

SECTION XIII.

GREAT as the pleasures were which we had enjoyed the preceding day, they did not exceed the satisfaction we received from the permission granted us to view Steep-hill Cottage. This was once the villa of the late right honourable Hans Stanley, then governor of the island; but it now belongs to the honourable Mr. Tollemache.

It was erected by Mr. Stanley, and, from its situation, must have cost an immense sum. From several concurring circumstances, we were led to believe, that even bringing the water up to the house was attended with a very considerable expence.

It is in the true cottage stile.—The roof consists, cottage like, of humble thatch; and the outsides of the walls are covered with white composition; forming together a rural and pleasing appearance. But its inside, for neatness and elegance, beggars description.—It is at once so plain, so truly elegant,

gant, and, though small, so convenient, and so pleasant, that I think I may venture to say I never met with its equal.

The entrance leading from the gate to the house, is lined on both sides with lofty elms and ashes, which form an avenue that reaches almost to the door of the hall, where a display of taste is seen in the surrounding flowers and shrubs.

On the left hand, before we reached the house, stood an urn; and on the right hand, a chair formed of the rough branches of trees, which, though simple, was curious.

As you enter the hall the sight is encountered with fresh beauties; it is not spacious, but in the extreme of taste.—Here are a few pictures by Vandevelde, with several by other masters. But on entering the dining room, we found an exquisite display of the powers of this master's pencil.—We scarcely ever remember seeing a collection of shipping to be compared with it.

The piece in particular which hung over the fire-place, is, without exception, one of the finest by that master.—The subject is a ship in a gale of wind, under top-sails. The handling is wonderful; and the penciling clearly pronounces it to be a *chef d'œuvre*.

Two others of considerable merit hung over the doors: we imagined them to be by Brooking.—They are finely touched:—the sea, in one of them, is spirited to a degree. There are also some by De Velieger, executed in a fine manner, particularly the view of Scheveling.

Last, though not least, two landscapes attracted our notice; which, at first sight, we thought to be Gainsborough's.—The colouring clear and beautiful; the drawing not less great; the finishing in his best stile.—We were however much surpris'd when we were informed, that they were not actually executed by that great master, but copied after two pieces of his, by the honourable Mr. Tollemache, the possessor of the villa.

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I shall not hesitate to pronounce, that were these pictures hanging in some snug corner in town, the most experienced connoisseur, on getting a sight of them, would immediately conclude them to be originals. They only want time to mellow their fresh appearance, and then few would be able to discover the difference.

The subject of one is a cottage; down the steps of which a country girl is descending—A favourite subject of that eminent and much lamented master. The other truly depicted to us the mind of this paragon of natural genius.—It was a small piece of water, with a grey horse in a market cart, sipping the surface of the pool. The distance of both is soft and harmonious, and adds double lustre and effect to the fore-grounds. Of all the copiers from Gainsborough, no one perhaps ever caught his touch and colouring with greater exactness, or has been more chaste in the drawing, than Mr. Tollemache, in the pieces referred to.

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There being company in the house at the time we were there, we were prevented from seeing the upper part of it;—a disappointment we submitted to with regret; as from what we had seen on the ground floor, we had but little doubt of the remainder being furnished and decorated with equal elegance and taste.

The outside of the house is no less free from ostentation in its appearance, than the inside is devoid of every false allurement to catch the eye. The principal view from it is towards the west; where a bow window projects, that, like the roofs of all the other parts, has only humble thatch for its covering.

A pleasing lawn lies before it, which gradually declining, presents the whole range of St. Lawrence on one side,—the extremity of the ocean on the other. On the right side, at the bottom of the lawn, you pass the wicket that leads to the garden, which, from its situation, cannot fail of being productive. The rocks protect
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it towards the north, and the sea breezes fan it from the south.

From hence we passed the wing of the house, and entered a path that leads to the grove before mentioned. The offices are some of them in the village, others are adjoining to the house. On the left hand stands the green-house and stabling, but they lie considerably lower than the cottage.

To enumerate the many delightful vicissitudes of this fairy ground, is beyond the power of a pen. I therefore shall conclude my description of it with saying, that to find a spot where those who reside in it are so much respected,—where its vicinity is so pleasing,—its situation so romantic,—and its *tout en-semble* so bewitching,—is next to impossible.

Mr. Tollemache has likewise a brigantine yacht, which, when the weather will permit, lies here to grace the ruder scenes of Nature. The inside of it, we were informed,
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is equally as elegant as his villa, and fitted up with the same taste; but we had not an opportunity of viewing it.

Parties frequently come to the New Inn, at Steephill, to dine; where, though they might not find the sumptuous entertainment of a modern hotel, they will meet with every convenience for serving up a cold collation.

