

## A SUMMER MONTH IN A WELSH VILLAGE.



It was early in August that my companion and I, accompanied by her French maid, left London for Wales by the limited Holyhead train.

From Chester to Bangor we followed the beach of the north coast of Wales, and the white tongues of surf broke close to the railway at Rhyl and Llandudno. We watched the long, pale, yellow sands stretching well off toward Liverpool, and saw beyond them the blue line of the Irish Sea, sharply cut on the horizon. Long-legged water-birds and long-winged gulls disputed the beach with bathers and pleasure-seekers from Rhyl to Bangor. Summer hotels as showy as our own were mixed in among the low, thatched stone cottages of the Welsh peasants, the latter scarcely to be distinguished from the masses of blue slate which stood near them. This seaside looked pleasant and festive enough, with women in big hats, and protected by red umbrellas, strolling about; while little bathing-houses were slowly trundled along the shore, drawn by a horse or a mule, or maybe pushed into the surf by man or boy. We alighted from the train at Carnarvon, a small town on the northwest side of the Welsh coast. A few minutes later we were seated in one of the little cars of a narrow-gauge railroad that leads from the sea-coast for ten miles into the heart of the mountain region of north Wales, and soon found ourselves meandering in and out among the hills.

A great change had taken place in the vegetation of the country since we left England. Though we had traveled only two or three hours from Chester, the full-leaved and softly rounded elms and beeches had given place to stunted, weather-beaten firs, larches, and oaks. The velvet-like grass of the flat English meadows was replaced by a scant verdure which clung close to the thin soil, and lay in patches on the blue and red slate of the Welsh landscape. The grass was intensely green, however, and its vivid tints brought into fine contrast the various shades of rock, to which the bloom of the heather added still another set of hues. Our tiny train pursued its way, the small engine struggling over the irregular surface of country. On each hand were rugged pastures where the whitest of white sheep and lambs were grazing. The naked hills were bare of trees, but little brooks in great number ran down their sides, and lost themselves in small lakes. These in their turn fed rushing streams, which,

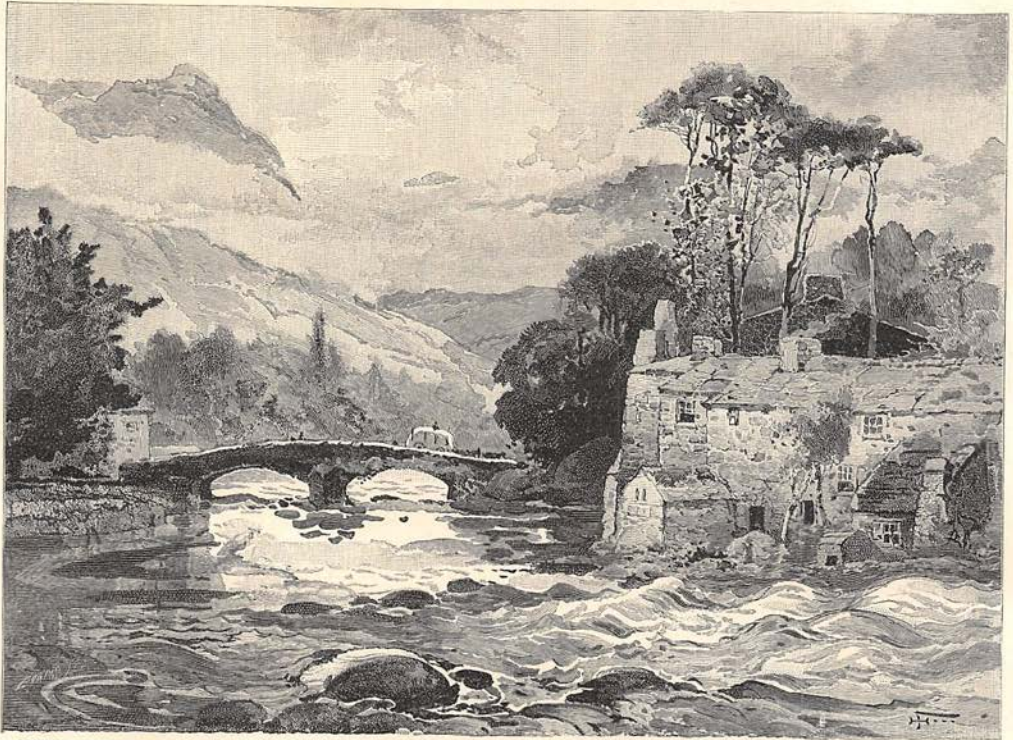
after leaping in white cascades, or spreading out in quiet pools, at length buried themselves in some cove of the Irish Sea. Sometimes the land dipped to a level valley, and again our engine puffed and struggled to reach a higher eminence. A dark slate-colored station, as windowless and simple as a barn, showed itself occasionally by the side of the track.

