

A DREAM OF THE WESTERN WYE.



YES; there can be no doubt about it. Winter has arrived. The bleak, blighting north-easter heralds with its blast the advent of rheumatism, dear coals, and fireside felicity. Outside all is wild, and wet, and windy. The skies wear the blackest crape, and are weeping over the grave of Autumn. The black, bare boughs of the trees shiver with cold. The faded leaves, chased by the wind, are huddling themselves together in close corners, as if to seek mutual warmth; but the Spirit of the Storm ever and anon with a shriek bids them "move on," just as the great-coated policemen do the poor outcasts who starve upon the stony steps in the streets of the Great City. It is a withering wind, laughing derisively at the most voluminous ulster, and mocking the warmest woollens: a vicious wind, sneering at you through the window-panes, and sending a spiteful message of wet down the chimney to damp the geniality of the friendly fire.

I have a bundle of old letters before me; I have been turning them over in search of a lost address, and, although discovering the most unexpected epistles, cannot meet with the missing one. Only a pile of old correspondence, yet what a store of mental wizardry it enshrines! Faded letters are embalmed memories. Their talismanic power transports you to far-away scenes, and to bygone days. The sight of an old letter will bring back "the touch of a vanished hand, and the sound of a voice that is still," and will unite friends severed by wide continents and raging seas. That small envelope contains the record of a comedy, and this relates a life's tragedy; that perfumed *billet-doux* recalls an early attack of the lunacy of love; while that exaggerated envelope, with the pen-and-ink caricature of the postman, is from the facetious friend with whom I spent a bright holiday in the illusive morning of life. Here is an epistle from my friend Gloucester; it is a mere invitation to "come down, old fellow, and see this part of the country;" yet the law of association links that letter with the most glowing memories. It touches the ever-sensitive strings of memory, and they respond in a sympathetic strain. It calls forth sweet odours from the flower-garden of recollection. It makes this common-place communication like unto the simple sea-shell which retains the refrain of the singing sea, though years ago exiled miles away from its native shore. "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!" Rain, leaky leaden clouds! I defy ye. This letter bears me away on paper pinions to the bosom of a bewitching river, which brightens a Western landscape. Fleecy clouds fleck the fair sky; a soft wind is the bearer of messages of scent from forest flowers; I hear the music of tremulous trees; and all around there is a silver shimmer of summer colours, and tender effects of light and shade.

It is just as summer is melting into autumn that we embark on the waters of the Western Wye. The

"we," ladies and gentlemen, includes my aforesaid friend Gloucester; his good wife, whom we will call, if you please, Queen Mab; his sister Sylvia; the Ancient Mariner; and, lastly, your obliged and obedient servant, myself. Mab is a merry little wife, who can make either a pun or a pudding with equal ease. Sylvia is a winsome Western wizard, who brightens the boat like a sunbeam. Dulcet eyes divinely dark; a pretty, pale face, which when animated is suffused with flushes that the blossoms of her beloved orchard country might covet; just one dainty wave of hair stealing over an intellectual brow, but none of that affected "Grecian fringe" with which modern "girls of the period" strive to hide what little forehead they possess; a black camlet dress clinging in graceful folds, a dress relieved by narrow bands of black velvet, bearing a delicate embroidery of gold-coloured silk toned down with olive-greens and sober browns, a dress sufficiently modern in *mode* as to hint at the grace of a youthful figure without displaying its every outline of rounded beauty; a small knot of gay ribbon, holding two roses and a spray of fern, closes the plain white collar at the dainty throat; round the neck is a shining chain of silvery hair, a memento of a loved and loving friend—add a crimson wrapping-shawl and a coquettish hat;—but there! my attempt at painting Sylvia's portrait is only a qualified success. As for the Ancient, he is a brawny, bronzed boatman, who knows all those treacherous currents, and impassable shallows, and reefs of sunken rocks, that spell disaster, and sometimes death, to the novice who attempts the navigation of the Wye.

