

VIII - THE LAND'S END.

Something like what Jerusalem was to the pilgrim in the Holy Land, the Land's End is--comparing great things with small--to the tourist in Cornwall. It is the Ultima Thule where his progress stops--the shrine towards which his face has been set, from the first day when he started on his travels--the main vent, through which all the pent-up enthusiasm accumulated along the line of route is to burst its way out, in one long flow of admiration and delight.

The Land's End! There is something in the very words that stirs us all. It was the name that struck us most, and was best remembered by us, as children, when we learnt our geography. It fills the minds of imaginative people with visions of barrenness and solitude, with dreams of some lonely promontory, far away by itself out in the sea--the sort of place where the last man in England would be most likely to be found waiting for death, at the end of the world! It suggests even to the most prosaically constituted people, ideas of tremendous storms, of flakes of foam flying over the land before the wind, of billows in convulsion, of rocks shaken to their centre, of caves where smugglers lurk in ambush, of wrecks and hurricanes, desolation, danger, and death. It awakens curiosity in the most careless--once hear of it, and you long to see it--tell your friends that you have travelled in Cornwall, and ten thousand chances to one, the first question they ask is--"Have you been to the Land's End?"

And yet, strange to say, this spot so singled out and set apart by our imaginations as something remarkable and even unique of its kind, is as a matter of fact, not distinguishable from any part of the coast on either side of it, by any local peculiarity whatever. If you desire really and truly to stand on the Land's End itself, you must ask your way to it, or you are in danger of mistaking any one of the numerous promontories on the right hand and the left, for your actual place of destination. But I am anticipating. Before I say more about the Land's End, it is necessary to relate how my companion and I got there, and what we saw that was interesting and characteristic on our road.

The reader may perhaps remember that he last left us scrambling out of reach of the tide, up the cliffs overlooking Kynance Cove. From that place we got back to Helston in mist and rain, just as we had left it. From Helston we proceeded to Marazion,--stopping there to visit St. Michael's Mount, so well known to readers of all classes by innumerable pictures and drawings, and

by descriptions scarcely less plentiful, that they will surely be relieved rather than disappointed, if these pages exhibit the distinguished negative merit of passing the Mount without notice. From Marazion we walked to Penzance, from Penzance to the beautiful coast scenery at Lamorna Cove, and thence to Trereen, celebrated as the halting place for a visit to one of Cornwall's greatest curiosities--the Loggan Stone.

This far-famed rock rises on the top of a bold promontory of granite, jutting far out into the sea, split into the wildest forms, and towering precipitously to a height of a hundred feet. When you reach the Loggan Stone, after some little climbing up perilous-looking places, you see a solid, irregular mass of granite, which is computed to weigh eighty five tons, supported by its centre only, on a flat, broad rock, which, in its turn, rests on several others stretching out around it on all sides. You are told by the guide to turn your back to the uppermost stone; to place your shoulders under one particular part of its lower edge, which is entirely disconnected, all round, with the supporting rock below; and in this position to push upwards slowly and steadily, then to leave off again for an instant, then to push once more, and so on, until after a few moments of exertion, you feel the whole immense mass above you moving as you press against it. You redouble your efforts--then turn round--and see the massy Loggan Stone, set in motion by nothing but your own pair of shoulders, slowly rocking backwards and forwards with an alternate ascension and declension, at the outer edges, of at least three inches. You have treated eighty-five tons of granite like a child's cradle; and, like a child's cradle, those eighty-five tons have rocked at your will!

The pivot on which the Loggan Stone is thus easily moved, is a small protrusion in its base, on all sides of which the whole surrounding weight of rock is, by an accident of Nature, so exactly equalized, as to keep it poised in the nicest balance on the one little point in its lower surface which rests on the flat granite slab beneath. But perfect as this balance appears at present, it has lost something, the merest hair's-breadth, of its original faultlessness of adjustment. The rock is not to be moved now, either so easily or to so great an extent, as it could once be moved. Six-and-twenty years since, it was overthrown by artificial means; and was then lifted again into its former position. This is the story of the affair, as it was related to me by a man who was an eyewitness of the process of restoring the stone to its proper place.

In the year 1824, a certain Lieutenant in the Royal Navy, then in command of a cutter stationed off the southern coast of Cornwall, was told of an ancient Cornish prophecy, that no human power should ever succeed in overturning the Loggan Stone. No sooner was the prediction communicated to him, than he conceived a mischievous ambition to falsify practically an

assertion which the commonest common sense might have informed him had sprung from nothing but popular error and popular superstition. Accompanied by a body of picked men from his crew, he ascended to the Loggan Stone, ordered several levers to be placed under it at one point, gave the word to "heave"--and the next moment had the miserable satisfaction of seeing one of the most remarkable natural curiosities in the world utterly destroyed, for aught he could foresee to the contrary, under his own directions!

