

IRON-BRIDGE.

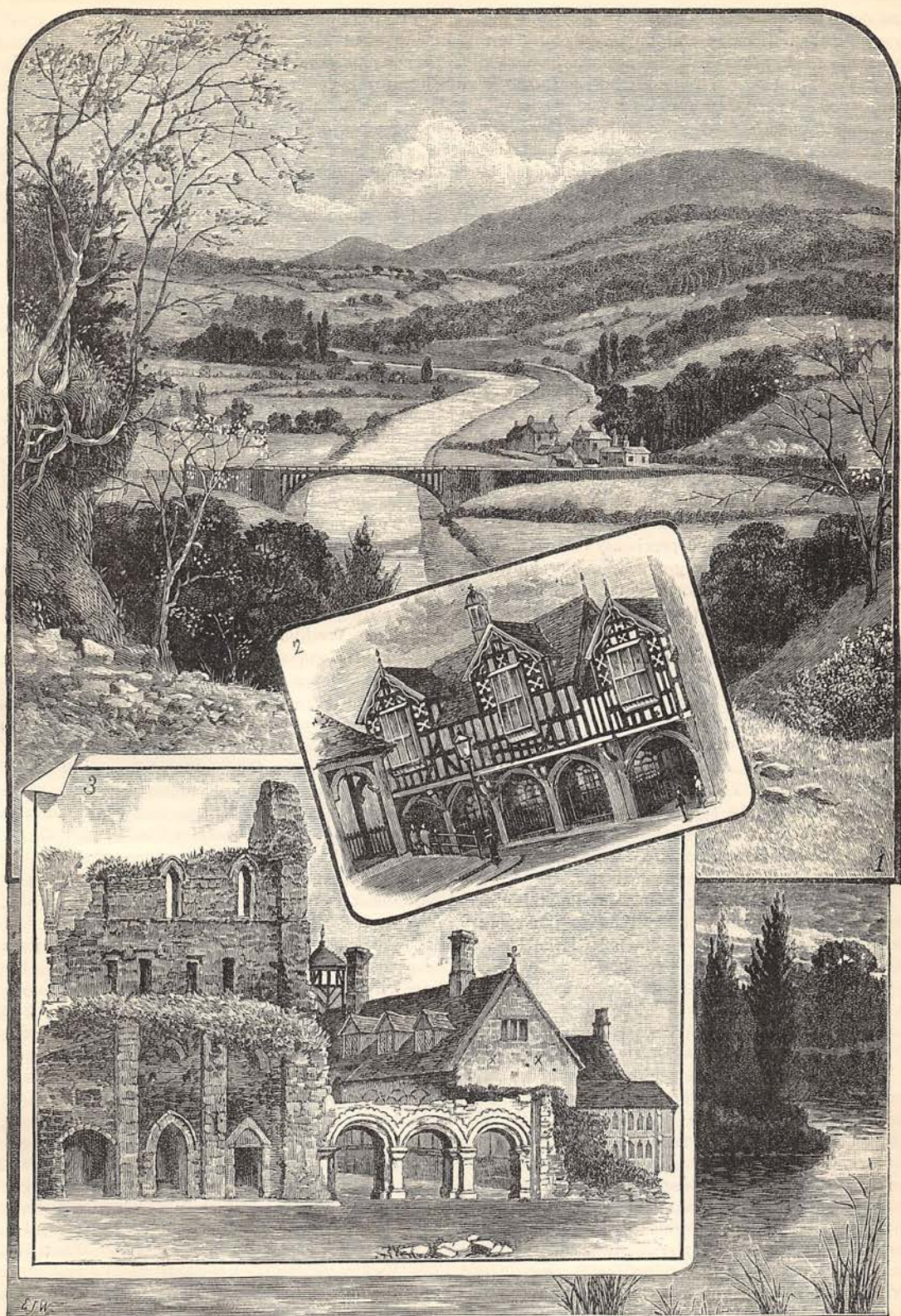
ALL ROUND THE WREKIN.