Americans scarcely realize that Great Britain is so heterogeneous, and can hardly fancy that within an hour's ride of Liverpool a race distinct from the English talk a dialect so different from our mother-tongue that a traveler conversant with German can more readily interpret the Dutch market-woman at Amsterdam or Ghent than an American can comprehend the Welsh of Conway or Bangor; yet such is the fact. Black-headed Welshmen were loafing about the railway stations, and chatting with our guard in their Welsh dialect, as we stopped for mail-bags and perhaps a few passengers.

As the sea was gradually hidden by higher hills, the view became continually wilder and more romantic. The scud from the ocean clung closely to the mountains, and the deep indigo-colored sides of the Snowdon range served as a wall to support the pale masses of mist which hid their summits, and stretched in an unbroken veil across the deep gorges of the valleys.

Hitherto there had been little sunshine, but as we emerged at length upon the shore of a small lake, sunbeams pierced through the vapor, and streamed down upon upland meadows. Purple and pink masses of heather assumed more than their local beauty of hue, where they grew in the crevices of the blue rock; small, thatched cottages, which resembled cromlechs, clung as closely to the sod as the rock itself, and showed in the slanting rays of the sun a narrow door here or a little low chimney. Now and again we saw a hayrick, or a shed beneath which cows or sheep were huddled. The color of the meadows was soft and rich with shades of brown, green, purple, and blue, which melted into misty haze where a wreath of vapor caught in some little projection of rock; or they stood out in bold relief with the varying shapes of the slate formation in this exquisite landscape.

At length the train struck the edge of a river which rushed wildly and tumultuously by the roadside, and while we watched this stream tumble over rocks, or widen between low banks, or narrow its bed in a gorge of the hills, we reached Rhyd Dhu, the terminus of the rail-



DRAWN BY HARRY FENY.

BETHGELERT.

ENGRAVED BY J. W. EVANS.

road, where we expected a trap to convey us to our journey's end.

Like the roads generally in Great Britain, that from Rhyd Dhu to Bethgelert was a good one, smooth and hard; so, though our conveyance was heavily loaded with our luggage, and the country was as uneven as the waves of the sea, we drove along in tolerable comfort.

Bethgelert is a closely grouped cluster of stone houses, most of them with small door-yards, and with trees waving above their roofs. Our trap, dashing along the smooth street of the village, rumbled over an ancient, arched, ivy-covered stone bridge, and, a moment after, the driver got down from the box, and led his horses carefully along a narrow path by the river, and across another bridge, and finally stopped before one of the small garden gates which opened on a low block of dwellings, where we found a hearty welcome in unintelligible Welsh.

The people of Wales have remarkably clear and rosy skins even for Great Britain, and the cheeks of the women and children look like pink wax. I was so occupied with the appearance of the bright assemblage that greeted us that I almost forgot to go into the house, which stood behind flowering-shrubs and trellises, which half hid the lower story of all these dwellings. In the windows of every house on the

block, between white lace curtains, I saw garden boxes blooming with scarlet geraniums and yellow musk flowers, while the bedrooms above were curtained with white drapery.

