

THE ABBERLEY HILLS;

A MEMORIAL OF

AN EXCURSION

TAKEN BY THE KIDDERMINSTER

Church of England Mutual Improvement Society

ON WHIT-TUESDAY, 1858.

BY GEORGE E. ROBERTS,

VICE-PRESIDENT

"What hath God wrought ? "

"Ask the Earth, and it shall teach thee ! "

KIDDERMINSTER

FRIEND, PRINTER, 7, BULL RING



Yr. ever
George Herbert
:

TO THE

REV. T. L. CLAUGHTON, M.A.,

PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY,

THESE PAGES ARE RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

This digital version of
'The Abberley Hills'

was prepared in
May 2016
by
Bob Millward

Kidderminster
&
District
Archaeological
&
Historical Society

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

I DO not offer this slight memorial because I think it likely that you, who took part in the *fête* will easily lose recollection of it—the day will ever be as prominent in your memories as are the sunny hills of Abberley in the circling landscape, years hence to be recalled and dwelt on with delight as one of unmixed enjoyment; but upon reflection of the *many* pleasures it afforded, I think it may aid such remembrances if I arranged the chief points of interest, and presented them in the order of their occurrence.

Our dusky jewel of a town is in such a beautiful setting, that the contrast of a day's ramble in the surrounding country to a man who seldom stirs beyond the streets, is so great as to render time and method as necessary to the comprehension of what he sees, as if he had entered a new kingdom with customs and language different to his own. For apparently

there is a wide separation between the kingdoms of Country and Town; in the latter, man and the tongues of men alone are heard; but in the other, the myriad voices of Nature fill the hills, dales, and woodlands, and the histories they are telling, imperfectly understood after a life-time devoted to their study, cannot be read by hurried glances within the limits of a day. Attentive study of the Natural Creation will alone bring you near its beating heart of life, and enable you to read that wonderful history of change every pulsation is bringing to pass. Would you hear these voices of Nature? Go to the greenwood—enter its portals with a child-like, teachable spirit—recline upon a mossy bank and listen to the mingled hum of insects, and the "whisperings soft and low" of forest trees as the gentle breeze plays among their foliage; watch the flowers "expand their light and soul-like wings," and while you reflect on all this, and thus insensibly approach more closely the heart of Nature, you will find a strange kinship to human things in all you see; a unity of impulse

pervading the kingdoms of Man and Nature:

" The Poet, faithful and far-seeing,
" Sees, alike in stars and flowers, a part
" Of the self-same universal being
" Which is throbbing in his pulse and heart."

His noblest aspirations are addressed to the Sun, as the type of Deity, and the simplest flower turns its face and affections to the same orb of light and glory! Again, just as the storm of passion in the human heart, overriding for the time the better senses, silences the voices of all kindly feelings, so a tempest in the Natural world disturbs the peaceful order that would have gone prosperously on, and involves in one common ruin the bud that would have delighted the eye, and the blossom that would have borne. These, and many like similitudes, you will clearly make out; and what are they but proofs of the entire unity of all created things?—to man, the archetypal form all others yielding synonyms,—to one great law of being a hundred lesser ones pointing by affinity—and so the chain of circumstances that builds up the life of a man may be paralleled in lesser type through the whole range of lower

existences! It is well with such feelings to seek the country:—

"Therefore, at PENTECOST, which brings
"The Spring, clothed like a bride,
"When nestling buds unfold their wings,
"And bishop's-caps have golden rings,
"Musing upon many things,
"I sought the woodlands wide." *

And there, not only to make out the growth of plant and insect life, pleasant and instructive though it be to watch, but to catch somewhat of that higher tone in which all created things bear their witness to God, do I ask you, when time permits, to betake yourselves. Perhaps among the many mysterious affinities that bridge the gulf between the Spiritual and the Natural worlds, there is none more apparent than the adaptability of Whitsuntide to the season in which it occurs. The quickening Spirit of Pentecost is reflected in the green robes of Nature, and like its silent, searching operations, we see its fruits in the treasures of Autumn, but its workings are hidden, close as in the hearts of men. Yet a continuous witness is arising, would you know it?—

* Longfellow's "Voices of the Night."

