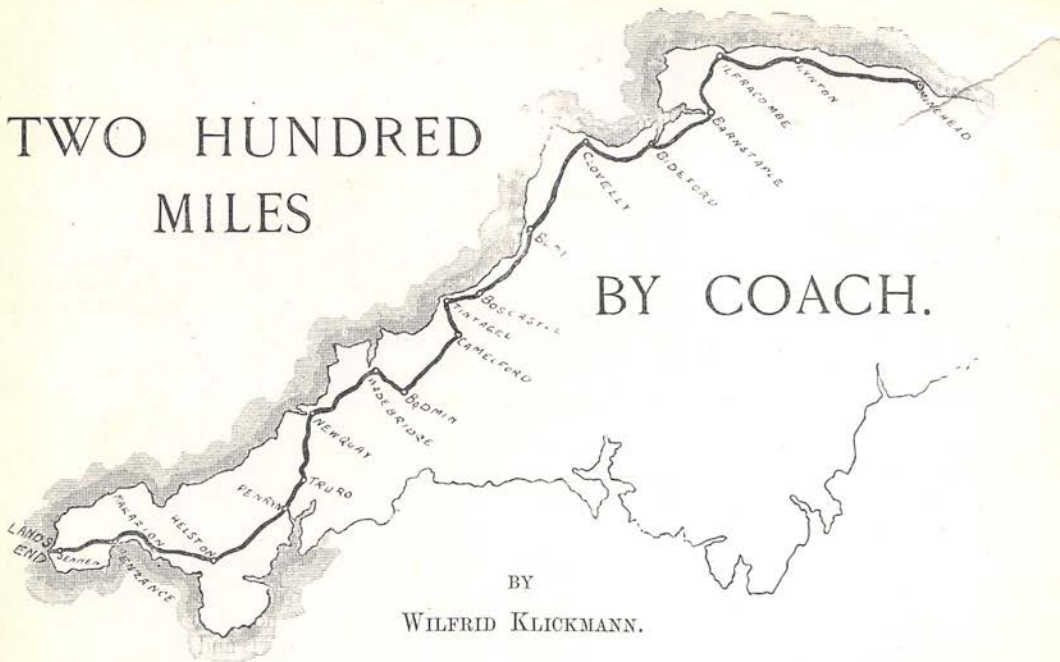


TWO HUNDRED MILES

BY COACH.



BY
WILFRID KLICKMANN.

MINEHEAD, so popular with hunters of red deer on Exmoor, is the starting point of a continuous coaching system in the west of England, extending for two hundred miles in almost a straight line. What is more, for about half the distance the coach travels within sight of the ocean, passing through scenery now world-famous through the pens of R. D. Blackmore, Kingsley, "Lucas Malet," Dickens, Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, and many others.

Coaching is inseparably connected with the romantic halo obscuring the inconveniences of "the good old days." Here in the west country the stage-coach is still existent, but in a few years it will have been driven from the road by the iron horse and automatic motor. The Barnstaple and Lynton coach, which ran daily from time immemorial,

has succumbed to a narrow-gauge railway. With the line to Clovelly from Bideford already planned, and others threatened in all directions, this phenomenally long coach ride of two hundred miles will soon be an impossibility.

Nowadays the stages are much shorter

than formerly. In fact, while travelling in the same vehicle, one has now the maximum of convenience with none of the discomforts our forefathers had of necessity to experience. The afternoon coach from Minehead to Lynmouth is well known as a smart and serviceable turn-out. It is, and has need to



Photo by P. Prith & Co.,

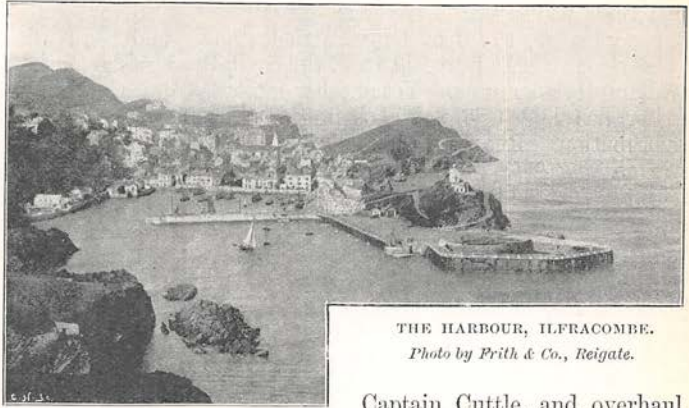
[Reigate.]

