



COWSIC VALLEY, ABOVE TWO BRIDGES, DARTMOOR.

FROM MOOR TO SEA.

By GRANT ALLEN.

Illustrated by W. BISCOMBE GARDNER.



SOMEBODY once well described Dartmoor as "a crushed mountain."

The graphic phrase would have been still more correct if he had described it instead as a worn volcano. For Dartmoor, as we know it at the present day, is in fact the mere basal stump, or weather-beaten relic, of a huge fiery cone of ash and tufa that must once have risen, like Etna or Chimborazo, many thousand feet into the air of a vanished continent. It consists for the most part of a single great compact granitic mass, poured upward in the molten condition

from below at a date somewhat later than the first laying down of the carboniferous deposits. And if we want to understand the present aspect and nature of Dartmoor, with its flat-topped outline, and its deeply-scooped valleys, and its stony clatters, and its strange pointed tors, we must always bear in mind that what we see to-day of that ruined mountain is but the base, or torso, of a vast rearing range now almost entirely worn away and reduced to the level by the ceaseless aerial bombardment of ten thousand centuries.

Granite is a very solid substance indeed; yet anybody who examines those mouldering pinnacles whose big rocks still crown every height throughout the Dartmoor region, will soon see for himself that even solid granite can be gradually eaten out piecemeal, a grain at a time, by wind and water. Everywhere the exposed surface is weathering at the joints: everywhere the action of rain and air is making it crumble into atoms by slow degrees, and washing down its *débris* with every freshet into the valleys at the foot. The old lake basin at Bovey Tracey, for example, is entirely filled up with fine white clay (the raw material of porcelain), brought down in solution by the wintry streams from the tors above it. Not a river that drains the summit of the moor

but carries off each day a fresh contribution of sand and pebble from those eternal heights. Not a frost but chips them, not a storm but rends, not a shower but disintegrates. And ever since the immensely remote epoch when Dartmoor first rose, a gigantic mountain, from the Permian plain, the self-same process has been going on ceaselessly through unnumbered seasons. The moor as it stands is just the hard stump which still survives, though worn so small and low, that continual battering by

the rain of ages.

Of course however it hasn't all worn down equally. The softer portions, where the rivers carved themselves out their first courses, have been cut in places into deep and romantic gorges; the harder nodules or bosses that intervened between the valleys have longest resisted the wearing action, and rise to this day as low stunted hills or dividing ridges. The very summit of each is usually crowned by what we call a tor—that is to say, a mass, or masses, of very hard granite indeed, whose tough grain has withstood to this moment the assaults and attacks of all the elements. Sometimes the tor is merely a projecting naked dyke of the granite underneath, left behind when the rest was worn away by the rainfall; sometimes it consists of several



TWO BRIDGES, NEAR PRINCE TOWN, DARTMOOR.

crumbling and somewhat rounded kernels, perched logan-wise on a base of solid rock below. In the latter case it represents the very hardest and most insoluble cores or nuggets in a superincumbent portion long since denuded.

It is this peculiar geological origin that gives Dartmoor all its special interest, both pictorial and historical. Unlike most of our English hill districts the Devonian moor is almost flat-topped: its central part consists of a wide plateau, barely broken at long distances by the undulating rise of the gentle and wave-like tor-crowned hillocks. In between stretch bogs of deep brown peat, the favourite haunt of the sundew and the osmunda fern. Black cattle wander among the sedgy bottoms; a few horned sheep nibble at the close sward of cinque-foil and eyebright that spreads between the high

clumps of tussocky grass on the rounded uplands. The total effect is one of severe and solemn wildness—a great rolling waste of treeless moor, covered by mile after mile of whortleberry and heather, unrelieved by a single smiling feature, and varied only by the bleak grey masses of the frowning tors.

Yet it is on this barren stretch of stern granite solitude that the softest and most romantic of English rivers takes its rise.

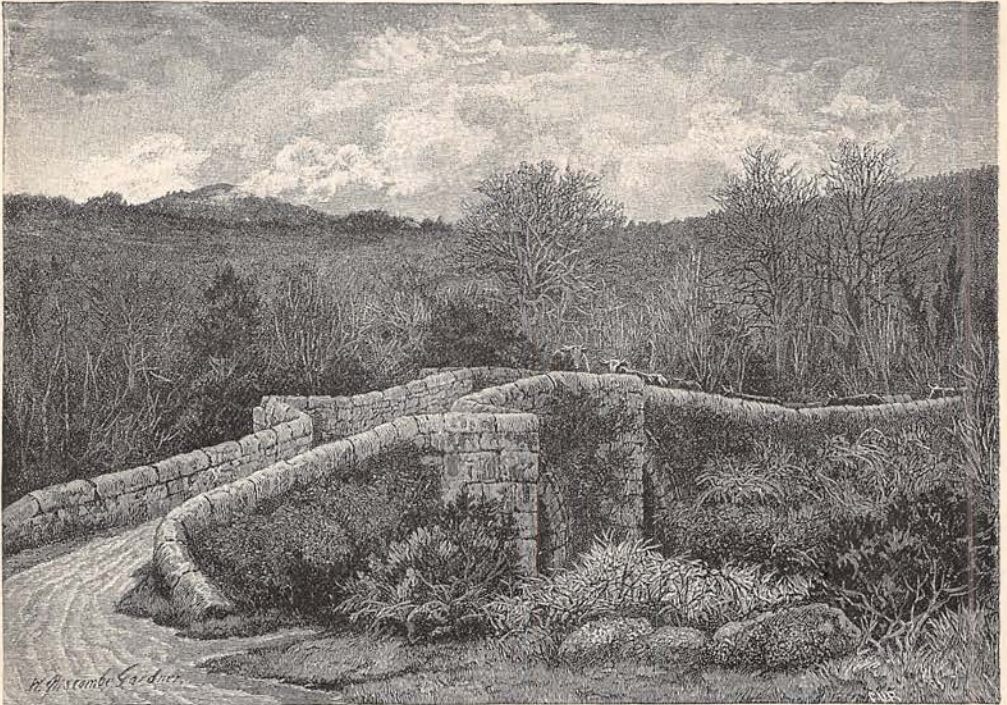
Not however from a single source. Like all other great streams, our peerless Dart derives its origin from a double parentage. As there is a White Nile and a Blue Nile, as there is a Hinter Rhein and a Vorder Rhein, so too there is an East and a West



DARTMEET.