But Fortune befriended the Loggan Stone. One edge of it, as it rolled over, became fixed by a lucky chance in a crevice in the rocks immediately below the granite slab from which it had been started. Had this not happened, it must have fallen over a sheer precipice, and been lost in the sea. By another accident, equally fortunate, two labouring men at work in the neighbourhood, were led by curiosity secretly to follow the Lieutenant and his myrmidons up to the Stone. Having witnessed, from a secure hiding-place, all that occurred, the two workmen, with great propriety, immediately hurried off to inform the lord of the manor of the wanton act of destruction which they had seen perpetrated.

The news was soon communicated throughout the district, and thence, throughout all Cornwall. The indignation of the whole county was aroused. Antiquaries, who believed the Loggan Stone to have been balanced by the Druids; philosophers who held that it was produced by an eccentricity of natural formation; ignorant people, who cared nothing about Druids, or natural formations, but who liked to climb up and rock the stone whenever they passed near it; tribes of guides who lived by showing it; innkeepers in the neighbourhood, to whom it had brought customers by hundreds; tourists of every degree who were on their way to see it--all joined in one general clamour of execration against the overthrower of the rock. A full report of the affair was forwarded to the Admiralty; and the Admiralty, for once, acted vigorously for the public advantage, and mercifully spared the public purse.

The Lieutenant was officially informed that his commission was in danger, unless he set up the Loggan Stone again in its proper place. The materials for compassing this achievement were offered to him, gratis, from the Dock Yards; but he was left to his own resources to defray the expense of employing workmen to help him. Being by this time awakened to a proper sense of the mischief he had done, and to a tolerably strong conviction of the disagreeable position in which he was placed with the Admiralty, he addressed himself vigorously to the task of repairing his fault. Strong beams were planted about the Loggan Stone, chains were passed round it, pulleys

were rigged, and capstans were manned. After a week's hard work and brave perseverance on the part of every one employed in the labour, the rock was pulled back into its former position, but not into its former perfection of balance: it has never moved since as freely as it moved before.

It is only fair to the Lieutenant to add to this narrative of his mischievous frolic the fact, that he defrayed, though a poor man, all the heavy expenses of replacing the rock. Just before his death, he paid the last remaining debt, and paid it with interest.

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Leaving the Loggan Stone, we next shaped our course for the Land's End. We stopped on our way, to admire the desolate pile of rocks and caverns which form the towering promontory, called "Tol-Peden-Penwith," or, "The Holed Headland on the Left." Thence, turning a little inland--passing over wild, pathless moors; occasionally catching distant glimpses of the sea, with the mist sometimes falling thick down to the very edges of the waves, sometimes parting mysteriously and discovering distant crags of granite rising shadowy out of the foaming waters,--we reached, at last, the limits of our outward journey, and saw the Atlantic before us, rolling against the westernmost extremity of the shores of England.

I have already said, that the stranger must ask his way before he can find out the particular mass of rocks, geographically entitled to the appellation of the "Land's End." He may, however, easily discover when he has reached the district of the "Land's End," by two rather remarkable indications that he will meet with on his road. He will observe, at some distance from the coast, an old milestone marked "I," and will be informed that this is the real original first mile in England; as if all measurement of distances began strictly from the West! A little further on he will come to a house, on one wall of which he will see written in large letters, "This is the first Inn in England," and on the other: "This is the last Inn in England;" as if the recognised beginning, and end too, of the Island of Britain were here, and here only! Having pondered a little on the slightly exclusive view of the attributes of their locality, taken by the inhabitants, he will then be led forward, about half a mile, by his guide, will descend some cliffs, will walk out on a ridge of rocks till he can go no farther--and will then be told that he is standing on the Land's End!

Here, as elsewhere, there are certain "sights" which a stranger is required to examine assiduously, as a duty if not as a pleasure, by guide-book law, rigidly administered by guides. There is, first of all, the mark of a horse's

hoof, which is with great care kept sharply modelled (to borrow the painter's phrase), in the thin grass at the edge of a precipice. This mark commemorates the narrow escape from death of a military man who, for a wager, rode a horse down the cliff to the extreme verge of the Land's End; where the poor animal, seeing its danger, turned in affright, reared, and fell back into the sea raging over the rocks beneath. The foolhardy rider had just sense enough left to throw himself off in time--he tumbled on the ground, within a few inches of the precipice, and so barely saved the life which he had richly deserved to lose.

After the mark of the hoof, the traveller is next desired to look at a natural tunnel in the outer cliff, which pierces it through from one end to the other. Then his attention is directed to a lighthouse built on a reef of rocks detached from the land; and he is told of the great waves which break over the top of the building during the winter storms. Lastly, he is requested to inspect a quaint protuberance in a pile of granite at a little distance off, which bears a remote resemblance to a gigantic human face, adorned with a short beard; and which, he is informed, is considered quite a portrait (of all the people in the world to liken it to!) of Dr. Johnson! It is, therefore, publicly known as "Johnson's Head." If it can fairly be compared with any of the countenances of any remarkable characters that ever existed, it may be said to exhibit, in violent exaggeration, the worst physiognomical peculiarities of Nero and Henry the Eighth, combined in one face!