Alice, the daughter of our hostess, a pretty girl of about fifteen, was ordered by her mother in Welsh to take some of our umbrellas and bags, and her companions caught up our wraps, while we followed them in-doors.

The door was level with the garden-path, and not even a sill raised the little hall above the garden. What can be neater and more shining than a British kitchen? And the kitchens of Wales are the most shining of them all. That of our hostess was a small room with a floor of big slabs of slate; the two windows were gay with flowers, while the soft-coal fire that blazed in the open range was reflected in the brightest of copper kettles, pots, and candlesticks, which nearly covered the wall around it. Dark, high-backed oaken chairs that would be the delight of antiquarians, and a dresser filled with shining glass, and with curious pottery figured with animals, bright-colored flowers, and bands of bronze-color, helped to fill the room. On one side stood a high kitchen-clock with a sun and a moon on its big face, while a glazed bookcase, with volumes in Welsh, completed the furniture of this little apartment.

The parlor on the opposite side of the hall



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN.

THE STREAM ABOVE THE VILLAGE.

ENGRAVED BY J. W. EVANS.

was to be ours; we had also engaged three bedrooms up-stairs. When I ascended to examine the sleeping-apartments, they were so neat, so fresh,—and to me, accustomed to the bareness of American country boarding-houses, they looked so luxurious, with small bath-tubs in each room, and white dimity hangings to the beds,—that a home-like cheer at once filled my heart.

The Glaslyn and Colwyn rivers, which are really mountain torrents, form a junction in Bethgelert, and came tumbling down toward our house through their rocky channels, foaming and leaping under the bridges. Looking toward the opposite shore from our cottage, I

saw a row of queer old stone houses backed close upon the stream, while their odd holes of windows, and their roofs covered with brilliant green moss, formed a charming combination of color and broken shadow with the yellows and blues and red shades of the slate. The mountains on the other side of the valley—Moel Hebog and Craig-y-Llan, as I came afterward to know them—were blue and hazy in the lovely distance, but on the near hillside I could see white sheep and lambs grazing among the crags.

Our hostess furnished the rooms and service, as in British lodgings usually, but the food we were obliged to get for ourselves. This we were

glad to do, since possibly our own ingenuity might make up for the lack of variety in the simple resources of the town.

The market at Bethgelert was very stinted, and to me, accustomed to the luxury of New York, there seemed next to nothing to supply our table. Little Alice told us that she could get bread from the grocer, and that a neighbor

none of the villagers seemed to mind at all; women on the other side of the river were washing clothes and dipping up water; boys rode their horses into the stream to drink; and the village life went on irrespective of the weather. As nobody else appeared to regard the soft rain as a hindrance, I concluded it was the proper way to behave, and so with waterproof and um-



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN, FROM A SKETCH BY SUSAN N. CARTER.

ENGRAVED BY R. C. COLLINS.

LOOKING TOWARD THE PASS OF LLANBERIS.

would sell us potatoes and green peas; and I found sweet butter, fresh eggs, and good milk. Our lingual intercourse with Alice and her mother was so limited, however, that it was of little use to inquire much from them, for "yes" and "no" appeared to be used indiscriminately. So the first night we ordered our evening meal of the simplest kind, and it proved to be so frugal that we were glad to supplement it with the remains of our lunch-basket, on a table set with fresh white linen, bright china and glass, and a jar of flowers.

That night I slept well under my dimity bed-hangings, and when I occasionally stirred, nothing more rude disturbed my slumbers than the murmuring of the two rivers uniting before our domicile. The next morning Alice brought the jug of hot water, inevitable here as it is everywhere in Great Britain; and we had a blazing fire, which proved a necessity every day of our month's visit in Bethgelert.

This first day began with a fine mist, which

brella I prepared to take the gage of Bethgelert in the housekeeping line.

