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CHAPTER EIGHT

I walk the walls of Chester, skirt Black England, tell the truth about Wigan, visit the 'Lakes', and make a dash at Gretna Green

§ 1

WELL and truly was Chester called by the Britons *Caer Lleon*, the 'City of the Legions'. Chester is still the 'City of the Legions', only they come from Louisville, and Oshkosh, New York, and Washington.

For years I have heard people describe the wonder of a walk round the walls of Chester. Naturally the first thing I did when I arrived here was to find the wall, which is not difficult. Chester, as you must know, is the 'only city in England which retains its medieval wall complete: a high red sandstone wall with towers at various strategic points along its course; on one side a handrail to prevent you from falling into back gardens, on the other a waist-high barrier from which in old times the *Cestrians* were in the habit of defying their enemies with boiling oil—and anything else that came handy. 'Blessed is he that expecteth little' is a wise maxim that has been drummed into me since I first sat up and wanted the moon; but I have never absorbed it. I realized this on the walls of Chester.

Any man might with justice, I think, expect that as he walked a medieval town wall something at least heroic would meet his eye, but the walls of Chester gave me only a much better idea of other people's washing, the gas-works, and the canal. You see Chester within the wall remains medieval, but Chester outside the wall is industrial. It has not been possible, with factory sites at one hundred and thirty pounds an acre, for Chester to retain a wide, open space outside the wall, and, consequently, the wall of Chester stands with its arms round beautiful old Chester, while ugly new Chester peeps over the parapet from the other side.

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I had been walking for about ten minutes, admiring the small, reddy-brown cathedral through the trees, when I came to a turret approached by a flight of ancient steps, and on the wall was this dramatic inscription:

KING CHARLES
STOOD ON THIS TOWER
SEPTEMBER 24TH, 1645, AND SAW
HIS ARMY DEFEATED
ON ROWTON MOOR

Inside the tower a man was presiding over a little museum. He told me, just as though he was present at the time, that when the Royalist army was riding to reinforce the garrison at Chester, the Roundheads set upon them and routed them with poor King Charles standing on this tower watching every move of the game. There are various battle-field relics in the museum, also several Roman antiquities which take the mind back to the days when that magnificent Legion, the 20th, known as the 'Valeria Victrix', was the crack regiment of *Deva*.

I had been walking for miles, wondering if the wall of Chester ever completes its circle, when I came to that which any exhausted visitor must regard as a poor joke. Here, near Bridge Gate, is a long flight of steps arranged in sets of three and known as the 'Wishing Steps'.

'Why?' I asked a man who was standing on them, looking as though none of his wishes had ever come true.

'Well,' he said in the curiously blunt way they have here, 'you have to run up and down and up again without taking breath, and then they say you'll get your wish.'

I noticed a band of breathless Americans standing on the other side, utterly vanquished. I decided to try no conclusions with the Wall of Chester and passed on in a superior way, mentally deciding to have a wish—for I can never resist these challenges of Fate—some morning when I could come fresh and vigorous to the steps. That, however,

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I learn is not playing the game; you must walk the wall first and then 'run up and down and up again', a feat which I shall leave to the natives—and to the Legions!

There is one feature of Chester which, to my mind, is worth ten walls. There is nothing like it in any English town—the Chester 'Rows'.

Chester is a town of balconies. The first impression I received of it was a town whose inhabitants spend a great portion of their lives leaning over old oak galleries, smoking and chatting and watching life go by below them in the streets.

'The Rows' are simply long, covered arcades formed by running a highway through the first stories of a street of old buildings. You mount from the roadway to 'the Rows' on frequent flights of stone steps and find yourself in the strangest shopping streets in England. Here are the best shops hidden away in the darkness of these ancient arcades, and it is possible to shop dry-shod in the worst weather. There is a peculiar charm about 'the Rows'. They are not typically medieval, because there is no record of any other street of this kind in the Middle Ages, yet they impart a singular impression of medievalism: through the oak beams which support the galleries you see black-and-white half-timbered houses on the opposite side of the street, with another 'Row' cut through their first floors, on whose balconies people are leaning and talking and regarding the flow of life.

The main streets of Chester give you the impression that a huge galleon has come to anchor there with easy, leisurely passengers leaning on the deck rails.

This peculiar feature of Chester has worried the antiquaries more than anything. Theories to explain how and why these peculiar streets grew up are numerous and none of them definite.

