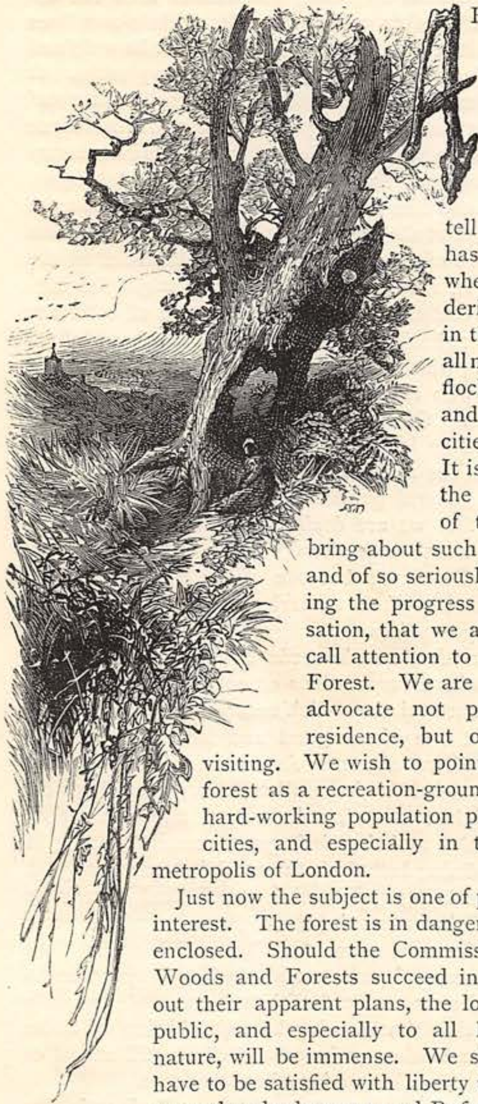
A RAMBLE IN THE NEW FOREST.



A FAMOUS living philosopher has said that could he only find words to tell what he has enjoyed when wandering about in the woods, all men would flock to them and leave the cities empty. It is not with the intention of trying to bring about such a result, and of so seriously hindering the progress of civilisation, that we at present call attention to the New Forest. We are going to advocate not permanent residence, but occasional visiting. We wish to point out the forest as a recreation-ground for the hard-working population pent up in cities, and especially in the great metropolis of London.

Just now the subject is one of particular interest. The forest is in danger of being enclosed. Should the Commissioners of Woods and Forests succeed in carrying out their apparent plans, the loss to the public, and especially to all lovers of nature, will be immense. We shall then have to be satisfied with liberty to ramble over a hundred acres round Rufus's Stone, whereas at present we enjoy, by inheritance, the right of free passage over no less than sixty thousand acres. But into the controversy between the Commissioners and the Commoners—who, as Mr. G. E. Briscoe Eyre, to whose kindness we are indebted for much valuable information, says, are "practically trustees for the public"—we shall not enter. At the same time we shall await the result with considerable anxiety. To destroy anything old and beautiful is—leaving the Commoners' rights out of the question—an injury to the community, for which no amount of money made by new plantations can ever compensate.

On entering the New Forest, we set foot in a region which, in its main features, is the same as when it was afforested by William the Conqueror. The wild boars and badgers and wolves are gone; the deer also have disappeared, and the South-Western Railway runs through it, but far more is to be found there reminding us of the past than of the present. Within its sylvan shades we can forget both to-day and to-morrow, and revel in thoughts of eight hundred years ago.

The great charm of the New Forest is its scenery. And it is well here to correct an impression which is likely to be made on the reader's mind by the name Forest. Though all the district is so called, it includes many moors, and plains, and open heaths, on which there is not a single tree growing. It is to the woods, however, with their wonderful depth of foliage, their grand old trees, and green avenues, that the tourist will give most attention. He will find enough to gratify him. The oaks, many of which are hundreds of years old, form the characteristic features of the forest. They have a character peculiar to themselves. They are not so high or so large as in many other parts of England, but they are more picturesque in their outlines.