Dart. The two run together at Dartmeet Bridge, after some miles of separate existence among the lonely granite uplands. In common with almost all the rivers of Devon, however, both Darts take their rise on the slopes of a single rounded mass, the central watershed for the Damnonian peninsula, whence the Taw and the Okement, the Tavy and the Teign, all gather their springs from a kindred source to diverge once more through all the green orchard vales of the county. Here, in the very heart of Dartmoor Forest, the bareness and loneliness become almost oppressive. For of course the forest, like most other forests, is absolutely treeless; it is a mere philological blunder of recent times that connects forests with trees; etymologically, the word means only an open space or uninclosed wild, and it is in this sense alone that it could ever have been applied to Dartmoor, Snowdon, or the heather-clad moors of Scotland. The tradition that places so-called were once well wooded has arisen only from the recent misuse of language; no trees have ever grown within historical times, or could possibly have grown under existing conditions, on any of our great open British moorlands. Of course there were wooded forests, like the Weald, and Sherwood, but the wood was accidental, so to speak; the wild and uncultivated condition being the sole essential.

The man who attacks the upper reaches of the Dart must not expect, like Agag, to go "walking delicately." He must be content to foot it with a pair of stout mountain boots, to tramp through bogs, to flounder in fogs, and to lose his way hopelessly among trackless gorse-wilds. All the winter through, when the snow is not lying thick, the greater gorse makes the uplands golden with its scented bloom; and as soon as its blossoming season is fairly over, and its hairy brown pods begin to crackle in the sun, shedding their seeds elastically as the valves fly open, then the smaller and daintier summer species starts afresh, with its paler flowers, beloved by mountain bees, and keeps up the continual succession of yellow glory. But the heather that purples the slopes of Broad Down and Hartland Hill, near the actual source of the Dart, is of course at its best in August or September; and then is the time when the hardy pedestrian, botanizing case on back and lunch in knapsack, may set out with his compass and his



NEW BRIDGE, ON THE DART.

ordnance map to find his way vaguely across country from Prince Town, or Two Bridges, to the peaty bottoms, white with cottongrass, green with butterwort, and blue under foot with the creeping ivy-leaved harebell, where the flora of the moor may best be wooed and won in its native fastnesses.

After passing through a mile or two of this picturesque wilderness, by bickering stickles, the East Dart comes suddenly upon its first taste of civilization at Post Bridge where the great highroad across the moor, from Moreton Hampstead to Tavistock and Plymouth, crosses the infant river by a rude stone structure, which may almost be described as a megalithic survival into our own age. It is the finest example, in fact, of that peculiar type of cyclopean building known on Dartmoor as a *clapper bridge*. These very antique erections consist of large flat granite slabs resting on solid piers of one or more blocks, and poised without masonry or mortar, like the gates of Mycenæ or the solemn doorways of Etruscan tombs. Post Bridge itself, the noblest of its kind, has three piers, each six blocks high, and spanned by two huge stone slabs, fifteen feet long, of immemorial antiquity. The tin-streamers, who have left traces of their industry on every brook about, were no doubt the original architects of this most ancient bridge; for the merchant track that carried the ingots of tin from Cornwall and Devon to the port of Sandwich is now known to be the most ancient road in Britain, traceable throughout to this day by many signs from Dartmoor and Somerset to the Pilgrim's Way along the open downs of Kent and Surrey. Tin was a necessary

component of bronze ; and in the Bronze Age the tin-mines of Devon and Cornwall answered to the Black Country of our modern iron civilization.

The West Dart takes its rise equally among these wild solitudes by the two Mis Tors, but emerges much more rapidly upon the traces of modern life in the dreary little upland village of Prince Town, with its great barrack-like prison, and its gloomy granite quarries. All round spreads the prison farm, where the convicts, working

