

**BRADLEY
ARTHUR
GRANVILLE**

THE RIVERS AND
STREAMS OF ENGLAND

Arthur Bradley

The Rivers and Streams of England

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A.G. Bradley

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PREFACE

THOUGH this is not a book on angling, a life-long attachment to the fly-rod on the part of the author, and to the delightful scenes into which such predilections notoriously lead one, makes it at once more difficult and more easy to write than if one were approaching the subject as a stranger to the atmosphere, and merely to “write round” the pictures Mr. Palmer has so admirably painted. But in my case it is by no means only this. A predilection for British landscape in general, and all that thereby hangs, has stimulated a far wider acquaintance with it than any mere angling rambles could achieve, and resulted in the publication of several books concerned with such things, and covering more or less about twenty counties. I feel this explanation is desirable, lest the note of intimacy with many far-sundered streams, in allusion and otherwise, that must occur in these pages may be suspect. The more so, as from the fascination of the Cook’s ticket or what not, comparatively few of my countrymen have any considerable knowledge of their own land. The Rhine is certainly better known than the Wye, and the Danube probably than the Severn.

But these very experiences made the first proposal to write a book, other than a mere encyclopædia, within a brief space on such a big subject, seem almost hopeless. Rivers and streams from every direction, by scores, came surging out upon the memory at the very thought of it, in quite distracting fashion. It was finally agreed, however, that the literary part of the book should take shape in a series of essays or chapters dealing with the rivers mainly in separate groups or water-sheds, leaving the proportions to my discretion. Capricious in a measure this was bound to be. Selection was inevitable. It is not of supreme importance. *Caeteris paribus*, and without diverging more than necessary from the skilful illustrator, I have dealt more freely with the rivers I know best, and also with those I hold to be more worthy of notice. There are, of course, omissions, this book being neither a guide nor an encyclopædia, but rather a collection of descriptive essays and of water-colour sketches covering, though necessarily in brief, most of the groups. In this particular subject there is happily no need for author and illustrator to keep close company in detail. What inspires the pen, and in actual survey stirs the blood, is often unpaintable. What makes a delightful picture, on the other hand, tells sometimes but a dull tale in print. I have had to leave to the artist’s capable brush, owing to the necessary limitations of the letterpress, several subjects; a matter, however, which seems to me as quite immaterial to the general purport of the book, as it is unavoidable. But otherwise I think we run reasonably together. At first sight the omission of the Thames in description may seem outrageous. A moment’s reflection, however, will, I am sure, conduce to a saner view. Illustration is wholly another matter; but to attempt ten or fifteen pages on that great and familiar river, dealt with, too, in bulk and brief by innumerable pens, that could serve any purpose or gratify any reader, seems to me a fatuous undertaking. The Severn, on the other hand, as great, almost as important as the Thames, and still more beautiful, is by comparison an absolutely unknown river, and we have given it the first place.

A. G. B.

CHAPTER I THE SEVERN

THERE is surely some peculiar fascination in the birthplace of a famous river when this lies in the heart of moors and mountains. For myself, I admit at once to but scant interest in the infant springs of even such slow running rivers as I have some personal affection for. There is neither mystery, nor solitude, nor privacy about their birth. They come into the world amid much the same surroundings as those in which they spend the greater part of their mature existence – amid ploughed fields, cattle pastures, and villages, farmyards, game covers, and ozier beds. When full they are inevitably muddy, and when empty are very empty indeed; lifeless, and mute at the best, at the worst actually dry. The river of low-country birth acquires, in short, neither character nor quality worthy of consideration till as a full-grown stream it can trace a shining coil in the valley, or reflect the shadow of spire, bridge or mill, of willow or poplar.

How different is the source of a mountain-born river, above all when it boasts some name famous in story, and is to become the feeder of historic cities and bearer of great navies. Its hoarse voice plashing amid the silence of the eternal hills strikes the chord responsive to such scenes as these with singular force, and a little louder perhaps than its comparatively nameless neighbour, which leaves their common watershed for some other sea. As the lowland landscape of England is unique, so the mountain and moorland solitudes of these two islands are quite different from anything else in the whole universe. The mountain regions of England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland, exhibit, to be sure, some slight variety of detail, due partly to human and partly to natural agencies. But such differences are positively trifling compared to the contrast they each and all present to any other of the waste places of the earth, unless perhaps some wilder portion of Brittany may be a qualified exception. This delightful singularity, to my thinking a wholly favourable one, is not sufficiently understood or appreciated. There are tremendous masses of snow and crag and evergreen timber, as well as marvellous formations of naked rock, in four continents appealing to practically another sense. There are lower ranges, too, on the scale of our own mountains, in many parts of the world draped in timber from base to summit, which again are of another family, and those who have lived or been much among them know how unsatisfactory by comparison are their limitations, how obstructive both of free movement and of outlook.

But there is nothing anywhere resembling our open hills where heather and bog grasses of many hues, where emerald turf, spreading bracken and golden gorse, broken with cliff and crag and scaur, invite the wanderer to a delightful and easy intimacy with their innermost haunts. Here you may ramble practically at will, with the unobstructed glories of earth and air always before your eyes, the fresh tempered breezes of our gulf-stream-washed island in your lungs, your feet pressing upon plants and grasses all instinct of a soil that knows nothing of fierce heats and binding frosts as those terms are understood in most other lands. And then, again, how futile to parade the altitude of our British mountains as evidence of insignificance. They laugh to scorn all such arithmetic, and many times in a single day will wrap themselves in some magic veil, and lift their peaks and shoulders round you, till scale and altitude as expressed in figures become practically a thing of naught. The obvious of the past garish and sunny hour, when their modest measurement proclaimed itself to any reasonably experienced eye, has vanished, and you find yourself confronted by heights that lack absolutely nothing in stature and dignity, and are in effect mountains of 10,000 feet. Everything that shapely form and atmosphere can achieve in the way of effect these little mountains of ours are capable of. Our much maligned climate not merely clothes them in a chequered mantle of green and russet, of grey, purple, or saffron, only less in winter than in summer, but gives them those ever-changing moods and aspects that few people who know both would as a permanency exchange for all

the sun glare of the earth. And how solitary are the hollows of these hills where rivers rise: nay, often more than that, and little short of awesome. Here again, perhaps, comes in the quite undisturbing reflection that there is a railway within five miles and a town possibly within ten! What does it matter, when nobody ever comes here, and there is not a trace visible anywhere of man's handiwork but possibly the dark line of some stone dyke built two centuries ago? The very consciousness that this is in populous Britain makes the wild wilder, the silence stiller, the solitude more solitary.

For myself, I know of a score of such valley heads in the North and Wales, whence streams and rivers have their birth, that provoke a feeling of positive and pleasurable creepiness, such as the wildest woods and the remotest prairies never touched me with. Whether opening and shutting in a driving winter mist, or with their high rocky shoulders turned gloomily from the sun on a fine autumn morning, these inner sanctuaries and water-sheds where so many of our English rivers rise seem as if they gathered the silence of unlimited wastes and distilled its very essence. The very sounds that break their solitude, intensify it: the plashing of the tiny stream when it has struggled out of the meshes of the high bog that gives it birth, and is taking its first leap for liberty and independence down the rocky ledges of the precipice towards the world below, the mournful call of the curlew, the fitful, plaintive bleat of the mountain sheep, or the faint rattle of stones misplaced by its nimble feet. Poets have written of the "startled air," and some of them perhaps have used the phrase but tritely, and themselves but half suspecting the true felicity of the metaphor. In these sombre chambers of the hills, walled in upon every side, the stillness seems literally to grasp at every slight sound and cling to it with strange vibrations and lingering echoes, which remind one how utterly alien to these places are the common sounds of the everyday world that pass unnoticed – a world so ridiculously near and yet so infinitely remote.

Among the outstanding geographical facts which used to be hammered into the heads of schoolboys was that of Plinlimmon being the parent of both the Severn and the Wye. Many poems both in Welsh and English have been inspired by this picture of two infant streams springing from the bosom of the same mountain, and after following widely sundered courses through various counties, meeting again as great rivers, just in time to mingle their waters before merging them in the brine. It would be a pretty conceit even if it were not in the case of these two rivers an actual fact. Whether

it is on this account, or because of the huge bulk and prominent situation of Plinlimmon, many "eminent geographers" of not very remote days wrote it down for the benefit of generations of misguided students as the third loftiest mountain in Wales. But it is not even in the first rank, being less than 2500 feet. There are several mountains in South Wales alone of greater altitude and more graceful shape. But Plinlimmon, all the same, is a fine upstanding mass of wild bog, linked upon both sides to far-spreading solitudes, and worthy to be the mother of the greatest and of the most beautiful river respectively in England or Wales.

