

ALFRED PARSONS

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NASEBY CHURCH.

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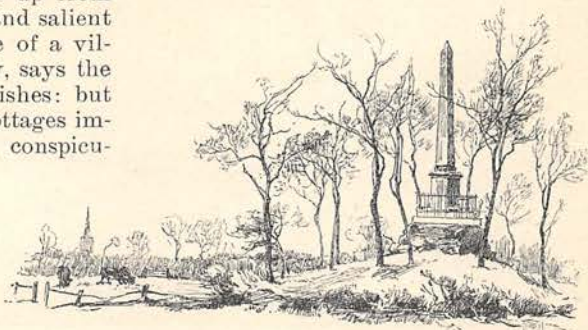
OUR journey opens in Northamptonshire, and in that season when the year grows ancient,

“Not yet on summer’s death, nor on the birth
Of trembling winter.”

In the stubble the *crack! crack!* of a stray gun speaks, now and again, of partridge-time. Over the pastures, undulating with ridge and furrow, where the black oxen feed, patches of gloom and gleam are scurrying as the wind—westerly, with a touch of north—chases the light showers under a vivid sun. Along the drab road darts a bullfinch, his family after him; pauses a moment among the dogrose berries; is off again, and lost in the dazzle ahead.

A high grassy ridge stands up from the plain; and upon it, white and salient against a dark cloud, the spire of a village church. From its belfry, says the sexton, you may spy forty parishes: but more important are the few cottages immediately below. They seem conspicuously inglorious; yet their name is written large in the histories. It speaks of a bright June day when along this ridge—then unenclosed and scattered with broom and heath flowers—the rattle of musketry and outeries of bat-

tle rolled from morning to late afternoon, by which time was lost a king with his kingdom. For the village is Naseby. Here, by the market green, the Parliamentarians ranged their baggage. Yonder, on Mill Hill and Broad Moor, with just a hollow between, the two armies faced each other, the royalists with beanstalks in their hats, their enemies with badges of white linen. To the left, Sulby hedges were lined with Ireton’s dragoons. And the rest is an old story: Rupert, tardily returning from a headlong charge, finds no “cause” left to befriend, no foe to fight. While his men were pillaging, Cromwell has snatched the day. His Majesty is flying through Market-Har-



NASEBY MONUMENT.



Sulby Abbey.

borough toward Leicester, and thither along the dusty roads his beaten regiments trail after him, with the Ironsides at their heels, hewing hip and thigh.

An obelisk, set about with thorn-bushes and shaded by oak and birch, marks the battle-field. It rests on a base of rough moss-grown stones, and holds out "a useful lesson to British kings never to

exceed the bounds of their just prerogative, and to British subjects never to swerve from the allegiance due to their legitimate monarch." And the advice is well meant, no doubt; but, as the Watch asked of Dogberry, "How if they will not?"

Naseby, however, has another boast. Here, beside the monument, we are standing on the water-shed of England. In the fields below rise many little springs, whereof those to the south and east unite to form the Ise brook, which runs into the Nen, and so find their goal in the North Sea; those to the west form the Avon, and seek the Bristol Channel. And it is westward that we turn our faces—we, whom you shall briefly know as P. and Q.; for the business that brings us to Naseby is to find here the source of Shakespeare's Avon, and so follow its windings downward to the Severn.

The source is modest enough, being but a well amid the "good cabbage" of the inn garden. Today, a basin of mere brick encloses it; but in 1823, the date of the obelisk, some person of refinement would adorn also Avon Well; and procured from Mr. Groggan of London a Swan of Avon in plaster; and Mr. Groggan contrived that the water should gush elegantly from her bill, but not for long.

For the small boy came with stones, after his kind; and now, *sans* wing, *sans* head, *sans* everything, she couches among the cabbages, "a rare bird upon earth."

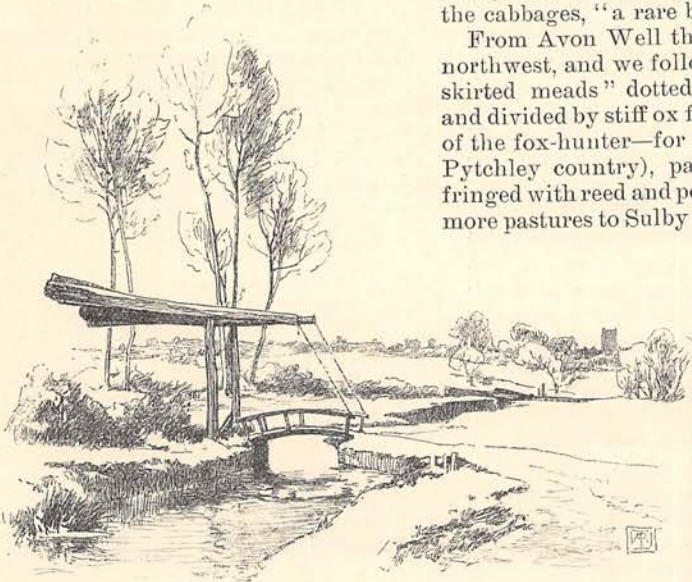
From Avon Well the spring flows to the northwest, and we follow it through "wide-skirted meads" dotted with rubbing posts and divided by stiff ox fences (the *bullfinches* of the fox-hunter—for we are in the famous Pytchley country), past a broad reservoir fringed with reed and poplars, and so through more pastures to Sulby Abbey. And always,

as we look back, Naseby spire marks our starting-point. About three miles down, the runnel has grown to a respectable brook, quite large enough to have kept supplied the abbey fish-ponds.

On the site of this abbey—founded *circa* 1155 by William de Wyde-



WELFORD CANAL HOUSE.



SWING-BRIDGE NEAR WELFORD.

ville in honor of the Blessed Virgin—now stands a red-brick farm-house, passably old, and coated with ivy. Of the vanished building it conserves but two relics—a stone coffin and the floriated cover of another. The course of the stream beside it, and for some way below, is traced by the thorn-bushes under which it winds (in spring-time how pleasantly!) until Welford is reached—a small brick village. Here, after rioting awhile in a maze of spendthrift channels, it recombines its waters to run under its first bridge, and begin a sober life by supplying a branch of the Grand Junction Canal. A round-house at the canal's head forms, with the bridge, what Mr. Samuel Ireland, in his *Beauties of the Warwickshire Avon* (1795), calls “an agreeable landscape, giving that sort of view which, being simple in itself, seldom fails to constitute elegance.” Rather, to our thinking, the landscape's beauty lies in its suggestion; in that here we touch the true heart of the country life, of quiet nights dividing slow familiar days, during which man and man's work grow steeped in the soil's complexion, secure of all but

“the penalty of Adam,
The season's difference.”