“**W**HERE is the Wrekin? I have never heard of it.” Such was the confession of my friend Nomad. He is an average specimen of the middle-class educated Englishman. He can talk with remarkable fluency about German spas and Swiss mountains. He is familiar with every peak of the Pyrenees, and grows eloquent over the Rialto and the Square of St. Mark. He can converse for hours about the discomforts of the Nile, the dangers of Norway, and the dirt of Normandy; and he has even been contemplating writing a book on a trip from St. Pancras to San Francisco. “Where is the Wrekin?” he asked. Nomad’s ignorance is only the typical ignorance of thousands of his cultivated countrymen, who know a great deal about foreign places, but very little about their native land—who accomplish “the Grand Tour,” but neglect Great Britain.

We are supposed to be a most insulated people, but really we are most cosmopolitan. If Nomad’s innocent query were submitted as a test question at a Civil Service Examination, it would be appalling to regard the number of erudite candidates—crammed with cosmopolitan knowledge, like living libraries

or breathing books—who would be thus reduced to despair and incontinently “plucked.” Even if a half-day’s holiday for that encyclopaedial wonder, Lord Macaulay’s “merest school-boy,” depended on the successful solution of this simple problem, he would vaguely regard the vacation as vain. England is as a sealed book to many Englishmen who have read every page of the Continent. Its scenes of stirring historic interest, and places of quaint beauty, suffer neglect because they are too accessible. What is easily gained is lightly prized. The difficult and remote seems to have a greater claim upon our attention than what is close at hand and easy of access; charity does not begin at home, and prophets have no honour in their own country. “That is best which lieth nearest,” says the poet, “Shape from that thy work of art.” The advice of Bacon, “Know thyself,” might be expanded into “Know thy country.” “England for the English” would be an apposite title for a book in defence of our island scenery. Educated Americans appear to know more about our country than we know ourselves. How many Englishmen, for example, have taken the trip just accomplished by Mr. Andrew Carnegie, the millionaire iron and steel master of Pittsburg and New York, who drove with a party of friends in a four-in-hand from Brighton to Inverness? This was an expedition of a thousand miles along old coaching-roads



1. THE SEVERN VALLEY, FROM BENTHALL EDGE. 2. MARKET, MUCH WENLOCK. 3. MUCH WENLOCK ABBEY.

and down devious green lanes, past grey and moss-grown cathedral cities and dreamy historic towns, through a country that combined at once romance and beauty, quaintness and magnificence, grandeur and gentleness. What Mr. Carnegie thought of these "Strange Adventures of a Phaeton" (for Mr. William Black's story is simply an account of a similar drive through the English counties) is best expressed in a telegram he sent to some friends on the completion of the journey. "*We arrived at the end of Paradise this evening at six o'clock,*" were the words sent by the wire from one who comes from a continent where Nature has exhausted herself in scenic miracles, and who had seen all that Europe has to show the tourist. A recent writer on Derbyshire has said: "There are many strange people and odd scenes to be met with in England, if a man goes about keeping his eyes open for them, and is prepared to enter into the spirit of the thing when accident throws them in his way. As for the beauty of this little country—for we must all confess it is not large—no one will ever be capable of doing justice to it. Its endless variety astonishes me the more I see of it; travel as much as one may, there is always a pleasant surprise in store—a landscape more striking than we have previously met with, fields and hills more exquisitely grouped, nobler and finer trees, or a view which somehow finds its way more directly to the heart. I do not believe there is any man alive who can say with truth that he has seen England thoroughly. One may have lived in much larger countries, it is true, but there are none which it takes so long to get tired of as England." This is a great truth well expressed; and it receives earnest endorsement in a passage by the author of "Tom Brown's School Days," who says, writing about the Vale of the White Horse, "I only know two English neighbourhoods thoroughly, and in each, within a circle of five miles, there is enough of interest and beauty to last any reasonable man his life. I believe this to be the case almost throughout the country."

