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[Smartt & Son, Leamington.

THE LOWER PARADE, LEAMINGTON.

## THE CENTRE OF ENGLAND:

### THE STORY OF A FAMOUS SPA.

BY HARRY GOLDING.

IT is one of the cherished superstitions of the average Englishman that the only health resorts worth talking about are at the seaside. Without in the least

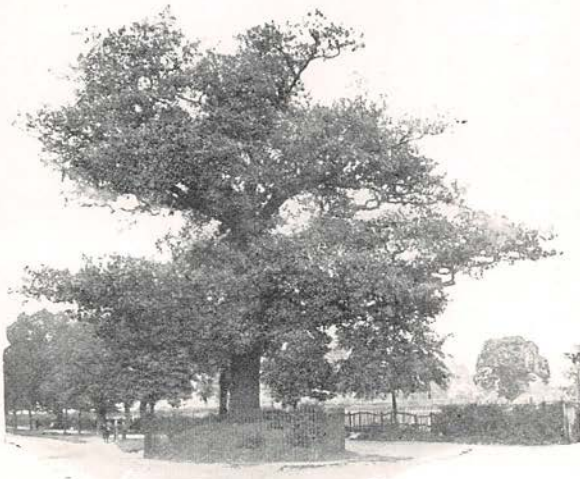
degree calling in question the medicinal value of cocoanut shies at Great Yarmouth, or an ascent of the big wheel at Blackpool, it is permissible to point out that this fair island of ours has a centre as well as a circumference, and that though life at the hub may have little in common with the giddy whirl of gaiety at the outer edge of the wheel, the number of turns, after all, is the same. To drop the difficult language of metaphor, and come to plain speaking—why should not the change-seeking citizen, perplexed by the eternal question,

“Where shall I go?” try a change that shall be a change indeed, and *go inland*? The suggestion savours of the reckless, and is hardly likely to be accepted without grave

questionings, but, really, why not?

Let us tell the story of a pretty Midland town that is better worth going to than one-half the pretentious and crowded resorts on our coast, and that is almost without a peer as a place for autumn and winter residence.

Rather more than a hundred years ago, when public opinion respecting health resorts was at the exactly opposite



OAK TREE IN THE LILLINGTON ROAD, MARKING THE “CENTRE OF ENGLAND.”

pole, and learned doctors were gravely warning their patients against “the noxious fumes of the sea,” there chanced to be walking in a field in one of the loveliest

parts of Warwickshire two undistinguished individuals, one of whom was undistinguished simply because he was a poet, and at odd times only a shoemaker, and the other because he sold beer by the pint at the "Dog" public-house. Around these two worthies clings a halo of romance similar to that associated with Romulus and Remus in the first days of Rome. While "earnestly conversing," according to the legend, Ben Satchwell, the poet, experienced what is by the vulgar of to-day known as a "thirst." His friend Abbotts, the publican, was at hand, but the more important part of him, his beer tap, was not. Ben therefore resolved to make practical acquaintance with the

ordinary article, and his forceful exclamations aroused a curiosity in Abbotts to see, or rather to taste, for himself what the matter was. A moment later they were the happiest men in Warwickshire. They had discovered a mineral spring—and could anyone deny that Bath and Cheltenham and Harrogate, and other places too numerous to mention,

all dated their prosperity from similar discoveries? With commendable business acumen Abbotts immediately started "bottling," despatching one of the first samples to a famous Northampton physician for analysis. The report being highly favourable, the enterprising publican set to work to convert his humble hostelry into a comfortable hotel for the accommodation of drinkers

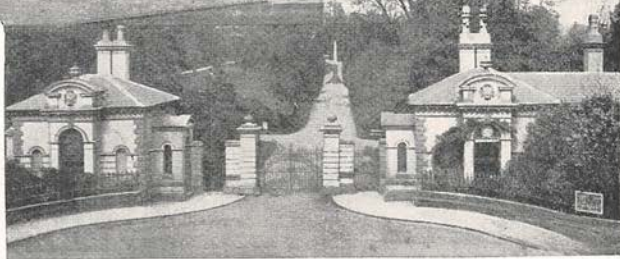


THE OLD WELL HOUSE.



