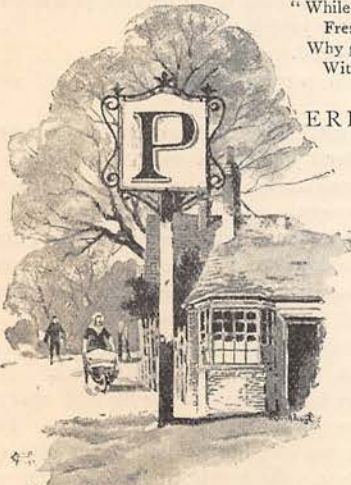


BETWEEN TWO WATERS.

BY A MODERN RAMBLER.

"While we find God's signet
Fresh on English ground,
Why go gallivanting
With the nations round?"
—KINGSLEY.



The White Hart 179.
Howkswell.

PERHAPS I ought rather to say three waters, as we sometimes caught distant glimpses of the Thames.

The other two waters were the Crouch and the Roach—the former known chiefly as defining the situation of Burnham-on-Crouch, the latter,

we fondly hope, known only to ourselves in its upper course. Of course, we except the dwellers on its banks from this audacious expectation, but, as far as the ordinary tourist is concerned, we have found no one who is acquainted with the River Roach.

"What's that place?" ask the friends who turn over our sketches.

"How did you find it out?" they next inquire.

We almost feel as if the spot were an invention of our own, and that we ought to take out a patent for it.

Modest people hesitate to ask for definite information; sketchers and

fishermen, in this crowded country, are often shy of revealing their favourite nooks, like the ladies who decline to give the address of a clever dressmaker.

It does not really matter, for it is much more amusing to find out a place for yourself. Instead of asking your friends, consult a map—a good big one: Lord Salisbury's excellent advice should never be forgotten.

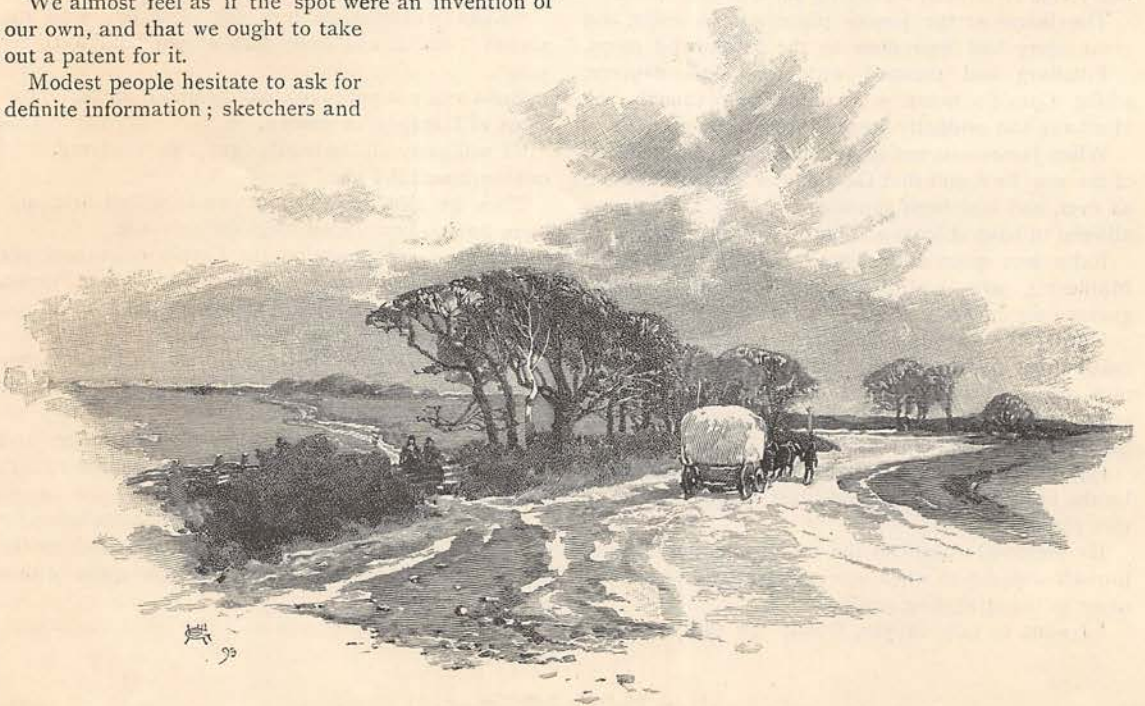
Hill or plain, marsh or moorland, sea-coast or river-bank, the little black dots and lines become wonderfully interesting, when you mean to go and see what those symbols represent.

