

**DARTMOOR:**  
 THE HIGHLANDS OF DEVONSHIRE.  
 BY ARCHIBALD S. HURD.

*Illustrated from special Photographs.*



VERY American globe-trotter and every tourist knows Devonshire, or thinks he does—which is much the same. Clotted cream and junkets, streams babbling through valleys of unequalled loveliness, quaint villages and narrow high-hedged lanes, and a climate soft and balmy—all these characteristics have helped to make the county one of the play-grounds of England for children of tender and maturer years. Who has not spent a holiday in this land literally flowing with milk and honey and cider—some weeks of idleness at Ilfracombe, Torquay, Dawlish or Teignmouth, where

Seaborn gales their gelid wings expand,  
 To winnow fragrance round the smiling land?

But Dartmoor, the name given to the great wide, wild highlands of the county, is still a spot almost unknown, untrod, because its genius is misunderstood. The popular impression of this tableland is that it is an arid waste—a kind of Egyptian desert—the locale of a prison where our worst convicts are banished from the society of man and

beast. It is regarded as an English Siberia, a land of desolation, with bogs instead of steppes.

The widespread impression of Dartmoor was never better mirrored than by a writer some years ago. "You put your foot on a carpet of beautiful green and plump in up to your knees—lucky if you get no deeper—before you know that you have taken a step. Down you go, and run a chance of trying its antiseptic qualities—if you happen to be alone—by sinking in, seeing your waistcoat buttons disappear one by one, while the moor echoes your yells for help, till the vile black mess creeps into your choking throat, the beautiful green closes over your head, your friends advertise for you, and you are unknown till that obnoxious New Zealander of Macaulay digs you up, a perfect specimen, and sets you in some paulo-post-future museum for the pleasure of gaping sight-seers and the gratification of unfeeling science."

How far this humorous description is from the sober truth those know who love the rugged moorland, with its heathery tors and mountain torrents; its varied beauties

as the clouds sweep the shadows over its ever-changing face, its brilliance as the sun reveals the purple of the heather, the yellow of the gorse, and the rich green of the bracken and the tall, stately osmunda ferns. Dartmoor is stern and lonely as the wildest stretches of the Highlands of Scotland, but in the summer months there is no place in England more suggestive of lazy leisure or more fitted for man to renew his youth—a paradox, but true.

It is another paradox that though from time immemorial it has been known as Dartmoor Forest, it is neither moor nor

shire, and that it remains to-day somewhat as it was 2000 years ago is largely due to the fact that it is Crown land, and was probably used as a royal hunting ground—hence its name forest, from *fera*, a wild beast; at least so it is said, and those who like can accept the explanation. For many hundred years it has formed part of the Duchy of Cornwall, from which successive heirs-apparent have drawn a portion, though a small portion, of their incomes—about £70,000 a year.

But though Dartmoor has been in royal keeping so long it has suffered from the



[From a photo by]

STONE AVENUE, NEAR KES TOR.

[Chapman, Dawlish.]

forest. Dartmoor has changed with the ages, but it has never boasted many trees; it has never been a flat, uninteresting moorland waste. It is a great upland of 130,000 acres, the mother of the rivers of Devonshire, the source of all those soft beauties which have made the county famed in story and in song. Devonshire—the Devonshire of the holiday-maker—skirts this central, oval tract of highland, which stretches for twenty-five miles from Okhampton in the north to Ivybridge in the south, and for twenty miles across from Bovey Tracey to Tavistock, with an average height of about 1200 feet above the sea-level. It is the lung of Devon-

vandal, who has enclosed it in some places, disturbed its rich archæological remains by quarrying in other parts, and in many ways robbed this home of the early Britons of some of its interest. Remonstrance has proved of little use, for among the tenets of the moorman in his hard struggle for existence is a firm belief that "whatever the Almighty has put in the country was meant to be used in the towns." From the town residents' point of view this sentiment may be healthy, but it has robbed Dartmoor of stones for London Bridge, despoiled the ancient Timmers' Parliament, Crockern tor, of its judicial bench and table, where from



From a photo by]

[Chapman, Dawlish.

