and its fabric and possessions confiscated. It was surrendered on September 27th, 1536, and the monks turned adrift upon the world, perhaps too late in life to set about the performance of any honest work; but by no means with that utter indifference as to whether they were clothed and fed, or went in rags and starved, that the apologists for monkery and critics of Henry the Eighth and his Ministers of State would have us believe. No: unless they had proved contumacious, the rulers and the brethren of the disestablished religious houses were pensioned. The last Prior of Woodspring, Roger Tormenton, who was appointed in 1525, received a pension of £12 per annum upon his surrendering the Priory in 1536—a sum equal to nearly £100 at present values. The Priory itself was then leased for twenty-one years to

WOODSPRING PRIORY.

Edward Fettiplace, of Donington, Berkshire: one of the formerly numerous family of that name once settled chiefly in that county and in Oxfordshire, but now utterly extinct. Passing through many hands, it is now among the properties of the Smyth-Pigott family, owners of much land hereabouts, including the site of Weston-super-Mare.

There can surely be no farmhouse more ecclesiastical in appearance than that of Woodspring Priory. As the traveller approaches it across the rough occupation-roads of two large pastures, he sees the noble central tower of what was the Priory church rising exquisitely from a characteristically English rural scene of tall elms, profuse hedgerows, and succulent grass. Rude wooden field-gates and rutty tracks partly filled with straw combed off passing heavy-laden farm-waggons by projecting brambles, conduct him into a farmyard where porkers grunt from their sties and cows low from their linhays in a not unmusical orchestration; the grey and lichened stonework of the Priory tithe-barn and the tall tower surrounding them with an unwonted halo of romantic association. On that spot where, in the olden days of Woodspring's pride, the porter slid back his hatch in the gatehouse, in answer to the stranger's knock, the pigs snuffle in their troughs and thrust pink snouts through palisades, enquiring curiously who comes this way. A fantastic thought possibly occurs to the modern pilgrim that they

might be re-incarnations of those old fat porters themselves; and a glance into those pig-houses further discloses fine Berkshires there, as sleek and well-larded as any greasy mediæval Prior.

The entrance to the farmyard is flanked with a somewhat noble effect by heavy sculptured stones bearing shields. That on the right hand bears the sacred symbols of the five wounds of our Lord, with a heart in the centre; while on the left is the heraldic coat of the Dodingtons, anciently among the benefactors of the Priory; a chevron between three bugle-horns, stringed, two and one; a crescent for difference.

Less remains of the Priory church than might be at first supposed from the majestic bulk of the tower and the tall buildings that once formed nave and aisles. The choir has entirely disappeared, and the nave itself, with the north aisle of three bays, has been divided into floors for the purposes of a dwelling-house. It may thus readily be imagined that the interior is as little ecclesiastical in appearance as can well be; although it is true that winding stone staircases serve instead of ordinary domestic stairs, and that here and there some ancient carved corbel, fashioned in the likeness of a human head, projects from walls otherwise to all appearance secular; its stony countenance seeming to grin and gibber in the flickering light of a bedroom candle. Clustered stone pillars, too, thrusting through upper floors, and ending in capitals and sweeping arches, would convince the stranger

that he had found himself in some farmhouse entirely out of the common order. Even the coal-cellar, which was once a part of the north aisle, has its features, and the coals repose on incised slabs and other memorials of the dead. The cloisters, also, have disappeared; and the monks' refectory, a detached building on the south side, is now a waggon-shed, its windows filled in with bricks. A peep within discloses a fine open-timbered roof. The only building that yet retains its ancient use is the Prior's Barn, still, as in bygone centuries, the storehouse of grain, straw, and hay. At the east end of it is a doorway, now blocked up, formerly leading by nineteen steps down to the existing pool called the "Holy Well." The "Prior's Pool" is the name of a pond in the meadows westward, to which an avenue of elms leads.

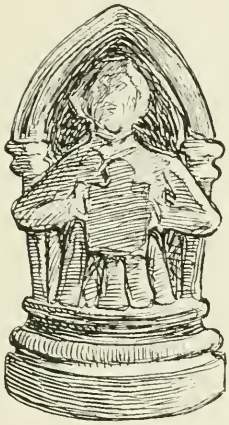
Sand Bay, nearly as large as Weston Bay, but quite lonely, stretches from St. Thomas's Head and Swallow Cliff to Anchor Head, Weston-super-Mare. Shingle and sand continue in an unbroken semicircular sweep, fringed by pastures, to the neighbourhood of Kewstoke, a small village situated on a shelf of rock below the craggy uplands of Worle Hill, and yet raised above the meadows. Nowadays Kewstoke is greatly afflicted in summer by brakes and traps, and strollers from Weston, for it is but two miles from the town, and there are the beautiful Kewstoke woods fringing the road all the way. It thus forms an easy and popular morning or after-

noon trip, in spite of the fact that a small toll is payable for the use of it—this being really a private road cut by a Smyth-Pigott in 1848, and used by the public only at the pleasure of those all-pervading landowners of this neighbourhood. Indeed, were it not for this fine level road through the dense woods, Kewstoke would scarcely ever be visited, save by young and energetic people, prepared to circle round by the rugged old way through Worle.

There are legends of St. Kew at Kewstoke. On the rocky crest of Worle Hill, looking down upon the village, is an ancient excavation of some twenty feet by twelve, popularly known as "St. Kew's Cell"; and the long rude flight of over two hundred rocky steps towards it is, of course, "St. Kew's Steps." But not the most patient archæologist has ever traced any genuine association with St. Kew here. The place-name has, however, a real connection with that so-called "cell" on the height, for the excavation was a part of the elaborate defensive works constructed by ancient peoples on the summit of the Hill: a kind of guard-house situated in a difficult approach, where a small garrison could easily from behind a palisade or stockade hinder the advance of many. It is an ascertained fact that here, at various periods of strife, throughout many centuries, people of widely sundered eras have taken up a defensive position. Among the many curious finds made in or near this pit was an ancient silver fibula, or ring, coeval with the

Phœnicians who are traditionally said to have traded to these coasts three thousand years ago ; a Saxon knife ; coarse early pottery ; remains of a fifteenth-century spear, and the hilt of a seventeenth-century sword.

Although the sea in those times flowed to the very base of this hill, just below where the village church now stands, and submerged the site of the



RELIQUARY IN KEWSTOKE CHURCH (FRONT).

present broad meadowlands, it seems absolutely certain that the name of Kewstoke does not, as so often asserted, derive from the Celtic word "kewch," or boat ; and does not mean "the place of boats." The hilltop guard-house gave the name, as may clearly be seen in Domesday Book, that valuable sidelight upon place-names, as also upon many other things. There we find "Chiwestock," the not greatly corrupted version

from the original form. It appears to mean "the stockade on the ridge."

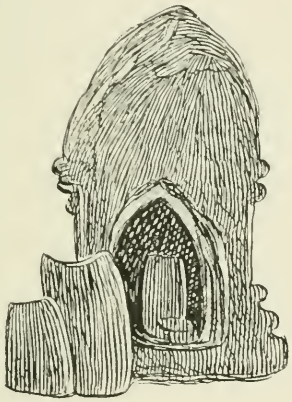
The church, dedicated to St. Paul, is a small building, without aisles. Here is a fine Norman south door, but the principal features are Late Perpendicular. The elaborate stone pulpit dates from about 1500. The old churchwardens' accounts abound with curious items, among them that of 1702. "Item: gave unto 7 poor ship carpenters that had their bones broken at Bristoll, 0. 1. 0." Doubtless the benevolent churchwardens gave this shilling with strict injunctions to the seven broken-up carpenters not to be so extravagant as to spend it all at once. But whatever they did, it is quite certain that the ratepayers of Kewstoke admonished the churchwardens against this and other reckless charities, and gave them to fully understand that any future benevolences must come out of their own personal pockets.

There are no ancient monumental brasses in Kewstoke church; a fact perhaps fully accounted for by the following entry in the accounts: "1748. Item: paid for casting the ould brasses, 23 at 6*d*. . . 11. 6."

So there we perceive the accumulated monuments of centuries going in one plunge into the melting-pot.

An interesting discovery was made during the restoration of Kewstoke church in 1849. A block of stone sculptured with a half-length figure, supposed to represent the Virgin Mary, built firmly into the north wall under the sill of

a window, had long been a curious object of the interior of the building, and was by some antiquaries considered to be a heart-shrine. The greatly defaced figure appeared to be holding a shield. To satisfy curiosity, the stone was removed, disclosing a small arched hollowed-out chamber at the back, in which was a greatly decayed oak vessel, or cup, partly split open by



RELIQUARY IN KEWSTOKE CHURCH (BACK)

warping. At the bottom of this was a dry black incrustation, pronounced to be congealed human blood. It was supposed, from the circumstances of the founding of Woodspring Priory, and from the fact of a cup, or chalice, forming a part of the Prior's seal, that this relic was nothing less than a precious portion of the martyr's blood—the greatest treasure owned by the Priory. It was further thought that the monks, foreseeing the troubles of the dissolution of the religious

houses, caused the relic to be secretly removed and placed here, in Kewstoke church. It is now in Taunton Museum.

The Kewstoke woods, largely of scrub-oak, closely woven and interlaced and compacted together by the winds off the Channel, descend in tangled thickets to the water's edge. At the end of them, a picturesque toll-gate marks the beginning of the modern pleasure-resort of Weston-super-Mare. No one need have the remotest shadow of a doubt that he has arrived, for the crowds of excursionists here and on that Walhalla of noisy enjoyment, Birnbeck Pier, make themselves very fully seen and heard.

CHAPTER VIII

WESTON-SUPER-MARE

Weston-super-Mare has frequently been styled the "Western Brighton." It matters little or nothing to those who invent these impossible parallels that the places thus compared with one another have nothing in common; and certainly Weston (for few there be who give it the longer name) is as little like Brighton as any place well can be. Weston fringes the bold curve of the shallow and sandy Weston or Uphill Bay, sandy inshore: a mile-broad expanse of mud at low water. Brighton is built on a straight coastline, part of the town standing on the cliff-tops of Kemp Town, and the narrow beach is exclusively shingle. At the back of Brighton run the treeless chalk hills of the South Downs; behind Weston stretch the levels that extend further inland as far as Sedgemoor. Brighton took its rise in the middle Georgian period, about 1780; Weston remained an insignificant village until the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

While it is certainly a mistaken compliment to compare the situation of Weston with that of Brighton, it is, on the other hand, unfair to

Brighton to pretend that, as a town, Weston approaches it, for size or splendour. But in every respect the places are so wholly dissimilar that it would be the worst of mistakes to play the one off against the other.

One of the very earliest discoverers of Weston was Mrs. Piozzi, the Mrs. Thrale of earlier years, friend of Dr. Johnson. Writing hence in 1819, she mentions the fine qualities of the air : " The breezes here are most salubrious : no land nearer than North America when we look down the Channel ; and 'tis said that Sebastian Cabot used to stand where I now sit, and meditate his future discoveries of Newfoundland."

The reference to " no land nearer than North America," with the cautious proviso, " when we look down the Channel," strikes the modern observer, who in fine weather distinctly sees the busy towns of the South Wales coast and the smoke-wreaths of its factory chimneys, not more than ten miles distant, as particularly quaint. The old county historians have little to say of Weston, and what they have to remark is concerned only with the descent of the manor.

Even so comparatively recently as 1824—five years, it will be noted, later than Mrs. Piozzi's raptures—Weston remained a very small place, as shown in an old engraving published at the time in Rutter's " Westonian Guide." It consisted, it would appear, of the parish church of St. John, just rebuilt, and some thirty houses. A few trees, of a distinctly Noah's Ark type,

looked upon the sands, occupied by two bathing-machines, a shed, a horse and cart, and twelve widely distributed people of uncertain but pensive character. Such was the old inheritance of the Pigott and Smyth-Pigott family, who have owned the manor of Weston, with much else in the neighbourhood, since 1696.

But the evidence afforded by the frontispiece to "Rutter's Guide," which shows Weston like some sparse settlement on a desolate shore, does not tally with the statements contained in the booklet itself, in whose pages we read:

"The fishermen's huts have almost disappeared and the town now contains about two hundred and fifty houses; a large portion of which are respectable residences,* and even some elegant mansions; but notwithstanding this, its general appearance is little inviting to the stranger, especially in gloomy weather, or when the ebb of the spring tides leaves open large tracts of beach. But on a fine summer evening, when the tide is in, nothing can be more beautiful than the scene which it presents: numerous groups walking on its smooth and extensive sands, intermingled with a variety of carriages, horses, fishermen wading with nets, and the villagers enjoying the exhilarating breeze after the fatigues of the day."

The seaside was at that time in process of being discovered. At innumerable spots around our coasts fisher villages were then being transformed into elegant resorts, which were saved

* This is good hearing.

from becoming vulgar by the sufficient facts that the working classes could not afford holidays, and that, if they could, the means of transport were lacking. When tedious and expensive coach journeys were the only methods of being conveyed, it is obvious that wage-earners could spare neither the time nor the money for what would have been to them, under the most favourable circumstances, an enterprise. But those classes were quite content to do without the week's or fortnight's holiday at the seaside which appears nowadays to be regarded as the birthright of most men, women, and children. They were not then educated up to holidays, and were content to work week in and week out through the year, never questioning the scheme of things that gave to the few that leisure they themselves could never enjoy.

It is a little difficult nowadays to realise the exclusive Weston that was ; although, to be sure, those days when it still posed as exclusive are not so far distant but that many old people in the town can recollect them perfectly well.

The beginning of the end of this old-time attitude of aloofness may be dated from 1841, when the Bristol and Exeter Railway that was—the Great Western that is—was opened to Worle, in continuation of the line from Paddington to Bristol ; being completed the whole way to Exeter in 1844.

The early history of railways is not yet ancient history, but it is already old enough to be obscured

and made romantic by legends, some true, others coloured with that passion for the picturesque which transfigures history everywhere. Stories are told, as they are told everywhere, with a great deal of truth in them, of local objections to the railway. We hear of the passionate opposition offered by the Smyth-Pigotts and by the inhabitants of Weston to a proposal to run the main line near the town; with the result that it was constructed no closer than a mile away inland. The two thousand inhabitants who then constituted the town of Weston short-sightedly rejoiced at this victory, which was very speedily found to be a costly one; the branch tramway laid down from the main line, with railway carriages dragged slowly into the place, to a shed situated in the rear of the present Town Hall, proving an undignified entrance that not many visitors cared to experience twice. But for ten years this remained the way into the town by rail. A proper branch line was afterwards built from Worle, but still Weston station remained a terminus, until the new loop line was made, in 1884, coming through the town and rejoining the main at Uphill and Bleadon station.

Another local railway legend, of some interest, relates to a forlorn platform that no living person ever saw put to any manner of use. It stood some distance to the north side of the existing station for Uphill and Bleadon, and was popularly supposed to be a station erected by the

Company in accordance with the letter (certainly not with the spirit) of an agreement entered into between the Company and a local landowner through whose land the railway had been made, at an extravagant cost, in consequence of the high price this freeholder had put upon his holding. He, it appears, finally insisted upon having a station built for his own personal convenience, and the Company agreed. But nothing had been said about trains stopping there, and so no tickets were ever issued to or from this freak building, and no trains ever halted at it.

Nowadays with its twenty-five thousand inhabitants, Weston welcomes, instead of repelling, the visitor. Nay, more: it has arrived at that stage of existence to which most other seaside towns have come, and lives for and on visitors, and when the summer season is over ceases to be its characteristic self; always remembering that in winter its climate is mild and inviting to invalids.

It has long been the fashion in many quarters to depreciate Weston-super-Mare, and to style it "Weston-super-Mud." Mud there is in plenty, far out in this shallow bay, and it is exposed for a great distance at the ebb, but it never intermingles with the fine broad yellow sands that form a paradise for children along the entire two miles' sweep of the bay, from Anchor Head to Uphill, and make a fine track for the donkey rides that are so great a feature of the children's

holidays here. The scenery surrounding Weston is delightful and singularly romantic. Boldly placed in mid-Channel are those twin, but strongly dissimilar islets, the Steep Holm and Flat Holm, the last-named provided with a prominent white lighthouse, and both in these latter days the site of massive forts presenting an embattled front to any possible hostile voyage up the Severn Sea. These islets are outlying fragments of the Mendip range of hills, which ends south of the town in the quarried hills of Bleadon and Uphill, and in the almost islanded gigantic bulk of Brean Down. Overhanging the town on the north is that other outlier of the Mendips, Worle Hill. In every direction, therefore, we find hills peaking up with a suddenness and an outline almost volcanic in appearance. The air, too, of Weston is brisk and enjoyable; and if there be indeed nothing of interest in the town itself, modern creation as it is, the same criticism is applicable to many another seaside resort. The stranger, therefore, who has for many years been familiar with severe and undiscriminating criticisms of Weston finds it, when at last fate brings him hither, a very much more likeable place than he had dared hope.

It must, however, be said that Weston is not select. It is popular, in the sense that Yarmouth, Blackpool, and Southport (to name none others) are popular. It caters of necessity for the crowd, for the crowd is at its very threshold. Half an hour's railway journey from

Bristol, and a mere ten miles' steamer voyage from Cardiff and other populous Welsh ports, would render useless any attempts that might be made to keep Weston as a preserve for the comparatively few rich, leisured, and cultured persons who might give its Parade a better tone, but certainly would not do the shopkeeping class much good. And to do the people and the local authorities of Weston the merest justice, they make no such attempts, foredoomed to failure as they would be. I do not know what the motto of Weston-super-Mare may be, nor even indeed if it has one. If not already furnished in this respect, it might well be "Let 'em all come." And they do already come in very considerable numbers. But this, it should be said, is not to pretend that Weston is either so large, or so besieged with immense crowds of visitors, as Blackpool and the other popular resorts already mentioned. Still the streets, the long curving Parade, and the sands are in July, August, and September as densely crowded as any lover of humanity in masses could reasonably desire, and the place is as fully furnished with strictly unintellectual amusements as the average lower middle-class holiday-maker could hope for, outside Blackpool and Yarmouth. Here is a pier, the "Grand Pier" it is called, thrusting forth a long arm from the centre of the Parade into the shallow waters of the bay, with a huge concert pavilion midway, and a further lengthy arm going on and on until it rivals Southend pier

itself, with a total length of 6,600 feet, or something like a mile and a quarter; the intention being to enable the excursion steamers to touch at the pier-head. An electric railway runs the length of this prodigious affair, which entirely eclipses the old Birnbeck Pier under Anchor Head: really a pier-like bridge connecting the rocky isle of Birnbeck with the mainland. From the isle itself three pier-arms project in different directions, and to these the excursion steamers from Bristol, Cardiff and other ports have hitherto come. Such dreams of delight await the incoming visitors on this siren isle that many day-excursionists to Weston proceed no farther. The place abounds with every kind of amusement, except the intellectual variety: water-chutes, switchback railways, try-your-weight and try-your-strength machines, and battalions of other penny-in-the-slot mechanisms; and, above all, a damned something that may be espied from the shore, like a huge giant's-stride pole with baskets whizzing in dizzy fashion around it; the said baskets being filled with people who have paid a penny each for the privilege of being given a sensation which must be a colourable imitation of sea-sickness. The channel called the Stepway, which separates Birnbeck from Anchor Head at high tide, is readily crossed at low water; but the place has its hidden dangers, in a very swift current that sweeps suddenly through when the tide again begins to flow; as may be seen by personal observation, and in the evidence offered by

a tablet in Clevedon church, which records the deaths in 1819 by drowning of Abraham and Charles Elton, two sons of Sir Abraham Elton, who at the ages of thirteen and fourteen were thus cut off: "In crossing from Bearnbeck Isle, at Weston-super-Mare, the younger became involved in the tide, when the elder plunged to his rescue. The flood was stronger than their strength, though not their love, and as 'they were lovely and pleasant in their lives,' so 'in their death they were not divided.'"

Midway between Birnbeck and the Grand Pier is a projecting rock, once an island called Knightstone, now connected with the shore and made the site of the Knightstone Pavilion and Baths.

Add to these varied delights the presence of hundreds of itinerant vendors on Parade and sands, and barrows innumerable in the busy streets; and throw in a very plentiful supply of teashops, restaurants, and dining-rooms in the centre of the town, whose proprietors or their agents stand on the pavement and shout for custom, and you will have a very fair notion of what Weston is like. To these items, however, must be added Grove Park, with its mansion, the old manor-house of the Smyth-Pigotts, and, the Clarence Park, and one other. Finally, conceive that indispensable feature of a modern watering-place, an electric tramway, and there you have Weston-super-Mare.

Everything is very new, and probably the

one ancient object is the chancel of the parish church, which seems to have escaped rebuilding, but is not, at any rate, of much interest. In the church is the following curious epitaph :

Of two brothers born together,
Cruel death was so unkind
As to bring the eldest hither,
And the younger leave behind.
May George live long,
Edgar dy'd young,
For born he was
To Master Sam Willan, Rectour
of this place, and Jane his wife,
Sep^r. 5, 1680, and buryed Feb.
the eleventh, 1686. The 9th
did put an end to all his pain,
And sent him into everlasting gain.

CHAPTER IX

WORLEBURY—WORLE

All the ebullient modernity of Weston is looked down upon by the immemorially old, from that overhanging vantage-point, Worle Hill, where the ancient camp and fortress of Worlebury, dwelling-place and stronghold of many ancient peoples, shows traces of occupation by a race who flourished some four thousand years since. Worlebury passed through many hands, but the last people who sheltered there died in ruthless battle thirteen centuries ago.

Worlebury rises to a height of 357 feet above Weston, and although modern villas here and there impinge upon it, and the spire of Holy Trinity Church and the unlovely backs of houses are a thought too insistent from these grey ramparts of prehistoric times, it is in many ways as remote from the seething crowd beneath as its height would imply. The camp of twenty acres is divided into two unequal parts by a ditch. It is conjectured that the larger portion was the place of refuge, and the smaller the actual fortress, of the race who constructed it. The whole is irregularly enclosed by ramparts of

loose pieces of limestone and rocky banks, roughly of five successive ranges, but here and there, in places thought weakest, of as many as seven. On the side facing the sea, where the limestone rocks of Worle Hill go precipitously down, and artificial defence was not required, there are no ramparts.

This hill-top was until about 1820 a barren spot, quite innocent of trees, but the plantations made at that time by the Smyth-Pigott of the period have by now resulted in a crown of beautiful woodlands of larch, oak, and other trees. Amid these woods the extraordinary ancient ramparts of loose limestone fragments, the broadest of these defences about a hundred feet across, glimmer greyly, like petrified rivers. The flakes and knobs of stone, broken up and placed here in such immense quantities and with incredible labour, vary in size from about that of an ordinary brick to three times those dimensions, and are as clean and sharp to-day as though but recently quarried.

It is not an easy matter to climb over these successive banks and ditches, and it is quite evident that those who at different periods stormed these defences and slew those who occupied them, must have been determined people, little daunted by the losses they must needs have suffered in the advance. The early defenders were men who used the sling for chief weapon of defence, and great numbers of slingers' platforms—little flat spaces contrived in strategical

positions along the sloping sides of the hill—remain, like so many primitive artillery emplacements; while quantities of their ammunition—pebble-stones that are not in the course of nature found on the crests of limestone hills—may be picked up.

The first people, it is thought, who seized this hill-top, were Belgic tribes from over seas, who, landing in the shallow waters that then spread where the meadows below Kewstoke are now, or in the lakelike bay on whose side Weston now stands, fortified the summit and held it as a base from which to make further advances. The natives of these parts, whose lands those ancient raiders coveted, were chiefly lake-dwellers, living on the many islets that then studded these marshy seas and salt-water lagoons, or housed on pile-dwellings ingeniously constructed in the waters themselves. Larger communities of them lived for safety inside stockades, whose fragments have been discovered of recent years at Meare, in the neighbourhood of Glastonbury, where evidence of the conflicts that followed the appearance of the raiders was found, in charred remains of wrecked homes. Evidence was not wanting that this was a conflict in which both sides suffered, and among the remains of a stockade unearthed recently was found the trophy of a woman's head, which the science of ethnology proved to have been that of a person belonging to the raiders' tribes. Thus it appeared that the lake-dwellers had seized and murdered one of their

enemies' women, and had fixed the head upon a stake of their defences, by way of derision.

Those who first seized Worle Hill, and made the camp of Worlebury, evidently intended to stay, for they constructed many well-like dwelling-pits in the hilltops. Some of these remain. They are about four feet deep, and had originally a surrounding wall, about two feet high. A roof of boughs and twigs, kept in place by flat slabs of stone, completed a specimen dwelling. We know so much for a certainty, because in excavating examples of these houses the original roof has been found, with the boughs and twigs and the flat stone slabs that had been especially brought from the lias strata of Nailsea by these ancient folk. Plentiful signs remained that at some period this camp had been rushed and every dwelling burnt out, for charred barley was found, together with remains of burnt logs and wattle-work roofing. Under the remains of these roofs were pebble-stones, part of the ancient occupants' sling ammunition ; and relics of their last meals, in the shape of bones of birds and rabbits. Some flint arrow-heads also were discovered, and, secreted behind a rocky ledge in one of these pits, some iron ring-money. So, on some day of red ruin, at a date no man can give, the first camp of Worlebury was destroyed.

Centuries passed, and the hilltop apparently was given over to solitude, and nature buried these relics of a desperate day under moss and grass. Whether, as sometimes has been supposed, the

Romans at a later age stormed a British camp on this height, is at least uncertain. The only things Roman ever found here were some coins, and they may well have belonged to the Romanised Britons who, after the withdrawal of the Roman garrisons of Britain, fell a prey to the more virile barbarians from the north of Europe, and retreated before them, being driven mercilessly from one fortified post to another, and slain in many thousands. The last great struggle in Worlebury took place at this period. Arthur, the half-legendary King Arthur of so many romances, the great warrior-king of more than three hundred years earlier date than Alfred the Great, had been at length slain, in A.D. 542 ; and the Saxon onset, checked by his successes, was renewed. Ceawlin, the great Bretwalda of the powerful and rapidly growing kingdom of Wessex, overthrew the Britons at the bloody battle of Barbury Hill, near Swindon, in A.D. 556, and in A.D. 577, with great slaughter, gained the battle of Dyrham, between Bath and Bristol ; all those parts we now know as Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, together with parts of Somerset, being thereby added to the kingdom of Wessex. Soon after the battle of Dyrham, Ceawlin captured Worlebury, where the Britons had taken refuge, and the evidence of what was then wrought here was still visible in 1851, when archæologists systematically excavated and examined the turf that covered the ancient pit-dwellings. In one pit were found three skeletons, doubled up and

lying across one another, evidently just as they had been flung there after the fierce onset of the storming party. The skull of one was cleanly gashed in two places, as though by a sword; doubtless in this case the "saexe," the short sword the Saxons used, and from which, indeed, their name derives. Another had a wound in the thigh and an iron spear-head was found embedded in the spine. Evidently this was the framework of a warrior who had been taken in the rear while engaging in executing a strategical retreat; or, as we used to say at school, "doing a bunk." Unfortunately he had not started early enough. The third skeleton was that of a bolder man of war, who had stayed to see it out and scorned to run, with the result that he received a huge stone in the skull, and his collar-bone was driven up into his jaw. It was then too late to leave, and in fact his bones remained here for close upon thirteen hundred years, with these evidences of his ill-advised stand, plain to see. But his soul goes marching on.

Other pit-dwellings contained skeletons, portions of rusted arms, potsherds of a rude type of earthenware vessels, and beads; many of them superimposed upon the infinitely older relics of the earlier defenders. Many of them are to be seen in the collections of the Somerset Archæological Society at Taunton. There is prominently displayed the skull of a slaughtered warrior with no fewer than seven gashes in it. He must have been a bonny fighter, to have attracted all

this hewing and slashing that at last put him out of action; or else the crowd concentrating their efforts on him wasted those energies that might with greater advantage have been distributed more evenly over the stricken field. We can know nothing of who he was. No monument was ever raised to his memory. But, although it may at first sight seem to be an indignity that his shattered skull should be exposed here, yet, when you more closely consider the rights and the wrongs of it, is this not his best monument—showing that he fought for all he was worth, and was only slain by overpowering odds? *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori!*

Worle (locally "Wurle") itself is a detestable village of vulgar and poverty-stricken shops and out-at-elbows cottages, a blot on its surroundings. As Weston rose from insignificance, Worle, which was anciently its market-town and centre of supplies, sank into obscurity, and now the sole interest of the place is its pretty church, containing some good miserere seats. It was of old the property of Worspring Priory, and Richard Spring, one of its later Priors, was at the same time vicar of Worle. He resigned the Priory in 1525. His initials are found carved on one of the misereres. A small stone in the churchyard is inscribed:

A Maiden in Mold
60 years old
JOANNA
1644

The registers contain some curious items, among them, under date of 1609, the following note :

" Edward Bustle cruelly murthered by consent of his owne wyfe, who, with one Humfry Hawkins, and one other of theyre associates, were executed for the same murther, and hanged in Irons at a place called Shutt Shelfe, neere Axbridge, and the body of the said Bustle barberously used, viz., his throte cutt, his legs cutt of, and divers woundes in his body, and buryed in a stall, was taken up and buryed in the church yard at Worle, March Xth. A good president (*sic*) for wicked people."

Apparently the degree of criminality of the unhappy Edward Bustle's wife was not great, for she not only escaped this hanging which, according to the wording of the above note, she suffered, but married in the following October a certain bold man, by name Nicholas Pitman.

A violent, but unexplained, local antipathy to lawyers was formerly manifested at Worle, by the contumelious drumming out of any member of the legal profession who chanced to be discovered in the village. Some embittered page of local history is no doubt concerned in this now obsolete custom, but this is probably almost as far removed in the annals of the place as those distant ages when Worle was by way of being a seaport. Where the flat meadows now spread, maplike below the village, and where the Great Western Railway runs, ships in dim bygone æons

rode at anchor. Proof of that forgotten fact was accidentally discovered of recent years, when, in digging the foundation of a new brewery, an ancient anchor was unearthed from the sandy subsoil.

CHAPTER X

STEEP HOLM—FLAT HOLM—UPHILL—BREAN DOWN

If one might dare so greatly as to make one prominent comparison to the disadvantage of Brighton and the advantage of Weston, it would be this : that the seascape off Brighton beach is a mere empty waste of waters. What shipping there is to be occasionally seen is observed going far away out in the Channel ; there so broad that it might be, for all the evidence there is to the contrary, the wide ocean itself. Here at Weston, on the other hand, where the Bristol Channel is so narrow that the coast of South Wales is easily to be seen, a constant passage of shipping enlivens the outlook. Here also are those picturesque islets, Steep Holm and Flat Holm, that have so companionable and cheerful a presence.

The two Holms that stand forth so picturesquely midway in the Channel deserve some detailed description, for they not only form prominent objects in every view from Weston, but have a curious history. Both are favourite places for excursions by sailing skiffs or motor-

boats, and if there be those persons who cannot obtain a sufficiency of sea-bathing on Weston shores, Flat Holm affords plenty. The name, "Holm" is Norse for "island," and remains evidence of the Danish descent upon these coasts in A.D. 882. The Saxon names for the isles, as given in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, were "Stepan-reolice"; and "Bradanreolice"; *i.e.* "Steep Reel Island," and "Broad Reel Island": the word "reel" being probably an allusion to their supposedly reel-like shape; Steep Holm a long and narrow rock, rising abruptly, with steep and jagged limestone cliffs, to a height of 256 feet above the sea; and Flat Holm presenting a broad, flat, egg-like form.

It was on Steep Holm that Gildas, the bitter and melancholy monkish Celtic chronicler of the woes that befel Britain after the death of King Arthur, wrote his Latin complaint, *Liber Querulus de Excidio Britanniæ*, telling how the country was overrun by the Saxon hordes in the fifth and sixth centuries.

In later centuries the Saxons themselves fell upon evil times, and were overcome by stronger races, or waged inconclusive defensive wars with other oversea marauders. Thus the isles were the scene of a hostile descent from Brittany in A.D. 918. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle tells us, in doleful language, of the miseries of that time; how a numerous fleet, commanded by Earls Ohtor and Rhoald, pillaged either shore from these fastnesses, and how finally they were defeated

and Earl Rhoald slain, on the mainland; when "few of them got away, except those alone who there swam out to the ships. And then they sat down on the island of Bradanreolice, until such time as they were quite destitute of food; and many men died of hunger, because they could not obtain any food." At length a famished remnant at last dispersed to South Wales and Ireland, and thus ingloriously faded out of history. Seventy years later, that is to say A.D. 988, the Danes, ravaging these coasts, made Steep Holm a base, and in 1066, after the Battle of Hastings, Gytha, mother of the brave but unfortunate Harold, took refuge here from the Norman.

Steep Holm, one and a half miles round, is not an easy place to approach, having only two landings. It is the nearest of the two from Weston, being but three miles offshore, while Flat Holm is five and a half miles distant. The area of Steep Holm is, roughly, seventy acres. Geographically it is situated in the parish of Brean. It is the property of Mr. Kemeys-Tynte, of Cefn Mably, Cardiff, and is partly leased to the War Office, which maintains six heavy batteries here; the Gordon, Rudder Rock, Split Rock, Laboratory, Summit, and Tombstone forts, mounted with modern heavy guns, crowning the cliffs. Here also is a Lloyd's signalling station, together with an inn, formerly a residence built by Mr. Kemeys-Tynte, who at one time resided here.