I chose the path by the riverside that had brought us to our lodgings the day before, and, following across the ivied bridge, in a moment was in the center of the quiet town.

As I stood on the ancient bridge and looked about me I saw, nestled in the two little valleys along the banks of the streams, fifty small stone houses or thereabouts, dominated, close to the beginning of the bridge, by four or five buildings larger than the rest, which included the post-office, the Prince Llewellyn hotel, the house of the English clergyman, and one or two other abodes. Immediately off the village street, the wild pasture-land came directly down to the dooryards, while on every side rose blue mountains. Some youths—the native fishermen—were hanging over the stone parapet of the bridge, dangling flies from the end of their long poles. I watched them a few minutes, and gazed about for shops at the same time; but



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN.

THE REPUTED RESIDENCE OF PRINCE LLEWELLYN.

ENGRAVED BY H. DAVIDSON.

none of any importance were to be seen. The dwellings all looked very tiny, and the doors and small windows, sunk deep in their thick stone walls, were scarcely higher than my head. I saw the sign of the Prince Llewellyn on the inn, and concluded to enter and find out, if possible, a little about the town.

From what I could discover I supposed that Bethgelert depended principally on the sheep and lambs of the hillsides for its supply of food. They, I could see, must be largely at the mercy of chance winds and storms, for rain, which in level country would have no significance whatever, here chases the flocks into the caves on the mountain-sides and under cover in the valleys; and the very flesh of the poor things seems to grow thin and watery in the nearly incessant mist by which their wool is moistened. The valleys are so narrow as to give little opportunity to raise vegetables, and, as a permanent resource, salmon and trout are always in demand.

I was impressed by the absence of men about the town. Women and children were visible everywhere, but only now and then an old man or a young lad appeared. I met "our baby" toddling along with half a dozen little creatures of her own age, who trudged with their arms about one another's shoulders and necks in the

most affectionate manner. The girls wore queer, long petticoats, and on their heads were hats and caps of every shape. The little assemblage occupied the middle of the road, and they could safely do so, for except for tourists' carriages and the coach which departed daily for Port Madoc and Bettys-y-coed, scarcely a vehicle but the postman's wagon ever disturbed the quiet of Bethgelert. When they met me the entire row of little girls dropped a deep courtesy, and the boys touched their caps in a military salute.

The houses of Bethgelert are built in small blocks, or at any rate very near together, and it is in one of the front rooms that business is usually carried on. The entrance to these houses is low and narrow, and the heavy wall in which it is sunk would be thick enough for a fortress.

In small places one often is amused to observe how some presiding hero holds a traditional importance in the imagination of the inhabitants. The household god of Bethgelert is Prince Llewellyn, and the doings of this last native prince of Wales are as familiar now as when he roamed over his wild dominion with hounds and followers at his back.

The most important tradition of Llewellyn connects an act of his with the name of the village. The story—a very old one, and familiarly known through literature—is of the faithful

ness of a hound belonging to the prince, and the details about him have been carefully cherished by the inhabitants of Bethgelert from generation to generation.

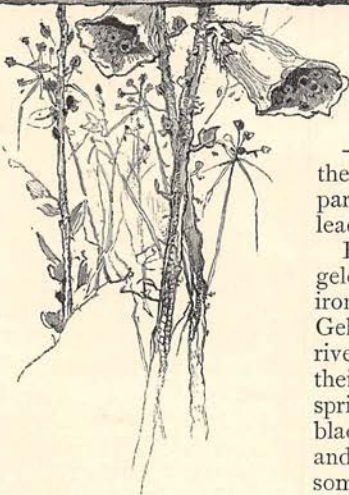
Prince Llewellyn, so the story runs, went out for a hunt one day, but, contrary to habit, Gelert, the hound, did not accompany him. On returning home, the prince found Gelert covered with gore, and his child's cradle vacant. Grief for the child, and anger at the dog, which, he supposed, had murdered the little one, seized upon him, and in an instant he plunged his sword into the side of poor Gelert. But presently came the wail of his baby from another spot, and at the same time, lifting the coverlet of the cradle, the prince discovered the body of a gaunt wolf. All was now clear, and great was the despair of the



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN.

