



*(From the picture in Chester Town Hall).*

## JOHN FLETCHER AND THE STRANGER IN CHESTER.

*By Charles R. Hand.*

Read 30th Oct., 1924.

THE second newspaper to be published in Chester appeared on the 2nd May, 1775, under the title of *The Chester Chronicle*, and was the property of Messrs. Poole, Barker and Co. During their ownership the journal never acquired popularity, and at last, discouraged by the small amount of support accorded to them, the proprietors published the following notice:—

8th August, 1783.

The Editor of this paper begs leave to inform the public that finding the printing of it to be a losing concern, on several accounts, is determined to discontinue the publication of it from this day. He esteems himself much obliged for the kind indulgence and favours shown to him by the public, and shall ever retain a grateful sense of the obligation. All persons who have any demands on this Printing Office, are requested to send in their accounts, in order that they may be immediately discharged; and those who stand indebted to it, in any sums of money, are desired to pay the same to Mr. Charles Hamilton, Attorney at Law in Chester, who is authorised to settle all accounts.

There were however, others in the city who were not so dubious about the potentialities of the venture, for when the next publishing day came round, the *Chronicle* appeared as if nothing had happened, though under different auspices, as will be gathered from the following announcement:

15th August, 1783.

John Fletcher having purchased of the late Proprietors of this Paper the Stock of their Office, will, in compliance with the requests of his Friends, continue to publish and circulate it as heretofore



and execute any orders in the Printing or Copper-plate Branches in the most correct, neat and expeditious manner, and on terms to merit the continuance of the favours of the generous Public. The heavy imposts on Advertisements, Stamps, and paper will, he hopes, be sufficient plea for requesting payment for Advertisements at the time of insertion.

Mr. Fletcher, a quaint and lively character, immediately took advantage of the opposition paper in which to advertise the continuation of the *Chronicle*. On the first page of his ledger, which is still existing, he made the following entry:

This being our first publication, we are necessitated to advertise the continuation (which the former proprietors had declined) in Mr. Monk's paper, and to encourage the distribution by a treat in ale, and to send to Liverpool for stamps for the publication, which altogether increased our weekly expenses. Mr. Monk was so elated with the prospect of our discontinuation that this day was intended for a festival to his men in triumph of his victory, but which was rendered a Day of Gloominess and Dejection by the re-publication.

He paid 4s. for his advertisement in the *Courant*, Mr. Monk's paper; the "cash given to the carriers to drink" (the "treat in ale") amounted to 3s. The "coach express" for taking the papers into Lancashire that week was 2s. 2d., and the weekly rent of the entire establishment was 5s. 8d. ! There was at that time a tax imposed upon newspaper advertisements, and the amount paid in that week was 35s.—"duty on 14 advertisements." Mr. Fletcher's income for his first week's issue consisted of £7 os. 0½d., from the sale of the papers, and £5 7s. 5½d., from advertisements and printing orders—a total of £12 7s 6d.; while the cost of printing 775 copies of the *Chronicle* amounted to £5 18s. 9d. !

It would appear that for about eighteen months, others were associated with him in the enterprise, which received greater public recognition. He acknowledged this in the following terms:

18th March, 1785.

J. Fletcher, impressed with the most grateful sentiments, returns thanks to the Public for the generous encouragement he has received since his engaging in the Printing Business, and as he is now the sole publisher of this Paper, trusts their confidence and support will not be withdrawn, as his chief attention will be to approve himself their faithful servant. His friends in the country when they give orders for this Paper, will please to appoint some person in Chester or pay for them, at least half yearly, to the persons (mentioned in the last page of this Paper) appointed to receive orders, as it is impracticable to collect them in any other way without considerable expense.

Although Mr. Fletcher was becoming a man of considerable popularity in the city, and highly esteemed in Whig quarters, it was not long before his honesty of purpose and freedom of speech involved him in a prosecution for libel, and on the 19th November, 1785, he was sentenced by the Court of King's Bench to six months' imprisonment and a fine of £50 for publishing the following article, which was held to be a libel against Robert Townsend, Recorder of Chester:

29th October, 1784.

