

All the resources of this goodly land are now about to be thrown open, and for once in a way it seems as if the supply of comestibles both for man and beast must almost exceed the demand. Ripe fruit in hot climates is not so much a luxury as an important

article of food; but though, in consequence of this, the plains of India will absorb the great bulk of the consignments, a few tons will travel through from time to time, and supply English tables with dessert novelties from Afghanistan.

ELIZA CLARKE.

OUR HAPPY VALLEY: A VISIT TO DOLGELLEY.



THE Dale of Hazels is not unknown to tourists, many of whom spend a few days or hours, as the case may be, in ascending its grand mountain, visiting its noted waterfalls, and perhaps taking one or two of its chief walks. Then, satisfied that they have thoroughly "done" the place, they hurry on to the next spot recommended by the guide-book as

an "eligible centre for excursions."

So that for a few weeks, in the height of the season, our quaint little town will often be quite gay with an ever-varying tide of visitors, and the old church thronged for two or three successive Sundays, the strangers generally lingering in the churchyard after service is over, to enjoy the view down the valley—"deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard-lawns and bowery hollows;" while above the clustering roofs and chimneys of the town, and overtopping the nearer verdant slopes, a glimpse is caught of rugged purple peaks—the outworks of that giant citadel which is the pride and glory of our small community.

Not to these casual passers-by, however, does our valley reveal itself. Some of its loveliest scenes are unknown and undiscovered by them, and weeks and months may easily be spent in exploring the neighbourhood, fresh beauty being found at every turn in each of the numerous glens and valleys which "run amongst the hills." We have passed many months in this manner, and (good walkers though we be) have found the time all too short for the purpose; recalling even now, with fond regret, many a charming spot only once visited, or remoter nook never reached.

Let us suppose that the reader, acting upon our advice, has arrived by the late train last evening, and driven through the narrow irregular streets, which break out unexpectedly here and there into odd little squares, and then seem to end, till a sudden turning brings you out again into an open space where the houses have apparently quarrelled and refused to face each other; some standing with their backs to the company, some edgewise, some endways, one retreating shyly behind its neighbours, another standing boldly forth alone. The older dwellings have high-pitched roofs, with great rickety-looking stone chimneys, equally primitive and picturesque in their construction; casement windows, and sometimes flights of outer stairs leading to the attics. A few

years ago there were several "timbered" houses, but with one conspicuous exception (the so-called Parliament House of Owen Glendwr) these, alas! have disappeared, and comfortable but commonplace modern habitations are fast displacing the queer old cottages. Perhaps you have elected to put up at one of the two principal hotels in our town, but if you intend to follow our example and make a prolonged stay, you will probably have secured private lodgings, which can always be heard of through the Postmaster. I know if you have the good luck to get into our quarters you will be indeed fortunate; and supposing such to be the case, you will very likely have been wakened from your slumbers this morning by the church-bells ringing for 8 o'clock prayers, and with a sense of bewilderment, consequent on yesterday's journey and the unfamiliar surroundings, will have listened vaguely to the murmur of the river close by, mingling with the sweet tinkle of the chimes. Come out when you have breakfasted in that pretty room whose windows look over the smooth, rippling water to the green uplands of its further bank; a few steps will bring you to the river-side, and there, seated on a bench in the long pleasant meadow, where eternal games of cricket are played, you can take your ease and have a look about you. Facing you, the little town and church nestle close at the foot of Cader Idris, a chain of mountains which are all included under the name of the central and loftiest peak, that being invisible from your present position. A fine group it is, bare and rugged, with purple rifts and deep hollows, wherein lie hidden tarns; but the nearer ridges and lower wooded hills conceal much of its sterner features, and disguise its height, so that many persons are disappointed at the first view from hence. It is when you come to closer quarters that its true grandeur is disclosed, and from any of the hills around you gain a juster idea of its proportions, rising with you as it seems to do, at every step, and gradually dwarfing into insignificance all rivals.