These several local curiosities duly examined, you are at last left free to look at the Land's End in your own way. Before you, stretches the wide, wild ocean; the largest of the Scilly Islands being barely discernible on the extreme horizon, on clear days. Tracts of heath; fields where corn is blown by the wind into mimic waves; downs, valleys, and crags, mingle together picturesquely and confusedly, until they are lost in the distance, on your left. On your right is a magnificent bay, bounded at either extremity by far-stretching promontories rising from a beach of the purest white sand, on which the yet whiter foam of the surf is ever seething, as waves on waves break one behind the other. The whole bold view possesses all the sublimity that vastness and space can bestow; but it is that sublimity which is to be seen, not described, which the heart may acknowledge and the mind contain, but which no mere words may delineate--which even painting itself may but faintly reflect.

However, it is, after all, the walk to the Land's End along the southern coast, rather than the Land's End itself, which displays the grandest combinations of scenery in which this grandest part of Cornwall abounds. There, Nature appears in her most triumphant glory and beauty--there, every mile as you

proceed, offers some new prospect, or awakens some fresh impression. All objects that you meet with, great and small, moving and motionless, seem united in perfect harmony to form a scene where original images might still be found by the poet; and where original pictures are waiting, ready composed, for the painter's eye.

On approaching the wondrous landscapes between Trereen and the Land's End, the first characteristic that strikes you, is the change that has taken place in the forms of the cliffs since you left the Lizard Head. You no longer look on variously shaped and variously coloured "serpentine" rocks; it is granite, and granite alone, that appears everywhere--granite, less lofty and less eccentric in form than the "serpentine" cliffs and crags; but presenting an appearance of adamantine solidity and strength, a mighty breadth of outline and an unbroken vastness of extent, nobly adapted to the purpose of protecting the shores of Cornwall, where they are most exposed to the fury of the Atlantic waves. In these wild districts, the sea rolls and roars in fiercer agitation, and the mists fall thicker, and at the same time fade and change faster, than elsewhere. Vessels pitching heavily in the waves, are seen to dawn, at one moment, in the clearing atmosphere--and then, at another, to fade again mysteriously, as it abruptly thickens, like phantom ships. Up on the top of the cliffs, furze and heath in brilliant clothing of purple and yellow, cluster close round great white, weird masses of rock, dotted fantastically with patches of grey-green moss. The solitude on these heights is unbroken--no houses are to be seen--often, no pathway is to be found. You go on, guided by the sight of the sea, when the sky brightens fitfully: and by the sound of the sea, when you stray instinctively from the edge of the cliff, as mist and darkness gather once more densely and solemnly all around you.

Then, when the path appears again--a winding path, that descends rapidly--you gradually enter on a new scene. Old horses startle you, scrambling into perilous situations, to pick dainty bits by the hillside; sheep, fettered by the fore and hind leg, hobble away desperately as you advance. Suddenly, you discern a small strip of beach shut in snugly between protecting rocks. A spring bubbles down from an inland valley; while not far off, an old stone well collects the water into a calm, clear pool. Sturdy little cottages, built of rough granite, and thickly thatched, stand near you, with gulls' and cormorants' eggs set in their loop-holed windows for ornament; great white sections of fish hang thickly together on their walls to dry, looking more like many legs of many dirty duck trousers, than anything else; pigsties are hard-by the cottages, either formed by the Cromlech stones of the Druids, or excavated like caves in the side of the hill. Down on the beach, where the rough old fishing-boats lie, the sand is entirely formed by countless

multitudes of the tiniest, fairy-like shells, often as small as a pin's head, and all exquisitely tender in colour and wonderfully varied in form. Up the lower and flatter parts of the hills above, fishing nets are stretched to dry. While you stop to look forth over the quiet, simple scene, wild little children peep out at you in astonishment; and hard-working men and women greet you with a hearty Cornish salutation, as you pass near their cottage doors.

You walk a few hundred yards inland, up the valley, and discover in a retired, sheltered situation, the ancient village church, with its square grey tower surmounted by moss-grown turrets, with its venerable Saxon stone cross in the churchyard--where the turf graves rise humbly by twos and threes, and where the old coffin-shaped stone stands midway at the entrance gates, still used, as in former times, by the bearers of a rustic funeral. Appearing thus amid the noblest scenery, as the simple altar of the prayers of a simple race, this is a church which speaks of religion in no formal or sectarian tone. Appealing to the heart of every traveller be his creed what it may, in loving and solemn accents, it sends him on his way again, up the mighty cliffs and through the mist driving cloud-like over them, the better fitted for his journey forward here; the better fitted, it may be, even for that other dread journey of one irrevocable moment--the last he shall ever take--to his abiding-place among the spirits of the dead!

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These are some of the attractions which home rambles can offer to tempt the home traveller; for these are the impressions produced, and the incidents presented during a walk to the Land's End.