It must excite abhorrence in every liberal mind to see him who is placed to determine the elective rights and franchises of this City step forth the avowed enemy to the exercise of those privileges which were granted by the Crown for the wisest purposes. When the great Paramount of Justice was called on by the advocate of the injured Citizens, with what prevaricating arguments did the self-created Recorder endeavour to stifle their complaints and suppress their legal demands, "to know by what authority they exist as a body, and exercise dominion over them;" was it denied because you were conscious of not being justified in your proceeding? or as the aged Lawyer of 75 years whose recollection sanctioned the unjustifiable mode: "he could remember 50 years, and the election was always the same as it is now, and no doubt was always so conducted, for this City was founded and governed by its Officers before the existence of Charters, and they have handed down this prescriptive mode to the present time;" but, good Mr. Recorder, as your memory is so collective of antient usage and antient history, you perhaps have not forgotten that



this City is privileged by Charter, which points out the extent and duration of your authority, and by what means and manner you must acquire it; you must know that the present mode of election is contrary to Charter, is repugnant to the principles of the British Constitution. As a member then of that body, how durst you stand forth an advocate of tyrannical usurpation, and as a man advance positions in the face of an insulted people which you cannot but know to be without foundation of truth; but this is consonant with the whole tenor of your proceedings, and what other expectation can be formed when impotent ignorance presides on the bench, and partiality dictates decision? What can be expected from a set of men placed by their oath to administer justice as well to the poor as to the rich, to hear their complaints and redress their wrongs (who in a Court of Justice, with the boldest effrontery, tell you that your requisitions shall not be heard), but every species of oppressive insolence? Notwithstanding a report has been propagated that the citizens had abandoned the idea of any further proceedings respecting their right of annually electing the whole body of Corporation Officers, we are desired to assure the public that the claim will be firmly prosecuted as speedily as possible, the subscription entered into for that laudable purpose meeting the approbation of the public in general by almost daily additions thereto.

In the next week's issue of the *Chronicle* the following assurance of its continuance appeared:

25th November, 1785.

On Saturday last the Court of King's Bench gave judgment against Mr. Fletcher, the printer of this Paper, for the insertion of a paragraph adjudicated to be a libel against Robert Townsend, Esquire, Recorder of this City; where he was sentenced to suffer six months' imprisonment in the King's Bench, and to pay a fine of Fifty Pounds, or to remain in prison until that sum is paid. The chief apprehension we are under from this judgment is that the length of the confinement may probably affect his health. We can, however, assure the numerous friends of this Paper as well in this City as throughout its widely-extended circuit, that the business will be carried on during his imprisonment (notwithstanding the vain hopes and malevolent propagations of a few individuals to the contrary), under the immediate inspection of Mr. Cowdroy; and it would be impeaching the humanity of the public to suppose, for a moment, that the present unfortunate situation of Mr. Fletcher will not induce them to continue those friendly offices

they have hitherto so kindly and liberally shown to him. Any orders, therefore, he may be favoured with, will be thankfully received and executed with elegance, accuracy and dispatch.

From this time, Mr. Fletcher's popularity increased in a wonderful manner (perhaps on account of the libel, who can say ?) and his business enlarged to a remarkable extent; so much as to necessitate the publication in the ensuing week's issue of the following acknowledgment:

9th December, 1785.

The several consolatory letters we have received respecting the present confined situation of Mr. Fletcher must be extremely flattering to his mind. It is not, however, either our province or our wish to accord with the requisitions of some of them, lest they might be deemed exceptionable to the mental tranquillity of . . . his friends and advisers; the eye that looks through the medium of candour and moderation will view all the circumstances in their true colours. Every man who is condemned by his peers is supposed guilty. Till he has passed that tribunal no imputation can affect him, but having done so it becomes, in our opinion, a libel even to question the justice of the sentence, though we may sometimes lament it. "To err is human, to forgive divine," and whether or not, after the very singular, honourable, and, indeed, humiliating concessions made by Mr. Fletcher, immediately on being told of his error, he merited the exercise of that godlike attribute, is a question we cheerfully submit to be answered by any man whose heart has ever flowed with "the milk of human kindness." Let not the few real enemies to Mr. Fletcher's concern (if such there are behind the curtain) suppose that we have said thus much with the smallest view to awake their compassion. No! Sentence is given, and in God's name let it take its course! As he bore the prosecution, so he received the sentence, and will suffer the imprisonment. Why should they not, therefore, enjoy the exultations of this great triumph unenvied? and wear the laurels of this mighty conquest without restraint? The glory, and above all, the intention of the deed, have been long ere this (to use the language of Sterne) registered in "heaven's chancery," and He whom we daily call upon "to forgive our trespasses as we forgive others" will in that court and by that balance, most certainly and infallibly weigh, judge and reward them.

