

evening fires were blazing brightly and cheerily from every quarter of the camp.

But Pir Bakhsh went home and meditated upon what had happened. He looked at the money, and said to himself—

“This is far more than the value of the wood. It is a stroke of luck that has come to me. This must be the time of which the crow spoke five years ago. I will pursue my fortune.”

But then he found the next step more difficult, for he remembered the exact words of the bird, and he kept saying to himself—

“You must knock down the king. You must rule the country: this is what was said. It cannot mean that I am to kill the king. No. I will just take the words in their plain meaning, and see what follows.”

The next morning many persons came to visit the king, bringing him offerings, and at the same time presenting their petitions to him. The day was very hot, and so an old barn had been emptied and turned into a sort of court or reception-room for the king's use.

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning; the barn was filled with visitors of various descriptions. Pir Bakhsh watched his opportunity, and entered the building by a door behind the king. His Majesty was sitting cross-legged upon his charpoy (or bedstead), as is the fashion in many Eastern countries.

Suddenly his royal person was pushed from his seat, with great violence, and fell headlong amongst his visitors, who were sitting upon the floor in front of him.

At the same moment there was a great crash, and a portion of the roof exactly above the spot where the king had placed himself fell down. The charpoy was broken to pieces, and the king, it was quite clear, must have been killed had he not been pushed away in time.

Pir Bakhsh soon emerged from the clouds of dust, and bowed himself very humbly before his fallen sovereign.

“Pardon me, sire,” he said. “I trust you are not hurt. There was no time to speak. I had to use violence to save your life.”

“There is no reason to ask pardon,” replied the king. “You have saved my life at the risk of your own.”

He then ordered his treasurer to give the young man two thousand rupees as a reward.

Pir Bakhsh went home, much pleased with his morning's work.

“But still,” he said, “there must be more to do. I shall have to knock him down again. Next time I will do it better by hitting him with a big stick over the head.”

Accordingly, the next day the bald-headed one stationed himself again in a convenient position. Just when the king was most occupied with his visitors, he raised his stick, and aimed a vigorous blow at his Majesty's head.

Whether it was that his nerve failed him or not, it is impossible to say, but fortunately for the royal skull, the blow missed the mark, and merely caught the king's turban, and sent it flying into the middle of the room.

Poor Pir Bakhsh for a moment stood aghast. He was so frightened that his hair would have stood on end—only he had none. But he was brought to his senses by the wild scare of those amongst whom the turban had fallen. Some half-dozen of them rose, and rushed pell-mell from the room, shouting—

“A snake! A snake!”

Then was Pir Bakhsh's time. He pointed in triumph to the turban, out of which was crawling a most venomous reptile.

He turned once more to apologise for the indignity he had offered to the king. But the latter embraced him, saying—

“You have saved my life twice; you shall never leave me again.”

Pir Bakhsh became great and rich. He was at last appointed as the king's wazir, and in years to come he was really the ruler of the country.

It is said that when the king was able to spare him for a lengthened holiday, he actually visited Europe, and bought a wig with handsome curls.

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## THE FILLING-UP OF CWM ELAN

[“In order to supply water for the new Birmingham water-works, it has been decided to form a lake, thirteen miles round, in the Elan Valley. A huge dam will be constructed, and thrown across the narrowest part. The valley is one of the most beautiful in Wales, holds many prosperous farms and two fine country seats, all of which will now be destroyed.”]

**N**O sound but the rush of the river over the stones, the baa—a—a of a mountain lamb, or the shrill note of the grouse upon the hill-top. This valley, right in the heart of Radnorshire, is so beautiful that it seems incredible, nay, impossible, to realise that soon its beauty will be gone, merged into the great lake which will be made to supply water to Birmingham. The soft, sunny breezes will ring with the clang of hammers

upon iron rails, as hundreds of navvies construct the railroad that is to bring concrete to the spot where the huge dam is to be built.