The way to see the New Forest is not to keep to the high-roads which, smooth as in a park, intersect it. We must wander about here and there over the fern and heath, and, best plan of all, following the streams. These will lead us through the greenest valleys and past the thickest woods. There is just one inconvenience attending this departure from the beaten track—one may land in a bog. But, remarks one writer, "the stories with which most books on the forest abound, of persons being swamped in morasses, are much exaggerated. Mind only this simple rule—whenever you see the white cottton-grass growing, and the bog-moss particularly fine and green, to avoid that spot." As for losing one's way whilst roaming there in search of sequestered spots unknown even to the "oldest inhabitant," there is not much danger of that. The forest is not so wide that one can hopelessly wander in it, and with a clear head and a good map—say the Ordnance Survey Map—one need never be much at a loss.

In addition to this independent exploration, however, there are some sights which every one should see. And for the first of these we shall mention Rufus's Stone, about four miles from Lyndhurst, which marks the spot where the oak-tree stood, "on which an arrow, shot by Sir Walter Tyrell at a stag, glanced, and struck King William II., surnamed Rufus, in the breast, of which stroke he instantly died, on the 2nd of August, 1100." The stone is guarded against the chipping of relic-hunters by a hideous iron case.

One of the best-known scenes in the whole region is the avenue between Brockenhurst and Lyndhurst. The visitor is never likely to forget its beeches, and groups of oaks, and long lawns stretching away into distant woods. In the spring-time, and indeed at all seasons, it is a most beautiful road. Another favourite scene is the view from Stony Cross, extending over a

lovely country to the Wiltshire Downs. If any one wishes to know the beauty of the forest in autumn, it has been said he should see the view from the high ridge here. A third scene which should not be passed by is the village of Minestead, a haven of peace, lying sheltered amidst the forest oaks and its own orchard trees.

We have spoken already of the oaks of the forest. Certainly, whoever wishes to make the acquaintance of trees noted for age or picturesque appearance will not meet with disappointment here. At Knightwood, three miles or so from Lyndhurst, there is a well-known oak, whose arms run out in a most fantastic way, each arm being a tree in bulk. It is in all the vigour of life, and may last till Lord Macaulay's New Zealander comes to sit on the ruins of London Bridge. Not far from the great Knightwood oak stand his ancient brethren, the "Twelve Apostles." It is held that they are the oldest trees in the forest. Unfortunately, some of the twelve have perished, and of those that remain the heads are gone. They are just shattered stumps dragging on a weary existence. The handsomest oak in the New Forest is reported to be one near its western boundary, at Moyle's Court.

"WONDERFUL DEPTH OF FOLIAGE" (*p.* 508.)

The noblest relics of the ancient wooding are to be found at Burley Old, Bramshaw Wood, Denny Wood, and Mark Ash. Of these the finest is the last. It is a sombre beech-wood, under whose melancholy boughs travellers may imagine strange things. It should be visited from Boldrewood.

The sentimental tourist may drop a tear over the loss of the once familiar herds of deer. From the romantic point of view, it is certainly a great pity they are gone. The droves of routing swine one meets in the autumn are never likely to satisfy the poetic soul.

The forest pony is an interesting animal—lath-legged, small-bodied, and heavy-headed, but strong and hardy. There is a tradition—said to be a pure piece of imagination—that it is descended from Spanish horses which swam ashore from the disabled ships of the Armada.

We come now to the human inhabitants. The natives are a "long-limbed peasantry, with narrow head and shoulders, loose shambling gait, and slowness of perception." Their dialect is ungainly in sound, harsh and drawling, with no tone in it, and spoken mainly with the teeth shut, besides exhibiting many peculiarities, including a great confusion of cases, of interest to philologists. We met lately in a contemporary with the following example of it:—

"Hev'ee zeen t' fox? they'se lost he, I bet!"

"Na-a-a; I zeed 'en goo into vuzz at t' carner o' thic 'ood."

"Big un?"

"Ya-a-as."

"Where bist gwine now then?"

"Whoam; thee's betterr come with I."

The gipsies are amongst the most interesting of the population of the district, though by no means so numerous as is sometimes said. They are Lees and Stanleys for the most part, and lead an unsettled life from necessity as well as choice, being driven about here and there by the rural police. Occasional fowls, hedgehogs, and squirrels are their most luxurious fare, and the chief industries which they follow are the manufacture of mats, brooms, bee-hives, and such-like articles.