THE PUMP ROOM AND BATHS.

"babbling brook," the good qualities of which he had doubtless, like so many poets before and since, more frequently applauded than tested. Near the then tiny thatched church of Leamington Priors was a pool, into which Satchwell dipped his palm and secured a copious draught. Abbotts, an interested spectator, observed with delight that the poet's acquaintance with spring water was not likely to be of long continuance, for never did man pull a more rueful face. Satchwell knew enough of the bountiful fluid of Nature to be aware that this was not the



ENTRANCE TO JEPHSON GARDENS.

Photos by Smartt & Son, Leamington.

and visitors; while Satchwell invoked his muse to higher flights and scattered poems by the score in praise of the water.

Many years before Abbotts' discovery, however, Leamington was known to possess a spring of salt water, "whereof," in the words of Dugdale, "the inhabitants make much use

for seasoning their meats." But by common consent Abbots is credited with having been the first to see the enormous value of the water and its bearing on the future of the hitherto insignificant village.

A small beginning! Yes, but what of the end, or rather of the present, for the end is not yet by a very long way. The patrons of publican Abbots and his water grew yearly more numerous, until it occurred to other enterprising people that they might find medicinal waters cooped up somewhere beneath their cabbages, and no less than ten such springs were discovered in a period of twenty years. Leamington now began to enjoy all the benefits, and some of the disadvantages, of notoriety.

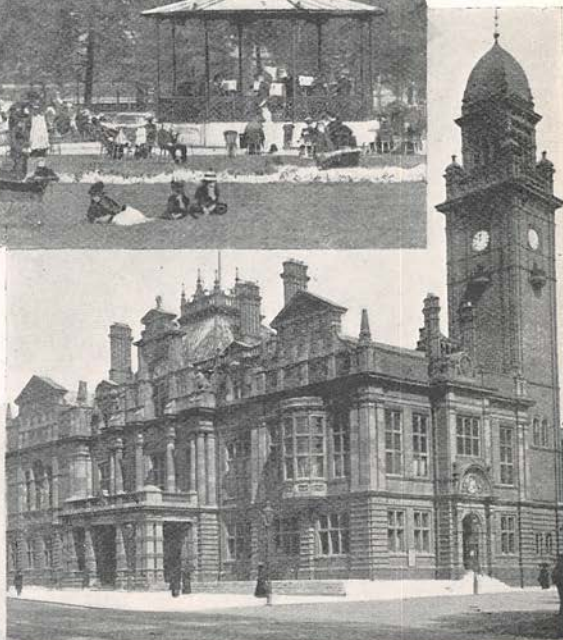
It is difficult to know under which head to place the visit, in 1819, of the much abused Prince Regent. The fourth George

Princess Augusta, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, and other long-forgotten notabilities came to taste the magic waters. Other more important visitors were the Duchess of Kent and her daughter, the Princess Victoria, now and for more than



LISTENING TO THE BAND IN THE PUMP ROOM GROUNDS.

THE TOWN HALL.  
Photo by W. Harvey Barton, Bristol.



THE UPPER PARADE.

Photos by Smartt & Son, Leamington.

had at least the merit of assisting by his patronage two of our chief present-day health resorts, Brighton and Leamington.

The Regent's example was quickly followed by other members of his family, and the

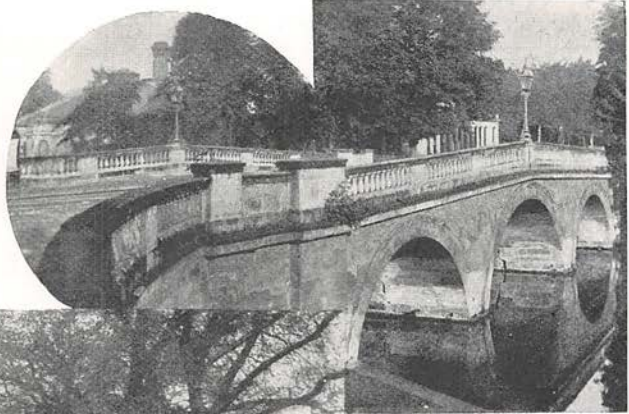
sixty years past the gracious Sovereign of this realm. In honour of the Queen's visit the title, "Royal Leamington Spa," was conferred upon the town in 1838.