That the former deserves the epithet is a mere geographical fact. That the Wye contains a greater mileage of the highest types of British scenery than any other river, will surely be conceded by any one sufficiently equipped with a knowledge of British rivers to pronounce an opinion worth having and not disqualified by too intimate personal association with some other possible claimant. For it is the only river in the country that rises to the highest scale of physical beauty and distinction as we know them in Britain, both in its earlier and its later stages. A few large rivers, notably the Cheshire Dee, the Usk, the Tynes, the Tees, and of course many smaller ones in the north and west, compare with the Wye, though few surpass it in their higher reaches, being all distinguished by the same type of rugged and mountainous scenery. But none of them, after they have left such associations behind and become by comparison low-country rivers on their progress to the sea, break out again like the Wye for such a long period of their later course in scenes that vie with those of its youth and are among the recognised gems of British scenery.

The fountain springs of the Severn and the Wye are less than a mile apart on the long slope of Plinlimmon. The one flowing north-east, the other south-east, there is little to choose between them

as they fume and fret in their sombre mountain cradles or sparkle among the narrow stone-walled meadows, the little white-washed sycamore-shaded homesteads of the upland farms. The Wye has greater things in store for her than even the wild foothills of Plinlimmon as she dashes off into the mountain gorges of Radnorshire and Brecon. But the Severn, though flowing always from source to mouth through a landscape consistently fair and often striking, seldom rises to the level maintained by her younger sister for more than half of her journey to the sea. The Severn, called hereabouts the Hafryn by the Welsh, may be said to emerge into civilization near the little Montgomeryshire town of Llanidloes, noted for its sheep fairs and its fish poachers. Here it meets, to follow northwards the only railroad which even now links North and South Wales. This will have brought with it over the wild heathery moorland watershed between Wye and Severn, where dark brooding hills enclose the region of Pant-y-dwr (Hollow of the waters), the brown streams of the Tylerch. The Clywedog meeting the other two just below their junction, the Severn now becomes a lusty little river, brawling incessantly upon a wide stony bed.

Of the thousands of tourists who every season travel on the Cambrian railway to the Welsh watering-places, few probably realise that the little trout stream which prattles in and out of the line in the high country around Moat Lane Junction bears the name of the greatest, though truly the second in fame, of English rivers. From first to last the Severn is faithful to Montgomeryshire as the Welsh county of its birth. From Blaen Hafryn, its source on Plinlimmon, just within the county bounds, for some 50 miles straight measure along its valley – all the way, indeed, from Llanidloes to the Breiddon Hills – it waters the richest pastures and the fattest corn lands of the ancient kingdom of Powys Fadog. But if the Severn drains the richest portion of this most delectable and highland country, it must not be supposed that its environment is tame or its streams lazy. Everywhere to the right and to the left lofty hills, though for the most part somewhat back-lying, bound the limits of the vale, while now and again a glimpse of some distant mountain serves to remind one that Montgomeryshire is in the main a mountain county. For the Severn valley is so intercepted with small hills, so richly wooded, so ornate in places with the park lands and foliage of country seats, so sprinkled with pleasant villages, one is apt to forget that the little streams hurrying down to the river from the north come from a really wild Wales beyond, while lying back to the south the regions of Kerry and Clun speak in their very names to the initiated of the spirit of solitude.

But the human or certainly the historic interest of Montgomeryshire and much of its visible wealth clusters along this broad and broken vale of the Severn. Newtown and its flannel industries and the name of Pryce-Jones will strike a responsive note in the ear of every British housewife. But the stern fragments of Montgomery Castle, perched on the summit of a rock 350 feet above the river, is perhaps more in harmony with the mood in which we should follow an historic artery through this Border country. The little town, absolutely the smallest and most somnolent county capital in the two countries, lies behind the rocky castle height. The Norman, Roger of Montgomery, was granted this country by his friend and chief William the Conqueror, who appears to have assumed it was in Shropshire, because Offa's Dyke crosses the river near by. This misconception soon became apparent, and though the well-nigh impregnable castle, called always Tre-Faldwin by the Welsh after Roger's constable, Baldwin, was retained in Anglo-Norman hands, it is not too much to say that it was a centre of strife between the Welsh and English for 200 years, till Edward the First completed the conquest of Wales and created the North Welsh counties, this one being fortunate in acquiring the sonorous name which had clung to the castle and lordship. The actual building, whose scant fragments are now so conspicuous and suggestive, was erected by Henry the Third, who in his troubles with his barons was compelled to promise Llewelyn the Second or "the Great" that this should be the uttermost western limit of his pretensions to dominion.

But a more accessible celebrity than either Henry the Third or Llewelyn, seeing that he has left us one of the raciest autobiographies in the language, owned and lived in Montgomery Castle, to wit, Lord Herbert of Chirbury. His period was the first half of the seventeenth century, but his exploits

were not confined to Montgomeryshire, as his reputation for courage, brains, and eccentricity was a national one and something more. His literary remains, which are numerous, are matter, perhaps, for the specialist, but his autobiography, which in a reprint can be bought for a shilling or two, is the most delightful picture in brief of country and domestic life, of Courts and Camps abroad and at home, of social London, and, above all, of the point of view of a shrewd, original, experienced and travelled man of the world, warrior, courtier, scholar, and theologian. Chirbury is the adjoining parish, and this sombre-looking fortress above the Severn may in a sense be regarded as the cradle of the great race of Herbert, which with its many noble branches and varied achievements is perhaps the most illustrious in England. One branch, in the persons of the Earls of Powis, is still very much represented here on the Severn. For as the river tumbles along in occasional pools where the salmon ought to rise to the fly, but for some inscrutable reason refuse to do so, and in long gliding deeps to Welshpool, Powis Castle, the “Castell Goch,” the “Red Castle” of old Border days, rises out of its wooded park lands on the left bank. Known locally as “Pool,” Welshpool was a Border town like Berwick-on-Tweed and Hay-on-Wye. Two nations dwelt there in separate quarters in a sort of armed neutrality in days when nationality at intermittent periods meant life or death, and still dwell there in long-mingled unity.

Shropshire runs close up to the Severn at Montgomery Castle upon the south bank, and English only is spoken by the Welsh population all down the valley from Moat Lane, though with the spring of the hills to the northward the native tongue still everywhere asserts itself. Around Welshpool, too, the Jones's, Hughes's, and Williams's begin to display the Shropshire type of man as opposed to the Welshman, whether English-speaking or otherwise. But the Severn turns away and clings to its native county for yet another 10 miles. Receiving the first of its three important affluents, the Vyrnwy from the north, it finally takes leave of Wales beneath the shadow of those imposing twins the Breiddons, which like a pair of huge sentinels stand guarding the gateway from the plains of north Shropshire into the hills of Wales. Indeed, the exit of the Severn, by this time a considerable river, from Welsh territory is finely marked, for when it has run a pleasant, uneventful course, touching by the way no place of note, to Shrewsbury, the westward view from the latter is significant and striking. To the last mile of Montgomeryshire, Wales stands finely out above the rich undulations of this once frontier and much harassed county, with singular distinction. The properly constituted Salopian as he stands upon the western outskirts of his town, where his famous school has in recent times perched itself above the high banks of Severn, sees his past laid out before him, like a page of history; the fat Saxon lowland spreading westward for a dozen miles, and the sharp rampart of Wales from north to south as far as the eye can see, height after height, range after range, almost precisely delimiting the outworks behind which for centuries lay a vigilant, unforgetting, and alien people, ready to strike at the first sign of over-confident negligence. This to the indifferent eye may seem ancient history, but it was real enough even as late as the days of Henry the Fourth, when for ten years Glyndwr kept the Border counties in a continual state of apprehension. Part of the walls are still standing, while the Severn, bending in horse-shoe shape round the town, still runs under both the *English* and the *Welsh* bridge, and the castle rises above the river-bank whence Henry the Fourth and his army marched out on that July morning 500 years ago to meet the Percies on the bloody field of Haytely.