THE LYNTON AND ILFRACOMBE COACH.

be, well horsed, for the country's face in these parts has protuberances akin to young mountains. An easy run of six miles brings us to Porlock, so reminiscent of Whyte-Melville's spirited romance, "Katerfelto." Here the serious work of the stage begins, and

in another mile we are 1,400 feet above sea level. As every cyclist knows, though sometimes he doubts, there are two sides to every hill, and a long, gentle decline leads through County Gate into Devonshire, and so on to Lynmouth. Away on the left lies the famous Doone Valley, and the passengers listen respectfully while whip and guard declaim abridged editions of "Lorna Doone." We drop steeply into Lynmouth with musical flourishes on the horn, and a verbal contrapuntal treatment composed of "Oh! isn't that . . .!" (the range of adjectives is too large to quote).

Eight a.m. in summer as a starting time is an hour quite conformable with healthy inclinations. Having ascended by the *Tiv-Bits* cliff railway to Lynton (how those literary associations dogged our progress!) we say "Good-bye" to one of the fairest spots in England. The Ilfracombe coach, as it leaves Lynton, follows the West Lyn. At Martinhoe Cross the driver turns himself into an animated foot-rule, and mentions that we have topped 1,000 feet. Parracombe and Kentisbury Downs likewise need plenty of collar work. We then turn-to, like



THE HARBOUR, ILFRACOMBE.
Photo by Prith & Co., Reigate.

Captain Cuttle, and overhaul our "Mighty Atom." At Combmartin Church, so long tended by Norman the sexton, certain lady passengers, of course, alight and wait for an afternoon coach. To others the mystical neighbourhood of "dark Tintagel," looming in the far distance of several days ahead, has a charm far more magnetic. Combmartin Bay, however, is always admirable, and we closely follow the cliffs to Ilfracombe beloved of honeymooners.

To Barnstaple the road is pretty enough. A halt should be made at Pilton Church to examine the swinging arm and hour-glass attached to the pulpit—a delicate hint, the thing "contrives a double debt to pay." With it the preacher points his moral, and to it the congregation ever and anon cast anxious eyes. Barnstaple, or Old Barum, must surely date from about the year 1, for the Saxon King Athelstan repaired the town's walls and defences, which had fallen into ruin from old age.

The short run of nine miles into Kingsley's country is performed in a vehicle not quite so high-toned as our previous conveyances. It is a hybrid in which the omnibus type predominates. The Barum and Bideford carrier runs every day, following in turn the rivers Taw and Torridge. At the Royal Hotel, Bideford, Kingsley's room is shown, in which "Westward Ho!" was written. Close adjoining is the railway station, from whence start the fours-in-hand for Clovelly and Bude. From June 1 to October 31 these coaches carry over ten



Photo by]

[Christie Hipp, Lynton.

THE WEST LYN VALLEY, AND ROYAL CASTLE HOTEL.

thousand passengers. We can cross the famous bridge, 677 feet long, carried over twenty-four arches into Bideford, the capital of Kingsley's country. Yet another famous writer has laid this neighbourhood under contribution. Rudyard Kipling's notorious trio "Stalky & Co.," whose adventures were recently recorded in the WINDSOR MAGAZINE, disported themselves at Westward Ho! a couple of miles out of Bideford. The whip of the Clovelly coach is and has been a man of many parts. Sam Jewell, formerly the Clovelly carrier, is as popular a man on the road as ever handled a rein. He is "a Clovelly man," and therefore a right good

Bideford on one occasion a wheel came off, and the crash of the vehicle was lost in the shrieks of the occupants. He calmly turned on the box seat and said: "Do not be alarmed, ladies, I beg; it is nothing: it's only a wheel come off—I know which one."

The Bude coach made its wonted journey several times before we reluctantly left Clovelly and joined it to penetrate a district known only to a few. For a thickly wooded country we have exchanged a breezy, gorse-scented moor, with a keener and more bracing quality in the air. Over Bursden Moors we draw rein at the West Country Inn, an out-of-the-way house in a lonely



Photo by]

[Puddicombe, Eileford.