'Who knows why they are built?' said a local antiquary. 'One theory is that the ruins of the Roman buildings inspired the architects of later times. Another theory is

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that the arcades were formed during the Middle Ages to provide street defence against Welsh raiders; a third theory explains them on the ground that traders erected their buildings on the ruins of the Roman castrum, the most valuable ground, naturally, in the town, and, as other traders were attracted to the same profitable site, a further row of buildings rose up on the ruins behind the first, from which, of course, it is but a step to a covered arcade running the length of the street. But no one can say with certainty how they evolved. "The Rows" are one of the architectural mysteries of England. . . .'

Chester is as 'medieval' as Clovelly is 'quaint'. There is no getting away from it. At night a walk through 'the Rows' is eerie. These long tunnels are almost pitch dark. When the shops are closed they are deserted, for the Cestrians then take to the normal roadway, and you can walk on and on along this ancient highway, through colonnades upheld by vast oak beams, half-expecting to hear the scuffle of hired assassins and the gasp of a man with a dagger in his neck. I have yet to meet a more dramatic street.

Chester is so accustomed to ancient things that no one considered it strange to drink coffee in a twelfth-century crypt. There is a beautiful vaulted crypt which has been converted into a restaurant! I went there and sat utterly crushed by my surroundings. I looked round for the monks, but saw only young men and women, taking, so it seemed, sacrilegious sips of tea and eating cream cakes.

One of the happiest memories of my search will be the recollection of the many times I have hung out of hotel and inn windows before going to bed listening to the night sounds of towns and cities and villages. I must write a story about them some day. At night, when the tramcars have stopped running and the crowds have gone home, and the last American has drunk the last 'highball' in the smoke-room, ancient cities like Chester come most vividly to life. So you must leave me in Chester, under a big round moon,

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leaning out in the soft coolness of the night, watching the Valeria Victrix stack spears in the main street, and stand back waiting for orders to found one of the oldest cities in England.

And it was on the 'holy Dee', the broad, slow river that winds itself round Chester, that King Edgar in 973 gave away his character to posterity by being rowed in his barge by tributary princes. And it was in Chester . . . I could go on through history picking out little pictures of Chester; but it is so late, and the moon is riding high above this silent city, where old houses dream across old streets with their roots among the little red tiles of Rome.

§ 2

The change of country at the Cheshire-Lancashire border is more startling than the change between Cornwall and Devon or between the sweet lowland counties and the wild marches of Wales. Here the traveller enters Industrial England.

I looked at the map. I was passing between Liverpool on the left and Manchester on the right, and about sixteen miles from both cities. Far off to the left I could see the Mersey estuary, with red smoke-stacks rising above the flat lands by the sandy shore. To the right there was an ominous grey haze in the sky which meant Manchester. For months I have motored through a green England which might never have known the Industrial Revolution. Round Bristol, it is true, I saw factories. I left Birmingham on my right, and saw no trace of that monster as I went on into Old England. Here was New England: an England of crowded towns, of tall chimneys, of great mill walls, of canals of slow, black water: an England of grey, hard-looking little houses in interminable rows; the England of coal and chemicals; of cotton, glass, and iron.

Yet how difficult it is to kill an English field, to stamp out the English grass, and to deform an English lane! Even



11 THE ROWS, CHESTER



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here, within sixteen miles of the two great giants of the north, men were raking hay in a field within a gunshot of factory chimneys.

With the beautiful Old England that I love so fresh in mind, I stood ready to be horrified by the Black Belt; yet strangely, I stood impressed and thrilled by the grim power of these ugly chimneys rising in groups, by the black huddle of factories, and the still, silent wheels at pit-mouth and the drifting haze of smoke.

At Warrington I heard the clap-clop of clogs; at Warrington I saw mill girls with shawls over their heads; at Warrington I smelt for the first time the characteristic aroma which permeates the industrial towns and villages of Lancashire—fried fish and chips.

Mill towns look grandly impressive from a hill, but when you dive into their streets the stark ugliness of the long, barracky, prison-like houses, run up so quickly to serve the servants of the machines, gives you an ache. The only consolation is that these monster towns and cities of the north of England are a mere speck in the amazing greenness of England: their inhabitants can be lost in green fields and woodland within a few minutes. London is much more distant from a real wood than Warrington.