Mrs. Fletcher herself expressed her thanks for the numer-



ous marks of kindness and expressions of sympathy which she had received.

16th December, 1785.

The kind and generous support I have already received under the heavy inconvenience of my husband's distant confinement and large fine, calls for such acknowledgments on my part, that I am at a loss how to express them. My intention, however, I trust, will be admitted as an apology for the feebleness of the attempt; it being no less my duty than I feel it to be my earnest wish to make every return my poor ability will suffer me to do. And although to a compassionate breast an act of goodness is its own reward, yet I cannot help saying that I feel the obligation more sensibly from the manner in which it has been bestowed. The smallness of my deserts has increased the merit of the bounty, and rendered the generosity of the act doubly amiable. Under this conviction, while I cannot but lament the incautious error that unhappily gave the offence, it affords me the inexpressible satisfaction to find that the unkind and unmerited endeavours of a very few individuals will be defeated by the fostering hand of a benevolent public.

MARY FLETCHER.

That Mr. Fletcher was not forgotten while in prison we gather from the following letter:

30th December, 1785.

We are desired to mention the sincere thanks of Mr. Fletcher for the several complimentary presents he has received in his confinement during this festive season, and we trust we shall be excused expressing them in so public a manner when we say that more than one have come from the hands of anonymous persons, consequently any other mode of address is impracticable. Among the rest of the favours we cannot help observing, is a pye, weighing exactly twenty-four pounds, the contents of which do as much credit to the bounty of the donor, as its richness does to the hands of the cook that made it. In an Eastern tale we read, that a man, having been condemned to severe punishment for a very trivial and venial offence, contrived to send his prosecutor a pye with the heart of a tiger in it—a just and keen rebuke for the implacable cruelty he had exercised towards him. We shall not presume to say whether this may be thought at all applicable to the present instance, but leave every candid, humane, and intelligent mind to make its own comments upon the singularity of this present. It seems, however, necessary briefly to state that it contained

three domestic rabbits devoid of brains, and equally remarkable for having each of them had, as we are informed, a bladder of gall preternaturally large, with ears so unusually capacious that, were we inclined to speak ludicrously, they might be deemed a new species of traps, to catch the artless words of poor, inoffensive printers; also a goose without a heart, which, were it not for spoiling the pye, we could heartily have wished had been an old gander.

N.B.—The letter accompanying this present being dated Pulford, we rather suspect that it is the donation of a tenant of the worthy gentleman who is lord of that manor; and who perhaps might think Mr. Fletcher not undeserving, at this inclement season, the crumbs falling from his master's table; although he was so peculiarly unfortunate as not to succeed in his application to that respectable character for m . . . y and forgiveness. It may not be impertinent to remark that Mr. Wilkes, when in the same prison, had a pye sent him, weighing precisely forty-five pounds.

Two further extracts having reference to this episode will be of interest:

12th May, 1786.

The period of Mr. Fletcher's confinement having expired, we hear that it is in contemplation among many of his friends, to congratulate his return by publicly escorting him into the city; and although such a mark of attention would be highly flattering to a mind rendered sufficiently gloomy by a long and rigorous confinement, yet we are authorised to say that feeling himself, as he does, unconscious of the smallest claim to such honour, he humbly trusts they will forego their kind intentions; and (as neither himself nor his few enemies have any great cause for triumph) he wishes to avoid every appearance of public exultation—which at best can but afford a momentary gratification to some, and may probably give a lasting offence to others, whom, as a servant of the public, it is not less his duty than he knows it to be his cordial inclination, on all occasions, to oblige.

In his last letter on the subject, Mr. Fletcher appealed for forgiveness and forgetfulness on the part of all concerned:



26th May, 1786.