BUDE AND CLOVELLY COACHES LEAVING THE NEW INN, BIDEFORD.

fellow. Few would imagine that this quiet-looking man had ever headed a mutinous crew at sea; yet such was the case. Supported by his mates he compelled the captain, an intolerable tyrant of the old school, to maintain good behaviour for the rest of the voyage. What is more, Sam's diplomatic conduct in a difficult position prevented a prosecution for mutiny on reaching port. It is no wonder there is always a scramble for the box seats of this coach, for few drivers can better beguile a journey with yarns and entertaining stories from real life than the quondam Clovelly carrier. Jewell is nothing if not placid. When driving some ladies to

parish. Here are the sources of the Torridge and the Tamar, rivers which reach the sea at opposite sides of the country. The county border line is soon crossed and we enter Cornwall. Our coach takes us within a very few miles of Stowe, where lived one well known to all readers of "Westward Ho!"—Sir Richard Grenville, who commanded the *Revenge* during her immortal fight against the whole of the Spanish fleet. Stamford Hill is soon passed, and the curious may inspect the old cannon mounted *in situ* to commemorate Sir Beville Granville's victory over the Parliamentary forces, 4,000 strong. And so to Bude, which has been one of



Photo by]

10 A.M. AT THE FALCON HOTEL, BUDE.

[Thorn, Bude.

Cornwall's chief coaching centres. During the early seventies the first coach over the route just traversed started from the Falcon Hotel, Bude, and ran to Barnstaple, thirty-eight miles. Sometimes four or five well-hoised coaches can be seen before the Falcon, ready to start on their respective journeys.

Bude has its attractions, but on the threshold of King Arthur's domains one need not linger. At 10 a.m. we mount to the outside of the Boscastle coach—the same vehicle which has carried Mr. Gladstone, Lord Tennyson, and Sir Henry Irving, to name only a few of its famous passengers.

As regards fares a peculiar survival of former days is noticeable. The stuffy inside seats, with circumscribed views, are more expensive than those outside. Needless to say, no one dreams of riding inside while a vacant seat remains on the roof. Bleaker and barer is the scenery with every mile traversed. Ascending gradually we soon see their highnesses Brown Willy and Rough Tor, young mountains away on our left. The loneliest spot in Cornwall to-day is Dozmary Pool, beyond these heights. This was the traditional scene of the passing of Arthur. Here it was that an arm—

Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful—

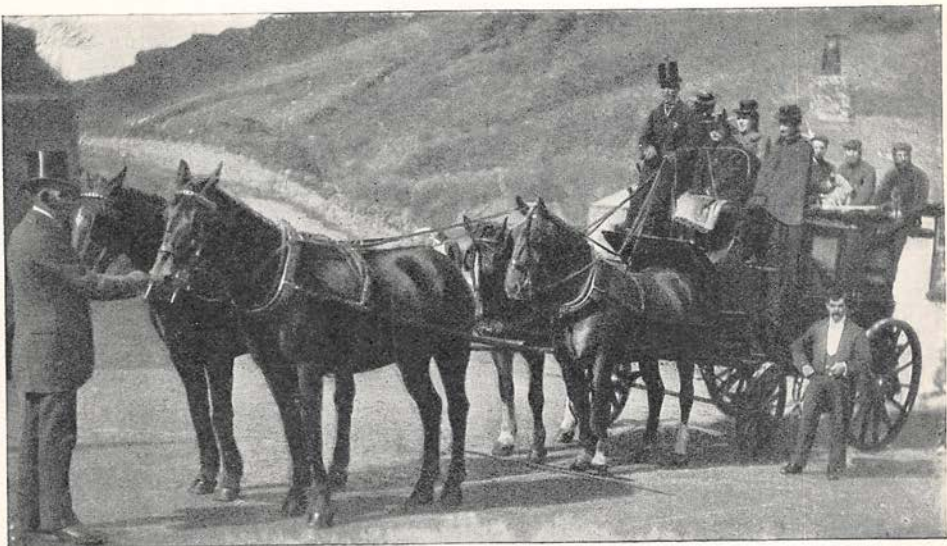


Photo by]

THE BOSCASTLE COACH.

[W. Klickmann.



Photo by]

THE HARBOUR, BOSCASTLE.

[F. Waren, Newquay.

appeared from the waters and received the ever-victorious sword *Excalibur*.

Boscastle is the wildest example of rugged cliff scenery to be found in all this long, indented coast. The opening between the cliffs is called a harbour, and a couple of tiny jetties give a significance to the name. A more difficult harbour to make for could hardly be conceived. A mariner able to negotiate safely the tortuous passage between these awful cliffs might navigate between Scylla and Charybdis with his eyes shut. The village of Boscastle lies scattered along the valley which is the continuation of this unique cleft in the cliffs; and the coach, skilfully guided around some astonishingly sharp corners, pulls up before the hospitable Wellington Hotel. Tintagel lies five miles further down the coast, and the coach still follows the cliffs. A pretty scene is at the crossing of Rocky Valley. St. Knighton's Kieve, a beautiful waterfall, is higher up the valley on the left. Tradition declared that here King Arthur's knights met prior to

