

S E C T. IV.

**A**S we left Monmouth, the banks, on the left, were, at first, low; but on both sides they soon grew steep, and woody; varying their shapes, as they had done the day before. The most beautiful of these scenes is in the neighbourhood of St. Brevall's castle; where the vast, woody declivities, on each hand, are uncommonly magnificent. The castle is at too great a distance to make any object in the view.

The weather was now serene: the sun shone; and we saw enough of the effect of light, in the exhibitions of this day, to regret the want of it before.

During the whole course of our voyage from Ross, we had scarce seen one corn-field. The banks of the Wye consist, almost entirely either of wood, or of pasture; which I mention as a circumstance of peculiar value in landscape. Furred-lands, and waving-corn, however charming in

in pastoral poetry, are ill-accommodated to painting. The painter never desires the hand of art to touch his grounds.—But if art *muß* stray among them—if it *muß* mark out the limits of property, and turn them to the uses of agriculture; he wishes, that these limits may be as much concealed as possible; and that the lands they circumscribe, may approach, as nearly as may be, to nature—that is, that they may be pasturage. Pasturage not only presents an agreeable surface: but the cattle, which graze it, add great variety, and animation to the scene.

The Meadows, below Monmouth, which run shelving from the hills to the water-side, were particularly beautiful, and well-inhabited. Flocks of sheep were every where hanging on their green fleeps; and herds of cattle occupying the lower grounds. We often failed past groups of them laving their sides in the water; or retiring from the heat under sheltered banks:

———*vallem, amnemq; tenebant.*

In this part of the river, which now begins to widen, we were often entertained with light vessels gliding past us. Their white sails passing along the sides of the hills were very picturesque.

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In many places also the views were varied by the prospect of bays, and harbours in miniature; where little barks lay moored, taking in ore, and other commodities from the mountains. These vessels, designed plainly for rougher water, than they at present encountered, shewed us, without any geographical knowledge, that we approached the sea.

From Monmouth we reached, by a late breakfast-hour, the noble ruin of *Tintern-abbey*; which belongs to the Duke of Beaufort; and is esteemed, with its appendages, the most beautiful and picturesque view on the river.

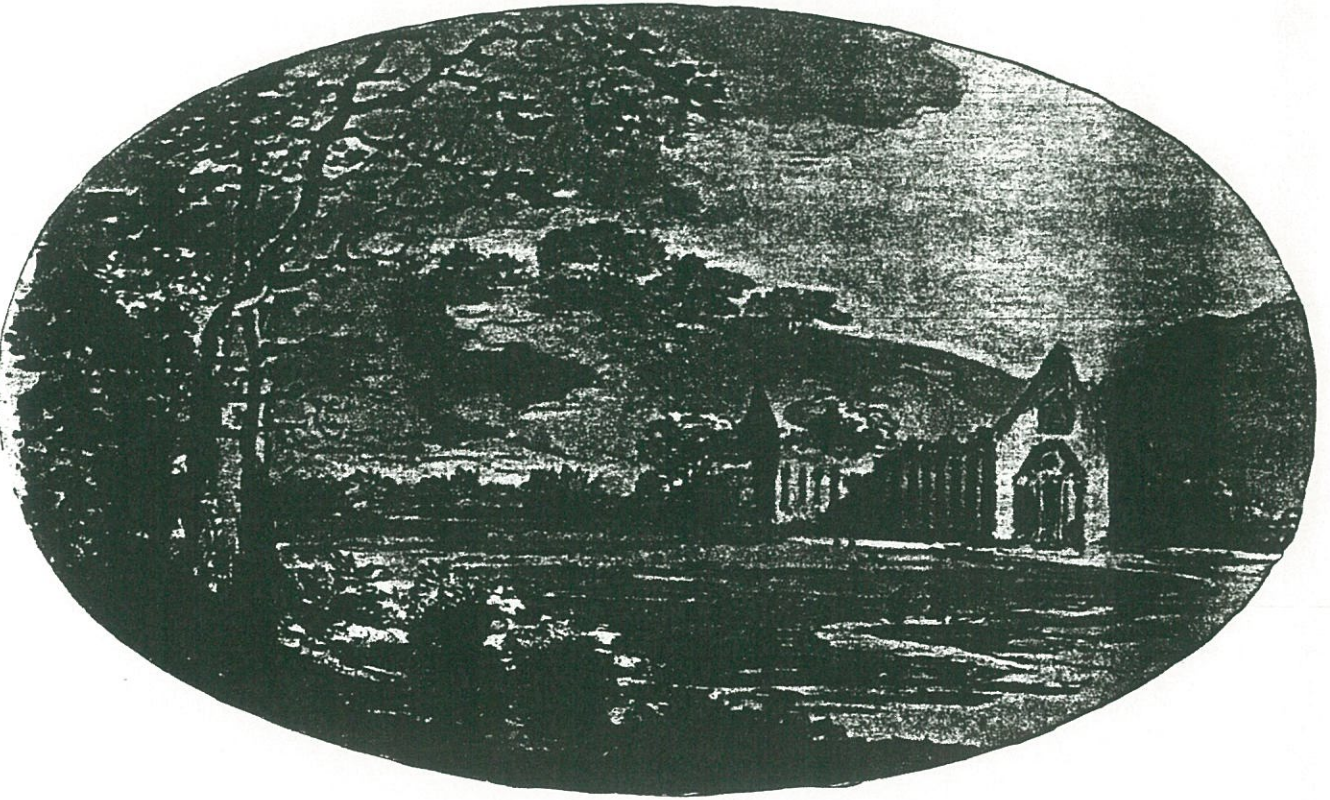
Cattle, and abbeys have different situations, agreeable to their respective uses. The cattle, meant for defence, stands boldly on the hill: the abbey, intended for meditation, is hid in the sequestered vale.