"Ask the craggy mountains what part they sing,—they "reply, the praise of the Immutable, Unchangable GOD. "The flowers sing of His wisdom and liberality, who clothes "them beyond Solomon in his glory. The Sun, Moon, and "Stars sing the constancy of God's promises, in that they "hold their course and alter not. Truly every creature "beareth its part, doing the will of Him who is just in all "His ways, and pure is all His works!" *

Faintly and imperfectly we hear these testimonies of praise, but at this great Christian Festival "some rays of glory." as an old writer saith, "may break through the shadows of earth!"

Our party, numbering nearly eighty, met at the Hotel, and ascended by gentle slopes to the summit of Woodbury. Standing upon the hill-top, which is a table land twenty-six acres in extent, it was clear that a winding ridge running through Martley, Ankerdine, and Storridge, connected these Abberley Hills with the Malvern range. They indeed lie upon the same axial line of volcanic outburst, though the elevatory operations were active at different periods. The germ of the Malverns seems to have been a ragged sub-marine reef of Sienite,

* Dr. Everhard's " Militia Cœlestis." A.D. 1650.

(an igneous rock allied to granite,) lying beneath the waters of the Silurian ocean; but when this reef was, ages after, pushed up by a mighty internal disturbance, then it was that the line of outburst extended northward to the Abberleys; and the ancient sea-bottoms, which, with their myriad treasures of once animate life had long slumbered in quiet, were raised into these beautiful hills. The Silurian limestones lie here, as at Malvern, along the *western* side; but their arrangement is different. So sudden and violent was the outburst at the Woodbury point, that the unprepared beds are *reversed*, i.e. the *oldest* turned over so as to lie upon and nearly cover up the more *recent* sedimentary deposits. Thus, the Upper Ludlow series of beds appear by this extraordinary convulsion of natural order, to dip beneath the older Wenlock rocks. This curious phenomenon is confined to Woodbury. The Abberley Hill, which deflects out of the line, was thrown up by a force pressing evenly in one direction.

At this end of the axial line there is no igneous rock exposed, though, doubtless—were a tunnel driven through either hill, a *central*

ridge of Sienite would be found to exist; for at the Berrow Hill, two miles lower down the ridge, a Sienitic boss has protruded through the sedimentary beds. This proves them younger in time of elevation than the Malverns.

The forces that have thus upcast the hills seem to have extended from the early Silurian to the Permian epochs; but it is during the latter period that the greatest and most sudden upthrow occurred. To this time we also refer that remarkable ice-deluge which swept down from the north, and left on all our hill-tops a mass of broken and shattered rocks. Woodbury, Abberley, Stagbury, Churchhill, (Mamble) the Clents, and our own Warshill are all capped with this bed, which merits very attentive study from the geologist. The fragments are composed of a hard igneous rock, called Trap, angular in shape—not waterworn and rounded as other pebbles are—while their surfaces exhibit peculiar scratches and deeply cut grooves. The bed is of varying thickness, and except near its base, is unstratified, thus exhibiting no evidence of a quiet regularity of deposition.

The exterior of the fragments is coated with a vitreous glaze, which though a simple operation of Nature's chemistry, is not easy in this instance to connect with what is known of their history.

These remarks, explanatory of the hill's internal construction ended, we turned to the general features of the landscape, more entrancing in outward show, though not so valuable in enabling us to read the history of the past. On either side the ridge lay a wide expanse of undulating country. On the west, the orchards and rich pasture lands of Herefordshire were well displayed, stretching far away till the dark range of hills beyond Ludlow formed its sky line. To the north, the Titterstone—perhaps the most beautiful hill in middle England—and its dark brother, the Brown Clee, adorned the scene. The Teme "wanders at its own sweet will" adown the valley, receiving a hundred brooklets whose waters have intersected, like threads of silver, the country round. To the east of the Malverns, the prospect is bounded by the terrace lines of Cheltenham, with white villas glittering in the sun-light; while nearer

and more distinct, "the Faithful City," rich in Cathedral glories and in historic associations, sits, stately as a queen.