Shrewsbury is a fine old town, and the encircling Severn adds no little to its pride of pose. It sprang into being on the ashes of the neighbouring Brito-Roman city of Uriconium a few miles down the river, so ruthlessly destroyed by the Saxon pagans. First as Pengwern, then as Schrobberie, the principal city of the middle March, it gave in time its name to a county, and kept chief watch and ward against the Welsh of Powys land and of North Wales. It has a great story and stout traditions like all Border towns, and looks it. Of late years it has begun to share the attentions of over-sea visitors with Chester, a fact in no way surprising. For though its antiquities are not so definite and obviously on show, Shrewsbury, unlike the other, is far removed from the disfiguring industrial atmosphere of the North. It is nothing, to be sure, but the historic market-town of a great district; but the latter is so large, so important and interesting, including as it does both English and Welsh territory, that Shrewsbury

has at once the peaceful air of a country borough with the size and dignity of something very much more. It is rich in ancient half-timbered houses, often standing in their original narrow wynds or rows. Its sixteenth-century market-hall is one of the best in England. There are some beautiful old mansions too, that were the town-houses of great Salopian families in the days when counties or groups of counties were a social unit unto themselves, and London a far-away rendezvous for great nobles or pronounced courtiers only. Shrewsbury is justly proud of its old churches. The Abbey is a fine Norman building with later additions and much recent successful restoration, and will be the Cathedral when Shropshire – only a matter of time – becomes a diocese. St. Mary's, however, is the more interesting, being of large dimensions and exhibiting almost every style of architecture from Norman onwards, and lifting a lofty and beautiful spire heavenwards. In its windows is a wealth of old stained-glass, brought at various times from various places both in the locality and on the Continent. Battlefield Church, beyond the town, was raised over the burial pits of the many thousand dead who fell at that great encounter, to say masses for ever for their souls and for those of Henry the Fourth and the pious founders. With its fine tower planted amid the quiet fields upon the site of the very shock of battle it seems to tell a strange story, and to have long outlived the prodigiously important function it was destined for, if numbers counted for responsibility in the repetition of masses.

It was here, of course, that our old friend Falstaff was almost at his very best in the scene of the fight between Hotspur and Prince Henry. To return to fact, however, it was in Shrewsbury market-place that Hotspur's naked body, after being three days buried, was set up between two mill-stones to show the world that the lion of the north, the terror of his enemies, was in truth dead. It was on Severn's banks at Berwick, close to Shrewsbury, that this paragon of his day and type, whose very defects of speech the golden youth of England affected, spent the last night of his life; and in the morning, when he was told the name of the place, turned pale and said that "he had ploughed his last furrow," for a wizard in Northumberland had told him he should die at Berwick, meaning, as he supposed, that more famous one in the north, where every generation of Percy in those days fought and bled. He traced the outline of his hand with a dagger on an oak panel of the house, and it became a tradition of the Bettons, the owners, that if the panel was lost Berwick would go with it, and sure enough the double disaster occurred within quite recent times. Near a century later, Mytton, the Governor of Shrewsbury, refused to open the gates to Henry the Seventh as he was marching to fight for that title on Bosworth Field, swearing he should only enter the town "over his belly." Matters having arranged themselves pleasantly, however, the too protesting Governor, to save his oath, lay on his back in the gate while Henry stepped over him.

The Severn is in sober mood for much of its progress round Shrewsbury, providing both the school and the townsfolk with an admirable boating course, after which it breaks out again into those interludes of shallow rapids that mark its normal course. Soon after leaving Shrewsbury, having run under the high ridge of Haughmond Hill and the ruinous Abbey of that name, the river swerves southward, and for the rest of its long course holds more or less to that point of the compass. In spite of increasing volume from various small affluents – the Meole at Shrewsbury, the Conover brook and the little river Tern which joins it just below – the Severn still retains, in subdued fashion, the qualities of a big hill-born stream running from long pike-haunted deeps into shallow rapids, where persevering anglers still catch occasional trout, and up which the salmon run in high water as they head for their breeding-grounds among the Montgomery Hills. It is a sore point among Severn anglers that for some occult reason no Severn salmon can be persuaded to take a fly – one of those mysteries with which the king of fishes continues to bewilder and exasperate generations of experts. Here all the way up through Shropshire and Montgomery are the fish, the water, and the conditions that make the salmon a fly-taker more or less in every other river of this pattern in Great Britain. Nay, its very tributaries, the Wye and the Usk, though you would expect, to be sure, greater things of them than of the Severn, are conspicuous in this particular. Salmon are taken occasionally on a minnow above Welshpool, but so rarely on a fly as not to be worth noting.

Running under the picturesque church and bridge of Atcham the river soon passes Uriconium or Wroxeter, the partly excavated Roman British city some six miles below Shrewsbury. The wall of the Basilica (as supposed) at Uriconium is, I think, the only ruin south of the Roman wall country that has weathered the storms of centuries and the hand of man above ground – the only one, at any rate, like this one springing out of a lonely rural landscape, – and thus sitting against the skyline with a turnip-field as a foreground, it seems to move one even beyond a Norman or a Saxon church – and no wonder. How the “White city” was utterly destroyed by the west Saxons after the battle of Deorham in 577 is told us vaguely in the wail of Llywarch Hen, whose sons perished in the carnage. Still winding through a pleasant undulating region, passing the high red cliff and the deep dingle near Hamage and the wooded slopes about Shadwell, the Severn runs within a mile or two of the Wrekin, which rises some 1300 feet high to the eastward. Away to the west Wenlock Edge, Caradoc, and the Longmynd, approaching 2000 feet in altitude, show their shapely forms. At Buildwas the beautiful ruins of its Norman Cistercian Abbey overlook the river, while those of Much Wenlock Priory, once the greatest and most powerful in Shropshire, cover twenty acres not far from its banks. Just above Buildwas the Severn begins to accelerate its pace in the deep trough it has cut in the limestone hills, and enters the mining district of Coalbrook dale, where for a few miles what must once have been a beautiful gorge has been for ages smirched with many disfiguring industries; for here in the seventeenth century iron is said to have been first smelted with coal. The phase, however, is a very short one, for with Coalport the smoke and turmoil are left behind, and through peaceful and delightful scenes the river forges on to Bridgenorth.

Here, perched on a high promontory between the river and a tributary ravine, with the leaning wall of its ancient castle upon the summit and its houses clinging to the steep, the historic little Shropshire town makes a brave show. And from this point, by Hampton Wood and Highley, to Arley and Bewdley the Severn runs in a narrow valley with woody hills pressing upon the right and left, and oftentimes rolling glades of birch and bracken about its banks, and the entire distance beautifully varied with foliage and meadow. Below Arley, a place of renown for its scenery, the Severn may be said to abandon definitely all semblance of a mountain river, to cease from intermittent fretting on rocky channels, and to sober down for good – a procedure due in part no doubt to certain weirs below – into a fairly fast but smooth, deep, and navigable stream. Bewdley, though but a small town now of some 2000 souls, is a place of peculiar interest in Severn annals; for in times remote, those of the Saxon and the Roman at any rate, it was certainly the head of the swampy lagoon through which the river wandered from here to the Bristol Channel, and the head consequently of navigation. But much more interesting than this, Bewdley was, till the period of canals, a great shipping port for Birmingham and other Midland centres. Long barges travelled down to Bristol, and it can be readily understood what this meant in days when roads were practically useless for transportation. Bewdley, moreover, at one time manufactured as a monopoly the famous “Monmouth caps” worn by soldiers, sailors, and others when sumptuary laws ordained in what manner each rank of life should array itself. But canals which struck the Severn lower down, followed in due course by railroads, destroyed Bewdley. It is now, however, a singularly interesting illustration of a Queen Anne and Georgian town left commercially derelict in the full career of its prosperity. A long row of substantial buildings once full of merchandize spreads along the river-bank, while a wide street runs inland up the hill slope bordered with houses, which speak eloquently, to any one who can read such messages, of the prosperous provincial merchant of the Jacobean and Georgian period, put to such humble modern uses as an insignificant agricultural market-town can find for them. With its sombre Queen Anne church, its placid old-world air, and leafy hills mounting high in pleasant confusion above it, and its fine stone bridge spanning the river, Bewdley is a place to remember among the Severn towns. Always celebrated for its beauty of situation, old Leland, brief and curt to the verge of humour, broke out in its presence into verse:

Deliciis rerum Bellus locus undique floret
Fronde coronatus Viriarae, tempora sylvae.