On Sundays, in all the grey villages of Lancashire, the miners sit on their haunches against the walls, their hands between their knees. They are the only Englishmen who squat like Arabs. In the centre of nearly every group is a white whippet on a lead. The men sit and smoke, regarding the highway with a certain bright expectation.

I saw with great interest a signpost marked 'Wigan'. Who could resist a glimpse of Wigan?

§ 3

Wigan, were it not inhabited by a race of sturdy and rather tough Lancashire folk, would be the most self-conscious town in England. For years it has suffered from

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a joke. The words 'Wigan Pier' spoken by a comedian on a music-hall stage are sufficient to make an audience howl with laughter, and the ease with which the name works on the sensibilities of an audience is probably, in some measure, responsible for the great success of this joke.

Wigan, to millions of people who have never seen and never will see the town, represents the apex of the world's pyramid of gloom. So serious has the Wigan joke become that the go-ahead Corporation, who are full of local pride, take what steps they can to counteract it; but the silly old joke goes on! Certain Wigonians of high commercial standing believe that this joke delays the prosperity of Wigan, which not only affords rich sites for new factories, but also offers all the necessary conditions for manufacture, such as good transport, labour, and coal, so to speak, laid on in normal times.

Now, I had been in Wigan just ten minutes when I saw that there is no joke! Wigan is a spa compared with towns like Wednesbury, in the Black Country, and with certain of the Staffordshire pottery towns. I admit frankly that I, too, shared the common idea of Wigan. I admit that I came here to write an impression of unrelieved gloom—of dreary streets and stagnant canals and white-faced Wigonians dragging their weary steps along dull streets haunted by the horror of the place in which they are condemned to live.

This is nonsense. I would not mind spending a holiday in Wigan—a short one.

'This town has been badly libelled,' I said to a man who was standing in the main street.

'I'm reet glad to hear thee say that!' he cried warmly. 'I've lived in Wigan all my life, and wish for no better town'.

He beamed on me. He offered to show me the chief glories of Wigan. I told him that I wanted to find them for myself. Still he beamed on me! They all do this in Wigan if you go up and say frankly that the town has a certain attraction.

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Wigan's swift reaction to praise is rather pathetic.

Now, when you enter Wigan expecting the worst, it is surprising to find a place which still bears all the signs of an old-fashioned country town. Its wide main street meanders down a hill in a casual, leisurely way. Along this street are many modern half-timbered buildings. The Corporation of Wigan has made a rule that buildings on the main streets must be rebuilt in the Tudor style, so that in twenty years or so there will not be a more original or better-looking manufacturing town in the north of England.

During an hour's walk round Wigan I discovered many things. Wigan was made by the Romans. They called it Coccium, which, I think, is a much funnier name. Perhaps the Legions went into fits of laughter when any one said 'Coccium' in Roman Britain! All that remains of Coccium is a Roman altar, which I found built into the north window bay of the tower of the fine but much-restored fourteenth-century church.

King Arthur knew Wigan! It is famed as the scene of some of his most glorious exploits.

Beyond the Market Square I entered a park of about thirty acres. In it were Italian gardens and an ornamental lake. In slandered Wigan I found one of the few good war memorials I have seen in England, and also the largest open market-place outside Nottingham.

But no one could tell me the meaning of the word Wigan. So I went to the Town Clerk.

'The derivation is obscure,' he said. 'It is Saxon, of course, for we are very old. The Wigan motto is "Ancient and Loyal", you know. I believe that the word Wigan means "the rowan trees near the Church".'

'And this,' I said, 'is the name that rocks a thousand stalls?'

'Yes,' he replied, 'the Wigan joke has gone too far. It is surprising what a joke can do to a town. It can spread an entirely false idea. Now just let me take you to the outskirts of Wigan, and you will agree that few manufacturing towns are surrounded by such rustic scenery. . . .'

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We went round Wigan. Before we had left the town we smelt hay. Wigan is surrounded by fields which rise on the north towards Duxberry Hall, the only American pilgrimage in this part of the world, where the doughty Miles Standish was probably born. On the main road we came to the scene of Wigan's most cherished legend: a rough stone cross.

