

## DARTMOOR.

BY W. F. COLLIER.

(Read at Ashburton, July, 1876.)

DARTMOOR is a theme which to every Devonian is a romance. Dartmoor is wild, rugged, mountainous, and grand. The hills are high, and are crowned with granite tors, which impart to them a power to excite feelings of reverence. Like crowned monarchs, when there is a cloud upon their brow we fear the storm that follows the frown, and when their aspect is clear and bright we bask in the sunshine of their royal favour.

Beneath them is the deep valley and the stream in its rocky bed, roaring or murmuring in response to the frown or the smile of the ruling power above; the roar sounding like the threat of a destroyer; the murmur, soothing, gentle, and persuasive.

From the heights of the tors to the depths of the valleys ever-varying contrasts present themselves. The green turf, the purple heather, the graceful fern, the golden furze, the black bog, the granite boulders relieved with gay moss and lichen, lie before us, stretched in irregular expanse as far as the eye can reach. The whole effect rouses the feelings, stirs our emotions, and awakens in us the sense of the sublime grandeur which nature in a wild state impresses upon those who indulge themselves by contemplating her in her simple purity.

To admire nature apart from civilization is not to be uncivilized. It is so much the contrary, that it may be questioned whether uncivilized men admire nature at all. To them nature is a severe task-mistress, imposing upon them unceasing labour and numberless hardships in whatever climate they may live. To civilized men she is a delight, a relief, and a rest; a pure unalloyed enjoyment, drawing their thoughts away from the toil of civilized life, putting the sense of beauty into the mind of the jaded worker in dry, ugly detail, and restoring tone to the nerves of the exhausted student of hard facts.

Nature still remains dominant on Dartmoor ; but how much longer she will so remain in her glory and her power—a healing, restoring, softening influence—is a serious and alarming question which I am exceedingly desirous to bring before the Devonshire Association.

There is a conflict on Dartmoor between two opposing forces, and the stronger of them is fast gaining ground on the weaker, shortly to occupy the camp of the beaten power. There has been a slow, persistent, determined advance by the invader on the territories of the native possessor, and the aggressor is fast becoming, as usual, the conqueror. In other words, and in homely common phrase, Dartmoor is in danger of being civilized off the face of the earth. I want to raise the cry of “Devonshire to the rescue !”

The two opposing forces are, not civilization ranged against uncivilization, but one phase of civilization ranged against another phase ; the hard, grinding, unsympathetic, worldly-wise, wealth-seeking, dull side of the shield of the knight-errant of civilization, in opposition to the bright, glistening, glorious, and lovely side. It is the lower civilization seizing nature by force and making a slave of her, putting her in chains and confining her in prisons, against the higher civilization, making a friend, a mother of her, placing her at the head of our affairs, choosing her for our queen.

To put this question in a more practical shape : Are supposed economical laws to supersede all other laws, and are the beauties of Dartmoor to fall before the spade and the plough, for the sake of the miserable pittance that can be wrung from her granite and bog ?

When the invasion of the native soil takes place, the first step in the advance of the aggressive force is a fortress in the shape of an enclosure ; no spade, no plough, no abomination can make progress without an enclosure.

As a Devonshire man, a member of this Association, a lover of nature and her beauties, I lift up my voice and cry, “What right has any man to enclose any part of Dartmoor ?” I will not, like Brutus, pause for a reply, because I well know that I shall get none. I well know also that no such right exists, and I equally well know that the enclosure of Dartmoor will go on in spite of all rights to the contrary, unless indeed I move you to take the field in support of the native defending forces, in whom, as oppressed, virtuous, noble, and beautiful indigenous occupants of the country, I have a great wish to enlist your sympathies.

It is Dartmoor in the state of nature that I admire ; the

rivers, streams, and brooks, as clear as the clearest crystal; the far and wide space, as if fresh from Nature's workshop, with no straight lines, no geometrical angles, and not a square suggested. Nature in her glory, free from science, free from art, free from economy and utility, free from geology, archæology, and every human device for making her other than what she is.

“Where all, save the spirit of man, is divine.”

It is this Dartmoor that I wish to bring before you, that I want you to admire and love, to adopt as something requiring your protection and care, something for the sake of which you have associated yourselves, and to be regarded by you as a special subject demanding at your hands deep and permanent consideration.