Here, too, as an occasional alternative to Ludlow, was held the Court of Wales and the Marches. Of Bewdley Forest nothing is left but some great oaks scattered over meadow and park land, but that of Wyre, near by, still rolls back from the Severn, ridge upon ridge of scrub oak woodland, covering about twenty square miles with dense foliage scarcely anywhere broken but by the trail of the little streams that prattle down its narrow glens. There is nothing quite approximating to Wyre Forest remaining in England – this dense mantle of scrub oak, laid over a large tract of uninhabited hilly country. In autumn this uniform sea of russet, splashed about with the dark green of stray yew trees, rolling over hill and dale for many miles, presents a sight common enough in some other countries, but quite unfamiliar in English landscape. Stourport, a little outpost of murky industry, soon follows, with the tributary of the Stour from the Birmingham country, together with the canal that in pre-railroad days virtually killed Bewdley. But from here to Worcester the Severn steals serenely on, through pastoral scenes of quiet but engaging charm. Hills of moderate height, and muffled betimes in foliage, trend upon the narrow vale, which is always one long carpet of meadow, while a weir or two at long intervals now checks any natural tendency the wide river might have had to retain the livelier habits of its youth, being now everywhere navigable for boats, barges, or small steamers. But the Severn, unlike its famous twin the Thames, remains for all that a lonely river. At certain spots of course, such as Bewdley, Holt, Fleet, and Worcester, Midland holiday-makers paddle about within limits, but, fine boating river in a practical sense though it must everywhere be, in its long solitary journey from point to point the pleasure-boat is conspicuously absent. Probably the high, bare, grassy banks which are almost continuous, and must shut out the surrounding country from any one down on the surface of the stream, has something to do with this.

Once a day, perhaps, in summer a small steamer from Worcester or Tewkesbury carries a load of holiday-makers between those places or up to Bewdley, while occasionally a long line of tarpaulin-covered barges, drawn by a tug, lashes the brown sombre river into great commotion. Save for these rare interruptions, however, Sabrina in her pilgrimage through Worcestershire is a lonely stream; at close quarters even a thought sombre and moody, swishing noiselessly between those high grass embankments and half-submerged willows, over the top of which she gets up so readily when the fountains of the Welsh hills are loosed. Seats of old renown lie here and there upon the ridges to the right and left. Hartlebury Palace is near by, where the Bishops of Worcester are still seated in the Jacobean halls of their gorgeous predecessors, behind moats and ramparts that sheltered much earlier prelates even than these; past the many-hundred-acred wood of Shrawley and past Astley, where are the remains of hermitages cut in the cliff, used in quite recent years for profane purposes, but of old by pious recluses who exchanged benedictions with the Severn boatmen for small coin. Thence to Ombersley, the seat and village of the Sandys, who were foremost among Worcestershire loyalists in the Civil War; and Holt Castle, where the Elizabethan Chancellor, the first of the Bromleys, set up house and founded the present family. Close by, too, are the ancient oaks of Whitley, almost brushing the costly fountains and terraced gardens of the Earls of Dudley, till the uplifted glades of Hallow Park, where Queen Elizabeth stayed with a little retinue of 1500 horses, and shot a buck, makes a fitting approach to Worcester, whose Cathedral stands out conspicuously above the town, which lies sloping upwards from the river-bank.

Plain though stately in exterior and nobly poised, Worcester Cathedral holds the visitor rather by the richness of its interior and the many successive styles of architecture it displays, including the original crypt – almost the best in England – of Bishop Wulfstan, the eleventh-century founder of the present fabric. Little of the latter indeed but this Norman crypt is left, for the church of the great Monastery of Worcester suffered sorely from fire and mischance in the Middle Ages, while during the civil wars, the city being nearly the whole time “in action,” as it were, was more fleeced

and knocked about than almost any other in England. The first small battle of the war, fought by Rupert, which struck a long and serious misgiving into the minds of the raw mounted troopers of the Commonwealth, took place at Powick Bridge over the Teme, near the city. The last battle of the second brief war, as every one knows – a fierce and bloody one – was also fought at Worcester. Otherwise it was occupied for a brief time by Essex's raw army, who worked havoc among the monuments, windows, and ornamentation of the Cathedral. Thenceforward the "ever faithful city" was held for the King, though at the cost of much hardship and constant exactions for his cause, till near the end of the struggle, when it was captured.

Modern Worcester is singularly fortunate in the wide range of its industries, gloves and porcelain still claiming pre-eminence. It still retains, however, among much of that reconstruction inevitable to a busy town, quite a large number of sixteenth and seventeenth century half-timbered houses. That occupied by Charles the Second, at the great battle of Worcester, and from which he escaped by only a hair's breadth to pursue the adventurous course of a hunted fugitive, is still standing, as also is the yet finer old house which was the headquarters of the Scottish commanders, and in which the Duke of Hamilton died of his wounds. It would be out of place, even if space permitted, to dwell here on the peculiar position which Worcester, and the county of which the Severn valley is so important a part, occupied from the Norman Conquest to the Reformation. It was of all English counties the one where the Church had most property and most power, and the influence of great lay magnates was least. While here too, and above all while treating of the Severn, the fact must be emphasized what an influence the river had on the drift of race and political balance in England. In British, Roman, and probably for most of the Saxon period, the Severn was by no means the well-behaved river, a hundred or so yards broad, flowing between well-defined banks, that we see to-day, but the whole valley through which it now flows was a marshy lagoon. Beyond the valley was a strip of forest wilderness, and beyond the wilderness was Wales and its dubious Borderland. Worcester first came into being as the chief passage of the Severn, since Roman, British, and Saxon roads, and the route of travel for long afterwards, all converged here. As a historical boundary no river in England has played such a part. Even in that more or less authentic compact known as the Tripartite convention, caricatured by Shakespeare, between Owen Glyndwr and the Percies in the early fifteenth century to divide England and Wales into three kingdoms, the Severn was the natural frontier of the western dominion. Its west bank even to-day has a faint Celtic flavour, while nothing to the eastward of the river could possibly suggest anything but the Saxon.

Leaving Worcester for its twenty-mile run to Tewkesbury, the Severn almost immediately receives the Teme, that famous trout and grayling river which from here to its source in the Radnor moors has scarcely a dull mile. Whether brawling in the woody limestone gorges of Downton, gliding under the storied walls of Ludlow, slipping from pool to rapid through the pleasant meads of Herefordshire, or running its Worcestershire course through the deep romantic vale between Tenbury and Powick, the Teme is always beautiful. With this final contribution from the Welsh mountains, the Severn pursues its sombre, smooth, fast-gliding course between the same high banks of red sandstone soil, held together by tufted grass for the better resistance of winter floods, and the low willows which trail and dip in the stream. Occasionally some slope of woodland makes a brief change in its character. But no villas nor country-houses to speak of venture on the river edge, nor vary its somewhat monotonous character of foreground detail with their ornate accessories, such as display themselves in one shape or another on most of our famous rivers. Neither punts nor skiffs nor house-boats, nor flannelled youths nor gay parasols, ever brighten its broad silent stream. But as a natural feature in a typical English landscape of more than common beauty, rolling majestically along between

wide ox-pastures and meadows that in June are busy with haymakers and instinct with pastoral life, it leaves little to be desired. One feature, however, here adds abiding lustre to the Severn valley; for the Malvern Hills, by far the finest range for their modest altitude in all England, rise within easy

distance of its western bank, and following in the same direction make a mountain background to a scene that even without them would be fair enough.

While noting contrasts, too, though in this case not anywise concerned with the physical attributes of Thames or Severn, what a curiously different tale is told in the ownership of their respective banks. Along the former, for instance, with its gayer surface, its more ornate and gregarious shores and splendid mansions, how few occupants of these last have any hereditary association with the soil, how utterly broken are most ties with the past! Along the Worcestershire Severn, on the other hand, the ancient stocks hold their ground with singular tenacity. Above Worcester something of this has been indicated; and again, as one follows the river downwards and recalls the names of Lygon (Earl Beauchamp), Hornyold, Berington, Lechmere, Coventry, Temple, or Martin – all but the last two, who are about a century later, representatives by descent of Tudor ancestors – it seems to cover almost every seat of note within hail of the river, and probably the greater portion of the land abutting on its banks to the county's limit: and this for modern England anywhere is extremely creditable and rare enough.