It is enough that we are grateful for it as we pass on down the valley where the canal and stream run side by side—the canal demurely between straight banks, the stream below trying always how many curves it can make in each field, until quieted for a while by the dam of a little red-brick mill, set down all alone in the brilliant green. The thorn-bushes are giving place to willows—not such as fringe the Thames, but gray trees of a

smaller leaf, and, by your leave, more beautiful. Our walk as we follow the towpath of the canal, having the river



STAMFORD HALL.

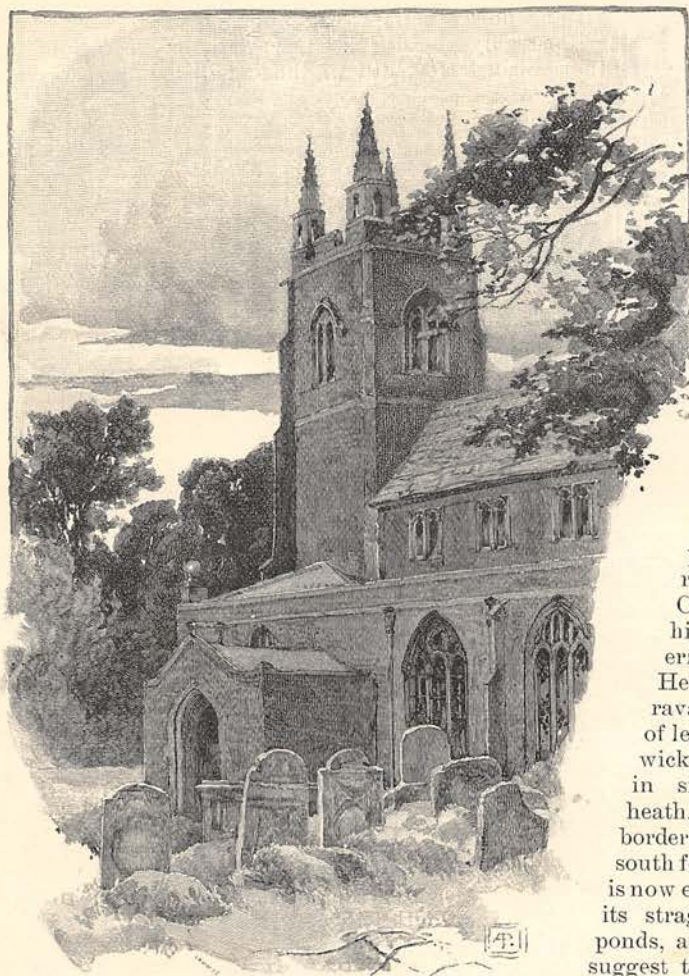
on our left, is full of peaceful incidents and subtle revelations of color—a lock, a quaint swing-bridge, a swallow taking the sunlight on his breast as he skims between us and the inky clouds, a white horse emphasizing the meadow's verdure. The next field holds a group of sable—a flock of rooks, a pair of black horses, a dozen velvet-black oxen, beside whom the thirteenth ox seems consciously indecorous in a half-mourning suit of iron-gray. Next, from a hawthorn “total gules” with autumn berries, we start six magpies; and so, like Christian, “give three skips and go on singing” beneath the spires and towers of this and that small village (Welford, and North and South Kilworth) that look down from the edging hills.

Below South Kilworth, where a wind-mill crowns the upland, the valley turns southward, and we leave the canal to track the Avon again, that here is choked with rushes. For a mile or two we pursue it, now jumping, now crossing by a timely pole or hurdle, from Northamptonshire into Leicestershire and back (for the stream divides these counties), until it enters the grounds of Stamford Hall, and under the yellowing chestnuts of the park grows suddenly a dignified sheet of water, with real swans.

Stamford Hall (the seat of Lord Bray) is, according to Ireland, “spacious, but wants those pictorial decorations that would render it an object of attention to the traveller of taste.” But to us, who saw it in the waning



ROMAN CAMP, LILBURNE.



STAMFORD CHURCH.

daylight, the comfortable square house seemed full of quiet charm, as did the squat perpendicular church, untouched by the restorer, and backed by a grassy mound that rises to the eastern window, and the two bridges (the older one disused) under which the Avon leaves the park. A twisted wych-elm divides them, its roots set among certain broad leaves, about which Q. asked a question. But P. alleged them to be "Foreground Plants," and their species a trade secret. About these things, then, as Herodotus says, it is unlawful to speak.

Below Stamford the stream contracts again, and again meanders among black cattle and green fields to Lilburne. Here it winds past a congeries of grassy mounds,

dotted now with black-faced sheep, that was once a Roman encampment, the *Tripontium* mentioned by the emperor Antoninus in his journey from London to Lincoln. Climbing to the eminence of the *prætorium* and gazing westward, we see on the high ground two beech-crowned *tumuli* side by side, clearly an outpost or *speculum* overlooking Watling Street, the Roman road that passes just beyond the ridge "from Dover into Chestre." This same high ground is the eastern hem of Dunsmore Heath, once so dismally ravaged by the Dun Cow of legend, till Guy of Warwick rode out and slew her in single combat. The heath, a long ridge of lias bordering our river to the south for many miles to come, is now enclosed and tilled; but its straggling cottages, duck ponds, and furze clumps still suggest the time when all was common land.

At our feet, close under the encampment, an antique bridge crosses Avon. Beside it is hollowed a sheep-washing pool, and across the road stands a little church. Tempted by its elaborate window mouldings, we poke our heads in at the door, but at once withdraw them to cough and sneeze. The place is given over to dense smoke and a small decent man, who says that a service will be held in ten minutes, and what to do with the stove he doesn't know. So we leave him, and pass on, trudging toward Catthorpe, a mile below.

A wooden paling, once green, but subdued by years to all delicate tints, fronts the village street. Behind, in a garden of cypress and lilacs, lies the old vicarage, with deep bow-windows sunk level with the turf, a noteworthy house. For John

Dyer, author of "Gron-gar Hill"—"Bard of the Fleece," as Wordsworth hails him—held Catthorpe living for a few years in the last century; and here, while his friends

"in the town, in the busy,
gay town,
Forgot such a man as John
Dyer,"

looked out on this gray garden wall, over which the fig-tree clammers, and "relished versing." The church stands close by, a ragged cedar beside it, an elm drooping before its plain tower. We take a long look before descending again to the river, like Dyer

"resolved, this charming day,
Into the open fields to stray,
And have no roof above our head
But that whereon the gods do tread."

Just below Catthorpe, by a long line of arches called Dow (or Dove) Bridge, Watling Street pushes across the river with Roman directness. This bridge marks the meeting-point of three counties, for beyond it we step into Warwickshire. It is indifferently modern, yet "the scene, though simple, aided by a group of cattle then passing, had sufficient attraction in the meridian of a summer sun to induce" the egregious Ireland "to attempt a sketch of it as a picturesque view," and supply us with a sentence to be quoted a thousand times during our voyage, and always with ribald appreciation.