'That,' explained the Town Clerk, 'is Mabs Cross. It is mentioned in Walter Scott's *The Betrothed*. The story is that while Sir William Bradshaigh, a knight of Wigan, was away on the Crusades his wife Mabel, believing him to have been killed, married a Welsh knight. Sir William came home suddenly, discovered what had happened, and killed the Welsh knight, for which he was outlawed for one year. His wife Mabel was publicly shamed. Her confessor imposed this penalty: that once every week she must walk, bare-legged and barefoot to Mabs Cross. I believe it all ended happily, and that husband and wife came together again!'

Within five minutes of notorious Wigan we were in the depth of the country. On either side were fields in which men were making hay; old bridges spanned streams; there were high hedges, delicious little woods, and valleys.

'This is all Wigan!' said the Town Clerk with a smile.

This town is interesting as a perfect example of a busy industrial town with a fine record in pre-industrial England. Wigan is not a mushroom town that grew up overnight on a coal-field. It has history, and behind it the tradition of centuries of loyalty to the Crown.

Henry I incorporated the town in 1100. A specimen of the twelfth-century seal is still in existence. During the Civil Wars Cromwell pursued the retreating Royalist army through the streets of Wigan, and in 1651 the Earl of Derby suffered a defeat at the 'Battle of Wigan Lane' which cost him his head. When the Mayor of Wigan goes out in State a sword is borne before him which was given to the town in 1660 by Charles II in special token of his favour for the loyalty of Wigan at the Restoration.

That was the closing event in Wigan's pre-industrial

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history. Then came King Coal in the nineteenth century, and Wigan began a new life.

§ 4

I joined the Windermere queue at Lancaster, and hoped for the best. Every one in the north of England seemed at this moment to have decided to visit what the guide-books call, so inanely, 'the land of the Lake Poets'.

In front of me was a heavy forty-five horse-power touring car containing a rigid old man in a young Stetson; in front of him was a dashing two-seater driven by a woman; in front of her was a closed limousine full of American tourists; in front of them was a family in a Ford; in front of that was a Rolls-Royce, and leading the procession was a hatless young obstructionist lying full length in a fifteen horse-power scarlet bath with aluminium fittings and an exhaust pipe like a stove-pipe.

Behind me the queue lengthened car after car, my immediate neighbour a neat saloon in the fair but reckless hands of a beautiful maiden, who, by edging in and nosing my suit-cases, seemed to be doing all she could to kill her father and mother. Had she been her brother I would have been rude to him!

So we sped lakewards. How sweet the solitudes will be to-night, I thought, as I kept my eye on the packed highway! Those lines written by Lakeland's chief historic character came most opportunely to mind:

*These tourists, heavens preserve us! needs must live
A profitable life: some glance along
Rapid and gay, as if the earth were air,
And they were butterflies to wheel about
Long as the summer lasted. . . .*

This is a remarkable prophecy. One might think that gentle Wordsworth, writing long before the first motor-car, had been granted a vision of the main Windermere road in 1926!

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And now all the beauty of the day is gathered, as by the hand of God, in the west. The sun is setting behind the hills. Through my window I see a great sheet of water that within the last twenty minutes has lost all colour. The blue of Windermere has been drained away drop by drop as the blue has been drawn from the sky; it is now silver; the white swans are black against this glittering metallic sheet. The swallows fly high in wide circles; a jet-black boat moves on the placid surface of the lake, two silver lines widening from the stern. The sun, lost in a rich smouldering bank of cloud, drops minute by minute towards the crest of the hills. In the stillness sounds carry far . . . such sounds!

Two charabancs prepare to return to Kendal. A straggling band of Lancashire men in their Sunday clothes comes slowly along by the lake-side playing a concertina. Girls in summer dresses with blue string bags over their cropped hair, and young men whose bared necks rise from tennis shirts, pass down the hill singing; motor-cars hoot at the hairpin bend, and in the next room to mine a gramophone says that there will be tea for two and two for tea, a boy for you and a girl for me. . . .

With shattering indifference to man, the black and silver nocturne of evening is played to the end. The sun goes. Darkness spreads between the trees. A deep grape-blue mist hangs over the woods; a fish jumps in the lake, making a black pool for a second in the still, silver water.

'Oh, say,' a voice has just cried beneath my window, 'if this isn't too poifect . . . why, it's just like one of his sonnnts!'

(Shall I throw a boot or just go on smiling? A grave temptation.)