Whatever place you choose, you are sure to find something beautiful or interesting in the neighbourhood—it is difficult in England not to find both; and the distances between the places are so small that, if the first one does not suit you, you can take the next train and go on to another.

There is a pleasant sense of adventure as you start off to visit the spot you have chosen, and compare the reality with the imaginary picture you have formed of it.

Our destination was a little range of hills in the south-east corner of Essex, to which a newly-opened railway line gave easy access.

Two little towns, Rayleigh and Rochford, lie at either extremity of the range, and a railway runs along the foot of the hills on their northern side. There is



"AT THE TOP OF THE FIELD, OVER A LOW STILE, WE FOUND OURSELVES IN THE MAIN ROAD" (p. 695).

a station at both the townlets, and a third station between them, lying among the fields of Hockley.

For some inscrutable reason, the fare from London to all these stations costs the same modest sum of two shillings and twopence, so we vindicated the commercial spirit of our race by getting the longest ride we could for our money, and early one April morning we took our tickets to the little town of Rochford.

At first we thought we had drawn a blank.

The little town looked uninviting in a drizzling rain, and my companion—who is fastidious, though she thinks she is not—declared that it was “sordid.”

The field path was charming, running slant-wise across a green pasture, which sloped gently upwards in gracious curves, and a lark was singing overhead.

At the top of the field, over a low stile, we found ourselves in the main road, along which a high-laden hay waggon was slowly making its way.

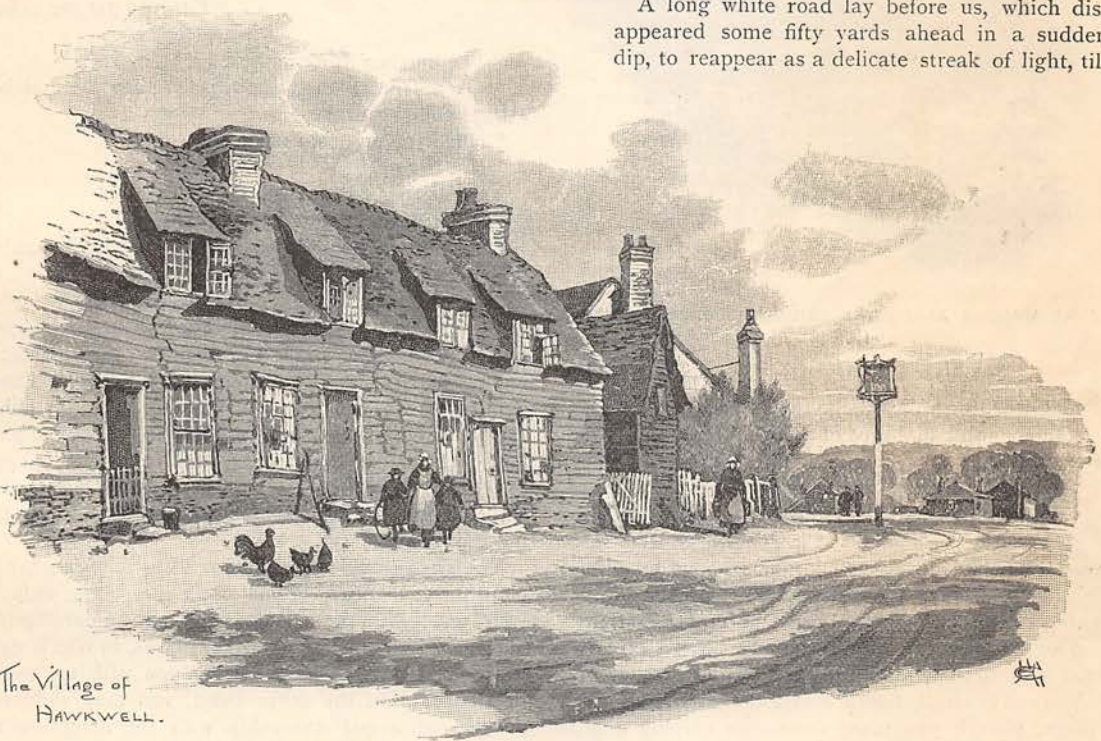
After a moment's consultation, we decided to turn to the left, and walked between the budding hedges up a gentle hill.