*Ab! happy thou, if one superior rock  
Rear on its brow, the shiver'd fragment huge  
Of some old Norman fortrefs: happier far,  
Ah then most happy, if thy vale below  
Wash, with the crystal coolness of its rills,  
Some mould'ring abbey's ivy-veiled wall.*

Such

Such is the situation of Tintern-abbey. It occupies a gentle eminence in the middle of a circular valley, beautifully screened on all sides by woody hills; through which the river winds its course; and the hills, closing on its entrance, and on its exit, leave no room for inclement blasts to enter. A more pleasing retreat could not easily be found. The woods, and glades intermixed; the winding of the river; the variety of the ground; the splendid ruin, contrasted with the objects of nature; and the elegant line formed by the summits of the hills, which include the whole; make all together a very enchanting piece of scenery. Every thing around breathes an air so calm, and tranquil; so sequestered from the commerce of life, that it is easy to conceive, a man of warm imagination, in monkish times, might have been allured by such a scene to become an inhabitant of it.

No part of the ruins of Tintern is seen from the river, except the abbey-church. It has been an elegant Gothic pile; but it does not make that appearance as a distant object, which we expected. Though the parts are beautiful, the whole is ill-shaped. No ruins of the tower are left, which might give form, and contrast to the walls, and buttresses, and other inferior parts. Instead of this,



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*The portion of the front of side of a building which enclosed by a wall is the end of a garden*

this, a number of gabel-ends hurt the eye with their regularity; and disfigure it by the vulgarity of their shape. A mallet judiciously used (but who durst use it?) might be of service in fracturing some of them; particularly those of the cross illes, which are not only disagreeable in themselves, but confound the perspective.

But were the building ever so beautiful, impassioned as it is with shabby houses, it could make no appearance from the river. From a stand near the road, it is seen to more advantage.

But if *Tintern-abbey* be less striking as a distant object, it exhibits, on a nearer view, (when the whole together cannot be seen, but the eye settles on some of its nobler parts,) a very enchanting piece of ruin. Nature has now made it her own. Time has worn off all traces of the rule: it has blunted the sharp edges of the chiffl; and broken the regularity of opposing parts. The figured ornaments of the east-window are gone; those of the west-window are left. Most of the other windows, with their principal ornaments, remain.