CATTHORPE CHURCH.

The valley narrows as we draw near Rugby. Clifton on Dunsmore, eminent by situation only, stands boldly up on the left, and under it, by Clifton mill, the stream runs down to Brownsover. Brownsover too has its mill, with a pool and cluster of wych-elms below. And hard by we find (as we think) Tom Brown's willow, the tree which wouldn't "throw out straight hickory shoots twelve feet long, with no leaves, worse luck!" where Tom sat aloft, and "Velveteens," the keeper, below, through that soft, hazy day in the May-fly season, till the sun came slanting through the branches, and told of locking-up near at hand. We are hushed as we stand before it, and taste the reward of the truly virtuous who "identify."

And now, just ahead, on the same line of hill as Clifton, stands the town of Rugby. No good view of it can be found



Rugby from Brownsover Mill.

from the river-side, for the middle distance is always a straight line of railway sheds or embankments. Perhaps the best is to be had from the towpath of the Oxford Canal, marked high above our right



Dow Bridge
on Watling Street.

by a line of larch and poplar, where a tall aqueduct carries it over the river Swift.

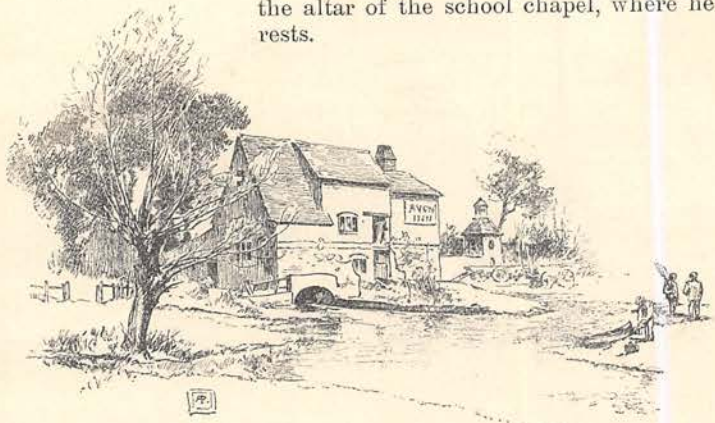
This is the stream which, coming from Lutterworth, bore down in 1427 the ashes of John Wiclif to the Avon. Forty years after his peaceful interment the Council of Constance gave orders to exhume and burn his body, to see if it could be discerned from those of the faithful. "In obedience thereto," says Fuller, "Richard Fleming, bishop of Lincoln, diocesan of Lutterworth, sent his officers (vultures with a quick sight sent at a dead carcass!) to ungrave him accordingly. To Lutterworth they come, summer, commissary, official, chancellor, proctors, doctors, and the servants (so that the remnant of the body would not hold out a bone amongst so many hands), take what is left out of the grave, and burn them to ashes, and cast them into Swift, a brook running hard by. Thus the brook hath conveyed his ashes into Avon, Avon into Severn, Severn into the narrow seas, they into

the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wiclif are the emblem of his doctrine, which now is dispersed all the world over."

For aught we know, the upper part of this stream may justify its name. The two streams unite in that green vale over which Dr. Arnold used to gaze in humorous despair. "It is no wonder," he said,

"we do not like looking that way, when one considers that there is nothing fine between us and the Ural Mountains"; and, in a letter to Archbishop Whately, ". . . . we have no hills, no plains, not a single wood, and but one sin-

gle copse; no heath, no down, no rock, no river, no clear stream, scarcely any flowers—for the lias is particularly poor in them—nothing but one endless monotony of enclosed fields and hedge-row trees"; lastly, "I care nothing for Warwickshire, and am in it like a plant sunk in the ground in a pot; my roots never strike beyond the pot, and I could be transplanted at any moment without tearing or severing my fibres." And we consent, in part, for the fibres of great men lie in their work, not in this or that soil. But what fibres—not his own—were cracked when Rugby knew the great school-master no more, we feel presently as, haunted by his son's noble elegy, we stand before the altar of the school chapel, where he rests.



AVON INN, RUGBY.

At Rugby our narrative, hitherto smilingly pastoral, quickens to epic. So far we have followed Avon afoot, but here we mean to launch a Canadian canoe on its waters, creating a legend. She lies beside a small river-side tavern, her bright basswood sides gleaming in the sunshine. A small crowd has gathered, and is being addressed with volubility by a high-complexioned man of urbane demeanor. He is bareheaded and coatless; he is shod in blue carpet slippers, on each of which a yellow anchor (emblem of hope) is entwined with sprays of the pink convolvulus, typifying (according to P., who is a botanist), "I recognize your worth, and will sustain it by judicious and tender affection." As we launch our canoe and place our sacks on board, he turns his discourse on us. It breathes the spirit of calm confidence. There are long shallows just below (he says), and an uprooted willow blocking the stream, and three water-falls, and fences of barbed wire. He enumerates the perils; he is sanguine about each; and ours is the first canoe he ever set eyes on.

We pushed off and waved good-by. The sun shone in our faces; behind, the voice of confidence shouted us over



Newbold
upon Avon

ter-fall he took leave of us, and turned back singing across the fields. He was a good man, but would be obeyed. We learnt from him, 1st, that the art of canoeing has no

limits; 2d, that the "impenetrability of matter" is a discredited phrase; and, after the manner of Bunyan, we called him *Mr. Win-by-Will*.

By many dense beds of rushes, through which a



HOLBROOK COURT.

the first shallow. Our canoe swung round a bend beside a small willow coppice, and we sighed as the kindly crowd was hidden from us. Q. said that our voyage was a symbol of life.

We turned at the sound of stertorous breathing. A pair of blue slippers came twinkling after us over the meadow. Our friend had fetched a circuit round the coppice, and soon both craft and crew were as babes in his hands. Was it a shallow?—he hounded us over. Was it a willow fallen "ascaunt the brook"?—he drove us under, clambering himself along the trunk, as once Ophelia, and exhorting always. At the foot of the first wa-

flock of ducks scattered before us, we dropped down to Newbold on Avon, a pretty village on the hill-side, with green orchards sloping to the stream. By climbing through them and looking due south, you may see the spire of Bilton, where Addison lived for many years. Below Newbold the river tumbles over two water-falls, runs thence by a line of rush beds to a railway bridge, and so beneath Caldecott's famous spinney, where Tom Brown, East, and the "Madman" sought the kestrel's nest. Many Scotch firs mingle with the beeches of the spinney, and just below them the stream divides, enclosing a small island, and recombines to

hold a southward course past Holbrook Court.