I cannot omit the first opportunity which presents itself, since my enlargement, of rendering my most cordial thanks to those friends who have so kindly and liberally contributed their support to my business during my long confinement. Deeply impressed, as I am, with a sense of obligation, it is my earnest wish to make every grateful return in my power, and hope my future conduct will evince, to every unprejudiced mind, the sincerity of my professions. A period being put to my imprisonment, I trust that a period will also be put to a recollection of the error which gave rise to it. And as I am not conscious of having ever entertained the smallest enmity to the gentleman whom I hastily and incautiously offended, I trust that every resentment will expire with my punishment, and be no longer remembered.

JOHN FLETCHER.

In 1789, Mr. Fletcher printed and published *A Planetary and Almanack*, "being more full and compleat than any hitherto published," and *The Royal Chester Sheet Almanack, and Lancashire and North Wales Diary* for 1789, while in 1791, there issued from his office *A concise History of the County and City of Chester*, by Mr. Cowdroy; and *The Epitaph Writer*, the work of John Bowden.

Mr. Fletcher now sought a wider scope for his activities, and on 8th June, 1795, the "Passage Boat" was launched in the New Canal to the Mersey which had been constructed under his direction. Other important public works for which he was responsible were the construction of the new road to Ruthin, the making of the embankment to the aqueduct over the River Dee, the laying out of the racecourse and the building of the grand stand. He was one of the sheriffs in 1813, a member of the common council and of the racecourse committee in 1816, and mayor in 1825 and 1826.

In 1831, Mr. Fletcher printed the important *History of Chester*, written by Joseph Hemingway, editor of the *Chronicle*, who mentions Mr. Fletcher among those who have a claim upon his acknowledgments for a variety of useful information. In this work Hemingway says:

At the further end of Further Northgate Street [now called Upper Northgate Street] there are two roads verging from the centre; the one on the left hand leading to Mollington and Parkgate, the other on the right, conducting to Eastham and the Liverpool ferries on the Mersey. On the ground in front, which divides these roads, is an excellent brick building which appears to great advantage, built by, and the residence of, J. Fletcher, Esq. The top of this mansion is surmounted with a glass cupola, forming an excellent observatory, and admirably situated on account of its great elevation, particularly on the western front, for such a purpose. On this spot formerly stood the Church of St. Thomas, or Thomas-a-Becket, which is distinctly marked on the plan of Chester, published by Daniel King, and probably taken down about 1620. A contemporary says it was converted into a dwelling house by Alderman Richard Dutton, who served the office of Mayor of the City in 1627, and was afterwards called Jolly's Hall. In 1645 it shared the fate of most other buildings in the suburbs, and was demolished that it might not afford shelter to the enemy in the siege. I have been informed that in turning up the ground in Mr. Fletcher's garden at the time of building his house, numerous reliques were found, indicative of the site having been a place of ancient sepulture.

Late in 1816, John Fletcher printed *The Stranger in Chester*, written by J. H. Hanshall, the first editor of *The Chester Chronicle*. He bound up a copy with blank leaves for his own use. This book he passed on to an unknown "Stranger in Chester," who recorded therein the account of a Tour from Liverpool to Holywell and back, from which the following extracts are given. They are of some interest as the story of a journey before the days of railways. The spelling has been followed, but some punctuation has been attempted.

On leaving the Liverpool side of the water, we found the rain to pelt against us that we were obliged to descend into the cabin of the steam packet on which we had embarked for Eastham, and had on the whole an unpleasant sail to that place. . . .

The Park mill, etc., upon a hill after leaving the docks, looks well from the river, as does Bevington<sup>1</sup> church and its spire nearly covered with ivy. On landing at Eastham ferry we found two

<sup>1</sup> Bebington.



coaches waiting for the passengers and we immediately set off for Chester, the expence in the cabin and inside the coach being only 3s. in the whole. The weather continuing still wet we were obliged to keep inside, which prevented our having an extensive view of the country as we travelled, but from what we saw it appeared to be full of fine growing timber, especially about the residence of Sir T. S. M. Stanley at Puddington Hall, and also Mr. John Feilden's of Mollington, about two miles from Chester. The land also seemed very good and affords excellent pasturage for herds of fine cattle.

CHESTER.