Slowly—and so gradually that it is almost imperceptible—comes that moment when a man watching the lovely pageant of light and half-light, can say that night has come. Over the dark hills and the pale waters is an unearthly radiance which is not that of either sun or moon, but something, it seems, like the cold light which washes the

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mountains of dead moons. Above the hills burns the first small star. . . .

No matter what opinion you may hold of Wordsworth as a poet, you must recognize him as a great, but unconscious, publicity agent. The solitudes which he loved are now well populated. Americans who come here in enthusiastic waves stand reverently before his cottage in Grasmere. The hunger for a pilgrimage of any kind appears to be a deep-seated spiritual necessity with them. (I found two of them paying homage to the house in which Harriet Martineau wrote her guide to the Lakes in 1855!)

One of England's great sights is that of a New York business man, determined to get every cent's value from his tour, trying to work up enthusiasm for Wordsworth in the little churchyard at Grasmere:

*A Rock there is whose homely front
The passing traveller slights;
Ye there the glow-worms bang their lamps,
Like stars at various heights;
And one coy primrose to the rock
The vernal breeze invites . . .*

'Gee, that's great stuff! Say, listen, while I read it again. . . .'

The population of Lakeland may be divided into two groups—those who stay on the water level, sail in boats, seek suicide in their cars on the narrow roads and drink coffee in evening-dress after dinner on neat lawns at the lake-side; and those who, rising early, put on khaki shorts, grasp stout sticks, and leave the ground level before the first group have had their morning tea.

These picturesque ones are, to my mind, the only people who get the true value from the Lakes. Had I more time I would buy a Scout's outfit and join them; for the only way to enjoy this country is to climb away from the crowds and seek solitude in the bosky silence of woods or on the craggy heights of fells. I like to see the real Lakelanders returning

covered in dust and victory as the shades of night are falling fast. Among them are men who would not say 'thank you' for Switzerland; and there are brown-faced, muscular girls in breeches and stockings who carry rucksacks on their backs and grasp stout ash-sticks. (I wish some one would design a pair of breeches which girls could wear without looking quaint or regrettable.) Then there are bug-hunters of all types. They chase the butterfly by day and the moth by night. There are geologists. There are, of course, ambitious maidens who steal off with camp-stool and drawing-board to transfer some part or portion of the landscape to drawing-room walls in Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, and even, so experience warns a man, Kensington.

I will not dare to compare the soft beauty of Windermere with the majesty of Derwentwater or the grand solitude of Ullswater, or the high serenity of Thirlmere and Coniston. If I have any preference it is for the smallest of them all: little Rydal Water, which is three-quarters of a mile long and, beside these watery giants, is just a spoonful of blue in a cup of green hills. Rydal Water is a magic, satisfying lakelet—a little looking-glass in which the woody heights, by which it is hemmed, lie as in a mirror.

I saw it first at night. It was a clear, moonlit night, with no breath of wind among the trees. In the middle of the little lake, round and golden as a guinea, lay the moon. Sights such as this, hiding round a corner, lurking behind trees and suddenly revealed, pull a man up sharply and fling him on his knees. Had Rydal Water been in Cornwall or in Wales nothing could have disconnected it from the Excalibur legend; and most men would have believed it, for this is a mystic mere. . . .

As I looked, a water-fowl, surprised among the dark reeds, flew noiselessly over the lake in the night, its little feet just tearing a thin silver line in the water. The moon danced up and down once or twice; then the lake composed itself, and went on dreaming.

This story has no right in this book, and I apologize for writing it. It happened like this.

I was finding my way out of Carlisle with the intention of crossing the Roman Wall that runs across England from Solway Firth to the Tyne, when I saw a signpost: 'To Gretna Green 10 miles.' I pulled up sharply:

'This,' I said, 'is where I go right off the rails. I *must* see Gretna Green! I'll take a holiday and—go to Scotland!'

How could I neglect to visit the scene of so much folly? In a few minutes I had left England behind me and was spinning along in a country which looked exactly like it, but was not. I had crossed the Border!

Scotland does not begin to get 'bonny' just here, but it was stimulating to realize that we were in the land of red whiskers and freckled maids, of brown trout streams, of purple moors, of great mountains, which, even in fair weather, wear white caps of cloud. At the cottage doors clustered brawny sandy-haired boys (who some day, of course, go south) and little girls who will grow up and speak the most delicious English in the world.