In this aspect of Dartmoor, which may be called the emotional and poetical aspect, many who have taken an interest in Dartmoor hitherto may find themselves thrown into the shade. From this glorious Dartmoor, in a pure state of nature, who would care to turn for the purpose of searching for celts, flint instruments, and other relics of a departed race of savages that lived in this country a few years ago, a very few years in comparison with the ages of the tors? Who would care to speculate on the works of a Druid, when he can contemplate the granite towers (tor is Saxon for tower) of Vixen Tor or Hay-tor? Who would care to grovel in a barrow in search of a vase, or a ring, or a spear, which everybody knows that everybody used a very few thousand years ago, when he can seat himself on Mist-tor, and, looking moorward, see nothing but the sublimity of nature uncontaminated by the hand of man? How pitiable it is to be scratching the surface of the delicate turf, disturbing its look of quiet and repose, merely to search for that which every one knows may be there, but which would surprise no one whether it were there or not there! How frivolous it is to gloat on the circular rows of stones, which some people delight in calling villages! Whether they are three hundred or three thousand years old signifies nothing. Grant that they are the work of man, what then? in comparison to the work of nature all interest in them vanishes. What do they tell us of the history of man? Absolutely nothing. There is as good reason to suppose them to be three hundred years old as three thousand. The only tale they tell is that man defaced the features of nature when they were made as he does now, but not nearly so much, and that is all. The

pyramids of Egypt, St. Peter's at Rome, the Cathedral at Exeter, are far more creditable to man, as an artist, than these circles of stones; and we may thank our good fortune that he has so far left Vixen Tor alone. Kent's Cavern tells us a history of man that Dartmoor can never tell; and a history of nature too which is sublime in its significance. Dartmoor does not tell us anything like this; but it can sing us an epic poem descriptive of nature as she is, and as she would be if untouched by the hand of man. It is a superfluous work to ask Dartmoor to tell us what is well known, and what Kent's Cavern and other evidences of the past can tell us very much better. It is well to look at what relics Dartmoor may have; but it is destructive to disturb them, to dig at them, or to carry them away in order to put them in glass cases and museums. Any amount of nonsense can be said or written about them without doing much harm, as long as a morbid curiosity be not excited that ends in digging.

Those with whom I have just been remonstrating, archæologists let them be called, are lovers of Dartmoor, and are by no means enemies of the native powers. They are only indiscreet and too enthusiastic friends, who admire Dartmoor in a mistaken spirit; more, perhaps, for the qualities that it has not than for those it has—not an uncommon symptom of being in love. They have fallen in love with Dartmoor, and are like a lover, who would in taking locks of hair from his sweetheart leave bald places on her beautiful head, and doting on the hair, become forgetful of the sweetheart.

There are others who seem to be altogether insensible to the charms of Dartmoor, who are at the present moment, and have been for some time past, gradually destroying its beauty utterly and for ever. It is these whom I wish, not to oppose, for opposition in such a case is misplaced, but to convert to a more reverential state of mind, to inspire with some feeling for the glories that surround them, to elevate above the common level of life, as the tors themselves have been elevated, and to lead to the enjoyment of a far greater and more intense pleasure than can be obtained from any work that involves the destruction of wild and grand beauty.

I mean those who cut the granite out of Dartmoor to metamorphose it into such things as the Thames embankment or Dover pier. Why should London be enriched by the spoils of Dartmoor? Has it not spoils enough from all countries and people that it must take from us even our tors?

I mean also those who pollute the rivers of Dartmoor, cut artificial channels for their waters, deface the appearance of the

country, and efface all expression of wild and artless grandeur by their straight-cut water-courses, turning the bright stream into a dirty opaque white, brown, or yellow liquid, unworthy of the name of water, stolen from the rocky torrent, revolting alike to the senses as ugly, and to the sentiments as a theft.

I mean those also who vainly dig for gold on Dartmoor. They may as well dig for gold directly as indirectly in the form of a profit on any other metal. There is as much profit as gold to be got from mining on Dartmoor, and no more; a very consoling thought—consoling only because it may eventually lead to a happier and more ennobling state of things. The treasures of Dartmoor are on its untouched surface. Why cause unhappy shareholders to curse Dartmoor, when, as beings free from the cares of shareholding, they might bless it as “a thing of beauty, and a joy for ever”? Though all other corners of the earth be given up to the worship of mammon, let us have Dartmoor free from the woeful rites of that great religion. Leave us our altars on the high places of Dartmoor, built by Nature herself, and let us worship nature there if nowhere else. We will not quarrel over our ritual; it will be too simple to provoke casuistry; we only ask that our altars may be spared to us undefiled.