We were set down at the White Lyon near the Exchange in the Market place about 11 o'clock, and immediately went to the Cathedral, and heard the Dean of Chester preach to a very respectable congregation; and really is a most excellent pulpit orator. After the sermon the Bishop, who was present, went to the Communion Table atten'd by the Dean and the rest of the dignitaries and ordained about 20 deacons and about the same number to be priests. After the ceremony had ended one of the vergers ordered all present to withdraw who did not intend to receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper along with them. I was sorry to observe upon this solemn occasion all the people to withdraw. I went into a pew and after his lordship had received it and administered it to the Dean and Chaplin, he beckoned me to come to the act and I received it along with the priests and deacons. After dinner we perambulated the town, and walked round the city walls. . . .

The appearance of this city seems very gloomy and heavy. Many of the newer buildings are very good, but owing to the narrowness of the streets, badness of the houses near, or from the singular plans of the builders, they have not that grand appearance as we see no better houses have in other places. Those situated near the river Dee, and some in the suburbs, have certainly a good appearance; the gardens are tastefully laid out.

Hearing of this publication and our stay being so short we wish'd to obtain it, that we might if time would permit see any particular object which we were yet unacquainted with; we went to a Mr. Fletcher, the printer of this book, who we were informed lived at the end of the street leading to Neston. We went to the place we were recommended too, expecting to find a dwelling house and shop where the printing business were carried on; we were however agreeably surprised on ascending several

steps cut out of the solid rock to find ourselves in a most beautiful garden, well stocked with flowers and with a profusion of hollyhocks of all colours, which gave it a very Chinese and yet handsome appearance. From the side of his house projected a hot-house and as you entered in, on your right and left were greenhouse plants neatly arranged one above another, and vines filled with grapes surmounted the whole. On entering the house a very handsome carpet covered the floor of the room, filled with good furniture, added to a most extensive library of books, induced me to apologise for my intrusion, naturally conceiving our director had made a mistake; but finding he really was Mr. Fletcher, the printer of this book, I told him I hoped that our returning at 7 o'clock in the morning (which we intended) would apologise for our troubling him on a Sabbath day. He informed me that he was not a seller of the work, but only the printer, but thought he had one which he had got bound for himself with blank leaves for remarks; and after some trouble he found it amongst his books and kindly let me have it on my paying him a little addition for the binding and paper. After a further conversation he very politely invited me to sit down and take wine with him. I refused his kind invitation, but expressed a wish to walk round his garden, where I had a friend waiting for me. He immediately met my wishes and his lady accompanied us; on whose management its beauties was owing. A pump close to the garden wall 26 yards deep, cut out of the rock, was very convenient both for it and the house. He made us a present of some garden seeds, shewed us his little work shop adjoining, in which he made most of his instruments of measuring land etc. The rain was conveyed from this building by small tin painted down-spouts. We informed him what we had seen; and he promised if we would favour him with our company to tea he would shew us the remainder of the city. We complied with his polite and pressing invitation. We were then shewn into a front room, in which there was a bow window, from whence you had a delightful view of several of the mountains in Wales, especially one in Denbyshire on which they had erected a round building to perpetuate the jubilee year of the reign of his present majesty. Nearer lay the sea coast of Wales, Flint Castle, Pargate<sup>1</sup> shore, Neston; and under the window the canal and richly cultivated fields, where formerly the river Dee ran. The house is built in the forme of a summer house and on the top is a cupola of glass from whence there must be a still more

<sup>1</sup> Parkgate.



extensive prospect. During our tea we found Mr. Fletcher to be a most intelligent and scientific man. He had cut the present line of canal, had laid out the race course and built the grand stand and had undertook most of the public works, and made the new road from Wrexham to Llangollen and so on to Ruthin. He had also the making of the embankment to the magnificent aqueduct over the river Dee, which he strongly recommended us to see. After accompanying us through the remainder of the city and it had got quite dark, we all adjourned to the inn and the clock had struck one before we separated; enjoying very rational and instructive conversation. . . .

