

IN SEARCH OF ENGLAND

should see, as they stand quietly hand in hand. It was very dark. I lit a match and the light flickered a moment on a marble man in armour and a marble woman sleeping together side by side: Baron Harington, who died in 1417, and his lady. Over these two is a gracious peace that confounds the cynic:

'Till death us do part,' I whispered as the match went out.

But in the last flicker of it I saw that Mr. and Mrs. were standing close together, their little fingers crooked, looking not at the baron and his lady but at one another; and in a most self-confident way.

So, feeling a thousand years old, rather sad, and very lonely, I said good night, and walked back to the inn, where I drank a large tankard of beer while a retriever came slowly out of the shadow and placed a black satin head on my knee.

TRAVELLING BEITAIN.

HARDY WEEK 2. (SOUTH-WEST)

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CHAPTER SIX

Describes Glastonbury and the Holy Thorn. I sink into Bath, take the waters, hunt for Mr. Pickwick, and see ships riding at anchor in the streets of Bristol

§ 1

THE most conspicuous object in the Vale of Avalon is a high, rounded hill, crowned with a lonely tower, rising beyond the ruins of Glastonbury. This hill is known as Glastonbury Tor, and the building is all that remains of the old pilgrimage chapel of St. Michael.

In the early morning before the sun is strong, a man standing on this hill looks down, not upon the neat flat pasture lands of the Vale of Avalon, but upon Avalon, an island again, rising from a steaming sea of mist. In summer the mist rises from the fields as if it were the ghost of that sea which covered the valley in the age of legend. In the cold wind that runs before the dawn a man looks down upon this faint, moving veil, watches it writhe in spectral billows over the land, steaming upward in faint lines in the high places and so exposing the darker objects beneath which, in this hushed hour, seem almost like the bones of heroes, or the hulls of legendary barges sunk in some old poem.

It was over this sea to Avalon there moved that 'dusky barge, dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern', in which the hooded queens bore the dying Arthur, his scabbard empty of Excalibur. As the low mists move, curling upwards from the land, the lowing of cattle in the fields below rises starkly in the silence as though it might be the wailing that died upon this mere so long ago; as though in the first hour of a summer's day the Isle of Avalon remembers Arthur.

The sun shines, the mists go, and the green fields are smiling to the sky-line.

I am writing in the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey.

A hot afternoon is almost over. There is in the air that summer stillness like the peace of a cloister, in which—so they say in Glastonbury—the scent of mysterious incense sometimes drifts over walls to astonish men working in their gardens. I can, however, smell only the incense of new-cut grass.

An hour ago I stood on the summit of the Tor above Glastonbury in the shadow of the tower of the pilgrims, chapel of St. Michael, now a patched ruin. When I looked east I gazed down at the Isle of Avalon; when I looked west I saw lying in a heat haze the isle of Athelney. These 'islands' are now hills rising from flat fields over which in the age of myth ran wide lagoons; and I thought that if a man were looking for the roots of England, this is the place to which he would come: in Avalon the roots of the Church; in Athelney the roots of the State.

Now I sit in the ruins of Glastonbury. Near me at the east end of St. Mary's Chapel archaeologists are digging. They have just unearthed the yellow arm bone of a man which lies in the sunlight on a mound of soft brown soil. I wonder whether it is the arm of saint, abbot, or king; not that it matters much now. A man in spectacles is examining it expertly while the red face of the labourer who unearthed it gazes up earnestly over the parados of the trench, wondering if it is a treasure or a piece of rubbish.

It is so quiet here. The shadows of the yews lie in long pencils over the smooth grass, but—stay—it is not so smooth! There are grassy dips and terraces where once ran altar steps. From tree to tree is a chain of bird-song. Rising sheer from the grass, appalling in its appealing starkness, is the great arch of the central tower of Glastonbury Abbey, the two piers rising into the air, but not to meet; there is blue sky between, and on the high cleft towers grass is growing. This with a few tumbled walls and the beautiful

St. Mary's Chapel represent all that remains of the once mighty Abbey, the elder brother of Westminster and the birthplace of Christianity in England.

It is, perhaps, not strange that all places which have meant much to Man are filled with an uncanny atmosphere, as if something were still happening there secretly; as if filled with a hidden life. Glastonbury is like that. A band of tourists, who came in laughing and joking, move among the ruins, puzzled and ill at ease. Glastonbury has stilled their laughter. I hear the click and thrust of the labourer's spade in the earth, and it seems to me as each spadeful of Glastonbury soil falls on the mound that a spadeful of English history is stirred; in the brown dust that flies over the trench I seem to see the faces of anchorites, saints, priests, and kings; and in this pregnant dust of Avalon is drawn two of the greatest epics that have come from the English mind: one is of the Holy Grail and the other of a wounded king.

The Church of England has owned Glastonbury since 1907, and one must, at least, congratulate it on mowing the grass. But how is it possible that the Church has neglected for nineteen years to restore St. Mary's Chapel, the site of the first church built by British Christians, and probably the first above-ground church in the world. This lovely ruin, whose four walls stand, whose magnificent Norman archways are almost perfect, could in a few months be made fit for public worship. What queer lack of imagination stands in the way?

And why, I wonder, is there no intelligent guide to satisfy the bewildered curiosity of the people from many countries who every day roam these ruins, drawn to them by the greatness of the name of Glastonbury? The Church could surely arrange that at least one guide should be available to tell people that this quiet field is the only spot in England linked by legend with a man who knew Jesus Christ. For centuries men believed that in A.D. 61 St. Philip sent Joseph of Arimathaea, whose hands had laid

Christ in the tomb, to preach the Gospel in England. He is said, according to the later legend, to have come with a band of missionaries bearing the Chalice of the Last Supper, which he had begged of Pilate. This Chalice had held the Sacred Blood from the Cross. Here in this English meadow Joseph of Arimathaea is said to have built England's first church of plaited oziars.

When the missionaries crossed Weary-all Hill ('weary-all' with the journey), Joseph, so the famous old story goes, planted his staff in the earth. It took root and grew into the famous Glastonbury Thorn.

That belief founded the international fame of Glastonbury: for centuries it was an English Jerusalem, one of the holiest places on earth. Men came from the ends of the world to pluck a sprig of the Holy Thorn in order that it might be buried with them. Saints were gathered to Glastonbury to lie in its earth. The bones of Arthur and Guinevere are said to have been buried beneath the high altar. Behind the ruined abbey, at the foot of the Tor, is the mineral spring which was one of the wonders of the world. Its waters, heavily impregnated with iron, colour the earth, and everything they touch a rusty red; and this is the place to which the medieval pilgrim knelt trembling and crying—as I have seen pilgrims tremble and cry in Jerusalem—believing that here was buried the Holy Grail.