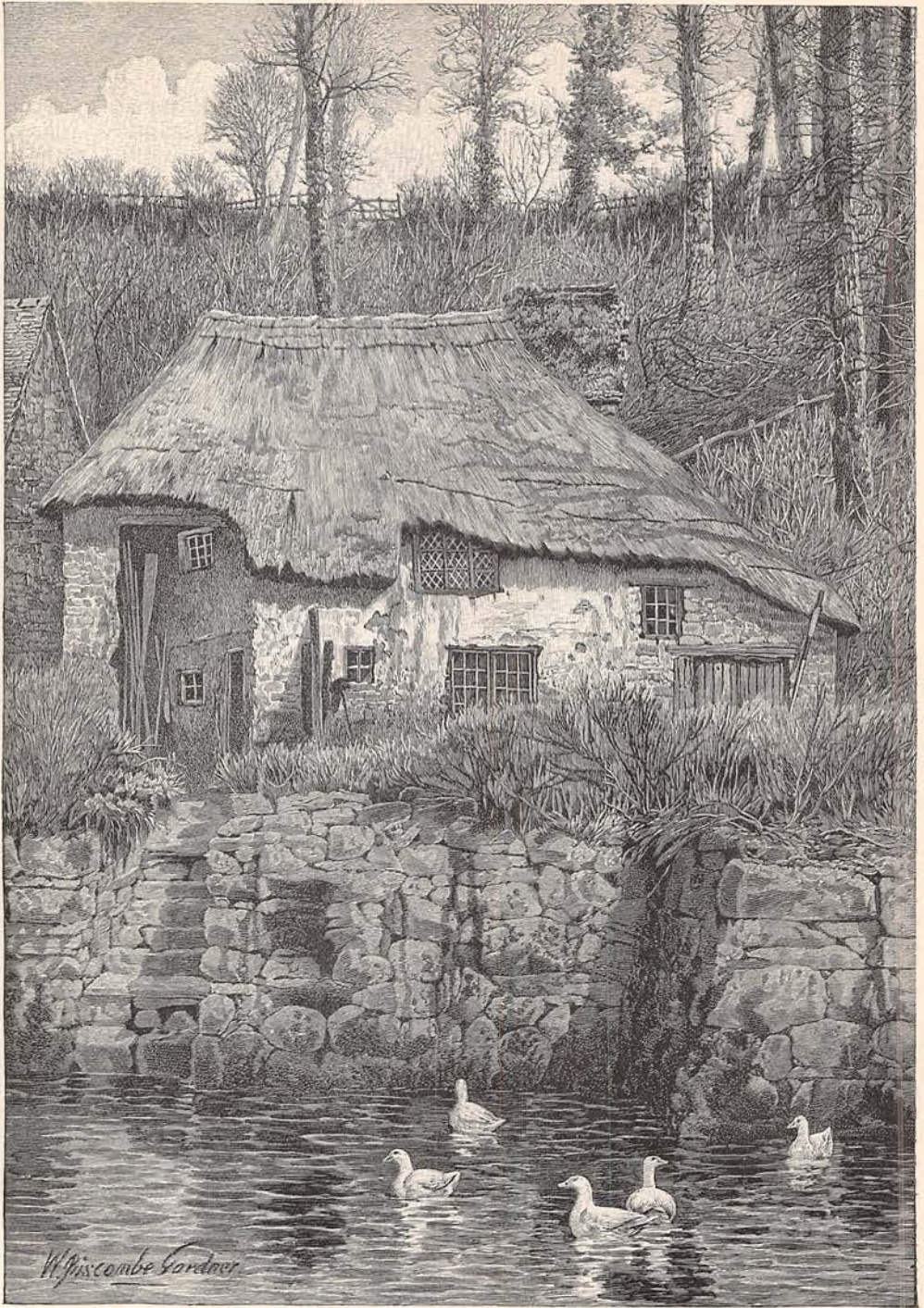
under the charge of armed warders, have made an oasis in the waste of gorse and heather. The Duchy Hotel at Prince Town has become of late years the great centre for exploring the moor. From it the tourist can most easily climb the surrounding tors, with their strange old Celtic or pre-Celtic names ; for Dartmoor is of course historically one of the most ancient seats of culture in England. From time immemorial it has been the haunt of tin-streamers ; and Crockern Tor, just above Two Bridges, "nearly equidistant from the Stannary Towns of the county," was the antique site of the open-air mote, or "Tinnerns' Parliament," which assembled here to discuss the business of the tin-producing region.

Dartmoor, too, though nominally in Devonshire, has from the very

first been intimately connected with the Duchy of Cornwall, and with the West Welsh kingdom which preceded it, or from which the Duchy took its rise. There is a quaint and interesting story still surviving in the West Country of how a Devonshire man once said to a Cornishman, "Cornwall is not a part of England." "No, I know it isn't," the Cornishman answered with spirit, "for everybody has heard that Cornwall is divided from England by Devonshire." Now this curious fragment of local tradition really incloses a singular kernel of historical fact. For Devonshire as a whole, and more particularly Dartmoor, long remained essentially British after Somerset and Dorset



LOVER'S LEAP, HOLNE CHASE.



FERRYMAN'S COTTAGE, DUNCANNON, ON THE DART.

had been conquered and assimilated by the English invaders. No Saxon prince ever really subdued the impregnable tors. Even after the time when Devonshire itself had been politically incorporated with the West-Saxon realm, Cornish Welsh continued to be spoken among the miners and herdsmen of these remote uplands, and is said indeed to have finally lingered on in outlying places as late as the time of Queen Elizabeth.

