

THIRD REPORT OF COMMITTEE ON DARTMOOR.

THIRD REPORT of the Committee—consisting of Mr. J. S. Amery, Mr. C. Spence Bate, Mr. W. F. Collier, Mr. J. Divett, Mr. R. Dymond, Mr. G. Hirtzel, Rev. W. Harpley, Rev. Treasurer Hawker, Mr. F. H. Firth, Mr. W. Lavers, Mr. G. W. Ormerod, Mr. W. Pengelly, Mr. J. Brooking Rowe, and Rev. W. H. Thornton—for the purpose of influencing public opinion in favour of preserving the peculiarities and antiquities of Dartmoor.

Edited by W. F. COLLIER, Hon. Secretary of the Committee.

(Read at Ilfracombe, July, 1879.)

THE Dartmoor Committee beg leave to report that the map of Dartmoor which Mr. Dymond has kindly undertaken to prepare has made considerable progress in his careful hands, and will be a valuable record of what Dartmoor is at the present time.

If Dartmoor is brought much further into that state of civilization so aptly expressed by the establishment of convicts there, it will be a lesson to the next generation which will teach them what they may lose by not resisting encroachments on their rights of free foot.

Since the last Report of this Committee extensive enclosures of wire fencing have been made, taking in all the best grazing land, which has been always common land, outside the previously enclosed land, on the south and east of Fox Tor Mire, near Fox Tor. These enclosures are important encroachments on the rights of the commoners, taking from them most of the good land, and leaving them the bogs. They also interfere with the right of way from the parish of Holne on the east across the end of Avon Head Mire to the westward, an old and well-worn way.

Notwithstanding the distress prevailing throughout the country, there still appears to be money enough to be expended on a railway to Prince Town, and on a scheme to convert the bogs, which are as full of water as a wet sponge, into fuel.

The Committee pointed out in their Report last year that both these schemes are fraught with danger to the water supply of the county. The railway, if persisted in by the Great Western Railway Company, may, if care be not taken, do a permanent mischief, especially as the Prince Town station will not be far from the source of the best water taken by Sir Francis Drake for the supply of Plymouth and H.M. fleet.

The Committee have under their notice the public rights of way on Dartmoor, which seem to have been by no means respected with that sort of sacred fervour bestowed on other rights connected with the land. Old well-known rights of way have been, there can be no doubt, interrupted by enclosures; and many have been lost because public property is not so zealously defended as private property. Euclid says, "Let it be granted that a straight line may be drawn from any one point to any other point." It might also be said that a right of way may be claimed from any one point to any other point on Dartmoor, usage for hundreds of years being decidedly in favour of such a claim. But whilst any one would be considered an idiot who refused to grant the postulate of Euclid, it is to be feared that there are some who would hesitate to grant the second postulate without running any risk of such an imputation.

There are two ancient rights of way on Dartmoor among many others, respecting which a special report will be interesting. These rights of way are known as the Abbots' Way and the Lich-Path. Both ends of these ways are now either lost in enclosures, or have become the present highways of the districts through which they lead. In all probability they have either continued to be the ordinary highways, have been diverted into the course of other highways, or have been stopped altogether, according to circumstances when the enclosures were made. In the heart of the Moor however they are still distinct as old ways for man and beast, and are more or less definite as the ground affords good or bad footing. Where the footing is bad, and single file alone is possible, they are very well worn ways; where it is good, permitting deviation to the right or left, or the spreading of a party, they are less so.

The Abbots' Way is so called because it was the path used by the Abbots and Monks of Buckland Monachorum and Tavistock when they visited their brethren, the Abbot and Monks of Buckfast Abbey; and it is the shortest way between those places across the Moor from the western to the eastern side. Reversing this order, by supposing the

Abbot of Buckfast Abbey to have occasion to visit the Abbot of Buckland or Tavistock Abbey, he would start with his sumpter horses and retinue from Buckfast Abbey on the banks of the Dart, and pursue his way through the parish of Buckfastleigh, long since lost amongst the enclosures as the "Abbots' Way," leaving a beautifully rich country behind him, and he would reach what is still the open Moor on the high land outside the enclosures at Skerriton and Lemsland. Looking backwards to the east he could command a lovely view, now cut up into enclosures like patch-work, of Buckland on the Moor at his left, Hay Tor, the estuary of the Teign, before him, and the South Hams, with the sea in the distance, at his right. Here, the ground being good, the way is not now very distinct, or rather there are many paths; but arriving at the stream which feeds the Avon from Brock Hill Mire the Abbots' Way becomes very well marked at the crossing-place, and passing along the side of the hill which slopes down to the left bank of the river Avon, or Awne, the Abbot would get on a part of the way which is still a turfless road broad enough for a cart, and is marked on the published Ordnance Map. This map was published many years ago from a survey made then, and is not very accurate. The names of the places, tors, &c., recorded, were probably much misunderstood when taken from the people of the locality, and had also undergone considerable modifications from generation to generation since the ancient times when they were first used. This remark will apply to all the names of places now in use on Dartmoor.