Upton, a little town of some importance in the more primitive times of Severn navigation, has now scarcely anything but a bridge and small market to live upon. In the churchyard and predecessor of the present abandoned and conspicuous Georgian church was fought a desperate skirmish between the Scots and Fleetwood's vanguard, just before the last battle of Worcester. Approaching Tewkesbury the river runs out into a wide expanse of meadow land, and through this, under the walls of the beautiful old town with its superb Abbey church rising conspicuously above its banks, Shakespeare's Avon, having now run its course by Warwick, Stratford, Evesham, and Pershore, rolls its classic waters to their confluence.

Tewkesbury has some claim to be the most picturesque of the Severn towns, though lying absolutely upon the flat. It is small, unsmirched by any industry, and undoubtedly contains in its two long streets a greater proportion for its size of really good sixteenth and seventeenth century houses than any of its neighbours on either Severn or Avon, rich beyond measure in this respect as both these valleys are. Then the Abbey church alone would make a town famous. To dwell upon this imposing pile, practically a Cathedral, is here out of the question. Its massive Norman tower with its wealth of rich external arcading is one of the finest in England. Its long nave with vaulted roof resting upon massive cylindrical Norman pillars is of scarcely less renown. Its aisles and transepts, choir and chapels, its pointed windows with their old stained-glass, its many monuments, and above all its superb west front, make a subject almost foolish to touch upon in half a page. One may state, however, that its lay founder was that celebrated Robert Fitzhamon, Earl of Gloucester, who in the time of Rufus added to his earldom by a romantic adventurous exploit, well remembered in Wales, the province of Glamorgan. His body lies, too, where it should lie, in his own abbey, beneath an elegant chantry raised nearly three centuries later to his memory by a pious abbot.

It would be ill omitting, however space may press, all mention of the battle of Tewkesbury, when on May 4, 1471, the Yorkist forces under Edward the Fourth encountered the Lancastrians under Queen Margaret outside the town in the final battle of the long Wars of the Roses. The latter were defeated with prodigious slaughter; a place near Severn's bank being still known as the *Bloody Meadow*. But the slaughter was not confined to the battle: the Lancastrian fugitives, when all was long over, were hunted and hounded to death, and with their chief, who had sought sanctuary in the Abbey, were dragged in great numbers to the scaffold. After this a solemn thanksgiving was held in the Abbey by the bloodthirsty victor, whose notions of a benignant deity, like most of his kind in those pitiless days, was merely the God whom he fancied had interfered in his favour.

Swishing silently onward between its high, monotonous banks of red earth and green tufty turf and unaspiring willows; stirred perhaps once a day by a trail of steam-dragged barges, but otherwise noiseless always, unless for the occasional plunge of a fish on its reddish-brown surface, the Severn rolls towards Gloucester through a fat and

teeming country. Peaceful hay meadows of ample acreage, astir but for a week of June, save when some winter flood rolling over them makes for their yet greater silence. Towering elms and yet older oaks, following some flood ditch or hedgerow along the river's edge or across the flat valley, which give a certain sense of dignity and opulence to this part of the Severn's course, and not least when a summer wind is ruffling their thousand leaves and curling over these great seas of mowing grass. Farms and cottages shrink backward a couple of fields' length from the river-bank on to the edge of the upland for obvious and sufficient reason. And so by Deerhurst with its part Saxon church and wholly Saxon chapel, by Apperley Court and Ashelworth ferry to the outskirts of Gloucester. Here the navigation of the river, helped by a canal cut across to Sharpness Point 18 miles below, assumes an ocean-going character and considerable importance for small ships. The well-known "bore" or tidal wave rushes up the Severn periodically, often achieving the height of 9 feet and a speed of 14 miles an hour, and special embankments have been made below Gloucester to preserve the land from its attacks. When the Severn begins to open out into wide watery flats, and below Gloucester to take on the muddy qualities of a tidal river, there is little occasion to follow it. The general outlook, however, during the last forty-mile stretch of the Severn, is worthy of its fame, for on both sides the uplands spread back in deep lofty ridges. The Cotswolds upon the one hand, with Mayhill and the Forest of Dean upon the other, give character and interest even to the shining flats of salt marsh, sand, and mud, through which the Severn, from any height, can be seen coiling like a serpent to meet the Wye, and with the later advent of the Avon to merge into the Bristol Channel.

But Gloucester is the real port of the Severn, a clean and pleasant city, and like Worcester has two long main streets meeting where an ancient cross stood, and still in name stands; for the heart of the city, unlike the other, is a mile from the Severn as well as lower lying, and its navigation is effected by canals. As an historic town in the Middle Ages Gloucester counted for much, its earldom carrying for many reasons extraordinary power, and its situation on the edge of the Welsh Marches, and on the lowest bridge of the Severn, having alone a significance that can scarcely be realised without some understanding of the military and political importance of this corner of England and Wales before the Wars of the Roses. Centres of influence shift, and when the archer and the man-at-arms under the Clares and Mortimers ceased to be a potent factor in English political life, the country between and about the Severn and the Wye, the original home of English archery, lost its peculiar significance and took rank by mere geographical and commercial considerations. In the Civil War, however, Gloucester came again to the front. Its stubborn retention by the Parliamentary party in a Royalist country, and its defence by Massey, entitles it to rank with Royalist Worcester as among the most conspicuous centres of strife in that distressing conflict. But strangers nowadays only visit Gloucester to see the Cathedral – an expedition well worth the making. Belonging to the middle group of cathedrals in size, this one is chiefly celebrated for its beautiful tower and cloisters, both of the Perpendicular period. Most of the nave, however, retains the original Norman character in piers and arches with exceptional grandeur of elevation; elsewhere it is much obscured by Perpendicular casing. Gloucester boasts also one of the four eleventh-century crypts and the largest east window in England, still containing a good deal of the old painted glass. Originally a Benedictine monastery, the burial within its walls of Edward the Second, murdered at Berkeley Castle near by, and afterwards held as a martyr, brought pilgrims, money, and additions to the church, which became the Cathedral of the new See of Gloucester, cut off from Worcester by Henry the Eighth. A fragment too of Llanthony Abbey, the twin sister, though in fact the unfilial daughter, of that stately ruin, that other Llanthony in the Welsh vale of Honddu, still stands amid the modern litter of the docks.

CHAPTER II

THE WYE

IF the Severn under its infant name of Hafren leaps towards such modified civilization as Llanidloes and the lonely trail of the Cambrian railway implies, amid solitudes profound, the Wye, though running even longer in the wild, has the company almost from its source of that ancient coach-road that in the good old stay-at-home days took even persons of condition on their wedding tours to Aberystwith. It was a wild and long way though, and its solitudes must have struck something like terror into the hearts of a Midland or East Anglian squire of the Regency period, getting outside the hedges as it were for the first time in his life, and looking possibly for the only one, upon actual mountains and tumbling streams. The Severn running north-east, and drawing mainly on the fountains of North Wales in its way to Welshpool and Shrewsbury, taps another country from the Wye. The latter is soon swollen into quite a large river by many lusty affluents from one of the wildest and most prolific watersheds in England or Wales. Birmingham, some of us may regret, has already discovered and laid this last under tribute. London engineers have had it all surveyed this ten years, and some day it is to be feared London will make it a burning question. The ordinary Londoner of intelligence, however, knows nothing about it outside possibly the path from Aberystwith to the top of Plinlimmon and back. Of its great lonely heart, tuneful only with the noise of waters, the bleat of sheep, and the plovers' cry, of its romantic girdle of crag and wood, of little white-washed sycamore shaded homesteads and rude hoary shrines of British saints through which these bog-fed torrents break, the outer world knows absolutely nothing at all. Here, however, are about 600 to 800 square miles of more continuously wild upland than anything even in North Wales, all lying in a block, to which the counties of Montgomery, Radnor, Brecon, Cardigan, and Caermarthen each contribute a slice. A land penetrated by no roads south of the Upper Wye, though pricked around its edges by rough and short-lived arteries

for local use. A region whose hidden charms are for the stout pedestrian alone, but have remained so far undiscovered even by him, for practically no human form but the Welsh-speaking sheep farmer on his pony or some more than commonly adventurous angler or occasional grouse shooter ever breaks upon the solitude of this far-reaching mountain waste even in mid-August. This barrier, so broad, so lofty, and so long, which counted for so much in Welsh history, was known by the men of old as "the mountains of Ellineth." They have now no composite name, and there is not a range in Britain needs one more. It is as if Dartmoor and Exmoor, which could be together dropped into this other one, each lacked a concrete designation.