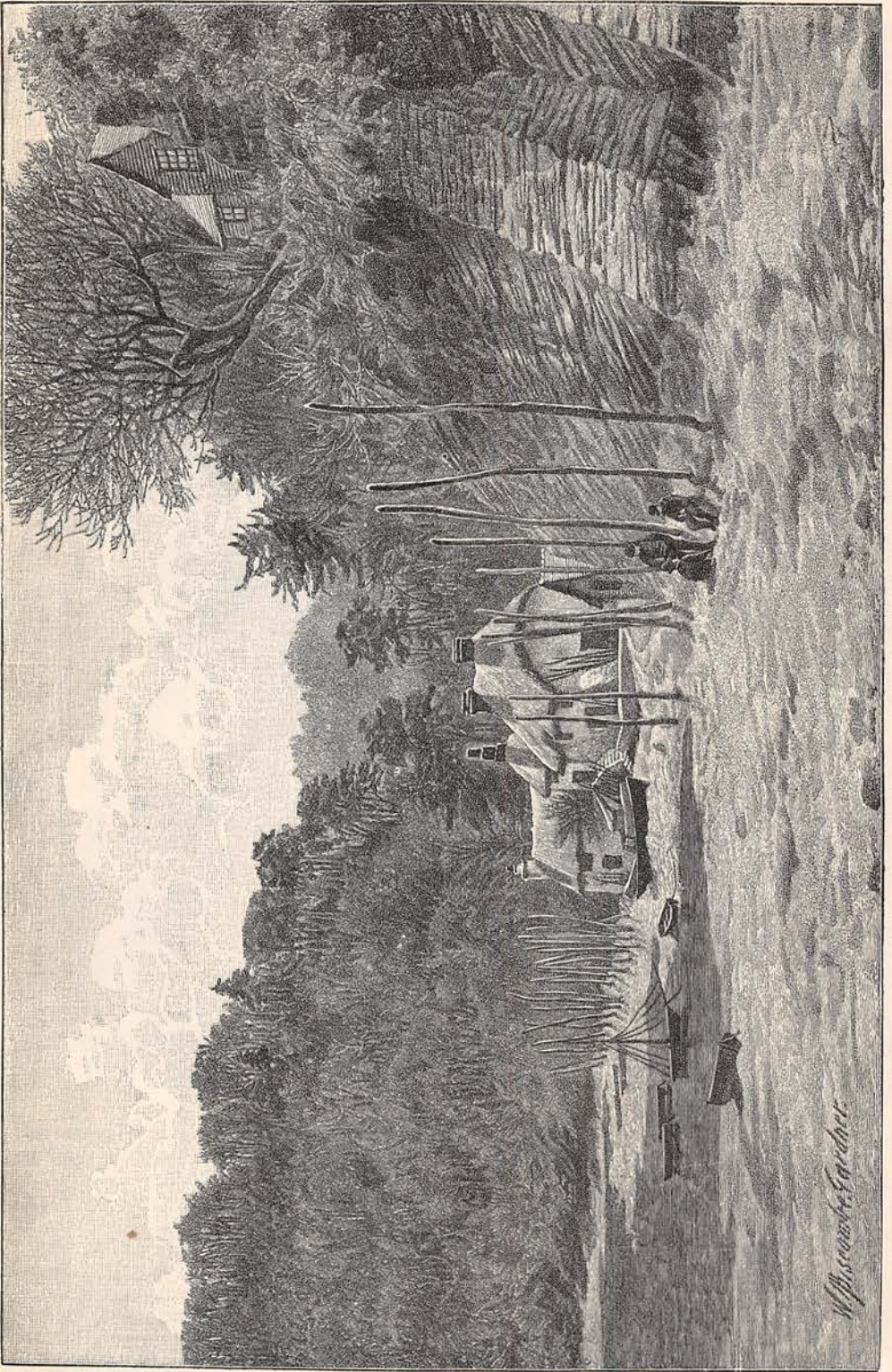
The Stannary Courts of the Duchy thus represent to this moment the old original open-air motes of the Ancient Briton. And the Tinnars' Parliaments continued to assemble on Crockern Tor "under the full eye of heaven" (as the Welsh Gorsedd does to the present day) up to the beginning of the last century. But in its later stages the parliament merely met first, *pro forma*, on the open tor, and then adjourned afterwards for serious business to some appointed building; just as in our own degenerate times the Gorsedd is proclaimed under the clear sky, but the Eisteddfod is held in a more modern town hall or vulgar assembly room. The stone seats, hewn in the granite of Crockern for those Areopagites of the moor, the stannators and their officials, have long since unhappily been converted into road-metal by the sacrilegious hammer of the British contractor.

Nevertheless, in spite of all latter-day abominations, lovers of the old Celtic stock that mainly peoples our island may still feel themselves here on true Damnonian soil, strewn thick with relics of the antique West-Welsh kingdom, to which we owe (among other rich legacies) the wild and melancholy poetry of the Arthurian legends. For this is in very truth Arthur's own land, and these are the bare heights that inspired every fibre of the weird Cymric fancy. All around lie mementoes of the storied past. The modern high-road from Prince Town to Two Bridges leads over a clapper bridge of antique workmanship, and passes full in sight of Crockern Tor itself, to that profoundest centre of the



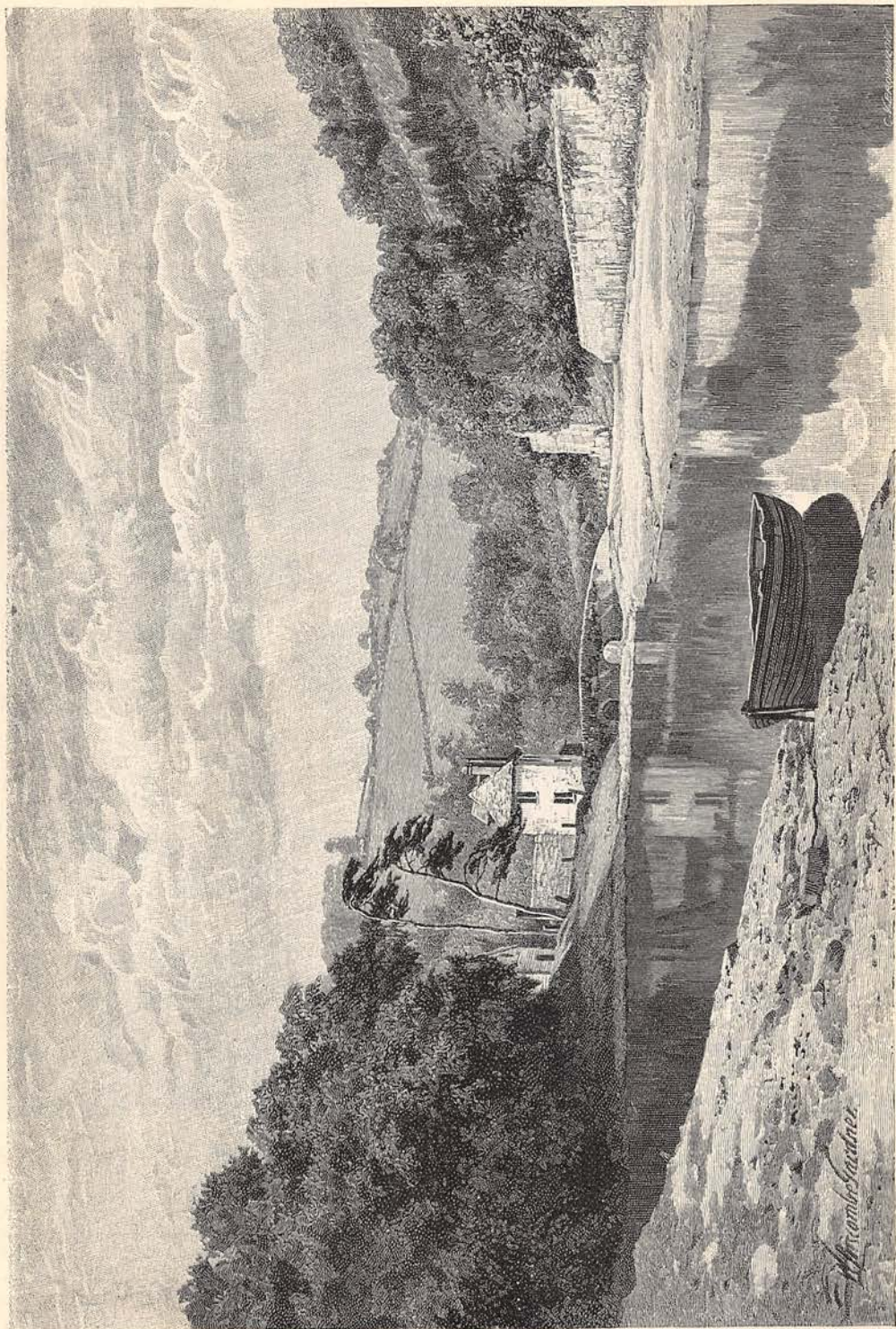
DITTISHAM CHURCH.