As I was walking over the grass of the choir, I came to a railed-off plot of turf which marks the high altar of Glastonbury. A man was walking across it behind a motor lawn mower! He told me that when automatic script was received in 1921, directing people to dig in a certain part of the ruins, he was one of the workers who found the hitherto unknown portions of the abbey indicated in the supposed spirit communication.

'Yes, sir,' he said, 'heaps of people say they see ghosts here, but I can't say that I have.'

He took a turn over the high altar and came back.

'See that bush? That's the Holy Thorn! The original

one was hacked down by a Puritan who got a splinter in his eye from it and died. There are several offshoots round Glastonbury, and you'd be surprised at the number of slips we send away. One is going to a big church they are building in New York. We sent one to America not long ago for the tomb of President Wilson.'

The grass has come back to the altar of Glastonbury, but the Holy Thorn still lives!

Now the sun is setting, and the diggers are packing up. The arm bone has been taken away. . . .

'I have been to Glastonbury!'

Six hundred years ago a man writing this would remember the greatest experience of his life. He would remember the greatest church outside Rome, the sound of its bells, the smoke of its incense, the sound of perpetual prayer, the gilded shrine, the horde of pilgrims at the doors—saints in ecstasy, sinners in tears; and in every man's mind faith in the marvellous story that had grown up round a reed hut in the Isle of Avalon.

'I have been to Glastonbury!'

Now a man sitting on a carved stone in a meadow hears the robin chant evensong, watches the thrush hunt his supper in the grass of the nave. From the site of chantry and chapel the blackbird flies with a silver chink of alarm, and from the high altar of Glastonbury comes the sound of a man mowing grass. . . .

The labourer has climbed from the trench. He shoulders his spade and walks heavily away past the ruin that stands where England heard for the first time the greatest story in the world.

I entered Wells Cathedral just before noon. The cream-coloured church seemed empty. When I came to the north transept I saw a crowd whispering, standing about, sitting on stone seats, leaning against pillars and tombs, each

member of it looking up anxiously at the west wall. There were charabanc parties, American families, market women, farmers and their wives, and young men and young women in cycling clothes.

'What are they doing?' I asked a verger.

'Waiting to see the clock strike twelve!' he replied.

Then I remembered that in Wells Cathedral is one of the most exciting clocks in England; in fact, with the exception of the clock in Strasburg Cathedral, probably one of the most exciting clocks in the world. It is six hundred years old, and it was invented by a monk of Glastonbury called Peter Lightfoot. At first sight Brother Lightfoot's clock looks like man's first attempt at an automatic calculating machine. The dial, which is six feet six inches in diameter, is a mass of lines and numbers. A large outer circle is divided into the twenty-four hours of the day; an inner circle shows the minutes. Round the hour circle moves a big slow star; round the inner circle a quick smaller star. Above the dial is a black cave in which things happen when the hour strikes—but I will tell you about that in its place.

In addition to telling the time, Brother Lightfoot's marvellous clock tells you the phases of the moon and the position of the planets. Beneath a gold moon is written in Latin, 'Phoebe ever wanders'; and as I tried to puzzle out all the information which Peter has crammed into his clock the silly thought came into my head that perhaps he referred to the moon, and—obliquely—to a woman. Who knows? Perhaps some unknown Phoebe wandering, sent him into a monastery, and gave the world this clock? (The influence of jilting on art and invention has yet to be written.) On the other hand, Peter may have been a solemn old medieval professor, poring over charts, drawing diagrams on the refectory table, the despair of the abbot and the butt of less congested minds. . . .

Ah; a rustle goes round the crowd! The minute star slides on to noon.

To the left of the clock dial, high up on the west wall, sits a smug little wooden man in the costume of Charles I's time. His name, is I believe, Jack Blandiver. He sits with his heels against two bells. . . .

Noon!

Jack Blandiver kicks out his wooden leg and brings his heel back against a bell; then the other one. He does this eight times. The clock dial, however, claims the attention of the crowd! From it comes a whirring sound. Out of the black cave above the dial appear four mounted knights: two gallop round to the left, two to the right; and at every revolution one of them is knocked back on his horse's crupper by the sword of an adversary. The tournament spins round to a standstill: the hourly fight in Wells Cathedral is over: the crowd is smiling with childish delight—the same smile that has gone round the north transept for something like six hundred years.

Just as the theatre was born in a church, the cabaret-show seems to have been born in a church clock. Bravo, Brother Lightfoot!

What a thrill there is in Wells. How can I describe to you the whisper of the water that runs in gutters, musically tinkling past the steps of old houses? In spite of the big charabancs that pile up in the square, it seems that the sound of coach-wheels has not quite died away on the London road. Wells is perfect. It is genuinely medieval, with no self-consciousness, and no abasement to the tourist. Behind the stout wall which runs round the cathedral is something you will see nowhere else in England: an inhabited medieval castle, complete with fortifications and moat. In this marvellous place lives the Bishop of Wells.

I sat on the grass beside the moat watching his lordship's ducks and swans. They have hatched the most delightful fluffy families. I saw a swan swim up and ring the bell of the gatehouse! I rubbed my eyes. Was this a fairy-tale? I looked at the white bird, half expecting that he might turn into a prince in white satin breeches. He did it again!

He took up a string that lay in the water and pulled it. A bell beneath the window of the gatehouse tinkled, the window opened, a crust of bread flew through the air and hit him on the head; he worried it under water, summoned his family to him, rang the bell again, and more food arrived!

I walked over the drawbridge and took the brass knocker in my hand. A small postern opened.

'Whenever the swans are hungry, they ring the bell!' explained a girl. 'We never disappoint them. We keep a tray of food always ready to throw out when they ask for it. They teach the cygnets to ring too! The ducks do it sometimes, but not so often as the swans. . . .'

I returned to the grass of the moat, watching the birds ring for their food. The cathedral bells chimed a quarter. The sun was mellow over old walls. I could see the fortifications of the Bishop's palace bending round to bastions fitted with sentry walks and slits for bowmen. What a place to live in.

'The mutton was tough,' said a voice. I looked up and saw a man.

'Yes,' replied a pretty girl, 'but the peas were simply delicious.'

They gazed at the moat, the drawbridge, and the swans; they turned and saw—perhaps—the central tower of Wells standing up above elm trees and the high wall, a big white cloud poised like a nimbus behind it.

'I never did think much of Cheddar cheese,' said the man.