Of Kidderminster we see but little. St. George's tower (from its position our most conspicuous landmark,) and one solitary chimney-stack being the sole indicators of its whereabouts; but between it and us, lies the noble domain of Witley. Oak woods "fledged with clearest green" encircle the Court, and in the mirror of the lake is reflected the beau-ideal of English scenery.

Leaving the hill-top,—but not without a thought of the scenes it witnessed when, in troublous times of old, OWEN GLENDWR, and HENRY of England successively camped upon it;—we bent our steps to Witley; and under the guidance of one to whom, our feelings of esteem will yield only to an affectionate remembrance—we crossed the Park, startling the deer from their sylvan haunts, and gleaning from each natural feature the liveliest feelings of enjoyment. Together we wandered through the princely halls of Witley, which, though strewn with the chips of the workman, gave

promise of the almost perfect beauty they soon would assume.

We next visited the Church, or rather, the Chapel of the Court. Gorgeous almost beyond description as were its gilt and decorated walls, and charming to the artistic eye, as was the marvellous beauty of the ceiling, perhaps it was the least gratifying feature of the day. No reverential feeling was induced by its overpowering splendour; and well would it be if its noble owner, in making the alterations suggested by the harmonious adornments of our own beautiful parish Church, could so extend them that it may take as high a place as a House of GOD, as his own mansion will among the homes of England.

Returning to the Hotel, by the noble liberality of the Vicar, you dined together. The phrase, "Hungry as a hunter," may have received on this occasion a new and more forcible reading, for the pure air of the hills had given appetite, and entire justice was done to the animal kingdom.

It is not the fashion of Naturalists to sit

idly after dinner, so the dispatch of the meal was followed by an exploration of the Abberley Hill. Through copses carpeted with wild Hyacinths, and along lanes and hedgerows lined with the pale blue eyes of Veronicas and Forged-me-nots, we ascended to the summit. From it the beautifully rounded, but more naked slopes of Woodbury could be studied to advantage; while on the other side, the isolated dome of the Wrekin came clearly out against the horizon. With these additions, the view was much the same as from Woodbury, but, as a picture, its fuller and more richly colored foreground far exceeded it. Crab and hawthorn blossoms brightened by their presence the scattered Thorn trees and sombre Yews, while the more humble flowers, pale-eyed daisies, and the un-coined gold of buttercups spangled the meadows. Indeed, of the latter flower it was wittily said, that quite a rash had broken out on the face of Nature, caused by too liberally drinking in the late heavy rains.

At the North end of the Hill, to which we bent our steps, the Upper Silurian Limestones are well displayed. The small open quarry,

visited in Ashwood, is in the Aymestry Ballstones, a bed which lies intermediate between the Upper and Lower Ludlow Rocks. Few good fossils are met with in its hard intractable masses, but the insight into the physical Geology of the Hill it affords is worth our notice, as it shows what a force was here exerted to raise its layers from their naturally horizontal position to a nearly upright one. This was a deep sea deposit, but resting against it, covering it up, are the Upper Ludlow Shales, the sediment of an after-time, when the depth of water was less, and its shell and coral life more diverse and abundant. These shales we noticed in the bank beyond the quarry; they are easily split up, and bear on their surfaces the preserved forms—fossils as they are called—of marine animals. These are chiefly *Bivalve* shells i.e. shells composed of two valves, opening with an hinge like an oyster; *Univalves*, composed of one part, spirally twisted, like the trumpet shells of our British shores; *Cephalopodous*, or chambered shells, like jointed tubes; *Annelid Tracks*, i.e., tubes of sand-boring worms, in life of the nature of cartilage; *Carapaces*, or covering shells of various minute crab-like animals,—one, the

Beyrichia, being no larger than a grain of mustard seed; and antlers, branches, and rounded masses of *Coral*, that curious substance built up and dwelt in by tiny worms.