moorland scenery. Here the Cowsic Valley opens up to northward, with its strange glimpses of an ancient wizard world. Above hangs Wistman's Wood, a little weather-beaten copse of stunted oak-trees, hoary with age, and with curled lichens, but *not*, as the local gossips will credulously tell you, the last relic of the ancient forest of Dartmoor. That rumour is but a fond thing, vainly imagined. The ancient forest of Dartmoor spreads all around you, exactly as it has always done, all bare and treeless; the only reason why oaks grow at all in Wistman's Wood, any more than elsewhere, is because some huge granite boulders, scattered clatter-wise on the slope, here give shelter enough from the wind to permit of these venerable trees attaining a height of some nine or ten feet under the lee of the protecting rock-masses. But to suppose that vigorous timber ever subsisted on these open and wind-swept heights is almost as absurd as to set down Wistman's Wood for a Druidical grove,



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LOWER DITTISHAM.



MILL CREEK HEAD, ABOVE DARTMOUTH

after the manner so fashionable in the prehistoric times at the beginning of this century.

From Two Bridges the Ashburton high-road skirts the valley of the West Dart to Dartmeet Bridge, where the twin torrents at last unite their boulder-strewn streams, and leaving behind their foaming tricks flow on together more peacefully towards the sea at Dartmouth. On the way we pass Dennabridge Pound, one of those curious rude inclosures, like the walls of some old Etruscan fortress, which stud in places the surface of the moor. Probably they were the moorland equivalents of the stockaded earthworks within whose shelter in time of war or invasion the women and children, and also the cattle, were driven from the neighbouring pastures and scattered huts. But in later days they have certainly been used as veritable pounds for the herdsman to see that no unlicensed stock were being grazed unawares within the forest limits.

From Dartmeet to Hanneford (where the road next crosses the river) the Dart falls considerably, and has cut itself a deep valley in the moorland rock. Round Holne Chase especially, that favourite drive of tourists, it bends in a long and abrupt elbow, flowing through a ravine which narrows at times into a regular



OLD HOUSE, FOSS STREET, DARTMOUTH.

gorge. We are now approaching the outskirts of the moor and the scenery becomes gradually less wild and rugged, but more beautiful, more romantic, and more prettily wooded. The very name of Holne indeed, like those of Holmwood and Holmesdale, is derived from the holly tree, in older English *holm-bush*, with whose bright green foliage the whole of this neighbourhood is richly diversified. Two private carriage roads lead through the gorge, one on the inner bend of the elbow, by Holne Chase, the other on the outer curve, by Buckland Woods. Both are thrown open to the public by the landowners with a just sense of the duties of landed proprietorship. Scenery like this belongs to mankind. We have all a vested interest in rocks and rivers. And indeed there are few more beautiful drives in England. At one point in

particular, known as the Lover's Leap, the gorge attains a high level of pictorial beauty, admirably represented in Mr. Gardner's exquisite and sympathetic sketch. Here it is that imaginative souls, crossed in their affections, are specially advised to sacrifice themselves to the *genius loci*. "River of Dart, river of Dart," says the pathetic West Country rhyme, "every year thou claimest a heart:" and the Lover's Leap is the place to pay it.

At Buckfastleigh, famous for its great Cistercian abbey (now scarcely recognizable



BAKE HILL, DARTMOUTH.

by a few unimportant remains), the moorland stream emerges at last from its native mountains and flows thenceforward among the comparatively low and placid ground of the South Hams of Devon. But though no longer mountainous its course is still hilly, it has but exchanged the solid granite of the moor for the gentler Devonian rocks of its lower basin. The shimmering silky reefs that line the seaward reaches belong for the most part to that beautiful formation. From Buckfastleigh to Totnes the Ashburton branch of the Great Western Railway follows close—too close—the bends and windings of the river, whose banks are here both pretty and romantic, though this is perhaps the least visited part of the whole valley. The railway hurries one through it without giving the distracted traveller time to admire the view; he can only enjoy both sides alike at the risk of contracting a permanent squint; and so the upper portion of the stream, which one follows on foot through the moor, and the lower tidal reaches, which one takes at one's ease in a boat or steamer, are far better known than these smiling middle regions which the locomotive has rendered far too accessible for anybody in these hurry-scurrying days to walk along.