GELERT'S GRAVE.

ENGRAVED BY PETER AITKEN.



FOXGLOVE.

prince at his impetuous act. He had murdered the dog which had saved the life of his infant. A grave — Bethgelert it was called in Welsh — was prepared for the faithful hound, and visitors to the little hamlet do their part to preserve the ancient and well-worn foot-path that leads to it.

Following the example of every other stranger in Bethgelert, one morning I scaled a stone wall by means of heavy iron clamps and slate steps, and took the little foot-path to Gelert's grave. The way led through a soft meadow, by the riverbank, and beside it grew harebells and foxglove with their purple and pink flowers, while delicate ferns and a sprinkling of daisies were scattered about. Groups of the black cows of this region quietly browsed in the meadows, and scarcely raised their noses as I passed. Occasionally some angler was seen on the river-bank, patiently holding his line over the water. Far down upon the green sward,

nearly half a mile off, I came to a tiny inclosure, and within it two old gnarled yew-trees had so welded and flattened their branches together that it was impossible to distinguish between them, after their arms quitted the main trunk of the tree. Beneath these trees stood two stone posts, but so worn by time and weather that the hard surface of the stone looked as smooth and abraded as worm-eaten wood. No words or epitaph marked the spot, but for five hundred years the tradition that this was the grave of Gelert has been handed down from sire to son.

At the side of the river, between our house and the old stone bridge, stood a long rambling group of very ancient buildings, now occupied for dwellings, a chapel, and shops. The walls are perhaps two feet high from the ground to where the sloping roof joins them. A tiny church, once an old abbey, now much in ruins, rose behind, in the midst of a graveyard fresh with green turf; while heavy masses of chimneys covered with ivy, diamond-paned windows among the eaves, and deeply embrasured doors, give an interesting and picturesque variety of outline. This cluster of buildings, a hundred or more feet long, had constituted an ancient Augustine monastery.

On one side of the monastery walls is a building which is believed to be the old palace of Prince Llewellyn; and fancy, groping its way back into the twilight of history, fills out the picture of the rude life of that early period, when a prince could live in so poor an abode. The house is so tiny that it scarcely affords space for a family of three, who devote one room to a little book-store and photograph-shop. This shop formed the literary emporium of the village, and though not more than a dozen feet square and seven feet high, it was an attractive spot. Above its low doorway, on a level with the river-bank, was a picture of Prince Llewellyn and his dog Gelert, while an inscription stated that this had been his palace.

Nearly everybody I saw in Wales had a great respect and affection for books. The children at our house often had them in their hands, and I was surprised and pleased to observe with what care they fondled them, and how clean they were kept. The young mistress of the book-shop, a gentle, patient-looking girl, brightened up when we spoke of some volume familiar to her, and she delighted to repeat phrases and poems to us out of her Welsh library, and then to translate them into English.

Back in the mountains I was told that a Welsh costume is still worn by the peasants, and the red Welsh cloak is a familiar object in pictures of Wales; but in Bethgelert the people were usually habited in sober colors. The younger women appeared at church in ordi-

nary hats and sacks, while their mothers retained the dresses which had served them during the last thirty years. About four o'clock on a Sunday afternoon, when the small church bell was tolling, wandering down the village street, and emerging from every narrow doorway, appeared women in large black silk poke-bonnets, dark shawls, and untrimmed stuff skirts falling to their heels, each one holding her Bible or prayer-book in her hand. The young damsels, especially Miss Jones, who kept the grocery, and Miss Owens, who had a sort of fancy-shop, wore beaded capes and feathers in their hats, which apparently had come but recently from Conway or Bangor.