The Wye draws little further on this watershed, till after 20 miles of wandering in the wilderness, growing gradually less savage, and playing all the tunes and chords known to little trout streams amid the pastures of Llangurig, it meets the Marteg and the Elan, near Rhayader, and begins to take itself seriously. This indeed is the real beginning of the Wye, for most of those who know its upper reaches. For here it achieves maturity and enters the world; and a beautiful world too, of waving woodlands and overhanging mountains, but one which many pass their lives in and others visit, and traversed by a good valley road and a railway. The Elan but a few short years ago came from the west out of this Ellineth wilderness, bringing with it the waters of the Claerwen through a deep vale, unforgettable by those who knew it for the exquisite combination of luxuriant low ground and the fine grouping of its overhanging mountain walls. If Cwm Elan was retired from the world in the ordinary sense, it is a familiar enough name to all students of Shelley, whose cousins then owned it, and who himself settled here for a time with his young, hapless, and ill-suited wife. The hills and crags, however, that inspired the poet's earliest muse,

Those jagged peaks that frown sublime,
Mocking the blunted scythe of time,

look down now upon far different scenes, though perhaps in their way not less lovely ones. Deep waters now glimmer from hill to hill where the Elan ran but yesterday through wood and pasture to join the Wye; and yet deeper into the hills, where the Claerwen leaped from the wild into this now submerged Arcadia, is another lake, thus laying both the main stem of the valley and its forks under the same vast sheet of water. If this chain of lakes is the work of the Birmingham Corporation and not of Nature, they are of this last at any rate a good imitation, and reflect upon their bosoms no shadows less harmonious than those of the everlasting hills.

The Wye is a delightful river from its source to its mouth; scarcely a suggestion of industrial defilement comes near it anywhere. The, in this respect, utterly guileless Cathedral town of Hereford is, indeed, the only place above the scale of a small market-town within touch of its banks. Everywhere, even between the rapids, the river itself is instinct with the sense of buoyancy. After leaving the Black Mountains above Hereford it becomes at intervals for pleasure-boats a navigable stream; but till it leaves Wales it has all the boil and rush and stir of a salmon river. It is easy to pick out those sections of the Wye, charming as they are in a quiet, pastoral, Severn-like fashion, which are the least distinguished. And that they form collectively much the smaller portion of a river running a course of 130 miles, says something for its qualities. The Wye divides itself readily into four distinct stages. The first, its infancy as a mere mountain stream to Rhayader; the second, its course thence for some 30 odd miles as a considerable river fretting in a rocky channel, and pressed between the heavily-wooded feet of hills and mountains, to Boughrood with a few reaches more of less violent perturbation, but imposingly guarded by the Black Mountains, to Hay or Clifford. The third stage may be reckoned as covering the rich and broken low country of Herefordshire; while the fourth begins near Ross, where the river enters that series of magnificent scenes which, opening with Symond's Yat, continues for above 30 miles, past Monmouth to Tintern, the Wyndcliff and Chepstow, maintaining a standard of beauty and grandeur altogether above the scale that you would look for, even in the more than pretty region through which it cuts its way. It is by means of this lower stage that the Wye seems to defy a rival; for as regards its upper reaches between Rhayader and Hay, beautiful as they are, the Dee through the vales of Edeyrnion and Llangollen, the Usk between Brecon and Abergavenny, the North Tyne, and one or two Yorkshire rivers, could show 30 miles of as noble a torrent, equally beautiful in environment. But none of these rivers, after they have abandoned their highland glories and settled down into the comparative quiet of the low country, wake again as they near the sea as the Wye awakes, and repeat, though with a difference of detail that is the more charming, the glories of their prime. Which of the two sections of the Wye is the more beautiful it would be ill saying. Their contrast, happily, makes comparison foolish. No other English river of any size can offer at once such a spectacle as Symond's Yat on the Wyndcliff, near its mouth, and the long gorge between Aberedw and the Epynt in its higher reaches.

This it is which crowns the Wye as fairest of English rivers by a practically indisputable title. So, carrying thus the Elan and the spare water of its many lakes with it, the Wye thunders on in rocky channels or heaves in wide swirling pools, beneath woods of oak and ash and larch, with the green or purple crests of the great hills looming high above. Plunging past Doldowlod and Llysdinam it receives the sprightly Ithon, which, born in the Kerry hills and gathering in its course half the waters of Radnorshire, has twisted between its red crumbly banks with much sound and laughter through 50 miles of that most delectable little county. Dividing Brecon here from Radnor, two unknown shires that outside North Wales and the Lake District it would be hard to match, counted as one, for their high qualities of form and detail, the Wye rages down those jagged stairways known as "Builth rocks," and noted as a famous stretch of salmon water. Here on the western bank a large tributary, and itself at times no mean salmon river, the Irfon comes pouring in its amber bog-fed streams. Born far away

in the very heart of the high moors, within hail of the resounding struggles of the infant Towy in the gorges of Fanog; cradled in unvisited hollows beneath raven-haunted crags of old Silurian rock; fretting amid the lush bracken glades and indigenous mountain oaks of Abergwessin and “the steps of the Wolf,” this bewitching stream drives downward through a rich and narrow vale encompassed by lofty hills, till, fuller by a half-score of mountain brooks, it meets the Wye near that historic spot where Llewelyn the Third, the last Prince of Wales, fell in battle at an unknown soldier’s hand.

Flowing under the many-arched stone bridge of Builth, that ancient little mart of sheep and cattle, and receiving the Edw from Radnor Forest, the Wye now enters on perhaps the most inspiring of all its upper reaches. For here on the Radnor shore the bold ridge of Aberedw lifts its

rock-plated sides some 1200 feet above the fretting river which upon the Brecon bank chafes the green and woody feet of the high sheep-walks of Epynt. What makes, too, for the exceeding beauty of these particular reaches of the Wye is not alone the lofty hills which press upon its here tempestuous streams, but the further fact that every downward view of the river has for a background the line of the Black Mountains waving at a great height against the skyline. Breaking at length out of its own pent-up channels, and turned back by the formidable barrier before it, which protects the vale of Usk, the Wye now swings to the east and down the broader meadowy vales of Glasbury and Hay; the Black Mountains of Brecon looming high and abrupt on the right, the Radnor moors rising more gradually upon the left, each bank from time to time ornate with some country-seat set back against the base of the hills. This is the spot to remind the reader, if such be needed, that the Wye is a famous salmon river, and that its fish, unlike those of the Severn, share the normal habit of all other salmon, mysterious and unaccountable though that instinct be, of rising in more or less capricious fashion to what we facetiously call, and the salmon most certainly does not consider to be, a fly. The upper or rockier portion from Rhayader to Glasbury is perhaps the best of the river, but all the way down, till it meets the tide at the proper and appointed casts, the Wye is a true salmon river in the angling sense of the word. To discuss its ups and downs, or to dwell upon the tribulations that this one in common with most salmon rivers has experienced in some recent years, is not our province. But the Wye is cursed with the pike, a gentleman that the salmon loathes – not, of course, like the trout, from bodily fear, but he shuns his presence and neighbourhood as a fastidious mortal moves from a neighbourhood invaded by vulgarians. The Llyfni comes with slowish current into the Wye above Glasbury from the neighbouring reedy lake of Tal-y-llyn, otherwise Savaddan, set like a gem in the rich basin between the Brecon beacons and the Epynt Hills, and it is by this route that the unwelcome aliens are said to make their entry. The Wye is also a trout river from its source to near its mouth, though of vastly varying quality, which we need not dwell on here. But in its mountain reaches two generations ago, if the local grandfather is veracious, it was equal to the Usk or Dee or Teify. These halcyon days till you get well above Builth are no more; for not only pike but the chub has pushed in, and in pellucid rocky pools where he has no business whatever, you may now have as fine fly-fishing for chub as anywhere probably in Great Britain. But the trout whose native and perfect haunt it is, has retired a good deal into the background. He exists, to be sure, everywhere, and may with luck be caught anywhere, but the fisherman can no longer as of yore wade up the rapids of Erwood or Aberedw and kill his 10-lb. basket, on a good day, with fly, though he may take a few on a minnow.