"At Totnes town the Dart becomes navigable." So the geography-books with one accord assert, though its navigability is now a more doubtful quality than in the days when Brutus of Troy—according to Welsh romance—first landed here the future lord of Britain. As a matter of fact a tiny tourist steamer does actually ply down the ten miles of shallow estuary to Dartmouth, which forms altogether the most beautiful bit of river scenery in southern Britain, with the exception perhaps of the Mawddach mouth between Dolgelly and Barmouth. I will not insult the proverbial intelligence

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or try the proverbial courtesy of the reader by informing him, after the same veracious authorities, that "the Dart is frequently called the English Rhine." There are no ten miles of the Rhine indeed that can for a moment compare with that beautiful stretch of wooded English undulating country. The only possible point of resemblance is the castles at the mouth, and even those are very different from the robber towers of Rhineland. The beauty of the Dart indeed is much more the beauty of an inland lake than of a great navigable river; it resembles the lower part of Loch Awe, or the Llanberis llyns, much more than it resembles the bare grey terraced vineyards of the overpraised German waterway. The steamer takes us at first past Sharpham woods, famous for their heronry, whose denizens may often be observed lower down the estuary, standing patient on one leg at low water in the tidal streams that intersect with their current the acrid shining mudflats. Then the river narrows down for a while as we pass the Gut, and widens out once more on approaching Duncannon. The ferryman's cottage here makes a pretty sketch; I needn't stop to describe it, in clumsy words, as my colleague's dainty pencil has done it far better already than my sharp-pointed pen could ever hope to rival.

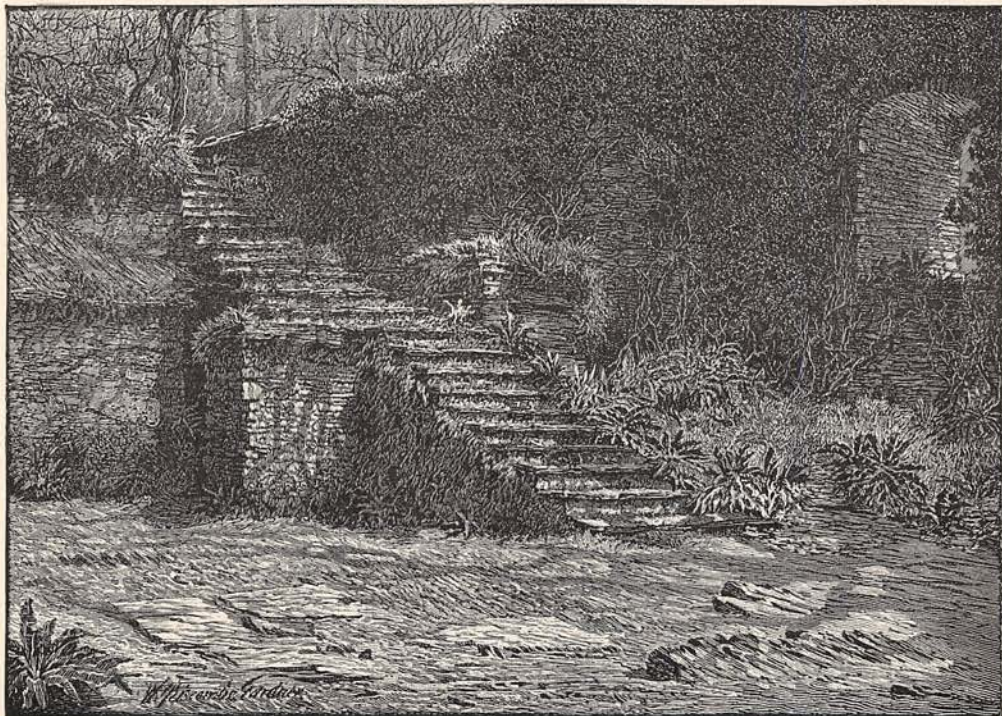
Passing on by various pastoral side creeks of quiet beauty we arrive at last at Goader Point, half way down our course, a little peninsula whose isthmus is occupied by the rustic villages of Upper and Lower Dittisham. By this time our upland river has become wholly estuarine and almost seafaring, for Dittisham is essentially a fisherman's port. The Dartmouth folk come out here to eat cockles for tea, and the women of the village pride themselves on the ease with which they can feather an oar against any man on the Dart. This part of the open fiord is known as Galampton Bay; below it the estuary once more contracts, at a point where the channel is divided by a sharp rock, known as the Anchor Stone. And a little beyond we are in sight of port, for yonder stand Dartmouth and Kingswear on their opposite hills, between which the Dart itself finally pours its pale green waters into the open sea.

The configuration of the mouth, however, would of itself suffice to make the Dart unique among English rivers. For instead of expanding at its end into a wide bay or funnel-shaped opening, our stream is closed on either hand at its outlet by high rocks and hills, with a narrow entrance between twin castles to right and left, which render the approach to Dartmouth harbour the most picturesque point among all our delightful British seaports. Indeed by far the most striking way to arrive at Dartmouth is by sea from Torquay, round the shining satiny cliffs of Berry Head, glistening grey in the sun, and past the endless craggy islets that rise from the water's edge into the pinnaced skerries of the Mouse and the Pisgeys. In this way alone does the harbour mouth burst upon you at last in all its full beauty. You sweep round a projecting corner of rock and see suddenly on your right the mouldering towers of Kingswear Castle upon their spray-beaten rocks; on your left the answering keep of Dartmouth Castle, with the town and churches; and full in front the beautiful lake-like harbour, alive with craft, and closed up in the distance by the wooded heights that bound the northward view towards the distant moorland. The narrow entrance between the two castles recalls rather some Swiss lake or some Westphalian fortress than any familiar scene of our industrial England.