THE CROMLECH AT DREWSTEIGNTON.

very earliest times rude justice was dispensed, and now its granite is being torn from its mountains to build bridges for commerce or ancestral homes for the *nouveaux riches*.

Now the cry is Dartmoor for the Devonians, and the suggestion has been made that this great upland should be purchased by the

county and preserved as a kind of county park, probably the most extensive in England, seeing that Dartmoor consists of one-eleventh part of the whole county—the third largest in England. The project is a big one, but it has to some extent fired the enthusiasm of the people of the West Country, and who knows what may not be achieved by the men of the land of Drake and Hawkins, Raleigh, Frobisher and Marlborough? If this wide-stretching heatherland with its mountains and streams ever passes into the hands of the Devonshire people there will be no need for notice-boards warning the public to keep to the roads and footpaths or to refrain from picking the flowers. There are few footpaths and fewer roads, and as to the flowers, the variety may not be great, but every season has its harvest, and when everything else fails there is the gorse, and “when the gorse is out of bloom, love is out of fashion.”



From a photo by]

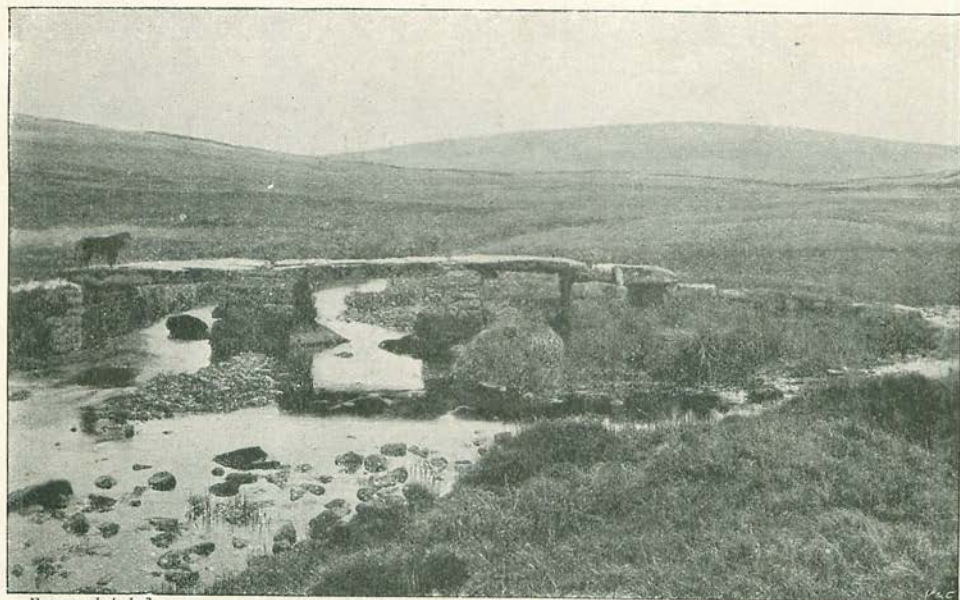
DREWSTEIGNTON.

[Chapman, Dawlish.

But whether or not Dartmoor ever becomes a county park it will remain an ideal holiday haunt for the over-worried town worker who wishes to get away from bricks and mortar and the jar of civilisation. There is little enough of civilisation on Dartmoor to please Herbert Spencer or any of his apostles. What Dartmoor was before the Roman conquest is not known, but probably it is very much the same now as then. Men have grown gray and fallen exhausted by the wayside in their efforts to fill in the gaps in its history. Not many years ago it was strongly held that once these tors and moorland stretches were the familiar haunts, and Drewsteignton the headquarters, of the

But the age which has given us the franchise and the Board school has cast a blight over all these hypotheses, and to-day the history of Dartmoor stands where it did before the Druidophiles, as they have been called, commenced their labours. Lovers of the breezy highlands of Devonshire may still tell these tales to strangers from far counties, but in their heart of hearts they are agnostics.

All that is known—and this is not capable of actual proof—is that Dartmoor was once the scene of a volcanic eruption, and some theorists hold that it was in fact one great volcano, possibly two and a half or three miles in height. What remains would be



From a photo by]

TEIGNHEAD BRIDGE.