Three minutes brought us to the crest, and then we both stopped short and looked at one another.

“That's exactly what I want,” said Anna.

I may as well give my companion half, at least, of her lawful name.

A long white road lay before us, which disappeared some fifty yards ahead in a sudden dip, to reappear as a delicate streak of light, till



The Village of
HAWKVELL.

A hasty view of the surrounding country revealed none of the beauties which I felt certain existed, and which I later on discovered, to the delight of my unbelieving companion.

Even the interesting old church and a picturesque manor-house, half hall and half farm, did not reconcile her to the place; so we agreed to shelter in the railway-station, and take the next train back to Hockley.

The weather had cleared a little when we again got out of the railway carriage and looked around us, wondering how our second venture would turn out.

Two or three new railway buildings, houses for station-master and porters, a country road, with a curious dilapidated-looking building on one side of it, a field or two, bounded by hedges and studded with hedgerow trees, made up the prospect.

A porter directed us to the village, and raised our spirits by sending us through the fields.

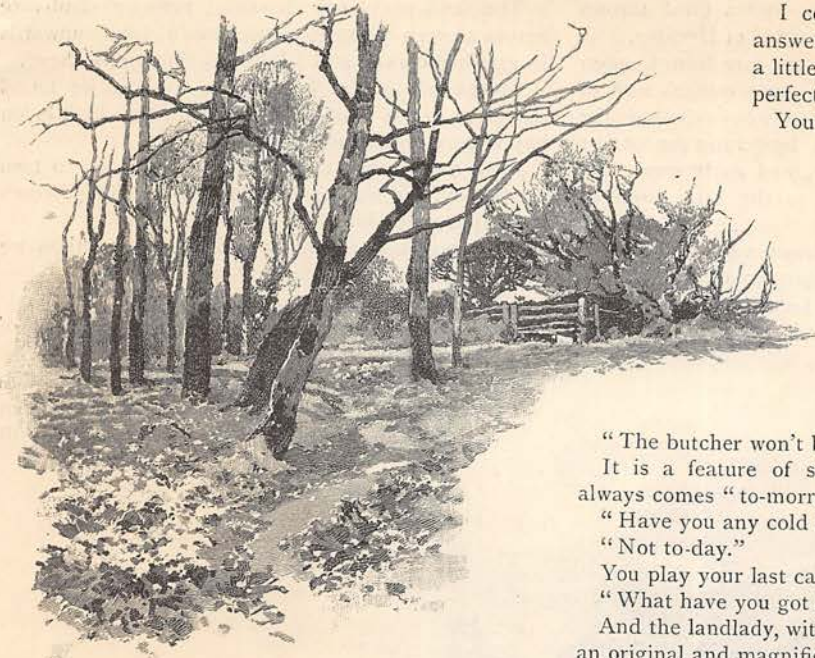
it vanished once again in the shadowy recesses of a mass of tufted green.