Dartmouth town, when you land and explore it, is almost as mediæval as anything to be found in Flanders or on the Zuyder Zee—a quaint old place, scrambling up hill and down dale, by devious ways, mounting here by steps cut in the bare face of the rock, and descending there by break-neck alleys where the sure-footed donkey alone can be trusted to keep his knees unbroken. The houses are many of them timbered and carved, sometimes with most grotesque and parlous monsters—gorgons, and hydras, and chimeras dire, intermingled with lizards and mediæval gargoyles; while from the upper windows, as in the Old Town of Edinburgh, project poles and lines where the family washing hangs out to dry before the placid faces of admiring fellow-townsmen. At every turn some picturesque little bit of old-world life meets one's eyes in Dartmouth. The curious thirteenth century church with its exquisite oak screen, the projecting fronts of the houses in the Butterwalk, the corbels and posts of the ancient inns in the back streets, the Italian plaster work on the parlour ceilings—all of them are well worthy of the artist's and the antiquary's polite attention. And so also are the male and female inhabitants.

For Dartmouth is one of the oldest and most historical ports in England. It smells of seafaring. Its excellent shelter, due to the projecting headlands, made it important

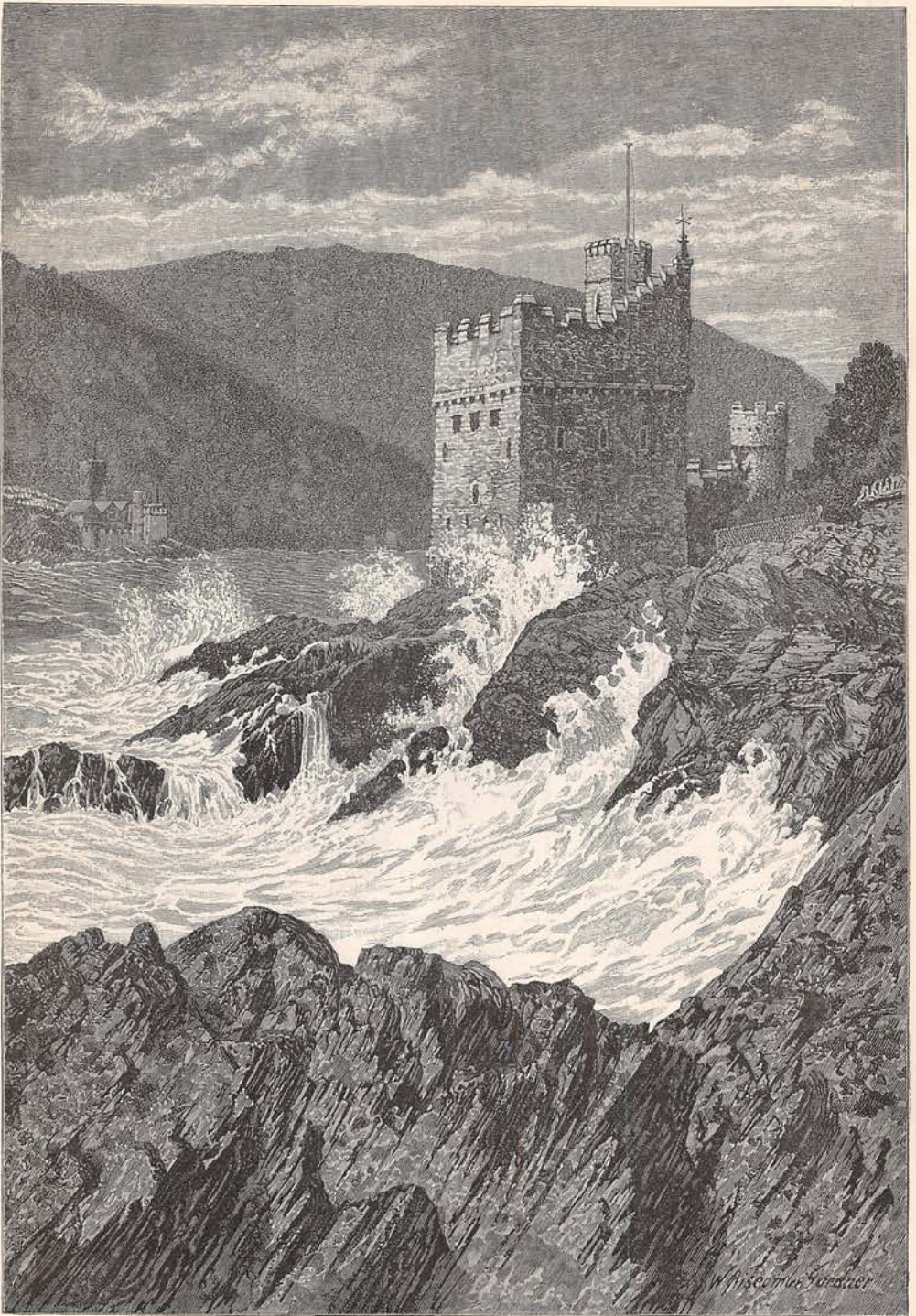
at a time when perfect screening from violent gales was of greater practical moment than depth of water, and it only began to decline in tonnage and in commerce when great ocean-going vessels drawing many feet at once took the place of the stout little mediæval coasting craft. Its memories therefore are all of the heroic age of navigation. They begin with the Crusaders and culminate worthily in the spacious days of great Elizabeth, when Devonians were undoubtedly the foremost men in the new, expansive England of Tudor development. The harbour was the rendezvous of Richard Cœur de Lion's fleet, and it sent a brave contingent in later days to the epoch-making siege of Calais. Chaucer mentions it as his sailor's town, much as to-day one might mention Liverpool or Glasgow; and indeed no other port save Orford and Yarmouth can have equalled its tonnage during the Plantagenet period. Coming down to the Elizabethan world, Davis of Davis's Strait was a Dartmouth man by birth, and Sir Humphry Gilbert, the father of electrical science and half-brother of Sir Walter Raleigh (though



GOMROCK CASTLE, IN THE GROUNDS OF R. F. WILKINS, ESQ., BROOK HILL, KINGSWEAR.