Steep Holm was formerly known as the home of the single peony, a wild flower peculiar to the

island ; but enthusiastic botanists would appear to have by this time collected it so extensively from the wild, ivy-hung cliffs that it is not now to be found. But wild birds, of aquatic and other varieties, still abound. Scanty remains of an obscure fourteenth-century priory, in the shape of a dilapidated wall with no architectural features, are left. A ruined inn, roofless, a melancholy sight to thirsty souls, is left on the island, relic of the illegitimate enterprise of a fugitive publican and sinner, who, fleeing to this sanctuary for debtors, outside the ordinary jurisdiction of the petty courts, imagined himself, wrongly as it appeared, also beyond the reach of the Inland Revenue.

Flat Holm is geographically and politically in South Wales, is the property of the Marquess of Bute, and is situated in the parish of St. Mary, Cardiff. Once a year the vicar and curate of St. Mary's visit the island and hold service in the barracks. Four batteries are situated on the island : the Castle Rock, Farm, Lighthouse and Well batteries. The tall white lighthouse that shows up so prominently from the shore at Weston is situated on Flat Holm, and rises to a height of a hundred and fifty-six feet. A singular phenomenon obscured the light in February 1902, when a shower of sticky whitish-grey mud fell and completely covered the lantern. Scientific men explained this happening as due to a portion of a dust-shower driving from the Sahara, and being converted into mud by the Channel mists.

A day's hard work was necessary before the glass was properly cleaned.

A light was first shown here in 1737, when it consisted of a brazier of burning coals ; no very effectual beacon on foggy nights. Nor was it greatly improved by the early years of the nineteenth century, for it was then still possible for such disasters as that of the *William and Mary* to happen. This unfortunate ship was wrecked in 1817, between Flat Holm and Lavernock Point, which marks the extremity of Brean Down ; and sixty lives were then lost.

The present light, of the occulting variety, has a power of 50,000 candles, and is visible for eighteen miles.

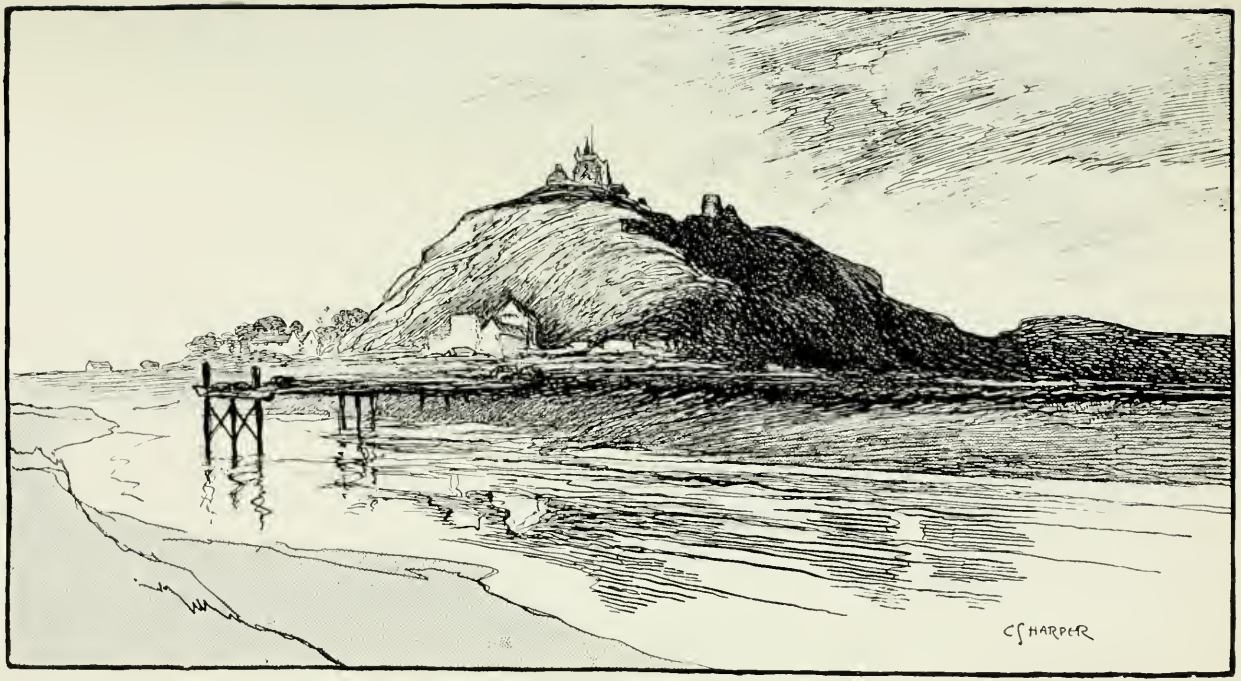
The total population of Flat Holm is twenty. Here is an inn. There are two fresh-water springs on the island.

There is much charm in the curious islanded and semi-islanded features of the Weston outlook. Boldly rising from sea-level to the left of the long front of the town, are the great hunchbacked masses of Brean Down and Uphill.

Uphill stands romantically at the mouth of the Axe, marked from great distances by its abrupt hill rising to a hundred feet above the plain, but looking much loftier. It is made further noticeable by the ruined church that stands prominently on its barren summit. The seaward side is scarred by limestone quarries into the likeness of cliffs, at whose feet the turbid waters of the Axe crawl sluggishly to the sea,

between deep, muddy banks. This was the site of a Roman station and port, whence the lead and other minerals mined by those strenuous ancients on the Mendip hills were shipped. From Old Sarum, a distance of fifty-five miles, a Roman road has been traced, going by Charterhouse-on-Mendip, and ending here. Antiquaries give the name of the Roman station as *Ad Axium*, following the lead of Sir Richard Colt Hoare, who himself invented the name. Still on the hilltop, near the church, may be traced the earthworks that once enclosed the Roman fort, and many coins of that period have been found here. Down below is a limestone cavern accidentally discovered in 1826, when it was found to contain bones of the hyæna and other animals long extinct in Britain : long centuries before ever the Romans came.

In Domesday Book Uphill is found as "Opopille," a form which takes the place-name almost entirely out of the category of names descriptive of the physical features of the spot, and places it in that of personal names. For "Uphill" is, in short, not what it seems, and does by no means refer, in its true form, to the hill. It is, reduced to the name first given, "Hubba's Pill" ; that is to say, Hubba's Creek, or harbour. All creeks, and many small streams on either side of the Bristol Channel, are "pills." This particular name was first conferred in A.D. 882, the year when these Channel coasts in general were attacked by Danish raiders under the leader-



UPHILL.

ship of one Hubba, who was slain in battle with Alfred the Great, either near Appledore, on the North Devon Coast, at a place still known as "Bloody Corner," or at Cannington, near the river Parret, in the neighbourhood of Bridgwater. supposed to be the "Cynuit" of ancient chronicles where the "heathenmen" were also utterly defeated by the great King.

Those sea-rovers were naturally attracted by the safe harbours afforded by such estuaries as these of the Parret and Axe, and laid up their piratical craft here. Probably Hubba's flotilla first anchored in the Axe before moving on to final disaster at Cynuit; and the stay, it might be supposed, could not have been short, for the place to have been given his name. Moreover, between Uphill and Bleadon we have the ferry known at this day as "Hobbs's Boat," this name itself hiding, in another corrupted form, that of the ancient chieftain.

Here, then, is good news for the Hobbses of modern times, writhing perhaps under the possession of so ungainly and apparently plebeian a name, and wishing they were Mountjoys or Mauleverers, or something of equally aristocratic sound. Any Hobbs may, it is clear, derive from Norse berserkers, and who knows but Biggs and Triggs also, and their like!

> Oh! what a chance of high romance
> Lies hid in names like Hobbs;
> There's balm therein for all their kin,
> And eke for Squibbs and Dobbs.

And Viking blood its daring flood
May pour in veins of Snooks:
Crusaders' dash with conduct rash
Inflame the frame of Jukes.

Per contra, oft a noble name
Is borne by alien loon,
And Rosenberg is "Rossiter,"
Cohen becomes "Colquhoun."
Around Park Lane, with might and main,
You hear the rumour wag
That "Gordon" may be Guggenheim,
And "Mervyn," "Mosenbag."

Romance we trace in commonplace,
And fact that custom shocks.
Thus we come daily face-to-face,
With cunning paradox.

Thus again we have, in the undoubted derivation of the name of Uphill, another instance of that eternal truth: "Things are not always what they seem." Yet who, looking at this most notable hill, rising so suddenly from the surrounding levels, would doubt, without the evidence of ancient forms, that the name was and could be nothing else than descriptive of the peculiarly striking geography of the spot?

The Norman clerks who, travelling from place to place, compiled Domesday Book from information received on the spot, very often made a singular hash of the place-names they heard from the Saxon, who spoke what was to those newcomers a difficult language. "Opopille," the best those Norman emissaries could make of "Hubba's

Pill," sounds very like a sudden and violent Norman appearance, and the shaking of some unfortunate Saxon churl, with the rough question put to him. " Vat is zat which you call zis place here, hein ? " and the reply, " Oh, sir ! don't shus-shake me like that : 'Ubba-pup-pille, sir."

The ruined church of St. Nicholas has not been in that condition so long as might be supposed. It was in use until April 5th, 1846. From Norman times it had stood here, and the religious fervour of many generations had proved easily equal to this arduous climb to the hilltop, a very real exercise, alike of piety and of the body. But hilltop churches must in modern times expect less faithful attendance, and must be resigned to compete, on terms disadvantageous to themselves, with dissenting chapels more fortunately situated in the levels. Thus, when, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the roofs of the old church of Uphill were discovered to be in a highly dilapidated condition, a long-sought opportunity was seized to abandon the building, which was otherwise not in any desperate structural condition. A new church was accordingly built below, and the old building unroofed and left to the winds of heaven and the fowls of the air. Even the old font was left here to unregarded desecration for a number of years. The chancel, it will be observed, has been re-roofed to serve as a mortuary chapel ; for the churchyard still receives the bodies of parishioners. Stoutly the ancient walls yet stand, and sharp to this day are the carvings

of the Norman north porch and the grim, uncanny faces of the uncouth gargoyles that look out over Weston and the bay.

Brean Down, that huge, almost islanded hill—a sort of miniature Gibraltar—that rises from the Axe marshes and the sand-flats opposite Uphill, to a height of 321 feet, looks from Weston, and from Uphill itself a place quite easy to arrive at, but, as sheer matter of fact, no one can reach it by road under nine miles, by way of Bleadon and Brean village. In a direct line from Uphill, across the river Axe, Brean Down is only about a mile and a half away. The readiest method of reaching this spot is by the ferry across the Axe at the end of Weston sands, a threepenny passage, generally, at low water, the matter of walking along planks laid in the mud, and a pull of three or four boat's lengths. And then you have the breezy isolation of all Brean Down before you ; and you will have it very much to yourself. Wild birds and wild flowers are the only habitants of the Down, once you have left the farmhouse on the flats behind, but the place has been the subject of not a few ambitious schemes. The summit was fortified in 1867, but suddenly ceased to be so in July 1900, when the magazine was blown up by a soldier firing his rifle into it. Whether he did this by accident, as a novel way of committing suicide, or as an ill-advised joke, does not appear, because there was nothing left of him from which to seek an explanation.

A grand scheme was formulated in 1864, by which a fine harbour was to be built under the lee of the Down, with piers, quays, and all the usual appurtenances of a steam-packet station, together with a railway from the Great Western. The huge sum of £365,000 was expended upon the pier, but the scheme eventually came to nothing, and the derelict works were finally destroyed in the storms of December 1872. So those far-distant merchants, the pre-Roman Phœnicians, who are said to have used this spot as a commercial port, are not immediately likely to have any successors.

CHAPTER XI

BLEADON—BREAN—BRENT KNOLL

To reach the village of Brean and to come in touch again with the coast on leaving Weston-super-Mare, Uphill village is passed, with a choice of roads then presenting itself : a short road with a penny toll to pay, or a slightly longer one, free. Either one of these brings you down into the flat lands under the scarred and quarried sides of Bleadon Hill, some 550 feet high. The handsome Perpendicular tower of Bleadon church groups beautifully with a fine fifteenth-century village cross.

Thenceforward, across the flats, now rich meadows, through lanes with much fine hedgerow timber, the way leads to Lympsham, a village rebuilt by the local squire, who happened to be also the parson, over half a century ago. Every cottage is in a more or less domestic Gothic style, as Gothic was then understood, strongly flavoured with ecclesiasticism. The manor-house itself is Gothic, something after the Strawberry Hill manner of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century date, and really deplorable, were it not that the beautiful and well-wooded grounds, and the

magnolias that clothe the walls, soften the effect. The church of St. Christopher, immediately opposite, and encircled by beautiful elms and oaks,

BLEADON CHURCH.

has a fine tower that noticeably leans to the west.

From Lympsham the road turns abruptly to the coast at Brean, winding and turning

unweariedly this way and that, over the open marshes ; with deep dykes, half-filled with water and mud, on either side, and willows of every age, from saplings like walking-sticks to reverend ancients, hollow and riven with age, lining them.

Thus shall we come at length to Brean, as into the end of all things ; for, truly, the spot is desolate. Not, let it be said, with an ugly desolation ; for, although as you approach the sea, and the good alluvial earth becomes more and more admixed with sand, the surroundings become mere waste land, these are wastes with their own charm and beauty to any but a farmer, to whose eyes nothing can be so beautiful as a ripening field of good corn when prices are likely to rule high, or a healthy field of swedes when he has much stock to feed.

Here a road runs parallel with the coast, under the lee of the impending sand hills, so that if you would catch the merest glimpse of the sea, you must climb to the summits of them and look down.

Brean church lies considerably below the level of these surrounding sand-towans, which menace it in a manner not a little alarming in the view of a stranger. But the sand here, at any rate, has done its worst, for although in places across the narrow road it stands higher than the church tower, it is largely held down at last by a sparse growth of coarse grass, and the very height and massiveness of these sand-hills act, under the circumstances, as a shield against the clouds of

other sand still blowing in during rough weather from the sea.

The church of St. Bridget is a small blue-grey limestone building of the Perpendicular period, of rough character, scarcely distinguishable from a little distance as a church, and remarkable only for having its dwarf tower finished off with a saddlebacked roof. It is, as a matter of fact, only the remaining portion of the tower, struck by lightning and thrown down in 1729. An inscription on it, "John Ginckens, churchwarden, Año Dom̃ 1729," no doubt records the repairs effected on that occasion. "Ginckens" appears to have been the best local attempt possible at spelling "Jenkins."

Although it is sand that now more nearly threatens Brean, the peculiar dangers of the place formerly arose from water. The ancient banks, supposed by some to be Roman, that kept the low-lying country from being flooded by the sea were burst in 1607, and a great stretch of land, roughly twenty miles by five, was submerged for a long time to a depth of from ten to twelve feet. A pamphlet published at the time says :

"The parish of Breane is swallowed (for the most part) up by the waters. In it stood but nine houses, and of those seaven were consumed, and with them XXVI persons lost their lives."

Local farmers are busily employed in the making of what is known as "Caerphilly cheese" ; sent across Channel to Cardiff and sold there as a

Welsh product to the South Wales mining population.

Blown sand, "allus a-shiften and a-blowen," is the most prominent feature of the way from this point, all the four miles into Burnham. The ragwort—"the yallers," as the countryfolk hereabouts know it—distributes a rich colour by the wayside, and confers upon what would otherwise be a somewhat dreary waste a specious cheerfulness. But even this hardy wilding, content with

BERROW.

the minimum of nutriment, grows scarce and disappears as Berrow comes in sight; Berrow, where the sand-hummocks broaden out and entirely surround the church that stands there in its walled churchyard with a solitary cottage for neighbour—as though defensively laagered against attack in an enemy's country; as indeed it is; the enemy, these insidious sands. Berrow, there can be no doubt whatever, was one of the many islets that anciently were scattered about Sedgemere, and we have but to glance inland

between Brean and Berrow for this aforetime character of the surrounding country to be abundantly manifest, and for the eye to be immediately fixed with one of the most outstanding features of old time ; the hill of Brent Knoll.

Travellers to or from the West by the Great Western Railway are generally much impressed, between Yatton and Bridgwater, by the strange solitary hill of Brent Knoll that rises abruptly from the plain of Burnham Level, and looks oddly like some long-extinct volcano with its cone shorn off or fallen in. Fast trains do not stop at the little wayside station also called "Brent Knoll," and while passengers are still gazing curiously at the hill, they are whirled away in midst of other interesting scenery.

Brent Knoll stands out prominently by virtue of its height of 457 feet, as well as by its isolated situation in the great alluvial plain through which lazily meander the muddy streams of Brue and Axe to their outlets at Uphill and Highbridge. It is one of those many scattered heights that are so strangely disposed about the neighbourhood of Sedgemoor, and give so romantic an appearance to these wide-spreading levels. Of these the most prominent, geographically and historically, is the famed Glastonbury Tor, which with its volcanic outline, crested with the tall tower of the ancient Chapel of St. Michael, is prominent for many a misty mile, like some Hill of Dream. Then there is the Mump at Boroughbridge, by the crossing of the Parret

into the Isle of Athelney; Borough Hill, near Wedmore; and many smaller, together with those scarcely perceptible hillocks amid the marshes that are now the sites of villages, whose very names of Chedzoy, Middlezoy, Westonzoyland, and Othery, tell us that these, together with the larger hills, were all, "once upon a time," islands in a shallow sea that stagnated over the whole of what is now called "Sedgemoor," but is properly "Sedgemere." Centuries of draining, of cutting those long, broad and deep dykes called "rhines," that cross the moor for many miles, in every direction, and so carry away the waters, have converted what had become, after the sea had retired, an almost impassable morass into a fertile plain. The industry of peat-digging in the heart of the moor shows the nature of the soil in these parts, and modern discoveries of prehistoric lake-dwellings at Meare, whose very name contains evidence of the mere, or lake that once existed, indicate the manner of life these ancient inhabitants lived. King Arthur seems a dim and distant figure to us, but long before his time there lived a race of people on the islands of this inland sea; folk who, although they frescoed themselves liberally with red ochre, were by no means without a more artistic knowledge of decoration than implied by that crude form of personal adornment. They certainly made earthenware pottery of graceful forms, decorated with ornament of excellent design and execution. Their other habits were primitive. Largely a

fish-eating folk, they often lived, as described earlier in these pages, in wattled huts built on piles or stakes driven in the waters. These forms of dwellings were readily adapted for defence, for shelter for their boats, and for fishing.

In those far-distant days Brent Knoll was an island. William of Malmesbury, whose chronicle of the English kings was written early in the twelfth century, and abounds in marvels and prodigies, tells us that it was originally named "Insula Ranarum," the Isle of Frogs. It had been, moreover, he says, in times even then far remote, the home of three most famous wicked giants, who were put to the sword, after a long and evil existence, by one Ider, in the marvellous times of King Arthur.

Excellent roads completely encircle Brent Knoll, making the circuit around the base of it in some four miles, and a very pleasant and picturesque miniature circular trip it is on a bicycle beneath the great hill, which is thus seen to be as it were, roughly, one hill superimposed upon another, with a remarkably distinct ledge or broad shelf running around it, at half its total height; more noticeable from the north-west, perhaps, than from any other direction. The great bulk of Brent Knoll forming this base is composed of lias rock; the upper part being of oolite. On the summit is an ancient earthwork, the centre of it marked by a flagstaff. No hilltop would be complete without its ancient fortified camp, but the story of that upon Brent Knoll has never

been told, nor is now ever likely to be. Roman coins, found in almost every old fortified post, have been found here also, and down below, in the meadows, the name of "Battleborough" remains, with a tradition of Alfred the Great having here fought with and defeated the Danes, or been defeated by them; which, in its vagueness, shows how extremely little is known of old times here. But the name "Brent"—*i.e.* "Burnt"—Knoll is of itself evidence of warlike times, when the hilltop flared with beacon-fires.

There are two villages on Brent Knoll; South and East Brent, both pleasant places; the first with a noble Perpendicular church and stately tower; the second with a church less noble, provided with a tall spire that was formerly used as a landmark for ships making Burnham, and was kept conspicuously whitewashed, that the mark might not be overlooked. Since the tall lighthouses of Burnham have arisen, the spire of East Brent is no longer regularly made white.

In the South Brent church a fine series of carved bench-ends includes satirical representations of the story of Reynard the Fox, here especially applied to the grasping conduct of the mitred Abbots of Glastonbury, who sought to seize the temporalities and emoluments of South Brent, but were defeated at law. Thus we find here a fox, habited as an abbot, preaching to a flock of geese and other fowls; the fleece of a sheep hanging from his crozier sufficiently showing that his wardenship of flocks does not go

BRENT KNOLL.

unrewarded. Three of his monks, shown as cowled swine, peer up at him. A lower panel on the same bench-end discloses a pig being roasted on a spit, which is turned at one end by a monkey and the fire blown with a bellows by another monkey at the opposite end.

On another bench-end of this series we see that the geese have revolted against the fox, who is found sitting upright in a penitential attitude, his hind legs in fetters. A monkey

BRENT KNOLL.

preaches to, or admonishes, the geese, in his stead. In the lower panel the fox is seen in the stocks, a monkey mounting guard with a halberd.

An elaborate mural monument to one "John Somersett," 1663, and his two wives, occupies great space on the south side of the nave; John Somerset himself represented in half-length, with a portrait-bust of a wife on either side. There are, further, effigies of himself and the two Mrs. Somerset praying, accompanied by a chrisom child; together with an alarming effigy, starting

up in a coffin and praying earnestly to an angel who, armed with a trumpet like a megaphone, wallows amid clouds, blowing reassuring messages, which issue from the trumpet visibly in lengths, not unlike the news from modern tape-machines. An elderly angel, with an oily smile of smug satisfaction, beams greasily below. The whole curious composition has been recently very highly coloured, in reproduction of the original scheme.

CHAPTER XII

BURNHAM—HIGHBRIDGE—BAWDRIP—"BATH BRICKS"—THE RIVER PARRET

THE upstart capital of these levels is Burnham, but the supremacy is disputed by Highbridge. Now Burnham and Highbridge, although but a mile and a half apart, are places very different, socially and geographically. The first stands amid sands, by the seashore; the other is situated about the distance of a mile from the sea, on the muddy, sludgy banks of the river Brue. Burnham is a pleasure resort, of sorts, to which all the railways of Somerset and Dorset run frequent cheap excursions. It is the ideal of the average Sunday School manager, seeking a suitable place for the school's annual treat; for here you have sands—a little muddy perhaps, but eminently safe. It would be possible to get drowned only after superhuman exertions in finding a sufficient depth of water; unless indeed one wandered off in the direction of the Brue estuary in one direction or the lonely shores of Berrow in the other; where it is easily possible to be drowned in the swiftest and most effectual

manner; as demonstrated every summer by a few rash and unfortunate bathers, who generally prove, strange to say, to be local folk, presumably well informed of the risks they run—and foolishly contemptuous of them.

Highbridge is not a pleasure resort. Not even a Sunday School manager would fall into that error. It was once (but a time long enough ago) a place inoffensive enough; a hamlet of no particular character, good or ill, beside the river Brue, and taking its name from the original humpbacked bridge that here spanned the stream; built in that manner for the purpose of allowing masted barges and other craft to pass under. That was Highbridge. Nowadays, the old bridge is replaced by a modern flat iron affair, and there are railway sidings and docks, and great sluice-gates to the river Brue. Here, too, are the engine shops and works of the Somerset and Dorset Railway, with a large and offensive, and exceptionally blackguardly, colony of railway men, Radicals and Socialists to a man, and not content with holding their own views, but insistent upon imposing them upon their neighbours at election-times, with threats and violence. There are railwaymen *and* railwaymen, but the country in general has, as yet, little comprehension of their essentially disaffected, selfish, and dangerous character, as a body: the more dangerous in that they have largely in their power the communications of the land. We shall hear more of them some day not far distant,

and governments will be obliged to give them a sharp lesson in social discipline.

But enough of Highbridge and its forlorn, abject houses, and its paltry modern church with red and black tiled spire, apparently designed by some infantile architect. Let us return to Burnham, and contemplate the crowded promenade there.

Weston we have seen to be a children's paradise; but there they are largely mingled with "grown-ups." Here they predominate, and the vast sand-flats, that at low tide stretch out more or less oozily and muddily as you advance, some four miles, are converted for a goodly distance from the promenade wall into a manufactory of sand-castles and mud-pies. The Burnham donkeys must feel a blessed relief when the season is over, for they are in great request for rides, even so far as the straddle-legged lighthouse that stands on iron posts to the north of the town; yea, and even unto the sandhills—or "tots," as the local tongue hath it—of Berrow.

All the eastern ports of the Somerset coast are severely afflicted by "trippers," who descend in their thousands upon Clevedon, Weston-super-Mare, and Burnham, not to mention the neighbouring villages. Truth to tell, they are effusively welcomed at these places, at any rate by the refreshment caterers and the proprietors of swing-boats, donkeys, sailing and rowing-boats, and by the "pierrots"; but the rest of the community resent the presence of these hordes of half-day

holiday makers, and act the superior person towards them. Yet, when you hear, at any of these resorts, visitors, obviously present on sixteen days' excursion-trip tickets, speaking disparagingly of "trippers," you wonder really what constitutes such an one. What is that time-limit within which a holiday-maker becomes a mere "tripper," and when does he become enlarged as one of the elect, who do not trip, but make holiday?

The definition of a tripper, in these parts, is a person who comes across the Bristol Channel from Barry, Cardiff, Swansea, or any other of the South Wales ports, for half a day, and "brings his nosebag with him"; or, if it be a family party of trippers, a family handbag with provisions; including a bottle of beer for mother and father, and milk for the children. Thousands of these family parties came over by cheap steamboat excursions on most fine days in summer, and may be observed on the sea-front at Weston and other favoured resorts, where they are apt to leave an offensive residuum of their feasts behind them, in the shape of greasy paper and pieces of fat, as often as not upon the public seats. Those are the trippers.

The unfortunate person who, clad perhaps in a light summer suit ("Gent's West-End lounge suit. This style 25*s.*"), has unwittingly sat upon a piece of ham-fat left behind by one of these gay irresponsibles, hates the tripper thereafter with a baleful intensity. Can we blame him that he

does so? But this is only one of that half-day excursionist's deadly sins, of which the fact that he brings merely his presence and his nosebag—and little money—into the places he favours is one of the deadliest. Another is the circumstance that he is a Welshman. The Somerset folk do not like the Welsh, who are alien from them in every possible way, and it is quite certain that the South Wales colliers and dockers are not a favourable or pleasing type. Thus triply—financially, racially and socially—the trippers from across the Severn Sea are not a success.

It is all very lively at Burnham, and there is a bandstand, and there are lodging-houses and boarding-houses innumerable, and tea-shops, and a "park" about the area of a moderate-sized private garden. No tramways have yet appeared at Burnham, but it is possible to travel expeditiously, if involuntarily and not altogether safely, and quite freely—on the banana-skins that plentifully bestrew the streets. But this form of locomotion is not altogether popular.

There is much motor-boating in these latter days off Burnham, and by favour of such a craft, or by sailing-skiff, or the comparatively tedious method of rowing, you may visit Steart Island, off the mouths of the Brue and Parret. But there are no attractions on that flat isle, swimming in surrounding ooze, except at such times as winter, when the wild-fowl congregate greatly there, in the mistaken notion that they are safe from the sportsman.

In midst of the long line of houses that closely front upon the sea, stands the ancient parish church of Burnham ; considerably below the level of the street. The traveller who has come from Brean and Berrow will at once perceive that this street and this roadway are founded upon the blown sand that has placed Brean church in a similar hollow.

Here, at Burnham, the church-tower, of three storeys, leans as many times, this way and that, and has apparently been long in this condition, having been left so at the restoration of 1887. In the chancel remains a portion of a huge white marble altar-piece designed by Inigo Jones for the Chapel Royal, Whitehall, and subsequently erected in Westminster Abbey by Sir Christopher Wren. At the coronation of George IV. it was removed and placed here by Dr. King, Canon of Westminster and vicar of Burnham ; and singularly cumbrous and out of place it looks still, even though parts of it have been removed, to afford much-needed room.

Leaving Burnham behind, and then Highbridge, we come to Huntspill Level, with the square, massive tower of Huntspill church prominent against the skyline, on the right hand. The road, worn into saucer-shaped holes by excess of motor-traffic, goes straight and flat across the Level, with pollard willows and stagnant, duck-weedy ditches on either side, and so through the wayside hamlet of West Huntspill : a naturally slovenly, out-at-elbows place, not improved by

being nowadays thickly coated with motor-dust.

And so to Pawlett (locally "Pollitt") consisting of an old church and half-a-dozen houses on a slight knoll, overlooking miles of flat pasture-lands, said to be the very richest in Somerset. Proceeding in the direction of Bridgwater, the Sedgemoor Drain, chief of the many cuts, large

HUNTSPILL.

and small, that prevent the moor from being inundated, is crossed at the point where it falls into the river Parret. Here is the level expanse known as Horsey Slime. It is not a pretty name. Dunball railway-station stands on the left, and the distance in that direction is closed by the Polden Hills, crowned by a ready-made ruined castle, built some sixty years ago, yet looking perfectly romantic and baronial, so long as this distressing fact of its appalling modernity is not

disclosed. Over those strangers and pilgrims from far lands who, landing at Plymouth, and travelling to Paddington per Great Western Railway for the first time, catch a momentary glimpse of this fictitious fortalice, before the engine dashes with a demoniac yelp into the Dunball Tunnel, there comes a feeling that they have at last entered a region of romance. They have indeed, but not in respect of *that* castle, at any rate. It is painful to be confronted with the necessity for such a revelation, but the honest topographer sees his duty plain before him—and does it, no matter the cost !

In the levels beneath the hills crowned by this sham castle lies Bawdrip, a village of the very smallest and most retiring agricultural type, with a little Early English cruciform church, remarkable for the finely sculptured female heads and headdresses of wimple and coif on the capitals of the four pillars supporting the central tower. Restoration has left the building particularly neat and tidy and singularly bare of monuments. Bawdrip church, however, contains a monumental inscription which includes a mysterious allusion that has never yet been properly explained ; and probably never will be. The small black marble slab setting forth this inscription in the ornate Latinity of the seventeenth century might well escape the scrutiny of the keenest antiquary, for it is built into the wall in a most unusual situation, behind the altar. It is a comprehensive epitaph to Edward and Eleanor Lovell and their

two daughters, Eleanor and Mary, erected here to their memory by the husband of the daughter Eleanor, who, singularly enough, omits his own name. Done into English, it runs as follows :

" Edward Lovell married Eleanor Bradford, by whom he had two daughters, Eleanor and Mary. Both parents were sprung from Batcombe, in this County of Somerset, from a noble family, and reflected no less honour on their ancestry than they received from it. Eleanor, a most devoted mother, as well as a most faithful wife, exchanged this life for the heavenly, April 20, 1666. Mary followed her, a most obedient daughter, and a maiden of notable promise, May 11, 1675. Edward, the father, M.A. and Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, also Rector of this Church for fourteen years, a most praiseworthy man, received the reward of his learning, September 1, 1671. Lastly Eleanor, the daughter, heiress of the family honour and estate, died June 14, 1681. Her most sorrowing husband mourned her, taken away by a sudden and untimely fate at the very time of the marriage celebration, and to the honour and holy memory of her parents, her sisters, and his most amiable wife, wished this monument to be put up."

Tradition associates the sudden death of the bride with the story of " The Mistletoe Bough," made popular many years ago by Haynes Bayley's woeful song of that name, worked up by him from ancient legends current in many parts of the country. The legend he versified was that of the

fair young bride of one "Lovel," apparently the son of a mediæval Baron, who, playing hide-and-seek in the revels of her wedding-day, hid in an ancient chest, and was imprisoned there by a spring lock. That it was at Christmas-time we are assured by Haynes Bayley's verses, which tell us that :

> The Baron's retainers were blithe and gay,
> Keeping their Christmas holiday.

Unavailing search was made for the missing bride :

> And young Lovel cried, O ! where dost thou hide ?
> I'm lonely without thee, my own dear bride.

The spring lock that lay in ambush in the old chest imprisoned her there securely, and her body was not discovered in the life of Lovel. To quote again from Haynes Bayley :

> At length an old chest that had long lain hid
> Was found in the castle—they raised the lid ;
> A skeleton form lay mouldering there,
> In the bridal wreath of that lady fair.
> Oh ! sad was her fate ! In sportive jest
> She hid from her lord in that old oak chest.
> It closed with a spring, and her bridal bloom
> Lay withering there in a living tomb.

But who was the " Baron " and who " Lovel," and where they resided, or when they flourished we are not informed. Curiously enough, however, a Viscount Lovel disappeared in something the same manner. This was that Francis, Viscount Lovel, who fought *ex parte* the impostor, Lambert

Simnel, at Stoke, and disappeared after the defeat of the pretender's cause on that day. His fate remained a mystery until 1708, when, in the course of some works in the ruins of what had been his ancestral mansion at Minster Lovel, in Oxfordshire, a secret underground chamber was discovered, in which was found the skeleton of a man identified with him. It was thought that he had taken refuge there, in that locked room, and was attended to by a retainer who, possibly, betrayed his trust and left his master to starve; or who, perhaps, was himself slain in some affray during those troubled times. The repetition of the name of Lovell is at any rate curious.