[Chapman, Dawlish.

Druids, those ancient Britons who dispensed justice and religion. Gradually there was formed a school to whom every stone-circle, such as may be seen at Stonehenge, was a Druidical temple or council chamber; every rough track with a line of erect stones forming an avenue was a *via sacra*; every cromlech an altar, and such tors as Mis tor, Hessory tor and Ham tor, were regarded as Druidical observatories. As Dartmoor has many cromlechs, stone-circles and avenues, and numberless tors, big and small, these Druidical theories added a fresh interest to the hills and dales, and the imaginative tourist, guide-book in hand, could let his fancy run wild as he peopled all the scenes with priestly figures.

merely the stump, which scientists tell us is wearing away. It is now an average quarter of a mile above the sea-level. Who, therefore, can say that in time Dartmoor may not sink below the level of the sea, and its many rills and rivers be turned back by the salt waves of the Atlantic, and the Dartmoor of to-day become a great inland lake?

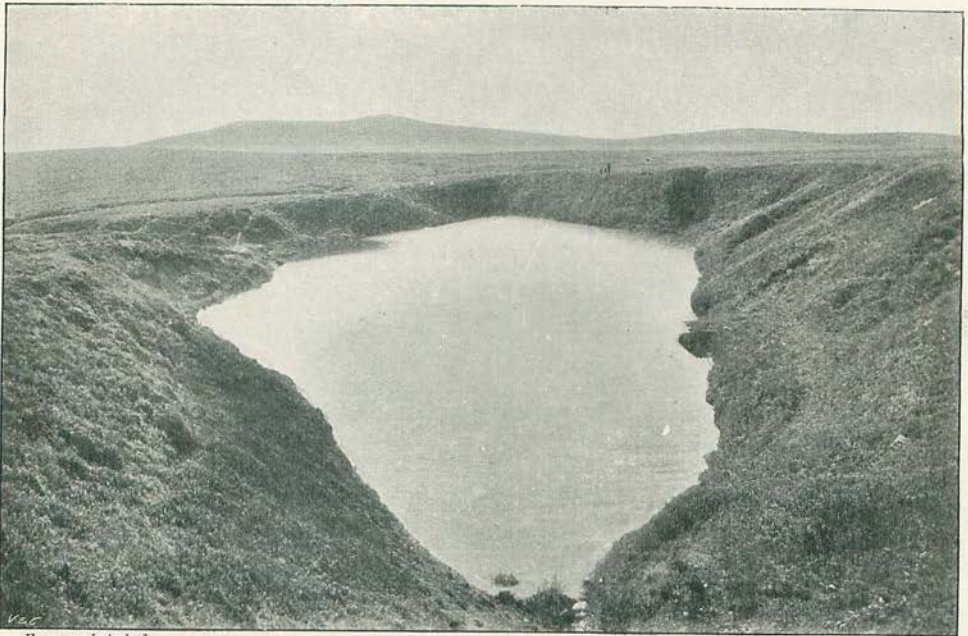
This is only a theory, but what are Dartmoor, Stonehenge, Karnak, or any other ancient place, were it not for the fairy tales with which we choose to label them? At least it is certain that thousands of years ago the vales between these rugged tors were alive with the busy tin streamers, and down to the middle of the last century the Parliament of the tanners of Devon was

wont to meet on Crockern tor, "neither yielding to, nor shrinking from, any blasts, storms and tempests, as not fearing their fury, nor hellish malice of undermining gun-powder." These are the words of an historian who was anxious to account for the quaint fancy of the miners meeting to settle the judicial business of the Stanneries on such an exposed hill.

In these latter days, Dartmoor has ceased to respond to the tin streamers' art or to reward those who have tunnelled into the bowels of the moor. It has relapsed into a state of inactivity, "a wild and wondrous region," famed for its convicts, its ponies,

times, on which we have turned our backs for ever, the favourite amusement of pixies was to lead men astray at night when returning from the convivial board at some market or fair. And in those bygone days fairs were fairs indeed, and the tale is still told of a candidate for confirmation who stated that the commandments were "Cris-mis, Lady Day, Easter, Witsuntide, our vair, and brither Jan's burthday."