the Holy Grail expedition. We pass onward through Bossiney, a "pocket" borough (before the Reform Act) in more senses than one. The village returned a member to Parliament with the votes of nine men only, who expected and received a *quid pro quo*, and sometimes more. We take the coachman's word that the uninteresting village of Trevena is really Tintagel. For a few moments misgivings arise, but cheery boys hail us and guide us through a gorge in the cliffs beyond. Merlin has not been seen hereabouts for some long time. In his absence visitors must prosaically apply at the cottage for the Castle door-key. A narrow path, followed by an almost perpendicular zigzag up the face of a huge black cliff,

bring us to the ideal Tintagel, the chiefest castle of "Lyonesse, the wave-worn Kingdom of Romance." A glance at the well-nigh shapeless bits of masonry makes one credit without question the antiquity of the buildings in consonance with the Arthurian legend. The learned point to the keep and say, "Norman," and label pieces of wall here and there "late twelfth century," but to little purpose. Malory's "Mort d'Arthur" is reputed gospel in these parts, and antiquarian interference is not appreciated by the masses. The veritable Round Table, as



Photo by]

THE NORTH CORNWALL COACH AT WADEBRIDGE.

[F. Waren, Newquay.

everyone blessed with a normal credulity knows, hangs against the walls of the Guildhall, Winchester. The coach having made a respectful halt while Tintagel Castle is examined, returns *via* Camelford, passing Slaughter Bridge, where Mordred the Usurper was slain and King Arthur wounded unto death.

Until four years ago the well-known North Cornwall coach took up the running from Camelford, but with the advent of the railway it awaits its passengers at Wadebridge. Eschewing quick transit, however, we can take the regular coach to Bodmin and then continue by mail brake to Wadebridge. So quickly are the coaches being superseded, that this last-named vehicle now only takes the road once a week, early on Sunday mornings, when the trains do not run. Parenthetically it may be mentioned that this Bodmin to Wadebridge railway line was the second passenger line built in England (1834). The white track across the foreground of our illustration shows where this railway still runs.

The North Cornwall coach leaving Wadebridge daily at 6 p.m. completes the last eighteen miles of the journey to Newquay *via* the London and South-Western Railway. Charlie Soper, who has guarded this coach



Photo by]

[P. Waren, Newquay.

CARNANTON WOODS, NEAR NEWQUAY.

for a quarter of a century, is a great favourite on the road. He specially endears himself to youths with musical aspirations, for his euphonious "yard of tin" is at the use of one and all should they desire. This coach had some rare experiences during the great blizzard ten years ago. Fred May (now the driver of the Bude railway station omnibus) drove this vehicle, and the stage was from Launceston to Newquay, forty-three miles. Camelford, sixteen miles from Launceston,

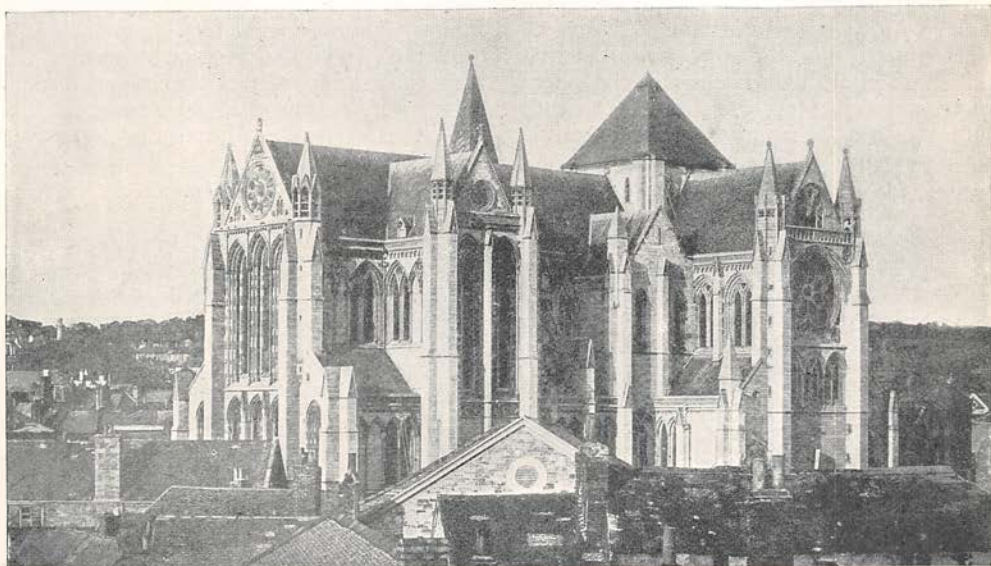


Photo by]

TRURO CATHEDRAL.