Now across the levels rise the distant houses of Bridgwater town, and the slim spire of its church. The long flat road, of undeviating directness, points directly towards the place. Hedgerow and other trees dispose themselves casually, without ordered plan, on either hand, and a railway crosses the highway, diagonally, on a bridge and embankment. The scene is absolutely negative and characterless: neither beautiful nor absolutely ugly: the very realisation, one would say, of the commonplace. As you proceed, a distant grouping of masts and spars proclaims the fact of navigable water being near at hand, and then groups of factory chimneys, smoking vigorously, loom up. These are the most outstanding marks of Bridgwater's only prominent manufacture: the manufacture of "Bath bricks." Every housewife knows what is meant by "Bath

brick." With this article of commerce and domestic economy knives are cleaned, brass fenders and candlesticks and coppers are scoured, and much other metal-work brought to brightness. But it is not made at Bath. At only one place in the world—and that Bridgwater—is the so-called "Bath brick" brought into being: the reason of this monopoly of manufacture lying in the fact that the material of which it is made is found only here in the mud of the river Parret. But only in a stretch of some three miles of that river's course is found the peculiarly composed mud of which this aid to domestic cleanliness is compacted. Equally above and below the town, within those strictly-defined limits, the rise and fall of the tide amalgamates the river mud, and the seashore sand in just the right proportions for the scouring properties of "Bath brick." At a further distance above the town, the mud that renders the Parret's banks so unlovely becomes merely slime; while, as the sea is more nearly approached, the proportion of sharp sand in it destroys the binding character of the mud, and would render bricks made of the amalgam there found very destructive to cutlery and other ware unfortunate enough to be scoured by it.

Why these "bricks," made only at Bridgwater, should be given the name of "Bath," and not that of the town where they originate, is a mystery at this lapse of time not likely to be solved. The most plausible explanation offered is that when these bricks were first made they

were stored and "handled," as a commercial man might say, at Bath.

The mud from which the bricks are made is collected quite simply, but ingeniously, in pens carefully constructed along the Parret's banks. These "slime-batches," as they are named, are brick-built enclosures, so arranged that the mud-charged tide flows into them at every flood, the mud settling down during the interval of ebb. Thus with every recurring tide a new deposit is added; the "batches" being filled in the course of two or three months, according to the time of year. This accumulation, grown hard in all this time, is dug out, generally in the winter, and removed to the banks, whence it is taken as required to the pug-mills, in which it is mixed with water and thus tempered to a putty-like consistency. Then it is ready for the moulder, that is to say, the actual brickmaker, who, after the identical fashion followed by the moulder of ordinary bricks, takes his lumps of material, throws them into a wooden framework made to the gauge of a brick, scrapes off the surplus clay from the top and pushes the raw brick aside, as one of a rapidly growing row. The rapidity with which a moulder does his work is astonishing to the unaccustomed onlooker. A workman of average excellence can thus shape four hundred bricks an hour.

The clammy slabs of clay thus formed are then taken by the "bearer-off" and placed in the "hacks"—that is to say, long stands—

with a slight tile roofing, to dry. The tiled protection is to shield the unbaked bricks from being partly dissolved by possible rainstorms.

The final operations are the stacking into kilns and the burning, carried out precisely in the same manner as the burning of bricks to be used in building.

The river Parret—in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle styled "Pedridan"—is in other ways a river of considerable importance to North Somerset. Like the Avon at Bristol, it runs out towards the sea in its last few miles more like a deep and muddy gutter at low water than in the likeness of a river; but the Parret mud, as we have already seen, is at least useful, and a source of wealth to Bridgwater; and shipping of considerable tonnage, bringing chiefly coals from South Wales, and deals from Norway, comes up the estuary to Bridgwater's quays.

The Parret is about thirty miles in length, rising some two miles within the Dorset border, near South Perrot, which, together with the two widely sundered small towns, or large villages, of North and South Petherton, and perhaps the village of Puriton also, takes its name from the river. In common with several other streams on either side of the Bristol Channel—with, of course, the river Severn at their head—it is subject to a tidal wave, known as "the Bore." This is caused by the very great ebb and flow of the tide, here so much as thirty-six feet at springs. The flood tide comes up the deep and narrow estuary

from the outer channel with such swiftness, and is so laterally compressed that a gradual rise is impossible and the water comes surging up as a great and formidable wave, like a wall, from five to six feet in height. At such times when westerly gales or spring tides prevail, the Bore easily rises to nine feet in height. It is always an impressive spectacle, seen from the river bank; and viewed from a boat, even when the craft is managed by a boatman accustomed to this phenomenon, is more than a little alarming. It sufficiently scared the French prisoners of war, confined by the riverside in an old factory, known as the "Glass House" and nowadays a pottery, from any serious attempts at escaping by water.

CHAPTER XIII

BRIDGWATER—ADMIRAL BLAKE—THE MONMOUTH REBELLION

The ancient town of Bridgwater can now produce few evidences of its antiquity. The siege of 1645, various conflagrations, and the very considerable modern prosperity of the place have all been contributory causes toward this—to the tourist—somewhat desolating result. The town straddles on either side of the Parret, the hither side named appropriately and inevitably "Eastover." It is the less considerable and important portion, the chief buildings of the place being on the left bank of the river. A dull, undistinguished, heavy Georgian appearance characterised the town until quite recently, but a great deal of building activity has of late been manifested here, with results perhaps as yet a little too recent for criticism. At any rate, the old outstanding features remain; the large parish church, with curiously squat tower and elongated spire, forming with the Corn Exchange and Town Hall, the one striking group that alone stands in pictures recognisably for Bridgwater.

A great deal of argument has been expended

upon the name of Bridgwater. The name is apparently of the most obvious and elementary derivation, for here is the "water" (largely impregnated, it is true, with mud) in the river Parret, and here is the bridge, the modern representative of others of different degrees of antiquity, erected at the lowest place down the estuary where it was possible to fling a bridge across. It is evident, then, that it must ever have been impossible to enter or leave the town in an easterly or westerly direction without crossing a bridge or ferry at this point. Other place-names in the district, those of Highbridge and Boroughbridge, for example, prove the word "bridge" to have been used in the ordinary way, when necessary, as an integral, and indeed scarcely avoidable, part of a name. Yet the derivation of "Bridgwater" has nothing to do, explicitly, with water, although "Brugge," *i.e.* Bridge, the name of the place at the time of the Conquest, certainly implies water beneath. The manor was given, after the Conquest, to one of the Conqueror's Norman barons, Walter of Douai, and became therefrom known as "Brugie of Walter" and by degrees, by a natural elision of letters readily dropped in ordinary speech, what it is now.

Of the Castle of Bridgwater, once a strong fortress, both by virtue of its own stout walls, and by reason of the fine position it held at the crossing of the Parret, nothing is left, except portions of the Water Gate, on the West Quay,

and the cellars of what is now the Custom House. The last occasion of its appearance in history was the shameful surrender of it to a besieging army under Fairfax, on July 23rd, 1645, after a two days' assault. It had been so generally

BIRTHPLACE OF ADMIRAL BLAKE

considered impregnable that the wealthy Royalists of the countryside, afraid for the safety of their jewellery and other valuables, had sent them hither from what they thought to be the insecurity of their own houses. Thus the taking of the impregnable castle and the surrender of the in-

vincible garrison resulted in exceptionally heavy spoils, amounting to £100,000 value.

Bridgwater boasts one famous son; Robert Blake, the great Admiral, or rather, General-at-Sea, of the Commonwealth, who taught foreign nations in general, and the Dutch in particular, who wanted the lesson badly, the respect due to England. His birthplace is still standing in this his native town, in a quiet byway, where tall, staid eighteenth-century merchants' residences look down, as it were with a certain condescension, upon the less imposing house in which the hero was first introduced to a troubled world, in 1599. It is a comfortable, rather than a stately, house; but it was built to last. It is the oldest house now remaining in the town, and was probably built in the early years of the sixteenth century, the interior disclosing a greater antiquity than would be suspected from the frontage. Huge, roughly squared oak timbers frame the walls and cross the ceilings with immense rafters. They had been all carefully covered up some generations ago, and their existence hidden by plaster and wall-papering; but recent repairs of the house have resulted in all this honest construction being again disclosed; and very noble, in the rugged old way, it looks. During the progress of these repairs and alterations, the plaster on the walls of an upper room was found to have been liberally scratched and otherwise drawn upon at a period contemporary with Admiral Blake. Sketches of ships were prominent among

these rough *sgraffiti :* ships built and rigged in a manner characteristic of the seventeenth century, and the words " Rex Carolus " appeared among them. It was necessary, for the repair of the walls, to cover up most of these sketches, but the best have been carefully preserved.

Robert Blake's father was a merchant, with more children (a round dozen of them) than business. His mother came of an old landed family ; the Williamses of Planesfield. Robert himself was sent to Oxford and was in residence there, chiefly at Wadham College, fifteen years, wishful of becoming a Fellow, but finally balked of that ambition for an easeful life. It is curious to contemplate that old possibility of this stout man of war having ever become a cloistral butt of futile learning, of the peculiar brand of futility affected by Oxford.

His father died, leaving but an insignificant sum to be divided among his many children, and Robert, with strong Republican views, was returned to Parliament for his native town of Bridgwater. Events were moving rapidly towards Civil War, and in the outbreak of that momentous struggle many men found at last their vocation. Among them was Blake, whose great defence of Taunton town against the Royalist siege in 1645 was one of the most dogged and successful incidents of that time. Encompassed by ten thousand men and his ammunition all shot away, food exhausted, and a breach actually made in the walls and the enemy swarming through it ; still

he would not yield, and declared he would eat his boots first. Fortunately the rumour of Fairfax's relieving army at that moment spread among the besiegers, and the siege was raised, else Blake would have had a full and an unappetising meal before him, as any one who contemplates his statue here, and the great thigh-boots he is wearing, may judge for himself.

At the establishment of the Commonwealth, Blake was given high command at sea : a military man afloat as Admiral ; a thing in our own highly specialised times unthinkable. His complete success in that new environment is a part of our history that need not be recounted here. After many inconclusive duels with the Dutch, who, under Van Tromp, disputed the sovereignty of the seas, and after brilliant services abroad, Blake died while yet in what may be termed the prime of life, of an intermittent fever, and probably also from an exhaustion induced by old wounds, on board his flagship, off Plymouth, in 1657. With his death disappeared one of the few entirely honest Republicans of that time : a man that England could then ill spare, as the nation was to find but ten years later, when the Dutch fully revenged themselves for former reverses by their historic raid up the Medway and destruction of English ships off Chatham.

After many years, Bridgwater has at last honoured itself and the memory of this great man with a statue, placed prominently in front of the Corn Exchange. He is represented in the military

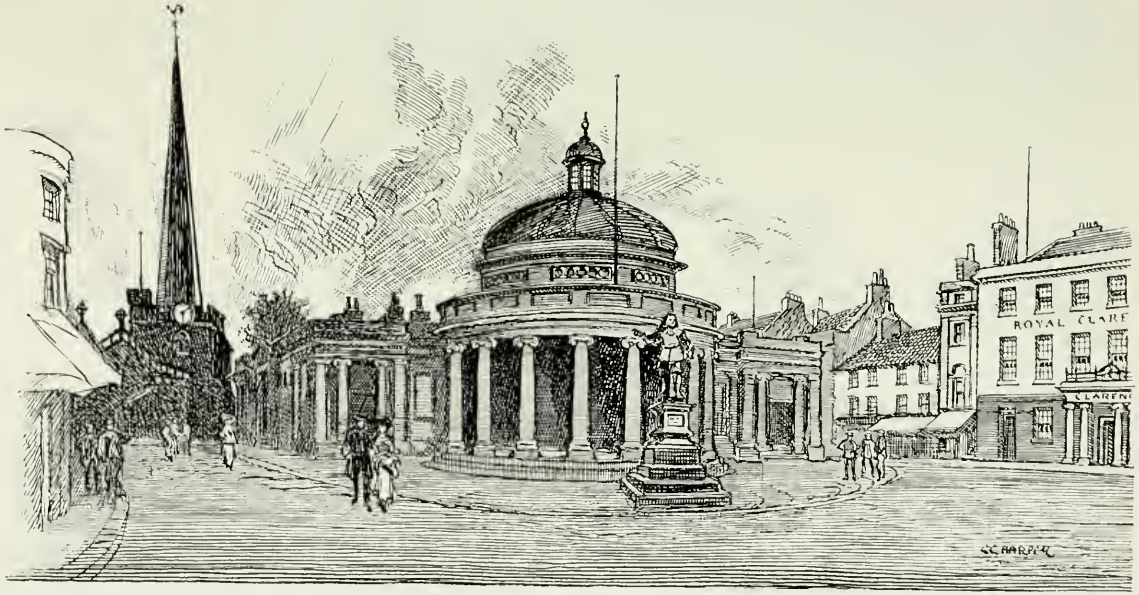
costume of the time, with a short, wind-blown cloak flying from his shoulders, pointing into space. It is a pose admirably chosen, and every line of this fine bronze figure expresses the courage, zeal, and bull-dog determination characteristic of the man. Bronze panels in relief on the plinth represent Blake's fleet off Portland, February 1653; the capture of Santa Cruz, April 20th, 1657; and Blake's body brought into Plymouth Sound, August 7th, 1657. This appropriate couplet from Spenser is added:

> Sleepe after toyle, port after stormy seas,
> Ease after war, death after life, doth greatly please.

Bridgwater church has its place in history, for it was from the battlements of this tower that the ill-fated Monmouth looked forth upon the plain of Sedgemoor, just before the battle that was to decide his fortunes.

Nothing in the long story of the West so stirs the blood as the incidents of the disastrous expedition captained by this handsome, ambitious, and well-liked son of Charles II. It was a generous enterprise—if at the same time not without its great personal reward, if successful—to attempt the saving of England from the domination of Popery that again threatened her; and it deserved a better conclusion than that recorded by history.

It was three weeks after the landing of Monmouth at Lyme Regis, on the coast of Dorset, that he arrived at Bridgwater. Three thousand men had flocked to him on his landing, and by



BRIDGWATER : ST. MARY'S CHURCH, AND CORN EXCHANGE.

the time he had reached Taunton, the enthusiasm was such that his forces were more than doubled, and numbered seven thousand. But his was an undisciplined and untrained mob, rather than an army, and a fiery religious fervour, ready to dare anything for Protestantism, was an ill equipment with which to contend against the trained troops of James the Second, hastening down to oppose their march. This was essentially a popular rebellion, for the influential gentry of the West, although ill-affected towards the reactionary rule of King James and willing enough to end his reign, hesitated to join, and by their cowardice lost the day. While they timorously waited on events, the peasantry showed a bolder front, and chiefly through their sturdy conduct, Monmouth's advance through Dorset and Somerset had been by no means without incident in the warlike sort. His rustics, badly armed though they were, and largely with agricultural implements instead of weapons of offence, gave with their billhooks, their pikes, and scythes, an excellent account of themselves against the Royalist regulars commanded by Lord Feversham in the hotly contested skirmish at Norton St. Philip on June 26th.

It was, perhaps, in some measure the unaccustomed weapons used by Monmouth's countrymen that alarmed Feversham's soldiers and gained that day for the rebel Duke, for even men trained to arms lose much of their courage when confronted with strange, even though, it

may be, inferior weapons. But it was still more the valour of the Somerset rustics that won the day on that occasion for Faith and Freedom.

Had Monmouth followed up his advantage, the wavering sympathies of the West of England gentry might have thrown fresh levies into the field for his cause; but he retired upon the then defenceless town of Bridgwater, and remained inactive.

Now, there is nothing that more disheartens untrained men than a check in their forward march. Countermarching to them appears but the forerunner of defeat, and the flow of ardour in any cause once hindered is difficult to recover. With regular troops the chances and changes incidental to campaigning inure them to disappointments, and the retreat of to-day they know often to be but the prelude of to-morrow's advance. But with Monmouth's men, their leader's plan once altered, their fortunes seemed irretrievably clouded. Monmouth himself grew gloomy at the delay the vacillations of himself and his lieutenants had caused, and when on the afternoon of Sunday, July 5th, he ascended to this point to reconnoitre the position his opponents had taken up in the midst of the moor, his heart sank. He saw the glint of their arms, the colours of the regiments drawn up beneath the shadow of the tall tower of Westonzoyland, and he well knew that a conflict between them and his brave, but untaught, peasants could only prove fatal to his ambitions. He had, some years before, led those

WESTONZOYLAND.

very soldiers to victory. "I know those men," said he to his officers, leaning over these parapets of St. Mary's; "they will fight!"

By a circuitous route, his army left the town of Bridgwater when night was come and darkness had shrouded the moor. By narrow and rugged lanes they went, past Chedzoy, towards the Polden Hills. Here they turned, and, led by a guide, essayed to thread the maze of deep ditches called, in the parlance of the West Country, "Rhines."

It was not until two o'clock in the morning that they had reached within striking distance of the Royal troops, crossing safely the Black Ditch, and moving along the outer side of the Langmoor Rhine, in search of a passage, when a pistol was fired, either by accident or treachery. "A Dark night," says one who was present, "and Thick Fogg covering the Moore." The darkness and the sudden alarm caused by the pistol-shot threw Monmouth's men into confusion, and the Royal forces were at the same time aroused. The night attack had failed.

James II.'s troops challenged the masses of men they saw dimly advancing through the mist, and were for a time deceived by the answering cry of "Albemarle," the name of the Royalist commander, who was supposed to be coming to the support of Lord Feversham.

And thus the Monmouth men passed on to the Bussex Rhine, where they were simultaneously challenged and fired upon by another outpost. Dismayed by this volley at close quarters, the

rebel horse, forming the advance, broke and dashed wildly back into the stolid ranks of the peasantry. It says much for the stubborn courage of those ploughmen and hedgers and ditchers who formed the bulk of the Duke's ranks, that in this confusion they stood fast.

Then the fight began in earnest, chiefly hand-to-hand, beside the broad and stagnant Rhine, in whose noisome mud many a stout fellow met his death that night. It was not until day dawned across the moor that the last band of rustic pikemen broke and fled before the King's battalions, pouring across the Bussex Rhine.

Hours before, under cover of the night, the rebel Duke had fled the spot with Lord Grey and thirty horsemen. It had been a better thing had he halted and been cut to pieces with his brave followers. His had then been a nobler figure in history.

He had looked with the ill-disguised contempt of an old campaigner upon his doomed rustics. Urged to make a last effort to support them, he said bitterly : " All the world cannot stop those fellows ; they will run presently "—and ran himself. The shattered remnants of his raw ranks poured confusedly into Bridgwater town, soon after daylight was come. At first the townsfolk thought them but the wounded stragglers from a great victory, and shouted, with caps flying in air, for " King Monmouth." Then the dreadful truth spread abroad from the lips of wounded and dying men, and those who had

cheered for the flying leader hid themselves, or fled on their own account. Three thousand of the rebels lay slain upon the field.

Swift and terrible was the punishment meted out to the unhappy victims of Monmouth's ill-starred rising. The moorland, the towns and villages throughout the counties of Somerset and Dorset, were made ghastly with the bodies and quarters of the rebels executed and hanged in gimmaces, or fixed on posts by the entrances to the village churches; and the shocking judicial progress of the infamous Judge Jeffreys, is aptly commemorated in the popular name of the "Bloody Assize." The Duke of Monmouth, captured at Woodyates, was beheaded on Tower Hill, after an abject appeal for mercy had been refused, on July 15th.

Lost causes always appeal to the imagination more eloquently than those that have gained their objects, and the Monmouth Rebellion is no exception. The enthusiasm aroused by the handsome presence and gallant bearing of this gay and careless son of Charles II. and Lucy Walters, still finds an echo in the West, in the sympathy felt for his tragic end and for the temporary eclipse of the Protestant cause. This interest lends itself to the whole of the level country behind Bridgwater, the flat, dyke-intersected, alluvial plain of Sedgemoor. The Bussex Rhine, one of the original dykes, has long since been filled up, and more modern ditches cut for the better draining of the district; but the spot

where the battle was fought can still be exactly identified. It lies half a mile to the north of Westonzoyland, whose rugged church tower overlooks the greater part of the moor, topping the withies, the poplars, and the apple-orchards of the village with grand effect. In that stately church five hundred of the rebels were imprisoned before trial. A little distance from the site of the Bussex Rhine is the Langmoor Rhine, and, near by, Brentsfield Bridge, where the Duke's men crossed. The village people of Chedzoy still show the enquiring stranger that stone in the church wall on which the pikes were sharpened before the fight, and the plough even now occasionally turns up rusty sword-hilts, bullets, and other eloquent memorials of that futile struggle. But the silken banner, worked by the Fair Maids of Taunton, where is it, with its proud motto, *Pro Religione et Libertate*? and where the memorial that should mark this fatal field whereon so many stalwart West-countrymen laid down their lives for their faith?

CHAPTER XIV

CANNINGTON—THE QUANTOCKS—NETHER STOWEY, AND THE COLERIDGE CIRCLE

We leave Bridgwater by St. Mary's church and the street called curiously, "Penel Orlieu," whose name derives from a combination of Pynel Street and Orlewe Street, two thoroughfares that have long been conjoined. "Pynel," or "Penelle," was the name of a bygone Bridgwater family.

Up Wembdon Hill, we come out of the town by its only residential suburb. Motor-cars have absolutely ruined this road out of Bridgwater, and on through Cannington and Nether Stowey, to Minehead and Porlock. It is a long succession of holes, interspersed with bumpy patches, and on typical summer days the air is heavy with the dust raised by passing cars; dust that has only begun to settle when another comes along, generally at an illegal speed, and raises some more. The hedges and wayside trees between Bridgwater and Nether Stowey are nowadays, from this cause, a curious and woeful sight, and the village of Nether Stowey itself is, for the same reason, made to wear a shameful draggletailed appearance. The dust off the limestone road is of the whiteness

of flour, but looks, as it lies heavily on the foliage, singularly like snow. The effect of a landscape heavily enshrouded in white, under an intensely blue August sky, is unimaginably weird: as though the unthinkable—a summer snowstorm—had occurred.

Cannington, whose name seems temptingly like that of Kennington—Köningtun, the King's town—in South London, especially as it was once the property of Alfred the Great, is really the "Cantuctone," *i.e.* Quantock town, mentioned in Alfred's will, in which, *inter alia*, he gives the manor to his son Eadweard.

The village stands well above the Parret valley, and is described by Leland as a "praty uplandische" place. A stream that wanders to this side and that, and in its incertitude loses its way and distributes itself in shallow pools and between gravelly banks, over a wide area, is the traveller's introduction to Cannington. Here a comparatively modern bridge carries the dusty highway over the stream, leaving to contemplative folk the original packhorse bridge by which in olden times the water was crossed when floods rendered impracticable the usual practice of fording it. The group formed by the tall red sandstone tower of the church seen from here, amid the trees, with the long rambling buildings of the "Anchor" inn below, and the packhorse bridge to the left, is charming. The present writer said as much to the chauffeur of a motor-car, halted here by the roadside. It seemed a

CANNINGTON.

favourable opportunity for testing the attitude of such an one towards scenery and these interesting vestiges of eld.

"Bridge, ain't it?" he asked, jerking a dirty finger in that direction.

"Yes: that is the old packhorse bridge, in use before wheeled traffic came much this way."

"'Ow did they carry their 'eavy machinery, then?"

"Our ancestors had none."

"Then what about the farm-waggons?"

"They went through the stream."

"Kerridges too?"

"Yes, such as the carriages of those times were."

"'Eavens," said he, summing up; "what 'eathenish times to live in!" And he proceeded with his work, which turned out, on closer inspection, to be that of plentifully oiling the fore and aft identification-plates of his car, to the end that the dust which so thickly covered the roads should adhere to them and obscure alike the index-letters and the numbers. He was obviously proposing to travel well up to legal limit.

The church is a noble example of the Perpendicular period, with an ancient Court House adjoining, the property of the Roman Catholic Lord Clifford of Chudleigh. It was made the home of a French Benedictine sisterhood in 1807; and is now a Roman Catholic Industrial School for boys. The tall, timeworn enclosing walls of its grounds form a prominent feature of the village.

One of the monuments on the walls of the church, in the course of a flatulent epitaph upon the virtues of various members of the Rogers family, of early seventeenth-century date, indulges in a lamentable pun. The subject under consideration is "Amy, daughter of Henry Rogers." "Shee," we are told, "did Amy-able live." Deplorable!

Cannington stands at the entrance to the Quantock country, that delightful rural district of wooded hills and secluded combes which remains very much the same as it was just over a century ago, when Coleridge and his friends first made it known. The Quantock Hills run for some twelve miles in a north-westerly direction, from Taunton to the sea at West Quantoxhead; the high road from Bridgwater to Minehead crossing the ridge of them at Quantoxhead. The highest point of this range is Will's Neck, midway, rising to 1262 feet. The capital of the Quantock country, although by no means situated on or near the ridge, is Nether Stowey. Behind that village rises the camp-crowned hill of Danesborough, which, although not itself remarkably high, is so situated that it commands an exceptionally fine panoramic view extending over the flat lands that border the Parret estuary, and over the semicircular sweep of Bridgwater Bay.

Some wild humorist, surely, that was, who pretended to derive the name of the Quantocks from a supposititious exclamation by Julius Cæsar, who is supposed to have exclaimed,

NETHER STOWEY; GAZEBO AT STOWEY COURT.

standing on the crest of Danesborough, behind Nether Stowey, "*Quantum ad hoc!*" That is, "How much from here!" in allusion to the view from that point. Serious persons, however, tell us that the name is the Celtic "Cantoc" or "Gwantog"; *i.e.* "full of combes."

Peculiarly beautiful though the Quantock scenery is, it is probable that the especially delicate beauty of it would never have attracted outside attention, had it not been for the association during a brief space at Nether Stowey of Coleridge and his friends. We will spare some time to visit Nether Stowey, and see what manner of setting was that in which the "Ancient Mariner" and other of Coleridge's poetry was wrought.

The entrance to Stowey from the direction of Bridgwater is particularly imposing. You come downhill, and then sharply round a bend to the right, where a group of Scotch firs introduces Stowey Court and the adjoining parish church: the view up the road towards the village made majestic and old-world by another grouping of firs beyond the curious early eighteenth-century gazebo that looks out in stately fashion from the garden wall of the Court. From this, and from similar summerhouse-like buildings, our great-great-grandfathers and grandmothers glanced from their walled gardens upon the coaches and the road-traffic of a bygone age. The roofs and gables, and the uppermost mullioned windows of the Court are glimpsed over the tall walls.

Although Stowey Court dated originally from

the fifteenth century, when it was built by Touchet, Lord Audley, and although it formed an outpost of the Royalists during the struggles of Charles the First with his Parliament, the building is not nowadays of much interest, and the church is of less, having been rebuilt in 1851, with the exception of the tower.

The romantic promise of this prelude to Stowey is scarcely supported by the appearance of the village street. It is a long street of houses for the most part of suburban appearance, running along the main road, with a fork at the further end, along the road to Taunton, where stands a modern Jubilee clock-tower beside the old village lock-up. The clock-tower seems to most people a poor exchange for the small but picturesque old market-house that until comparatively recent years stood in the middle of the street, with a streamlet running by.

To Leland, writing in the reign of Henry the Eighth, Stowey was "a poore village. It stondith yn a Botom emong Hilles." The situation is correctly described, and no doubt the condition of Stowey was all that Leland says of it, but no one could nowadays describe it truthfully as "poor," although it would be altogether correct to write it down as desperately commonplace. There is nothing poetic about the village at this time o' day, and its position on a much-travelled main road has brought a constant stream of fast-travelling motor-cars and waggons, together with a frequent service of Great Western Railway

motor-omnibuses, with the result that a loathsome mingled odour of petrol and fried lubricating oil and a choking dust pervade the long street all the summer. The local hatred of motor-cars—a deep-seated and intense detestation of them and those who drive them and travel in them—is, perhaps, surprising to a mere passer-by, who may just mention the subject to a villager; but it is only necessary to stay a day and a night in Stowey, and then enough will be seen and heard and smelt to convert the most mild-mannered person to an equal hatred.

They are naturally tolerant people at Stowey, and not disposed to be censorious. If you do not interfere with their comfort and well-being, you are welcome to exist on the face of the earth, as far as they are concerned, and joy go with you. They even tolerate the notorious Agapemonites of Spaxton, two miles away, the dwellers in the Abode of Love; and are prepared, without active resentment, to allow the Rev. Hugh Smyth-Pigott to style himself Jesus Christ and to cohabit with any lady—or any number of ladies—he pleases, and to style the resultant offspring Power, or Glory, or Catawampus, or Fried Fish, or anything that may seem good to him, with no more than a little mild amusement. "They doan' intervere wi' we, and us woan' intervere wi' they," is the village consensus of expressed opinion, greatly to the wrath of certain good Bridgwater folk, who come around, raving that the Agapemonites ought to be swept off the

fair land of the Quantocks, and when none will take on the office of broom, denounce all as Laodiceans, neither hot nor cold, and so fit only to be spewed out. But it surely rests rather with Spaxton and Charlinch to perform the suggested expulsion ; and even then, anything of the kind would be distinctly illegal, for it is part of the law of this free and enlightened and Christian country that any man may, if it pleases him to do so (and he can find others of the opposite sex to join him), set up a harem, and even proclaim himself the Messiah, without let or hindrance. The law no more regards him as a fit target for soot, flour, or antique eggs, or even for tar and feathers, than a respectable person.

The "Abode of Love," founded in 1845 by the notorious "Brother Prince," a scoundrelly clergyman who appears never to have been unfrocked, is a mansion maintained in the most luxurious style, but completely secluded from the highway, upon which it fronts, by substantial walls. In the time of "Brother Prince," the flagstaff surmounting the strong, iron-studded gateway, and supported by the effigy of a rampant lion, was made to fly a flag bearing the Holy Lamb, but this practice appears to be now discontinued.

Many inquisitive people nowadays visit Spaxton to view the exterior of the place where these notorious blasphemers live. None find entrance, for recent happenings have made the inmates extremely shy of strangers. It is notorious that

a raid was made upon the place one night towards the close of 1908, and that Pigott, the successor of Brother Prince, narrowly escaped being tarred and feathered by some adventurous spirits, who came down from London and, chartering a motor-car, drove up from Bridgwater to the Abode. Climbing the walls, they "bonneted," with a policeman's helmet filled with tarred feathers, the first man they met. This, however, proved to be only an elderly disciple, and not Pigott himself; and the intruders found themselves presently in custody, and were next day brought before the magistrates at Bridgwater, and both fined and severely reprimanded. The magistrates were bound to observe the law and to punish an assault; but the attempted tarring and feathering aroused a great deal of enthusiasm at Bridgwater, where the only regret expressed was that it had not been successful.

No one can complain that clerical opinion in that town is not freely ventilated. Here is an extract from a sermon preached by the vicar of St. Mary's:

"Near to our town for some years past, alas, has sprung up one of the most unhappy and miserable heresies that the world can show. Of course there have been heresies very brilliant and very beautiful. But here is a heresy foul, horrible, and bad, and a heresy with not one single redeeming point in it. A few years ago the head of this movement, now living in the little village under the shelter of the beautiful

Quantocks, made public proclamation in London that he was the very Lord Jesus Christ, and that he should judge the world. This man escaped at the risk of his neck—for however lethargic some people might be, these Londoners were not —to the quiet of the country. Here the old heresy, with a new name and with new horrible details, came into prominence again. It had quietly settled down, and men hoped that it would have died out, but the events of the past six months have revived it all again. None can pretend to be ignorant of what has happened, and none could pretend to be ignorant of the awful and blasphemous claims that have been made in the name of a wretched child born into a wretched world."

But although Nether Stowey is tolerant of all these things, it is not calm when motor-cars are under discussion. It would raise licences to £50 per annum, reduce speed to ten miles an hour on the open roads and three miles in villages and towns, and both heavily fine and award long terms of imprisonment to any who transgressed these suggested limits. Also, Nether Stowey suggests the reintroduction of turnpike-gates; or, to speak by the card, "tarnpayke-geäts." By all this, it will be perceived that automobiles have become a nuisance, a terror, and a source of injury to Nether Stowey; as they have to countless other villages similarly circumstanced.

THE MOTOR TERROR

Upon the pleasant country road
The motor-lorry runs;
Its build is huge and clumsy, and
It weighs some seven tons.
And when its cylinder backfires,
It sounds like gatling-guns!

Hark! down the village street there comes
The motor "charry bong":
And, gracious heavens! how it hums!
'Tis tall, and broad, and long;
And see its mountain-range of seats,
Filled with a motley throng.

Old Giles, who hobbled down our street,
Now he's in—Paradise.
A Panhard took him in the rear,
And shattered both his thighs,
They gave the chauffeur "three months' hard"
When tried at next Assize.

The motor-bus, with skid and lurch
And awkward equipoise,
Now fleets on Sundays past the church,
With hideous whirr and noise.
You cannot hear the parson preach;
It drowns the organ's voice.

And children from the Sunday School
Hang on behind, before
Our little Billy lost his hold:
Now he's (alas!) no more!
They rolled him pretty flat. His soul's
Gone to the Distant Shore.

Racing, toot-tooting, slithering,
The private owner goes;
The dust he raises fills the eyes,
His petrol-reek the nose;
His face he hides behind a mask:
He wears the weirdest clothes.

Now thanks to thee, thou callous fiend,
For the lesson thou hast taught:
Thus hast thou shown us how our lives
And comfort are as naught,
So you may, reckless, go your way
And take your murd'ring sport!"