The bloom of the romance of Dartmoor has been brushed away by those who have called for facts when any enthusiast has voiced a pretty theory. But still Dartmoor is Dartmoor, and there is no other tract in



From a photo by]

CLASSENWELL POOL.

[Heath, Plymouth.

and its pixies. Even these are a decreasing quantity. Princetown prison has not sufficient convicts to fill its cells, the ponies are not so sought after by town dwellers willing to pay good prices as once they were, and the pixies, those mischief-making whimsical elves, are seldom heard of. Though the children of Dartmoor are still ruddy of cheek, strong of limb, and unkempt, no self-respecting boy or girl believes to-day in Pixyland, that unknown country beneath the bogs where the fairies hatch their schemes of good or ill. For moormen, whose gait after attending market may be unsteady, the spread of unbelief in these dwellers in bog-land is unfortunate. In those good old

England like it for wild grandeur, for surprising changes of mood, for bracing breezes, in fact for all that goes to refresh the mind and strengthen the body.

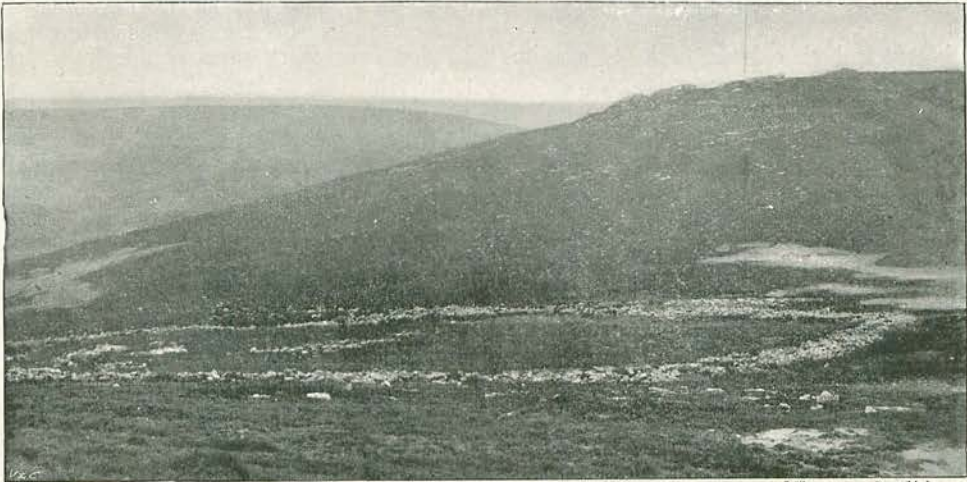
To attempt to attack Dartmoor delicately is like endeavouring to defend oneself against hordes of barbarians by means of the most clever sarcasm. In the dreariest, darkest, and most desperately savage part of Dartmoor, about 1500 feet above sea-level, is a small sheet of water called Cranmere Pool. It is a puzzle to find this mere handful of water; it is in the centre of what has been well described as the great swamp of Dartmoor—an area of bog-land cut up in all directions by fissures, and with no hill, or

house, or human being of any description within a radius of several miles, a very picture of silent, awesome desolation. Recently, when I arrived at this desolate pool, I found two tourists seated by the side of its waters of inky blackness. They had started from Okehampton in the morning, wearing tennis shoes and white flannel trousers, and in this equipment had walked to Cranmere. After jumping from bog-land tuft to tuft over the fissures, falling into the unhealthy water once and again, they had reached the pool, bespattered almost from head to foot, and presenting a very woe-begone appearance.

All Dartmoor is not bog-land, but nevertheless it is too wild for conventional dress, unsuited to the bicycle, and seen only

may be seen from the box seats of these conveyances, and much more may be heard from the drivers. Whether Bovey Tracey, Moreton Hampstead, Chagford, Okchampton, Princetown or Tavistock be the axis wherefrom it is intended to explore these highlands of Devonshire, there is no lack of interest.