Holbrook Court is a gloomy building that looks down its park slope upon a weir, a red-brick mill, and a gloomier farm-house of stone. This farm-house has a history, being all that is left of Lawford Hall, the scene of the once notorious "Laurel-Water Tragedy."



LAWFORD MILL.

The tale is briefly this: In 1780 Sir Theodosius Boughton, a vicious and sickly boy, was squiring it at Lawford Hall, and fast drinking out his puny constitution. "To him enter" an evil spirit in the shape of a brother-in-law, an Irish adventurer, one Captain Donellan. This graduate in vice took the raw scholar in hand, and with the better will as being next heir to his estates. But it seems that drink and debauchery worked too slowly for the impatient captain, for one evening the wretched boy went to bed, called for his sleeping draught, and drank the wrong liquid out of the right bottle. And as for Captain Donellan, he bungled matters somehow, and was hanged at Warwick in the following spring—an elegant, well-mannered man in black, who displayed much ceremonious punctilio at ascending the scaffold ahead of the sheriff. Ten years later Lawford Hall was pulled

down as an accursed thing, and the building before us is all that survives of it. To-day the Gloire de Dijon rose, the jasmine, and the ivy sprawl up its sad-colored walls and over the porch, which still wears the date 1604.

Either at Lawford Hall, or just above, at the old Holbrook Grange, lived, in Elizabeth's time, One-handed Boughton, who won an entirely posthumous fame by driving a ghostly coach and six about the country-side. His spirit was at length caught in a phial by certain of the local clergy, corked down, sealed, thrown into a neighboring marl-pit, and so laid forever. Therefore his only successes of late have been in frightening maid-servants out of their situations at the farm.

Leaving Lawford, we paddle through a land pastorally desolate, seeing, often for miles together, neither man's face nor woman's. The canoe darts in and out of rush beds; avoids now a shallow, now a snag, a clump of reeds, a conglomerate of logs and pendent shrivelled flags, flotsam of many floods; and again is gliding easily between meadows that hold, in Touchstone's language, "no assembly but horn beasts." Our canoe wakes strange emotions in these cattle. They lift their heads, snort, fling up their heels, and, with rigid tails, come capering after us like so many bacchanals. At length a fence stops them, and they obligingly watch us out of sight. The next herd repeats the performance. And always the river is vocal beside us,

"Giving a gentle kiss to every sedge
He overtaketh in his pilgrimage";

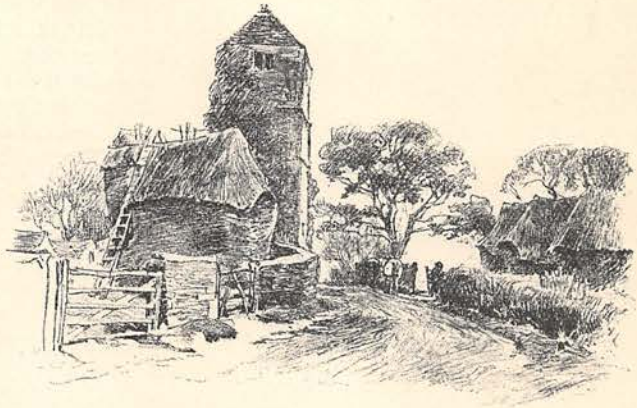
while ahead the water-rat dives, or the



Church Lawford.

moor-hen splashes from one green brim to another; and around the land is slowly changing from the monotonous to the "up-and-down-hilly"; and we, passing through it all, are thankful.

A small cottage appears beside some lime-pits on the right bank. Over its garden gate a black board proclaims that here are the "Newnham Regis Baths." A certain Walter Bailey, M.D., writing in 1587 *A Brief Discourse of Certain Baths, etc.*, sings loud praise of these waters, but warns drinkers to "consist in a mediocrity, and never to adventure to drink above six, or at the utmost eight pints in one day." Also, he "will not rashly counsel any to use them in the leap-years." We disregarded this latter warning, but observed the former; yet the plain man who gave us our glassful asserted that a friend of his, "all hot and sweaty," drank two quarts of the water one summer day, and took no harm. As a fact, the springs which here rise from the limestone were known and esteemed by the Romans; the remains of their baths were found, and the present one—a pump within a square paling—built on



RUINS OF NEWNHAM REGIS CHURCH.

the same spot. But their fame has not travelled of late.

We embark again, and are soon floating down to Church Lawford. What shall be said of this spot? As we saw it happily, one slope of green—vivid, yet in shadow—swelled up to darker elms and a tall church tower, set high against an amber sunset. Beyond, the sky and the river's dim reaches melted together, through all delicate yellows, mauves, and grays, into twilight. A swan, scurrying down stream before us, broke the water into pools of gold. And so a bend swept Church Lawford out of our sight and into our kindest memories.

Nearly opposite lies Newnham Regis, about a mile from its baths.

In Saxon times, they say, a king's palace stood here; and three large fish-ponds, with some mounds, remain for a sign of it. Here, beside a pleasant mill, the foot-path crosses to Church Lawford. Just below, the stream is blocked by an osier bed; and we struggled there for the half of one mortal hour, and mused on the carpet slippers, and hope, and such things; and "late and at last" were out and paddling through the uncertain light under the pointed arches of Bretford bridge.



BRETFORD.

Here crosses the second great Roman road, the Fosseway,

"that tilleth from Toteneys
From the one end of Cornewaile anon to Cateneys,
From the South-west to North-est, into Englonde's
ende.

Fosse men callith thilke way, that by mony town
doth wende."

Thenceforward for a mile we move in darkness over glimmering waters, until a railway bridge looms ahead, and we spy, half a mile away, the lights of a little station. This must be Brandon, we decide;



SITE OF BRANDON CASTLE.

and running in beside the bank, begin a quick contention with the echo.

Voices answer us, male and female, and soon many villagers are about us, peering at the canoe.

"Are we in time for the last train to Coventry?"

Chorus answers "Yes"; only one melancholy stripling insists that it isn't likely.

And he is right. We hear a rumble; a red eye flames out; the last train, with a hot trail of smoke, comes roaring over the bridge and shoots into Brandon station. We are too late.

"Beds?"

The melancholy one echoes: "Beds! In Brandon?"

"The inn?"

"Well, you might try the inn."

We march up to try the inn. There are seventy-four men in the bar, as we have leisure to count, and all are drinking beer. Clearly we are not want-

ed. The landlady has eyes like beads, black and twinkling, but they will not rest on us. The outlook begins to be sombre, when P., who, beneath a rugged exterior, hides much aptitude for human affairs, announces that he has a way with landladies, and tries it. He says:

"Can we have a horse and trap to take us to Coventry to-night? No? That's bad. Nor a bed? Dear me! Then, please, draw us half a pint of beer."