#### EATON.

On Monday morning we set off in a chaise for Wrexham to breakfast. The weather was wet and unfavourable for viewing the country. It is far from being a populous neighbourhood, compared with many parts of Lancashire. About 3 miles on the road to the left stands Eaton Hall, the magnificent seat of Earl Grosvenor. We stopped our chaise at the gates and had a distant prospect of the house at the end of a straight walk of 2 miles; the family being at home we were not permitted to see thro' it, Tuesday and Fridays being then the only days in which it is to be seen. The cottages here, as we passed, appeared very neat and the windows tastefully made; indeed at the sides and ends of several barns sham windows were painted and appeared real till we got opposite, and discovered our mistake. About 3 miles further on the road, in Wales, was an ancient house on the left in the centre of a large park belonging John Boydell, Esqr., from whence the road ascends a steep hill. From the top of it there is an extensive and delightful view of England and the fine and luxurious timber adds much to the beauty of the scene. The porches of the cottages here are all made very tastefully of piled oak branches of trees, covered at the top, and pieces of oak fixed at the sides for shrubs to run up to the top; they look very well and are made at a little expence. I very much admired them. . . .

#### WREXHAM.

In a short time after passing over this hill we arrived in Wrexham, a town in Denbighshire, the most populous in all North Wales.

It is of Saxon origin and retains the language and appearance of an English town and has a great share of the shopkeeping trade. The Ellesmere canal, washing this town on the N.W., greatly facilitates the trade thereof. This town, tho' of great antiquity,

has a wide and spacious street in the centre of it, and is in general well built. The church is said to have been once collegiate; was built in 1472, is a magnificent and highly ornamented structure in the cathedral form, 178 F long and 62 broad and the steeple is 135 in height. It exhibits much grotesque ancient sculpture. The alter piece is of Italian workmanship, and the inside of the church is very neat and contains some very handsome monuments; the most deserving of notice is that of Mary Middleton, daughter of Sir Rd. Middleton of Chirk Castle, who is cut out of white marble as large as life, in the act of rising out of her tomb. . . .

The antiquary will be highly gratified by examining a rude monument within the steeple which was dug up on sinking for the posts of the present church gates. The figure, which is as large as life, represents an old warrior with his right hand on the hilt of his sword and his left in his shield, on which there are several characters cut, but I could not make them out; the person who shewed it to us said that some people thought that the name of Owen might be made out. . . . All round Wrexham abounds with iron works. There is an annual fair that lasts 9 days; the markets are Mondays and Tuesdays.

#### PONTCYSYLTE.

We left Wrexham about 11 o'clock. About 2 miles from thence on our left stands a handsome house belonging the Honourable Mr. York; this is a very handsome building of free stone, with large plantations of timber about it. A little further the road goes through Rueabbin, belonging principally to Sir W. W. Wynne; his park wall runs on the left and his house is about two miles off. We also passed at a little distance Chirk Castle, the seat of the Middletons; on the left is the road to Oswestry where there were races and we overtook several country people going there. After going up a steep hill we found ourselves amongst the iron forges and coal works, so that we could scarcely take our breath. A little further on the left we saw a small aqueduct belonging the canal.

After proceeding a few hundred yards we came in sight of the grand one, and our driver stop'd his chaise and we got out, and he promised to drive it round the road, so as to go over the bridge which is over the river Dee, and stop for us at the further end of the aqueduct of Pontcysylte. This aqueduct, carrying over the river Dee the Ellsmere canal, is one of the most stupendous works of art that ever was accomplished by man, being carried



over a vale by an aqueduct supported on 18 massy stone pillars from 130 to 160 feet in height; and distant from each other at the top about 45 feet. These spring from the bed of the river and the rocks which line its banks; and extend in length (measuring by the iron work) about 1100 feet; on the top of these pillars is fixed the iron canal and horse road, wholly composed of arches and bolts and plates of cast iron.

The following inscription is engraved upon the south side of the pier, next to the south side of the river:—

The nobility and gentry of  
The adjacent counties  
Having united their efforts with  
The great commercial interests of this country  
In creating an intercourse and union between  
England and North Wales.  
By a navigable communication of the three rivers  
Severn, Dee, and Mersey,  
for the mutual benefit of agriculture and trade  
Caused the first Stone of this Aqueduct of  
Pontcysylte,  
To be laid on the 25th day of July, 1795;  
When Richard Middleton, of Chirk, Esqr., M.P.  
One of the original Patrons of the  
Ellesmere Canal  
was Lord of this Manor,  
And in the reign of our Sovereign  
George the Third;  
When the equity of the laws and  
The security of property,  
promoted the general welfare of the nation;  
While the Arts and Sciences flourished  
By his patronage, and  
The conduct of civil life was improved  
By his example.  
The navigation over this Aqueduct,  
was opened 26th of November, 1805.