Even in this recluse and humble situation a ray of taste is visible. The house being small, the proprietors have encouraged the irregular branches of a fig tree to repose itself on an artificial support; thereby forming a kind of canopy, which spreading over a daisy-mantled carpet, serves as a pleasing and agreeable receptacle, in which parties continually dine, *al fresco*. On the opposite side a prouder walnut spreads its branches over the seats, and likewise shelters the cheerful guests from the scorching beams of the sun.

The prospect from these rural sheds is very pleasing, but, in point of landscape, rather

rather contracted. The hill from whence the village derives its name binds the left-hand screen. The valley opens beneath to the road where Mr. Tollemache's yacht usually lies. To shew how much we were charmed with this place, I cannot help making use of an expression of the late Mr. Quin's, on his leaving Chatsworth: "I thought I should at times have broke my neck in getting there; but when I was there, I thought I should have broke my heart to leave it."

The shore here is very rocky, and, when the wind blows fresh from the southward, very dangerous for ships. At such times the yacht leaves her station, and makes for Sandown Bay, or for Spithead.

The inhabitants say, that within the last twenty years the sea has greatly incroached, at this part of the coast, on the land. But if we might judge from the pieces of rock with which the strand is every where strewed, and which must have fallen from the eminences at the time the sea washed their sides, (and this, from every apparent circumstance,

cumstance, must have been the case at some period or other,) it may rather, I think, be concluded that the contrary has happened. The country people, however, think otherwise.

A number of ravens build in these cliffs, and likewise hawks, of a species peculiar to this spot only;—they are of the falcon kind, and found to be the only sort proper for the sport of hawking. Jack-daws, crows, and many other birds, also make them their habitations, and breed on them. Some of the farmers say they have heard of eagles being there; others are of a different opinion. From the situation of the rocks, such a circumstance is not improbable; but as this bird is generally an inhabitant of colder climates, we were rather inclined to give credit to the assertions of the latter.

The people of this place are chiefly fishermen, who in the summer season take great quantities of crabs and lobsters. For this purpose some of them sink more than
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a hundred wicker pots, or more properly baskets, at a time; which they bait with whatever kind of flesh or garbage they can procure. And here it may not be improper to hint to the gentlemen of the island, that whenever they lose a dog, they cannot seek for it in a more likely place; though most probably they may chance to come too late to recover it while living. I have myself seen several fine pointers tied up in their huts at a night, which, before the succeeding day has broke, have been made not “worms meat,” as Mercutio was, but food for crabs and lobsters. The coast abounds with shell fish of all sorts, to the great convenience of the lower ranks, who purchase them at three pence per pound; that is generally the price fixed when boiled, and they are always sold by weight.

A fish of a very peculiar nature is sometimes taken here, to which the fishermen, from its circular form, give the name of the sun-fish. The appearance of this fish is extremely whimsical, and Nature seems to have been in a sportive humour when she

the first fashioned it. In shape it is nearly round, and does not, like most other fish, branch out into any part that might be termed a tail. One part however is rather pointed, at which the head is fixed; the shoulders are placed at the thickest part; after which it becomes rather oval; and it has four fins, situated at the extremities. Taken altogether, it is a droll composition. We could not help resembling it to a school-boy, who, having worn his long hair for a considerable time dangling down his back, has it, on a sudden, cropped close to his neck.

We had been informed, that here, also, we should see a cascade; our expectations however were soon put a stop to, by beholding a little spring, trickling down the side of a hill, in a contracted channel, devoid of every appearance of grandeur; and possessing nothing worthy of notice, but the large stone by which its mean clue was broken, and which was sufficient to sustain a body of water fifty times more weighty than that running over it.

Leaving

Leaving Steephill, we continued our course towards Bonchurch; during which several curious studies for colouring presented themselves, till we passed the corner of a precipice, from whence the beginning of Little-town Down commences. The shelving sides of this precipice hang tottering over the brink of the deep abyss, and threaten an intrusion on the road.—It forms a noble side-screen for the general view of Bonchurch;—while from it the sea has a variegated appearance, and finely assists the landscape.

On first viewing the mountain to which the name of Little-town Down is given, a traveller may be led to suppose it Steep-hill. Its sides, like that, are almost perpendicular, and, as seen from the road, are formed like a sugar-loaf. A few houses lie at its foot; the road to which from Appuldurcombe is dangerous in the extreme. The hill itself is a noble picturesque object; and forms an elegant back-ground to relieve the broken part of the road on which the cottages stand. Here are as many choice pieces

pieces of broken rocks, and fore-grounds well verdured, as at Undercliff; only more contrasted. The soil again alters here, and appears to be composed of flint, with great quantities of tobacco-pipe clay.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.