The cottage at Nether Stowey occupied by Coleridge, from 1797 to 1800, stands at the further end of the village, and is, indeed, the last house on the Minehead road. It duly bears an ornamental tablet proclaiming the fact of the poet's residence here in those critical years. Sentiment, however, is not a little dashed at finding the house to be an extremely commonplace one; now, owing to a succession of alterations, enlarged and made to look like an exceedingly unattractive specimen of a typical suburban "villa" of the first half of the nineteenth century, when stucco was rampant and red brick had not come into vogue. A scheme appears at the present time to be under contemplation by which the house is to be purchased and presented to the nation, as a memorial of the poet. It is to become something in the way of a "Coleridge Reading Room," or Village Institute; but at the moment of writing, it is a lodging-house. A few years ago it was the

"Coleridge Cottage" inn. Such have been the varied fortunes of this home, for those short four years, of "the bright-eyed Mariner," as Wordsworth calls him. When it is further said that a storey has been added to the house, and that the thatch of Coleridge's time has been replaced by

THE COLERIDGE COTTAGE, NETHER STOWEY

pantiles, it will be considered, perhaps, that the value of it as a literary landmark can be but small. Coleridge himself had no love for it, as may be seen in his later references to Nether Stowey, in which he refers to it as a "miserable cottage," and "the old hovel." But the years he passed in this place were the most productive of his career. It was while walking along the

hills to Watchet, that he composed "The Ancient Mariner" and the first part of "Christabel." Close at hand, at Alfoxden, was Wordsworth, poetising on primroses and the infinitely trivial; and at Stowey itself was the amiable Thomas Poole, literary and political dilettante, friend and host of this circle in general. Southey sometimes came, and friends with visionary schemes for the regeneration of the social system, then in some danger of being overturned, following upon the popular upheaval of the French Revolution, severely exercised the conventional minds of the local squires and farmers with their unconventional ways and rash speech.

The habits of these friends, accustomed to discuss and severely criticise the doings of the Government, often to dress in a peculiar manner, and to take long, apparently aimless walks in lonely places, no matter what the weather, when honest country folk were cosily within doors, or asleep and snoring, presently attracted the notice of the neighbours, to the extent that whispers of those suspicious doings and this wild talk were conveyed to the local magistrates, and the Government eventually thought it worth while to send down an emissary to keep a watch. The spy chanced to be a person with a long nose. He readily enough tracked their movements along the hills and dales of Quantock, and overheard much of their talk: probably because the friends knew perfectly well that they were under suspicion and were being watched, and were

humorously inclined to make the spy's eavesdropping as fruitful as they could of incident. Prominent among their jokes was the discussion, in his hearing, of Spinosa: that philosopher's name being pronounced for the occasion "Spynosa." This the long-nosed one took to be an allusion to himself. Coleridge, he reported to his employers to be "a crack-brained talking

NETHER STOWEY.

fellow; but that Wordsworth is either a smuggler or a traitor, and means mischief. He never speaks to any one, haunts lonely places, walks by moonlight, and is always 'booing' about by himself." The curious notion of the amiable Wordsworth being mischievous is distinctly entertaining.

The friends were generally gay and lighthearted, in spite of philosophising upon ways and means of setting the world right by moral suasion;

and picnics punctuated the summer days. One of these, at Alfoxden, has attained a certain fame. There were present on this occasion: Coleridge, William and Dorothy Wordsworth, and Cottle; the good-natured, providential Cottle, friend in need of literary babes and sucklings. The provisions consisted of brandy, bread-and-cheese, and lettuces. Coleridge, in his clumsy way, broke the precious brandy-bottle, the salt was spilled, a tramp stole the cheese, and so all that remained was bread and lettuces.

The "Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth," the poet's sister and companion at Alfoxden and elsewhere, have been published, but it cannot be said that they add greatly to one's intellectual appreciation of the society formed by these friends, nor do they impress the reader with the mental powers of the lady, or with her knowledge of country life. Here and there are such passages as "saw a glow-worm," or "heard the nightingale"; as though such sights and sounds were things remarkable in the Quantocks. To have been deaf to the nightingale in his season, or not to have noticed the glow-worm's glimmer: those would have been incidents of an evening's walk much better worth remarking for their singularity in these still unspoiled hills.

But let us have a few specimen days from Dorothy Wordsworth's diary, to taste her quality. March 1798, for example, will serve:

"28th.—Hung out the linen."

"29th.—Coleridge dined with us."

"30th.—Walked I know not where."

"31st.—Walked."

And then "April 1st. Walked by moonlight." What utter drivel and self-confessed inanity; exasperating in its baldness, when an account of what Coleridge said on the occasion of his driving with them would have given us reading the world would now probably be glad enough to possess!

CHAPTER XV

STEART—STOGURSEY—THE FOLK-SPEECH OF ZUMMERZET — GLATT-HUNTING AT KILVE — ST. AUDRIES

To touch the coast on the left-hand of the Parret estuary is to adventure into a little-visited land. But although the way is long—the distance is six miles to Steart Point—the road is sufficiently easy, being downhill from Cannington to Cannington Park, scene of the battle of Cynuit, and to Otterhampton ; and then flat for the remaining four miles. At Otterhampton, a village of a few farms and cottages, the church contains a memorial to a former rector, the Rev. Dr. Jeffery, who held the living for no fewer than sixty-seven years, from 1804 to 1871.

The river bends abruptly and nears the road at a point a mile and a half out, where the little waterside hamlet of Combwich—"Cummidge," as it is styled locally—stands looking on to muddy creeks and the broad grey bosom of the Parret itself, with a colour like that of a London fog. Bridgwater spire is plainly visible, far off to the right, across the levels : sailing barges are loading the bricks made here from the kilns close at hand, and carts rattle and rumble along the few narrow

alleys that form the only streets of the place. Away across the river, a whitewashed house marks the position of a little-used ferry from the out-of-the-world district of Pawlett Hams to this even more outlandish peninsula of Steart.

Steart Point thrusts out a long tongue of land over against Burnham, whose houses and tall white lighthouse seem so near across the levels, yet are almost two miles distant, over the river-mouth and the mud-flats. The name of "Steart" has come down to us little altered from Anglo-Saxon times, an "a" replacing the "o" with which it appears to have originally been spelled. It is the same name as that of the Start in South Devon, and signifies a boldly projecting neck of land, "starting" out to sea. Otherwise there is no likeness between that Devonian promontory of cruel, black jagged rocks and this flat, muddy and shingly fillet of land.

The fisher village of Steart is a singular place: a fishing village without boats! The shrimps, eels and flounders usually caught here are taken in nets set by the men of Steart going down to the sea at low water on "mud-horses." Everything is conditioned here by the deep mud of the foreshore, which may only be crossed by special appliances, evolved locally. Chief among these is the "mud-horse," which, it may at once be guessed, is no zoological freak. If it is related to anything else on earth, it may perhaps be set down as a hybrid production: a cross between a towel-horse and a toboggan sledge.

When the fishermen of Steart prepare to go forth a-fishing, they proceed to undress themselves to the extent of taking off their trousers and putting on a cut-down pair, very little larger than bathing-drawers. Mud-boots clothe their feet. Then they bring down their wooden "horses," and, leaning against the upright breast-high framework, give a vigorous push, and so go slithering along the buttery surface of the flats; the nearest approach to that fabulous body of cavalry, the "Horse Marines," any one is ever likely to see:

> There was an old fellow of Steart,
> Who went catching eels in the dirt.
> When they asked "Any luck?"—
> "Up to eyes in the muck!"
> Said that rueful old fellow of Steart.

The traveller has to pass the little church and scattered cottages of Otterhampton on the way to Steart; and on the return, if he wishes to keep near the coast, he comes through Stockland Bristol, a pretty rustic village, with prosperous-looking manor-house and an entirely modern church. Beyond it are Upper Cock and Lower Cock farms, that take their names from a tumulus down in the levels near the estuary known as "Ubberlowe."

"Upper Cock," in its original form, was "Hubba Cock"; "Cock" signifying a heap, and comparing with "haycock." "Ubbalowe" is properly "Hubbalowe," *i.e.* "Hubba's heap," both names pointing to the probability that here was buried the chieftain Hubba, who, as we have already seen, fell at Cynuit.

From this point a succession of winding lanes leads down again to the curving shore of Bridgwater Bay at Stolford. Here meadows, a farmstead with well-filled rickyards, and a compound heavily walled and buttressed against flooding from the salt marshes, border upon a raised beach of very large blue-grey stones, which replaces the

THE "MUD HORSE."

mud that gathers round the Parret estuary. Here at low spring tides traces may yet be found of the submarine forest off-shore. A sample of the foreshore taken at Stolford usually suffices explorers, and fully satisfies their curiosity; for the clattering loose stones of the heaped-up beach form an extremely tiring exercise-ground.

These level lands of highly productive

meadows, lying out of the beaten track, below the greatly frequented high road that runs out of Bridgwater to Nether Stowey, and so on along the ridge to Holford and West Quantoxhead, are much more extensive than a casual glance at the map would convey. They are at one point over five miles across. The centre of this district is Stogursey, which is, as it were, a kind of capital, if a large agricultural village may be thus dignified.

Stogursey is a considerable village, taking the second half of its name from the de Courcy family, who once owned it, but the thick speech of Somerset rendered the place-name into "Stogursey" so long ago that even maps have adopted the debased form; some, however, inserting a small (Stoke Courcy) in brackets, under the generally accepted form. The visitor will at the same time notice, in the title of the local parish magazine, that efforts are being made by the clergy to restore the original name. The church was built by those old Norman lords, but the family died out so very long ago, that no memorials of them remain in it; and the net result of all their ancient state and glory is—a name! It is a large and fine church, in the Norman and Transitional Norman styles; consisting of a large and lofty nave without aisles, a central tower, north and south transepts, and deep chancel. The clustered shafts supporting the central tower have elaborately sculptured Norman capitals of a distinctly Byzantine

character. A variant of the place-name is seen on a monument to one Peregrine Palmer, where it appears as "Stoke Curcy." The Palmer family is seen, on another monument, revelling in a pun beneath the Palmer coat of arms: in this wise, "Palma virtuti."

But the Verney aisle of this beautiful church contains more interesting memorials than those of Palmers; notably two altar-tombs with effigies of the Verneys of Fairfield. The earliest is that

STOLFORD.

of Sir Ralph Verney, 1352. The other, that of Sir John Verney, who died in 1461, is of very beautiful workmanship, and displays, among other shields of arms, the punning device of the family: three ferns—"verns," as a rural Somerset man would say, in that famous "Zummerzet" doric that is not yet wholly extinct.

No one could justly declare the village of Stogursey to be picturesque. Nor is it ugly; but at the radiant close of some summer day, when an afterglow remains in the sky, the village takes a beautiful colouring that cries aloud for the efforts

of some competent watercolourist. It is an effect, as you look eastward down the long broad village street to the church, standing in a low situation at the end, of a rich red-yellow, like that of a ripening cornfield, on houses, cottages, and church alike, with the lead-sheathed spire gleaming like oxidised silver against the chilly blue-grey of the eastern sky at evening, spangled already, before the sun has finally gone to bed, with the cold, unimpassioned twinkle of the stars. Daylight heavily discounts this romantic effect, for then you perceive that the lovely hue on the church-tower at evening was the dying sunset's transfiguration of the yellow plaster with which the tower was faced at some time in the Georgian period.

But Stogursey has a castle, or the remains of one, styled by villagers "the Bailey." The stranger looks in vain for it in the village street.

Stogursey Castle stands in a meadow, surrounded by a stream which in the olden days was made, not only to form the moat, but to turn the wheels of the Castle mill. The mill-leat still runs on one side of the lane branching from the main village street; a lane now smelling violently of tanneries, and lined with cottages of a decrepit "has been" character; for it should be said that Stogursey is a decaying place. Changes in method of agriculture; changes in methods of communication, making for swifter and cheaper import of corn and other products of the soil; changes, in fact, in everything have all conspired

to injuriously affect the place. The few remaining local shops do not look prosperous, and the village is full of private houses whose windows clearly show them to have once been shops, that gave up the pretence of business long ago. These bay-windowed, many-paned shop-fronts retired from business are familiar all over rural England.

STOGURSEY CASTLE.

The villagers generally turn them to account as conservatories for geraniums and other flowers, and a pleasant sight, treated in this way, they often are. But there is a future for the Stogursey district ; if not for the shopkeepers, certainly for the farmers. No light railway yet serves it, but the need of such an enterprise is great ; and when it comes it will effect great changes in local fortunes.

"Stoke," as it was styled originally, is a place of greater antiquity than any neighbouring village, as its name would imply; indicating as it does a stockaded post in a wild and dangerous district innocent of settled houses.

That post was probably on the site of the castle whose scanty ruins remain. The de Courcy castle was destroyed as early as the time of King John, when it passed by the second marriage of Alice de Courcy to one Fulke de Breauté, who set up here as a robber lord, and issued from this stronghold from time to time for the purpose of levying involuntary contributions from all who passed to and fro on the highway yonder, from Bridgwater to Quantoxhead. His castle can never have been strong, for its situation forbade strength, but the district was remote and little known, and people who were plundered on the ridgeway road had little inducement to plunge down here after this forceful taker of secular tithes. But de Breauté's proceedings at length grew so scandalous that a strong force was sent at the instance of Hubert de Burgh, Chief Justiciar of the realm, and this thieves' kitchen was burnt and more or less levelled with the ground. The subsequent history of the castle is vague, but it would appear to have been at some time rebuilt, for it was again, and finally, destroyed in 1455. A glance at the remains will show that it could never have been seriously defended against any determined attack. The moat, still in places filled with water, was deep as could be made,

for it was the only external defence. Fragments of curtain-wall and portions of towers with loop-holes for arrows remain; and the entrance-towers may yet be traced, although a modern cottage has been built on to them, in all the incongruousness of red brick and rough-cast plaster. Such is the modern economical way with the shattered walls of this old robber's hold. For the rest, the enclosure is a tangled mass of undergrowth and ivy-clad ruins of walls, and the meadow without is uneven with the ancient foundations of outworks that disappeared centuries ago.

The roads leading back from Stogursey to the coast have a distressing lack of signposts, and the district is for long distances without habitations, so that the way to Lilstock may well be missed. That they are fine roads for the cyclist, with never a motor-car about, is not sufficient to recompense the explorer who cannot find his way. And Lilstock—Little Stock originally; that is to say, some ancient small coastwise stockaded fort—is, perhaps, not worth finding, after all; for it appears to consist solely of a tin tabernacle, by way of church, and a lonely cottage amid elms, at the end of everything; a veritable dead-end. You climb to the lonely beach and have it all to yourself; the grey sea lazily splashing amid the ooze and scattered boulders, and a great empty sky above.

It is all the same beside the sea to Kilve, and rough walking too; the rebuilt church of Kilton

prominent inland, on the left; very modern, but with a relic of a century ago in the shape of a battered old barrel-organ with a set of mechanical psalm and hymn tunes, that used to be ground out every Sunday to the long-suffering congregation, who must, by dint of sheer damnable iteration, have come to loathe this unchanging psalmody with a peculiar hatred.

We come now into the marches of West Somerset, where the folk-speech still to some extent remains; but the famous broad "Zummerzet" speech of these parts nowadays survives in its olden force only in the pages of dialect novels. The dialect novel is a thing of convention, like the dramatic stage, and is not necessarily a direct transcript from life. In novels of rural life, in rustic plays, and in illustrated jokes in which villagers appear, the countryman still wears a smock-frock and talks as his great-grandfather was accustomed to talk. Frequently, too, he wears a beaver hat, with a nap on it as luxuriant as the bristles of a boot-brush; and he is made to smoke "churchwarden" clay pipes about a yard long. Real rustics do not do these things nowadays. I only wish they did; for then exploring in the byways would be much more interesting. Nowadays, the unaccustomed Londoner can quite easily understand anything a Somersetshire man, even of the most rustic type, has to say.

This, however, is not to be taken as an assertion that all the old characteristic words and phrases

have died out, or that the accent is altogether a thing of the past. The Somerset speech is really part and parcel of that delightful West of England trick of the tongue which still grows gradually more noticeable to the stranger as he progresses westward. You will not notice this in any measure until you have passed an imaginary line, which may be drawn from Oxford in the north, to Southampton in the south, passing on the way such places as Wantage, Newbury, Andover, and Winchester. Westward of this frontier-line, the West of England, linguistically, commences. Somerset, by some unexplained accident, was notoriously the home of the broadest speech; but recent years have witnessed the singular phenomena (singular when taken in conjunction) of Somerset folk-speech losing much of its old-time character, and that of Devon, which had also largely fallen into disuse, returning in almost its olden strength.

Much of this old manner of talking has been preserved in the publications of the English Dialect Society, in which we find embedded, among more stolid phrases, amusing scraps of rustic dialogues, illustrating the local shibboleths. Here we have, for example, a rural domestic quarrel, rendered in broad "Zummerzet." It has not been thought desirable to reproduce the somewhat pedantic inflection-marks given in the Society's publications, tending as they do towards the unnecessary mystification of those who do not happen to be philologists. The spelling has also been altered

here and there, to bring it more into line with the enunciation usually heard by the ordinary person.

The woman in this first specimen says, "Uneebaudee mud su waul bee u tooüd uundur u aaruz bee u foauz tu leave saeumz aay bee, laung u dhee. Tuz skandluz un sheemfeal aew aay bee zaard." *

To this pitiful complaint the husband answers, "U uumunz auvees zaard wuul neef uur udn aat ubeawt, un dhee aart nuvvur aat ubeawt." †

Here is another example from the collection already quoted from :

"Taumee, haut bee yue aiteen on ? Spaat ut aewt turaaklee ! "

Perhaps the reader may be left to translate this. But how about the following, spoken by a waggoner on a hot day ? "Mudn maek zu boalz t'ax vur koop u zaydur, aay spoüz ? Aay zuuree aay bee dhaat druy, aay küdn spaat zikspuns." ‡

Here again is some time-honoured "Zummerzet." "Come, soce ! Yur's yur jolly goed health. Drink ut oop tu onct ! "

"Naw ; daze muy ole buttonz neef aay due ! Aay diddn nuvvur hold wi' u-swillen of ut deown

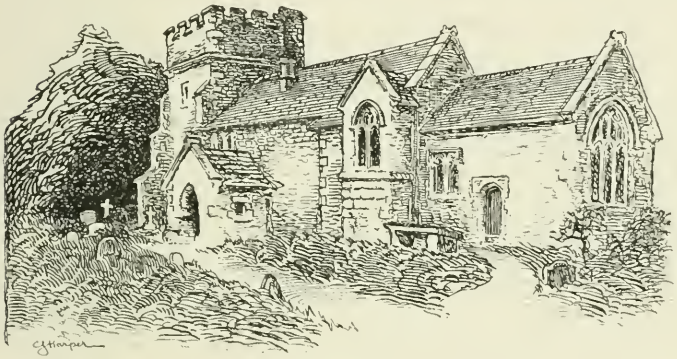
* "Anybody might so well be a toad under a harrow as be forced to live same as I be, long of thee. 'Tis scandalous and shameful how I be served."

† "A woman's always served well if her isn't hit about ; and thee art never hit about."

‡ "Mustn't make so bold as to ask for a cup of cider, I suppose ? I assure you I be that dry, I couldn't spit sixpence."

same uz thaet. Hurry no maen's cattle tul ye've got'n ass o' yur aeown! Hurry, hurry; 'tuz this yur hurryen what tarns everythen arsy-varsy vor me! Muy uymurz! what ood muy oal graanfer saay tu th' likes of ut? Wooden dh'oal maen laet aewt!"

Among the curious expressions found in this last speech, that of "soce" is prominent. The word is a familiar expression in these parts. It



KILVE CHURCH.

is used between equals, and is equivalent to "my boy," "old chap," etc. Philologists generally consider it to be a survival from monastic times, when itinerant monkish preachers are supposed to have been styled, "socii," *i.e.* "associates," or "brethren," or to have themselves used the expression in addressing their congregations.

"This yur," that is to say, reduced to ordinary pronunciation, "this here" is, on the other hand, equivalent to a strong disapproval of the subject

under discussion. It means "this new-fangled," unfamiliar, or unpleasant thing.

The village of Kilve lies down along a lane leading to the right from the road just past Holford, and rambles disjointedly down to the rugged little church. Church, ruined priory, and a large farmhouse stand grouped together in the meadows, beside the little brook called Kilve Pill, a quarter of a mile from the low blue-lias cliffs of the muddy and boulder-strewn lonely shore sung by Wordsworth, as "Kilve's delightful shore."

Kilve church is as rude and rugged as some old fortress, and probably its tower was originally designed with a view to defence. It is constructed of very rudely shaped blocks of blue limestone, many of them of great size, mortared together in rough fashion. For the rest, it is a small aisleless building, chiefly of Norman date, with a south transept-chapel of Perpendicular character, and a simple Norman bowl-font.

Giant, widespreading poplar trees adjoin the Priory farmhouse and the ruins of the Priory, or Kilve Chantry. This was a foundation by one Sir Simon de Furneaux, in 1329, to house five priests. The particular reasons that induced Sir Simon to establish his chantry in this lonely spot do not appear, for the history of the place is vague; but whatever they were, they did not appeal to Sir Richard Stury, to whom the property came, some sixty years later, on his marriage with Alice, the last of this branch of the Furneaux family. He abolished the establishment, and

the building stood empty for centuries, or was used as a barn by the neighbouring farmer. Another use, not so much spoken of, was as a storehouse for smuggled goods. A long succession of farmers at the Priory farm were, in fact, more smugglers than farmers. The church-tower was said also to have been used by them. The present roofless condition of the buildings is due to a fire, many years ago, supposed to have been

KILVE; THE CHANTRY.

caused by a conflagration of these smuggled spirits.

In these latter days, now that many townsfolk on holiday seek quiet, secluded spots, there are few among the rustic cottages of Kilve that do not house visitors, and nowadays the Priory farm is in summer as much a boarding-house as farmstead; while amateur geologists may be found at low water on the "delightful," if muddy, shore, searching for "St. Keyna's serpents"; or, in other words, ammonites, which, with other

fossils, abound in the blue lias clay. They are "St. Keyna's serpents," because the saint, coming to Somerset, transformed all the snakes of these parts into stone!

Kilve, in common with other villages situated on this part of the Somerset shore, indulges in a curious kind of sport: that of "hunting the conger." It is in the autumn that the unfortunate conger-eel is taken unawares, through the low tides that then generally prevail. The conger, known here as the "glatt," is the big brother of the ordinary sand-eel, who is dug out of the foreshore, all round our coasts. He lives in the blue lias mud hereabouts, generally beneath the boulders that are sprinkled about the shore like currants in a bun; and is clever enough, in the ordinary way, to have his home well below low-water mark. But the treacherous spring-tides are the undoing of him; laying bare perhaps a hundred and sixty feet more of mud than usual. At such times a large proportion of the rustic population anywhere near the shore assembles and proceeds to the muddy or sandy flats, accompanied by fox-terriers and other dogs, and armed with stout six or eight-feet-long sticks, cut from the hedges and sharpened at one end to a chisel-like edge. If there be by any chance a belated visitor in those October days when hunting the glatt is usually in full swing he is apt to imagine the simple villagers are trying to take a rise out of his ignorance of country life, when, in answer to his questions, they tell him they are off hunting

conger-eels—and with dogs! But it is simple truth. Hunting the wild red deer on Exmoor is the aristocratic sport of this country-side, and hunting the conger is the democratic ; and where in a purely inland district your sporting rustic may keep his lurcher, here the rural sportsman values his terrier or spaniel in proportion to his merits as "a good fish dog."

There is not that smartness among the pursuers of the glatt which is the mark of the hunting-field in the chase of the fox or the deer, and renders a fox-hunt or a meet of staghounds so spectacular a sight. Smart clothes are not the proper equipment of the glatt-hunter, whose hunting chiefly consists in wading, ankle-deep, through the mud, heaving up huge boulders, and mud-whacking after the wriggling, writhing congers, while the dogs rush frantically among the crowd, scraping holes in the mud and essaying the not very easy task of seizing the slippery fish. In fact, the oldest clothes are not too bad for this sport ; and the spectacle of a company of such sportsmen as these, properly habited for the occasion, is rather that of an assemblage of scarecrows than that of a number of self-respecting members of the community. That this precaution of wearing the oldest possible garments is not an excess of caution becomes abundantly evident at the conclusion of a rousing day's sport, when the mud has been flying in proportion to the enthusiasm of the chase, and every one has become abundantly splashed, from top to toe. The congers,

or "glatts," captured on these occasions scale, as a rule, about four or five pounds, but occasionally run to twenty pounds.

Over the meadows by church-path from Kilve to East Quantoxhead, is a pleasant stroll, bringing you into the village by the old watermill and the village pond. Not, mark you, an ordinary village pond with muddy margin and half-submerged old superannuated pails and the like discarded objects long past use, but a crystal-clear lakelet, with stone and turf parapet, well-stocked with trout—and the fishing preserved too, members of that branch of the Luttrell family living in the adjoining manor-house coming down occasionally to cast a fly. This is not angling in such public circumstances as might be supposed, for the village is very small and retired, and few strangers find their way hither. Indeed, things here are so little conventional that you enter the churchyard through a farmyard.

Church and manor-house stand side by side, both built of the local blue-grey limestone. In the chancel of the little aisleless church, stands a Luttrell altar-tomb of alabaster, inscribed to Hugh Luttrell, 1522, and his son, Andrew, 1538, with shields displaying their arms and those of the Wyndhams and other families with whom they have intermarried.

The large, square-shaped manor-house adjoining is the ancient home of the Luttrells, who were seated here at East Quantoxhead long centuries before they acquired the greater estates

ST. AUDRIES.

of Dunster and Minehead ; being descended on the distaff side from that Ralph Paganel who held this and other manors from William the Conqueror.

The tall, ugly masonry retaining-wall that fringes the hollow road for a long distance as you come uphill from East to West Quantoxhead, is that of St. Audries, the park of Sir Alexander Acland Hood. Where this ends, on the hilltop, the lovely park, sloping down to the seashore, is disclosed, like a dream of beauty. West Quantoxhead and St. Audries are convertible terms, the parish church being dedicated to St. Etheldreda, popularly known in mediæval times as "St. Audrey." The mansion in the park, the rectory, the post-office, and a few scattered cottages constitute all the village. The church itself is modern, having been built by Sir Peregrine Acland Hood in 1857. It is far better, architecturally, than the mere date of it would suggest ; doubtless because the architect relied more upon the traditional local style than on his own initiative. Although having stood for over half a century, the church looks astonishingly new. The mansion itself, a happy combination of stateliness and domestic comfort, and built of red brick and stone, is glimpsed romantically between the fine clumps of trees with which the park is studded ; and in a cleft you note the blue sea—for the Severn Sea is not so muddy and so dun-coloured under sunny conditions as some would have us suppose. Down on the beach, where a waterfall plunges boldly

over the cliffs of curiously stratified rock, the Somerset coast proves itself again to be more picturesque than it is generally allowed to be. The Devon and Somerset staghounds sometimes meet on the lawn, in front of St. Audries House, as the Quantock pack were used to do.

CHAPTER XVI

WILLITON—ST. DECUMAN'S AND THE WYNDHAMS—WATCHET

Leaving St. Audries, one also leaves the Quantocks behind, coming downhill into Williton, a place now by way of being a little town, with a railway station, a cattle market, a Union Workhouse, resembling the residence of some more than usually wealthy peer, a Petty Sessions Court, and a police station.

Yet, with all these adjuncts of an up-to-date civilisation, Williton does not enjoy the distinction of being a real, original, independent parish. It stands in the parish of St. Decuman's, a church yonder on the hillside, over a mile away, near Watchet: the peculiar humour of the thing being that St. Decuman's, save for a few rustic cottages close by, stands lonely, while Watchet and Williton are populous places. Thus we observe here the engaging paradox, outraging all the problems of Euclid, of the larger being contained in the smaller. At the same time, it must be allowed that the "chapel-of-ease" at Williton, however inferior ecclesiastically and architecturally to St. Decuman's, is at any rate

of a respectable antiquity. It originated in a chantry chapel founded by Robert FitzUrse, brother of that Reginald who bore his share in the murder of Thomas à Becket. In a district such as this, where churchyard and wayside crosses, more or less dilapidated, are commonplaces, it seems hardly worth while to note that the base of an ancient cross stands at the east end of Williton church, or that fragments of two others stand in front of that old white-faced coaching inn, the "Egremont Hotel," one of them made to support a gaslamp which itself has been put out of action by effluxion of time.

St. Decuman's, the parish church of Watchet, stands fully half a mile away from the little town, inland, within sight of Williton, on a conspicuous knoll. St. Decuman, to whom the church is dedicated, was one of those wonderful West Country saints for whom, as for Napoleon, the word "impossible" did not exist. He flourished at the close of the seventh century and the opening of the eighth, and came originally from South Wales, as a missionary to the heathen of Somerset. Crossing the sea on a hurdle, or on his cloak, according to the conflicting accounts given, he established a hermit's cell on this spot and subsisted chiefly on berries and the milk of a cow which came from nowhere in particular, especially for the purpose of sustaining the holy man. The heathen, however, resented the hermit's presence, and seized and beheaded him here, fondly imagining they had thus given him his *quietus*. But

they little knew the virile qualities of this hardy race of missioners who came from across Channel and wrought marvels all along these coasts of Somerset, Devon, and Cornwall. St. Decuman was beheaded, but that was by no means the end of him. He took up his head, washed it in a spring that gushed forth upon the spot (for he was a cleanly person for a hermit), and placed it again on his shoulders: probably remarking, in the manner of modern conjurors, "That's how it's done!" But of this we have no record. To convert the ungodly after this exhibition of his powers was easy. There would appear to have been no reason why so remarkable a man as this should ever have died, but he passed away at last, in A.D. 706. A grim little stone figure of him occupies a niche in the tower.

The existing church is a fine and stately building, chiefly of the Perpendicular period; the exterior remarkable for the extremely hideous carvings that decorate (if that be quite the word) the dripstones over the windows of the south aisle. Most of them are grotesque faces, but one is of a somewhat mysterious character and appears to be the representation of a little shivering nude human figure, threatened by a huge bird of the pelican type.

The interior discloses fine cradle-roofs to nave and aisles, with angel corbels and a deeply undercut frieze of conventionalised vine-leaves. The third pier from the west, in the north aisle, bears tabernacled niches filled with small statues of

four bishops, and on that behind the pulpit are figures of an abbot and of St. George and the Dragon. The Egremont and Wyndham chapels are rich in memorials of the Wyndham family, formerly of Orchard Wyndham, close by. An old funeral helmet, painted and gilt, and surmounted with the crest of a lion's head and fetterlock, hangs in the south chapel, and two others are suspended in the chancel and the north aisle.

The Wyndhams, who are represented here so numerously in sepulchral brasses and marble monuments, derived from the Wyndhams of Felbrigg, Norfolk, but originally of Wymondham in that county ; John, second son of Sir Thomas Wyndham, having in the reign of Henry VIII. married Elizabeth Sydenham, of Orchard Sydenham, afterwards known as Orchard Wyndham. The Norfolk branch of the family in course of time replaced the " y " in their name by an " i," but the West of England Wyndhams have generally (by no means always) adhered to the more picturesque fashion of subscribing themselves. The last Wyndham here was George, Lord Egremont, who died in 1845, when the title became extinct and the family property here and at Sampford Brett was sold.

The brasses include those of John Wyndham, of Kentsford, and his wife Florence, sister and co-heir of Nicholas Wadham of Merrifield, Somerset. He died in 1572, and she in 1596, many years after the gruesome adventure she experienced in being nearly buried alive.

The brasses of this worthy pair, half the size of life and most carefully, if at the same time coarsely, engraved, with a meticulous care for details of armour and costume, face one another on a huge stone slab, set against the wall. A smaller brass represents them and a third figure, intended for Fate, discussing their respective ends, with the following dialogue :—

MARITUS. When changeless Fate to death did change my life
I prayd it to bee gentle to my wife.
VXOR. But shee who hart and hand to thee did wedd
Desired nothing more then this thie bedd.
FATVM. I brought ye soules that linckt were each in either
To rest above ye Bodies here togeither.

It was in 1563, the year following her marriage with John Wyndham, that Florence Wyndham, in the words of Collinson, the historian of Somerset, "having in a sickness lost all appearance of life, was placed in her coffin and mourned as one dead." Fortunately, as the sexton was about to close the family vault, he imagined he heard a noise proceeding from the coffin. Another man might have fled in terror, but there are few superstitious fears left to sextons who have been long at their work, and this one approached and listened more carefully. The noise proceeded from the coffin and was that made by the supposedly dead woman, who had awakened from what had been merely a trance, and was trying to get out. Another, and a more scandalous, version tells us that it was the act of the sexton, repairing secretly to the vault for the purpose of stealing

BENCH-END, SAMPFORD BRETT; SUPPOSED TO ALLUDE TO THE LEGEND OF LADY FLORENCE WYNDHAM.