'I adore Gruyère,' said the girl softly.

A piece of bread shot through the air and landed on the grey fluff of a cygnet's back.

What a place to dream in is Wells when the sun soaks down through the trees and the lichen on my lord's battlements shines like new gold. The chapter-house of Wells, that lovely round room, approached by the most alluring flight of steps I have ever seen, justifies a pilgrimage. . . .

'Those prunes,' said a departing voice, 'we had in Bath were the best I've ever tasted.'

Two more people came and stood above me, a man and a girl.

'Oh,' she said, 'how adorable! Just look at those little windows over the moat! Don't you wish you were Peleas, dear, and that I was Melisande at the window, letting down my hair to you?'

'Don't be silly!' he said. 'How could you?'

She shook a cropped head.

'How unromantic you are,' she sighed.

They walked slowly under the trees arm in arm. . . .

The church clock struck the quarter, the half-hour, the three-quarters, the hour. It seemed to me, as I sat there wrapped in contentment, that the little mother moorhen who was taking four black chicks for their first swim was one of the most important people in the world.

§ 4

I have decided that when I grow old, with or without gout, sciatika, rheumatism, or lumbago, I will retire on Bath with an ebony cane and a monocle. I like Bath: it has quality. I like Bath buns, Bath Olivers, Bath chaps, Bath brick, and Bath stone (which to my London eyes is the beautiful sister of Portland stone), and few sights are more stimulating to relaxed nerves than to sit on the hotel terrace opposite the Pump Room and watch the Bath chairs dash past.

We were often told in the Army that the speed of a squadron was the speed of its slowest horse; similarly the speed of Bath is that of its slowest chair. Some months ago the local paper reported that a woman was run over by a Bath chair. I am too tired and lazy to look up the files to find out details, but from my slight knowledge of Bath I imagine that the injured person and the pusher of the chair were probably sleep-walking at the time of the collision. That is the great danger here. As long as you can keep

awake you may survive. When anybody yawns on the top of Combe Down the yawn goes right round Bath.

If you are a bad sleeper, as I am, you will know how gracious this place is. A delicious numbness drenches me; an adorable drowsiness sits on top of my head. I go to sleep at ten without counting one sheep, and I wake up at seven, feeling almost as tired, to swim for twenty minutes in a solution of warm pea-soup—only it tastes much nicer. Old men have told me that they attribute their agility, and their ability to drink half a bottle of port every night, to the fact that they, when young, did eagerly frequent these swimming baths so full of radium which generous Nature shoots piping hot into Bath through a deep rift in the surface of the earth.

Ohaaaah! Forgive my yawn! It is only five past nine!

I once heard a bright young man say at a party that living in Bath was rather like sitting in the lap of a dear old lady. Nobody laughed, because it is true. Bath is the dear old lady of Somerset: grey-haired, mittened, smelling faintly of lavender; one of those old ladies who have outlived a much-discussed past, and are now as obviously respectable as only old ladies with crowded pasts can be. She nurses you with a shrewd twinkle in which you detect experience mellowed by age. You look at her lovingly, wondering how she could ever have been wicked; wishing that she could grow young again for one wild evening and show you! That might wake you up!

The crowds in Bath move slowly. Noises here are louder than anywhere else on earth. A motor-cycle coming up Stall Street sounds like a giant rattling Cleopatra's Needle along area railings vast as oak trees. Bath was made for chairs. Sedan and the other kind. Anything else on wheels is a rude invasion. One of the most soothing sights in England is the vista through the black Georgian pillars in Stall Street—the Pump Room to the right, the lovely abbey in the background, the foreground occupied by the Bath chairmen in various peaceful attitudes.

On wet days the chairmen sleep inside their chairs with the little doors closed, sitting up behind glass panels like mummies in their sarcophagi; on fine days they sleep outside them.

'Your profession is not an exciting one?' I suggested to a veteran chairman.

He considered for some time and replied:

'No.'

'I can't think how all you make a living out of Bath chairs.'

'We don't. We do a little carpet-beating now and then and odd jobs. It isn't much of a life. Inside the Pump Room you can see pictures of Bath in the old days. In those times people didn't mind paying for two men to carry them about in a Sedan chair, but now— Excuse me, sir! . . . Yes, mum, I'm free! Half-past four, mum, to go round Victoria Park! Oh, yes, the step's low and I go steady! Thank you, mum. . . . That, sir, is my first job to-day!'

O gracious Old Lady of Somerset, how I love to be nursed at your once-naughty knee! . . .

I just half close my eyes and . . . those two old men talking above the pale-green water of the great Roman bath! One is a general, the other a judge. Why are they wearing togas? Why are their feet in white-laced boots? It is, of course, because I have half-closed my eyes; and when you do this in Bath you see ghosts! Look how the tumbled pillars of the Roman bath build themselves up, how the dusty tesserae shine again with colour and form a pattern. The Roman bath is alive; old General X and Sir Archibald Y are standing on a polished pavement on which Diana runs with her hounds in leash. Do they know that they are wearing togas? Ought I to tell them?

But is it General X? No, he is General Caius Sciaticus of the Valens Victrix. Is it Sir Archibald Y? No; he is Marcus Rheumaticus of Londinium. (Funny nightmare place, Bath!)

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'What a climate,' says General Sciaticus. 'By Jove, sir, what a damnable climate! It gets me in the knees. . . . By the way, is it true that Boadicea's great-grandson has gone Red?'

'He's a firebrand. It runs in the family, you know. I had to crucify his uncle at Camulodunum last year. Perhaps you heard about it?'

'A terrible country, but we're civilizing them by degrees. How's your rheumatism this year? Has it ever struck you that this hot water was placed here by Providence to hold the Empire together? If there was no place in Britain in which one could feel warm, what would one do? By Jove, that's a pretty woman, the one with the yellow hair.'

'Yes, the wife of Dion Neurasthenes, the Greek financier. Just travelling. Have you heard her speak? A pretty accent. Listen. . . .'

'Say, now, don't tell me that all this hot water comes right up out of the earth like this! Well, you certainly do surprise me. It's the only centrally heated spot I've struck in this little cold island. . . . Oh, I'd love to; I haven't been warm since I left Athens. And the draughts! Aquae Sulis is sure the draughtiest spot on earth. . . .'

I open my eyes and see that General X and Sir Archibald are properly dressed again, and Mrs. Boston certainly has lovely yellow hair.