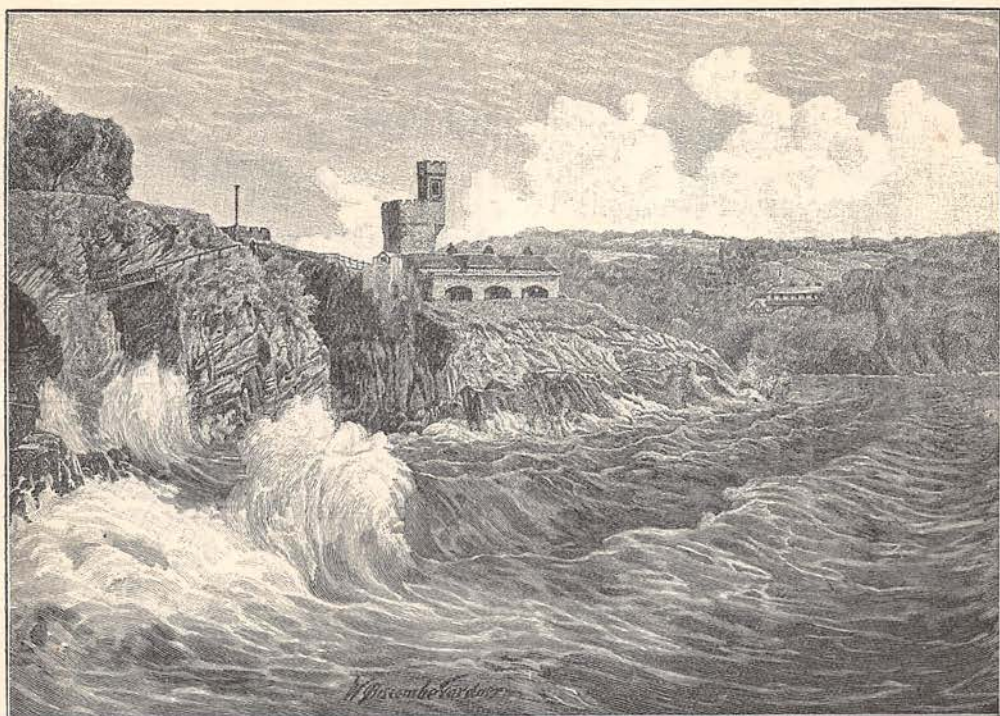
unrelated, I believe, to the Earl of Cork), had his seat at Greenway, close by, where the first historical pipe of tobacco was smoked in England. Even in more modern times Dartmouth has contributed its item to the world's progress: for Newcomen, a native of the town, was the real inventor of the original steam-engine. *Tulit alter honores*. Even so, too, another west-countryman, Trevithick, of Hayle, a Cornish Briton, rich in the inherited intelligence of the mines, was the maker of the locomotive: but being a Celt by birth, his fame has naturally been overlaid by that of his Saxon or Scandinavian successor, Stephenson, who improved and adapted Trevithick's valuable invention. *Sic vos non vobis*, ye long-suffering, patient Celtic folk! When will the world learn that you, not the stolid unintelligent Teuton, are the true makers and shapers of modern England?

Dartmouth is an excellent centre for excursions. It is the metropolis of the coast-wise scenery of the South Hams. Besides the two main castles that guard the river mouth with their well-preserved towers, two others, more ruinous, stand close by, at Gomrock and Bearscove. Then the estuary affords great scope for boating and picnics, while the cliff scenery outside the harbour abounds in beauty of something of the same sort as that of the Channel Islands or the Lizard promontory. The water is



KINGSWEAR CASTLE, ON THE EAST SIDE OF THE MOUTH OF THE DART.

green and deep and clear ; the rocks shelve up boldly at an acute angle. All round, delightful strolls can be made through the undulating hill country on either side ; while Slapton Sands, Berry Pomeroy Castle, Kingsbridge estuary and most of the



DARTMOUTH CASTLE, ON THE WEST SIDE OF THE MOUTH OF THE DART.

other famous south Devon lions lie within easy driving or boating distance. The soft Devonian air and the sweet Devonian emotional temperament help to keep up the mental atmosphere of the place: it is a land in which (with fair weather) it really seemeth always afternoon. The South Hams for lotus-eating. If you want to be blown through by the fresh and clear east wind that (*teste* Charles Kingsley) makes hard Englishmen, go to Cromer or Aldeburgh—good places, both—I owe them no small thanks in due season for cobwebs scattered. But we are not always in the mood for buffeting Eurus. There is a time for heading up against the wind, with your beard blown forked on either side your neck, and a time for lying close, with Neæra by your elbow drying her tangled hair, under lee of the great rocks that shelter you at once from sun and spray and obtrusive observation. When you want rather such rest than bracing breezes, then go to Dartmouth. And if you don't find the scenery of the surrounding hills come up to sample, why, be sure it is because your own inner eye has not so keen a vision as the observant artist's whose work I have striven at a humble distance to-day to elucidate.