For the Wye is a dangerous river. It is the *sine qua non* of a safe boating tour down the wooded reaches of the "English Rhine" that you should be piloted by a native waterman. This bend in the stream has its Scylla, and the next its Charybdis. Here you play an exciting game of hide-and-seek with a ridge of sunken rocks; there the sport is changed to pitch-and-toss among the impetuous rapids. The river is wonderfully rapid, although in the deep passages it appears as placid as a sheet of burnished glass—so rapid that the Ancient says that boats cannot well make headway against the stream. On the upward journey they are either towed, punted with poles, or brought back by land. But how clear the water is compared with the inky liquid of our Northern streams! How refreshing its olive-green colour to one accustomed to that Styx at Manchester, the Irwell, into which a man recently tumbled, and escaped death by drowning only to die from the effects of the poisoned water he had unwittingly swallowed during his immersion! How pleasant must be the Wye's crystal purity to a Leeds man whose knowledge of English rivers is confined to the Aire, the sullied depths of which supplied ink black enough to write a memorial to Parliament respecting the "Purification of Rivers!" How grateful and gladdening these reaches

of liquid light, mirroring the hanging foliage, to the sad Sheffielder from the dirty Don, and its sickly patches of blackened grass pining for a coat or two of green paint!

We are now leaving behind us the tranquil town of Ross, with its memories of John Kyrle, Pope's "Man of Ross." Our water-sprites, Mab and Sylvia, are seated on the cushions at the stern of our roomy craft. Gloucester and myself have been permitted to smoke. Yonder is all that is left of Goodrich Castle, looking down upon the windings of the Wye from a cliff to our left. A salmon jumps out of the water at our bows, and tumbles in again with a splash like a stone, leaving a legacy of silver scales on the boat-side. The Ancient is full of legends of heavy baskets of fish made by this and that "judicious hooker." A little cry of delight from Sylvia, and I know we are at Symonds Yat, where the scenery grows so romantic that it is doing it a gross injustice merely to describe it as picturesque. The river takes a serpentine course between hanging banks of billowy foliage, or rather great walls of changing green, that rise sheer from the water's edge to mountain heights, diversified here and there with the grey colour of a limestone crag. A new railway, that runs down to Monmouth, somewhat discounts nature's charms; but nowhere could you find a richer ridge of wooded heights, or more sylvan stretches of river. It is a subject for mutual congratulation that we have chosen this "Indian summer" season to pay our homage to the

Western river-queen. The Wye Valley is picturesque enough under any conditions—in winter, when the trees are covered with a fantastic fretwork of frost; in spring, when there is the scent of opening buds, and the sound of joyous birds; in summer, when the precipitous rocks are clad in a dress of radiant green, and the glad sunlight gives a new glamour to glancing water and gleaming wood. But autumn lends to the scenery a new enchantment. The foliage assumes glowing tints. The eye is not wearied with the monotony of green. There are now more gradations of colour than are dreamt of in Winsor and Newton's philosophy—flaming scarlets, sober russets, burnished browns, dark greens, fading yellows, bright bronzes. There! shut in by the towering banks of foliage, Sylvia has started a quaint old song. Gloucester accompanies her on the violin. The echoes are playing at shuttlecock and battledore across the water. "I can govern a state, but cannot play the fiddle," said Pericles; and there is certainly something to be said in favour of Gloucester's art, which seems to throw either the heart's melancholy or joy into music. And so we float

dreamily down to Monmouth; the sun sinking slowly behind the hills in a spectral saffron light; the boat floating on its own shadow; the hanging bushes throwing dark reflections on the rippling river; the "banks" of foliage acknowledging the evening "notes" of a nightingale; and the approaching town lying in a purple haze. The westerling sun expires in a melodramatic burst of blood-red radiance. The King of Day has abdicated his fiery throne, and now the pale Queen of Night, with her retinue of stars, reigns over the whispering water. The splash, splash of the oars makes the stillness noticeable; the banks now are but black shadows; Gloucester's cigar burns through the darkness like a danger-signal; a tender flood of moonlight falls on Sylvia's shoulders, investing her fair face with a saintly fancy; beyond, the lights of Monmouth glimmer through the gloaming.