The road runs straight from Carlisle to Gretna, as if anxious to cut off all the corners and give a sporting finish to the race. At the end of this road—and in the heart of a great crowd—I found Gretna Green.

The blacksmith's shop stands facing the high road: a long, one-story building, half dwelling-house, half smithy. This is the building which rose to fame in 1754 when Lord Hardwicke's Act put a stop to the scandal of secret marriages in England. Before this Act became law secret weddings were held in many places in London, notably the Fleet Prison, 'Parson Keith's Chapel' in Mayfair, now pulled down (the memory lives, however, in the names East and West Chapel Streets, west of Shepherd's Market, Piccadilly), and in the Savoy, where a notorious clergyman,

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Dr. John Wilkinson, used to advertise boldly: 'Marriages performed with the utmost privacy, secrecy, decency, and regularity. There are five private ways by land to this chapel, and two by water'!

Scotland was not affected by the Act of 1754, with the result that Gretna, the first village over the Border, began to hear with financial satisfaction the clatter of a flying coach and four along the Carlisle road, and occasionally the report of a pistol as a defiant lover took a pot-shot at the pursuing coach horses. I seem to remember that one Archbishop of Canterbury, three Lord Chancellors, and one Privy Seal were married over the anvil at Gretna. . . .

A large crowd stood before the smithy. Half were Americans, the other half tourists from over the Border. The smithy looked to me the most practical proposition I have seen for many a day; its front was plastered with notices to the effect that within was a museum, that the famous 'marriage room' was on view, that post cards were obtainable! (I might have known that Gretna Green would by now be thoroughly sophisticated!) The air was sweet with the sound of a pleasant Scotswoman collecting the gate money. I banged down my saxepe and went in through the turnstile.

In the old and now disused smithy—who with an ounce of commercial acumen would waste this forge on horses?—I wandered round with the crowd, gazing at a rather dull little museum: the State coach used by Queen Caroline; anvils, the old marriage register, two rather appropriate 'repentance stools' from the 'auld kirk', and tall stove-pipe hats worn by various Gretna 'priests'.

I went out and talked to the caretaker, who was selling to a tourist a replica of a Gretna marriage certificate.

'You still have marriages here?' I asked.

'Oh, aye,' said the caretaker. 'Twenty-two this year!'

She pointed to a bundle of papers on a shelf. They were the certificates.

'Who performs the ceremony?'

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'Weel, some bodies ask for the blacksmith, Mr. Graham, but generally my husband is the "priest".'

I entered an inner room and had a chat with 'the priest'. This word means nothing. Marriage in Scotland is regular or irregular, both equally valid. If two people affirm their willingness to marry before witnesses, I imagine they can be married in the street.

'Will you marry me?' I asked the priest.

He looked interested:

'Aye,' he said solemnly, 'that I will if ye hae lived twanty-wan days in Sco'land.'

I appeared crestfallen. He told me that the ceremony is simple.

'I just say to the mon: "Dae ye tak' this wumman tae be your wedded wife?" and he says, "I wull," and then I turn to the gurrl and say: "Dae ye tak' this mon tae be your wedded husband?" and when she says "I wull" they sign the paper and I sign the paper and the twa witnesses sign the paper and they're lawfu' spouses according to the laws o' Scotland. That's a' there is tae it!'

'Is it really legal?'

'Oh, aye!'

I told him that I would consider it.

I learned that the old Gretna Green chase is not yet dead. Quite recently the priest was awakened in the middle of the night by an agitated mother (in the old days it was always the father), who demanded to know if her daughter had made a runaway marriage:

'Puir body, she was a wee bit previous, for they came the verra next day! . . .'

I found it difficult to feel romantic about Gretna. I suppose its chief atmosphere has always been commercial. Joseph Paisley, the old high priest of the Gretna marriage business, had a secret code with the postilions in order to find out what his clients were likely to be worth to him. They say he often made one hundred pounds a week.

The picture of a simple-minded old blacksmith joining

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two star-crossed lovers in wedlock is not historically correct!

I took the Carlisle road again, that road on which long ago Lord Westmorland, eloping with Miss Child, of Child's Bank, gained Gretna by shooting the leading horse of his father-in-law's team as its straining head drew level with the coach window.

There is, however, something about Gretna that makes one sympathize with the apoplectic fathers in the coach behind.