Hay (Le Haie, as the Normans called it) marks the boundary on one bank between England and Wales. It was of old a sort of small Berwick-on-Tweed, and many a fight has taken place in its neighbourhood. As at Welshpool the English, mainly the dependants of the Norman castle, now a residence, lived in the east, the native Welsh in the west part of the town, and the memory of such divisions survives even to this day in the respective districts of English and Welsh Hay. Just below Hay the ruined towers of Clifford Castle, whence came fair Rosamond, cast their shadows on the stream. It is sixteen miles from here to Hereford. The Black Mountains recede from the river’s southern shore and droop to the lower ridges, in whose parallel troughs the Monnow, the Honddu, and the Dore, their backs here turned upon the Wye, hurry southward to meet it at Monmouth, 40

miles below. The Radnor moors on the north bank, too, have already fallen back, and the river has broken out into England and the plains of Herefordshire – if so diversified a country may be called by comparison a plain – and to a quiet life, unvexed by mountain spurs and unchafed by resisting rocks. The Wye, however, keeps plenty of life within it, tumbling oftener over gravelly shallows than the Severn, loitering less sullenly in long reaches, and lurking less frequently between high grassy banks – a brighter and more joyous river altogether to be with, and clearer too, for there is practically nothing to defile its waters. Shooting swiftly under the old bridge of Bredwardine, or stealing quietly through the park lands of Moccas, or winding among the pastures of Monington, where Owen Glyndwr is thought to have spent his closing years at his daughter's home, the Wye is always the best of company. Sleek Hereford cattle, the most decorative of all breeds to English landscape, are everywhere. The high wooded ridges, so characteristic of Herefordshire, rise now on one bank and now on the other, while always the long line of the Black Mountains fills the western sky. Fish of every kind worth having are in the river that offers such variety of lodging – the salmon in his season, the trout, the grayling, the pike and chub and perch, and all the lesser fry. And thus to Byford and Bridge Sollars where Offa's Dyke, having run from North Wales, ends its course, and leaves the Wye for the rest of its journey to form the eighth-century line of demarcation between Welsh and Saxon, or, more literally perhaps, between those who knocked under to the Mercian Kings and those who would not.

Not much of a boating river as will have been gathered is the Wye, but as it draws near Hereford there is a mile or two of deep water and a good deal more that is available to the energetic oarsman: sufficiently so, at any rate, to make the little cathedral city a boating centre in a modest way. Below the ancient bridge, over which so many armed hosts have marched to fight the Welsh, the Wye spreads into rapid shallows and thus skirts the city; fair meadows upon one side, upon the other the Bishop's Palace and the Cathedral, and the broad Castle green, where that vanished fortress once stood. And now upon high terraces the citizens of Hereford muster in strength when the sun shines, with a fine prospect over the broad rippling river and over the most wooded of landscapes, to the dark masses of the Black Mountains, behind which the sun sets. Hereford is a clean and pleasant old town, quite unsmirched by any factory chimneys, and largely concerned in cider-making, county business, and matters educational and ecclesiastical: a typical cathedral town, with the virtues and failings of its type in great perfection. It is not so rich in Tudor architecture as Shrewsbury, Ludlow, or Tewkesbury, but has a fair sprinkling of seventeenth-century houses, and many restful byways of Queen Anne or Early Georgian type. The Cathedral is of course one of the lesser ones in size, but is of great interest. Built at the end of the eleventh century to replace a humbler predecessor burnt by the Welsh, it has a great deal of the original Norman work, as, for instance, the piers of the nave, with much of the choir and south transept. As for the rest, there is much fine work, Early English, Decorated and Perpendicular.

The building is double cruciform in shape, with a massive central tower. It has several rich chantries of Perpendicular date and some fine cloisters. It was much injured by the fall of a west tower in the eighteenth century, and still more by the inept reparation of the damage by Wyatt, that misguided architect who gained the favour of an uncritical generation and ran amuck among such English cathedrals as were unfortunate enough to demand attention during his lifetime. Hereford may be dismissed with the perhaps serviceable remark that it is the best centre for seeing the Wye valley – using the latter term in the proper sense, not merely as applicable to the reaches between Ross and Monmouth, the conventional limitations of tourist literature.

The second stage of the river's third or lowland section, if so geometrical a term is in order, that, namely, from Hereford to Ross, must merely be indicated as of the same quality, though in detail perhaps more emphatically picturesque, as the stage from Hay to Hereford. The delightfully inconsequent outcropping wooded heights and ranges of Herefordshire press more closely on the river, particularly on its eastern banks, and amid the stately purlieu of Holm Lacy. From the gate of Wales to Hereford, ever charming though the river itself be, one looks always westward and up stream to the dominant Welsh hills and mountains as the outstanding feature and background of the canvas.

Below Hereford, as Wales grows dim, the valley begins to supply more prominent characteristics of its own – not such as it achieves later, but quite sufficiently distinguished in height and opulence of colouring to save its reputation from the reproach of a single commonplace interlude. Just below Hereford, too, the Lugg, bringing with it the waters of the Arrow, joins the Wye. Both these rivers rise in the Radnor hills, and have been always noted for their trout and grayling, particularly the latter, a fish now fairly distributed, but a generation ago only found in the comparatively few rivers where it was indigenous. Among these the Lugg, like the Teme, held high rank. After running out of Wales through the deep woody glens about Presteign and Aymestry, and then traversing the battlefield of Mortimers Cross, it turns due south at Leominster, and ripples brightly over a stony bed, amid lush meadows and ruddy banks, down the heart of Herefordshire towards the Wye.

Ross is, of course, quite a noted little place, and has associated itself with the glories of the Wye with a particularity that is, I think, just a trifle unfair to Hereford, which as a town is of course incomparably more interesting, and even as a vantage point on the Wye has some advantages. But Ross is the place where oarsmen, with a trip to Chepstow in view, usually hire their boats, and if not archæologically inspiring, it is picturesquely seated on a ridge above the river, with a fine church crowning it, and a good Jacobean town hall. Also a “man of Ross,” an estimable and philanthropic eighteenth-century country gentleman no doubt, whom Pope made fortuitously famous by a line or two, but as a claimant on the interest of the outsider is now made something of a bore by Ross literature.

It is at Goodrich Castle, where Sir Thomas Meyrick once kept his celebrated collection of armour, with its Norman keep and imposing modern substitute half a mile away crowning the steeps, that the first premonitions of the transcendent beauties of the Lower Wye show themselves, and lofty hills begin to trench upon the river-banks. At Symond’s Yat begin those remarkable lower reaches of the Wye, which in a sense challenge comparison with the Welsh section, and are far better known. But this should not be, for they are quite different. The latter lie among the moors and mountains. The Wye is there what you expect to find it – a characteristic mountain river. Down here, however, its suddenly uplifting qualities and transcendent beauty burst upon you in the nature of the unexpected. In a series of quite extraordinary loops it burrows in deep troughs for many tortuous miles, overhung on both sides by masses of woodland. These almost perpendicular walls of foliage, 600 to 800 feet in height, are buttressed, as it were, by grey bastions and pillars of rock that project in bold and fine contrast to the soft curtain of leaves that hang in folds round them. The noted view from the summit of Symond’s Yat is as bewildering as it is beautiful; for the river here makes a loop of 4 miles, the neck of which is but a few hundred yards wide. For over 10 miles, in alternate moods of shallow rapids and quiet deeps, the Wye is forcing itself in violent curves through this strange group of lofty sandstone hills. Roads scarcely penetrate them, but the railway from Ross to Monmouth, with the help of tunnelling, gets through with stations at Lydbrooke Junction and Symond’s Yat. At the latter place is a good hotel attractively situated, besides accommodation of other kinds. All this district is now Crown property, which greatly simplifies the question of exploring it. Escaping from this delightful and stupendous entanglement of cliff and wood, the Wye runs down to Monmouth through a most exquisite valley, and between hills of goodly stature verdant to their summits with green pastures, criss-crossed by straggling hedges or belts of woodland. Small farms and cottages, with brightly-tinted walls, perched here and there upon a ledge on the steep face of the hills, are a characteristic feature too of all this lower Wye. Away to the south-east, stretching almost to the river, spreads the Forest of Dean. To the west the rolling surface of Monmouthshire, luxuriant in verdure and opulent in colouring, is cloven by the valley of the Monnow, which well-nourished and rapid stream meets the Wye at Monmouth.