We sleep at an hotel which was once honoured with the patronage of Charles II., and the royal favour seems to be charged for in our bill. Sylvia is in the breakfast-room when I get down-stairs. We agree upon a short walk before partaking of the eternal coffee and ham and eggs. Monmouth at its briskest is a sleepy, picturesque old place, but in the early morning it is simply sepulchral in its deep somnolence. Perhaps Sylvia's presence adds new charms to the brightness of the morning, but it is a morning that does credit to our much-maligned English weather—a serene, sunny morning, to be recalled when we suffer from the coffee-coloured



TINTERN ABBEY.

fogs of November, from December's atmospheric aberrations, and January's meteorological miseries. It is pleasant to wander about the old-fashioned Monmouth streets, to gaze at the tree-covered hills that tuck in the town on every side, to watch the sun-lit river rushing through the sturdy stone arches of the antique bridge with the turbulence of a mill-sludge, and to follow the water until it is lost amid the hanging woods and stretching meadows beyond.

The fresh morning air is a capital tonic, and the coffee and ham and eggs were very acceptable after all. The Ancient is waiting for us at the slimy acknowledgment of a pier; and now we are dropping down with the tide Chepstow-ward. Yesterday we seemed to attain to the perfection of the picturesque, but this morning there awaits us a succession of sweet surprises in scenery. We skirt pleasant pastures where the cud-chewing kine survey us contemplatively, and stately swans sweep majestically towards the river-reeds, and a family of young ducks are paddling unwillingly to school. Presently the banks contract, and a towering tract of forest closes the stream on either

side. A cluster of young oaks grows from a submerged island in the centre of the river; Sylvia shows me a shooting-box high up on the dark-wooded hill; and the Ancient tells us the name of an old-world village which is mixed up among the fading foliage yonder. Wilder and steeper grow the wooded banks. Now you think you are land-locked, when, lo! a sudden opening reveals a fresh reach of river, and a richer vista of russet woodland. There is a soothing serenity in the solitude of the stream, which belongs to the sublime. Not a single angler is misplacing the confidence of the rising fish; not a solitary artist is transferring the wooded grandeur to canvas; no child is climbing in quest of the wild flowers and ripe blackberries and hazel-nuts that abound; and no tourist from toiling town is sharing the enjoyment of the stream with ourselves. It seems selfish to monopolise such sylvan scenery. It seems as if we were intruding in Nature's presence-chamber. We moor the boat to the margin of the stream and, getting out, expect to drop upon classic naiads and water-nymphs at their revels. But we only disturb two gossiping moor-hens, who gravely paddle off to see after their husbands' dinners. We land in what is surely

—"the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight,
Stand like Druids of old, with voices sad and prophetic,
Stand like harpers hoar, with beards that rest on their bosoms."

The trunks of the trees rise like the pillars of some solemn cathedral. The roof of this temple "not made with hands" is of transparent green and gold; and the carpet is a tangled mass of fallen leaves, and ferns, and wild flowers, and fir-needles. One or two dead leaves fall with a musical sigh. Some tall beeches hang right over the Wye, and cast a trembling tracery of tinted leaves upon the gliding water; and there is a mountain-ash which leans over the current and is mirrored leaf for leaf, scarlet berry for scarlet berry, beneath.

"I found the poems in the fields,
And only wrote them down,"

says John Clare, the poor pastoral poet of Northamptonshire, and here on the Wye are surely the choicest pages of Nature's poetic volume. With a ripple at the bows, and just a wake of white foam at the stern, we again drift down the wooded water-valley. The sweet cadence of Gloucester's violin once more is echoed across the water, and somebody, whose name modesty forbids me to mention, is attempting a German song, when we catch our first glance of Tintern Abbey.