About a mile from the little town of Rhayader the river is a broad, glistening sheet of water, rippling quietly over the shallower part by the ford, and hurrying faster where the stones have separated into deep holes and crannies, holes where the trout and salmon love to lie and watch the flies playing above their



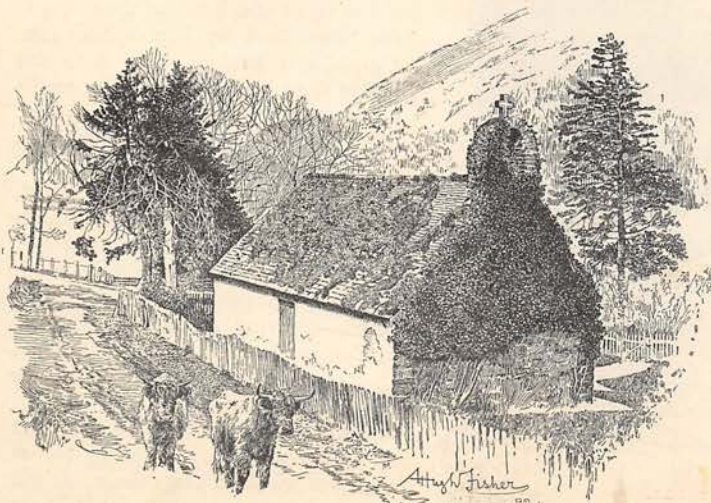
CWM ELAN VALLEY  
RHAYADER.

(From a photograph by  
Hudson.)

heads. Then the road winds to the right, between slopes of woodland, and hedges sweet with honeysuckle, until a turn brings once again the sound of rushing water, and the valley of the Elan lies spread before us. Surely none more beautiful could be found! High on either side the hills tower towards the blue sky, their bases seeming to fold lovingly across each other like the locked fingers of clasped hands. Straight ahead is the road, white and hard, and bordered on one side by the heather-covered

slope, on the other by more heather, short grass, and bracken already turned to golden brown. Beside the road the river hurries along, wide and clear, and tumbling over huge boulders of grey rock, now swirling round some corner in a little torrent of white fury, now deepening quietly into a clear pool, so clear that the trees on the opposite bank are reflected cool and green upon its face. Then on and on with new beauty in each wind and turn.

The hills are not all covered with heather. Some are quite bare, their slaty peaks standing out rugged and lonely against the sky, while the moving clouds lay light grey and purple shadows on their sides. Then comes a patch of woodland, and a dainty little flower-bordered path runs down to the river, ending in a giddy suspension bridge made of strong wire and crossed by a single plank. There are fields, too, all rich and green with soft grass, in readiness for the winter when the snow begins to whiten the heights, and the farmer drives his sheep from the hill pastures down to the more sheltered meadows below. The farms are numerous, not large, but small and prosperous, and hidden away from sight in the nooks of the



CAPEL NANTGWYLT, RHAYADER.

hills. They speak but little English, do these farm-people; but that English is of the best, pure and correct, and quite free from the everyday corruptions and abbreviations which have so crept into our language. They live in their homesteads, herd their sheep and cattle, and do a small amount of horse-dealing among themselves with their active, quick-stepping ponies. The women attend to the dairy, and spin the sheep's wool into blankets, flannel, and a peculiar warm, firm homespun, which last they dye themselves, either with indigo, or else with the lemon-coloured juice of a small yellow flower which grows in the fields. Their life is a peaceful one, broken only by rides (sometimes two on a pony) to the town on market day. Every farmer's wife and daughter has her own habit skirt, and then she rides over the hills, with a basket on either arm, to sell her fowls and butter in the neighbouring town.

Sheep-shearing is the great event of the year, and on this occasion "no cool cash passes," as they express it. Each farmer helps his neighbour, and is in his turn helped. They begin shearing at daybreak, and work until evening, only resting long enough for meals, which are provided by the farmer; and we heard of one party of shearers who consumed during the day a whole calf, two sheep, and a side of bacon, besides unlimited tea, coffee, cheese, and cake. At any of the farmers we visited, we were served readily with delicious tea, and home-made bread and butter, our hostess only anxious to make us comfortable.

Meanwhile the hills tower above us on either hand, and side by side with the rushing river, the road winds on till the valley narrows, and on the right is a cottage, its front room converted into a little shop for the sale

of lemonade, biscuits and ginger-beer. Before the door trickles a baby stream, a tiny tributary of the Elan, bordered with Lilliputian ferns, blue forget-me-not, and golden cistus.

At the head of the valley is the moss-covered chapel. The bell hangs in a small grey stone arch, which supports a cross, round which the ivy twines lovingly. The service is held here on Sunday afternoons, alternately in Welsh and English, and attended by nearly all the neighbourhood, from the family at the "seat" to the poorest cottager. The "seat," as all the people call Nantgwyll Hall, is a large home-like-looking house, built in a lovely nook on the side of a hill. Within a stone's throw of the windows the river rushes along over its rocky bed, fir-trees and oaks bend over the water, and on every side are the beautiful hills, purple, grey, and golden brown. A high wall of moss-grown grey stones runs round the house and grounds, and inside are the stables, farm-buildings, carpenters' and gardeners' cottages, a perfect little colony, busy and happy within its own area.