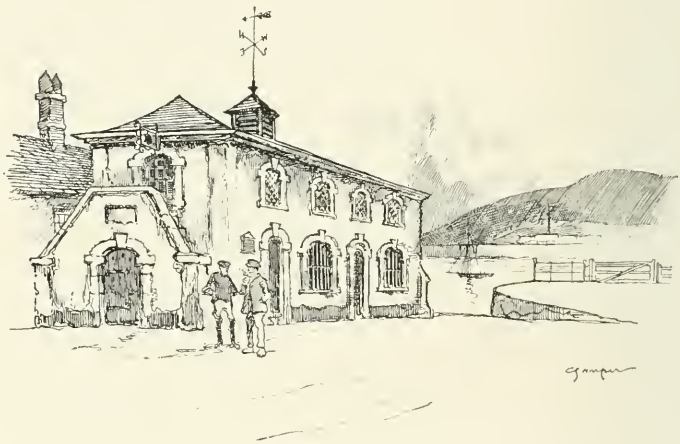
her rings, and cutting her finger, that restored her to consciousness. The story is a familiar one in many localities, but as told here, of Florence Wyndham, is more circumstantial than others. Happily rescued from this dreadful situation, she soon afterwards became the mother of Sir John Wyndham, and lived happily for another thirty-three years. The old manor-house of Kentsford, now a farmhouse, still stands, three fields away from the church of St. Decuman. Some versions of the story declare that Florence Wyndham was the

mother of twins shortly after the narrow escape narrated above, and the country-folk point to one of the Wyndham monuments on which, amid flaming urns, are two conventional marble cupids in tears, as proof of the story, but the monument in question is at least a hundred years later in date than that lady. Three miles away in the little church of Sampford Brett, formerly on the Wyndham lands, among the sixteenth-century carved bench-ends, is an exceptionally notable example, both for its large size and unusual design, which represents a woman surrounded by conventionalised Renaissance fruit and flowers : two little cupid-like figures blowing trumpets below. This is generally thought to be an allusion to this singular incident in the family history, and the merely decorative cupids are pointed out as the twins. It should be remarked that the lady's brain development, as shown on the carving, appears to be singularly poor.

The Wyndhams were ever loyal folk, as their monuments in St. Decuman's church clearly show, and that they did not always gain by their allegiance is shown by the querulous epitaph upon one of them, Sir Hugh, of whom it is written :

> Here lies beneath this rugged stone
> One more his prince's than his own,
> And in his martyred father's wars
> Lost fortune, blood, gained nought but scars,
> And for his sufferings as reward
> Had neither countinance or regard ;
> And earth affording no releif
> Has gone to Heaven to ease his grief.

He was son of the governor of Bridgwater, and one of the six hostages demanded by Fairfax on the surrender of the town. He died 1671. Let us sorrow for the unrecompensed services of a Royalist, fighting for Charles I. ; but perhaps we may also spare a little consideration for Charles II., who, on his restoration, was so beset by claimants for honours and rewards on account

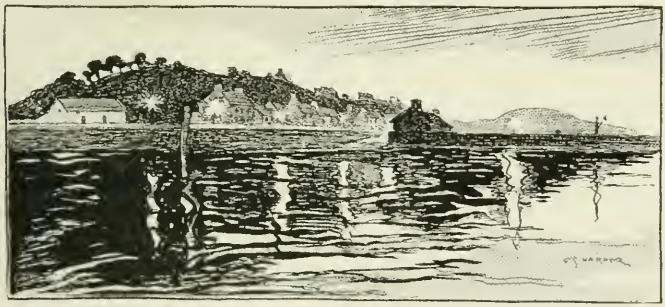


WATCHET ; OLD TOWN HALL AND LOCK-UP.

of Cavalier sufferings and losses in " his martyred father's wars " that not even the most generous ideas of compensation would have sufficed to satisfy the hungry crowds.

Watchet, the little town to which this church of St. Decuman belongs, is a seaport of a stirring history, early and late. Its earliest disaster was the destruction and plunder wrought by the Danes in A.D. 988 ; the latest the violent succession

of storms that from September 1903 demolished the harbour, and again demolished it, after expensive repair. There is much likeability in this little unfortunate port of Watchet, if only for the fact that it retains, even at this belated time o' day, almost every feature of its natural self, and has added few alien ones. It is a small place, with paper mills and iron-foundries, railway-sidings that come down to the waterside, and a mineral line descending from the Brendon Hills.



WATCHET.

For the convenience of those whose religion is not of that after all not very robust kind, which will lead them a mile's walk, chiefly uphill, to their parish church, a chapel-of-ease has been provided on the quay, over the old market-house, which has a kind of glory-hole in the basement, formerly the local lock-up.

Watchet shares with the Italian town of Magenta the honour of giving a name to a colour ; only, while the colour "magenta" is a modern

and a horribly inartistic kind of reddish purple, introduced soon after 1859, when Louis Napoleon's victory over the Austrians at Magenta was popular in France, "watchet" is certainly as old as Chaucer who, in 1383, in his "Canterbury Pilgrims," says :

> In hoses red he went ful fetishly,
> Y-clad he was ful smal and properly
> Al in a kirtel of lyght wachet ;

the colour "watchet" being a light, or celestial blue, as shown in "Hakluyt's Voyages," in which we read of "mariners attired in watchet, or skie-coloured clothe."

CHAPTER XVII

CLEEVE ABBEY—OLD CLEEVE—BLUE ANCHOR

Two miles inland from Watchet lies the Cistercian Abbey of St. Mary de Cleeve, or Clive ; that is to say, St. Mary of the Cliff—the most notable ruin in these districts of Somerset. The church, the Abbey itself, has quite vanished, and its materials centuries ago passed into such commendably useful purposes as building-stones for neighbouring farmsteads, cow-bartons and linhays, while the many excellent roads of the neighbourhood doubtless owe their foundations to the same source. The very interesting and extensive remains of the establishment are those of the domestic buildings, which have scarce their equal elsewhere in England.

This once proud and beautiful Abbey was founded in 1188 by one William de Romare, of whom we know little else than that he was of the family of the Earls of Lincoln of that period. It stands, after the manner of all Cistercian monasteries, in a pleasant fertile vale, watered by a never-failing stream ; for the White Monks were, next to their religious association, most remarkable for their agricultural and stock-breeding

pursuits. They were not greatly distinguished for their learning, as were, for example, the Benedictines; but as farmers they were pre-eminent, growing corn and breeding sheep and horses more scientifically than any secular agriculturists of their age.

The Cistercians, who derived from Citeaux, in France, were alternatively styled "Bernadines." They first established themselves in England in 1128: their first Abbey that of Waverley, near Guildford. They stood, originally, for simplicity, in life and worship. "They spent their life," says Peter of Blois, "on slender food, in rough vesture, in vigils, confession, discipline, and psalms; in humility, hospitality, obedience, and charity. We have also the testimony of St. Bernard's words, that "in praying and fast, in study of Holy Writ, and hard manual labour" they occupied their time.

They were not so dour and solemn as some others of the monastic orders, and typified the spiritual joy that filled their hearts by the white habits they adopted; largely, however, as a protest against the penitential Benedictines. For harmony never did exist between the monks of different rules, who were jealous of some and despiteful to others, according to circumstances. Most orders, however, united in despising and ridiculing the Cistercians, who were in this, as in the simplicity of their rule, and in the severe, unornamental character of their original Abbeys, the Plymouth Brethren and the Presbyterians of

their age. The first type of Cistercian house was almost as simple as a Dissenting Chapel of our own times. In the churches of other orders the Rood was made as ornate, and of as costly materials, as possible: often glowing with gold and silver and precious stones. The Cistercian monks, however, remembering that Our Lord died upon a cross of wood, placed a crucifix of plain wood in their churches, and throughout the whole of the establishment conducted themselves as the sanctified farmers they really were: not even scrupling to absent themselves from Mass at harvest-time. If it be true—and it is a noble belief—that "to labour is to pray," then the early Cistercians prayed well; for with all their might they brought lands under cultivation, and tended and improved stock, and helped the world along toward the distant ideal.

But as time went on, and the order grew rich by dint of its own farming and wool-growing successes, and by a never-failing stream of benefactions, the Abbots and monks by degrees became arrogant and lazy. They no longer worked in their fields; leaving the practical farming to the lay-brothers and the horde of dependents they had accumulated. As landowners they were even more grasping than secular landlords, and, in common with other orders, were extremely tenacious of their rights of market and other monopolies; thus earning for themselves a hatred which was in course of time to sweep them out of existence. The Cistercians were not alone—nor

perhaps even as prominent as others—in these worldly ways; but they shared in the growing arrogance and luxury of these bodies originally vowed to poverty and practising their vows because they did not own the wherewithal to do otherwise. Their churches and domestic buildings were rebuilt elaborately and their Abbots travelled

ENTRANCE TO CLEEVE ABBEY.

en grand seigneur through the country; persons claiming great consideration.

Cleeve Abbey derives its name from the swelling hills in the recesses of this valley of the stream, called the Roadwater, *i.e.* the "Rood-water." "Cleeve" indicates, in its old meaning, not only a cliff or cleft, but any bold hill. The word is found in the place-names of Clevedon,

near by, and at Clieveden, on the Thames. There are no cliffs in this gentle vale nearer than the not remarkably large cliffs at Watchet. The valley is, indeed, more noted for its quiet pastoral beauty than for ruggedness, and was in olden times known as *Vallis Florida*, the "Vale of Flowers."

Although only the ground plan of the monastic church remains, showing it to have been a building 161 feet in length, and of the transitional period between the Norman and the Early English styles, the domestic buildings are in very fair preservation, considering their use by so many generations of farmers as hay, corn, and straw lofts. The cloister-garth, now a lawn-like expanse, was, until Mr. Luttrell cleared it out about 1865, a typical farm-yard, rich in muck. At the same period, the pigsties and various farming outbuildings that had been added in the course of over three hundred years, were cleared away, and the place made more accessible to those interested in these relics of the past. The Luttrells, however, do not allow the place to be seen for nothing, and have indeed at least an adequate idea of its worth as a show; a notice confronting the pilgrim to the effect that Cleeve Abbey is shown on weekdays at one shilling a head: sixpence each for two or more: "special arrangements for Parties."

Cleeve Abbey is not shown on Sundays and that traveller who from force of circumstances comes to it on the Sabbath must be content

with a view of its entrance-gateway only. If he cannot contain his artistic or antiquarian enthusiasm, but must needs peer and quest about on the edge of the precincts, then the fury of the people who occupy the farm, and are at the same time caretakers of and guides to the Abbey ruins, and without whose unwelcome company you may not see the place at all, at any time, is let loose over him. Whether this be a respect for the Sabbath, or for the merely secular rules imposed by the Luttrells, or whether it is not more likely to be the rage aroused by the prospect of a stranger seeing for nothing that for which a fee is charged, I will not pretend to declare. You may come at any time over the ancient two-arched Gothic bridge from the road, and so through the gatehouse, and through that into the outer court, which is now a meadow, without being challenged: arriving at the further end at the farmhouse, beside which is a wicket-gate admitting into the cloister-garth. "Ring the Bell," curtly says a notice-board, with a small "Please" added, in hesitating manner, for politeness' sake; probably by some satirical visitor, wishful of imparting a lesson in manners.

The present explorer was one of those whom circumstances conspire to bring hither on Sunday, without the prospect of a return in the near future. He left a bicycle in the gatehouse and came across the meadow, where the base of the old Abbot's market-cross stands with a sycamore growing in the empty socket of its shaft, to the wicket-gate.

It being Sunday, he did not ring, but entered and sat down there in an ancient archway, in would-be peaceful and holy contemplation. What more Christian and Sabbath-like spirit than this would you have ? Better, I take it, than the occupation of most of the villagers at that same moment, reading the Sunday newspapers, filled (after the manner of the Sunday newspaper) with the raked-together garbage of the last seven days.

But this holy calm was not to continue. It was entirely owing to that bicycle. A strategist would have concealed it. Its presence under the archway of the gatehouse brought the peaceful interlude to an abrupt conclusion, as shall presently appear.

Within the space of an all too short minute or two there appeared two little girls through the wicket-gate, coming home to the farmhouse from a walk, or from Sunday school, evidently excited by the sight of that machine, and by the very obvious deduction that the owner of it must be somewhere near. " And very pretty it was," as Pepys might have put it, to see them questing about everywhere except in the right place, and not finding him, sitting there in the grateful shade quite close to them, and really easily to be seen, you know. And after all, it was the intruder himself who revealed his own presence, with the remark, " I suppose you are looking for the owner of that bicycle ? " Whereupon they ran away and there presently entered upon the scene an angry woman, with inflamed visage and furious

words ; with offensive epithets about " trippers," and the like. Outrageous !

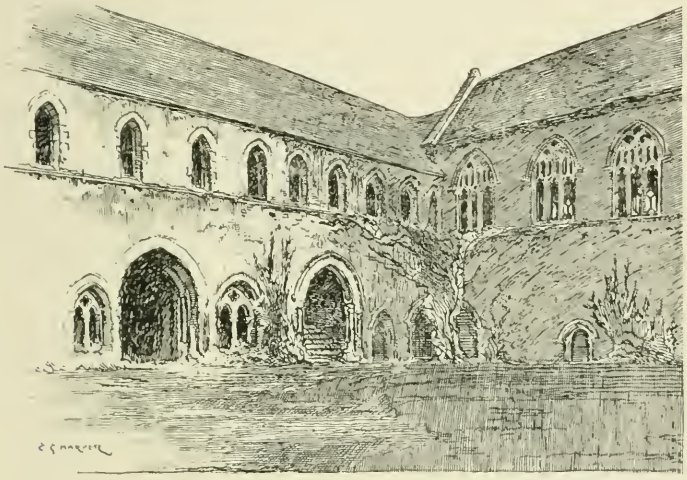
Now, to beat a leisurely and dignified retreat under such circumstances is difficult. You owe it to yourself not to be ignominiously routed in disorder, but to draw off your forces from the stricken field calmly and collectedly, inflicting losses upon the enemy, if possible. And then, you know, to be styled a " tripper," and by a fat farmer-woman ! Does that not demand retribution ?

Therefore, " Do you presume, woman, to call me a tripper ? " seemed the best retort : effective and injurious, and at the same time restrained and dignified.

" Woman ! " What a deadly offence, what a god-addressing-a-blackbeetle effect this has ! It produces rage of the foaming, abusive, incoherent order, in midst of which, with a cold-drawn, blighting smile, you retire, with the consciousness that the thing will rankle for days. But the incident renders a comparison of old times with new in Somerset unfavourable to the present age. In the olden days, before every historic spot or architectural rarity had become a show-place, resorted to by a constant stream of visitors, the farmer whose farm happened to be on the site of some ruined abbey would, as a rule, make the visitor courteously welcome at all times, in his homely fashion, and would indeed be pleased to see the rare strangers who came his way ; but in these times, now that excursionists are every-

where, and in great numbers, ruins have acquired a certain commercial value, and must be hedged about with restrictions.

But here we are in the twentieth century, and it were hopeless and foolish to wish ourselves back in the early years of the nineteenth ; for



THE REFECTORY, CLEEVE ABBEY.

not the most perfect examples of that old-time courtesy could recompense for other incidental discomforts.

Here, then, facing the road, across the little Gothic bridge spanning the Roodwater, stands the Gatehouse. Let us enter—it being week-day—beneath the ample arch of that mingled Decorated and Late Perpendicular building. The upper storey, the work of William Dovell,

the last Abbot, bears the hospitable Latin welcome :

> Porta patens esto
> Nulli claudaris honesto,

metrically rendered :

> Gate, open be ;
> To honest men all free.

but more literally translated, " Gate, be open ; and be closed to no honest man." It was a favourite threshold invitation with the Cistercians ; but the later corruption, avarice, and sloth that marked them, in common with other orders, led to a double meaning being fastened upon it, both in England and in France. The Latin construction easily admits of a cynical interpretation, figured for us by the still-surviving French punning proverb : " Faute d'un point Martin perdit son âne ; *i.e.* By the mistake of a full-stop, Martin lost his ass ; " the original Martin of this cryptic saw being the Abbot of Alne, who was so unscholarly that in setting up the honoured motto, he placed a full-stop after the word "nulli" ; thus making the phrase read scandalously,

> Gate opened be to none.
> Closed to the honest man.

That unfortunate Abbot's lack of learning caused the enraged people of the district, headed by rival churchmen, to demolish his Abbey.

But to return to the sea, at Blue Anchor, by way of Old Cleeve.

Past Washford—*i.e.* "Watchet-ford"—railway station, and down a leafy lane to the right hand, we come in a mile to the village of Old Cleeve; its pleasant rustic, vine-grown cottages commanding views of the beautiful bay between Blue Anchor and the bold promontory of North Hill, Minehead, from their bedroom windows in the heavily thatched roofs.

There is not much of Old Cleeve, but what there is, bears the impress of simplicity and innocence, not at all in unison with the scandalous rhyme:

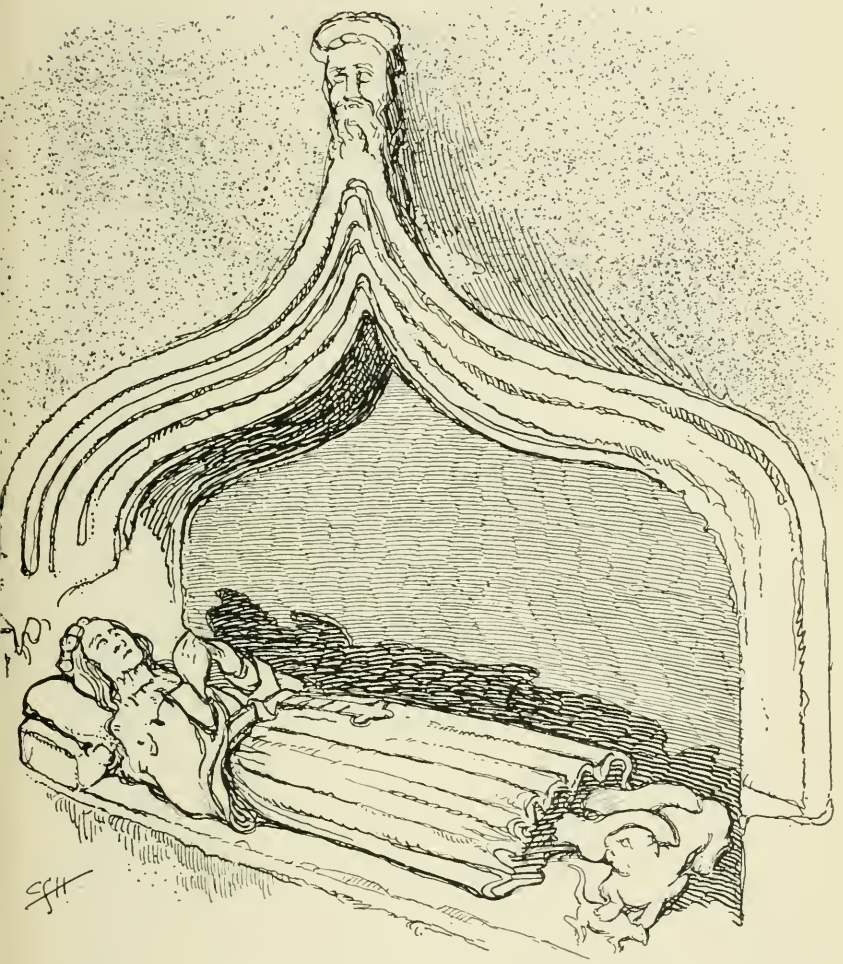
> There was a young fellow of Cleeve
> Who said, "It is pleasant to thieve!"
> So he spent all his time
> In commission of crime—
> Now he's out on a Ticket-of-Leave.

The church of Old Cleeve is of the usual fine Perpendicular character to which we grow accustomed in these parts; with the curious individual feature of a floor gradually, but most distinctly, ascending from the west end of the nave to the chancel. Here is an alms-box, dated 1634, and inscribed "Tob. 4. Pro. 19. Remember ye poore. Bee mercifvll after thy power. He that hath pitie vpon ye poore lendeth vnto the Lord."

In a recess contrived in the wall of the nave and surmounted by a boldly moulded ogee arch, finished off with a finial in the shape of a human face wearing a somewhat satanic expression of

countenance, is a recumbent effigy of a civilian of the fifteenth century. This, although blunted and damaged by time and ill-usage, was evidently a fine work in the days of its prime. The effigy has not been identified, and whether it be that of a merchant-prince, or some great local landowner, cannot be said; but the original was, at all events, if we may judge from the care evidently taken by the sculptor with the effigy, a person of importance. A peculiarly charming and dainty—almost a feminine—effect is given by the decorated fillet that encircles the long hair, and by the girdle around the waist; but what will most keenly arouse the interest and the speculation of those who examine the figure is the very striking little sculptured group, of a cat with one paw resting on a mouse, on which the feet of the effigy rest. Although the head of the cat is somewhat worn down, the group is still tolerably perfect, and the cat is seen to be looking up at the figure, as though seeking her master's approval.

The question visitors will naturally ask, "Has this representation of sculptured cat and mouse any particular meaning here?" at once arises; but no facts, or legends even, are available. It is curious to note, however, that Sir Richard Whittington—the famous "Dick Whittington," the hero of the "Dick Whittington and his Cat" story—was contemporary, or very nearly contemporary, with the unknown man represented here. It is not suggested that the



MYSTERIOUS EFFIGY AT OLD CLEEVE.

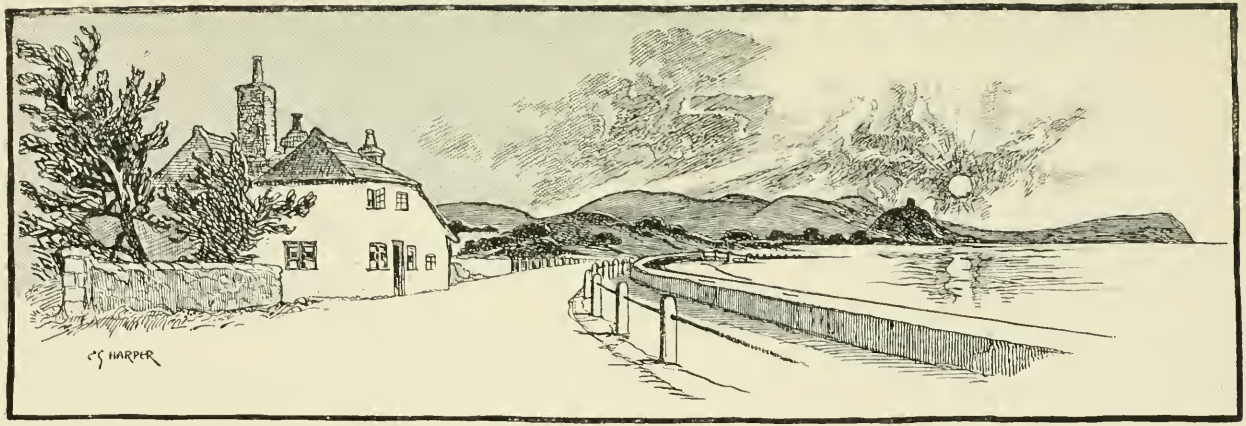
fact is more than a coincidence: but it is a curious one.

In the porch is an ancient, greatly timeworn

chest, with three locks and a slit in the lid, for the reception of "Peter's Pence" and other contributions. As the chest is about six feet in length and proportionably deep, it is evident that the expectations were not modest. Let us trust the faithful took the hint and contributed accordingly.

And so by delightful lanes to Blue Anchor, where the railway runs along the shore and has a station of that name. Blue Anchor station must in its time have misled many strangers, for where a railway station is, there one expects a town, or village, also. But here is a void, an emptiness, a vacuum. Only a solitary bay is disclosed before the astounded stranger's gaze. It is a noble bay, it is true, and commands lovely views of the great North Hill at Minehead, with Dunster nestling midway; and the sunsets are magnificent. But railway companies don't build railway stations merely for the convenience of those few people who would take a journey especially for sake of a view or a sunset; and it certainly seems as though the Great Western expected building developments here, long ago, and was still awaiting them. In short, all there is of Blue Anchor is an old inn of that name, not remotely suggesting a past intimately connected with smuggling, together with a cottage or two.

Unfortunately for the lover of an unspoiled sea-shore, a formal sea-wall has recently been built, to protect the marshes that here fringe



BLUE ANCHOR.

the bay from being drowned. The Somerset County Council built it, at a cost of some £30,000. Let us hope the Luttrells are properly grateful for this public work that so efficiently protects their lands.

CHAPTER XVIII

DUNSTER

The approach to Dunster from Blue Anchor, and through the village of Carhampton, is a progress of pleasure. Turner has left a picture of Dunster from Blue Anchor, but it is not one of his successes, and the reality is far more romantic than his representation. You see before you the Castle of Dunster, on its hill, the eighteenth-century tower of Coneygore, on its own particular eminence, and the great Grabbist Hill, disposing themselves in new groupings as you advance, and realise that England has not much finer to give.

Dunster, with much else in these districts, from Kilve to Minehead, belongs to the Luttrells, whose heraldic shield of a bend sable on a golden field, between six martlets—a " martlet " being a heraldic bird of the swallow species, without feet, unknown to ornithologists—is in consequence frequently to be noticed here. The Luttrell motto is *Quaesita marte tuenda arte* ; that is to say, " What has been gained by force of war should by skill be guarded." We may here perhaps detect the glimmerings of one of those puns of which the old heralds were so fond, in the similarity in sound

between "marte" and "martlet"; but it is not a favourable example.

By what feat of arms, then, the traveller naturally enquires, did the Luttrells obtain these lands? By none at all, for, as a matter of fact, they came to the family by purchase, and when the heirs of the vendor sought to prove the sale

CONEYGORE TOWER, AND ROAD INTO MINEHEAD.

illegal, it was by an action in a court of law, rather than by gage of battle, that they retained what they had bought. But it is well known that the family now owning the Luttrell lands are only Luttrells on the female side, and bear the name merely by adoption; Henry Fownes having in

1746 married Margaret Luttrell, heiress-general of these manors.

The history of Dunster begins with an entry in Domesday Book. There we learn that "Torre," as it is styled, was owned by a certain Aluric. Perhaps it were best to style that Saxon landowner un-certain Aluric, for that is all we hear of him. A mere mention by name in Domesday Book is, after all, no great thing. Thereafter it became chief among the properties of William de Mohun, from Moyun in Normandy, one of the Conqueror's liegemen in the red field of Hastings. The author of the "Roman de Rou" speaks of him as:

> Le viel Guillaume de Moion
> Ont avec li maint compagnon.

He was not, however, so elderly a warrior, but is thus described in order to distinguish him from his son. He became a very landed man in the West, with sixty-seven other far-flung manors in Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire, and Devonshire, including that of Tor Mohun, Torquay. But he established his headquarters here, and here he built the first castle of Torre, which soon afterwards is found referred to for the first time as "Dunestora," in the deed by which he, in 1100, gave the advowson of St. George's, Dunster, the fisheries of Dunster and Carhampton, the village of Alcombe, and the tenth part of his vineyards, ploughlands, markets, and flocks to the monks of St. Peter's Abbey at Bath.

William de Mohun the Second, son of this well-rewarded henchman of the Conqueror, played a turbulent part in the troubles that beset England during the war between Stephen and Queen Maud. He fought on behalf of Queen Maud; and the *Gesta Stephani*, which gives an account of these things from the point of view of King Stephen's adherents, does not fail to draw a highly unflattering portrait of him, in which he appears established, like some robber baron, at Dunster Castle, with a strong force of horse and foot; issuing therefrom to devastate the surrounding country; "sweeping it as with a whirlwind." The historian of these things proceeds to tell us that he was cruel and violent, firing the homes and pillaging the goods of the community indiscriminately. He appears, indeed, to have been one of those restless men of war, not uncommon in that era, who wanted trouble for its own sake, and when it came, cared little whether it was the property of friends or foes that he destroyed. "He changed a realm of peace and quiet, of joy and merriment, into a scene of strife, rebellion weeping, and lamentation," says the chronicler.

Queen Maud, on whose behalf he wrought so busily and with such devastation, created him —or he styled himself—"Earl of Somerset."

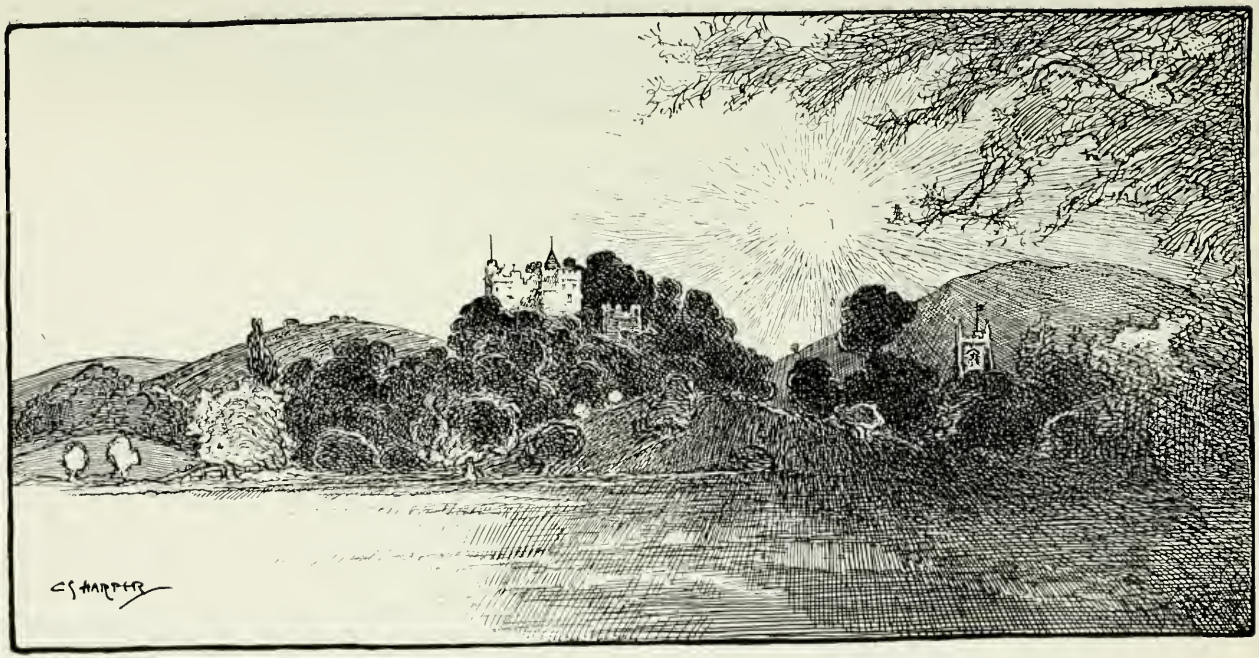
The historian continues:

"When these things were after a time reported to the King, he collected his adherents in great numbers and proceeded by forced marches, in order to check the ferocity of William. But

when he halted before the entrance to the Castle, and saw the impregnable defences of the place, inaccessible on one side where it was washed by the sea, and very strongly fortified on the other by towers and walls, by a ditch, and outworks, he altogether despaired of pressing on the siege, and, taking wiser counsel, he surrounded the Castle in full sight of the enemy, so that he might the better restrain them, and occupy the neighbouring country in security. He also gave orders to Henry de Tracy, a man skilled in war, and approved in the events of many different fights, that, acting in his stead, as he himself was summoned to other business, he should with all speed and vigour bestir himself against the enemy."

Henry accordingly, sallying forth from his own town of Barnstaple, so wrought with William de Mohun and his garrison that, if indeed he could not storm the castle, he could at any rate, coop within it that bold and fiery spirit, and so protect the neighbouring country. Tracy, in fact, did more. He captured a hundred and four horsemen in a single encounter, during one of those sallies from the castle by which de Mohun thought to break the force of the leaguer against him.

And so the claws of this tiger were cut, and himself rendered harmless until that time when the factious, assured at last that they were too well matched ever to bring the struggle to a decisive issue, made peace, and thus sent the unruly and restless back to an undesired state of order.



DUNSTER CASTLE.

We read incidentally, in those old accounts, of Dunster Castle being washed on one side by the sea. That passage places in a yet more picturesque setting the picturesque scene even now presented to the traveller; for where the road now goes past the level meadows on the way from Carhampton to Minehead, the sea then ebbed and flowed in a shallow bay, whose shores reached to the foot of the commanding hill on whose crest the castle turrets still loom up, majestically. Yet, beautiful in its wild original way though it may have been in those days, when the castle was a sea-fortress and the little town of Dunster something in the nature of a port, Dunster Castle in our own times, and on some evening of late summer, when the sun sets gloriously over the hills and irradiates the burnt-up grass to a golden tinge, affords a picture of surpassing beauty, viewed from the road to Minehead, across those level pastures.

The de Mohuns who succeeded the turbulent William of King Stephen's time make little show in the history of the place, and even that mid-fourteenth century John, Lord Mohun of Dunster, who was one of the original Knights of the Garter, is more notable to us for the doings of his wife, than for any action of his own. He married in 1350 Joan, daughter of Sir Bartholomew de Burghershe. This lady it was who, according to a legend, declared by serious antiquaries to have no real foundation, obtained from her husband the grant of as much common-land for the poor

of the town as she could walk barefoot : after the fashion of that Lady Tichborne who, although an invalid, crawled on hands and knees over an amazing acreage in one day.

With this Lord Mohun, the de Mohuns of Dunster came to an end, and the West of England presently witnessed the entire extinction of the family, root and branch ; or its gradual decline into obscurity through the growing poverty of landless collaterals who became absorbed by the middle-class, and survive here and there to this day as shopkeepers, and even as agricultural labourers, under the plebeian name of " Moon." As more peaceful and commercial times succeeded the era in which arms decided the fate of noble families, the fortunes of those who by any chance had lost their lands grew desperate. In the altered circumstances, when law and order had replaced brute force, the sharp sword was no longer a match for sharp wits. Hence the great rise in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of the trading class, to wealth, power, and honours.