This beautiful and picturesque region, then, with all its moorland and woodland, is at the present day far less known and recognised than it ought to be. It is easy to arrive at, lying as it does within a hundred miles of London, and being accessible from no fewer than twelve railway stations between Salisbury and Southampton. It is bordered by two branch lines of the South-Western Railway, and is traversed by a third—the well-known "Corkscrew" line. This line is

a tiresome one to the ordinary passenger, but to the tourist it is very convenient. Hotel accommodation is scarce within the forest, but walks of a day long, Mr. Eyre has pointed out, can easily be so managed between one railway station and another, as to secure the best of accommodation in the larger towns at the day's end. No one who has gone on such expeditions can ever forget them. They form, we believe, the brightest and happiest experiences of many a hard-working life.

THE GATHERER.

An Ice Harvest.

Most of the ice brought into this country comes from Norway, but it seems as if, in favourable years, we might "grow" a great part of what is required for our own consumption. To make this clear, we must explain that when pounded ice, or even snow, is submitted to hydraulic pressure, it will unite so completely as to present the appearance of a single solid block. On the same principle, if several slabs of thin ice be placed in contact, the one over the other, their surfaces may be so thoroughly united under pressure as not only to obliterate the line of contact, but to render them essentially one. On our lakes and rivers in winter, the ice is never more than a few inches in thickness; but it appears that we might, by means of a screw or lever press, combine these thin sheets into solid square blocks of a proper size for storage and transportation. Ice-farming, then, might become a considerable industry amongst us.

It is not so long ago since the trade in ice, which every year becomes more important, had its origin in this country. There is a pleasant story about the first ship-load which arrived on our shores. The Custom-House Tariff was found not to contain any reference to such an article, and a long correspondence ensued as to the terms in which the entries were to be passed. At last it was decided that the ice was to be entered as "dry goods," but by the time the decision was arrived at the cargo was all melted.

Fresh Air.

One of the problems of social life, and one which has never yet been quite satisfactorily solved, is that of ventilation. But few others are of more importance with regard to health, especially in large towns and crowded neighbourhoods. A simple method for ventilating sleeping and living rooms has been recommended in a recent publication. Cut a piece of wood three inches high, and exactly as long as the breadth of the window. Raise the sash, place the slip of wood on the sill, and draw the sash closely over it. If the slip has been well fitted, there will be no draught in consequence of this displacement of the sash at its lower part; but the top of the lower sash will overlap the bottom of the upper one, and, between the two bars, perpendicular currents of air, not felt as a draught, will enter and leave the room, and the atmosphere will be kept fresh and wholesome.

Roasted Figs.

In Austria roasted figs are sold as a substitute for coffee. They possess a sweetish-bitter taste, like caramel, and sometimes taste sour, owing probably to the use of inferior or even partially decayed fruit. Of course, though more enticing than chicory, this substitute has none of the qualities valued in coffee, and in fact the only argument which one manufacturer has to offer for its use is, that it is less stimulating than the pure article!

Washing-day Manœuvres.

The washerwomen of Belgium and Holland have a way of preparing linen which is worth knowing. They use borax instead of soda as a washing-powder. To every ten gallons of water a large handful of borax is added, with the result, which every frugal mind will hear with pleasure, of a considerable saving of soap. An extra quantity of borax is used for laces and cambrics. It does not injure the things washed in the least, and softens the hardest water. An ordinary kettleful of hard water will be effectually softened if only a tea-spoonful of borax be allowed to boil in it.

Tea in its presumed Native Land.

It is now known that the tea-plant was not introduced into China until about the fourth century, and that it was not generally used as a beverage in the Celestial Empire until the ninth century, when the government recommended the use of the infusion of tea-leaves as a corrective to the bad quality of the water ordinarily drunk. It has since proved the national beverage of the Chinese, the spirit distilled from rice being a drink of secondary importance. Sugar, it may also be remarked, was but imperfectly known to the Greeks and Romans. From 1466 to 1580 it was rarely used in England, save in the households of the wealthy, and was procured from the Portuguese, Venetians, and Genoese.

Light as a Motive-power.

Every day the world seems to grow more wonderful, and we have now to call attention to a discovery which promises to rank as one of the most remarkable that our times have witnessed. We are indebted for it to Mr. William Crookes, F.R.S., to whose scientific ability and good fortune we also owe the discovery of the metal Thallium.

For some time past, Mr. Crookes has been engaged in investigating the action of light and heat upon bodies suspended in a vacuum. It has always been thought that light, apart from heat, exercises no mechanical action whatever. But this is not the case, as Mr. Crookes clearly demonstrated by a series of most interesting experiments at a recent meeting of the