Rising at the head of the outermost eastern gorge of the Black Mountains, the Monnow runs a course from its source to its mouth of unremitting loveliness. Met at the base of the mountains by the Honddu, coming fresh from the sacred pastures of mountain-girdled Llanthony, the united streams

are still further reinforced at Pontrilas by the waters of the Golden Valley. Thence, running under the high-poised ruinous Castle of Grosmont, through the chase of Kentchurch Court, where another daughter of Glyndwr lived and her descendants live to-day, and onward yet down a deep, narrow vale overhung by hills over a thousand feet in height, washing the ivy-clad ruins of Skenfrith Castle, the beautiful stream slacks something for the last half-dozen miles of its pilgrimage to Monmouth. For the number and average weight of its fish the Monnow is perhaps the best trouting stream on the whole Welsh Borderland, which is saying a good deal, though the introduction of grayling has not been favourable to its maintaining its former high standard. It has given its name at any rate to a town, a county, and a king. A great king too was Harry of Monmouth, of whose birthplace, the Castle, there is not a great deal left, beyond the very perfect gateway on the Monnow Bridge. Regarding the county whose boundary against Herefordshire the Monnow forms for the greater part of its career, this was named, of course, from the town when Henry the Eighth created it out of many lordships. It would be ill forgetting, however, Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose “study,” by a pious fiction, is pointed out to the stranger in a fragment still remaining of a twelfth-century Benedictine Priory. Whether Geoffrey as a historian was over-credulous or a bit of a wag does not matter. The later poets and their readers are much indebted to him for the Arthurian legend. If Arthur did not hold his Court at Monmouth, he held it at Caerleon, in the next valley, and the glorious Usk, child of the Black Mountains, and almost the Wye’s equal in its upper reaches, is nowhere an English river – happily for our space. With the memory of many a ramble by the Teme and Lugg, the Monnow and the Honddu, it goes hard enough to pass them by, but the passing of the Usk in such light fashion would be harder still. As for Monmouth itself, there is nothing else remarkable about it, nor yet, fortunately, is there anything calculated to disturb the peaceful and romantic nature of its setting.

For the ten succeeding miles to Tintern Abbey the Wye valley is only less delectable of aspect than above Monmouth, while below Tintern, retaining almost to the last some of the stir of a salmon river in its maturer stages, it has all the charm of a broad one, flowing in a narrow valley between hills at once lofty in altitude and opulent in detail. For a time, however, below Monmouth the river flows in what approaches to a gorge with heavily wooded sides. At Redbrook, too, where a stream comes in, there is just a smirch of industrial life from the Forest of Dean. But this quickly passes, and the vale again opens. The lush wandering hedgerows again climb the steeps; the little white houses blink through orchards upon high-pitched terraces. Here still are the rich red patches of tillage, the woodland drapery, the country-seats, conscious no doubt that they have an atmosphere to live up to. All these are grouped with an effect peculiar to the Wye, for the simple reason that no other English river valley combines the luxuriance of a soft and forcing climate with a physical environment so consistently distinguished in scale and altitude as does the Wye for the 30 odd miles between Ross and Chepstow. There are interludes, of course, where both lofty sides of the vale are clad with an unbroken mantle of wood, and it is this variety of decoration that is so alluring. What is left of the great Cistercian Abbey Church of Tintern stands in a somewhat ampler opening in the vale, just wide enough to spread a generous carpet of meadow, as it were, on which to lay so beautiful a fabric.

Tintern has been so celebrated in prose and

verse and by the artist’s brush, it would seem almost futile to deal in paragraphs with this glorious specimen of the Decorated period, raised by the great Border House of Clare for the Cistercian Order, whose genius for selecting a site seems to have been in no way inferior to the lavish splendour of their architectural conceptions. Just beyond Tintern this wonderful valley makes its greatest and almost its final effort. Whether the Wyndcliff or Symond’s Yat be its greater achievement matters nothing. The latter, of course, combines its scenic splendours with extraordinary physical conditions. The Wyndcliff is simply a most superb wall of woodland and outstanding limestone crag upon a large scale, which from its summit displays a noble prospect of the final passage of the Wye out on to the Severn levels; a glittering, sinuous trail through a fold of precipitous wood-clad hills opening on to shining flats and infinite distances beyond. Fortunate is the wight who is privileged to

enjoy the Wyndcliff on some still, sunny morning when that stupendous curtain of foliage is fully lit by the fires of autumn, into a blaze of gold and russet, broken here and there by columnar limestone crags, and those sombre patches of yew that upon all the cliffs of the Wye seem purposely introduced to set off the contrasting brilliance of the autumnal foliage.

But the glories of the Wyndcliff in only a modified form extend the whole way upon one bank or the other to Chepstow, and here on the very verge of a low precipitous cliff, washed by the Wye, are the still considerable ruins of the great Castle of Chepstow or Striguil; and a more appropriate and significant ornament to what is practically the mouth of the river could not be imagined. In these few pages we have had to concern ourselves mainly with the physical aspects of this the most consistently beautiful of rivers. But to those, few enough it is to be feared, who care for the stirring story of this Borderland, the Wye is a great deal more than a long procession of ever-changing and enchanting scenes. Every stage of its course from its wild fountain-head, above which Glyndwr first flew his dragon flag to the castle of the Clares on this frontier of the Lordship of Lower Gwent, resounds, for those that have ears to hear, with the long clash of arms, rich in the memories and traditions and legends that are always thickest where two contentious and hostile races have for centuries kept each others'

wits and limbs alert, and each others' swords from rusting. The Guide-book may lead you to infer, with perhaps a shrewd estimate of its public, that the principal interest of Chepstow Castle lies in the incarceration there of one of the many regicides in the matter of Charles I. These hoary walls, whose shadows fall on the now tidal stream of the Wye, were something more than a seventeenth-century jail, by which time, indeed, their mission and their story was long done with. But we will let that pass, and reverting once again to those physical and visible charms of a river that may well abide by those alone, close this chapter with the reminder that Wordsworth, steeped to the heart and lips in an atmosphere that might well make such a part and parcel of it as he was, hyper-critical as regards all others, succumbed absolutely before the glories of the Wye:

How oft —
In darkness and amid the many shapes
Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart —
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee?

CHAPTER III

THE CHALK STREAMS

PARTICULAR distinction may be fairly ascribed to what is commonly known as the Chalk Streams. There are not many of them in the world, and nearly all of them are in England, being even here the possession of but a few counties. For Wilts, Hants, Dorset, and Berks, with Bucks, Kent, and Herts in a less degree, contain practically all the rivers of this type, and of these the two first-mentioned are more exclusively the home of the chalk stream. Wiltshire gives birth to the Kennet, the Christchurch or Salisbury, Avon, and the Wiley – all notable rivers of this class; the upper part of the first, most of the second, and the whole of the third being within the county, while Hampshire has the Itchen and the Test, of the same class and rank. The quality of the chalk stream lies in its exceeding clarity. The water filtering through the great masses of dry chalk upland, where it meets the clay or greensand on which they lie, breaks out of the base of the hills as pellucid in texture as the springs that rise in the limestone countries of the north and west, and form their more rocky streams. In the valleys of the chalk counties, too, the beds of the rivers are apt to wash out hard and clean, and set off to great advantage the crystal currents that glide or ripple over them.

They combine the clearness of a mountain stream with only a degree more current than the slow-running rivers of central or eastern England. They savour, in short, of the unexpected. There is no stir nor movement of water on the hillsides, as in Wales or Devonshire, to suggest the natural corollary of a clear torrent in the valley below. The hills here, though graceful and delightful in their peculiar way, are more waterless than any clay ridge in Northamptonshire or Suffolk, for reasons already given. Nor does the chalk stream usually run like a western river. It moves at most times but little faster than the rivers on which men go boating or float-fishing for roach. Its environment is smooth, its course is peaceful, and its fall gradual. It is all this that gives the flavour and charm of the unexpected, when you arrive at the bank and find a stream gliding past your feet as translucent as if it had just gushed out from a limestone mountain in Cumberland.

The Chalk Stream gives best evidence of its quality in being the natural home of the trout and grayling, fish that do not often flourish in, and are never indigenous to, slow-running streams of other than chalk origin. There are two Avons in Wiltshire which illustrate the contrast to perfection: the one which runs westward through the fat pastoral regions, the clays and greensands of north-west Wilts towards Bath and Bristol; the other, which rises in the Marlborough Downs, and cuts through the heart of Salisbury Plain, as translucent as a mountain stream. The last alive with lusty trout; the other, which moves slowly with murkier current over a muddier bottom, breeding only coarser fish and belonging to another family of rivers.

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