

arms. He was weak with want of food, and exhausted with the fright he had lived in for the past four days.

"I'm going straight to Byford. Give me some food first, and I'll go. You promise that I shall not be stopped."

"Us'll see to that," said Berryman.

They helped Tarleton all they could. He stopped speaking now, and then he muttered something; but Hugh advised him to put all his breath into the effort to reach Trosa, and he gradually stopped even these murmurs.

Roswen loitered behind.

They went as they came. No soul met them.

The heat was sweltering. Twice they rested during the long walk. Tarleton grumbled at Hugh for not having brought something to eat and drink.

At last the white walls of Trosa came in sight. One more climb, and they were at the garden gate. Tarleton gave the one and only sign that he feared Sir James.

"I shall be safe?" he said to Hugh.

"You will be safe."

"Ay!" said Berryman. "'Tis he now that'll be afeard of you."

It was two o'clock in the afternoon. The

house was empty, but for Abigail cleaning up her kitchen. She screamed at the sight of Tarleton.

"Where be 'ee come from? Sakes alive! I thought 'ee was safe at your own home."

Hugh hushed her outcry.

"Get us something to eat, and hold your tongue."

She spread a table, and brought meat and bread. Tarleton ate ravenously, and Hugh and Berryman were not unable to make a hearty meal. Roswen had left them at the path to Trosa, and continued his way across the sandhills to the village.

Tarleton would not speak until he had eaten. At last he pushed his plate from him, leant back in his chair, and looked at Berryman. He recognised that in the old sailor he met with sympathy in his anger against Sir James. Of Hugh he was not so sure.

"I'm going to tell you everything," he said to the old man; and with a side look at Hugh, "I'm going to let you know what a rogue you've been harbouring here."

Hugh pushed back his chair, and went to the window.

END OF CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH.



A RELIC OF WILD ENGLAND.



GREAT hollow like an arm of the sea, with a long succession of headlands stretching out on either side, crowned with great masses of trees, fading gradually into the soft blue

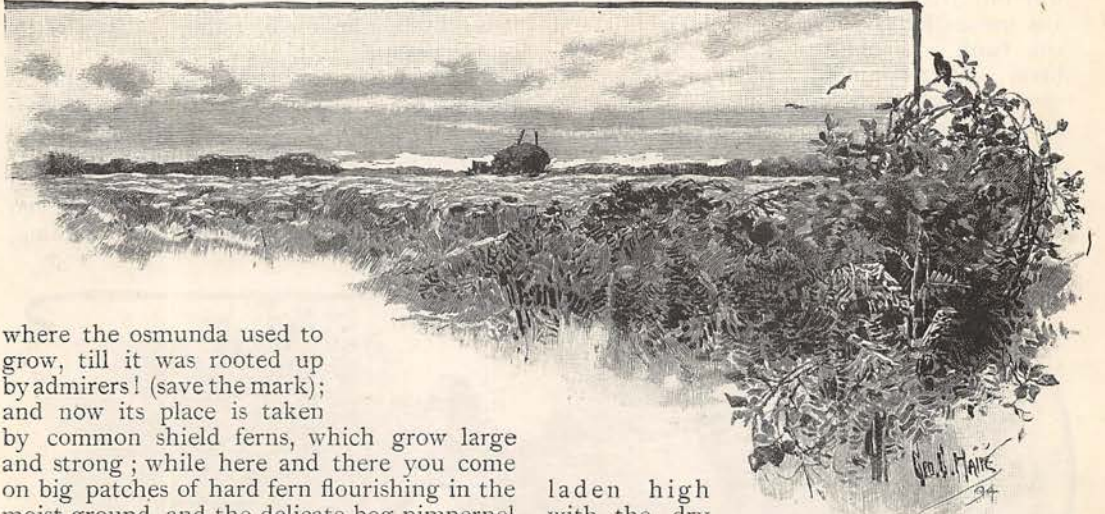
haze. Here and there a line of smoke shows the presence of a house hidden by heavy foliage, while a sparkle of water tells of a pond, for we are looking at Harting Coombe; and this bay—if bay it was—has been a mass of heath and woodland for many a long year.

Behind us the ground rises steeply to a long narrow ridge, sloping to the Coombe on one side, and to a wide valley, ending first in the Southdowns, and then in Blackdown and Wolmer Forest on the other. No wonder

that ridge has been discovered and colonised, and that there is a long row of houses built, or in building, for the inhabitants get fine air and lovely views, while the scent of fir and heath sweetens the whole country.