What a marvellous record of ancient life is this! A page of a great rock volume lying open upon the earth, that we may read therein the wonders that have been in old time! For long before man was called into existence, the Spirit of life was breathed into these inferior organisms: in the functions of their lives they bore witness to their Creator, and in their death they are witnesses to us! Everywhere is this chronicle of the world's history set forth, wherever compact rock, or fissile shale, or gravel is exposed, there may be learnt the history of the times that deposited them. The *rock* was a mud-bed once, and the shells and corals sank into it; the *shales* were tidal sandbanks, and the stranded weeds and fishes were caught in their hollows; and the *gravel* was a pebbly beach made up of older rocks.

Never look with indifference on their teachings: never pass with unconcern a spot where such knowledge may be gained, for

indeed it is a revelation from God to man, and reverently we must accept and study it. Progressive steps have brought the earth's surface to its present condition, but the highest elaboration cannot destroy their entire connection; life now existing is insolubly linked with the life of past ages, and, to use the words of an eloquent writer,—

"No end can be predicted of these successive worlds" "which Geology beholds rising each higher than the other— "so glorious in itself, or so consistent with all that is traced "in them of their Maker, as that *he* who is the *capital* of the "Natural world, and the *base* of the Spiritual, should one day "*glow along the whole line of his race* with a true conception "of the essential, indivisible unity existing between the "Word, and the Works of the Creator—in other, and more "familiar language,—that we should 'See Him as He is!' " *

The more recently deposited "Old Red" comes nearly up to this quarry, between it and the Kidderminster road; but none of its usual fossils have been found here: though in a passage bed between it and the Silurian occurs the "Downton vegetable bed," as Geologists term it, which contains the *oldest* land plants yet discovered. Close to this is a layer of glittering micaceous shales, formed by the breaking

* "The Book and the Rocks." Blackwood, Sept., 1857.

up, and re-compacting of some primitive rock. These we had not time to see, for rounding the hill we followed the terrace-like tracks till they were obscured in a thick brushwood coppice. Through this we toiled,—caught at every step by straggling brambles, or clutched by the thorny arms of dog-roses; attentions troublesome enough, but really introducing us to new objects of interest; for during the minute employed in disentanglement, the eye was caught by some deep, soft patch of moss—*Hypnum lorium*, perchance, with its beautiful rose-red stalk, and branches of transparent green; or its still more elegant cousin — *Hypnum proliferum*, the feathery fronds of which are as palm trees to the eyes of "sunshine beetles" that live about the roots.

Emerging from this thicket, we visited a quarry of Upper Silurian Mudstone, (Downton Tilestones,) crowded with instructive fossils, at which an hour may have been profitably spent; but the approach of evening warned us against delay, so, casting a last look at the village of Abberley, to which the thin, poor coal-measures of the Bewdley Forest Coal Field extend, we crossed the hill, and descended to the Hundred House.

From thence, after a slight refreshment, we returned to town, gratified by what we had seen, and sensible, I hope I may say, that the works of Nature, sought out in the right spirit, are capable at all times of yielding a true and beneficial enjoyment.

SHRUBBERY COTTAGE, KIDDERMINSTER,
MAY 26TH, 1858.

HEIGHTS OF THE HILLS SEEN FROM
THE ABBERLEYS.

	Feet.
RADNOR FOREST (BLACK MOUNTAIN).....	2198
BROWN CLEE (GLEE BARF).....	1806
TITTERSTONE HILL.....	1730
WORCESTERSHIRE BEACON (MALVERNS).....	1444
WREKIN.....	1320
WALTON HILL (CLENT).....	1007
LICKEY BEACON.....	960
LICKEY MONUMENT HILL.....	800
—————	
THE ABBERLEY HILL	985
WOODBURY HILL	975

Friend, Printer, Kidderminster.