On our left hand a little row of wooden houses ended with the village inn and its old-fashioned signpost. On our right lay a horse-pond, shaded by fine old trees; and a scanty sprinkling of cottages on either side of the grass-margined road completed the street of Hawkwell village.

But the beauty of the scene lay above these nearer objects.

Seen from our little eminence, the far-off country unrolled itself in misty shades of endless blue: that exquisite tint which gives a hint of something beyond the actual prospect, and lends it the charm which hope bestows on life.

“I don't like to leave it,” said Anna, “for fear it should change before we come back again. It seems too good to last.”



"WE WANDER ALONG THE PRIMROSE-BORDERED PATH"
(p. 698).

Half-way down the village road—you could not call it a street—we had heard of a house where there were rooms to let.

We found a little parlour, lined with varnished wood, and with window and door opening on to the narrow strip of garden which parted it from the road. There were two white-curtained bedrooms above, small, but delicately clean. We took them at once—rather taking away their owner's breath at the same time—and we left her to make the afternoon tea while we went back to the station to look after our luggage.

You can generally find accommodation in an English village, though you must sometimes employ a little persuasiveness or firmness, according to the nature of the case.

If there does not happen to be a lodging, you can make one.

The villages are scantily peopled nowadays, alas! and if you go the right way to work, you can generally hear of somebody glad to earn a little money by taking in a lodger who does not give too much trouble.

The chances are you will be far more comfortable in such a lodging than in the ordinary village inn.

In tourist neighbourhoods you may find little country hotels, which live by their visitors and make them comfortable.

At Porlock and at Aberaron, at Church-Stretton and in the Forest of Dean, I have found civilisation and good cooking at very moderate prices, but in breaking new ground, the village inn is to be avoided if possible.

I know beforehand the exact course which events will take in such places.

I could supply all the landlady's answers to my own questions. It is a little comedy in which I am word-perfect.

You arrive, tired and hungry, after much tramping across the country, or a long day spent in and out of railway carriages, and having taken your room for the night, you next inquire about some food.

"What would you like?" asks the landlady, as if you had only to choose.

"Can you get me a chop or a steak?"

"The butcher won't be here till to-morrow."

It is a feature of such villages that the butcher always comes "to-morrow."

"Have you any cold meat?"

"Not to-day."

You play your last card.

"What have you got in the house?"

And the landlady, with the air of one who is making an original and magnificent offer, replies—

"I can get you some ham and eggs."

I am afraid to say how many times I have rehearsed this little dialogue, and watched for the inevitable ending with which it is bound to conclude. There is only one variation to the monotonous theme: sometimes, as a great novelty, instead of offering you ham and eggs, your landlady will proffer you a dish of eggs and ham. Even if you are not sinfully luxurious, this style of living palls at last, and it has not always the merit of being cheap.

You are a troublesome visitor. You require a tablecloth for your meals, or you don't like Swiss milk in your tea. You are bewildering and unintelligible. You may be no better than themselves, in which case it will be a pity to have treated you with too much deference. On the other hand, you may suddenly develop an acquaintanceship with the neighbouring squire, which may rouse feelings of remorse for not having treated you better or charged you more.

"Why didn't you tell me you knew him before?" said one of my many landladies when I asked her for a messenger to carry a note to a local magnate.

The tears almost stood in her eyes, and there were depths of reproachfulness in her tones.

You deserve to pay for your eccentricities, and you had better submit cheerfully to your fate, unless you can avoid it by avoiding the inn altogether.

For preference, I like a lodging which has been inhabited by the village curate. Your landlady will have acquired a deferential tone, and be accustomed to surround the good gentleman with certain little attentions, which will be passed on to you, in spite of your inferior merit.