In the evening you can walk through the splendid streets of Bath—magnificent streets lined with Georgian houses standing stiff as lackeys behind pillared porticoes; elegant, formal homes. There is the Circus, the Crescent; there is Pulteney Bridge—England's Ponte Vecchio—there are lovely Georgian gateways, and little queer streets round whose corners it seems you just miss the flash of a red-heeled shoe, the twinkle of feet beneath brocade, the sound of a rather naughty little laugh.

It is very difficult, if you walk in Bath at night, not to find yourself suddenly under the rather contemptuous scrutiny of a man with a double chin and a heavy nose,

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whose three-cornered hat shades eyes that lie in fleshy bags—Beau Nash!

'Sir,' says this ghost, 'I would inform you that a gentleman of fashion carries a cane. I am glad to observe that you are not wearing a sword. Your hat is, sir, like a scullion's, and your legs are encased in two inelegant tubes of cloth for which, sir, I can find no name. You are, perhaps, a foreigner?'

'No, Beau, I come from London.'

Whereupon the ghost of Beau Nash, uttering an incredulous cry, vanishes; the two eyes go last, still fixed in a look of horror on your trousers.

So you return through haunted streets to the quiet hotel, where two old men, at war with lumbago, sit in the lounge, having loyally obeyed their doctors all day. The clock strikes ten. The devil enters into them. Their wives have retired to bed; no one will know. They call the waiter, and whisper wickedly:

'Two double whiskies!'

I think this is Bath's greatest sin! Outside, mercifully shrouded in darkness, is the Pindaric motto writ in Greek characters above the Pump Room: 'Water is the best policy.'

Aaaaaah! How tired I am!

If I am awake to-morrow I am going to take the cure. I am going to have a mineral bath: I am going to sip the waters.

Aaah! Forgive me. . . .

Good night!

§ 5

I have been reading with avidity the medical pamphlets provided free in Bath, and I feel that my arteries become harder and harder every minute. I wonder whether the ache in my left eye is paraplegia. I have no idea what this is, but when I whisper the word something ominous seems in mid-air with bared claws. It is hardly possible that I

shall escape from oxularia. (Obesity does not worry me.) Intestinal stasis? Well, perhaps! Chronic vesical catarrh? I wonder? As I glance down the long list of diseases cured at Bath—feeling a sharp twinge of fibrocitis, a swift jab of lithiasis, and an alarming touch of rhinitis—it is perfectly clear to me that the average human being's chance of seeing Bath more than once is about a hundred to one.

So early in the morning, wrapped in a dressing-gown, I gained the lift and was carried down to the baths to begin a day's treatment, just to see what is in store for most of us. I had decided against a mud pack, because I did not like the picture in the handbook, which shows a nurse building up a big black mud pie on a patient's foot. I considered the whirling bath, the hydro-electric bath, the heat bath, the hot-air bath, the vapour bath, the aeration bath, and came to the conclusion that probably the best bath for a man with no real honest symptoms is the deep bath; the characteristic bath of Bath; the bath with historic and literary associations, because it is simply the scientific version of the treatment as practised by the Romans and by those of our eighteenth-century forefathers who drew the first gout dividends before investing them for us at thirty per cent.

A man in a white coat took me into a tiled room. Sunk in the floor was a huge bath with six steps leading down to swirling green water. The water gushed in from the spring steaming hot at a temperature of 120 degrees as it comes up from the nether regions. Cold water was added till the temperature was 100 degrees.

I walked down the steps, was buffeted by the hot stream of radium, and the man in the white coat told me to sit down, which I did trustfully: for I could see no seat in the green water, but I met it just as my chin touched the floor. So I sat there, feeling hot and apprehensive. He told me to exercise myself gently: and I could tell that he considered me a genuine patient, which made me feel quite ill.

'Which is the affected part?' he asked.

'Everywhere,' I said.

'General massage!' he cried briskly, taking up a big hose-pipe, placing the nozzle under water and shooting a strong stream of water several degrees hotter than the bath up and down my spine. This was a delicious experience. My spine purred.

In ten minutes the treatment was over.

The attendant stood at the top of the steps and received me into a hot towel. It was then that I felt my first real symptom—a sharp pain in the knee.

I went up and had a melancholy breakfast.

Now with us invalids the next event is the Pump Room.

At about eleven o'clock we drag our weary limbs to that stately Georgian building, which since 1796 has been the ever-open door to the gouty, the rheumatically, and the sciaticky. This classic apartment is built above the three hot springs—the only natural hot springs in Britain—which shoot up half a million gallons of water a day into Bath.

A girl in a cap and apron stands at a fountain which bubbles with warm water. We limp on our sticks, and she hands us each a tumblerful of this water. We limp to a Chippendale chair and began to sip it. Now Sam Weller said that it had 'a very strong flavour o' warm flat-irons'. Somebody must have dropped a dumb-bell in the source when Dickens tasted the water, for it does not taste strongly of warm flat-irons to-day. To be quite truthful, Bath water tastes just like any warm water. If you are imaginative, you can suspect a subtle after-taste of—is it warm flat-irons? It is not, however, 'very strong'.

The water affects us differently. Some of us write letters, some go to sleep, some wander round as if recreated, looking at the sedan chairs, at the statue of fat Beau Nash, at the calm both of gently steaming pea-soup known as the King's Bath, now disused, but during the eighteenth century the place where, as Christopher Anstey noted: 'Twas a glorious sight to behold the fair sex all wading with

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gentlemen up to their necks.' Round the King's Bath are rings presented by grateful bathers in token of their recovery. One bears the name of lovely Barbara, Duchess of Cleveland; one given by Thomas Delves records that he was 'By God's mercy and pumping here formerly aided'.

Everybody drinks the Bath water. We invalids do it seriously; the casual tripper does it flippantly. We limp up and put our finger half-way up the glass and whisper: 'Only eight ounces this morning!' The tripper strides up heartily and says: 'A pint of the best, please, miss!' and the maiden of the healing spring gazes over the top of his head towards the sky, where, no doubt, she sees the great god Neuritis saving up his thunderbolts!

If our joints are equal to it, we can walk gently downstairs to see the 'source', the very heart of Bath.

An attendant in the nether regions unlocks a bronze door and we walk into a wall of white steam. Our eyes become accustomed to the gloom. It is very hot. The steam condenses on our hands and on our face in a clammy sweat. We see a Roman arch and Roman steps leading down to the springs. Hot water trickles, steaming down these steps. They are stained rust-red with minerals. Beneath the arch, just out of sight, bubble the hot springs which as long as there is any record have been pumping up their daily half-million gallons of water.