To no place in the United Kingdom does this observation apply with more cogency than to the country round the Wrekin. The Wrekin itself is an isolated hill dominating a soft Shropshire landscape, a beacon commanding the countryside, as is expressed in a line in "The Armada":—

"Till twelve fair counties saw the blaze on Malvern's lonely height;
Till streamed with crimson, on the wind, the Wrekin's crest of light."

There is a generous Shropshire toast that has been received with loyal hearts and lusty lungs for a thousand years. It is "To all round the Wrekin." There could be no more interesting district than the countryside embraced by this hearty sentiment. It is a district that has claims upon every taste. It appeals to every constitution of mind. The artist in search of fresh "effects" can find few finer studies of colour and character, of wood and water, of steep hill and deep valley, of grey gable and ruined arch, than in this Welsh borderland. The fisherman may wander with rod and creel by the Severn, and grow as attached to Milton's "Sabrina fair," as Charles Cotton was to his "princess Dove."

The Wrekin country addresses itself in a special manner to the archæologist. Historic buildings cluster round the grand old hill. The longest summer day of the year may be spent among the magnificent monastic ruins of Much Wenlock Abbey; and in the old-world streets of Much Wenlock itself there is a peace as profound as in the great grey enchanting ruins, with their rows of narrow-pointed arches and cloistral passages, their broken columns and grass-grown courtyards. Much Wenlock is the Sleepy Hollow of modern industrial England. It is the Valley of Poppies. It is the Village of Dreams. The town-hall is a picture rather than a place—a picture of dark old oaken panels and pilasters, chimney-pieces and mouldings, of everything that is quaint and picturesque, and belonging to an age long prior to Carlyle's time of "gin and steam-hammers." Scarcely so poetical as Wenlock Abbey, but still full of quiet beauty and restful charm, is Buildwas Abbey by Severn-side, with its series of sturdy pillars supporting heavy arches, as well preserved now as when they were built for the old Cistercian monks in 1135. Mr. Ruskin has placed upon deliberate record the fact that he could not, "even for a couple of months, live in a country so miserable as to possess no castles." Round the Wrekin he would find some structures that would gratify his passion for ancient architecture. Old castles are a distinguishing characteristic of the country all round the Wrekin. Thirty-one of these strongholds were built along the border soon after the Norman Conquest. "No county in England," says Fuller, "hath such a heap of castles together, insomuch that Shropshire may seeme on the west divided from Wales with a wall of continued castles."

Close at hand are the mediæval houses of historic Shrewsbury, a revelation of picturesque high-peaked gables and old timbered houses, with quaint dormered windows and panelled fronts of black and white. A stroll through the steep antique Shrewsbury streets is like stepping into the sixteenth century; but you can be transferred to a far more distant period by visiting Wroxeter, which is close by the Wrekin. "The British Pompeii" is the expressive title which antiquarians have given to Wroxeter. Excavations have exposed a buried Roman town—the ancient *Uricontium*—whose bygone military life that hoary old Wrekin looked down upon with the same grand spirit of unconcern as it regards the human insects of to-day.

While the Wrekin district has claims upon the artist, the angler, and the archæologist, it should be none the less attractive for the hard-headed man of science. At Iron-Bridge, the thriving river-port at the outlet of Coalbrook Dale, is the first iron bridge ever constructed in England; and in close proximity was the famous landslip which 100 years or more ago frightened the river Severn from its course, and was regarded as a judgment from Heaven. Geologically the Wrekin country is as romantic as its scenic charm. It is the fashion to sneer at the *ologies*. The amusement is a cheap one, and can only come from shallow minds. What, for instance, can be more interesting and instructive than the geological lessons taught us

by the Wrekin? Here Sir Roderick Murchison established the Silurian system in the science of geology. This was in 1831. Before then the Old Red Sandstone was the limit of research. Every formation met below was dismissed under the vague title of graywacke. Sir Roderick found Shropshire to contain every sedimentary formation from lias to slate; and after a conscientious survey of all the strata, the series of rocks below the Old Red Sandstone, so associated with the popularity of Hugh Miller, was shown in a complete order between that formation and the ancient slate. The new system was found to contain fossilised specimens of the very earliest created life. The discovery opened out a daring field in geological science. The term Silurian owes its origin to the name of the powerful tribe which once inhabited the Wrekin country.