[Valentine & Sons, Dundee.

the first stopping place, was reached two hours late. The outside passengers had to be lifted off, for they were nearly dead and quite unable to move. Just at midnight Wadebridge was reached amid enthusiastic rejoicings. With telegraph wires broken, and all communication cut off, the town was isolated for a week, when Soper and May on horseback penetrated nine out of the eleven miles to Camelford, only to be beaten by the impassable snowdrifts. Another attempt was made next day with a larger party. There was safety in numbers, and they dug each other's horses out of the snow, which not only obscured hedges, but even cottages. After incredible difficulties Camelford was reached, and mail bags, the first to reach the town for a week, were brought in triumphantly.

On approaching St. Columb Major we pass nine tall, upright blocks of granite, of prehistoric origin. They are called the Nine Maidens. Local legends unblushingly declare the pillars to be the petrified remains of nine girls who wickedly danced on the Sabbath. No antiquarian has been bold enough to deny the statement publicly. On through St. Columb Major, past Carnanton Woods, and the cliff road is again joined until Newquay is reached.

Three times a week Mr. Jane drives his four-in-hand from Newquay to the cathedral city of Truro, over some astonishingly long hills. In one instance, when standing at the eighth milestone, the ninth is also in view. On market days Truro is packed with vehicles. For a westward bound coach we have ample choice. The route *viâ* Penryn and Helston is slightly longer, but more picturesque than the road through Redruth and Camborne, where hills of mining refuse have been added to ugly, bare excrescences of Nature. Penryn is really a granite town.

Houses, shops, churches, streets, garden walls, outhouses are all made of solid grey granite. This material is used, in fact, for every imaginable purpose, except as an article of diet. A few more miles over moorland, with deserted mine shafts here and there for incident, and Helston is reached.

Only two more stages remain to be accomplished. Penzance, twelve miles from Helston, is the next stopping place, and we have passed through Marazion, with St. Michael's Mount lying off the shore, a rocky, castle-crowned islet. Beyond Penzance we are beyond railways. Regular vehicles ply to Sennen, the nearest village to Land's End. Bare hills, stone circles, and prehistoric relics unite to make the traveller feel he is an alien to the soil.

Sennen is the most westerly village in England. Here is the inn which once truthfully vaunted itself as "the first and last house in England." The Land's End Hotel has since been built on the edge of the cliffs, one mile distant. This surely is the "first and last house"? No! The proprietor of the inn built a little refreshment shanty on the rocks a few yards further west than the hotel, and proudly set up his signboard. Instead of the hotel retaliating by establishing a floating bar out at sea beyond the Longships Lighthouse, but anchored to a rock, the affair was amicably settled by the hotel buying out its close neighbour. Here, then, is Land's End, the haunt of artists, poets, record-breakers with yearnings towards John o' Groats, hurrying day-trippers, and solitary, leisurely wanderers. Each hopes, to find the Land's End looking to its best advantage for his especial benefit and behoof. The leisurely man wins, and he who waits to view the scene at early morning, or during an evening sunset, will have seen the finest sight our coasts can offer.

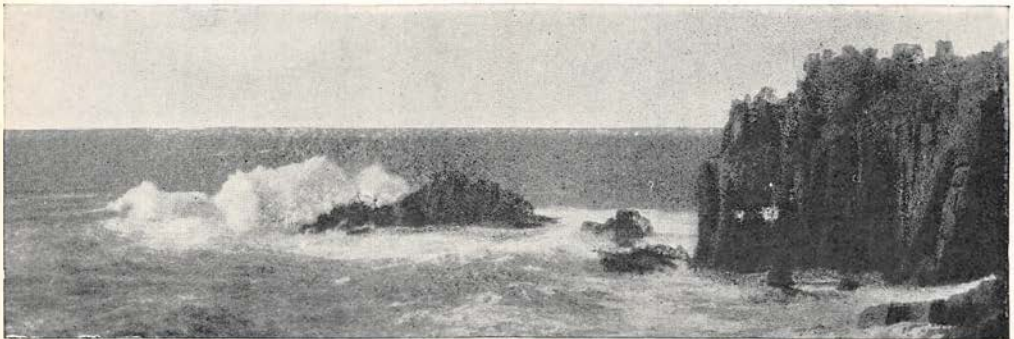


Photo by]

A ROUGH SEA AT LAND'S END.

[Gibson & Sons, Penzance.