A long toilsome walk up a steep lane and across boggy moorland, where stag's-horn moss alone seems to flourish, brings you to the tarn, which in itself scarcely repays the ascent, but the overhanging cliffs of Mynydd Moel are fine. Far larger and better worth the climb are the two lakes lying more to the westward, and nearly below the central peak of Cader, under a grand semi-circular precipice; but they must be reached by quite another route. Look over those pretty houses, the lawns and woods of which adorn the slopes

above the town, and you will perceive a gap in the chain of planted heights. The road to our great mountain crosses that gap, and leaving the richly-cultivated, smiling valley behind, enters a sterner region of wild crags, bare uplands, and lonely "vales uplifted high among the hills." About two miles from the town a solitary inn is reached, standing on a mound above the shores of Llyn Gwernen, a small lake, the resort of anglers; and there tourists who wish to ascend Cader Idris before sunrise frequently put up for the night. The summit is now in full view, and the perpendicular wall of cliffs, seamed with watercourses, which connects the two principal peaks, has a striking effect from this road, especially if seen just after a shower, when masses of white vapour keep rolling up, and stormy gleams of light glitter on the wet rocks and swollen torrents, deepest purple and softest green tinting the rain-washed mountain-sides.

A little further on is the gate where the ascent properly begins, and if you are fond of mountaineering, pick a clear day, and a glorious panorama will well recompense you for the fatigue of reaching the top. But are not these things written in the guide-books? My task is different.

This is the old coaching-road to the sea-coast at Towyn, fifteen miles distant, and beautiful as its scenery is all the way, you and I would not care now-a-days to bump up and down its tremendous hills, even if a great boulder of stone, or occasional watercourse, did not stop our progress; but on foot or horseback it is thoroughly to be recommended.

I can recall one delicious morning, when, after inquiring vainly for a guide at the aforesaid little hotel, we crossed a stile, and made our own way over a mile or so of springy turf, heather, and moorland, to Llyn Gafr, the lower of the two mountain tarns (to which allusion has been made), and having rested awhile on its margin, a tough climb landed us in the deep semi-circular hollow which contains the upper and finer lake.

Many such nooks lie hid away in the recesses of the neighbouring hills, differing in character, but alike dear to the lover of nature, and filled with an infinite repose. I can think of a sunny placid sheet of water, sleeping high up in Moel Cynwch, one of the chain of mountains which bound the opposite side of our Happy Valley, encircled by trees, a sheltered bright mirror, its background the very peaks which I have been describing, their dark ruggedness being softened by distance into the tenderest blue; and here cattle browse peacefully, and birds sing, while faint sounds from town and village float upwards—the bark of a dog, or far-away striking of a church-clock. Tourists often pass near this quiet lake on their way to the Precipice Walk, which can be quickly reached from its shores, and which in truth boasts as splendid a series of panoramas as can be met with far and near, surpassing in variety even the views from the higher mountains of the district. Take this excursion when the heather is in bloom, making a violet velvety carpet underfoot. Few people explore further, hereabouts, when they have "done" the famous

walk; but the extensive deer-park and demesne of Nannau which stretch over the hills on this side of our valley are rich in beauty, and, thanks to the owner's liberality, afford endless enjoyment to the visitor, who will discover other hills and vales, hidden glens, and unexpected waterfalls, as he wanders about.