But our subject is scenery and not science, so let us return to the hills. The Wrekin is not the only hill of the district. There is the Wenlock Edge range of bold, steep, green ridges, abounding in views that thrill the artistic eye; there is Longmynd, rising to an elevation of 1,600 feet, with prospects that photograph themselves upon the memory; there is the picturesque range of uplands which comprises the Lawley, nearly 1,000 feet high; Caradoc, 1,200 feet; Hope Bowdler Hill, and Ragleth, 1,000 feet, with panoramic visions of hills rising above hills, and valleys meeting in valleys. The Wrekin reaches a height of 1,320 feet, an altitude that will appear contemptible to people who measure beauty as the rich vulgarian in Pygmalion's

studio measured art—by the lineal foot. But if the height of the Wrekin is small, the view from the summit is great. From the top of mountains boasting of a sensational height, the reward is generally one of clouds, tempered with fatal accidents. The ascent of the Wrekin is wood-shaded and easy, and the prospect is a panoramic picture that stuns the imagination with its breadth and beauty.

The Wrekin stands aloof from the other hills. It is a mountain with a personality and character of its own. Conical in form, and densely wooded to the very summit, it stands alone as if communing in solitude with its own sublime thoughts. And if a mountain is sentient, what an experience that grand old Wrekin has had! The history of the country it looks down upon is an epitome of the history of England. The Wrekin sheltered Caractacus holding the country with wild untrained valour against the victorious legions of Rome. It heard the Welsh harps tuned to inspire fierce border battles. It announced the coming of the Spanish Armada. The spring of water which sparkles in the sun to-day, and refreshes the holiday-makers from Wolverhampton or Birmingham (whom the railway brings to Wellington, a mile or more away) flashed in liquid light before

"The glory that was Greece
And the grandeur that was Rome,"

and will perhaps bubble up, cold and crystal, when England herself has lived out the life given to nations.

EDWARD BRADBURY.

SANITARY ASSURANCE.

IT is a healthy sign of the activity of modern thought that the question of house sanitation should receive so much attention. On all sides we hear reports of the development and vigour of numerous existing societies who make the public health their concern, and of the formation of others with practical objects of a similar kind. It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of the interests involved, and, since the population of our large towns is steadily increasing in a greater proportion than their area, these matters must sooner or later become of the greatest moment.

Apart from private enterprise, there can be no doubt that the existing condition of things is most unsatisfactory, and that there is a terrible absence of all supervision of sanitary arrangements in many of the houses of the metropolis. The so-called Sanitary Authority has no *locus standi* until a nuisance is known or suspected to exist, and the provisions for house drainage required by the law are wholly inadequate to secure wholesome conditions of existence.

The preservation of health, and all subjects appertaining thereto, have a paramount claim to our consideration for national as well as private reasons. The well-being of a people depends in no small

degree upon its power for work, and its vigour must be very seriously impaired if the vital importance of health be not duly appreciated. Dr. Richardson, when speaking on a recent occasion in the Chapter-house of St. Paul's Cathedral before the members of the Homiletical Society, called attention to the greater vitality which the Jewish people exhibited as compared with that of other races among whom their lot was cast. From this he proceeded to consider the cause of that vitality, and argued that it depended mainly on the observance of certain parts of the Mosaic sanitary laws. Amongst other aids to health suggested from the source named, he adduced five in chief: viz., Passover cleansing, rest from labour once in seven days, chastity and good domestic life, temperance and great circumspection in regard to foods, and care of the enfeebled and destitute of all ages of life. This illustration is the more valuable since it places clearly before us the national importance of the apparently insignificant details of daily life. It is, we conceive, a new view of things to place "the daily round, the common task," which every good housewife performs so cheerily, in the high position of a national service; but in the same way as these furnish opportunities for showing patient heroism and Christian fortitude