Why does this hot water bubble up to Bath? The latest theory is that there is a deep crack in the crust of the earth through which volcanic gases escape. They turn into hot water as they reach Bath. The old theory that the Bath springs are composed of sea water volcanically boiled and delivered in Bath is, I understand, being gently but firmly abandoned.

However that may be, the sight of the source is most convincing. We feel, as we stand in the dark Turkish bath looking into the steaming gloom, that here is something unaccountable, something unique, something rather terrifying. It looks as though it ought to do us a lot

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of good, and, of course, it does. There are nearly two thousand years of testimony behind Bath.

Then we limp back to luncheon, choosing those dishes marked with an asterisk on the menu: 'Recommended by the Bath Medical Council for visitors taking the cure.' Hors-d'œuvres are safe, soles Colbert are safe, veal is safe, roast duck is not, mutton cutlets are not, roast beef is not, Bath chaps are all right, lobster is not, stewed fruits and Devonshire junket are heartily asterisked, so we can let ourselves all out here.

If our doctor told us to sleep in the afternoon we go upstairs to sleep, which is never difficult in Bath; if he recommended exercise we limp down to the Sydney Gardens to listen while a military band plays Gilbert and Sullivan. It is so soothing in the sun under a tree. A pretty nursemaid in a canvas chair pushes the perambulator an inch forward and an inch backward as she sits watching the circle of scarlet coats raised above a circle of geraniums exactly the same colour.

*The flowers that bloom in the spring, tra-la,
Have nothing to do with the case . . .*

How delicious! How our old brittle bones desire to get up and dance to it. We tap a toe on the grass; and it replies promptly by stabbing us with a scarlet stiletto: 'Don't be an old fool!' it says. We look at the time. Four o'clock! Time to drink the waters again. So we rise heavily and limp off in the direction of the Pump Room. . . .

Then as dusk falls . . . but I cannot write any more. The pain in my knee is much worse. I was rather foolish to take that bath.

I wonder if the cure has given me rheumatism?

§ 6

One of the greatest discoveries made by Charles Dickens was the name Pickwick. It is well known that he annexed

this name in Bath. There is a village just over the Somerset-Wiltshire border called Pickwick. I went there to see it. It is a one-street hamlet on the Bath-London road, and all the houses in this hamlet are built of stone washed an attractive khaki colour at the expense, so I am led to believe, of the lord of the manor. At the entrance to the village street stands a big sign with the name written on it in tall green letters, so that every charabanc load that passes points suddenly and says: 'Ooh! Look—just fancy—Pickwick!'

That, so it seems is as far as any one gets with Pickwick.

'Does a family named Pickwick live here?' I asked a native.

'No,' he said.

'Does the place take its name from a family that used to live here?'

'I don't know!'

'Did Charles Dickens take the name of Mr. Pickwick from this village or from a man called Pickwick?'

'I don't know,' replied my negative friend, 'but he wrote his history in the "Hare and Hounds" down the road there.'

'What history?' I asked, mercilessly.

'Why, the history of Pickwick, of course,' replied the Pickwickian.

So that was that! (I should state that the rooms round Bath in which Dickens wrote are as numerous as the beds in other parts of England in which Queen Elizabeth slept.)

There is probably no name so well known, or so well loved, in English fiction as Pickwick; he and Falstaff will never die. So I set my shoulders to investigate the origin of the name, and I discovered at length how Pickwick entered English literature.

When Dickens visited Bath the White Hart Hotel which stood on the site of the present Grand Pump Room Hotel, was owned by a man called Moses Pickwick. This name—as Sam Weller noted with some suspicion—was written up over the doors of the coaches. Moses, in addition to

his hotel, owned a profitable livery stable and ran a daily service from Bath. The name of Pickwick fell on Dickens like a ray of sunlight.

'What a name!' he thought, feeling for his note-book.

That was the beginning of the immortalization of Pickwick! So well known is the name now that French students of English literature will talk freely to you about 'Monsieur Peekweek'.

But who was Moses Pickwick, and how did the name originate?

There is a curious story about him. He was, it is said, the great-grandson of a foundling. A woman driving through the village of Wick, near Bath, saw a bundle lying on the side of the road, which on investigation proved to contain the first Pickwick. She took him home, cared for him, and christened him Eleazer Pickwick, otherwise Eleazer picked up at Wick!

In the course of time the foundling founded a family in Bath, which grew rapidly prosperous. When Dickens arrived on the scene the great-grandson of Eleazer was a man of wealth and position. Dickens provided the fame. . . .

From this it was a step to the Bath Directory. Here I found that there are five Pickwicks living in Bath to-day. One is an organist, two are grocers and provision merchants, and the occupation of the remaining two is not given. I took up my hat and went out of the reference library in some excitement to meet the nearest Mr. Pickwick!

'Is Mr. Pickwick at home?'

'Yes; come in!'

A grave, middle-aged man looked at me with thoughtful grey eyes. I thought that I had never seen any man who looked so badly christened. I had expected a bald, bland, ripe old man with glasses, who would put his head on one side and twinkle at me, but the real Mr. Pickwick might

have been a professor of geology or a distinguished lawyer. I felt chilled.

'Are you—er—Mr. Pickwick?' I asked.

'I am. What can I do for you?'

So we began. I discovered, as we made friends, that to bear the name Pickwick is not an unmixed blessing. It induces a horror of print. At hotels people look up at you when you give your name, and think that you are pulling their legs. Now and again hot Americans dash up to your door and cry: 'Say, put it there! I just wanted to say I've shaken hands with Mr. Pickwick, for I admire your ancestor more'n I can tell you. Yes, sir!'

'Thousands of people would be only too happy to be called Pickwick,' I said.

'Would they?' replied Mr. Pickwick grimly. 'Through no fault of mine my name makes people smile. Pickwick was a silly old ass, you know. It is, of course, a remarkable name and a very notorious one, but it has the effect of causing notice wherever I go. No doubt I am too modest.'

As he was saying this it occurred to me in how many ways the name Pickwick might be of service to a man. In how many professions and trades is the ability to cause a smile before business begins the half-way house to success? Just think of a canvasser called Mr. Pickwick! A client would, in spite of himself, see such a man. Who could help it? A Mr. Pickwick could float almost any kind of a company, and people would, I have no doubt, follow him quite gaily anywhere.

'You are, of course, all one family?'

'I suppose so. I believe that a direct descendant of Moses Pickwick changed his name some years back for family reasons. They still live in the neighbourhood.'

'There are Pickwicks in America,' continued Mr. Pickwick. 'My two brothers went over there. Americans show great interest in the name. To me, however, the name Pickwick has never done any good: it is a little too spectacular for my liking. When my son was invalided home

from France the doctor saw his name and was so interested that he sat up with him all night across the Channel. I suppose that is the one occasion when the name really did something for us!