The beer is brought. P. tastes it, looks up with a happy smile, and begins again:

"Can we have a horse and trap?" etc., etc.

It is astounding, but at the tenth repetition of this formula the landlady becomes as water, and henceforth we have our way with that inn.

Moreover, we have the landlord's company at supper, a deliberate, heavy man, who tells us that he brews his own beer, and has

twenty-three children. He adds that the former distinction has given him many friends, the latter many relatives. A niece of his is to be married at Coventry to-morrow.

Q., who ran into Coventry by an early train next morning to fetch some letters that awaited us, was fortunate enough to



RYTON-ON-DUNSMORE.



BUBBENHALL.

catch a glimpse of the bride as she stepped into her carriage. He reported her to be pretty, and we wished her all happiness. P. meanwhile had strolled up the river to Wolston Mill, which we had passed in the darkness, and he too had praises to chant of that, and of a grand old Elizabethan farm-house that he had found outside the village.

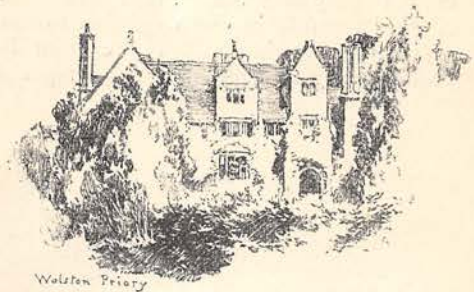
We embark again by Brandon Castle, the abode once of a Roman garrison, and later of an exclusive Norman family that kept its own private gallows at Bretford, just above. Where the castle stood now thrive the brier, the elder, the dogrose, the blackthorn twined with clematis; the outer moat is become a morass, choked with ragwort and the flowering rush; the inner moat is dry, and a secular ash sprawls down its side. We leave it to glide beneath a graceful Georgian bridge; past a lawn dotted with sleek cattle, a small red mill, a row of melancholy anglers, a mile of giant alders, and so down to Ryton-on-Dunsmore, the western outpost of the great heath. As the heath ends, the country's character begins to change, and all grows open. On either hand broad pastures divide us from the arable slopes where a month ago the gleaners were moving amid

"Summer's green, all girded up in sheaves";

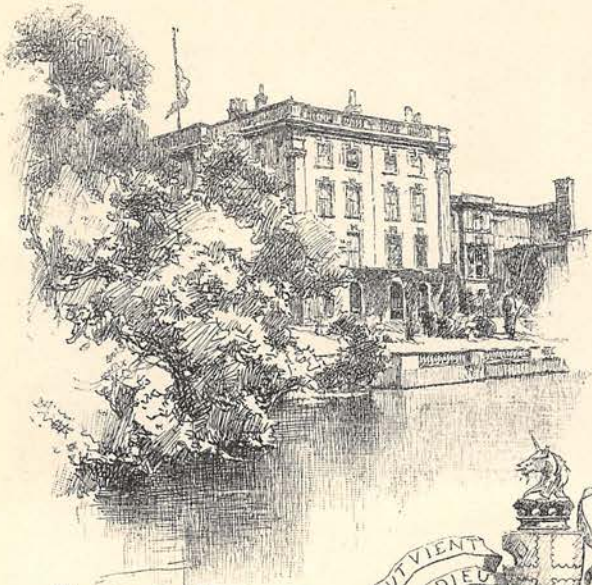
and therefore by Ryton's two mills and Ryton's many alders we move slowly, in-

viting our souls, careless of Fate, that lay in her ambush, soon to harry us. A broad road crosses above us, and alighting, we loiter by the bridge, and discover a milestone that marks 87 miles from London and 3 from Coventry. We can descry the three lovely spires, of Lady Godiva's town, mere needle points above the trees to northward.

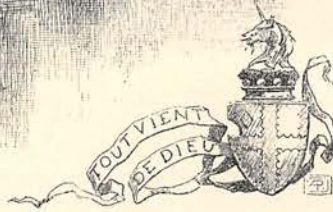
It was but shortly after that we came on an agreeable old gentleman, who stood a-fishing with a little red float, and lied



in his teeth, smiling on us and asserting that Bubbenthal (where we had a mind to lunch) was but a mile below. A mile! —for a crow, perhaps, but not for proper old gentlemen, and most surely not for Avon. The freakish stream went round and round, all meanders with never a forthright, narrowing, shallowing, cast-



Stoneleigh Abbey
Oct 15. 1884.



ing up here a snag and there a thicket of reeds. And round and round for miles our canoe followed it, as a puppy chases his own tail; yet Bubbenhall was not, nor any glimpse of Bubbenhall.

Our talk ran on open boats and notable privations of mariners, and at length Q. stepped out beside a guelder-rose bush (because its berries reminded him of red currant jelly and home), and said: "It is usual for folk in our condition to tell each other stories, and the custom is praiseworthy as distracting men from a

too close contemplation of their lot. I will begin with an Eastern tale. There stands on the Tigris, far above Babylon, a village at which all voyagers down the river must put up on three successive nights, so curiously does the channel wind about it. Men call the village Is—"

"That," interrupts P., "is where it differs from Bubbenhall, which isn't."