Failing the curate's lodging, you may be very comfortable with the retired servant of a "good" family. She will be able to "place" you in five minutes, and know your exact position in the social scale.

It really matters very little whether she is right or wrong in her estimate. The important thing is that she should place you somewhere—that being the condition of easy intercourse with the average English woman.

I have always found perfect honesty in my rural hostesses. I use that term advisedly, for they generally regard you as somewhat of a guest.

Unlike the landlady of the inn, they have time and leisure to be interested in you, and we find they can manage our housekeeping much better than we can manage it for ourselves.

Anna is apt to go off sketching in the morning, and forget that she will want dinner when she comes back again; while I am a little nonplussed—say, on a Tuesday morning—at being told—

“The butcher *sometimes* comes round here of a Friday.”

It is a great relief when the village woman takes the command of the situation. She knows where to go for a fowl or a rabbit, she can find the eatable butter or the young vegetables, she likes to exercise the little patronage afforded by your custom, and can conduct a delicate transaction according to the strictest rules of rustic propriety.

My own assurance would be quite unequal to approaching the respected vicar of a country parish with a view to dealings in gooseberries and cauliflowers. Yet during one happy summer in Wales all our fruit supplies came from the vicarage garden. Like neighbouring potentates, we had no personal transactions, but employed ambassadors, in the persons of his housekeeper and our landlady, who carried on negotiations to our mutual satisfaction.

The village woman of the eastern counties is often clever, and strikes one generally as having more

brains than her partner—a silent person, who puts his best energies into guiding his plough or minding his “beasts,” and rarely develops conversational powers till he arrives at old age.

An outsider is struck by her cleanliness. I have seen cottage homes where the virtue verges upon the heroic. She can vie with her neighbours of Holland on the one hand, and with her cousins of New England on the other. The latter spring from the same source as herself, and the Jane Fields and Amanda Pratts of Miss Wilkins's pathetic tales are near akin to the Essex and Suffolk village folk.

It was from this race that the Pilgrim Fathers drew the religious enthusiasm which formed the backbone of their enterprise.

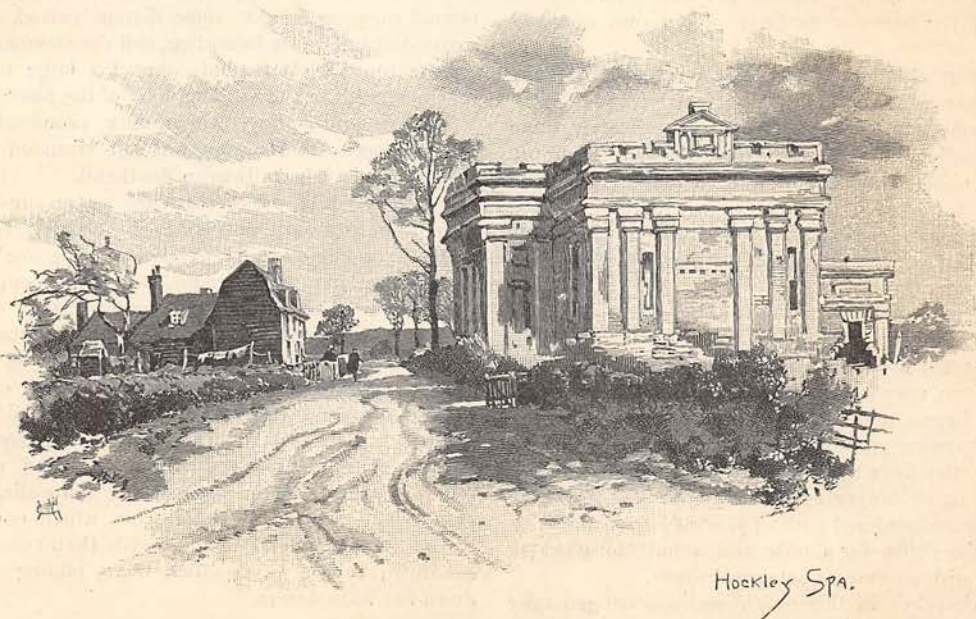
If you learn to know these outwardly quiet and unromantic-looking peasants, you will be startled at the vividness of their inward life, and you will understand how their forefathers faced the Marian persecutions—exceptionally severe in Essex.