But Mr. Pickwick saved up the most interesting fact till I was going.

'It is rather a singular coincidence,' he said, 'that my motor licence bears the names of Pickwick and Wardle! The Town Clerk of Bath is named Wardle!'

§ 7

I crossed the Somerset border into Wiltshire and dipped into a little town that lies beside the ubiquitous Avon. It was, as Wiltshire towns go, quite a shock.

At first it looked Dutch; in other parts Italian. Holland on the flat and Italy on the hill.

The small, white stone houses clung close to the hill-side; narrow flagged lanes twisted this way and that, with lamp-posts planted about, at the direction, it seemed, of distinguished artists. Wallflowers peeped over walls and trees leaned over the road, and one looked in vain for cypresses among the white houses. It was strange. An old man came towards me and I stopped him.

'Bradford-on-Avon!' he said.

'What do you do here besides looking like Perugia?'

'We make motor tyres,' he replied.

'Do many people know this place?'

'We get a few in and out quick to see the Saxon church. It's just round the corner.'

What a church! If you are ever asked in a general knowledge paper to give the name of the oldest unaltered church in England remember Bradford-on-Avon. Here is a church just as it was a thousand years ago: a tiny yellow stone building with three-foot thick walls and a nave only twenty-six feet long. It was preserved by accident. The legend of it never quite died away, but the church itself became in the course of centuries smothered in buildings till an

antiquarian vicar in 1857 looking down from a hill noticed a stone roof in the form of a cross. He had the buildings pulled down, and discovered in the heart of them this lovely, unique building.

I met an architect in this church.

'One of the most remarkable buildings in England,' he said, peering at the stones. 'I have a theory that when the Romans, who worked Bath stone for centuries, left England, the tradition of Roman quarrying and squaring stone was handed down from father to son in this tiny, then isolated, Saxon hamlet. The result is that this church is built on the Roman method—the squared blocks, the thin line of mortar—at a time when the rest of Europe had forgotten the art of it! Most singular!'

In the old inn of Bradford they give you tea in the room where Judge Jeffreys did his bloody work. The memory of Jeffreys will never die out in the West of England, where they still utter his name in a hushed voice. Hanging in the hall are caps and jackets made of Bradford-on-Avon broadcloth, which was famous long before the Yorkshire Bradford dealt in wool. They were found in an old oak chest in an attic.

'When I came here nineteen years ago,' said the innkeeper, 'I thought how foreign the place looked—like Spain.'

'Or Holland,' I said.

'Yes, or even Italy in parts,' he replied. 'I took an interest in local things, and I discovered that Bradford was rebuilt in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by Flemish immigrants, who came over to spin cloth. They still call a part of the town Dutch Barton. They brought with them an un-English idea of architecture; the hills make it look like Italy. I don't believe the story that this Bradford is the parent of the Yorkshire Bradford. That story grew because both towns were in the wool trade. The origin of the name is Broadford—the ford over the river. By the way, you must not leave without seeing our bridge. It has an old Mass chapel on it.'

'A Mass chapel on the bridge!' I cried. 'Give me my bill! That's one of the things I have wanted to see all my life.'

I saw it. Now I would like to know who owns it. Who is responsible for the repair of the Mass chapel of Bradford-on-Avon's bridge? Is it the town or the lord of the manor? Bradford-on-Avon seems in doubt about it. In fact, none seems to care very much.

This little chapel, which stands leaning out over the water on a specially built pier of the bridge, dates from the Middle Ages. There are only four other chapels of the kind in the whole of England: at Wakefield, Rotherham, Derby, and St. Ives, Huntingdon. I believe the building on a bridge just outside the village of Wick, near Bath, is a fifth. It seems incredible that a town which has given such care to its Saxon church can allow its next most distinguished possession to be in danger of collapse. Its stones are in need of preservation; the iron stays placed to keep them together have split; and the whole structure needs careful attention.

How slow some one must be in Bradford! If this chapel were restored, opened, and furnished, Bradford could collect shillings or sixpences all day long from people anxious to peep inside a building that with four exceptions is unique in England.

The recent history of Bradford's chapel is this: tool-house, ammunition store for Territorials, and lock-up. The weather-vane on top of the chapel is in the form of a fish, which gave rise to the local saying that a man going to prison was going over the river under the fish.

§ 8

The first notable sight I saw in Bristol was a ship mixed up with the tramway system.

Ships come right into Bristol town. They nestle down with their cheeks against the Tramway Centre and go to