#### LLANGOLLEN.

In the environs of Pontcysylte and the side of the hill we had left are so thickly set with houses, that it gives it the appearance of the immediate neighbourhood of some very populous town, and the view up the valley is delightfully grand. We found our chaise here waiting for us; and as the rain began, we were glad to get in, fully satisfied and our utmost expectations realized. We proceeded on our journey towards Llangollen, which was only 3 miles. The hills on our left, and indeed our road was cut out of their sides, was composed of iron stone; down below us was a beautiful valley, with the river Dee running thro' it and the

canal run parallel, only it is twice lost in going thro' hills on the opposite side to which we were travelling. Lime stone appears to compose those hills and much lime is burnt along the line of this Ellesmere canal, and the whitewashed houses on the sides of the hills and in the vale give a cheerful air and neat appearance.

The mountains are very high, particularly one called Dinas Bran, which is a conical hill almost opposite to Llangollen. On its summit stands the ruins of the castle of Dinas Bran. This hill on which this castle stands is of great height; towards its top the acclivity on the only accessible side is intersected by trenches, cut out of the solid rock. . . . . Notwithstanding its elevation I was informed that there are two never failing wells within the area of the castle wall. After proceeding forward about a mile we came in sight of the beautiful and far-famed vale of Llangollan, interspersed with scattered villas and cottages, which gives it an air of external gentility. The town itself is but small; the streets are narrow and inconvenient. We alighted at one of the two inns, with the river Dee flowing in front of the windows, and opposite are two factories for spinning and weaving cotton, the first of the kind in this country.

On enquiring if there was anything worthy of notice in Llangollen, we were recommended to visit the cottage of Lady E. Butler and Miss Ponsonby, so much celebrated by the classical muse of Miss Seward, which was about 10 minutes walk from the inn; but as the rain kept coming down we declined visiting it. We were in two rooms in this house, whose sideboards was very abundantly stocked with plate and cut glass, in such profusion as we never witnessed in any inns in Lancashire. In a recess in the wall was arranged some most beautiful old china. The waiter pointed out to us an old bowl, which had been pieced; yet he told us that his mistress had frequently been offered 20 guineas for it; it had been so often admired for the excellent workmanship of the figures upon it; which indeed appeared very beautiful and clear. The[re] was a very handsome small harp in the hall as you entered, but we did not see the harper. Here is a bridge of four arches, built on ledges of rocks, which cross the river Dee and is considered one of the wonders of North Wales. Here is a weekly market on Saturday, and several annual fairs.

#### VALLE CRUCIS ABBEY.

Leaving this place we proceeded in a good chaise, but under the care of a very poor driver, on our tour for Ruthin. About two miles on our right thro' a very pleasant vale, with the canal on our left,



and the Dee on our right hand stands Llan Egwest Abbey situated most delightfully. It is also known by the name of Valle Crucis. It is now a venerable pile of ruins, covering and nearly covered with ivy; nothing in my opinion can be more sweet than its sequestered situation, nothing more interesting than its remains, shewing sufficiently its former grandeur. They consist of the east and west gable ends of the church and some of the side walls on the south. . . . . A great number of trees occupy the area of the church, spreading their lofty branches over the mouldering walls. The cloister on the south is now converted into a farm house, which deforms the spot. Some of the ancient windows remain and arches seem made for endless duration. The dormitory, supported by three rows of ground arches on single round pillars, is now converted into a hayloft. . . . .

At the distance of less than a quarter of a mile higher up the vale stands the Pillar of Eliseg, the father of Brockmail, prince of Powis, who was slain in the battle of Chester 607.

After continuing our journey a few miles further we came to a more barren tract, from whence were dug the slates which we saw piled on the banks of the canal for conveniency of carriage. We thought it best to walk up a very steep sterile hill to ease our horses and also to save our necks, for our driver was none of the best, and the road here very narrow, with no fences or guard whatever, to prevent a plunge into a very deep abyss. Several Welch boys we presumed solicited money from us in a kind of singing strane, but we could not understand what they said. Some small Welsh sheep had stray'd down one of the hills amongst some potatoes, when one of the lads called out to them Collew, and with a smart whistle soon sent them to the right about. A very smart shower came on that forced us very reluctantly into the chaise, and I really had my fears that we should be blown over the precipice, the wind was so strong, and beat the rain into the horses' eyes, and I felt very happy when our bad driver brought us safe upon the level once more.

