

THE CLASSICAL QUANTOCKS.



THE Quantocks are not in Greece, but in Somersetshire. Few visit this short range of hills, and fewer still know how strong is their claim to be called classical. We call them classical for the same reason that we should designate Stratford-on-Avon or the Lake District as classical, viz., that with them

are associated names of some of England's classic writers. The region of the Quantocks is not only almost the last home of the wild red-deer in England, but has been the haunt of some of the most brilliant of our nation's poets. Two wanderers at least will approach them with somewhat of reverence.

At Bridgewater we left the train and made our way through the brick town, peeping at the spire which Monmouth used when seeking to ascertain the disposition of the royal forces, and into the church where is preserved over the altar a large painting, by some master-hand, of original design, of the dead Christ.

Out into the country, along roads of little interest to Spaxton and to Prince's "Abode of Love." Four or five miles further, and we find ourselves in a sweet valley, through which a small stream is making music as it flows. Here rabbits dart across the roadway, and a pheasant with her young brood hastens away from the intruders. A stiff pull, and we are strolling in the Seven Wells Wood, with a wealth of ferns and rhododendrons in bloom on every hand, and beech-trees of mighty growth giving delightful shade. On the mossy bank we several times rested in our long ascent, gaining strength and looking into the bluish depth of valley, then up the lofty hillside clad with trees to the summit. Just beyond is "Will's-neck," the highest point in Somerset.

Here we come to a cottage in a lonely coomb. A glass of milk helps us over our further trudge. Five miles more over these hills we go, keeping the ridge and making for St. Audrie's or West Quantock head. What views we get of lovely dells, the richly cultivated lowlands as far as Weston on the one side and Minehead on the other! And, oh, what soft tints of foliage, freshened by recent rains! As we look round into the romantic coombs that run off in every direction and out to the yellowish sea, we are not surprised that Southey said, "Devonshire falls flat after Somerset." Perhaps his admiration of the Quantocks led him to indulge in a little exaggeration, and he was forgetting the matchless glen of the Lyn, the district of Lorna Doone, and the Tors of Ilfracombe.

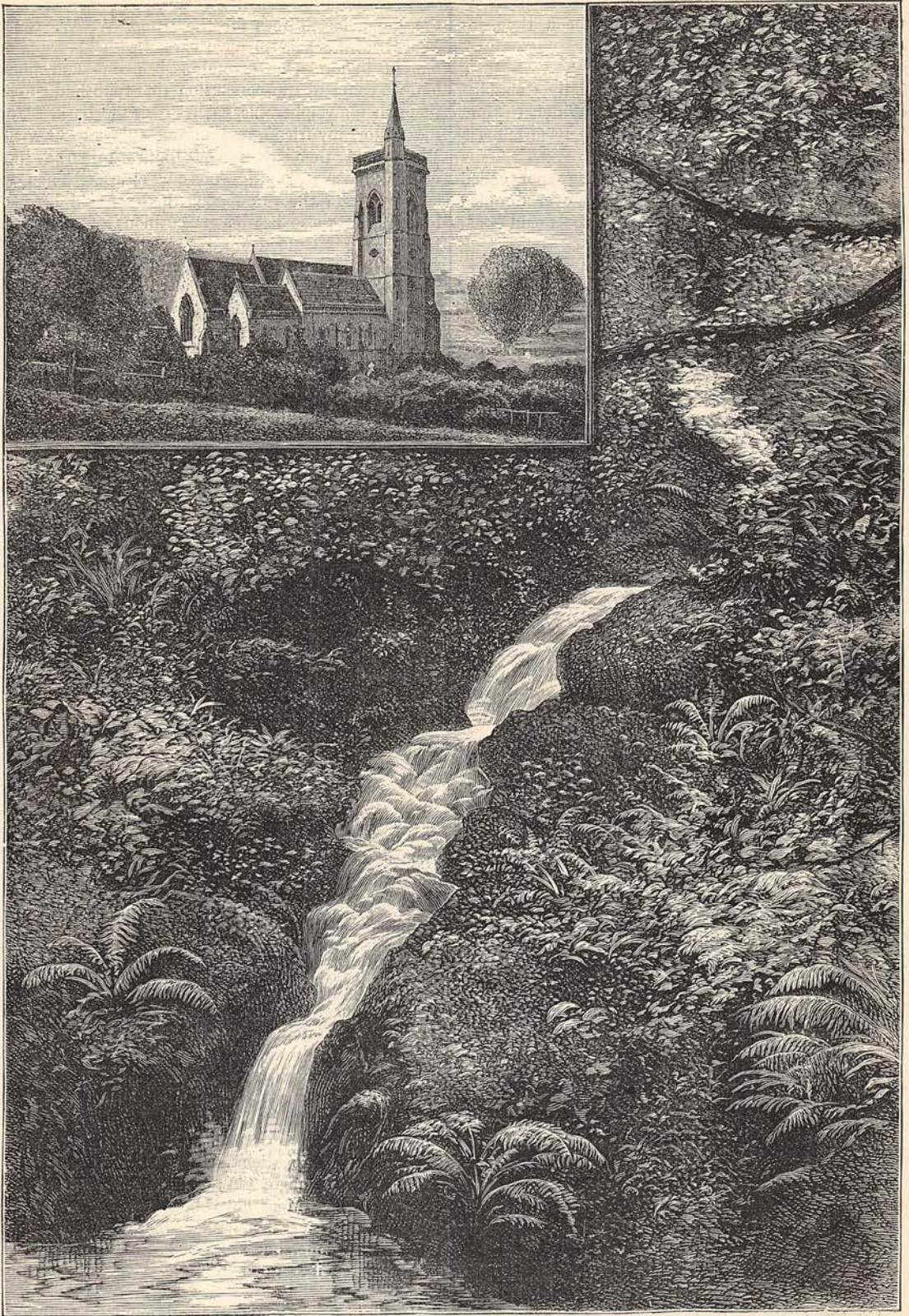
How we rejoice in our sense of freedom among the