The men of the village were at home for Sunday, and they too, as well as the women, went religiously to church or to "meeting." With the people of the hamlet, my companion and I sought the low porch of the chapel in the old monastery on Sunday morning, where, after an early Welsh service had been performed for such of the villagers as preferred it, later in the day an English service was held. The remainder of the townsfolk and the English visitors to Bethgelert came to the latter; besides a few old squires who had places in the neighborhood, and who attended with their families to listen to the clergyman in English.

The chapel had a low groined roof, a high pulpit with a sounding-board above it, a small transept and nave, which were lighted by narrow, high windows with tiny panes of coarse greenish or white glass. In the front pews in the transept names of "Honorable This" or "That" marked the distinctions of rank among the parishioners, while behind these pews, which clustered about the pulpit, narrow slips of seats were filled by the lower class of the villagers. The clergyman was a very old man with a snowy beard; but his face was full and rosy, and his voice, as he uttered "sixthly" and "seventhly" in his sermon, was deep and sonorous. When the "eighthly" was pronounced, the only liveried servant in the congregation rose from his place, put on his white overcoat ornamented with many big brass buttons, and stole out on tiptoe. The object of his early departure was apparent when we left the church, for he was the footman of a lumbering family-coach, into which climbed a red-faced squire and his burly wife and daughters.

But another branch of the villagers do not worship in the Church of England, for, in fact, a majority of the people of Wales belong to the Presbyterians or other dissenting sects, and you may see many thin-lipped, worn-looking miners leading their children by the hand to the "meeting-house," a plain, barn-like structure not far off.

I had early remarked the nearly total absence

of young and middle-aged men in Bethgelert. The occupation of the place was almost entirely mining or work in the slate-quarries of the country, which kept them away from Monday until Saturday. Our own landlord was a quarryman, and when Saturday afternoon arrived, I saw from my window a pale, drooping, slight laborer about forty years old come up the garden-path toward the house. The master of the house had walked ten miles over the mountains to spend Sunday with his wife and children. His little girls were on the watch for him, the "baby" in a fresh dress and frizzed fore-locks; Alice had put on her best frock, and our landlady had smoothed down with a superlative shine her own dark locks, which were adorned with artificial flowers. The poor husband came in wearily, and afterward I saw him in the kitchen holding the baby, and showing her and her little brother the pictures in a book he was tenderly handling. He gave me a gentle smile, but the wan, half-hungry look on his pale face struck to my heart. His wife told me afterward that the miners met with many accidents; one of them was the cause of her husband's delicate health.

Sunday morning the master, smartly dressed, was off to "meeting," taking all the children with him. I fancied I saw in his mien a hopeless dejection with his lot, mingled with pride and love for his pretty brood. To walk in the paths of the little garden, with the baby holding to his finger, was his sole amusement. That night when I woke up at three o'clock, and heard the water of the river roaring, and the wind and rain beating on the windows, I also heard our landlord starting off on his lonely ten-mile tramp across the mountains, to get to his work by daylight.

While everywhere the "weather" is a matter of a certain interest, at Bethgelert the interest in it became peculiar and intense. The wind had been blowing harder than usual one evening, and, looking out, I saw great masses of gray wrack tearing across the sky above our little valley. No hard rain had fallen since our arrival, and it had not occurred to me that any important consequences were likely to ensue from such an event. That night after I had gone to bed, however, as the hours wore slowly away, and I heard the storm raging in the valley, all at once it crossed my mind as to what might be the consequences to our household should the river overflow its banks.

I listened, and the roar of the two rivers seemed constantly to grow louder, and when at daybreak I raised my window-curtain to look out, an inundation was imminent. The clouds had settled low on the mountain-sides, but beneath them a hundred white rivulets had sprung into existence, and banded the hills like ribbons.