Where the brooding imagination of this people is fostered by solitude and a monotonous life, it will sometimes become strong enough to overpower the senses, and the inward thoughts will clothe themselves as outward sights or sounds.

Sitting in lonely cottages, by the light of a half-starved fire or the soft glow of the evening sky, I have listened to strange tales of apparition and vision—sometimes beautiful and sometimes terrible, but never failing to be impressive.

As the teller of the story, a homely figure with toil-worn hands and earnest face, describes her strange experiences, you almost see the vision which she has seen, or hear the voices which she has heard, calling to you outside the cottage door.

By other firesides you hear other stories of the





ROCHFORD Hall.

village life ; you see the people from their own standpoint, and may get glimpses of their primitive code of morals—pitifully lax on some points, on others comparing favourably with that of the world outside.

My companion sees the brighter side of the village life. The children cluster around her easel ; they bring her flowers and stand as models, and tell her that they could not make pictures like hers, “not if they tried ever so.”

This gratifies her, as she is used to small French critics, who declare they could paint as well as she does if they only had a paint-box like hers. She is proud of the superior modesty of her own country-people.

To her great delight, the village accepts her as one of themselves.

The policeman’s wife steps out of her leafy cottage for a friendly chat across the thick box-hedge, and the village cobbler interests himself in making the paste to strain her boards.

The labourers who pass in and out of the fields address her as “young woman” with grave civility and friendly remarks—

“Be it mapping now you’re a-doing?” or—

“You work very hard.”

They tell her of the pasture where the cows have been driven, they let her know when the sheep-shearing has begun, and a flower is sent to her as a sign that a charming garden is ready for her brush.

When the keen wind from the east makes it impossible to sit longer out of doors, we wander along the primrose-bordered path of Hockley great wood, or across the fields, for a mile and a half, to Hockley Church, with its curious octagonal tower.

The churches in this neighbourhood are generally

placed on the highest available ground, and are often at some distance from the rest of the village.

Some of them, like Canewdon and Prittlewell, are landmarks for miles around ; and at Maldon there is an old church with a triangular tower : the only example I have ever met with.

Besides its church, Hockley is distinguished by a remarkable elevation, called Plumburrow Mount, from which a bird’s-eye view is obtained of the surrounding country. The River Crouch is the chief feature in the scene, but prettier views can be had of it a little lower down the hill. The appearance of the smooth green mound suggests that, at some distant period, art has assisted nature in its formation, and the summer-house on the top, which reminds one of a large bathing-machine, adds to the artificial look of the place.

The mineral spring, which once promised fame and prosperity to Hockley, was left stranded by the construction of the railway to Southend.

The only traces of its existence are an inn—out of proportion to the size of the village—bearing the name of Spa Hotel, and the dilapidated building one notices from the railway—the ruinous old pump-room, which looks disreputable rather than picturesque.

But fashion and new buildings would spoil the charm of this neighbourhood, which consists in its simple rustic beauty and the freedom with which one can roam in all directions—through the endless field paths, with their happy accidents ; down the grassy roads, with their sparsely-scattered cottages and wayside ponds ; and along the tops of the sea-walls, which confine the tidal rivers, and from which one looks across the flat, indented banks, with their covering of sea-thrift, to the white-sailed boats gliding up and down the wide waters.

When we come home in the evening we find the village men are playing quoits upon the tiny Hawkwell green, and half-way down the village road a father is teaching the game to his boys upon a patch of wayside turf.

The game is kept up till it is too dark to see any longer. One wishes that it were always May, and that the cheerful spring would never cease to breathe over the land.