Within the boundaries of this forest, though there is only one lake, Classenwell Pool, there are nearly thirty tors, granite crested, which kiss the clouds that droop towards them—a fair compromise, for these hills are all from one to two thousand feet high—and there are innumerable traces of those to whom this moorland was once a home. Near Moreton Hampstead is Grimspound, where are still seen great granite blocks which once formed the hut dwellings



From a photo by]

[Chapman, Davlish.

GRIMSPOUND.

cursorily from the top of a coach. It is the pedestrian's paradise; for mile after mile he may tramp over springy turf and heather without meeting a living being; the whispers of the tors as they are buffeted by the wind, and the occasional gurgling of some moorland stream fighting its way amid boulders and tangled tree roots to the ocean, are the only voices of Nature where Nature reigns supreme.

Though Dartmoor is so stern and silent it is girdled round by the iron steed; though it is the holiday haunt of the pedestrian it may be seen and enjoyed by those less energetically inclined. It is flanked by a dozen or more towns, where its air is inhaled and its tors may be seen, and from north to south runs a well-settled road, now the route of modern coaches. In a few days much

of some wild hunters or shepherds, who, several thousand years ago, entrenched themselves within a circular cyclopean wall of great thickness and of nearly six hundred yards circumference, as a defence against the intrusion of man or beast. How they manipulated the great boulders, standing six or seven feet high, who can tell? but they remain to-day a memorial to their ingenuity.

Or one may wander from Chagford to the Gray Wethers and speculate on the activities which were once carried on within these rude hut circles, of which only a few great stones remain. There is a typical West Country joke associated with these Gray Wethers, as they are called from their fancied resemblance to a flock of sheep. A farmer, who knew nothing of these remains, was once offered a number of gray wethers at a

tempting price. He eagerly closed with the offer, and was immediately told that they were "up in the new take over against Sittaford tor." It is not difficult to picture the countryman's expression when he climbed



*From a photo by]*

THE GRAY WETHERS.

*[Chapman, Dawlish.*

the height and viewed the flocks of granite boulders he had bought—as a bargain.

It has been said that Dartmoor is not a forest, but it has never been entirely without trees. Many of the valleys overshadowed by the giant tors of these uplands are richly wooded, and are often a welcome change from the treeless heights. There is one spot on the open moor however which is honoured by the name of "wood," but even in this case the word is used rather by courtesy than by right. Wistman's Wood, near Princetown, is one of the wonders of Dartmoor. It occupies the side of a hill, and though extremely small, it is claimed that this cluster of gnarled and stunted oaks, none of which are more than twelve feet high, have put forth their buds for a thousand springs. One arboriculturist has succeeded in counting between seven hundred and eight hundred concentric circles, which is evidence that they stood at the time of the Conquest.

Dartmoor also has antiquities of less uncertain date and origin. A brisk half-hour's walk from Princetown will bring one to the site of a Parliament beside which St. Stephen's

and Westminster Abbey are modern—deserted Crockern tor. Here from time immemorial the tanners of Dartmoor were wont to foregather to legislate in imperious fashion under the ægis of the Lord Warden of the Stannaries, and hurl defiance at those who said them nay. It is only a hundred and fifty years since this rude assembly was last held. Those who know anything of miners know that they are daring and determined. In these days it is interesting to recall the scene when Strode, a local member of Parliament, was arraigned before this assembly. He was charged with rendering objectionable disservice in Parliament, and forthwith

handed over to the tender mercies of the gaolers of the adjacent Stannery prison at Lydford Castle, where, for a whole month, he remained in chains because he had dared to question the right of the tanners to block up the harbours of Devon with the refuse from their tin-streaming operations.

There are still some ruins of this castle of infamous memory, ensconced above a wild romantic gorge, through which the river Lyd



*From a photo by]*

SHEEP'S TOR.

*[Heath, Plymouth.*

tumbles and boils and churns. The shell of the old castle is all that remains of one of the most important borough towns of England; before the Conquest equally taxed with London, and with a mint of its own.