But it was not precisely in this manner that the de Mohuns became alienated from the land. That John Lord Mohun of Dunster, who in 1350 married Joan Burghershe, had three daughters, but no sons. A courtier during the greater part of his career, he fell into the extravagant ways of those with whom he associated, and lived and died heavily in debt, and his widow, doubtless in want of ready money, sold Dunster to Lady Elizabeth Luttrell, *née* Courtenay, widow of Sir Andrew

Luttrell, of Chilton, Devon, for the sum of five hundred marks, equal to £3333 6*s.* 8*d.*, present value. The receipt given for this purchase-money is still a curious and cherished possession of the Luttrells of to-day. The low price at which Lady Mohun disposed of the property is accounted for by the fact that the purchaser was not to come into possession until after the vendor's death, which did not occur until 1404, thirty years after the date of this transaction. Lady Joan retired from the West when this sale was completed, and was much at Court, and in Kent and Sussex in those thirty years. The curious may find her tomb in the undercroft of Canterbury Cathedral, and may with some difficulty read there the invocation to the piety of the beholder : " Pour Dieu priez por l'ame Johane Burwasche qe fut Dame de Mohun."

Two of her daughters survived her : Elizabeth Countess of Salisbury, and Philippa, married thirdly to Edward Plantagenet, Duke of York. To her daughter Elizabeth she left a cross, which she had promised to the one she loved best, and a copy of the *Legenda Sanctorum*. Philippa had merely her blessing, and some choice red wine ; but her husband, the Duke of York, became the happy recipient, by bequest of his mother-in-law, of some improving literature, in the shape of a copy of the *Legenda*, and an illuminated book.

Lady Elizabeth Luttrell, the purchaser of Dunster, did not live to enjoy the property. She predeceased Lady Mohun, and the reversion

went to her son, Sir Hugh Luttrell, a distinguished soldier, Lieutenant of Calais, Governor of Harfleur, Seneschal of Normandy, and, holder of many other distinguished posts, much abroad on the King's service all his life. It was one thing to become legal owner of Dunster, and quite another to obtain actual possession, for the daughters of Lady Joan refused to give up the property, on the ground that Lady Mohun had no right to dispose of it; and law-suits resulted, in which Sir Hugh was at length victorious. It was during his lifetime that the castle, by now grown ancient, was rebuilt under the supervision of his son, John, who occupied Dunster during his father's long residence abroad.

The Luttrells took the Lancastrian side in the quarrels of Red Rose and White, and suffered severely for that partisanship; Sir James, who had been knighted for valour at the bloody battle of Wakefield, being mortally wounded at the battle of Barnet, 1471, and his property forfeited to the victorious Yorkists, who granted the Luttrell acres to the Earls of Pembroke. After the battle of Bosworth, however, fourteen years later, they obtained their own again, and held it uneventfully until the beginning of hostilities between Cavaliers and Roundheads, in 1642. Mr. George Luttrell, the then owner, garrisoned Dunster Castle for the Parliamentary party, and held it for a time successfully against the Marquess of Hertford, the Royalist commander in these parts, established at Minehead, who was satisfied, in view of the

formidable front made by this hilltop stronghold, in merely keeping a watch upon it, and preventing any offensive movement on the part of the garrison: thus—to use a modern military expression—"containing" the enemy. Luttrell, for his part, was satisfied at keeping the Royalists thus inactive and useless for offence elsewhere; each side thus "containing" the other: a not very stirring method of warfare. In the following year, in consequence of the sequence of Royalist successes in the West, Mr. Luttrell surrendered the castle, which was then held for three years for the King by Colonel Francis Windham. It was at this period that Prince Charles, afterwards Charles the Second, stayed here. The bedroom he then occupied is still known as "Prince Charles's." In those years the fortunes of the King declined, and rapidly grew desperate; until at last Dunster Castle became the sole outpost of the cause in Somerset. Finally, in 1645, it was resolved to reduce this remnant, and in November of that year a force was despatched from Taunton to besiege the Castle. The investing force was commanded by Blake, great on sea and on land, and by Sydenham, and a lengthy and stirring siege began. Both sides worked vigorously. Attack and defence proceeded on engineering lines; Blake's men advancing cautiously by trenches, mines, and batteries; the defenders pushing forth to meet them by the same mole-like methods. On February 5th, 1646, in midst of these laborious operations, when the garrison

had come near to being starved out, a column under Lord Hopton relieved them, and Blake's men were forced to retire from beneath the walls. He kept watch, however, upon Dunster, and in the meanwhile received reinforcements. At length, on April 19th, the sturdy Windham, convinced that, the King having lost everywhere else in the West, it would be futile to hold this one remaining post, surrendered. The victorious Parliament, careful to destroy those places that had held out against it, duly ordered the Castle of Dunster to be "slighted," otherwise to be blown up; but the order was not enforced, probably for the sufficient reason that the Luttrells, as we have seen, were themselves partisans of the popular party. The Parliament found Dunster, thus preserved, a place useful enough; for here during twelve months, from June 1650, was imprisoned that dauntless reformer and pamphleteer of those troubled times, William Prynne, who proved himself a scourge to foes and friends. He began, absurdly enough, as it seems to us in these days, by attacking "love-locks" and long hair worn by men, and short hair affected by women, with an excursus upon chin-wags and lip-whiskers; and proceeding by easy stages to a denunciation of stage-plays, religious controversy, and political bludgeoning. He was, in short, a born controversialist: the Universal Provider, so to say, of red-hot pamphlets, and generally left his opponents dead, figuratively speaking. A very grim person was William Prynne.

No one, it is quite safe to say, ever called him "Willie," and as for "Bill," that would have been an impossible familiarity with the stern-faced Puritan, even supposing that vulgar diminutive to have at that time been invented. By the way, have the vulgarian who originated "Bill," and the period of its origination, ever been traced? His opponents were not skilled in wordy warfare, but what they lacked in repartee and argument they fully made up for with the pillory, the whip, and the branding-irons, and they inflicted some particularly cutting rejoinders when they caused his ears to be shorn off. Thus deprived of his face-flaps, many a man would have rested from his pamphleteering, but Prynne persisted, and earned thereby the particular attention of Laud, the High Church Archbishop of Canterbury, who procured his branding on the cheeks with the letters, "S. L." for "seditious libeller." With that iron humour that was all his own, Prynne referred to this horrible facial disfigurement as "Stigmata Laudis."

The loss of his aural attachments, together with the addition of this undecorative poker-work, and a fine of £5,000, so embittered Prynne that he for ever after pursued Laud with an undying hatred, and had a prominent hand in hounding the Archbishop to public trial and execution, in those days when his fellow-Puritans had obtained the upper hand. Can we honestly blame that intense malevolence he directed at the insidious Romaniser, who would have imprisoned

men's consciences again, and who did not hesitate, in procuring these savage mutilations of his opponents, thus to disfigure the image of God!

The fearless Prynne, imprisoned here awhile, passed the time of his captivity in looking over and arranging the Luttrell family papers. He was himself a Somerset man, and his detention in this castle could not have been very unpleasant, for it was then as much residence as fortress.

The fortress built here by the first of the de Mohuns ceased to exist when the castle was rebuilt about 1417 by Sir Hugh, the first of the Dunster Luttrells. The keep of that Norman place of strength was situated on the crest of the hill, now clear of buildings and used as a bowling green. The spot was once known as St. Stephen's, from an Early English chapel dedicated to the martyr having stood here.

Nothing earlier exists in the buildings of Dunster Castle than the great inner gatehouse, half-way up to the hilltop, now covered, together with the massive curtain-walls, with a thick growth of ivy. This was the work of Reginald Mohun, who died in 1257. The fine outer gateway, built during the enlargement under Sir Hugh, bears sculptured shields with the arms of Luttrell and Courtenay, Sir James Luttrell having, like his great-grandfather Andrew, married into that family.

The military works of Sir Hugh were in their turn remodelled, for the purpose of converting the castle into a residence, rather than a fortress,

DUNSTER; CASTLE AND YARN MARKET.

by George Luttrell, in the first years of the seventeenth century. Much of the Renaissance decorative plaster-work, particularly that of the Hall, belongs to this period. The havoc wrought by the siege of 1646 was fully repaired, and the Castle yet again remodelled as a residence, by Francis Luttrell. The grand staircase, elaborately and beautifully carved in oak with representations of hunting scenes, is of this period.

Curiously painted ancient leather hangings, ancient furniture, and old paintings that have been in the Luttrell family for many generations, abound in the castle, which is, it may be added, the "Stancy Castle" of Thomas Hardy's "A Laodicean," although it should be still further added that it is by no means well characterised in those pages.

Additions were again made in 1764; but a general overhauling and rebuilding under the direction of Salvin was undertaken by Mr. George Fownes Luttrell in 1854.

This beautiful and interesting old place is generally to be seen by visitors on Saturdays, but not without a good many restrictions readily to be understood in an historic castle which is at the same time a residence. Thus, you are not entitled, by the purchase of a sixpenny ticket at the confectioner's in the High Street, to wander at will through the beautifully wooded grounds. A guide meets strangers at the lodge-gates, and conducts them. It is not the ideal way, and one would fain linger awhile on the south terrace,

by that fine lemon-tree which climbs the wall and brings its lavish crop of fruit to perfect ripeness in this soft climate ; or would if possible dwell long upon the views in one direction and another ; down upon the growing town of Minehead, or across to Blue Anchor and the Holms, set in mid-Channel, with fleeting glimpses of the Welsh mountains.

The great church of Dunster, whose choir was in ruins until Mr. Luttrell undertook its restoration, about 1856, contains tombs of the Luttrells and others, and a very fine rood-screen. It is quite in character with the legendary and often muddled character of local history in England that the altar-tomb and alabaster effigies of Sir Hugh Luttrell and his wife, 1428, the first Luttrells of Dunster, were until recent times always shown as those of Sir John and Lady Mohun.

A curious example of architectural adaptation is to be seen here, in a fifteenth-century enlargement of an Early English doorway, by which the jambs were cut back for some two-thirds of its height, leaving the upper part as before. This "shouldered" arch, as architects would technically style it, forms a striking object.

One of the finest views of Dunster church is that in which, looking from the south, you get the great tower rearing majestically above the churchyard, and in the foreground the ancient alcove in the churchyard wall, formerly the home of the stocks.

Some sweet chimes play from the old tower,

at one, five and nine p.m., daily ; with a change of tune for every day of the week. Sunday, " O, Rest in the Lord " ; Monday, " Drink to Me only with Thine Eyes " ; Tuesday, " Home, Sweet

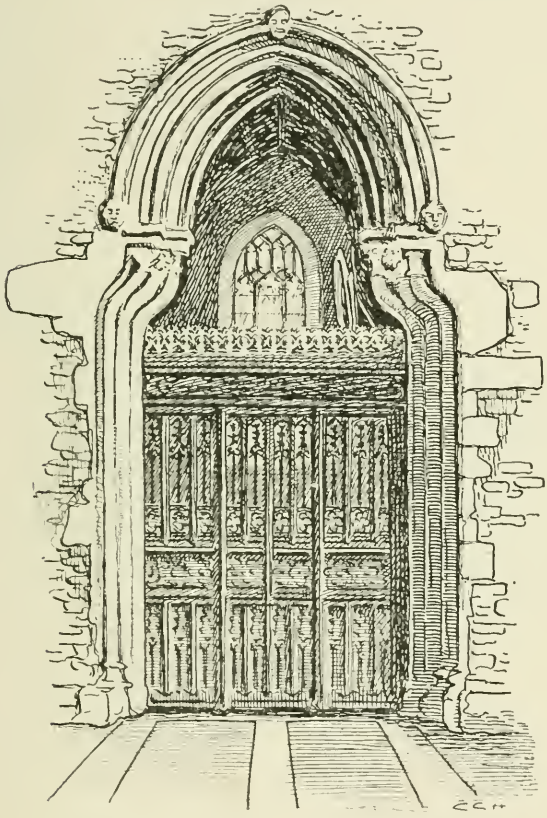
DUNSTER CHURCH, FROM THE SOUTH, SHOWING OLD ALCOVE IN CHURCHYARD WALL FOR THE STOCKS.

Home " ; Wednesday, " Disposer Supreme " ; Thursday, " The Blue Bells of Scotland " ; Friday, " The old 113th Psalm " ; and Saturday, " Hark, hark ! my Soul."

Not many visitors climb to the belfry chamber of Dunster church: the wealth of interest in Dunster makes too great a demand upon their energies for every corner to be explored; and as a rule, the interior of one belfry is very like that of another. There are the usual pendant bell-ropes, a few chairs, two or three oil lamps with tin reflectors, and various notice-boards of the Incorporated Society of Bell-Ringers, setting forth the appalling number of "grandsire triples" and "bob-majors" rung by those misguided persons who are so deaf to music that they consider bell-ringing to be harmonious. Education cannot be yet very far advanced while the barbarism of ringing church-bells for an hour at a stretch can be permitted these few fanatics, to the discomfort of the many; and justice and consistency are outraged at the ringing of the perambulating muffin-man's tinkling bell being held an illegal nuisance, while tons of heavy metal are permitted to be set in motion in church-towers, to the misery of villagers and townsfolk, who have, apparently, no legal remedy.

The bell-ringers take themselves with an absurd seriousness, which has not nowadays the least excuse. The exercise may have been accounted a useful and a pious one when bell-ringing was supposed to exorcise devils, or at the very least of it, to remind the faithful that the hour of prayer was come; but now that clerical advanced critics of the Scriptures themselves deny the existence of the Devil himself and all his

imps, and impugn the inspired character of the Bible, and now that every one can afford a watch and ascertain the hour for himself, the greater part



CURIOUS ARCHWAY, DUNSTER CHURCH.

of the church bells in this country could be broken up and sold for old metal, to the profit of the church, and the joy of the laity.

A battered, and now in parts barely legible,

old board hangs in the belfry of Dunster church, showing how very seriously these ringers have always taken themselves. Somewhat similar versified rules may be occasionally found in various places throughout the country :

You that in Ringing take delight
Be pleased to draw near ;
These Articles you must observe
If you mean to ring here.

And first, if any Overturn
A Bell, as that he may,
He Forthwith for that only Fault
In Beer shall Sixpence pay

If anyone shall Curse or Swear
When come Within the door,
He then shall Forfit for that Fault
As mentioned before.

If anyone shall wear his Hat
When he is Ringing here,
He straightway then shall Sixpence pay
In Cyder or in Beer.

If anyone these Articles
Refuseth to Obey,
Let him have nine strokes of the Rope,
And so depart away.

It will be observed that the fines inflicted were applied to the purchase of beer and cider, and no doubt the misdemeanours were invented for the purpose of providing a constant supply of drink to the thirsty ringers. We may, perhaps, dimly envisage the wrath of the rest when one of their number, having offended, refused to pay his

sixpence. "Nine strokes of the rope" were not too bad for him who refused to contribute towards quenching their thirst; and they were probably laid on with a will!

Prominent in the picturesque street of the quiet old townlet is the Yarn Market, a stout, oak-framed building, quaintly roofed, whose name recalls the time when Dunster was a cloth-weaving

THE "NUNNERY," OR "HIGH HOUSE," DUNSTER.

town, producing kerseymeres and goods named after the place of origin, "Dunsters." It was built in 1609, by George Luttrell. The initials of another George Luttrell, his nephew, and the date 1647 are to be seen on the weather-vane; evidence of the repairs effected after the siege of 1646.

The "Luttrell Arms," a famous hostelry, noted alike for its good cheer and for its interesting architectural details, stands opposite the Yarn

Market. Legends, all too often, but by no means always, picturesque lies, have it that this noble fifteenth-century building was originally a " town house " of the Abbots of Cleeve ; and they may in this case well tell us truly, for the massive carved-oak windows of the kitchen, looking on to the little courtyard, have a distinctly ecclesiastical feeling. But whoever it was owned the place, he was at pains to make the entrance-porch defensible, as may yet be seen in the arrow-slits contrived in the stonework on either side.

The so-called " Oak Room " is perhaps less clerical in effect, but is nobly timbered, with oak hammer-beam roof in three bays. A curious early seventeenth-century mantelpiece in plaster-work, with hideous figures on either side, displays as central feature a medallion relief representing the classic story of Actæon torn to pieces by his dogs, or, this being a hunting country, shall we say his hounds ? It is a very small and thin Actæon, and they are very large hounds that have got him down and are urgently seeking some meat on him.

Dunster, as already hinted, is a place not readily exhausted, nor lightly to be hurried through. Curious old houses, notably the so-called " High House," await inspection, and below the Castle, not always found by hurrying visitors, is the rustic old Castle Mill, with an overshot and an undershot waterwheel, side by side, tucked away from casual observation beneath tall trees.

CHAPTER XIX

MINEHEAD, NEW AND OLD—SELWORTHY—THE HORNER

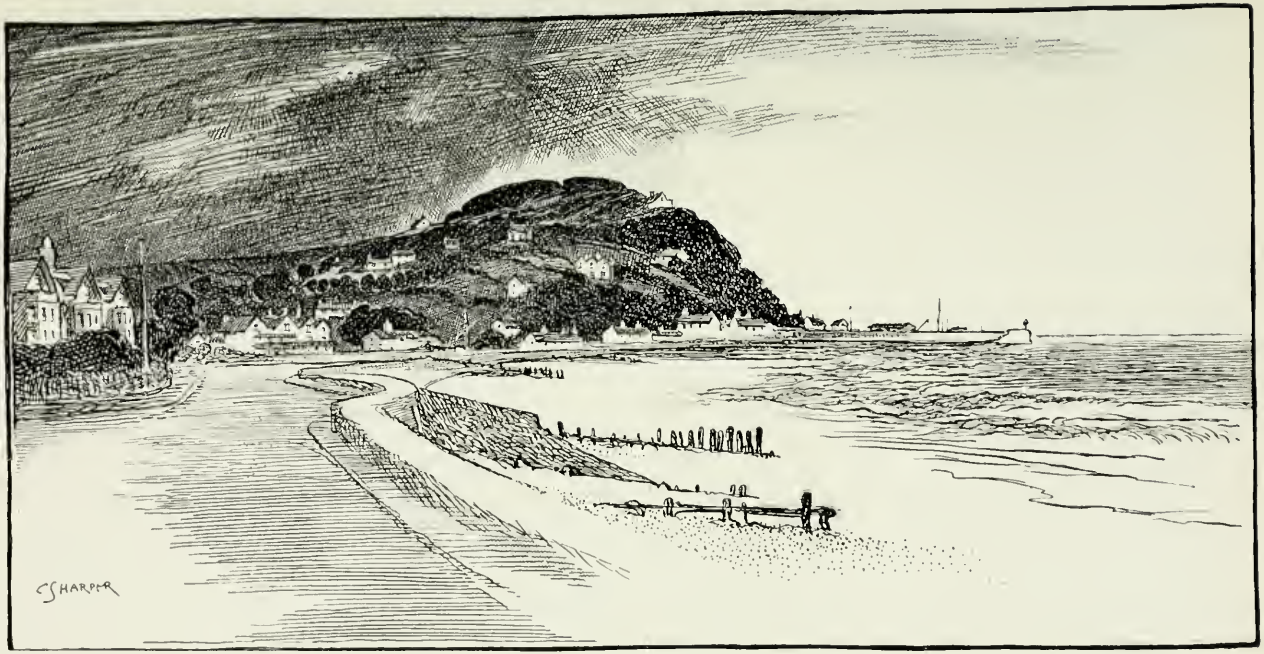
Scarce two miles distant from Dunster is Minehead, the hamlet of Alcombe lying between the two. Minehead, a group of three so-called "towns," Quay Town, Lower Town, and Upper Town, occupies a position on the gently curving flat shore sheltered on the West by the bold, abrupt headland of North Hill, rising to a height of 843 feet. North Hill is so striking a feature in all views of the town, that one comes unconsciously to regard it as the only typical outstanding feature of the place. It is, so far as pictures go, Minehead. A noble hill it is, with the old quay-side houses of the original fisher-village and ancient little port nestling beneath it. Immemorially a swelling green hillside, seamed and lined irregularly with hedgerows roughly into a chessboard pattern, it is distressing nowadays to find it being studded with villas and scarred with roads.

For to this complexion has Minehead come at last; development into a seaside resort. But a few years since, and here you had a scattered, unspoiled village. To-day, by favour of the

Luttrells, who own the land, and because the railway is handy, the terminus station being, in fact, on the beach, the builder is walking, splay-footed, all over it, and hotels have arisen on the front, and there is a bandstand, there are seaside "entertainers," and there are pickpockets among the crowds thus being "entertained"; with the result that numerous visitors have to remain in pawn at their lodgings until such time as they receive fresh supplies. This it is to be up-to-date! Among other up-to-date doings is the covering of the roads with asphalte, so that visitant motor-cars shall not stir up the dust; the result being that the roads so treated have an evilly dirty appearance and a worse stink. They look, and probably are, dangerous to health.

The old scattered Quay Town, Lower Town, and Upper Town, with their time-honoured cob-walled, whitewashed cottages, are being surely enmeshed together in an upstart network of new roads and uncharacteristic villas that might be in suburban London, rather than in Somerset; and the queer old Custom House, built in like manner on the Quay, and a little larger than a tool-shed, has been wantonly destroyed to make an approach to a pleasure pier, built in an impossible situation, so that visitors are pleased not to go upon it. So much—and more than enough too—of modern Minehead.

History-books tell us of strange doings in the old town. Thus in 1265, on a Sunday, the wild Welsh, under one William of Berkeley, came

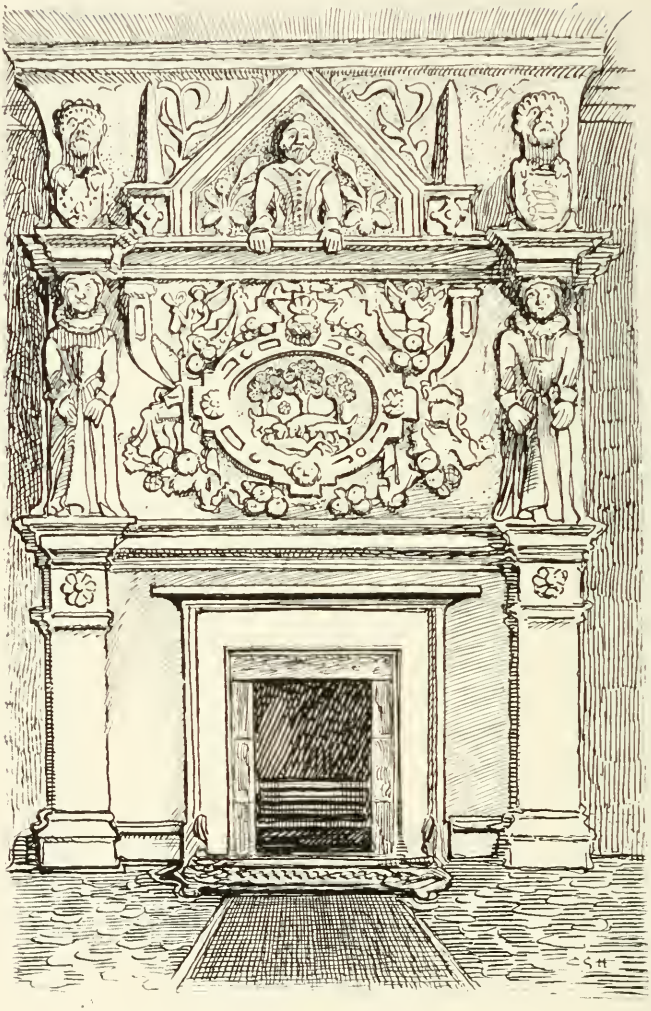


MINEHEAD.

across Channel very numerously and pillaged the surrounding country before a force could be despatched to deal with them. The reckoning was perhaps not a ready one, but it seems to have been complete ; the Constable of Dunster, one Adam of Gurdon, meeting and defeating them and driving them and their captain into the sea, wherein those who had not perished by the sword were drowned.

In olden times this was the seat of a not inconsiderable trade. Woollens were exported hence, and a large business was done in herrings sent to Mediterranean ports, which bought annually some 4,000 barrels. Hence the ancient armorial bearings of Minehead ; a sailing ship and a woolpack.

A curious incident in the annals of Minehead in days of old is that of the furious onslaught of the Church upon an unfortunate lad, a native of the place, who, sailing in a ship afterwards captured by Turkish pirates, was taken prisoner, and his life spared on condition that he embraced the Mohammedan religion. The desirability of life, and the practical certainty of this youthful sailor that one religion was as good as another, when a choice was offered between death and the acceptance of a new creed, may perhaps be readily understood. But the youth's refusal to add himself to the noble army of martyrs outraged the susceptibilities of the flatulent divines of the period, who, when he at last returned home and told his story, made so great an affair of it that



SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY MANTEL, "LUTTRELL ARMS" INN.

nothing would properly serve the occasion but a public recantation of error. We may, therefore,

vividly picture to ourselves that scene in Minehead church on Sunday, March 16th, 1627, when the more or less penitent, but certainly very frightened and astonished, lad was had in front of the pulpit, before the whole congregation, and, standing there in the Turkish breeches in which he had returned home, made to listen to the windy discourse of the Reverend Mr. Edward Kellet, who preached the sermon afterwards printed under the title of *A Return from Argier*. We may presume "Algiers" to be meant; but early seventeenth-century folk were more than a little uncertain in these matters. The central, harrowing fact of this occasion was, however, the length of that homily, which fills seventy-eight closely printed pages, and must therefore have occupied considerably over an hour in delivery. This is the manner of it, as set forth by the printer and published and sold in Paternoster Row for the edification of the godly:

"A Return from Argier: A Sermon preached at Minhead, in the County of Somerset, the 16th of March, 1627, at the re-admission of a Relapsed Christian into our Church. By Edward Kellet, Doctor of Divinity."

For the benefit of purchasers in London and elsewhere, who were not acquainted with the circumstances, the following explanation was made to preface the sermon:—

"A Countryman of ours goinge from the *Port* of Mynhead in Sommerſetſhire, bound for the ſtreights, was taken by Turkiſh Pyrats, and

made a ſlave at Argier, and liuing there in ſlauerie, by frailty and weakneſſe, forſooke the Chriſtian Religion, and turned Turke, and liued ſo ſome yeares; and in that time ſeruing in a Turkish ſhip, which was taken by an Englishman of warre, was brought backe againe to Mynhead, where being made to vnderſtand the grieuouſneſſe of his Apoſtacy, was very penitent for the ſame, and deſired to be reconciled to the Church, into which he was admitted by the authority of the Lord Bishop of that Dioces, with aduiſe of ſome great and learned Prelates of this Kingdome and was enioyned pennance for his Apoſtacy: and at his admiſſion, and performance thereof, theſe two Sermons were Preached the third Sunday in Lent, Anno 1627, one in the Forenoone, the other in the afternoone."

Jeremy 3. 22. "Return, ye backsliding Children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God."

The amount of pedantic verbiage in the Reverend Mr. Kellet's hour-long discourse is really appalling. That his congregation comprehended even the half of it is not to be supposed, and that the "penitent" himself but dimly understood what all the trouble was about may easily be imagined. But there can, at any rate, be no manner of doubt that the Doctor of Divinity enjoyed himself very much on this occasion: thundering forth denunciations barbed with quotations from musty theological works and fortified

by apposite texts, which he must most laboriously have raked together; for those were the days before Cruden's and other Concordances to the Scriptures had come into being. I will be more merciful to my readers than was Kellet to his congregation, and pretermit the most part of his sententious phrases and his excerpts from the patriarchs. But let the following stand as a taste of his quality.

"You," said he, pointing a scornful figure at the baggy-breeched penitent standing there, "you whom God suffered to fall, and yet of His infinite mercy vouchsafed graciously to bring home, not only to your country and kindred, but to the profession of your first faith and to the Church of Sacraments again; let me say to you (but in a better hour) as sometime Joshua to Achan: 'Give glory to God, sing praises to Him who hath delivered your soul from the nethermost hell.' When I think upon your Turkish attire, that embleme of apostacy and witness of your wofull fall, I do remember Adam and his figge-leave breeches; they could neither conceal his shame, nor cover his nakedness. I do think vpon David clad in Saul's armour and his helmet of braſſe. 'I cannot goe with theſe,' saith David. How could you hope in this unsanctified habit to attain Heaven? How could you clad in this vnchriſtian weede; how could you, but with horror and aſtoniſhment thinke on the white robe of the innocent Martyrs which you had lost? How could you goe in theſe rewards of iniquity

and guerdons of apoſtacie ? and with what face could you behold your ſelfe and others ? I know you were young. So was Daniel and the three Children : ſo were Diofcurus the Confeſſor, and Ponticus, the Martyr : adde (if you pleaſe) English Mekins, who all at fifteen yeares of age enured manfully whatſoever the furie of the perſecutors pleaſed to inflict vpon them."

The preacher then proceeded to remark :

" We are bound without failing to resist unto the death. You who go down to the sea in ships, and occupy your business in great waters, are reckoned by Pittacus as neither amongst the dead nor the living. The grave is always open before your face, and only the thickness of an inch exists between you and eternity."

Altogether, the lot of the seafaring community was revealed to this Minehead congregation in an entirely new light. They had never heard of Pittacus before, and had really, you know, fancied themselves alive, and not in the dreadful *tertium quid* pictured by that classical philosopher.

Time was also when Minehead possessed a ghost, but that was long ago. It is now going on for nearly three hundred years since this malignant spectre was finally discredited, and the up-to-date circumstances of the place scarce admit the possibility of a successor. Sir Walter Scott, in his notes to "Rokeby," tells us about this apparition, which was (or was reputed to be) that of a Mrs. Leakey, an amiable old widow lady of the

little seaport, who died in 1634. She had an only son, a shipowner and seafaring man of the place, who drove a considerable trade with Waterford and other ports of the South of Ireland. She was in life of such a cheery and friendly disposition, and so acceptable a companion to her friends that they were accustomed to say to her and to each other what a pity it was so amiable and good-natured a woman must, in the usual course nature, be at last lost to an admiring circle in particular, and in general to a world in which her like was seldom met. To these flattering remarks she used to reply that, whatever pleasure they might now find in her company, they would not greatly like to see her, and to converse with her, after death.

After her inevitable demise, she began to appear to various persons, both by day and night : sometimes in her house and at others in the fields and lanes. She even haunted the sea. The cause of this postmortem restlessness appears to have been a small matter of a necklace which had fallen into hands she had not intended ; and her dissatisfaction with this state of affairs entirely changed her once suave disposition. One of her favourite ghostly fancies was to appear upon the quay and call for a boat, much to the terror of the waterside folk. Her son, however, was the principal mark of her vengeance, for her chief delight was to whistle up a wind whenever the unfortunate son's ships drew near to port. He suffered, in consequence, so greatly from

shipwreck that he soon became a ruined man. So apparently credible a person as the curate of Minehead saw the spook, and believed, as also did her daughter-in-law, a servant, and numerous others. In fact, Minehead in general placed entire confidence in the supernatural nature of "the Whistling Ghost"; and it was not altogether

QUIRKE'S ALMSHOUSES.

reassured by the finding of a commission that sat to enquire upon the matter, presided over by the Bishop of Bath and Wells. The finding was "Wee are yet of opinion and doe believe that there never was any such apparition at all, but that it is an imposture, devise, and fraud for some particular ends, but what they are wee know not."

There are still some quaint objects, and odd

nooks and corners in Minehead. Among these an alabaster statue of Queen Anne (deceased some time since) is prominent in the principal street: but the local experts in the art of how not to do anything properly have just enshrined it in a clumsy stone alcove affair that not only serves the intended office of shielding the statue from the weather, but also most efficiently obscures it. This figure was the work of Bird, author of the original statue of Queen Anne in front of St. Paul's Cathedral, and was presented by Sir Jacob Banks to the town in 1719, as some sort of recognition of the honour he had for sixteen years enjoyed of representing Minehead in nine successive Parliaments, by favour of the powerful local Luttrell interest, he having in 1696 married the widow of Colonel Francis Luttrell. The statue was originally placed in the church, and the churchwardens' accounts tell us, in this wise, how it was received:

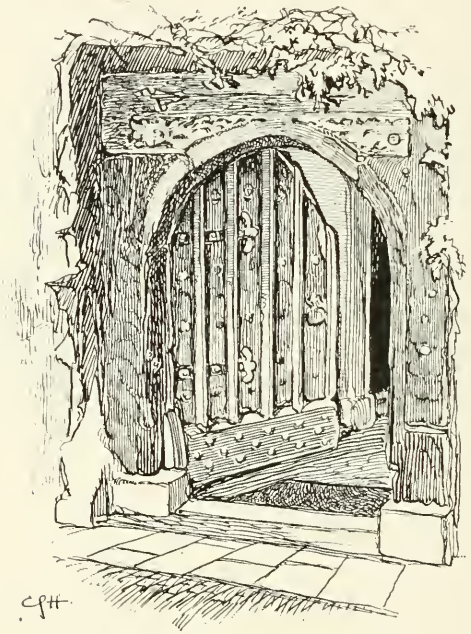
	s.	d.
Ringing when the Queen's effigies was brought to the Church	7	6
Paid for beer for the men that brought in the Queen's effigies into the Church	2	6

The Quirke almshouses, in Market House Lane, form a pretty nook. Their origin is sufficiently told on the little engraved brass plate that is fixed over the central door:

Robert Qvirck, sonne of James Qvirck
bvilt this howse ano: 1630 and
doth give it to the vse of the poore

of this parish for ever and for better
maintenance I doe give my two
inner sellers at the Inner End of the key
and cvrssed bee that man that shall
convert it to any other vse then to
the vse of the poore 1630.