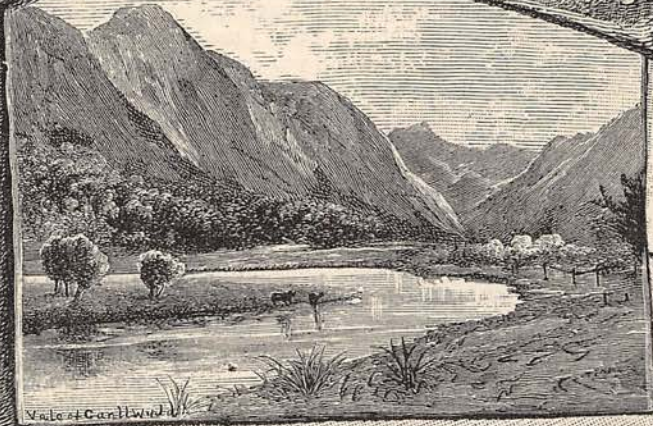
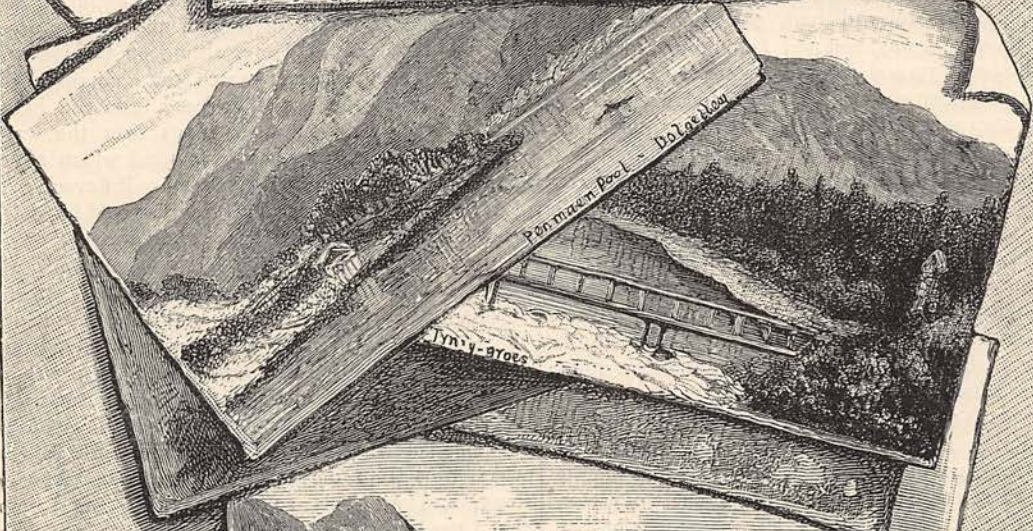
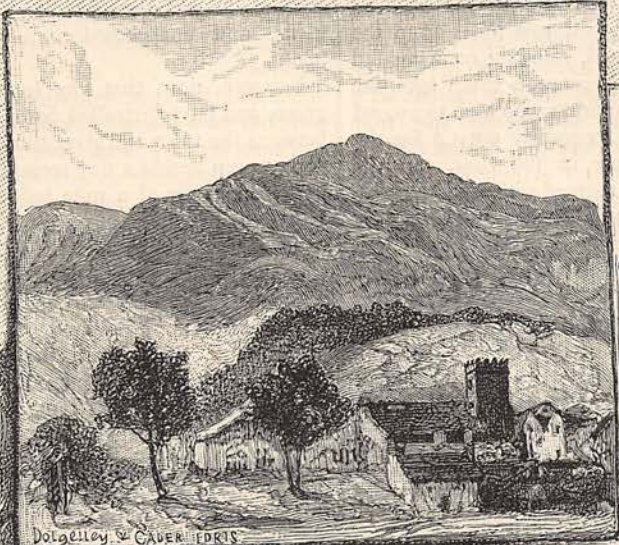
Suppose, now, that you leave your bench on the green, and having strolled down the long flat meadows between the town and river to their furthest extremity, you turn up beside a tiny streamlet into the high road, about a quarter of a mile below the town, at Pandyrodyn, where a group of quaint cottages, with clustering roses round porch and window, will not fail to excite your admiration. If you are inclined for a walk, you can hardly find a pleasanter road than this. A little way further our Happy Valley opens out into a wider one, where three vales meet, and where the mountains seem to have stepped back and ranged themselves in a circle. After great rains, when the rivers have flooded the level fields, you would take this for a vast lake, the openings to the three valleys being the only breaks in the surrounding chain. We have passed some charming residences, and presently reach the little old-fashioned wayside inn at Penmaen Pool, where there is a railway station, and a ferry across the now tidal river. Here, sitting on the low wall, or rustic bench, we can watch the changing lights and shades on the opposite shore, and the herons and sea-gulls flapping their wings over the water, flattering ourselves that the fresh wind which always greets us at this point has a genuine salt flavour.

If you pursued this road further, it would by-and-by lead you away from the river, entering a lovely wooded district, and winding among larch-planted hills, with glimpses of blue peaks between, and rapid streams. A "hardy pedestrian" will do well to walk some day the whole way to Arthog, the next station, where there are waterfalls worth seeing, and he can return by train, or over the hills if he likes. But to-day we will get into the ferry-boat, and landing on the far side of the estuary, gain the turnpike-road which runs from our town to Barmouth, ten miles away, and which is so renowned for its scenery that I need only add my advice to explore it as far as you can on foot, besides driving the entire distance to the coast. You will come upon delightful coves under the wooded cliffs, where, on sea-weedy rocks, with the tide lapping at your feet, you may fancy yourself by the veritable seaside.