Now it is merely a village, and a memory which lives in the lines of a local versifier—

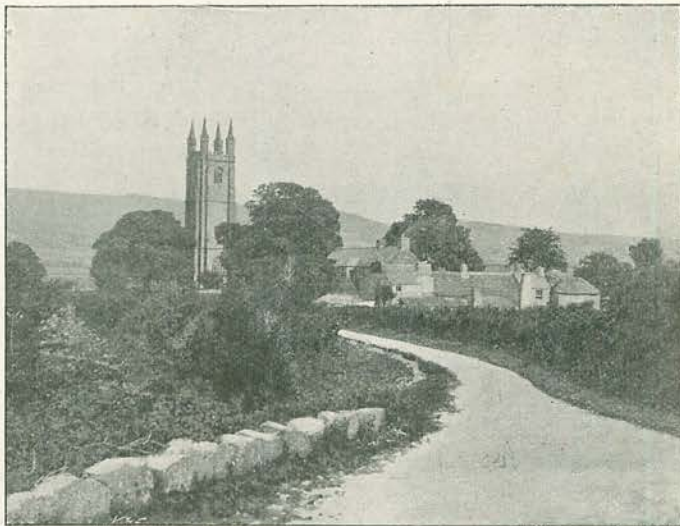
I oft have heard of Lydford law,  
How in the morning they hang and draw,  
And sit in judgment after.

Dartmoor is full of variety. One hour one may be seated below Crockern tor, picturing in one's mind's eye the strange gatherings that took place there under the vault of the skies, and the next at the top of Brent tor, crowned with one of the quaintest little churches in England—a mere stone box, less than thirty-seven feet long, some fifteen feet wide, and in height only eleven feet. As every stone-circle, cromlech and tor has its story, hidden or revealed, this little tabernacle is traced to a pious mariner in the days of Henry I, who, when adrift in an open boat in the English Channel, vowed that he would build a church on the land he first sighted.

This is the most curious church on Dartmoor; but there are many others more imposing, ranging from the cathedral of the moor, at Widecombe, to the little church in every village, whose size is usually out of all proportion to the population of the district. Widecombe has the largest church on the moor, having accommodation for fully six hundred worshippers,

and is typical of many of its smaller sisters, being wholly perpendicular, with a battlemented and pinnaced tower that has been compared, not inappropriately, with that of Magdalen College, Oxford.

These are a few of the artificial features of



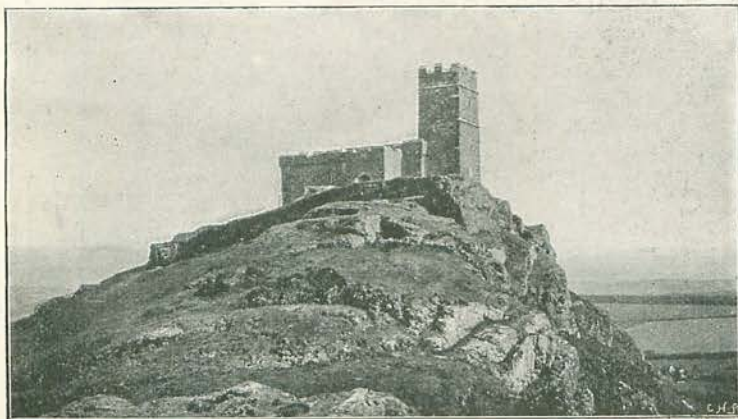
*From a photo by]*

*[Chapman, Dawlish.*

THE CATHEDRAL OF THE MOOR, AT WIDECOMBE.

this great upland. But after all has been said of the kistvaens, cromlechs, the hut circles, the stone avenues, the picturesque clapper bridges (such as that at Postbridge) and the churches, there is still the moor, a blending of soft beauty with the sternest grandeur, a mixture of browns and grays and purples of the dry bracken, the granite tors and the heathery slopes, with the vivid green and gold of the deceptive bog-land grass and the never-failing gorse. Its charm is indescribable, and when all that can be has been said of the relicts of earlier centuries and of the cathedral-like churches, the wide upswelling moorland remains—

An empty sky, a world  
of heather,  
Purple of foxglove,  
yellow of broom.



*From a photo by]*

*[Heath, Plymouth.*

BRENT TOR.