I mean those also who flatter themselves (and gross flattery it is) that they can farm on Dartmoor. It is this unhappy delusion that leads to the destruction of vast and really serious portions of Dartmoor by means of that most abominable of all abominations, the enclosures. As in the case of mining, there is no consolation in knowing that enclosing Dartmoor is a losing concern, that the land enclosed is not worth the cost of the enclosures. It is, on the contrary, an addition to the vexation that an act of spoliation causes to know that there is no compensating advantage to be set off against the loss, no comfort at all to be got out of the evil thing. That one man's gain should be another man's loss is bad enough; but when one man's gain is imaginary only, and the loss is in reality on all sides, not only another man's, but everybody's, a pitiful state of things is brought about. In contemplating the glories of Dartmoor, we not only look from a higher point of view than the ordinary level of the earth, but we feel higher and nobler impulses. The sublimity of nature would be as nothing if it did not excite sublimity of feeling. And as high as the tors are above the plains that groan under the plough ought the lovers of wild Dartmoor to be above the miserable feelings that would induce them to rejoice at the

losses of those who abandon themselves to the spoliation of Dartmoor. It is not in anger, but in sorrow, that the lovers of Dartmoor will address their remonstrances to those who under the too seductive name of improvement are extinguishing some of the works of the finger of Time that no art can by any possible ingenuity improve at all.

The rights of landowners may be left entirely untouched, and may remain as they have been from time immemorial, a phrase which I believe is strictly conservative of everything. But an enclosure is an innovation, a radical change, a revolution, and ought to be from that point of view a very alarming thing. My object is not to discuss the mysteries of land tenure, nor to alarm the worshippers of vested interests, but rather to suggest that it is a glorious inheritance to possess any portion of wild and beautiful Dartmoor, and a desecration (accompanied by a dead loss of money) to enclose an acre of it.

Property in land is a well-recognized fact, is respected by all, and has played, does, and will play a very important part in the destinies of the human race. Rights of common and rights of way are also properties, invaluable properties in land, distinctly protected by the law. There are other rights of free foot on the face of the earth, rights of visiting the high places and worshipping the powers of nature, rights of disporting oneself (I do not allude to sporting), not distinctly recognized by the law, which are, however, nevertheless legal. It will not be well for landowners to drive these questions rashly to an issue, and prompt a strict inquiry into the rights of the public that may rouse the whole nation to claim the wild, uncultivated tracts of land to which they have for ages resorted for the air and the exercise that can alone restore the health and vigour sacrificed to modern forms of industry.

Enclosures are made in the name of economy, and we are told that they afford employment both to the labourers who enclose and to the cultivators afterwards. The whole nation is ousted from a wild piece of land, enjoyable only as a place of exercise, where the climate is wretched, and the soil valueless; and one man alone is transformed by the magic of an enclosure into the sole and exclusive possessor of a piece of this planet, on the pretence of benevolence, and of a false, mistaken economy.

Economy is a fearful thing, an idol to which millions of human lives have been sacrificed, and for which incalculable agony and misery has been suffered by men, women, and by helpless little children. If the ulterior object of its

votaries has been happiness, what a false God it has been ! But, as usual, it is not the spirit, but the votaries who have been false. It is false economy, not true economy, that has demanded its victims and its sacrifices. I have not altogether neglected the study of economy, recognizing it as I do as a powerful factor in the solution of all social problems ; and I venture to say that enclosures on Dartmoor, if made in the name of economy, are monstrous economical errors, and if in the name of benevolence, are, instead of a blessing to a few, a curse to thousands. It is not only economically true that the same labour which has been bestowed in enclosing and cultivating Dartmoor would have returned twice or thrice the produce if it had been directed to the further improvement of better land already enclosed ; but it is not over-stating the case to say that no enclosures have been made on Dartmoor, except at a loss to the rash innovator, who so recklessly and disastrously expended his energies in erecting them. It is not too much to state that, taking into account all the enclosures now existing on what is popularly known as Dartmoor, the cost of their erection would far exceed the value of the land which they enclose. The enclosures have rarely, I believe never, been made by those who claim to be the owners of the soil—by those who by virtue of the enclosures (I am sorry to use the word virtue in such a connection) are converted into absolute owners, where before they held the land subject to rights and usages enjoyed by many. They have let others do that which it would seem they have been too wise to do themselves, and in many instances, by granting leases, they have acquired the enclosures and the land which the ill-advised speculator has been glad to abandon, leaving behind him the ugly monuments of his folly to block the path of the wanderer, and to transform the innocent admirer of nature into a trespasser and breaker of the law.

The most serious innovations recently made in the shape of enclosures have been the work of the wretched convicts in the prisons at Prince Town.

“The law condemns both man and woman,  
Who steals the goose from off the common ;  
But lets the greater felon loose,  
Who steals the common from the goose.”—*Hudibras*.

Therefore it would appear that the felons in Dartmoor prisons are set to work, by way of improving their morals and thoroughly reforming their characters, to steal the common from the goose.

For whose advantage, and at what cost, is this done?