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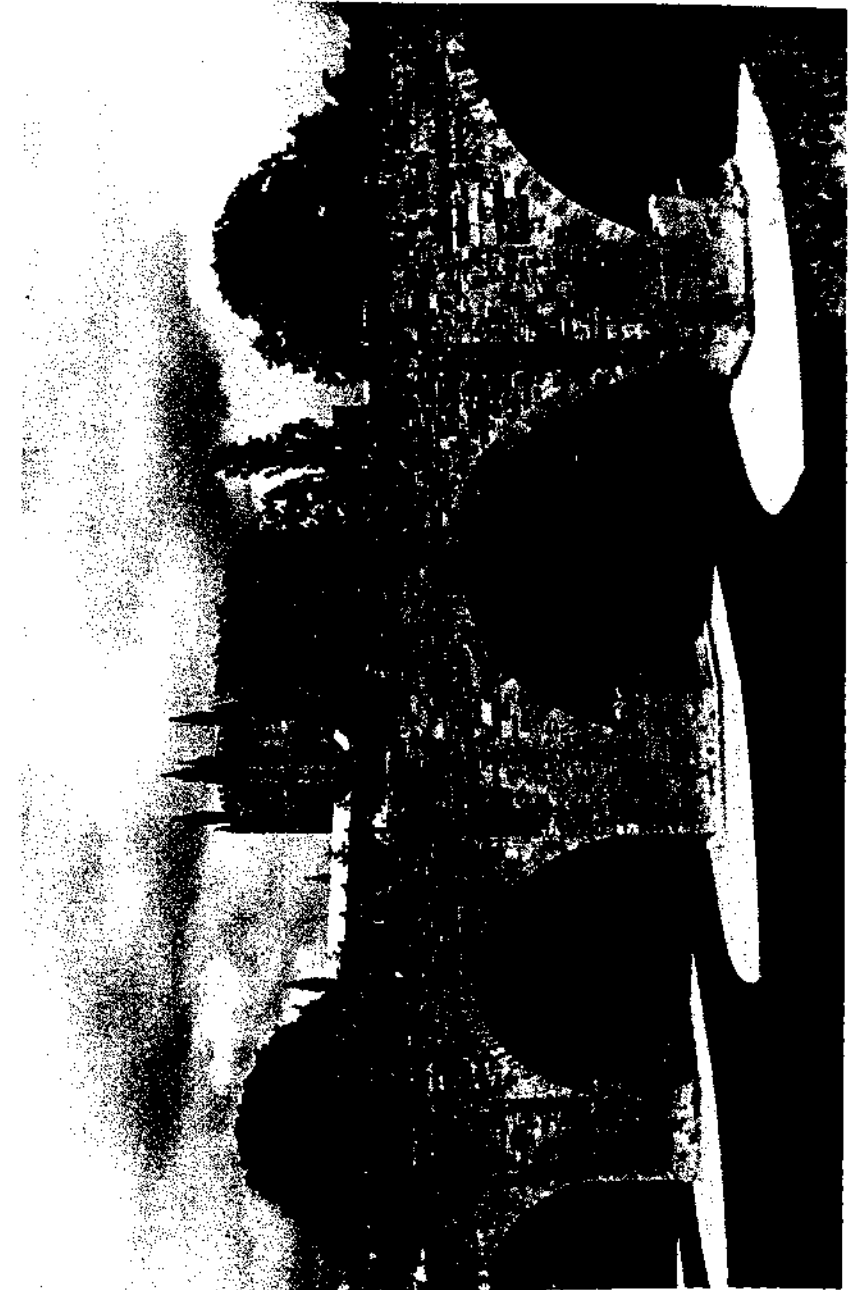
sleep till the bananas are unloaded. Sometimes a full-rigged ship anchors with her bowsprit in the back of the nearest policeman and the shadow of her masts over the Clifton tramcars, and the men of Bristol think nothing of it. They have been accustomed to this disturbing sight for over nine centuries. It must occur to a man looking at Bristol for the first time that a city which welcomes ships to her bosom in this manner could not help carving a great future on the seas.

In the Middle Ages, when the masts of ships surrounded Bristol on three sides, thick as pine woods, and the spires of the churches rose up between them and behind, this city—this county—must have been one of the most inspiring sights in all England. . . .

One of those foolish travellers who cannot see the long procession of men and affairs behind an English city said, after boring me at some length on various subjects: 'Of course, you won't go to Bristol! It is a smoky hole of a place, and—there is nothing to see there.'

Nothing to see in Bristol! There is too much to see there! I could stay for a month and write you a different story every day. I could write about the bronze tables which sprout like toadstools from the pavement opposite the Exchange, the 'nails' on which the Bristol merchants formerly paid their accounts (hence the saying, 'to pay on the nail'). I could write about one of the finest modern universities in England; about the Dutch House, a half-timbered mansion that stands in a main street like a galleon in a modern port; I could describe at great length the sixteen almshouses of Bristol, which include St. Peter's Hospital—a marvel—and Foster's, with its chapel dedicated to the Three Kings of Cologne.

In a rather bitter vein I could describe the decaying north porch of St. Mary Redcliffe—the church in which Chatterton claimed to have discovered the Rowley poems—a lovely carved thirteenth-century porch which, I imagine, must be unique in England. It is a delicate tracery of Bath



9 THE WYE BRIDGE, HEREFORD

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stone, black with soot, and round it the medieval craftsman has let himself all out on grotesque carvings—men with the bodies of fishes and beasts; queer, half-human things creeping in niches or peeping round corners, and each carving a gem. This porch is decaying in a city which spends millions on good works.

My trouble in Bristol is that I cannot leave the byways. It is a city as fascinating as London; and in the same unself-conscious way. Bristol hides itself up alleys just as London does. It gives nothing to him who does not search; but to the explorer Bristol is generous with the unexpected; with sudden glimpses of old things: queer old buildings; old steps; alluring doorways, and—always—the sight of a ship lying landlocked between two streets.

In Marsh Street, the centre of a maze of Georgian survivals, I came to the Merchant Venturers' Hall. No man who remembers the name of the two greatest venturers who trod an English quay—John Cabot and his son Sebastian—could stand for long outside this hall.

Inside, what did I find? Here one of the last medieval trade guilds is busier than it ever was; more vigorous; more important. As I was taken through spacious rooms hung with stately eighteenth-century portraits, through hall after hall into the banqueting chamber, where crystal candelabra hang from a high ceiling and a polished table gleams like a still pool, I could hardly realize that I was not in one of our own ancient livery company halls in the shadow of the Mansion House.

'We trace our history back to Henry II,' said the treasurer. 'Oh, yes; we are busy! We run the Merchant Venturers' Technical College. The almshouses round the corner for old seamen and seamen's widows was established by us in 1554. We look after the young and the old, you see.'

In the almshouses round the corner live nineteen old sailors and twelve sailors' widows. They live in a gracious old harbour of yellow cottages built round three sides of a paved courtyard. In the centre of the court rises a tall,



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white mast; on which the old men run up flags at emotional moments. When they limp to their doors and gaze up at the sky with eyes too dim now to cope with an approaching storm, these buildings take on the appearance of a becalmed vessel. They have sailed down nearly four centuries with an aged crew; a crew that changes every few years, yet always looks the same. Over the central building are these lines:

*Freed from all storms, the tempest, and the rage
Of billows, here we spend our age;
Our weather-beaten vessels here repair—
And from the merchants' kind and generous care,
Find harbourage here; no more we put to sea
Until we launch into Eternity.*

Over one door are the words—'Elder Brother'; inside lives Captain Andrews, skipper of this good old ship.

'Quarrels are our only trouble,' he said. 'I settle all disputes if I can. Old men are often quarrelsome, especially when they tell the same yarns to each other for years.'

An ancient mariner, with a beard sprouting from beneath his chin in the real W. W. Jacobs manner, and a short pipe apparently growing in his mouth, touched a peaked cap.

"Mornin', Cap'n! Fine day!"

'Aye, 'tis so!' said the skipper; and they both looked up at the sky; and out towards the prow—or gate—of the good ship, where a butcher's boy went whistling with mutton in his basket.

What do these old sailors talk about? Here is a typical conversation.