Thus, in the words of Hawthorne, who wrote

most lovingly of Leamington in "Our Old Home": "The original nucleus, the plausible excuse for the town's coming into prosperous existence, lies in the fiction of a chalybeate well, which, indeed, is so far a reality that out of its magical depths have gushed streets, gardens, mansions, shops, and churches, and spread themselves along the banks of the little river Leam. The miracle accomplished, the beneficent fountain has retired beneath a pump room."

The beneficent fountain has not "retired" in the sense of having finished business, for it enjoys to-day a greater vogue than ever, and the attendant nymphs, who dispense the water from a beautiful shell-shaped

with virtues every whit as great, and accommodation in all respects equal and in some far superior. The cost of the handsome Pump Room, with its fine Doric colonnade, amounted to upwards of £20,000. The bathing establishment includes baths and balneological appliances of every imaginable



THE VICTORIA BRIDGE.



HOLLY WALK.



THE NEW RIVER WALK.

Photos by W. Harvey Barton, Bristol.

basin of pure white marble, are generally kept busy. The Corporation of Leamington — one of the most enterprising public bodies in the Kingdom — has spent enormous sums in endeavouring to

meet the wants of those who visit the town in quest of health and pleasure. It is still one of the great unexplained mysteries why people flock abroad to Kissengen and Homburg, and endure the fatigue, discomfort, and expense of a long journey, when here at home, in the very heart of England, is a spa

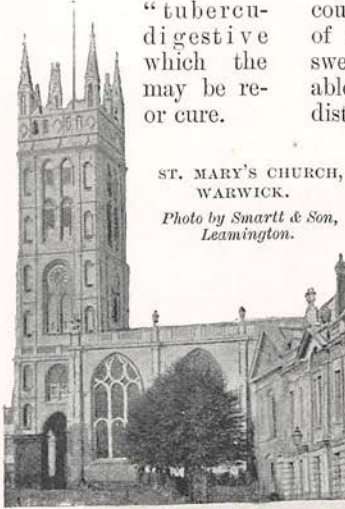
of this kind are capable of very varied application, and the list of the diseases finding relief here is a very long one; but perhaps the chief of them, and those which were the main subject of Dr. Jephson's successful practice, were dyspepsia or indigestion, sluggish liver, and affections of the digestive apparatus generally.'

Those whose ailments are not included under this fairly comprehensive statement may obtain, on application at the Pump Room, a little pamphlet in which is considerably set forth a fearful list of diseases, ranging from rheumatism to lar disease of the apparatus," all of Leamington waters lied upon to relieve

So far so good. But the healthy patron of the grill, who knows nothing of "tubercular disease of the digestive apparatus," and little of any other trouble, organic or mental, may say, "What has this to do with me? Leamington may be the best of all possible places for invalids, so by all means let them have it to themselves." No greater mistake could be made. If an earthquake caused the water to disappear to-morrow, Leamington would still have attractions enough and to spare. Well has it been called "Leafy

simple  
"tubercu-  
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the riverside, trees wherever roots can find soil to nourish them. Almost every thoroughfare in the fashionable part of the town is shaded by elms, planes, and sweet-scented limes, and in many cases banked by well-kept grass-plats. The Parade is a kind of countrified Regent Street, alike in the contents of the shops and in the curving upward sweep of the road. It has, too, the indefinable air of cleanliness which is one of the distinguishing features of the famous London thoroughfare. Indeed, the town generally is about the best groomed in the Kingdom, the new red sandstone soil on which it is built greatly facilitating the efforts of the zealous authorities. A journalist who ought to have known better once went so far as to declare that nothing would give him greater



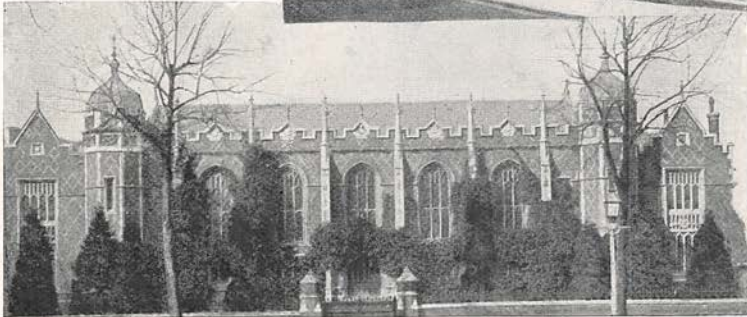
ST. MARY'S CHURCH,  
WARWICK.