But we have nothing to do with houses; below us is a sea of green, beeches and oaks, birches and firs; with here and there a Spanish chestnut, grandest of forest trees, or an open glade which is a mass of fern. Some of the beeches are magnificent trees, with the splendid forked and branched stems which are the glory of the beech; and near them the old gnarled birches wave their graceful plumes to an unusual height, for the trees at this end have been undisturbed for many a long year, and the old stems contrast with the young saplings further on.

What a delightful place it is! Under foot there is the soft grassy road, while on either side the bracken grows shoulder-high; among the brushwood tiny birches are even growing up in the road, and there is quite a thicket on either side. There is a fascinating bog, too,



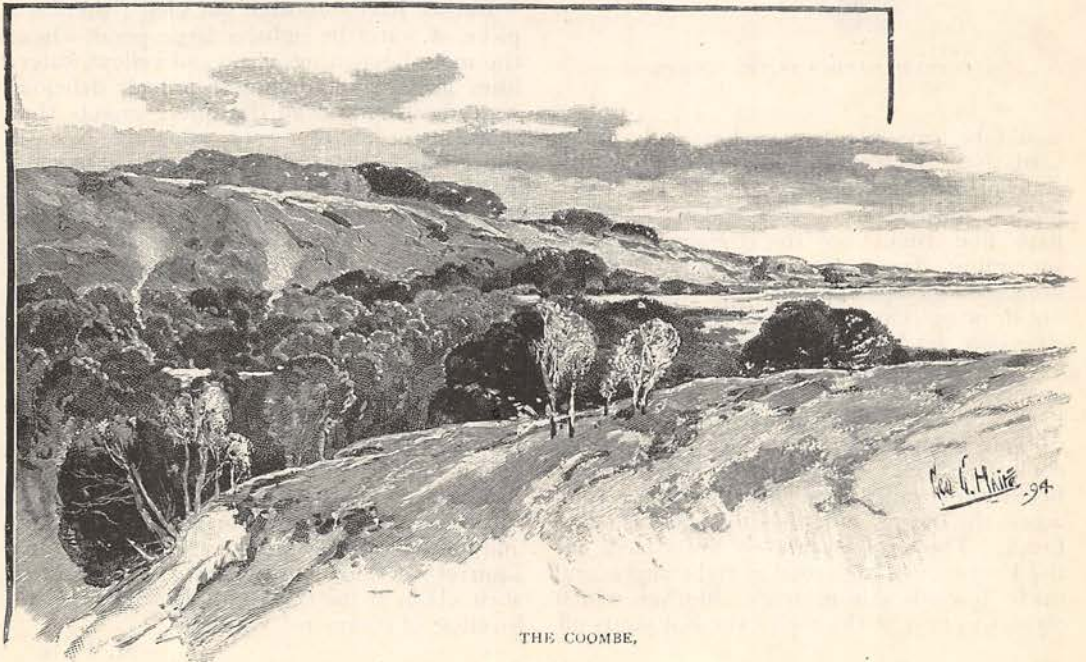
CARTING FERN IN THE
COOMBE.

where the osmunda used to grow, till it was rooted up by admirers! (save the mark); and now its place is taken by common shield ferns, which grow large and strong; while here and there you come on big patches of hard fern flourishing in the moist ground, and the delicate bog pimpernel and lesser skull-cap grow luxuriantly.

But we must leave the bog for higher ground, and before long we find ourselves on a slope that has quite changed from our former outlook. Instead of trees, we have heath in a mass of purple and brown. The bell heath has lost its first beauty, and has dark bells among the purple; but the ling is at its best, and the air is fragrant with its honeyed scent, while innumerable bees work among the lilac bells. Here the fern has been cut, and on the road half-a-mile away we can see a waggon moving slowly along,

laden high with the dry bracken that makes such excellent litter.