Then follow the representation of a three-



DOORWAY OF THE MANOR OFFICE.

masted, full-rigged ship of the period, and the concluding lines :

God's providence
Is my Inheritance
R Q
E

MINEHEAD CHURCH.

The shaft of an ancient cross stands at one end of this row of cottages.

In midst of Minehead, now overshadowed by tall business premises, painfully like those to be seen any day in London, stands a charming old building, long past used as the Manor Office.

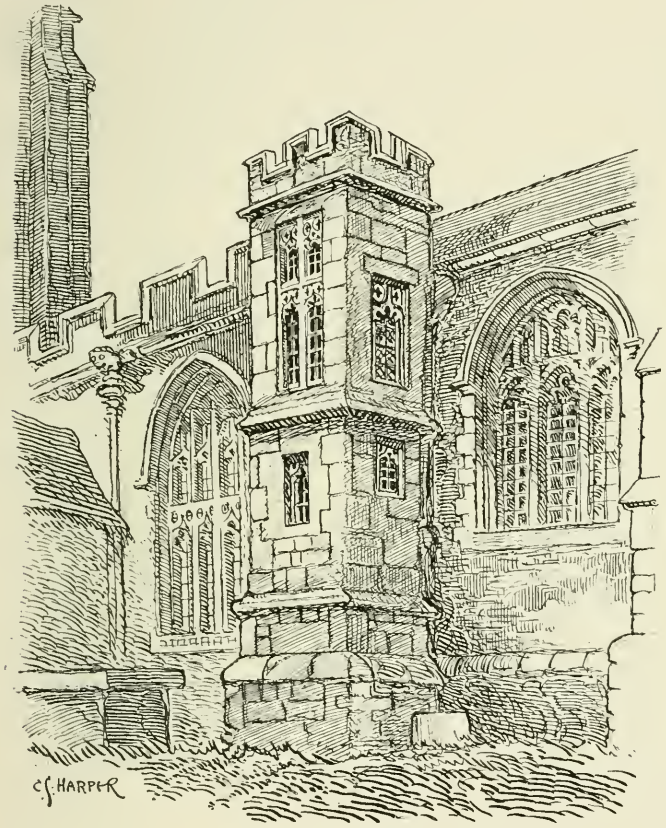
THE MANOR OFFICE, MINEHEAD.

The original use of the building, which appears to be of the fifteenth century, is unknown, and perhaps hardly even to be guessed at. The walls, of red sandstone, are immensely thick and stoutly buttressed, with oak-framed windows of semi-ecclesiastical design, still displaying traces of rich carving.

Old customs survive at Minehead, in a half-hearted way, and not perhaps from any natural spontaneous joyousness, but because there is something to be made out of them. This does not, however, apply to the burning of the ashen faggot on the domestic hearth on Christmas Eve, and but partially to the "worslers"—*i.e.* "wassailers"—who every January 17th visit neighbouring orchards, and with song and dance invoke a good crop of apples in the forthcoming season. But weddings at the old parish church still form an excuse for levying tribute, and those who have attended generally discover their return barred until they have rendered the wherewithal for drinks round.

Chief among the town celebrations is that of the Hobby Horse, surviving from a remote antiquity. It takes place annually, on the first three days of May, and assumes the shape of a gaudily caparisoned What-is-It, escorted by fishermen and fisher-lads, playing on drum and concertina, with an obbligato of money-box rattling. We have styled the Hobby Horse as above for the sufficient reason that it is not only utterly unlike anything equine, but with an equal conclusiveness unlike anything else on earth; being just a draped framework, hung with gaily coloured ribbons, from the midst of which rises a something intended for a capped head. The human mechanism that actuates this affair may be guessed at from the great boots that ever and again are to be seen protruding from it.

This is a survival of more simple times, and seems a little out of the picture in the sophisticated streets of modern Minehead. Rural customs,



ROOD-LOFT TURRET, MINEHEAD.

outside the radius of the town, wear a more natural appearance.

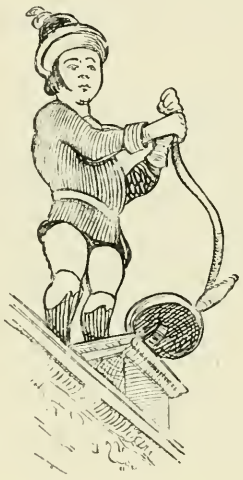
The ancient church of Minehead, the parish church of St. Michael, stands as do most churches

dedicated to that saint, on a hilly site. It is in Upper Town, half way up North Hill, and quite remote, thanks be, from the recent developments down below. Here the ancient white-faced cottages remain, and the steep steps that form the road, and here you feel that you are come again into the Somerset of pre-railway times. The church is chiefly of the Perpendicular period. On the tower, rather too high for their details to be easily made out without the aid of glasses, are sculptured panels representing St. Michael weighing souls, with the Virgin Mary on one side and the Devil on the other contending for possession, by pressing down the beam of the scales ; and a group of God the Father, holding a crucified Christ. A rich projecting bay filled with windows forms an unusual feature of the south side of the church. It is the staircase turret of the rood screen, and was designed in this fashion and filled with windows, it is said, for the purpose of showing a light at night-time for fishermen making the harbour. No beacon is shown now, but it is stated that fishermen still speak of "picking up the church lights" as they make their way home. At the same time, it is only right to say that, from personal observation, it seems impossible that the windows or the turret could ever have been visible from the sea. They look out rather in a landward direction, if anything, towards Dunster. But on the opposite side of the church there remains an inscription in Old English characters, somewhat decayed, by which

it is evident that the well-being of the neighbourhood was near the hearts of these church folk :

We . prey . to . John . and . M(ary)
send . our . neyburs . safte.

The interior of the church is very fine, with the usual rich rood-screen we come to expect in these parts. It is possible to ascend the staircase-turret and walk along the site of the rood-loft, which was indeed until 1886, when the church was restored, occupied during service by school-children. Here is preserved a queer little clock-jack figure, removed from the tower. The entrance to the chapel of St. Lawrence from the chancel is by an archway curiously framed in wood, instead of stone. Various relics, in the shape of old books and Bibles, a carved-oak late fifteenth-century chest, and some brasses of the Quirke family (among whom one notices the oddly named "Izott," wife of John Quirke, mariner, 1724) reward the visitor.

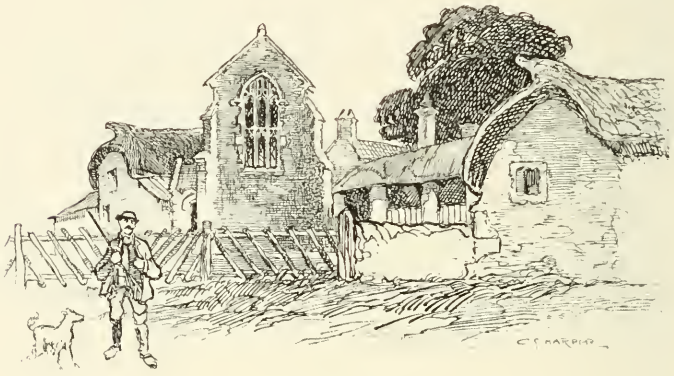


THE CLOCK JACK, MINEHEAD CHURCH.

This way, uphill, past the old church, is the pleasantest exit from Minehead, on the way to Porlock, but it is by no means the usual or the

easiest one, as the stranger will perceive when he is reduced to enquiring the proper choice among several roads that presently confront him.

"Y'ant coom up yur to get to Parlock?" asked an old rustic cottage woman of the present writer, with some astonishment. Being reassured that one really knew this to be a very indirect route, she abandoned the sarcasm she was prepared with, and was reduced to satire on visitors in



LYNCH CHAPEL.

general. "*Some* on 'em doan' niver think of asking the way. They jest goos arn, an' then they goos wrong. I often larfs in me sleeve at 'em, I do."

Saucy puss!

Yes. I suspect the simple countryfolk enjoy many a sly laugh at visitors, quite unsuspected.

To Selworthy, over North Hill, is a rugged way, of narrow woodland lanes. Selworthy, as its name sufficiently indicates, is a village amid

the woods ; woods around it, above and below ; the woodlands belonging to the Aclands of Holnicote—*i.e.* " Hollen-cot," or holly-cot,—that seat lying down beside the main road to Porlock. Here are ancient oaks and other trees, and more recent plantations that have now matured and clothed the hillsides with fir and larch. These were planted by that Sir Thomas Acland who died, aged 89, in 1898. A wild region is that of Sel-

PACKHORSE BRIDGE, ALLERFORD.

worthy Beacon, rising to a height of 933 feet, above the village.

The village itself is a small and scattered one, with a large and handsome church, neighboured by a monastic tithe-barn. A " Peter's Pence " chest, hinting, by its size and iron bands and triple locks, great expectations, is one of the objects of interest here. But tourists from Minehead and Porlock do not come chiefly to see the church, beautifully restored with the aid of Acland gold though it be. It is rather the fame of the pretty thatched cottages bordering a village green that

attracts them. These owe their origin to the late Sir Thomas Dyke Acland, who built them as homes for servants grown old in his employ, and pensioned off by him.

The road down from Selworthy to Porlock passes the little river Horner and commands views on the left hand up to the purple hills of Exmoor, up to Cloutsham, where the wild red deer couch, and the great heights of Dunkery, Easter Hill, and Robinow. To the left lies the hamlet of Horner, so-called from the river, "Hwrnr," = "the Snorer," snoring, as the Anglo-Saxons are supposed to have fancifully likened the sound of its hoarse purring, over the boulders and amid the gravel-stones that strew its shallow woodland course. Here, amid the woods, you may find, not far from a comparatively modern road-bridge, an ancient pack-horse bridge flung steeply across the stream. At Allerford is another pack-horse bridge.

CHAPTER XX

PORLOCK—BOSSINGTON—PORLOCK WEIR

A SUDDEN drop into the vale of Porlock tilts the traveller neck and crop into the village street. You realise, when come to the village, that it stands in a flat, low-lying space giving upon a distant bay ; a bay distant just upon one mile. Once upon a time—a time so distant that history places no certain date against it—the village immediately faced the sea, and indeed took its name, which means " the enclosed port," from the fact of the harbour running up to this point, deeply embayed between the enfolding hills. Rich meadows now spread out where the sea once rolled ; but the waves might surge there even now were it not for the continued existence of that great rampart of stones flung up in the long ago by the sea, which thus by its own action shut itself out from its ancient realm.

Porlock has for " ever so long " been a show place, and, like any other originally modest beauty, has at last become a little spoiled by praise, and more than a little sophisticated. We do not

greatly esteem the self-conscious beauty, especially when she paints.

The charm of Porlock has been, and is being, still more sadly smirched by expansion and by that increasing intercourse with the world which has taken the accent off the tongues of the villagers, replaced the weirdly cut provincial clothes of an earlier era with garments of a more modish style, and brought buildings of a distinctly suburban type into the once purely rustic street. But these newer buildings, although sufficiently odious, do not by any means touch the depths of abomination plumbed by the local Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, built in the '30's, and fully as bad, in its grey stuccoed, would-be classicism, as that date would imply.

The coming of the motor-car has been nothing less than a disaster to Porlock. Not only private cars, growing ever larger and more productive of dust, noise, and stink, rush through the once sweet-scented street, regardless of the comfort and convenience of villagers or visitors, but "public service" vehicles and chars-à-bancs as big as houses slam through the place, raising a stifling dust that penetrates everywhere. Few sights are more distressing, to those who knew Porlock as it was, than that of the clustered roses and jessamines that mantle so many of the houses, thickly covered with dust. It is a standing wonder that the inhabitants of pretty villages plagued almost beyond endurance by motorists do not arise and compel County Councils and other authorities to

take action. Possibly they know only too well that the majority of members of those Councils is formed by owners of cars, who are themselves among the worst offenders.

But, in any case, the simple old days of Porlock are done. To have seen Porlock with Southey, how great that privilege! Great, not only in the literary way, but in a glimpse of it in its unspoiled, unconscious beauty, before ever it had become notable as a show-place.

Local connoisseurs of the picturesque prefer Bossington, now that Porlock is worn a little threadbare and grown so dusty. They are of opinion that Bossington is the quainter of the two. But to come to judgment in this frame is not wholly in order, for the places are of such different types, and cannot fairly be compared. Porlock is a considerable village, with numerous shops; and Bossington is but a hamlet, without a church, and apparently with no shops at all. It is a very sequestered place, standing on the Horner, about a mile distant, north-eastward, from Porlock. The great recommendations of Bossington in these latter days are that motor-cars never or rarely get there, and that it is by consequence quiet and dustless. Porlock is on the main road —on the way to that Somewhere Else which is ever your typical motorist's quest: a quest he relinquishes at night, only to resume it the next morning. Bossington stands in the way to Nowhere in Particular, and the roads that lead tc it are less roads than lanes. That they may

long continue their narrow, rough, and winding character is the wish of those who wish Bossington well.

For the rest, it is pre-eminently a hamlet of chimneys. The chimneys of Porlock are themselves a remarkable feature of that place, but at Bossington they are *the* feature. They are all of a remarkable height. There are coroneted

BOSSINGTON.

chimneys ; round chimneys, with pots and without ; chimneys square, and chimneys finished off with slates set up (as wind-breakers) at an angle, something like a simple problem in Euclid. The next great feature of Bossington is its immense walnut-tree, whose trunk measures sixteen feet in circumference. This is the chieftain of all the many walnut-trees that flourish in the neighbourhood.

The modern Wesleyan Chapel of Bossington puts its stuccoed brother at Porlock to shame. It is a pretty building, designed in good taste, built of stone banded with blue brick, and is finished off with a quaintly louvred turret. Not even the neighbouring restored chapel of Lynch, rescued from desecration by the late Sir Thomas Dyke Acland, looks more worshipful.

Bossington street, irregularly fringed with rustic cottages, and with the Horner on one side fleeting amid its pebbles to the sea, is as unconventional as a farmyard, and ends at last on the great shingle-bank of Porlock Bay, where two or three ruined old houses stand against the skyline and look as if they had known stirring incidents of shipwreck and smuggling, as indeed they probably have, in abundance.

Smuggling was the chief occupation of Porlock and its surroundings in Southey's time. The lonely beach of huge pebbles that stretches between Porlock Weir and Bossington, with low-lying, marshy meadows giving upon it, was most frequently the scene of goods being landed secretly and thence dispersed into the surrounding country. The Revenue officials knew so well that smuggling was carried on largely that it behoved the "free-traders" to be at especial pains to baffle them. Some of their ingeniously constructed hiding-holes have not been unearthed until comparatively recent years. Thus, in so unlikely a situation as the middle of a field, a smugglers' store-chamber was found in course of ploughing,

between Porlock and Bossington. Again, it was left to modern times for a smugglers' hiding-hole in the picturesque farmhouse of Higher Doverhay to be discovered. This ingenious place of concealment for contraband goods had been constructed by the simple process of building a false outer wall parallel with the real wall of the farmhouse, leaving a narrow space between. When discovered the shelves with which this recess was fitted, for the reception of spirit-kegs, were still there ; but the spirits themselves had departed.

The church of Porlock, dedicated to St. Dubritius, is generally regarded by visitors as an architectural joke. It is the curiously truncated shingled broach spire that produces this derogatory view. It is understood that the local clergy, seriously exercised in their minds about this attitude of unseemly mirth, would greatly like to rebuild tower and spire. But guide-books and visitors alike, placing such stress upon this alleged grotesqueness, are quite wrong. The spire, as it is, has that all-too-rare thing, character, and it is a joy to the artist, and something on which visitors can exercise their wits. In short, Porlock would be a good deal less than its old self were it abolished. With the huge and dilapidated churchyard yew, and the tall neighbouring cross, the old church, as a whole, forms a striking *motif* for a sketch.

The most notable feature of the interior is the noble altar-tomb of the fourth Baron Haring-

PORLOCK CHURCH.

ton of Aldingham, and his wife, Elizabeth Courtenay, daughter of the Earl of Devon, who died respectively in 1417 and 1472. She married, secondly, Lord Bonvile, of Chewton, but chose to lie here; and here, in finely sculptured effigies, they are represented, the noble helmeted and in complete armour, and his lady with tall mitre headdress and coronet.

Guide-books tell of the "curious epitaphs" at Porlock, but they are not so curious as might thus be supposed; certainly not more so than those of the average country churchyard. The chief feature of these is their ungrammatical character, as where we read of Henry Pulsford and Richard Bale, "who was both drownd" at "Lymouth," in 1784. Poetry—or rather, verse—that changed, in arbitrary fashion, from first person to third, was still possible in 1860, as witness these unpleasant lines upon one Thomas Fry:

> For many weeks my friends did see
> Approaching death attending me.
> No favour could his body find,
> Till in the earth it was confined,

and so forth.

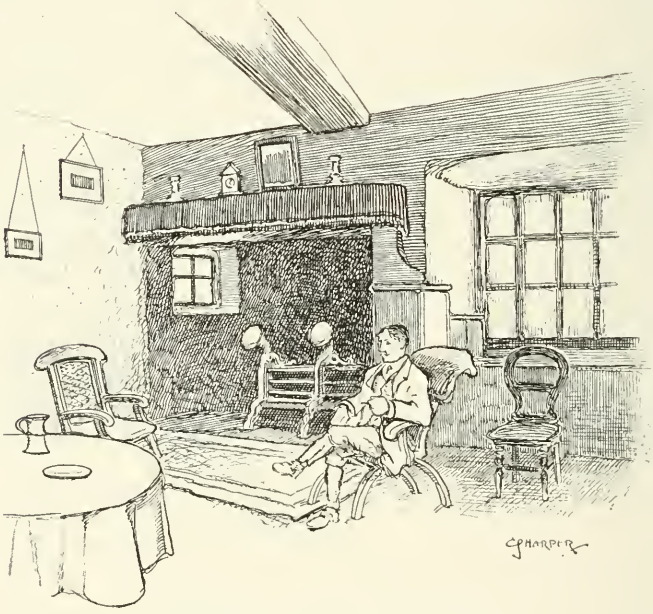
The "Ship" inn is almost, if not even quite, as well known a feature of Porlock as the church, and is unaltered since Southey sheltered here considerably over a hundred years ago—

> By the unwelcome summer rain confined.

The thatch has, of course, been renewed from time to time, but always in the old traditional

style, and the white walls are obviously what they were a couple of centuries or more ago. The oldest part of the inn is probably a curious little trefoiled-headed wooden window, of semi-ecclesiastical design, under the eaves.

Southey sat in the little parlour still existing,



INGLENOOK, "SHIP" INN, PORLOCK.

and, by the ingle-nook that has fortunately been preserved, wrote the oft-quoted lines :

> Porlock, thy verdant vale, so fair to sight,
> Thy lofty hills, which fern and furze embrown,
> Thy waters, that roll musically down
> Thy woody glens, the traveller with delight
> Recalls to memory, and the channel grey
> Circling it, surging in thy level bay.

"THE SHIP" INN, PORLOCK.

A small window in this chimney-corner commands a view up the road, just as of old, where the famed "Porlock Hill" begins that steep and long-continued rise which has made it known, far and near, as "the worst hill in the West of England." This is a mile-long rise from Porlock Vale to the wild, exposed tableland that stretches, for seven miles, to Countisbury, where it descends steeply to Lynmouth. The rise of Porlock Hill is one thousand feet, but the tableland beyond it rises yet another 378 feet by Culbone Hill. The gradient of Porlock Hill is in parts as steep as one in six, and the surface is always, at all seasons of the year, bad in the extreme. A sharp bend to the right appears, a little way uphill. In summer a mass of red dust six or eight inches deep, and plentifully mixed with large stones, it is in winter a pudding-like mixture of a clayey nature. The spectacle of heavy-laden coaches toiling up this fearsome so-called "road" is a distressing one for those who love horses, and grieve to see them overtaxed. No cyclist could, of course, hope to ride up, while none but a madman would attempt to ride down.

A private road, however, engineered some forty years ago by Colonel Blathwayt through his domain of Whitestone Park, ascends the hill-sides by a long series of zigzags, and thus admits of easy gradients. The distance is twice as long, but the ruling gradient is only one in ten, and the surface is good. The scenery also—the "New Road," as it is called, running through

woodlands for the most part—is much preferable to that of the old road. In order to provide funds for keeping this "New Road" in repair, certain tolls are payable: a penny for a cycle or a saddle-horse; fourpence for carriages, etc., with one horse, and threepence for every additional horse; and a shilling for motor-cars.

But, before leaving Porlock behind, it will be well to visit Porlock Weir. Porlock Weir, or Quay, as some style it, is the port of Porlock. It is not, commercially speaking, much of a port, for the basin is neither large nor deep, and only the smallest of sailing-vessels may enter it.

As you come along the mile and a half of pretty country road that leads from Porlock to Porlock Weir, passing many remarkably picturesque cob-walled and thatch-roofed cottages on the way, you catch glimpses of the kind of place this port is. Porlock Bay lies open to the view, and is revealed as a two-and-a-quarter mile semi-circular sweep of naked pebble-ridge between Hurlstone Point and Gore Point. Under the last-named wooded bluff, which forms the buttress, so to speak, on which rests the romantic domain of Ashley Combe, the village and harbour of Porlock Weir are snugly placed. "Weir" stands, in the minds of most people, for a foaming waterfall on a river; but there is no stream whatever at this place, and the harbour that has been given the name is just a natural basin formed by a long-continued action of the tides in heaping up a great impervious outer bank of pebbles under

this protecting bluff, where the bay finds its western termination. Left to itself, the trench-like inlet thus formed would fill automatically with every flood-tide, and empty again with the ebb; but the mouth of it was closed, perhaps three centuries ago, by a wall and sluice-gates, by which the water could, at ebb, be kept in the harbour so easily constructed. That is Porlock Weir, upon whose primitive quays look a few picturesquely dilapidated waterside buildings. The spot is quiet and delightfully unconventional, and is frequented in summer by visitors who appreciate those qualities and the sea-fishing that is to be had off the beach. The old "Ship" inn is a counterpart of that hostelry of the same name at Porlock, and is generally old-fashioned and delightful. You catch a glimpse of copper warming-pans as you pass, and are in receipt of an impression of that kind of comfort which was the last thing in innkeeping life of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The "Anchor Hotel" is a gabled building, obviously built about 1885, when architects found salvation in gables, red-brick, rough-cast plaster, and a general Queen Annean attitude. Besides these, there stands an *omnium gatherum* shop that will supply you at one end of the scale with a ton of coals and any reasonable requirement in fodder and corn-chandlery, or with a penny-worth of acid-drops at the other. The romantic-looking old cottages that face the road and have quaintly peaked combs to their thatches, display

luxuriant gardens in front, and the sea on occasion clamours for entrance at the back ; for it can be very rough here at times, as the pebble-ridge heaped up against the stout sea-wall protecting the road sufficiently witnesses.

The little harbour, although apparently so derelict, is not altogether a thing of the past, for Porlock is some seven miles distant from any railway, and it still remains cheaper to bring coals into the place by sea than by any other method. And this, it would seem, must always be the case, for coal comes to Porlock direct from the quays of the South Wales coalfields. But, except for this class of goods, and for a few other miscellaneous and casual items, the harbour of Porlock Weir is nowadays practically deserted. It forms a curious spectacle. Old vessels lie rotting in the ooze, with no one to clear away their discredited carcases ; the *Caerleon* of Bridgwater, lying at the quay awaiting a discharge of her cargo of coals, the only craft obviously in commission.

Life certainly does not run with a strong current at Porlock Weir. Overnight you may see jerseyed seafaring men sitting in a row on a waterside bench, their backs supported by a convenient wall. They are engaged in contemplating nothing in particular. Vacuity of mind is set upon their countenances, and expresses itself in their very attitudes, hands drooping listlessly over knees, heads sunk upon chests. There they have sat, with intervals for refreshment, all day,

PORLOCK WEIR.

and there they are sitting as twilight fades away into darkness. When the visitor comes down to breakfast at the "Anchor" or the "Ship" opposite, they are discovered in the selfsame place and in the same attitudes as before. They seem to hold constant session, but rarely speak; not because they hold silence to be golden, but for the simple reason that all subjects are exhausted.

This silent companionship is not often broken, the chief occasions of the break-up being those exciting times when some terrified, panting, hunted stag comes fleeting down out of the woods with the yelping hounds at his heels. The sea is the harried creature's last resort, and in it he is generally lassoed and dragged to shore, where the hounds tear the unfortunate beast to pieces, amid interested crowds of onlookers. Such is "sport."

But this death of the stag on Porlock beach is now very much a thing of the past, since the strong line of fencing that runs through the woods of Ashley Combe and Culbone, as far as Glenthorne, has come into existence, preventing the fugitive stags from taking this last desperate refuge. Nowadays, more commonly, they take to the water at the eastern end of the beach, coming down through the Horner valley to Bossington. Here, then, the hunt often ends, and spectators are treated to the extraordinary sight of huntsmen in scarlet clambering about the rocks of Orestone Point, or wading in hunting boots in the sea.

CHAPTER XXI

CULBONE AND ITS REVELS—WHORTLEBERRIES

THE way parallel with the shore to Culbone lies at the back of the "Ship" inn at Porlock Weir, steeply up the wooded hillside that looks along down to the sea. The recluse situation of Culbone is shadowed forth, in company with those of two other lonely parishes of this neighbourhood, by the old local rhyme, often quoted:

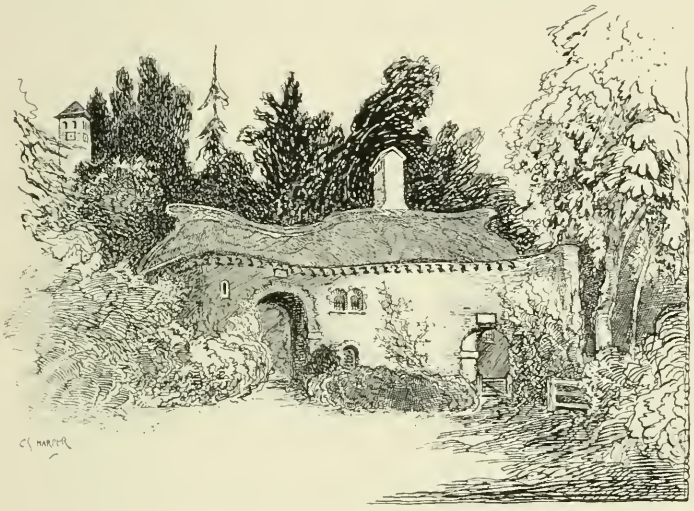
> To Culbone, Oare, and Stoke Pero,
> Parishes three, no parson will go.

The reason for this old-time clerical distaste is found partly in these circumstances of solitude in which the opportunities for doing good must needs be small; but chiefly, perhaps, in the fact that the pay was not sufficient. The living of Culbone is stated by Crockford to be £41 net per annum; that of Oare, £93; Stoke Pero, £75. Culbone and Oare are, nowadays, held in conjunction by one parson, who thus enjoys an income of £134—if a person may correctly be said to "enjoy" these less than clerk's wages.

The population of Culbone is thirty-four, and the spiritual care of them thus costs £1 4*s.* 1*d.*

and an infinitesimal fraction of a farthing, per annum per head; but the spiritual shepherding of Stoke Pero, whose population is thirty-eight, comes to nearly £2 per head.

The only way to Culbone lies past the entrance-lodge of the beautiful estate of Ashley Combe, the property of the Earl of Lovelace,



THE LODGE, ASHLEY COMBE.

but formerly that of Lord Chancellor King. The clock-tower of the house, in the likeness of an Italian campanile, is seen peering up from amid the massed woodlands. Ashley Combe is a place beautifully situated and finely appointed, and is splendidly situated for stag-hunting with the Devon and Somerset hounds. Until recently, and for a number of years past, it was rented,

chiefly for hunting purposes, by the Baroness de Tainteignes.

A narrow wooden gateway in an arch of the entrance-lodge to Ashley Combe leads into the footpath through the woods that forms the sole means of reaching Culbone church. Here is nothing to vulgarise the way, and only an occasional felled tree is evidence of some human being having recently been in these wilds.

A silence that is not that of emptiness and desolation, but rather of restfulness and content, fills the lovely underwoods that clothe the hillsides of Culbone. "Sur-r-r-r," sighs the summer breeze in the grey-green alders, the dwarf oaks, and slim ashes. It is like the peace of God.

Deep down on the right—so deep that you do but occasionally hear the wash of the waves—is the dun-coloured Severn Sea, glimpsed more or less indistinctly through the massed stems. The path winds for a mile through these solitudes, mounting and descending steeply, and clothed in a few places with slippery pine-needles that render walking uphill almost impossible, and the corresponding descents something in the likeness of glissades.

Culbone church is suddenly disclosed in an opening of the woods, standing on a little plateau amid the hills, with but two houses in sight, and those the cottages of what the country folk call "kippurs": that is to say, keepers. St. Francis preached to the birds, and the casual visitor to Culbone is apt to think the vicar of Culbone's

only congregation must be the birds and beasts of this wild spot. But a visit paid on some summer Sunday would prove that, however few the parishioners, the visitors from Porlock, drawn by curiosity to take part in the service in what is supposed to be the "smallest church in England,"

CULBONE CHURCH.

are many. The attendance is then, in fact, often more than the little building can accommodate, and service is frequently held in the churchyard.

It is a singular little building thus suddenly disclosed to the stranger's gaze: a white-walled structure of few architectural pretensions, but exhibiting examples of rude Early English and

Perpendicular work. A shingled "extinguisher" spirelet rises direct from the west end of the roof: own brother (but a very infant brother) to the bulgeous, truncated spire of Porlock. The length of Culbone church is but thirty-three feet, and the breadth twelve feet, but it is quite complete within these limits. The nave roof, internally, is of the usual West of England "cradle" type, of Perpendicular date. It is, of course, an aisleless nave; but here will be found a tiny chancel and a chancel-screen, with a font to serve those rare occasions when a baptism takes place, and a family-pew for the Lovelace family on those rare occasions when the Earl is not earning an honest addition to his income by letting Ashley Combe.

A few tombstones, with the usual false rhymes "wept," "bereft," are disposed about. On one of them you read the strange Christian name of "Ilott," for a woman. By the south porch stands the base of a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century cross, stained with lichens.

Culbone is found in Domesday Book under the name of "Chetenore," and appears in old records as "Kitenore," "Kytenore," and "Kitnore": "ore" standing in the Anglo-Saxon for "seashore." The present name derives from the dedication of the church to "St. Culbone," a corruption of "Columban."

St. Columban, or Columbanus, was an Irish saint, born A.D. 543, in Leinster. The author of the "Lives of the Saints" says he "seems to have been of a respectable family"; which was an

advantage not commonly enjoyed by saints, as the histories of these holy men show us. The greater therefore, the credit due them for qualifying for saintship.

Columban, as a student, came very near disaster. He was a good-looking young Irishman, and, as such, very attractive to the dark-eyed colleens of his native land, who interrupted his studies in grammar, rhetoric, and divinity so seriously with their winning ways that he fled at last, on the advice of a mystic old woman, to Lough Erne. Thence he repaired to Bangor, in Carrickfergus, and placed himself under the rule of Abbot Congall. At length, leaving this seclusion, he set out upon a life of itinerant preaching on the Continent, chiefly in Burgundy, whence he was expelled for his too plain speech, criticising the conduct of the Court. His last years were spent in meditation ; and in peace and quiet he died at length, on November 21st, A.D. 615, aged seventy-two.

Solitary places were especially affected by St. Columban, who liked nothing better than the sole companionship of nature. There is thus a peculiar fitness in the church of so retired a place as this being dedicated to him.

But, quiet though it may now always be, Culbone was, in the eighteenth century, the scene of an annual fair that, for merriment and devil-me-care jollity, seems to have been fully abreast with other country romps and revels.

The Reverend Richard Warner, coming to

Culbone in 1799, in his "Walk through the Western Counties," says :

"Quiet and sequestered as this romantic spot at present is, it has heretofore borne an honourable name in the annals of rustic revelry. Its rocks have echoed to the shouts of multitudinous mirth, and its woods rung with the symphonious music of all the neighbouring bands : in plain English, a revel, or fair, was wont to be held here in times of yore." In still plainer English, there used formerly to be a fair held in Culbone churchyard.

Entering upon the meditations of the Reverend Richard Warner, striving to write plain English, and failing in the attempt, came an old reminiscent, ruminating blacksmith, with an artless tale, recounted, apparently, by the Reverend Richard as a moral anecdote.