'The sea!' (contemptuous spit) 'The sea! When I signed on in '59 the sea was the *sea*, but now it's just yachting! Young fellows don't know what the sea is; they might as well sign on in one of these here hotels. I crossed the Atlantic in a sailing boat in '69, sir, with a cargo of salt for the Newfoundland fisheries. The rats, mad with thirst—for they got at the salt—gnawed through the lead pipes to the water tanks. And when two days out we began shipping water, and it was all hands to the pumps. Those

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were the days, sir! Up in the rigging, with the sails froze hard as boards and your nails torn off. Those were the days! Now you cross the Atlantic in a hotel, and you only see the ocean by mistake when you take a wrong turning, and meet it sudden like. . . .'

'Who,' I asked, 'is that very old man?'

'That's the poet, sir. He can't write, but he can remember; he recites his poems.'

'Would he recite them to me?'

'Of course he would; he hasn't had an audience for months! We know them all!'

The poet is nearly ninety. His name is Hook.

He sat at his bare little table, assumed a dramatic expression, turned to me a grey-bearded face, which might have been the face of a saint, and began his longest poem. What it lacked in metre and polish it gained in sincerity. It started on the dockside as the author was watching a ship unload, and it ended with the downfall of the Kaiser.

The old man's hand fell on the table, and his dramatic expression changed to a smile: the poem was over.

'I will now,' he said, 'recite you the one about the almshouse fire.'

'First tell me how you came to compose verse.'

He told me that the war had inspired him, and since then he had not been able to stop. He cannot write, but when he has saved up enough money he goes to a Bristol typist and recites his poems. He remembers twenty-five long epics.

I left old Seaman Homer sitting at his bare table and went out into Bristol, this thriving, thrusting modern city, with a crowded past, a busy present, and a great future, where so many kind deeds are hidden round a corner.

§ 9

Among those inventions and devices which never fail to charm me, and, I suppose, all simple-minded persons, are

cuckoo clocks, warming-pans, glass globes which, when shaken, deluge a subaqueous landscape in snow, and—camera obscuras.

I have found a really good camera obscura; a big one in which the figures are at least six inches high. It stands on the top of Clifton Downs not far from, and slightly higher than, the famous Suspension Bridge. Every one in Bristol has, I gather, seen it and become weary of it, for I have twice paid down my sixpence and twice climbed the winding stairs to it and each time the so-called Observatory has had to be unlocked for me. Yet every Bristolian knows it.

'The Observatory! Oh, yes; I haven't been there for years, but before we were married my wife and I used to go up there and look into the camera obscura!'

That is how they talk about it. Gazing into the camera obscura at Clifton seems a natural prelude to marriage in Bristol!

On Clifton Downs, the site of an early British camp, stands an innocent-looking tower, which is the eye of the hill. It is the remains of an ancient windmill, once known as the Snuff Mill, which was partially destroyed by fire in the year 1777. After lying derelict for half a century, a Mr. West made his home in this lonely tower, in the year 1828—ideal home for a star-gazer, an alchemist, or a camera obscurantist—and installed a telescope and the camera. The Snuff Mill then became known as the Observatory.

To-day Mr. West's telescopes have earned their repose, but the camera obscura, one of the largest in the country, is still doing its work well. . . .

I climbed to the top of the tower, and was shown into a small circular apartment. The door was shut to exclude all light save a thin beam filtered through lenses in the roof, which, falling downward so as to cover the surface of a large, round, convex table, reflected in sharp, coloured detail everything that was happening in the immediate locality.

Slowly the table revolved, exposing as it did so a new tract of country. . . .

How much more thrilling than a cinema is this ancient invention—at least to me. One is looking at life, not at actors. The colours in which the landscape is reproduced are perfect, and the people who stroll calmly across the mysterious Merlin's table in the dark room, so deliciously unconscious that the hill has its eye on them, move without the jerkiness of the cinema, without the self-consciousness of the film actor. They are, in fact, so natural that one childishly follows them with a finger and pinches the empty air in a futile endeavour to pick them up. It seems that one should be able to capture one of them and hold him between the finger and thumb as Gulliver examined a Lilliputian.

An elderly woman walked slowly up to the downs, holding a parasol in a white-gloved hand. Two Clifton school-boys strolled slowly along over green grass talking; a man sat on a wooden bench reading a newspaper, all of them unconscious that every movement made by them was reproduced on the slowly revolving table in the tower. As it moved I gained a glimpse of the thick woods on the opposite side of the gorge. I could see the wind moving the tree-tops and a thin puff of smoke ascending from a chimney. The view of Clifton Suspension Bridge seen in this way is more marvellous than the direct one. The thin, graceful thread flung from one side of the rocky gorge to the other is examined as a bird might see it in mid-air. One looks down on the towers and on that airy thread along which tiny motor-cars move, the footways over which go people, with, below them, two hundred and forty-five feet of a space ending in the river and the jagged rocks.

As I stood there in the dark I thought that a few hundred years ago any man who owned a camera obscura would have been burned at the stake or made Lord Chancellor.

The charm of looking into this reflection of life is the illusion it imparts of omnipotence. You are, as it were, enthroned anonymously in a position of unassailable

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safety, and free from detection, watching the little actions of little men. Nothing escapes you. A man blowing his nose in a scarlet handkerchief occupies the Universe for a second. There is also the charm of the unexpected. You never know what the next turn of the table will reveal, so that you stand in the dark like a second-class deity observing the working of a more powerful intelligence. Look! Under the trees a young father who has taken his family for a picnic is keeping the baby quiet with chocolate while his wife sleeps in the shade. . . .

Another move of the table . . . a fat man puffs slowly up the hill, desperately hot, mopping his head, supremely ridiculous. If you met him face to face he might be impressive; but here, with life just a shadow show, he is merely an amusing little clown in the circus of existence.

Another move of the table. . . . The scene shifts to a bosky dell. A young man is sitting on a seat with a girl. He looks carefully round to see that no one is looking. You know that he nervously premeditates kissing her. For the first time you feel that a camera obscura is rather a low-down invention. Why should you . . . not quite playing the . . . now he's done it; and made a frightful hash of it! Aiming an inexpert salute which landed on her ear, he has received a slap in the face, and . . . the table moves on!

You leave the dark room of this simple wizardry and look through the windows of the tower. How strange! There sit the man and the girl under a distant tree; there, in a shady hollow, the father feeds his young with chocolate; there stands the fat man puffing beside a fence; and in the remote distance walks the elderly woman whose parasol is like a little yellow mushroom on the grass.

Why, you wonder, has no writer of detective stories used the camera obscura? The eye of the hill lends itself to treatment.

You go down, and in your turn become a little painted

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shadow moving across the table beneath some one else's eye. You feel divine no longer! You wrestle with a gamin desire to turn round in the direction of the tower and put out your tongue, just to show some Peeping Tom that you know all about him.