Photo by Smartt & Son,  
Leamington.



LORD LEICESTER'S HOS-  
PITAL, WARWICK.

Photo by W. Harvey  
Barton, Bristol.



LEAMINGTON COLLEGE.

Photo by Smartt & Son, Leamington.

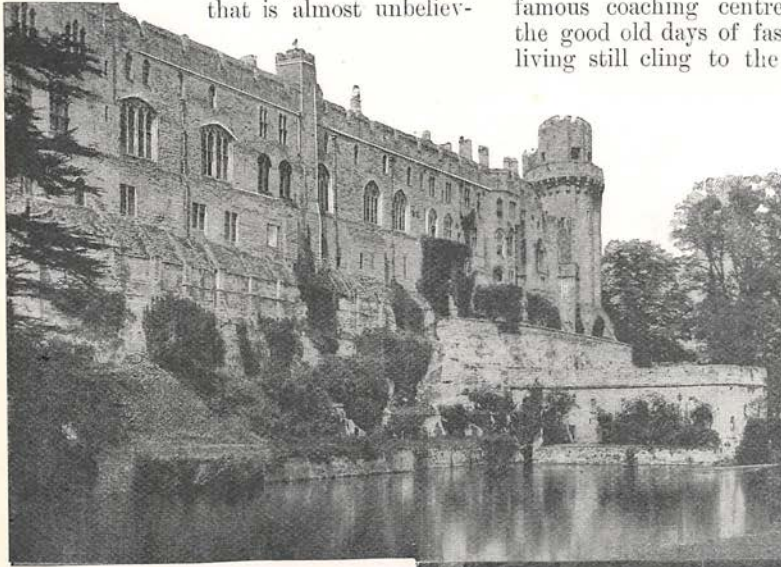
Leamington." There is hardly a town in England that is so little like a town and so much like a garden. Foliage meets the eye on every side: there are trees in the streets, trees in the gardens, trees in the parks and by

is called the Jephson Gardens, after a distinguished doctor who by his persistent advocacy of the waters did much to make the town famous, but its rightful name is, as we have said, Little Paradise. Anyone

pleasure than to eat an *al fresco* lunch off the pavement—as if Leamington would allow its spotless footways to be degraded by any such vulgarity!

Right in the heart of the town is a little Paradise. It

may go in free on certain days of the week, and on other days the charge for admission is no more than a penny. Here are broad lawns and gaily decked flower-beds, tortuous riverside paths, a pretty lily-dotted lake, and numbers of magnificent trees. Above all, here is peace—an intense quiet, save for the songs of the birds, that is almost unbeliev-



WARWICK CASTLE: RIVER FRONT.  
Photo by W. Harvey Barton, Bristol.

able in the centre of a busy, go-ahead town.

On the other side of the Parade is another delightful open space attached to the Pump Room; and a short walk brings one again to what Drayton calls "the high-complexioned Leam," by the banks of which is a short and pretty walk to the recently opened Victoria Park, a memorial of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

A pretty stroll to the north of the town leads to the village of Lillington, now practically absorbed in its larger neighbour. By the side of the road, securely guarded by an iron railing, is a gigantic oak tree, said to mark the "Centre of England." The authorities of the Ordnance Survey would probably decline to set the seal of official sanction to this statement, but its approximate accuracy can hardly be disputed.

The Town Improvement Association sees to it that visitors shall not be dull. There are daily band performances and concerts, and occasionally a grand gala day is held

at the Jephson Gardens, when the trees and the lake are decked with fairy lamps and lanterns, and King Carnival holds sovereign sway.

The rambler, the cyclist, the golfer, the tennis player, the cricketer, the huntsman, will all find ample provision for their wants at this delightful Midland spa.