We are told of sufferings from the winter's cold, when the little wooden cottages are a poor protection from the icy winds; and we cannot but think that if the butcher's cart were a more frequent feature in the village life the men would look stronger, and the women would not lose their early bloom so soon.

The children, however, seem healthy enough, and Anna is captivated by two tiny creatures with fair hair and mottled arms, their red frocks peeping beyond the white edges of their pinafores, who are just big enough to toddle about the village, holding each other by the hand.

With some trouble she prevails on them to stand for her, but barely five minutes have passed before the smallest toddler is overcome with shyness, buries his face in his sister's skirt, and breaks forth into lamentations, which require to be pacified with many chocolate-drops.

It is best to try and catch hurried sketches of the children before their unstudied grace stiffens into awkwardness, under the consciousness of being looked at. Only one little girl was able to stand this ordeal, and she was so anxious her baby should be "taken" that she forgot to think about her own *pose*.

If you want a change from the village, a twopenny railway fare takes you to pretty, clean, little Rayleigh, with its air of genteel prosperity, on the one hand, or to old-world and melancholy Rochford on the other. Another twopenny franks you on to Southend, a pretty

watering-place, in spite of the somewhat plebeian character of its attractiveness.

But here one touches on well-known ground, and my last words must be for the less visible beauties of Rochford. The old Hall, of course, is well-known to the visitors at the watering-place, and the obliging caretaker who shows you over gives you her own version of the history of England and the fate of Anne Boleyn, whose mother, Lady Rochford, once owned the hall.

She also gives us roses off a great tangled bush in the courtyard. In shape they are like large single wild roses, but in colour they are of a vivid golden yellow, such as we do not remember to have seen elsewhere. We cannot learn how the flowers came here, and please ourselves with fancying that Anne Boleyn may once have gathered such roses and worn them in her hair or on her dress.

As I began this sketch in April, I may be asked how I have already reached the time of roses; but while business often called me away to town, my companion stuck faithfully to her village, and lured me back again and again to this soft land of spreading fields and waters.

It was in one of my walks beyond Rochford that I lighted upon the River Roach, and introduced my unbelieving comrade to its beauties.

She forthwith fell a helpless victim to its charms, and moved to Rochford to be within easy reach of the wide Dutch-looking landscapes, where the distant boats seem to be sailing through the green meadows, and the little river-side harbours offer their unique combinations of seafaring and agricultural life.

It is a country you leave with regret and return to with pleasure, and after months of London life you may get as complete a change in rambling around an Essex village as you will find in Swiss hotels or German baths.

E. CHAPMAN.

THE BRIGHT-EYED STRANGER.

BY W. TEIGNMOUTH SHORE.



EVER before had I felt so utterly lonely; the rattle and roar of the express as it hurried North grew wearily monotonous; the rain streamed down the carriage windows, and the wind dashed against them in heavy gusts; and I was alone in the compartment.

It was difficult to believe that it was Christmas Eve; somehow Christmas is not Christmas without snow and frost. I was on my way home to spend a few days' holiday with my people, who dwelt in the far north of England.

The miserable lamp burnt dimly, and I soon wearied of my reading. Laying down my book, I took out my

watch, and was annoyed to find that it had stopped. This completed my discomfort; not that there was any real necessity for me to know the time, but I wanted to know it simply because I could not, and this added to my irritation. I peered out at the blackness; we flashed through a dreary little station, and I saw the lights of the village through the rain-mist; then I heard a church clock striking. Should I be able to hear the whole of the chime? I knew it must be near midnight. One! Two! Three! The sound of the bell did not diminish as we rushed on. Ten! Eleven! Twelve! Thirteen!! The bell rang on! What was it? On we tore through the darkness, and still on and on rang the bell, still distinct, growing louder, ringing more slowly. It sounded like a passing bell or a toll for a funeral. It was