At present, however, we will turn towards home, and shall soon come to Llanelltyd, a pretty hamlet, at the mouth of a comparatively little-known but most exquisite mountain valley. Let us sit here on the low parapet of the long bridge, where an old willow (the sole survivor of a group I remember) dips its arms into the clear brown river, which, born far away up the vale, in the heart of unseen mountains, has travelled over miles of peaty moorland, and taken many a wild leap, growing, swelling, deepening, with every little rill that slips down into its embrace, till here the tiny church

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and cluster of cottages look from their grassy mound across a wide stretch of hurrying waters to the ivied ruins of chapel and abbey standing amongst venerable trees on the brink. See how it swirls under the bridge, as if rejoicing in its new-born freedom and escape from narrower limits into open fields and sunlight; and soon it will have swept the gentler stream from our Happy Valley into its current, as it hastens seawards. I know no sweeter spot from whence to watch the sunset than this bridge. Westwards, the broad flat expanse of marshy land, dotted with a few bent trees, showing black against the glowing sky, a dim pool gleaming here and there, the shining river, the soft hills which bound the level vale bathed in a transparent haze of amber light; then, to the south, the graceful peaks and curves of the monarch Cader tower up, the outline clear-cut, but all below transfigured in the golden mist; while a turn of the head, and there, in the narrow gorge behind us, cool blue shadows are creeping up the sides of the unfolding mountains, whose summits are still bright and rosy.

I do not think any one could pause here without longing to explore this latter valley—our best-loved and favourite resort. Many a morning have we started off to spend a whole day within its precincts, generally leaving the town by a steep road which climbs the intervening ridge behind Hengwrt, and descends through a belt of wood and pleasant fields, just above the Abbey Farm yonder, into the by-road, running up the vale of Ganllwydd on the nearer bank of the river.

Along that charming terrace, where the mountains rise sheer from the path, we always loitered, and watched the sheep getting "crag-fast," as they tried to surmount some impassable barrier in search of the scanty herbage on the hill-sides opposite us; or waited to gather baskets-full of the delicate oak-fern which here grows luxuriantly amongst the slaty rock, its trailing roots binding the crumbling masses together. Presently a deserted copper-mine is reached, the great wheel nearly hidden in a thicket of trees; and if you turned up that way, you would come upon a picturesque glen, and by crossing an old stone bridge, and passing near the sequestered village and church-spire of Llanfachreth, you might return homewards through Nannau Park. But our destination is different, and, leaving the mines, we make for that lovely gorge now opening to view on our left, where fir-clad heights and foaming rapids lend quite an Alpine character to the scene. Our path lies along the hillside, over fern and moss, and we glance across at that romantically situated house perched high above the river, its bright flowery slip of garden contrasting with the dark screen of trees behind.

We must cross the upper of the two wooden bridges if we wish to climb up into the road where stands the little hostelry of Tyn-y-Groes, but our usual plan is to pic-nic beside the stream, seated on felled timber, under the shade of the larches. The scenery hereabouts is unrivalled, and the seclusion probably unbroken, unless by a stray fisherman, who may be seen, rod in hand, knee-deep in a brown pool, or jumping from rock to rock in the bed of the river.

There is a fine walk over the hills, into the heart of the mountains in an easterly direction, commanding extensive views, and leading to a bare bleak region, where a lonely inn stands at cross-roads. One of these runs at the rear of Cader Idris through a wild pass, with shattered rocks piled up and flung about on either hand, from which a zig-zag descent conducts you to Tal-y-Lyn, the largest and most beautiful lake in the whole district; but this must be made the sole object of a day's excursion by carriage, and I am strictly limiting my remarks to the walks about our valley. The last time I drove to that lake, the floods were out, and where the road skirted the shore, our horses were above their knees in water!

Bwlch-oer-Drws, another grand, solitary pass, on the road to Dinas Mowddy, equi-distant from our town, but in a contrary direction, is scarcely ever seen by tourists, though it will amply repay a visit, and can easily be reached by good walkers. We have trudged there and back more than once without encountering a single human being after we had left Dolgelley.

The rambles I have noticed are but a very few out of the many I could name, did space permit. Those of my readers who are familiar with our Happy Valley will easily guess which road we call our "wet-weather walk," where the over-arching network of foliage keeps out all save the heaviest rain; but which partly owes its name with us to the fact that we invariably came in for showers when we went that way.

I have said not a word of the dwellers in the Happy Valley, but I can recall the kindly faces of many of them, poor and rich; and should these lines ever meet the eyes of those among them to whom we are indebted for kindness or courtesy, shown to strangers, herewith we send them a cordial greeting from across the sea.

And now, O reader, if crowded watering-places delight thee not, nor seaside dulness either—where the monotony of a sandy desert is only broken by wandering hordes of small Arabs, armed with spade and bucket—if flying tours, and restless journeyings hither and thither, are a weariness to the flesh—then try a month or two in our Happy Valley, where, "far from the madding crowd," amid the sweet sights and sounds of country life, rest and refreshment will be found for body and mind.