It is the final load of the season, for the last two nights have been cold, and the fern has begun to don its autumn dress. Such a glorious mass of tints! every shade of gold, from pale yellow through vivid orange to sombre russet, colours the ground, and leaves the heather comparatively dull. There is a bank not far off which we want to investigate, so we leave the open and push our

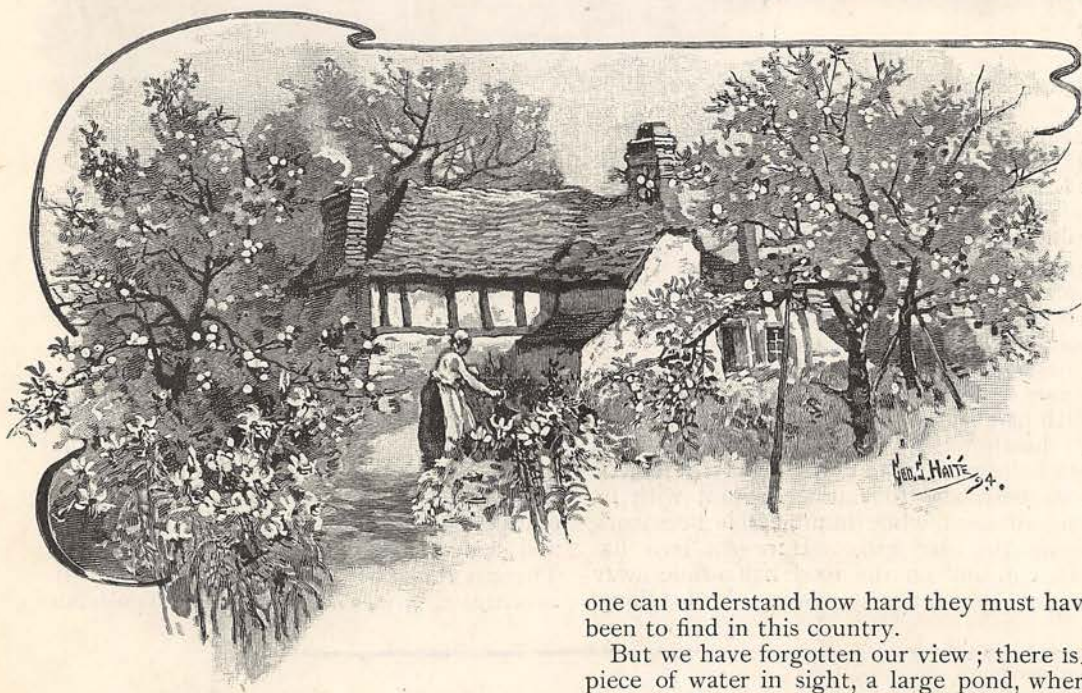


THE COOMBE.

way into the fern. It is not an easy road by any means, for the fern is shoulder-high, and the bank is a mass of heath and whortleberry, while brambles are plentiful below, and sometimes usurp the upper place. By patience and perseverance we creep along for a hundred yards, and find what we sought. The ground falls suddenly into a deep hollow, and we are in the smugglers' road, a place where they

in the other direction towards Guildford; but it is only in a hollow like this that you come on traces of it.

The smugglers grew too bold at last, and took such a horrible vengeance on an excise-man who declined to be bought off, and so interfered with their doings, that they attracted public attention, and were hunted down and their gangs broken up; but even now in the days of railways and building,



COTTAGE GARDEN IN THE COOMBE.

would be invisible to searchers only a few yards away, for the trench is as narrow as it is deep, and there are trees at the top which hide it entirely from view. They used to have fine times on the Sussex coast in smuggling days. At mid-day a man on horseback galloped through the villages without drawing rein or speaking to anyone; but wherever he passed every light was out, every door locked, every inhabitant asleep (!) at nightfall. Then the cargo was run ashore, kegs of brandy slung across the pack-horses in waiting, and started at once for the wild country inland. None of the sleepers ever heard the tramp of horses, they were soon across the downs, and miles inland before day-break. The road we are on must have cut the Portsmouth high road at right angles and made towards Alton, while another which divides from it at the top of the hill slants off

one can understand how hard they must have been to find in this country.

But we have forgotten our view; there is a piece of water in sight, a large pond, where the most fascinating white and yellow water-lilies grow, and dragon-flies and delicious water-beetles, and all the queer insects that skate about on the water abound. Near it the ground is park-like, with fair-sized oaks and grass-land; but there is plenty of cover for rabbits, which dart about as gaily as the dragon-flies. Further on there are plantations of young oaks, with thick undergrowth, and a rustle here and there will tell you of the presence of the young pheasants, who are awaiting the first of October. Sometimes you come upon a cottage with a big garden well filled with apple-trees, laden with fruit. Sometimes in a wild bit you find crab-trees with tiny hard apples—beautiful to look at, but too rough and acid for anyone but jays. Then half a dozen fields seem to hint of cultivation, but the wild woodland soon resumes its sway, and heather and pheasants, fir, oak, and squirrels, or fern and rabbits, seem to justify their claim to be the rightful owners of this loveliest of commons.