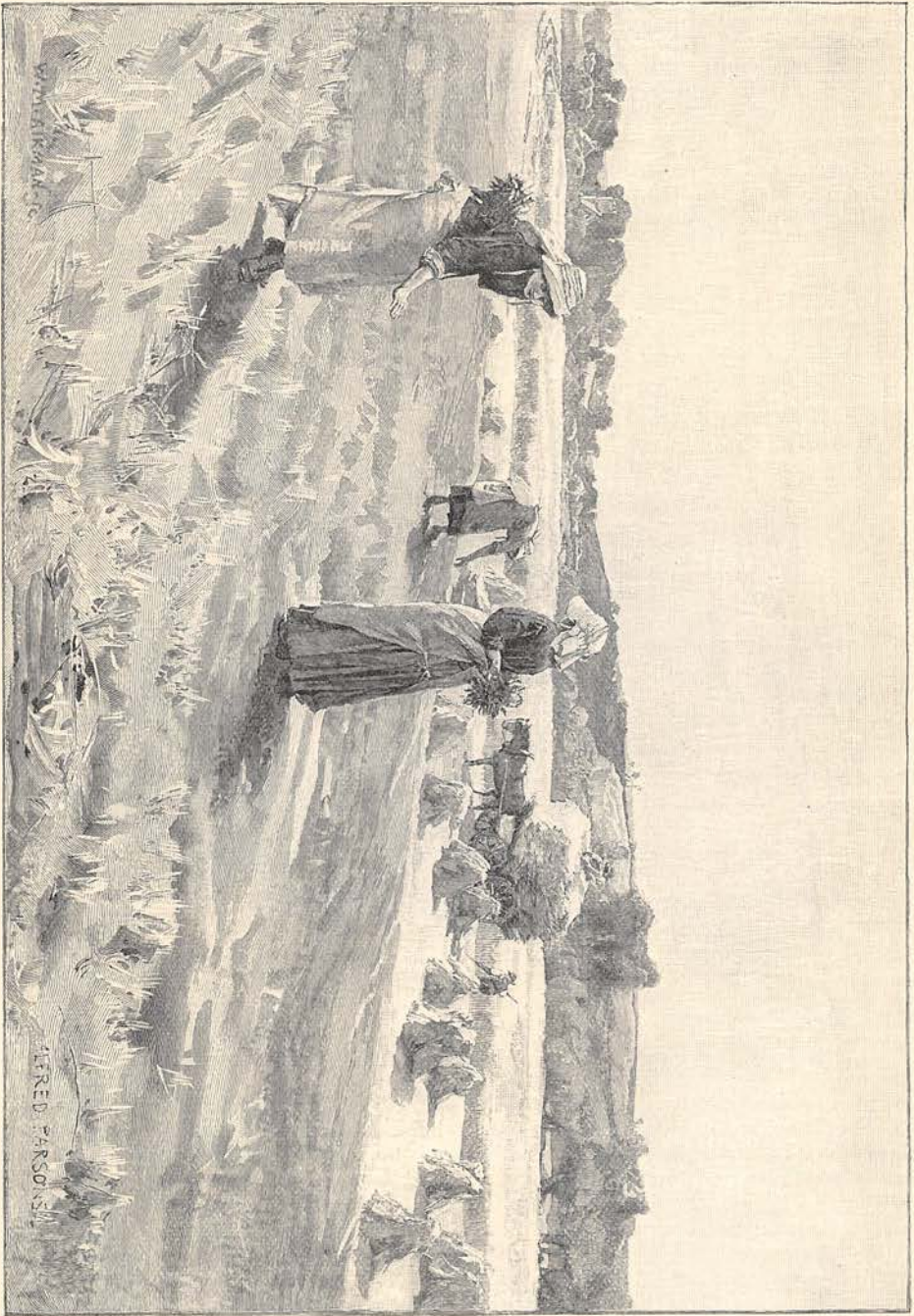
"Your levity," says Q., "has deprived you of the story of the Goldsmith and the Three White Asses. It is a pity, for the tale was full of instruction; but let us push on."

These windings above Bubbenhall have their compensations, keeping both hand and eye amusedly alert as our

canoe tacks to and fro, shooting down the V of two shallows, or running along quick water beneath the bank, brushing the forget-me-nots (the flower that Henry of Bolingbroke wore into exile from the famous lists of Coventry, hard by), or parting curtain after curtain of reeds to issue on small vistas that are always new. And Bubbenhall is worth the pains to find—a tiny village of brick and timber set amid elms on a quiet slope, where for ages "bells have knolled to church" from the old brick-buttressed tower above. Below



In Stoneleigh Deer Park.



GLEANERS.

sleeps a quaint mill, also of brick and timber, and from its weir the river wanders northeast, then southeast, and runs to Stoneleigh deer park.

A line of swinging deer fences hangs under the bridge, the river trailing between their bars. We push cautiously under them, and look to right and left in amazement. A moment has translated us from a sluggish brook, twisting between water-plants and willows, to a plea-

monster, thirty-nine feet around—whose "antique root" writhes over the red sandstone rock down to the water's brim. The very bed of Avon has altered. He runs now over smooth slabs of rock, and now he brawls by a shallow, and now,

"where his fair course is not hindered,
He makes sweet music with the enamell'd stones."

Down to the shallow ahead of us—their accustomed ford—a herd of deer comes



ASHOW.

sant river, stealing by wide lawns, by slopes of bracken, by gigantic trees—oaks, Spanish oaks, and wych-elms, stately firs, sweet chestnuts, and filmy larch coppices. We are in Arden, the land of Rosalind and Touchstone, of Jaques and Amiens. Their names may be French, English, what you will, but here they inhabit, and almost we look to spy the suit of motley and listen for its bells, or expect a glimpse of Corin's crook moving above the ferns, Orlando's ballads fluttering on a chestnut, or the sad-colored cloak of Jaques beneath an oak—such an oak as this

daintily and splashes across, first the bucks, then the does in a body. If they are here, why not their masters, the men and women whom we know? We disembark, and letting the canoe drift brightly down stream, stroll along the bank beside it, and "fleet the time carelessly," as they did in that golden world.

Too soon we reach the beautiful sandstone bridge, tinted by time and curtained with creepers, that divides the deer park from the home park; and soon, beside an old oak, the size of Avon is almost doubled by junction with the Sowe, a stream

that comes winding past Stoneleigh village on our right, and brings for tribute the impurities of Coventry. The banks beside us are open no longer; but for recompense we have the birds—the *whir-r-r* of wood-pigeons in the high willow copse, the heron sailing high, the kingfisher darting in loops of light before us, the green woodpecker condensing a whole day's brilliance on his one small breast, the wild-duck, the splashing moor-hen, and water-fowl of rarer kinds—that tell us we are nearing Stoneleigh Abbey.

The abbey was founded in 1154 by Henry II. for a body of Cistercian monks, and endowed with privileges "very many and very great, to wit, free warren, infangthef, outfangthef, wayfs, strays, goods of felons and fugitives, tumbrel, pillory, sok, sak, tole, team, amercements, murders, assize of bread and beer; with a market and fair in the town of Stoneleigh,"—a comprehensive list, as it seems. There were, says Dugdale, in the manor of Stoneleigh, at this time, "sixty-eight villains and two priests; as also four bondmen or servants, whereof each held one messuage, and one quatrone of land, by the services of making the gallows and hanging of thieves; every one of which bondmen was to wear a red clout betwixt his shoulders, upon his upper garment." The original building was burnt in 1245, and what little old work now remains belongs to a later building. The abbey went the way of its fellows under Henry VIII.; was granted to Charles



Cherford Bridge.

Brandon, Duke of Suffolk; changed hands once or twice; and was finally bought by Sir Thomas Leigh, alderman of London, in Queen Elizabeth's reign. The present Ionic mansion, now the home of Lord Leigh, his descendant, was built toward the close of the last century. The river spreads into a lake before it, and then, after passing a weir, speeds briskly below a wooded bank, with tiny rapids, down which our canoe dances gayly. As twilight overtakes us we reach Ashow.

A little weather-stained church stands by Ashow shore—a church, a yew-tree, and a narrow graveyard. Close under it steals the gray river, whispers by cottage steps where a crazy punt lies rotting, by dim willow aits and eel bucks, and so passes down to silence and the mists. Seeing all this, we yearn to live here and pass our days in gratuitous melancholy.