Dinner at the "Beaufort Arms Hotel," a quiet, quaint hostelry overlooking the ruined abbey, and the river wandering through its wooded paradise. A sunny afternoon in the exquisite ruins. We climb a worn spiral staircase, and gain the top of the mighty chancel-wall. The great window-arch, bereft of its coloured glass, is the frame for a picture whose beauty it is difficult to imagine, and impossible to depict. A wealth of waving woodland climbing skyward, with a *chevaux-de-frise* of pines on the topmost ridge; the Wye winding almost at the foot of the great grey

abbey-walls; a meeting of the mountains, and a convergence of several verdant valleys; and immediately below, the sacred floor, covered with a carpet of soft grass, emerald-green. It is a trite but true remark that the pious founders of our mediæval abbeys made a happy choice of locality. The scenery surrounding these grey old piles is invariably the most picturesque in the district, and in most cases the site selected is near a fish-stocked river. Bolton and Tewkesbury will serve as instances, but the situation of Tintern Abbey is perhaps the best illustration of the artistic eye possessed by the monks of old. The Wye in the whole of its course is nowhere prettier than at Tintern. Tintern Abbey! Within the limits of this article how dare I describe the honoured, hallowed pile? How shall I speak of the majesty of its architectural proportions? To what extent shall I relate its interesting history? Even in space less restricted, how could I hope to say anything new respecting a place which has so often been described, but which has never been described, and never will be described? When one of our popular writers was staying at the Falls of Niagara, he appended as a foot-note to one of his admirable letters the remark: "There are some waterfalls hereabouts, which are said to be pretty." I must avoid attempting to describe the indescribable, by penning a similar postscript concerning Tintern. Ruins so ravishingly romantic are calculated to drive the most prosaic pen into guide-book raptures, and I have to rein my Pegasus for fear she—uncertain steed!—should rush recklessly into notes of admiration and super-superlatives. I cease to wonder now at so many acres of painter's canvas being covered with the walls of Tintern Abbey, and at the reams of paper the poets have spoiled in the apotheosis of the fine old fabric.

The afternoon is wearing on. We have no desire to see Tintern Abbey by moonlight. Sir Walter Scott himself never beheld Melrose by moonlight, and he laughed a lady friend of his out of the idea of indulging in that sensation, by telling her the result would be rheumatism. Barry Cornwall, the author of "The Sea, the Sea, the open Sea," was never on the waves but once in his life, and then he suffered so much from *mal-de-mer* that he had to be prematurely taken ashore. "It is just the same if you say you have been down," said Sheridan to his son Tom, who wanted to go down a coal-mine; and we regard things from the Sheridan point of view as we sail down the Wye from Tintern to the Windcliff, a brief transition of two or three miles. The Windcliff is a steep hill, a towering crag, overlooking the Valley of the Wye. It is a stubborn climb to the summit, now along steep serpentine paths among the trees, and through a tangled thicket of brambles and bushes, ferns and fox-gloves, and then up sinuous stone-steps seemingly as unceasing as the everlasting boards of the tread-mill. It is a stiff climb, an Avernus-ascent which would have taken all the wind and aspiration out of the impatient youth who wanted so to "get up in the world" in Longfellow's "Excelsior." It is "bellows to mend" before we are half-way up, yet I am sorry when the summit is reached, for I have no longer an excuse to retain

Sylvia's hand, and can no longer feel the warm pressure repaid with a greater interest than the exigencies of our Alpine climb demanded. This, mark you, my dear madam, is quite *entre nous*. Gloucester and Queen Mab have been seated at the summit several minutes, enjoying a panorama which justifies all the perspiring exertions of the ascent. The Windcliff is an observatory from which you can see half a dozen counties—a watch-tower with a wider sweep of view than had Herr Teufelsdröckh from his garret eyrie. Immediately below is the wooded steep up which we have toiled—a rippling expanse of colour; the white streak of turnpike road intervenes; then comes the Wye, stealing between limestone crags and hanging woods; anon a stretch of pastoral landscape; yonder, glistening in the hollow like a pearl, is the town of Chepstow, from which Sir Walter's "stout Clare and fiery Neville" rode; beyond are the sombre sands of the Bristol Channel, where the tawny waves come up to meet the Wye and the Severn, to show them the way to the sea, which is a pale plain in the dreamy distance. The opposite coast lies in a purple haze.