The arches of the stone bridge, which usually stood many feet above the pebbly bed of the river, were now so nearly full that the foam of the flood as it dashed through them flew thick into the air. Just below our own yard, and in the one beyond it, a little pond had already formed itself, and the water had risen so nearly to the level of the river-bank that it leaped over in tongues as it dashed past. The wind was blowing a hurricane, and roared in our chimneys as loud as thunder. "If this continues," I thought, "what is to keep the water from coming into the parlor and kitchen?" Truly there was nothing; for as I remarked when we first arrived, the garden-paths and the hall were paved on the same level. The prospect was dreary, yet there was nothing to do but wait. We *could* go off to the hotel if we were fairly drowned out; but it was not cheerful to think of facing the storm under such conditions. After a while the children in the next house came out, and on boards or tubs paddled about in their own dooryard; while in the row of houses that backed upon the stream opposite to us, the tide had already risen half-way up the lower story, and trees and bushes were partly submerged.

That night I listened to the storm again in the darkness, and when I looked out of my window fancied that others were keeping watch as well as I, for many were the lights that burned in the small houses in the valley, and occasionally I saw a man come out to the riverbank, and hold his lantern up till its light caught the white waves as they dashed swiftly along. By degrees the wind died away, and before the next noon the weeds and bushes by our garden-wall again appeared, though much bedraggled by the torrent. Later in the week, after news of the ravages of the storm reached us, came particulars of men drowned and cattle floated away, which made the possibilities of what we had escaped very vivid. I asked my friend at the book-shop if the river ever came into the houses, and she pictured to me the autumn storms when the waves made a clean sweep over everything in the bottom of the valley.

Probably in no part of Great Britain are the drives more romantic and the scenery more interesting than in this district of the Welsh mountains. In other parts of Wales, at Llandudno, Colwyn Bay, and such resorts along the seashore, rows of lodging-houses are constantly springing up, and have destroyed the rural character of these towns. Fortunately for the traveler in search of repose, and who cares to see the country in its primitive conditions, small hamlets like Bethgelert still retain their original simplicity nearly undisturbed by contact with the outside world; and one finds the same habits and pursuits among these simple peo-



ple that occupied their parents fifty years ago. To go from here to the pass of Llanberis, where the wild, bare peaks are nearly always lost in cloud; to track along by the deep, lonely tarns, from the edges of which rise precipitous black cliffs; and to watch the leaping brooks with no vestige of human habitation near — all this appeals most strongly to the sense of the picturesque. Especially do you feel the romantic character of this region when, in presence of the bold scenery, you recall at the same moment the traditions of the Druids, and the wild life so closely blended in English history with these desert tracks.

But the morning of our departure dawned in fairly good weather. The same trap which had brought us drove up to the little gate of our garden, and the same neighbors who had welcomed us assembled to help us off. Alice brought down shawls and baskets, and the baby clung close to a big doll we had given her, which she appeared to be afraid would vanish with us. Trunks were put on the box; the French maid laughed with joy, and uttered pious ejaculations at the prospect of her return to the busy world; while my companion and I bade a regretful farewell to the little household and to this gem of Welsh villages.

*Susan Nichols Carter.*



## THE QUEST OF THE ARBUTUS.

FOR days the drench of noiseless rains,  
Then sunshine on the vacant plains,  
And April with her blind desire  
A vagrant in my veins!

Because the tardy gods grew kind  
Unrest and care were cast behind:  
I took a day, and found the world  
Was fashioned to my mind.

The swelling sap that thrilled the wood  
Was cousin to my eager blood;  
I caught the stir of waking roots,  
And knew that life was good.

But something in the odors fleet,  
And in the sap's suggestion sweet,  
Was lacking — one thing everywhere  
To make the spring complete.

At length, within a leafy nest  
Where spring's persuasions pleaded best,  
I found a pale, reluctant flower,  
The purpose of my quest.

And then the world's expectancy  
Grew clear: I knew its need to be  
Not this dear flower, but one dear hand  
To pluck the flower with me.

*Charles G. D. Roberts.*