To these are superadded the ornaments of time. Ivy, in masses uncommonly large, has taken possession of many parts of the wall; and gives a happy contrast to the grey-coloured stone, of which the

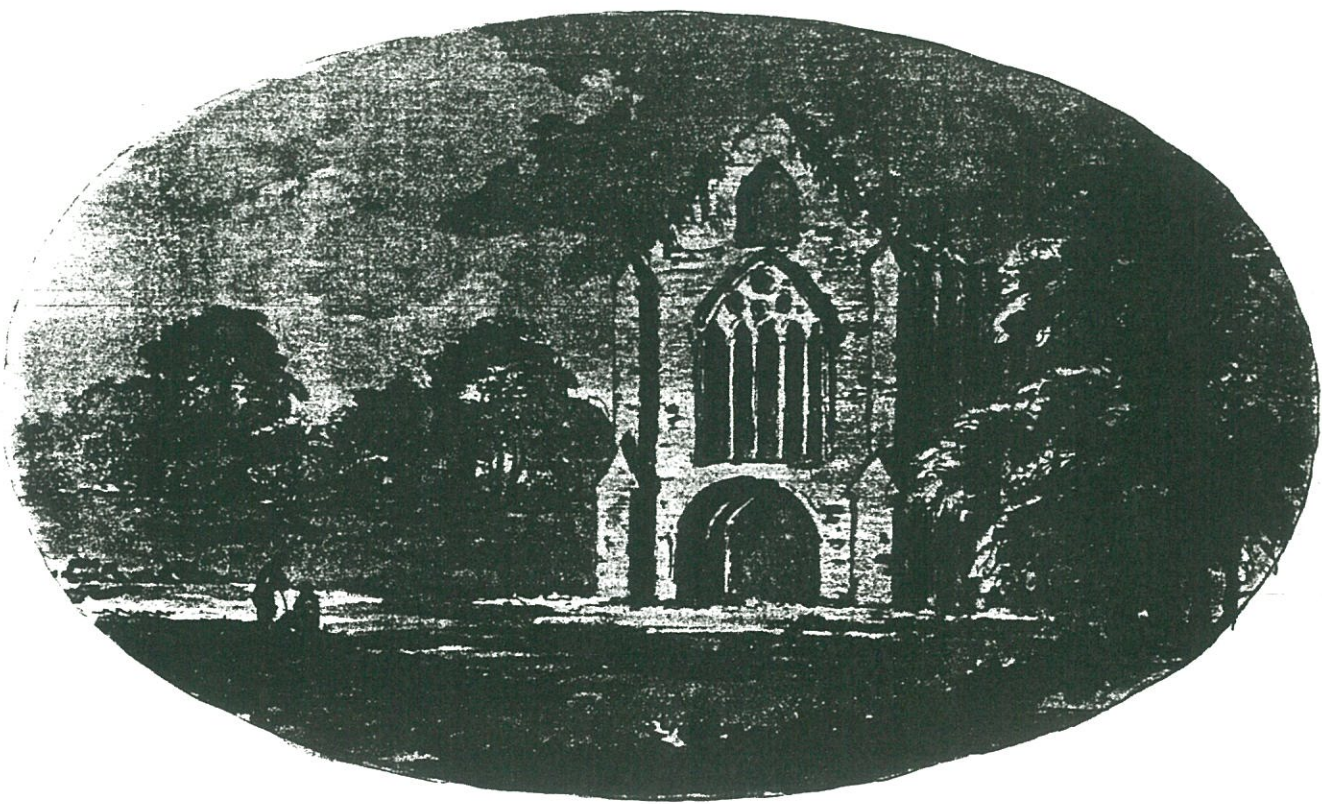
the building is composed. Nor is this undecorated. Mosses of various hues, with lichens, maiden-hair, penny-leaf, and other humble plants, overpread the surface; or hang from every joint, and crevice. Some of them were in flower, others only in leaf; but, all together, they give those full-blown tints, which add the richest finishing to a ruin.

Such is the beautiful appearance, which Tintern-abbey exhibits on the *outside*, in those parts, where we can obtain a near view of it. But when we enter it, we see it in most perfection: at least, if we consider it as an independent object, unconnected with landscape. The roof is gone: but the walls, and pillars, and abutments, which supported it, are intire. A few of the pillars indeed have given way; and here, and there, a piece of the facing of the wall: but in correspondent parts, one always remains to tell the story. The pavement is obliterated: the elevation of the choir is no longer visible: the whole area is reduced to one level; cleared of rubbish; and covered with neat turf, closely shorn; and interrupted with nothing, but the noble columns, which formed the Isles, and supported the tower.