"About forty-five years agone, sir," said the blacksmith, "I was at a noble revel in this spot ; three hundred people at least were collected together, and rare fun, to be sure, was going forward. A little warmed with dancing, and somewhat flustered with ale (for certainly Dame Mathews did sell stinging good stuff!) I determined to have a touch at skittles, and sport away a sixpence or shilling, which I could do without much danger, as I had a golden half-guinea in my pocket. To play, therefore, I went ; but, the liquor getting into my head, I could not throw the bowl straight, and quickly lost the game, and two shillings and ninepence to boot. Not liking to get rid of so much money in so foolish

a manner, and not thinking the fault was in myself—for too much ale, you know, sir, is apt to make one over-wise—I resolved to win back the two and ninepence, and then leave off; and accordingly set to play a second time. The same ill-luck followed me, and in an hour and a half I had not only lost the remainder of my money but about sixteen shillings more out of a guinea I borrowed of a friend. This terrible stroke quite sobered me. I could not help thinking what a wicked scoundrel I must be, to go and run into ruin, and deprive my wife and child of food, merely to indulge myself in a game, which, instead of being an amusement had put me in a terrible passion, and made me curse and swear more than ever I did in my life. Desperately vexed at my folly, I went into the wood hard by, and sat down by the side of the waterfall to reflect on the situation. I could plainly hear the singing and laughing of the revel, but it was now gall and wormwood to me, and I had almost resolved to escape from my own reproaches and the distress of my wife by throwing myself down the cliff, upon the shore, when Providence was so good as to preserve me from this additional wickedness, and to put a thought into my head which saved me from the consequences of despair. Cool and sober, for I had washed myself in the stream and drank pretty largely of it, it struck me that if I went back to the skittle-ground and ventured the remaining five shillings, I should have a good chance of winning back my money

from those who had beaten me before, as *I* was now fresh, and *they* all overcome with ale. Accordingly I returned to the churchyard and took up the bowl, though pretty much jeered at by the lads who had been winners. The case, however, was altered. I had now the advantage ; could throw the bowl straight ; took every time a good aim, and more than once knocked down all *nine* pins. To make short my story, sir, it was only night that put an end to my good luck ; and when I left off play, I found I had got back my own half-guinea, the guinea I had borrowed, and fifteen shillings in good silver." The blacksmith's cleverness at getting back his own, and incidentally a proportion of other people's money is amusing enough ; and so is the attitude of the Reverend Richard Warner, amiably finding a moral in it. There is an obvious enough lesson here, but not an improving one, of the blameless copybook kind.

The neighbourhood of Porlock and Culbone, and, in fact, all the district on to Lynmouth, is noted for its whortleberries ; " urts," as the country people call them. Up the Horner valley, and on the wild widespread commons that stretch away —a glorious expanse of furze, bracken, and gorse— to Countisbury, the whortleberry bushes grow in profusion. But " Bushes " is a term that, without explanation, is apt to be misleading, for here the whortleberry plant grows only to a height of from six to nine inches. The whortleberry, in other parts of the country called bilberry, whin-

berry, and blueberry, is a familiar many-branched little plant with small ovate leaves that range in colour from a light yellow-green to that of burnished copper. Its fruit is perfectly round, about the size of a large pea, and of a dark-blue colour, with a slightly lighter bloom upon it, resembling the bloom on a plum. The berries ripen in July and August, and are sweet, with a sub-acid flavour. They form a very favourite dish in these parts, stewed, or made into tarts and puddings, and in such cases strongly resemble black-currants. Whortleberries generally command eightpence a quart in the shops ; but they are also largely picked for the use of dyers, who use them for the production of a purple dye. It is understood that large quantities of them are thus sent to Liverpool. The whortleberry harvest being in full swing during the schools' summer holidays, the boys and girls of Porlock and round about are generally to be found on the commons and the moors, busily engaged, with all the baskets they can manage to commandeer, in the picking. Four or five quarts can readily be gathered by one of these experts in the course of a day.

To this prime habitat of the whortleberry we come, by old road or new, passing one or other of the coaches that in summer ply a busy trade in carrying pleasure-seekers through a district innocent of railways. At the crest of the moorland, where a weatherworn, wizened signpost says simply " To Oare," we enter upon a much-discussed district.

CHAPTER XXII

THE "LORNA DOONE COUNTRY"

We have here come into the very centre of what has in these later years become known as the "Lorna Doone Country"; the neighbourhood of Oare and the so-called "Doone Valley." Oare lies in a profound valley, giving upon Exmoor, on the left hand, and to it we must needs go, for to write upon these parts of Somerset, where they march with Devon, and not to enter upon the subject of the Doones, would in these times be impossible, if the resultant book is to be at all representative.

No one who travels through North Devon and Somerset can escape "Lorna Doone." Nor, indeed, should they greatly wish to do so, for it is a stirring romance. Since 1871, when the story first became popularised, it has pervaded the whole countryside, much to the combined profit and astonishment of the natives, who accept the good gifts it has brought, chiefly in the shape of greatly increased numbers of tourists, but at the same time they do not profess to understand it all, and have not been generally at pains to

inform themselves as to whom all these developments are due.

"A Lunnon gennelman—I doan't rightly knaw th' name of 'en—wrote all about thesyer Doones there is so much tark of, an' put'n into a book, yurs since. Read it? Not I, but my darter, she hev, an' she do say that Lorna Doone was a proper fine gell; not that I b'lieve much on't; although, mark you, it's my idea that if so be them 'Doone' houses they do let on so much about wer' tarned auver an' dug up, ther'd be a deal o' gold found there. There was some mighty queer folk lived up to Badgery in wold times." Such are the somewhat contradictory opinions to be heard between Oare and Malmsmead.

Richard Doddridge Blackmore, author of the novel, "Lorna Doone," came of a North Devon and Exmoor ancestry, and so was, as it were, the predestined author for these regions. He was born in 1825 and educated largely at Blundell's school, Tiverton, where Jan Ridd, hero of the novel, got his schooling. Blackmore afterwards went up to Oxford, and imbibed there a certain fondness for classical studies and a love of literature that never left him; although a great part of his life, from 1858, was devoted to the cultivation of choice fruit at his residence at Teddington, beside the Thames. The public, however, that knew of Blackmore the novelist never heard of Blackmore the grower of choice pears and plums for the London market, on his eleven Middlesex acres.

His first book was "Poems by Melanter," pub-

lished in 1835 and heard of no more. In 1855 the Crimean War stirred him to authorship again, with "The Bugle on the Black Sea," and 1864 saw his first novel, "Clara Vaughan," published anonymously. It was not a success, nor was "Cradock Nowell," in 1866, more fortunate.

In March 1869 was published "Lorna Doone," with the same dispiriting want of success. The first edition was still hanging on hand in 1871, and seemed likely to go the unhonoured way of all completely unsuccessful books, when a strange reversal of fortune befel it. In the preface to the twentieth edition, years afterwards, Blackmore tells us vividly of this. One clearly perceives, in the manner of apostrophe to a personified "Lorna" he adopts, that he was, at the time of writing this preface, still entirely amazed at the abounding success that had at last come, but in a wholly mistaken fashion. He says:

"What a lucky maid you are, my Lorna! When first you came from the Western moors nobody cared to look at you; the 'leaders of the public taste' led none of it to make test of you. Having struggled to the light of day through obstruction and repulses, for a year and a half you shivered in a cold corner without a sunray. Your native land disdained your voice, and America answered, 'No child of mine!' Still, a certain brave man, your publisher, felt convinced that there was good in you, and standing by his convictions—as the English manner used to be—'She shall have another chance,' he said;

'we have lost a lot of money by her; I don't care if we lose some more.' Accordingly, forth you came, poor Lorna, in a simple, pretty dress, small in compass, small in figure, smaller still in hope of life. But, oh—let none of her many fairer ones who fail despond—a certain auspicious event occurred just then, and gave you golden wings. The literary public found your name akin to one which filled the air, and, as graciously as royalty itself, endowed you with imaginary virtues. So grand is the luck of time and name—failing which more solid beings melt into oblivion's depth." In short, the dear, dunderheaded add-two-together-and-make-them-five British public came to the wholly erroneous conclusion that "Lorna Doone" was in some way connected with the marriage of Queen Victoria's fourth daughter the Princess Louise with the Marquess of Lorne; an event which took place in 1871. The times were remarkable for the strong wave of anti-monarchical feeling then rising, in consequence of the recluse life led by the Queen in her widow-hood; and there can be no doubt that "Lorna Doone" was, in the first instance, purchased so freely because it was suspected of being one of the many scandalous satires then issued in plenty and bought eagerly.

Books have strange fortunes. Their careers hang upon a hair. Many nowadays live but a season: others may be said never to have lived at all. Others yet enjoy a furious, but short, vogue, and then die as utterly as those that never

enjoyed real life. The public originally purchased "Lorna Doone" under a misapprehension that was, perhaps, not very creditable, and then read the book and continued to buy it for its own merits. And so it continues to run ever into new editions, and has made the fortune of the Exmoor and North Devon districts, and the adjoining parts of Somerset. Here it should be noted that, although the public persists in regarding "Lorna Doone" as essentially a Devonshire book, it is really chiefly concerned with Somerset.

Written in the first person singular, as the memoirs and experiences of John Ridd, a seventeenth-century yeoman of Oare, the book, it will be seen, is cast in a fashion not easy to make convincing reading, but it successfully surmounts the difficulties of armchair expressions, and the strong story carries the reader over many a passage otherwise dangerously weak. But it is not great art. It does not compare with Stevenson's novels in the same manner, written nearly twenty years later.

Still, such as it is, it is Blackmore's best, and although he wrote many other novels, he never again approached "Lorna Doone," either in sheer writing, or in commercial success. Booksellers stocked, and the public bought, or borrowed from the libraries, his later works, because they were by the author of "Lorna Doone," and not for their intrinsic merits. For Blackmore always just failed to convince, and never quite dispelled an unreal kind of atmosphere that took his novels

quite out of the experiences of actual life, and made his characters so many jumping-jacks, obviously actuated by strings.

The origin of "Lorna Doone" demands some notice. Blackmore freely acknowledged that he was led to contemplate a romance on the subject of the legendary wild squatters of these parts by reading a story published in the *Leisure Hour* during 1863, entitled "The Doones of Exmoor," a very poor piece of work, loosely strung together from recollections of the Wichehalse and Doone legends that had long been floating about the West Country. He rightly conceived he could do better, and set to work upon his own early recollections of those legends, and, moreover, revisited Porlock and Oare and other places, for the purpose of acquiring more local colour, before beginning to write.

The question, Had the Doones ever a real existence? was debated somewhat half-heartedly in the lifetime of Blackmore, but has since his death been more and more keenly continued; until the literature written around the subject, for and against the credibility of such a band of outlaws having really made Exmoor their home, has assumed considerable dimensions.

An examination of the evidence available appears to conclusively establish the fact that no unassailably genuine documents have ever been produced by which the existence of the Doones can be proved. No one has ever traced legal documents, baptismal or other registers,

or even records of sessional proceedings in which the name Doone appears in Somerset or Devon. Outlaws such as these, illiterate and half-savage, would not, on the face of it, be likely to find a place in church registers ; but they would, on the other hand, it is fairly arguable, easily have found mention in the records of punishments, great or small, inflicted upon criminals or petty evil-doers. The inference that they, as Doones, never existed here, is therefore well-nigh irresistible.

But the legendary belief in them in all this countryside is strong, and dates far back beyond the appearance of Blackmore upon the scene with his "Lorna Doone." Aged people who lived at Porlock, and in all the districts affected by legends of these robbers, and whose memories carried them back to the early years of the nineteenth century, have given testimony, not only to their having heard abundantly of "Doones" on Exmoor, but to their having received the legends from their parents. The long-lived fishermen of Porlock Weir, confronted with pamphlets written and published, elaborately arguing against the existence of those people, indignantly declared that one might as well pretend there were never Aclands of Holnicote. They were not in the least concerned with Blackmore's story ; for they had never read it, and did not carry the author's name in their minds. A curious thing is that so few people of these districts have ever read "Lorna Doone." But the fishermen, in common with others, knew the usual run of the stories ; al-

though, to be sure, they believed that the Doones were almost extinguished by the Reds of Culbone, and knew little or nothing of the Ridds of Oare.

We are met with several theories as to the origin of these floating legends, and the name of Doone. A favourite theory is that which dismisses these stories by contending that the name is a corruption of "Danes," and that these more or less mysterious outcasts were really belated memories of those Danish sea-rovers who made such fierce havoc along all these shores in the ninth and tenth centuries.

A second belief, strangely supported by the undoubted existence in South Wales of a family, or band, of Dwns (the pronunciation is exactly that of "Doone") in the time of Queen Elizabeth, is that a number of Welsh outlaws, fleeing from justice, came across the Channel from Carmarthenshire and became the Exmoor Doones. These Dwns were very objectionable people in their own country, and were largely intermarried, strange to say, with Ryds.

A third guess at the origin of the Doones is found in the belief, sometimes held, that they were originally fugitives from Sedgemoor fight, hiding from the retribution of the Government in what were then the fastnesses of the moor; but the obvious criticism of this view is that all danger would have been past after the revolution of 1688, and they would then no longer have needed to hide.

The fourth theory, and one stated to have

been shared by Blackmore himself (although he was not necessarily a prime expert in the matter) is that the Doones were Scottish exiles. We have but to spell the name "Doune" for it to be at once recognised as Scottish. Certainly it is no West of England patronymic. At what period this view of the puzzle holds those supposititious Dounes to have come from Scotland does not appear. Scottish history may, if necessary, be made to afford many likely junctures at which various people would find it advisable to seek a sanctuary abroad. Of recent years an odd claim to relationship with the Doones, involving an attempt to connect them with Scottish exiles, has been made by the owner of a curiosity-shop at Hunstanton, Norfolk. This person, Beeton by name, and his niece, one Ida M. Browne, who has adopted the pseudonym "Audrie Doon" for literary purposes, have since 1901 produced what purport to be old family portraits, relics, and documents, taking their history back to the seventeenth century and connecting them and the Doones with the Earl of Moray of the early years of that century. According to this story, a brother of the Earl of Moray assumed the name of Doune, and after much persecution in the course of family disputes over property, was obliged in 1620 to leave Scotland. This "Sir Ensor Doune," as the claim has it, settled in this neighbourhood, where he and his "were more or less hated and feared by the countryside until their return to Perthshire in 1699."

Thus Miss Ida M. Browne.

From this Sir Ensor Doune was descended (always according to this showing) long lines of Dounes, or Doones.

Among the "family relics" is an old oil-painting, inscribed "Sir Ensor Doune, 1679"; an ill-drawn daub representing an elderly man with small crumb-brush whiskers, and an expression which leaves the beholder in doubt as to whether he is half-drunk or half-mad: both Doone characteristics, if we have followed the legends at all attentively. Another item is an old flint-lock pistol inscribed on the barrel "C. Doone, 1681, Porlok," and furnished further with a representation of skull and cross-bones. These, with a genealogy drawn up by one "Charles Doone of Braemar," bringing the family down from 1561 to 1804, are the evidences adduced; together with what is put forward as the diary of a "Rupert Doune," stated to have been a fugitive from Scotland after the rebellion of 1745. He, it appears, found his way at last to North Devon and Somerset; to the districts in which his seventeenth-century forbears had settled. Here are extracts from his journal:

"Sept. 3rd, 1747.—Went to Barum on my way to the place they call Oare, where our people came after their cruel treatment at the hands of Earl Moray."

"September 3rd, 1747.—Got to Oare and then to the valley of the Lyn; the scenery very bonny, like our own land, but the part extremely wild

and lonely. Wandered about and thought of the doings of the family when here, which I gather were not peaceable."

How very precious is that last phrase—and how entirely unconvincing! It would, in short, were any claim to material things attached to these pretensions, be impossible to establish it on such slight foundations.

The first printed collection of Doone legends is that to be found in Cooper's "Guide to Lynton," published in 1853. It is derived from local folk-lore and from a manuscript collection of stories made for the Reverend J. R. Chanter in 1839. Among these legends, besides those of the Doones, we have the wild tales of Tom Faggus, the North Devon and Somerset highwayman, and his "enchanted strawberry horse," and the fantastic and particularly stupid "legend of the de Wichehalse family,* utterly without foundation.

Caution is therefore evidently to be exercised before accepting anything in the way of these folk-tales, which tell of a fierce and utterly lawless band of Doones who dwelt up the Badgworthy Valley, from about the time of the Commonwealth, in a collection of some eleven rude stone-built huts, and lived by raiding the houses and stock-yards of the neighbouring farmers. One of these stories tells us how the band was at length exterminated by the long-suffering countryside. One

* See *The North Devon Coast*, pp. 25–33 for a complete exposure of the lying "de Wichehalse" legend, which contains no particle of truth.

winter's night, it appears, when snow was lying upon the ground, they made a raid upon Yenworthy Farm, a lonely farmstead which still stands, although since those times rebuilt, in a deep valley between the high-road near County Gate and Culbone. Here they were received with an unexpectedly bold front. *Arma virumque cano*; only in this instance it is of arms and the woman one must sing. It was, in short, the farmer's wife who stood at an open window and opened fire upon them with a long duck-gun that is to this day preserved in the house. This scattering discharge appears to have severely wounded one, or several, of the raiders, for blood-tracks were traced in the snow, leading in the direction of Badgworthy. That same night the same party (or perhaps really another part of the numerous band) appeared at Exford, in midst of Exmoor, and attacked a farmhouse, in which were only a servant girl and a child. The servant hid in the oven, leaving the child in the kitchen. The robbers, the legend goes on to declare, killed the infant, and went off, with the mocking lines,

> If any one asks who 'twas killed thee,
> Tell 'em—the Doones of Badgery.

This outrage formed the breaking-point of the rustic endurance of the Doones, who were tracked to their lair by large bodies of country-folk and slain, and their stone huts demolished. The incident of the killing of the infant is told,

with variations, by Blackmore, in "Lorna Doone"; a footnote declaring the author's belief in the truthfulness of the legends regarding the raid, but holding that the Doones did not wilfully kill the child, which was fatally injured by being tossed playfully to the ceiling, and accidentally let fall.

Variations of the final ending of the Doones place the scene at Robber's Bridge, on the Weir Water, and tell how the Ridds were chiefly instrumental in bringing on the fight.

Yenworthy Farm, formerly the property of the Snow family, was sold to the late Reverend W. S. Halliday of Glenthorne, by the late Mr. Nicholas Snow. Mr. Halliday also purchased the duck-gun traditionally said to have wounded the Doones. It is to remain always here, as a relic of the lawless old times.

We may perhaps find in the name of Snow a significant clue to the evolutionary processes of these old stories told in past generations around local firesides on winter's nights in those times when few could read, and when, if they owned that accomplishment, literature of any sort was scarce and dear. In tales repeated from mouth to mouth, all kinds of accretions are to be expected; and it will already have been noted how many are the variants of these Doone and other stories. The patient and contemplative seeker after truth may easily find in the name of Snow the origin of the snowy night on which the Doones attacked Yenworthy Farm, the owner of

the property being gradually brought into the tale by the mishearings incidental to repetition.

The last two surviving Doones are said, in legends current some years ago, and related by the Rev. W. H. Thornton, many years since curate at Countisbury, within the North Devon border, near Lynmouth, to have perished about the year 1800. They were an old man and his granddaughter, who for a long time had been used to roam the country, singing carols at Christmas-tide. They were said to have been found together in the snow, frozen to death, on the road between Simonsbath and Challacombe.

The conclusion of the whole matter appears to be that there was really a band of semi-savage hut-dwellers established on Exmoor in the middle of the seventeenth century, and that they continued to be a nuisance to the neighbourhood, in the sheep-stealing and petty-pilfering way, until perhaps the first few years of the next era. But that they were ever the terrible marauders of legend is not for a moment to be credited. They were probably, like the old type of gipsy, only too glad to be able to sneak necessaries covertly, and then to make off, and to be let alone; and were never bold enough to make raids. The duck-gun at Yenworthy was not used necessarily against a Doone: for lonely farmhouses were of old, all over the country, not unlikely to be the objects of attack. For a striking instance of this truth reference may be made to Tangley Farm, or "Lone Farm," as it is often called, in the

neighbourhood of Burford, Oxfordshire, which was attacked boldly by the "Dunsdon Gang" one night about 1784.*

It may here be not altogether out of place to remark that anything with which the late Rev. W. S. Halliday was associated is to be examined closely and suspiciously, for he was a person of a saturnine turn of humour, delighting to send antiquaries and others upon false scents. His ancient habit of burying Roman coins in the neighbourhood of his residence at Glenthorne, with the singular object of deluding future generations of archæologists into the belief that they have come upon plentiful evidence of Roman civilisation in these parts, is well known; and being well known (doubtless to the distress of his tricksy spirit) is not now likely to deceive any one.

It must remain an open question as to how the outlaws of Badgworthy, in whom, with the reservations made above, we are prepared to believe, came by the name of Doone. The probabilities and theories have already been given, and the matter must rest there.

The undoubted existence of old of other Devonshire semi-savage bands is itself a strong presumption of a like tribe here. The Gubbins band, in the neighbourhood of Lydford, "living in holes, like swine," was well known in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and is made the subject of a reference by so serious a writer as

* See *The Oxford, Gloucester, and Milford Haven Road*, Vol. I., pp. 248–252.

Thomas Fuller, 1660. "Their wealth," he says, "consisteth in other men's goods: they live by stealing the sheep on the moors. Such is their fleetness, they will outrun many horses: vivaciousness, they outlive most men. They hold together like bees: offend one, and all will revenge his quarrell."

The Gubbins also have found their way into fiction, in "Westward Ho!" The Cheritons, on the other hand, who also lived on the borders of Dartmoor, at Nymet Rowland, have not found their apotheosis in literature.

CHAPTER XXIII

OARE—MALMSMEAD—THE BADGWORTHY VALLEY—THE "DOONE VALLEY"—GLENTHORNE

And now, after having fully considered the evidence for and against the much-debated existence of these old reprobates and masterless men, let us advance into their country, and into that of the romantic Lorna, who was, of course, an adopted Doone merely.

The way to Oare, branching off to the left, plunges immediately down into the profound valley of the Oare Water. "Hookway Hill" is the name of this abominable road, bad enough in its own native vileness, but rendered worse by the strange humour of the local road-repairing authority, always at pains to deposit cartloads of stones on it in the summer, so that there shall be plenty of opportunity for the tourist traffic to roll this loose material in by the autumn. Thus the literary pilgrim to the scenes of "Lorna Doone" is made to earn that title, eloquent as it is of suffering and difficulties encountered, wrestled with, and overcome. Long is the way and steep and winding, and he who, cycling, would seek to avoid the prodigious stones by tracking to the

side, must make his account with the yard-long projecting blackberry brambles, armed with monstrous thorns, that curry-comb the face, clutch off the cap, or take one by the arm in a confidential grip, like some old friend who would bid

OARE CHURCH.

you "wait a bit." Later on in the year, possibly, hedgers will be at work with their "riphooks," slashing off these terrors of the way, and then woe to the cyclist's tyres! It is a nice point, where and when the blackberry bramble is most offensive; when it is in a position to scarify the

traveller's person, or when, shorn off and lying in the road, its thorns play havoc with india-rubber.

At the foot of Hookway Hill, the peaty little Oare, or Weir, water, rushing over a pebbly bed is crossed by Robber's Bridge, and thenceforward the road runs level, past Oareford, and then as

NEAR ROBBER'S BRIDGE.

an exceedingly narrow lane, to Oare; passing two or three solitary farms that in these latter days provide for summer visitors whose humour is for a fortnight or a month in the wilds. One of these is identified, more or less accurately, with the "Plovers Barrows' Farm" of the novel.

Presently Oare church appears, on the left hand, almost wholly hidden in a circle of tall, spindly trees, and neighboured only by one farm.

It is a grey, sad-toned building, this centre of interest in Lorna's tragedy. Chiefly in the Perpendicular style, it consists of an embattled western tower and a nave without aisles. The chancel is a modern addition. All day and every day in the summer an old man sits in the little north porch, with the key of the church on a bench beside him, and if, not seeing the key, you try the door, and, finding it locked, ask him, he will give it you, and leave you to let yourself in: mutely remaining there, a living hint for a tip. "Lorna Doone" has done this. "Parish clerk, he be, an' used to be saxon," remarked an old road-mender. "He do mek' a dale o' money," is the rustic opinion; but what amount may be represented by "a deal of money" in this estimate does not appear. Also, "Dree an' saxpunz a wik," he gets from the parish: so there is no old age pension for him; and unless the parish of Oare, in a fit of wild extravagance, springs another eighteenpence, he will be a loser.

The interior of Oare church is, truth to tell, lamentably uninteresting, and architecturally deplorable. A something wooden, that does duty for chancel screen, divides nave from sanctuary, and a few characterless marble and slate tablets are affixed to the walls: one of them to the memory of a Nicholas Snow, 1791. A tablet to various members of the Spurryer family exhibits a curious uncertainty as to how the name should be spelled. "Spurre" and "Spurry" are the two other versions given. The name of "Peter

Spurryer, Warden, 1717," appears under one of a couple of fearsome paintings in the tower, representing Moses and Aaron ; the work of one " Mervine Cooke, Painter."

Under a deplorable representation of the triple Prince of Wales' feathers, placed on the

INTERIOR OF OARE CHURCH.

wall near the pulpit, to commemorate a visit of the Prince of Wales in 1863 will be found the only interesting object in the church : a rudely carved stone bracket supporting what was once a piscina. Shaped in the form of a head, the expressionless face is flanked by two hands. Very few visitors can have any notion of the meaning of this gro-

tesque object, and most people set it down as a mere fantasy; but the thing is symbolical, and really typifies the Divine gift of speech. Other examples are found throughout England: notably in the churches of Bere Regis, in Dorsetshire, and Gotham, Nottinghamshire.* This carving is by far the oldest thing in Oare church, and is probably a relic from some earlier building.

From Oare we come directly to Malmsmead where the Badgworthy Water divides Somerset and Devon, and is spanned by a grey, timeworn, two-arched bridge.

The scene is sweet and idyllic. Here the bridge, grown thickly with ferns and moss, and stained red, brown, and orange with lichens, spans the water in hump-backed fashion, and on the opposite—that is to say, the Devonshire—shore, the three farmsteads of Malmsmead, Lorna Doone, and Badgworthy Farms stand side by side in seeming content, sheltered beneath swelling hills. Day by day in summer a long succession of brakes and flys bring visitors from Lynton and Lynmouth and set them down here for an afternoon's exploration of the Badgworthy Valley, or drive them on to Oare.

To see one of these brake-drivers take the steep rise of the narrow bridge of Malmsmead at full speed, and so continue his reckless way along the narrow lanes, is to realise that death possibly awaits the cyclist who descends hills and rounds

* See *The Manchester and Glasgow Road*, Vol. I., pp. 265-6; and *The Hardy Country*, p. 143.

the sharp corners of these lanes at high speed at such times when these vehicles are about.

For the comfort and refreshment of these "Lorna Doone" pilgrims, the three farms, that were nothing but humble farmsteads in the days before Blackmore wrote that popular romance, have now become rustic restaurants, doing a very thriving and remunerative business, at prices which, calculated on the basis of their charge of twopence for a small glass of milk, must be rapidly earning a more than modest competence for these simple folk. Simple, did I say? Well, that, perhaps, is hardly the word. Nor is the content that seems to be pictured here, in every circumstance of running water, moss-grown bridge, and bird-haunted trees, more than a hollow mockery. Come with me over the bridge, into Devon, and I shall show you evidence of keen commercial rivalry, in the notice-board displayed from the hedge of Malmsmead Farm, which says "No connection with Lorna Doone and Badgworthy Farm." Now it is a curious fact that the names of these rival rustic refreshment-providers are the same—French—but that does not by any means explain the hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness that are displayed between these neighbours; for few must be the pilgrims in these parts who acquire such trivial facts. The stranger coming from the direction of Oare and halting awhile on the bridge, to admire the beauty of the scene, will soon find himself invited, by one or other of these people, to patronise his establishment, and will thereby

learn something not to the advantage of the rival. Hearing the tale of one, you are shocked at the depth of infamy with which the other is charged, but the people of the neighbourhood take it all philosophically enough. "I 'xpec' they do saay 'most as bad o' he," is the general remark.

MALMSMEAD.

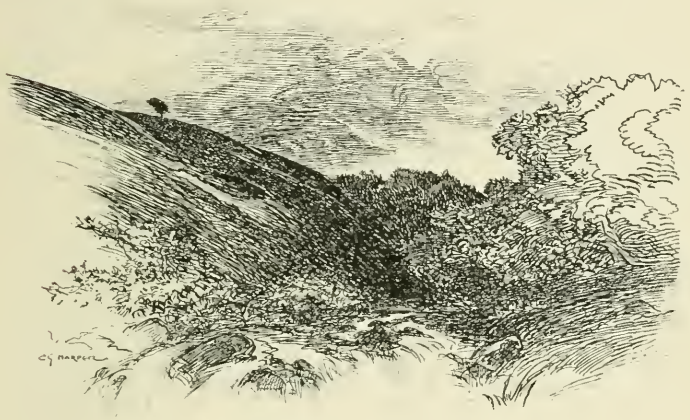
On a busy day, as many as twenty-seven waggonettes and other vehicles may be found at Malmsmead, drawn up empty, awaiting the return of the "Lorna Doone" sightseers from the Badgworthy Valley and the Doone Valley, or Oare. Constant repetition of the trip, day by day in the season, for many years, has rendered the drivers indifferent. Some you may observe asleep, others playing cards, and all those who

are awake swearing. Meanwhile, the pilgrims in search of the Doone Valley and the homes of those entirely fabulous people have tailed away along the footpaths beside the Badgworthy Water, in search of literary landmarks. Few, however, get as far as the so-called "Doone Valley," for it is a very considerable walk; and most people have by this time sadly realised that Blackmore's fervid descriptions of places are, as a rule, remarkable for their shameless exaggeration. In sober truth, the Badgworthy Valley, that opens out of Malmsmead, forms a much more striking scene than the supposed stronghold of the Doones. It is a typical moorland vale, with the Badgworthy Water—or the "Badgery" as they style it in these parts—pouring down out of the sullen Exmoor hills, gliding with an oily smoothness over waterslides, foaming over stickles, or splashing like very miniature Niagaras over great moss-grown boulders.

The valley is not nowadays so lonely as Blackmoor pictures it: in fact, the terrible "Badgery Valley," as described by him, never existed, and almost the entire thing is a delusion and a snare. Plantations of fir and larch partly clothe the rounded hills on the left hand, and a farm-house (since the publication of "Lorna Doone" named "Lorna's Bower," in big letters that, painted on its whitewashed garden-wall, stare across the stream) is perched comfortably half-way up the hillside.

The footpath that winds ribbon-like beside

the stream comes presently to Badgworthy Wood, a wood of stunted oaks, whose limbs are bearded with a grey-green moss that tells sufficiently of the humid atmosphere and the mists that drift from Exmoor. Parson Jack Russell believed Badgworthy Wood to have been a Druid's grave ; but we may, perhaps, with safety decline to accept him as an authority on the subject. Now,



BADGWORTHY VALLEY.

had he expressed an opinion on horse-coping and sharp practice generally in horsey matters, his views would carry all the weight due to such an acknowledged authority.

Here the foxglove grows in the shade, and hart's-tongue ferns come to an unusual size. The whortleberry plant, too, flourishes in this moist spot to a height prodigious for whortleberries. Some of them must run up to eighteen inches ; but the berries have not the sweetness of those that

grow on the dwarfed plants of the sun-scorched, rain-furrowed, and wind-lashed downs.

Save for the passing of groups of "Lorna Doone" pilgrims, the place is very solitary. The hills that look down upon the valley here rise higher, and draw closer in, swooping down in naked round outlines in the foreground, and filling in the distance with dense blue-black plantations of larch. The bald outlines of those near at hand are sharply accented by a wind-swept lone thorn-tree that stands out curiously against the sky. Below it, stretching down the hillside is an ancient earthwork, in shape roughly like the letter Y ; and down below this again, the Badgworthy Water foams and slides amidst its boulders.

Quietly walking through the little wood, and then silently along the grassy paths through the almost breast-high bracken beyond, I started a fox from his summer afternoon sleep on a sun-warmed boulder ; a fine, but gaunt fellow of crimson hue, and with a magnificent brush. Not one of your full-fed Midland foxes, plump with a long career of raids on poultry-runs, but one accustomed to picking up a mere living by sheer hard work in these wilds. He loped leisurely away into the woods, with an easy swinging gait that looked deceptively slow. Up along there, where he disappeared amid the tangled branches, a monstrous square mass of rock stands half-revealed, remarkably like some ancient stone-built house ; a veritable Mockbeggar Hall, that, on a near approach, is found to be no habitation

of man, but a crannied, cliff-like place, partly draped with ivy; the home of jackdaws, and tunnelled about the base of it with the runs of hares and rabbits.

And thus, at length one comes to the terrible "Doone Valley," or, as it is better, and correctly known, Lankcombe; a pretty vale branching to the right, not in the least terrible, you know, and in fact rather dull and commonplace, after the beauties of Badgworthy. Perhaps the enthusiastic Lorna Dooneite, if he would keep his enthusiasm, had better not adventure thus far; for though he may indeed see some problematic ruins and doubtful foundations of houses, he will assuredly be keenly disappointed. A commonplace shepherd's hut looks down upon the scene, young plantations mantle the quite unremarkable hills, and romance fails to keep the expected tryst.

But if so be the pilgrim resents being cheated of scenic delights, let him then retrace his steps, cross Malmsmead Bridge into Devon, and so proceed a distance of some six miles down the enchanting gorge of the Lyn, to Lynmouth. No novelist has flung the spells of romance upon that delightful scenery, which is indeed sufficient in itself to enchant the stranger, without such extraneous aid. Or, if it be desired to return to Porlock, let the stranger proceed to Brendon, and then descend the hill at Combe Park, coming thus again to the ridge of moorland that runs between Porlock and Lynmouth. Here turning eastward

he will come to Glenthorne, where the wooded cliffs plunge daringly to the sea, and where the boundary line passes that divides Devon and Somerset. The name of Glenthorne clearly invites irresponsible and foolish rhyme, and so, responding to so obvious an invitation, these pages shall conclude with such :

There was an old man of Glenthorne,
Who played " tootle-oo " on the horn.
He blew night and day
To his neighbours, till they
Said, " Stop it ! you giddy old prawn : *
Oh ! why don't you place it in pawn ?
You tootle all night,
You malicious old sprite.
We wish you had never been born."

* " No class " people, these neighbours, obviously.

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