hills! What a joy is existence! And we are out of the beaten tourist track. Here we are evidently out of any track, for after descending through a long stretch of ferns and gorse we come to lofty, strong iron railings, six feet high. It is a park fence, meant to keep in the deer. We clamber over it. What if we get shot for our temerity by some keeper, and thrown in the coomb to the right, called, gloomily, "Dead Woman's Ditch"! We go on, up to our knees in ferns, startling rabbits and foxes. Two foxes, with their long brushes sweeping after them, dashed by to their holes. The ground all seems hollow and honey-combed here with their burrowing. And now the descent is so steep that we are almost tempted to sit down and slide to the bottom among the luxuriant ferns. Steadying ourselves by clutching at the trunks of beeches and firs, we drop right upon the very garden of the rector of St. Audrie's, the well-known author of the "Harvest of a Quiet Eye," from whom we receive a very cordial welcome.

What a paradise is this St. Audrie's! It is just the spot for a man with a poet's mind and eye, like the rector. It is called St. Audrie's from Elfrida the virgin queen.

Sir Alexander Hood, a descendant of the great Admiral Hood, lives here in a large Tudor-like mansion, surrounded by a well-wooded park, where swarms of deer roam at their sweet will. We were taken over the hall, and shown the various points of interest.

On the following day we visited Alfoxdon, the place where Wordsworth lived for a time, and where he wrote that exquisite bit, "We are Seven," and a number of other ballads and sonnets. It seems strange that at that early period of his poetical career he should have been able to occupy so large a house; but possibly, as it had been shut up, he obtained it for a merely nominal sum. The agent who let it to him would not, however, renew the lease, for he became afraid of the poet, suspecting him to be connected either with smuggling or with some of the dangerous revolutionists of France just then making so much ado, and striking terror into every loyal heart. The agent's suspicions and alarm were very possibly fostered by the knowledge of Wordsworth's lonely walks and solitary musings; or, possibly, by the *outré* appearance of Coleridge, his companion, who came and lived at Nether Stowey, close by. These two, with Southey, were, of course, men of tastes and habits such as a Somersetshire agent of that day was not expected to understand. He thought he would be on the safe side, and help to rid the country of such dangerous characters. Nevertheless, the three literary men lived in this district long enough to make this ground classic. Here, "Christabel" was written, and one may find in the lyrical ballads of Wordsworth various references to the Quantocks. Scott, even, speaking of Words-



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worth's withdrawal from publishing for a time, inquired—

"Why is the harp of Quantock silent?"