The Abbot descending this road down to the Awne would pass Buntingdon Cross, and ford the river from the left bank to the right at Huntingdon Warren. Here the Abbots' Way is marked as such on the Ordnance Map, but is not well preserved, an old artificial water-course, long disused, a relic of one of the many Dartmoor speculations, having nearly obliterated it. The map, however, shows it to be on the right bank of the river, opposite Huntingdon Warren, in the parish of Lydford, and therefore on the Forest. Leaving the river and turning up the hill towards Peter's Cross, the way is again a well-worn road, and the Abbot following it would leave Peter's Cross several yards on his left, and, passing the high ground which separates the valley of the Awne from the valley of the Erme, descend on the boggy source of Red-lake, a tributary of the Erme. The footing on both sides being bad the way here is very well preserved, having a good sandy hard bottom. It is here crossed by what was once the Brent

tramway, laid down for taking the peat cut from the bogs to be converted into fuel, which is now a wreck. The Abbot would then take the way across the head of Red-lake, where the path is very evident, or he might follow the course of the little stream to its foot, where there is also a path; and in either case he would come on Erme plains on the left bank of the river Erme, where there is good grassy galloping ground for some distance to Erme Pits and Erme Head, Dark-lake and two other rocky feeders of the Erme being crossed at places where the way is again very well marked. Arrived at Erme Pits, which are very remarkable remains of the early tin-streamers (in all probability), the Abbots' Way is clear, and following it he would reach Erme Head, a hopeless looking mire; hopeless, one would think, for claiming a right of way through it. But it is a curious confirmation of the postulate after Euclid that there is a way through Fox Tor Mire, a way through Awne Head Mire, and also one through this much smaller mire at Erme Head. It may here be observed for the benefit of the uninitiated that a mire is a mire, and a bog is a bog, and that the two words do not mean the same thing, as might be supposed. At Erme Head the Abbot would see before him a very bright straight little stream, running towards him through the mire, with glistening white sand and pebbles at the bottom; this is his way, affording just room enough for one horse's foot on its solid bed, and allowing him to pass with perfect safety. He would then proceed on the side of the hill until he arrived at the top of the high land separating the waters of the Erme from the waters of the Plym, where there is a rock known as Broad Rock, now marked with BB cut in modern letters. Here the Abbots' Way is a well-worn path, with boggy ground on each side of it, on a high level, commanding all the country between Dartmoor and the river Tavy, as far as Hamoaze. At this point the way to Buckland Abbey and that to Tavistock Abbey would diverge; and supposing the Abbot to be going to visit his brother at Buckland, he would sink the hill towards the Plym in a westerly direction, and cross the upper part of that river at a ford which clearly marks the Abbots' Way. Ascending the hill on the west of the river, he would reach what is now a high road and a few enclosures at Aylesborough, where there is an old house and a long-abandoned mine; and here all trace of the Abbots' Way becomes lost. The high road, now good enough for carts or carriages, may have been made on the track of the Abbots' Way, for it points straight in the direction of Buckland.

Having brought the Abbot to Broad Rock, on the western side of the Moor, we took him on to Buckland, and abandoned him to the parish road at Aylesborough. But suppose him on some other occasion to visit the Abbot of Tavistock. He would leave Broad Rock, and pursue a track in a north-westerly direction on the side of the hill, just skirting very boggy ground on his right, gradually descending to the river Plym, near Plym Head, somewhat above the crossing on the way to Buckland. At the Plym, of course, the Abbots' Way is very well marked indeed; and, mounting the hill on the other side to ground that is fairly level, the Abbot would pass through a sound track, with bogs on each side, until he came upon some fine turfy ground commanding quite a different part of the Moor from any that he has as yet seen. He has passed the high boggy land which is the source of the Plym and the Erme, and he has the range of tors before him of which Great Mist Tor is the chief. On his right are Fox Tor, Fox Tor Mire, and the valley of the Dart; before him are this range of fine tors and the Moor, not yet encumbered by Princetown and the convicts; and on his left is the valley of the Mew, or Meavy. The river Meavy on Dartmoor becomes the Mew, and the river Avon becomes the Awne. The shorter names are probably the oldest; but it may be taken as a rule that the names of tors, rivers, and places on Dartmoor have been so corrupted in course of time—the literature of Dartmoor being of very recent date—as to defy etymology. The Abbot passing along this good ground would come to the spot where now stands Nun's Cross. Some little distance north of Nun's Cross is now to be found a road leading on the eastward to White Works, close to Fox Tor Mire, and on the westward to Walkhampton, Horrabridge, Tavistock, and the rest of the world. Here the Abbots' Way is lost: but it is not likely that the Abbot followed the track of this road, because there would have been much shorter ways to Tavistock for him on good ground. There are many paths that might have been the Abbots' Way, but not one that can be satisfactorily identified as a continuation of the way here traced.

The Lich-Path is an ancient way in quite a different part of the Moor, used for carrying the dead to the parish church of Lydford, the whole of Dartmoor Forest being in the parish of Lydford; and it presents many of the same features as the Abbots' Way. Particulars respecting it are left for a future report.

(Signed) W. F. COLLIER, Hon. Sec.

(Signed) W. H. THORNTON, Chairman, *pro tem.*