During the thirties Leamington was a famous coaching centre, and memories of the good old days of fast driving and faster living still cling to the place. It was here

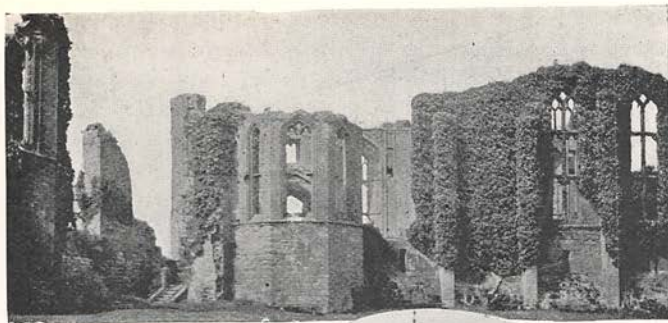
that Jack Mytton made and won his famous wager that he would ride his mare into the hotel dining-room, make her jump over the table and the heads of the assembled guests, and then out of the balcony into the



THE GREAT HALL, WARWICK CASTLE.  
Photo by Smartt & Son, Leamington.

street below. There were gay times, too, under the old régime, in the assembly rooms, when the belles and dandies of the period danced and talked scandal at inordinate hours under the direction of a Master of the Ceremonies well nigh as autocratic as Bean Nash of Bath.

Aunt Gilchrist, in William Black's "In Far Lochaber," would certainly have described



THE BANQUETING HALL,  
KENILWORTH CASTLE.

*Photo by Smartt & Son, Leamington.*

Leamington as "a grand place for being in the middle of things." It is in the middle—in the very middle—and, what is more, the things around it are well worth being in the middle of. But two miles away is the dear old town of Warwick—sleepy, old-fashioned, quaint, but possessing objects of the greatest interest in its magnificent Castle, the beautiful Beauchamp Chapel, and Lord Leicester's ancient Hospital. Less than six miles away is the crumbling ruin of Kenilworth Castle, with



HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, STRATFORD-ON-AVON.

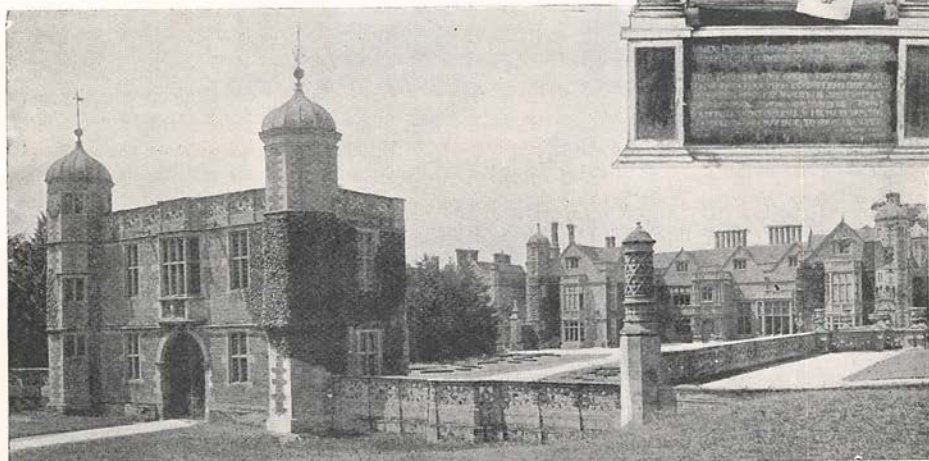
*Photo by Harvey Barton, Bristol.*

its memories of Elizabeth and Leicester, and poor, heart-broken Amy Robsart. A few miles beyond is Coventry, the city of the cycle and of the three spires; and northward again is Nuneaton and the George Eliot country. Eastward is Rugby, with its famous foundation; westward the great city of Birmingham; and southward, eight or nine miles only by road, the picturesque town on the Avon which gave Shakespeare to the world.

How many coast towns can offer attractions to equal these?

SHAKESPEARE'S MONUMENT IN TRINITY CHURCH.

*Photo by Smartt & Son, Leamington.*



*Photo by]*

CHARLECOTE HALL.

*[D. McNeill, Stratford-on-Avon.*