When we stood at one end of this awful piece of ruin; and surveyed the whole in one view—the  
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elements of air, and earth, its only covering, and pavement; and the grand, and venerable remains, which terminated both—perfect enough to form the perspective; yet broken enough to destroy the regularity; the eye was above measure delighted with the beauty, the greatness, and the novelty of the scene. More picturesque it certainly would have been, if the area, unadorned, had been left with all its rough fragments of ruin scattered round; and bold was the hand that removed them: yet as the outline of the ruin, which is the chief object of *picturesque curiosity*, is still left in all its wild, and native rudeness; we excuse—perhaps we approve—the neatness, that is introduced within. It may add to the *beauty* of the scene—to its *novelty* it undoubtedly *does*.

Among other things in this scene of desolation, the poverty and wretchedness of the inhabitants were remarkable. They occupy little huts, raised among the ruins of the monastery; and seem to have no employment, but begging: as if a place, once devoted to indolence, could never again become the seat of industry. As we left the abbey, we found the whole hamlet at the gate, either openly soliciting alms; or covertly, under pretence of carrying us to some part of the ruins, which each could shew; and which was far superior to



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any thing, which could be shewn by any one else. The most lucrative occasion could not have excited more jealousy, and contention.

One poor woman we followed, who had engaged to shew us the monk's library. She could scarce crawl; shuffling along her palsied limbs, and meagre, contracted body, by the help of two sticks. She led us, through an old gate, into a place overfread with nettles, and briars; and pointing to the remnant of a shattered cloister, told us, that was the place. It was her own mansion. All indeed she meant to tell us, was the story of her own wretchedness; and all she had to shew us, was her own miserable habitation. We did not expect to be interrested: but we found we were. I never saw so loathsome a human dwelling. It was a cavity, loftily vaulted, between two ruined walls; which streamed with various-coloured stains of unwholsome dews. The floor was earth; yielding, through moisture, to the tread. Not the merest utensil, or furniture of any kind, appeared, but a wretched bedstead, spread with a few rags, and drawn into the middle of the cell, to prevent its receiving the damp, which trickled down the walls. At one end was an aperture; which served just to let in light enough to discover the wretchedness within.—When we stood in the midst of this cell of misery; and felt the chilling damps, which struck

struck us in every direction, we were rather surprised, that the wretched inhabitant was still alive; than that she had only lost the use of her limbs.

The country about *Tintern-abbey* hath been described as a solitary, tranquil scene: but its immediate environs only are meant. Within half a mile of it are carried on great iron-works; which introduce noise and bustle into these regions of tranquillity.

The ground, about these works, appears from the river to consist of grand woody hills, sweeping, and intersecting each other, in elegant lines. They are a continuation of the same kind of landscape, as that about *Tintern-abbey*; and are fully equal to it.

As we still descend the river, the same scenery continues. The banks are equally steep, winding, and woody; and in some parts diversified by prominent rocks, and ground finely broken, and adorned.

But one great disadvantage began here to invade us. Hitherto the river had been clear, and splendid; reflecting the several objects on its banks. But

But its waters now became ouzy, and discoloured. Sludgy banks too appeared, on each side; and other symptoms, which discovered the influence of a tide.

S E C T. V.

**M**R. Morris's improvements at Persfield, which we soon approached, are generally thought as much worth a traveller's notice, as any thing on the banks of the Wye. We pushed on shore close under his rocks; and the tide being at ebb, we landed with some difficulty on an ouzy beach. One of our bargemen, who knew the place, served as a guide; and under his conduct we climbed the steep by an easy, regular zig-zag; and gained the top.

The eminence, on which we stood, (one of those grand eminences, which overlooks the Wye,) is an intermixture of rock, and wood; and forms, in this place, a concave semicircle; sweeping round in a segment of two miles. The river winds under it; and the scenery, of course, is shewn in various directions. The river itself indeed, as we just observed, is charged with the impurities of the soil it washes; and when it ebbs, its verdant banks become slopes of mud: but if we except these disadvantages, the situation of Persfield is noble.

Little

S E C T.