The "Ancient Mariner" was planned by Coleridge during a walk over these hills to Watchet; and "Kubla Khan" was written in a lonely farmhouse beyond Minehead.

There is near Alfoxdon a charming spot called Holdford Glen, through which rushes, over tumbled boulders, a small torrent, of which the poet said—

"No check, no stay, this streamlet fears."

This was a favourite haunt of Wordsworth. Here he wrote the touching lines—

"I heard a thousand blended notes
While in the grove I sat reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind."

In this neighbourhood grow some of the rarest—well, I will not say what, but simply call them botanical specimens—to be found in England. Our clerical guide said, "I will show you their habitat, if you promise not to tell." As we easily understood his desire to preserve them from extinction by ruthless searchers, we readily gave the promise, and were rewarded by being taken to places where a few of the rare "botanical specimens" still remain. We were allowed to take away "just very small" specimens.

As we went back to St. Audrie's we hunted on

the great beech-trees for the letters W. W. which Wordsworth is said to have carved with his knife on one of them. Our careful search was unavailing, and we came to the conclusion that time had spread them in undecipherable gashes over the bark. How the rector, my friend, and myself enjoyed our visit! We talked theology on our outward journey and drifted down to politics on our return. Then we spoke of how the three poets had strolled here, or lounged on these heathery "cushions of the Quantock." We imagined we could hear the energetic talk of Coleridge and Southey, and see the meditative attention of Wordsworth. They had looked at these hills and these interlacing dells at all seasons, when the myriad fronds of the young fern gave a delicate green tinge to them, or later, when the golden hue of autumn and the yellow of decay mingled with the purple heather, or with the bright vermilion of the luscious whortleberry, or the turquoise bloom of the forget-me-not.

Wordsworth said that he remembered Coleridge once saying to Thelwell, when visiting the dell of which we have spoken, "This is the place to reconcile one to all the jarrings and conflicts of the wide world." Thelwell replied, "Nay, to make one forget them altogether." This would apply to the whole district which we venture to term the Classical Quantocks.

F. HASTINGS.

HOSTESS AND GUESTS.

(A HAPPY HOME WELL ORDERED.) BY ARDERN HOLT.



WISE hospitality is one of the duties of our lives, and yet in how few houses are stray comers invited to join the family meals! Entertaining most generally means parties. A hearty welcome comes well from the house-mother, and a man appreciates the fact greatly that he may whenever he pleases take a friend home unexpectedly, without being put to the blush by the deficiencies of his domestic arrangements, or being received with black looks. To bring

this about, the table should be always laid as neatly and well as though visitors were expected, and a centre flower or pretty ornament not omitted. With a press the table-cloth, even at the end of a week, may still present a respectable appearance; but the press must be well screwed down, and the cloth previously damped. It is best to keep distinct cloths for breakfast and dinner. It is no economy not to have a sufficient stock of table-linen; what a sufficiency is, depends on the size and requirements of the family, and valuable practical hints on these points may be found in almost any manual of domestic economy.

On the question of stores the most experienced housekeepers differ. On the one hand, it is said that only a sufficient quantity of the several articles re-

quired, had in weekly, prevents waste; on the other hand, that a shortness of supply is apt to lead to domestic discomfort. Things cannot be properly cooked without the necessary materials, and the science of housekeeping is to know what the *necessary* materials are. According to my own personal experience of some years, the best plan is for the mistress to keep a moderate store of such things as are known to be required, and to give them out herself in the quantities needed, but only at stated times, or she will find that servants will be coming to her at all hours.

Tinned soups and meat, and some preserved fruits, which will make an appetising sweet in a few minutes, should have their place in every store-room where unexpected demands on the resources of the establishment are likely to occur. Variety in food, and such food served in appetising fashion, are essential points in domestic management; and in domestic economy, good carving. Meat goes much further if it is well cut; the mistress should see that down-stairs this is properly done, but she will be able to do so with double force if a good example is set in the dining-room.

I will just give a few practical details as to the best methods of cleaning glass, &c., for on these things much of the necessary dainty appearance of the table