We revisited Ashow next morning, and were less exacting, asking only to be carried back and buried there. The clew to our inconsistency will be found in the ensuing extracts:

From P.'s Journal.—"*A hateful day, with sheets of rain. Q.'s temper insufferable.*"

From Q.'s Journal.—"*P. to-day like a bear with a sore head. Rain in torrents.*"

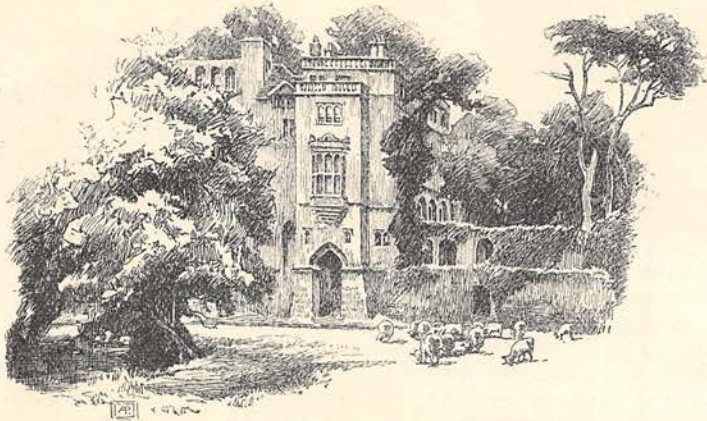
We agree, you perceive, that it rained. Indeed, we were soaked to the skin before paddling a mile; and as for the canoe,

"Too much of water hast thou,
poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my
tears."

We passed, like Mrs. Hel-
ler's infant, "not dead, but



BLAKEDOWN MILL.



GUY'S CLIFFE.

very wet," under old Chesford Bridge, whereby the road runs to Kenilworth, that lies two miles back from the river, and shall therefore, for once in its history, escape description; and from Chesford Bridge reached Blakedown Mill and another old bridge beside the miller's house. This "simply elegant form of landscape" led Samuel Ireland to ask "why man should with such eager and restless ambition busy himself so often in the smoke and bustle of populous cities, and lose his independence and too often his peace in the pursuit of a phantom which almost eludes his grasp, little thinking that with the accumulation of wealth he must create imaginary wants, under which, perhaps, that wealth melts away as certainly as under the more ready inlet of inordinate passion happiness is sacrificed." Clearly Mr. Samuel Ireland was never rained upon hereabouts.

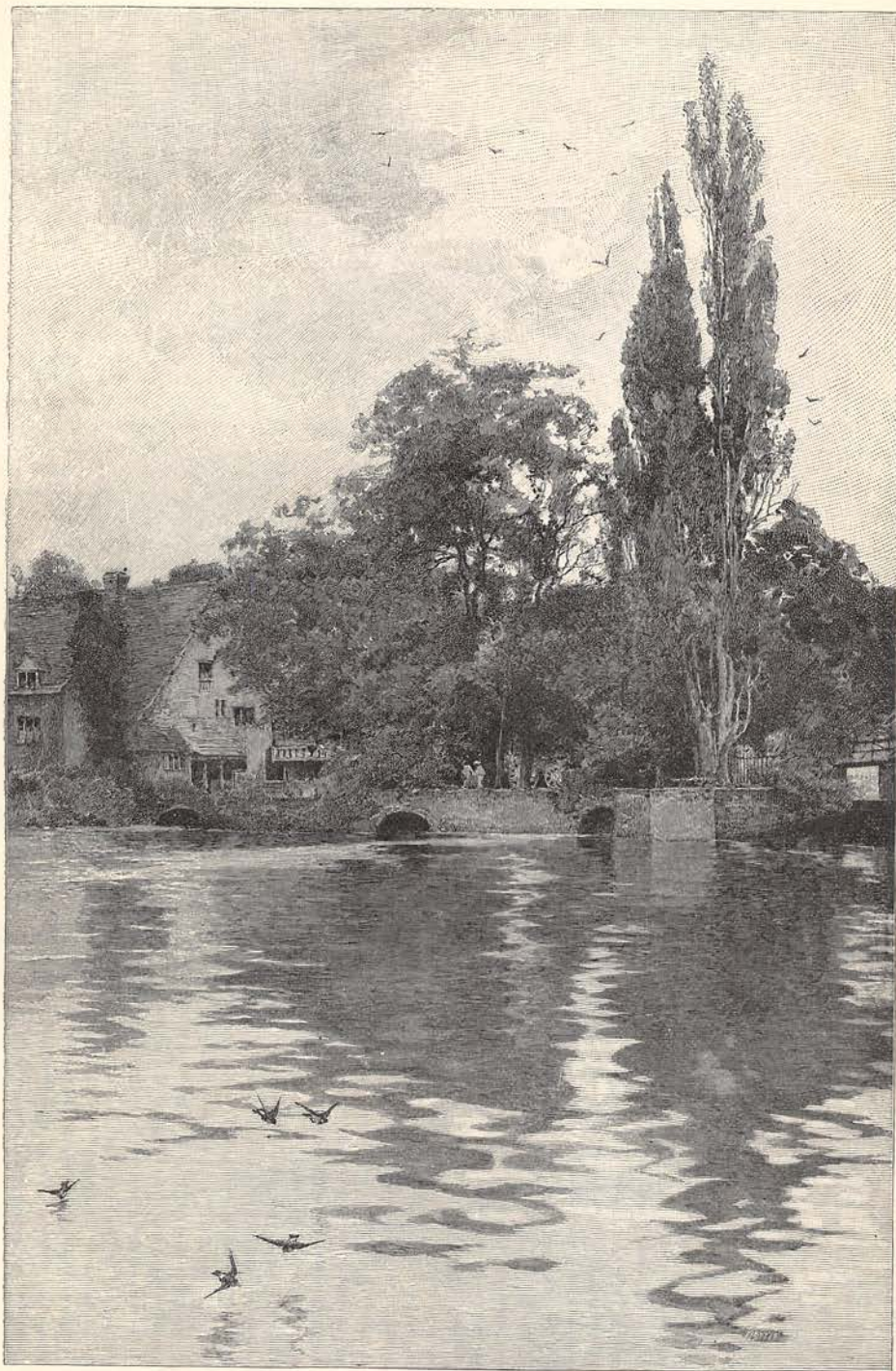
Just below, on the north bank, rises Blacklow Hill, whither, on the 19th of June, 1312, Piers Gaveston, the favorite of King Edward II., was marched out from Warwick Castle by the barons to meet his doom. His head was struck off, and rolling down into a thicket, was picked up by a "friar preacher" and carried off in his hood. On the rock beside the scene of that grim revenge this inscription was rudely cut: "P. GAVESTON, EARL OF CORNWALL, BEHEADED HERE + 1312"; and to-day a simple cross also marks the spot.