As to the cost, the labour is said to be cheap; but cheap is a relative term, and if it could be more profitably employed, it is dear. How can labour be cheap that has to be watched by a cordon of pickets with loaded rifles? The cost of artificial manures and other farming expenses, together with superintendence and watching, must be enormous. These costs are paid by the public taxpayer, and vast portions of his recreation-grounds are, at his own expense, shut in from him by enormous unsightly fences, and common-land is converted into private property on terms, concerning the particulars of which he knows nothing.

Ask the commoners of Dartmoor what they think of this misappropriation of funds and prison labour! They will tell you that they have spent years of their lives in forming what they call a lair for their cattle. They select the best available grazing-ground on their right of common on the forest, and accustom their cattle to frequent it. This habit of the cattle to graze on particular spots is only acquired by care and attention during some considerable time, and is very valuable to the farmer. He calls it his lair. (I cannot find the term in the glossary published by this Association.) He has spent his time and his pains upon it, and it is his right. Then comes the convict, and encloses the best of it, making that which has for ever before been common-land for ever after private property. A convicted felon is a fit tool for such a purpose indeed. There are few more industrious men in the world than the holders of little farms on the borders of Dartmoor, with rights of common on the moor. They have a rough life of it. If they were paid by the hour the wages of an artizan, they would be well off. They pay high rents for their rights of common to their landlords, they establish their lairs, and the common is stolen from the goose, from the cattle, and from them. The landlords care but little; they like enclosing and enclosures on principle.

I have one more impending example of the desecration of Dartmoor to mention before I close the subject, which, I trust, is nothing more than a maniacal threat.

It is quite natural that Dartmoor should be an exciting subject. I have dwelt on its beauties and on its powers to attract admiration and elevate the feelings; but when the emotions are brought into full play, they are apt to disport themselves in the channels and in the directions to which they have been accustomed.

Thus an archæologist, excited by Dartmoor, wants to find



celts, arrow-points, and spears; an etymologist wants the names of the tors and the rivers to correspond with his ideas of by-gone languages, and to confirm his speculations concerning the races of men who saw and talked about Dartmoor long before he did, with very different ideas concerning it. A naturalist wants to shoot every living thing he can find there, put the remains of the poor brutes in a museum, and say they "occurred" on Dartmoor at a certain date.

It is even thus also with the railway enthusiast. He has caught sight of Dartmoor, his emotions have received an impulse, his steam is up, and he wants to make a railway to Prince Town, reckless of the beauties that he will destroy, and of the money he must inevitably throw away.

There are many places far more populous than Prince Town, surrounded by rich and prosperous country districts, instead of by wastes and bogs, much more accessible, offering no such difficulties in the way of the construction of a line to which no railway has yet been projected or suggested. But Dartmoor excites enthusiasm, and enthusiasm, like other properties of the nerves, rushes along the customary lines, which by habit have become the lines of least resistance.

A railway to Dartmoor can only carry artificial manure—destined to be washed into the rivers or neutralised by the peat soil—a few convicts, and some pleasure-seekers, who with infinite lack of taste go there to stare at the convicts and make merry, forgetful of the dire distress to himself, to his family, and to his country, involved in the destiny of every convicted felon; flaunting their liberty, often libertinism, and their gay clothing in his face, demoralising themselves and him by both imparting and receiving a specious amusement in the unholy contact of pleasure with misery and humiliation.

Such a railway, serving such a purpose, can be but of little use, and will do incalculable harm. It will only be yet another of the numerous channels through which the hard-earned wealth of the country is drawn to the coffers of London capitalists, never to find its way back in any shape or form whatever. It can by no possibility be anything but destruction to the charms of Dartmoor.

Those who would wish to see Dartmoor by means of a railway, cannot wish to see Dartmoor in reality at all. A railway on Dartmoor is an incongruity which, let us hope, may never be attempted by the folly of man, great as it is.

If Dartmoor, or that which is left of it, still wild, still grand, still beautiful, still untouched by the hands of the

spoiler, is dear to us Devonians; if amidst the din of one form of civilization—scrambling, bustling, elbowing in the haunts of men under the sacred name of competition—we wish to seek another and a better form in the solitude, the quiet, and the grandeur of the works of primæval nature, let us resolve to do our utmost to preserve Dartmoor from the inroads of what I have called the lower civilization, and devote it to the service of the higher.

It would be ridiculous and irrational to attempt to ignore utility; but we can elevate utility to the highest rank, to rank with the grand, the beautiful, and the true. Our reason without our emotions would make us miserable beings. Dartmoor is an emotional power, where the calculator of profits and losses will find a cold, ungenial, forbidding climate.

Let us consecrate Dartmoor to its true utility, and prevent its sacrifice to a vain greed for land.