It is several miles by the Wye from the Windcliff to Chepstow. The tide is coming up from the channel, and the chill darkness will soon be settling down. Gloucester shares one of the oars with the Ancient.

Mab and Sylvia are wrapped up in shawls and each other. I take a cigar and the rudder-lines. The sun, a shield of fire, is dropping down behind the cliffs. The rushing water and hanging trees become enchanted in their Turner-like effects of light and shadow. The rosy rays of the fiery disc slant on the river with a golden radiance, and the hugging banks look spectral in the waning light. The silence is rendered musical by the swirl of the current and the dip of the oars. Anon the pale sickle of the moon glints through the umbrageous wall of wood, and a fleecy cloud sails through the water like an argosy of pearl. The wind's mystic fingers gently stir a moaning harp of pines, and then we sing together the "Canadian Boat-song." We arrive at last at Chepstow, famous for its great railway bridge built by Brunel, its general depression, and its rich black river-mud.

Mud and depression recall me from my reverie, and to a consciousness of the withering wind and cheerless rain outside. Some one, whose finger wears a golden fether, and who looks like Sylvia, is assisting the fire to a little more coal. She says that I have been an unconscionable time in finding that lost address, and begins to go through my letters herself, thinking she may be more successful in her search.

E. B.

HARMLESS REQUISITES FOR THE TOILET.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



HIS paper, gentlemen readers, is dedicated to the fair sex. It is written expressly for the ladies, although, to be sure, I have no objection to your reading it. Figuratively speaking, you may if you choose come and hear the lecture, so long as you come into the hall on tiptoe, with your hats beneath your knees, and take your places modestly and quietly in one of the back seats, the front rows being reserved for your sisters. For once in a way, if never again, I would have my audience exclusive; for once in a way I would be surrounded by beauty. Now, beauty is the birthright of a woman. It is not only her privilege, but her duty to be lovely if she can, and at all times to make herself appear to the very best advantage. I shall try in this paper to show how this can be best accomplished without risk and with simplicity; and, mind you, this last is something to be aimed at. In the practice of my profession, I have at times the privilege of getting a peep at a lady's toilet-table. I shouldn't for the world think of telling tales out of school, but I cannot help remarking here, that female loveliness is not always proportionate to the multiplicity of the different

articles to be found on the dressing-table. Indeed, it is more often quite the reverse.

Before sunrise, upon May mornings, in a county that I am acquainted with, little maidens may be seen tripping fieldwards to bathe their faces in the dew from the grass. They tell me it makes them beautiful, and I don't doubt it. Just such a toilet, you may be sure, as mother Eve made. We have grown more fastidious in our tastes since her day. We will not cull our cosmetics by Nature's fount; we must have them brought to us in our rooms, and brought to us, too, from the uttermost parts of the earth. There would be small harm in this, were it not for the fact that a large proportion of the articles used for the toilet are useless, and many injurious and poisonous. Now, if any lady were to ask me the question, "Can I improve my looks?" or, "Can I make myself look better than I do at present?" I should put my gallantry in my pocket and answer, "Yes, decidedly you can *if* there is room for improvement in your general health, for health is at the foundation of all beauty; and there is hardly any one living who takes all the care of herself or himself that might be done." If you want to look well, then, you must feel well, and to do this you must live regularly and temperately, and take a due proportion of sleep and exercise.