Hence, by the only rocks of which Avon can boast—and these are of softest

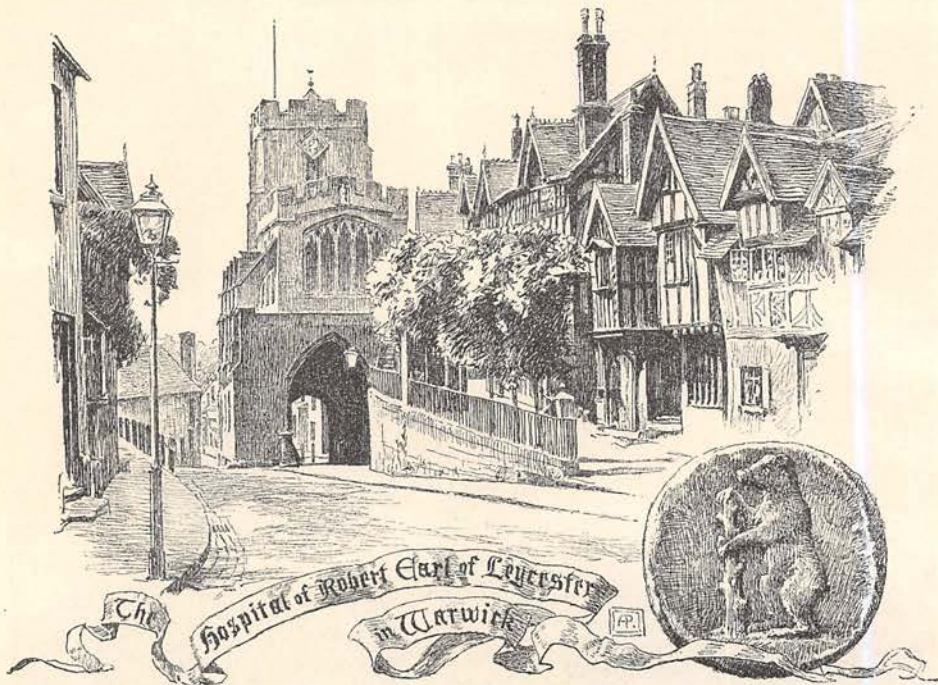
sandstone, their asperities worn all away by the weather—we wind beneath Milverton village, with its odd church tower of wood, to the weir and mill of Guy's Cliffe.

The beauties of this spot have been praised for centuries. Leland speaks of them; Drayton sings them. "There," says Camden, "have yee a shady little wood, cleere and cristal springs, mossie bottoms and caves, medowes alwaies fresh and greene, the river rumbling heere and there among the stones with his streame making a milde noise and gentle whispering, and, besides all this, solitary and still quietness, things most grateful to the Muses." Fuller, who knew it well, calls it "a most delicious place, so that a man in many miles' riding cannot meet so much variety as there one furlong doth afford." The water-mill is mentioned in Domesday-book, and has been sketched constantly ever since—a low, quaint pile, fronted by a recessed open gallery, under which the water is forever sparkling and frothing, fresh from its spin over the mill-wheels, or tumble down the ledges of the weir.

And below this mill rises the famous cliff, hollowed with many caves, in one of which lived Guy of Warwick, slayer of the Dun Cow, of lions, dragons, giants, paynims, and all such cattle; who married the fair Phyllis of Warwick Castle; who afterward repented of his much bloodshed, and trudged on foot to Palestine by way of expiation; who anon returned again on foot to Warwick, where was his home and his dear Phyllis. And coming



GUY'S CLIFFE MILL.



to his own house door, where his wife was used to feed every day thirteen poor men with her own hand, he stood with the rest, and received bread from her for three days, and she knew him not. So he learned that God's wrath was not sated, and betook him to a fair rocky place beside the river, a mile and more from his town; where, as his words go in the old ballad,

“with my hands I hewed a house
Out of a craggy rock of stone;
And livèd like a Palmer poore
Within that Cave myself alone:

“And daily came to beg my bread
Of Phyllis at my Castle gate;
Not known unto my loving wife,
Who daily mournèd for her mate.

“Till at the last I fell sore sicke,
Yea, sicke so sore that I must die;
I sent to her a ring of golde,
By which she knew me presentlye.

“So she, repairing to the Cave,
Before that I gave up the Ghost,
Herself closed up my dying Eyes—
My Phyllis fair whom I loved most.”

His statue stands in the little shrine
above the cliff; his arms lie in Warwick



Old Bridge.
Warwick.

Castle; and in the cave over our head is carved a Saxon inscription, which the learned interpret into this: "*Cast out, Thou Christ, from Thy servant this burden.*"

We pass on by Rock Mill, haunted of many kingfishers; by Emscote Bridge, where the Avon is joined by the Leam, and where Warwick and Leamington have reached out their arms to each other till they now join hands; by little gardens, each with its punt or home-made boat beside the river steps; by a flat meadow, where the citizens and redcoats from Warwick garrison sit all day and wait for the fish that never bites; and suddenly, by the famous one-span bridge, see Warwick Castle full ahead, its massy foundations growing, as it seems, from the living rock, and Cæsar's glorious tower soaring above the elms where Mill Street ends at the water's brink. Here once crossed a Gothic bridge, carrying the traffic from Banbury. Its central arches are down now; but the bastions yet stand, and form islets for the brier and ivy, and between them the stream swirls fast for the weir and the ancient mill, by which it rushes down into the park. We turn our canoe, and with many a backward look paddle back to the boat-house at Emscote.

Evening has drawn in, and still we are pacing Warwick streets. We have seen the castle; have gazed from the armory windows upon the racing waters, steep terraces, and gentle park below; have climbed Guy's Tower and seen far beneath us, on the one side, broad cedars and green lawns where the peacocks strut, on the other, the spires, towers, sagged roofs, and clustering chimneys of the town; have sauntered down Mill Street; have marvelled in the Beauchamp Chapel as we



CÆSAR'S TOWER, WARWICK CASTLE.

conned its gorgeous tombs and canopies and traceries; have loitered by Lord Leicester's Hospital and under the archway of St. James's Chapel. Clearly we are but two grains of sand in the hour-glass of this slow mediæval town; our feet, that will to-morrow be hurrying on, tread with curious impertinence these everlasting flints that have rung with the tramp of the King-maker's armies, of Royalist and Parliamentary, horse and foot, drum and standard, the stir of royal and episcopal visits, of mail-coach, market, and assize. But meanwhile our joints are full of pleasant aches and stiffness, our souls of lofty imaginings. As our tobacco smoke floats out on the moonlight we can dwell, we find, with a quite kingly serenity on the transience of man's generations; nay, as we sit down to dinner at our inn, we touch the high contemplative, yet careless, mood of the gods themselves.