There is no sound but the rush of the river and the song of the wind in the swaying pine trees, and with the feeling that we are looking for the last time on all this beauty, we gather a handful of fern from the old stone wall. Alas! that the growth of our large cities should demand the sacrifice of such an ideal English country home!

Further on there are more farms, and we had a good deal of conversation with the tenants, who were mostly out in the very uphill fields, surrounded by their households, young and old, endeavouring to get in the hay while the sunny days remained. Five-and-twenty, forty, fifty years have they lived in the same spot, grandfather, father, and son, nor do they wish to change. Their farms look as though they prospered, and the good feeling and familiarity that seem to exist between the men and their animals is really remarkable.

Far up at the head of the valley is the Silent Pool, by Pont-hyll-fan (the Ugly Little Bridge). Just here the bed of the Elan is a mass of enormous boulders, perforated like a gigantic fossil sponge. The river dashes down a narrow gorge, so hidden that even from the little bridge it is only heard, not seen, as it falls into a hole of such awful depth that, on coming again to the surface, the water is quite stagnant. Standing on the bridge—one single plank—listening to the roar of the hidden torrent, and gazing down into that deep, black, hideous pool, where the bubbles rise darkly and silently, and where even the birds seem afraid to come, we find it hard to realise that in a few short years the whole will be gone, drowned in all its darkness



CWM ELAN VALLEY, RHAYADER.  
(From a photograph by Hudson.)

and intensity, drowned with the happy farm life, the active birds upon the hills, the little chapel, the quiet graveyard, in the depths of that lake, the waters of which are to be carried to Birmingham to supply the thousands of rich and poor in its streets.

A short journey by rail, a noisy bustling station, trains rushing in and out, busy porters wheeling barrow-loads of luggage upon the heels of the unwary

road, and meeting an early death at the heels of some passing horse. Three little ones are sitting in the gutter, playing with bits of broken crockery, and their shrill voices are perpetually raised in angry altercation, while a lame boy, of some five or six years, props himself against the nearest doorway, and contributes his share to the wordy fray. The air is sultry and full of dust. We shudder to think of the



PONT-HYLL-FAN, ELAN  
VALLEY.

(From a photograph by J.  
Owen, Newtown, North  
Wales.)

passenger. A little delay, and we are out in the crowded streets.

The air seems heavy with smoke and steam, and there is an indefinable odour everywhere. We cannot describe it otherwise than as an unpleasant taint to every breath we draw. In any other place the sky would be blue and clear. Here it is dull and heavy, and only a few pale sickly rays do their best to pierce the greyneess and show that the sun is somewhere, above the maze of houses and factory chimneys. The people do not appear to recognise this, but with bent heads they hurry along, looking either at the passers-by or else into the shop-windows. If they consider the matter at all, it is but to be content that the pavement will dry after the rain, or that the sun is good for trade, because it tempts people out to look and buy. What a contrast to the peaceful life in the Welsh valley! Can they belong to the same world, the same island?

The streets grow rapidly narrower and more dirty. The houses are crammed together, row after row, street after street, of the same dead level of dwellings. Some have dingy window blinds, others have none. Here and there a board or a chair is put across the open doorway to prevent the baby crawling into the

heat inside the squalid houses, and now a woman comes out of a door with a pail in her hand, and makes her way towards a little group of children, principally boys, further down the street. As she approaches they separate, and we see that in the midst is a rather dilapidated pump, from which a small stream of water slowly trickles. From the damp appearance of the children's pinafores it is evident that they have been in close contact with the stream. The woman dashes them angrily on each side of her.

"At that water again, you wasteful imps!" she exclaims. "And you, Jess Harding," addressing the biggest girl, "as ought to be ashamed of yourself, and knowing there's never enough water to drown a flea! Get out with you!" dealing a cuff to a boy who has dodged her under the spout of the pump. "If I catch ye round here again I'll break every bone in your body, that I will, and yer little sister crying her heart out for a drop of water but two nights since!"

Our thoughts travel back to the peaceful Elan Valley. Its almost perfect beauty of heather and fern, its sunlit slopes and rushing river, and yet—a sick child cries in vain for water and there is none. The ruin of life on the one hand, the saving of life on the other—the pity of it all, and the salvation. Which is the worthier sacrifice? Who can tell?