We were now upon very high ground and found the air very keen and cold. The view was not so extensive as we expected owing to the hills behind preventing the prospect by bounding the horizon. About a mile further we stop'd at a public house recommended by our driver as having some good ale; but no one could imagine it to be one that was a stranger, for to me it seemed to have been the study of the builder to exclude the view of it from the road. We were waited on by a very handsome buxom landlady, who we found very chatty; she had lived there 15

years but acknowledged she was not troubl'd with many visitors. She sold her ale 9d. pr. quart. After leaving this noted inn, we soon got into a more cultivated part. We met several Welsh women, all on horse back, who had been at Ruthin market.

## RUTHIN.

On driving into the town we found it a very busy day. The streets were very narrow and the houses not well built. About 400 yards from our inn, which tho' rather large was an uncomfortable place, is situated the ruins of an old castle; we went round them and they certainly have a very venerable appearance. With some difficulty we climbed to the top of the inner court over a part of the mouldering walls. This castle appears to have been moated round. I cannot learn anything of its history; there is at present a part of the court used for a bowling green. The market seemed to consist of potatoes, greens, apples, etc., linen cloth, and a few tapes, etc. We saw two cart loads of herrings, and the country people as they purchased thread them upon sticks which they had ready in the carts.

My friend, who wished very much to hear a dialogue in Welsh, had it to his heart's content, for as we drew near to look at the herrings in the carts, a young Welsh girl bought a shilling's worth, and after having had them thread upon a stick, she gave the herring man a one pound note. He was folding it up to put it by; and hearing he could speak English I desired he would let me examin the note for him. On looking at it, I found it was a very bad one and told him it was a counterfeit. It was a long time before he could make the poor young woman understand that it was of no value, and tho' he thanked me kindly for my information, yet both my friend and myself regretted that I had given that information. Several Welsh market men came up, and we now heard plenty of Welsh for they nearly spoke all at once; the herring merchant informed me that the young woman had recd. the note from an English gentlemen only that morning. I recommended her immediately returning it to him and if he was a gentleman, he would not refuse exchanging it for another note. Indeed the Welsh people seem'd to have no idea of forged notes, for those we paid at the inns were immediately pocketted without even looking at them, except just to see their value.

We now returned to the inn to look after the chaise, for we had been waiting of a pair of horses coming in, and also to stop of their being fed. I called for a glass of ale, my friend a 4d. one of liquor, when the female waiter boldly charged us 1s.; and



upon my remonstrating she very modestly dropped her demand to 9*d*, which we paid tho it was 3*d*. too much. This I only mention as a sample of Welsh imposition. Our landlord, after many remonstrances on our parts for detaining us so long, contrived to mount his male waiter on his tired chaise horses; and as a first specimen of his whipmanship nearly overturned us in setting off, and actually drove over several heaps of potatoes; and for this exquisite driving the honest innkeeper charged us six miles more than the real distance, and after that the rate of 18*d*. p. mile.

#### DENBIGH.

After turning our backs of Ruthin we in a short time gradually descended into the beautiful vale of Clwyd; but as night was coming on, we had no opp<sup>y</sup> of viewing its beauties, at any distance; especially as we approached Denbigh, formerly called by the Welch Cled-fryn-yn-Rhos or the craggy hill of Ross. This town formerly stood on a rocky declivity on the W. banks of the Clwyd, was walled round and protected by the castle now in ruins. . . . The town was in Queen Elizabeth's time removed to the foot of the hill on which it stood formerly. It is a very steep ascent to the castle, which which seems from the remains to have been a very extensive one, and to have had several outworks. The hill and castle is all composed of lime stone and must have been very formadable from its elivated situation, strength of the walls and durability of the materials. A little under the castle stands the walls of a large intended church, which was never finished; if it had, it would have been a very noble structure, but the builder (who we were told was the then owner of the castle) went abroad to the wars and never returned to complete it. The view from the castle is very extensive up both sides of the beautiful vale of the Clwyd, and seems to have been well chosen by our first Edward to hold in check the warlike Welch.

The town as it now stands at the foot of the hill contains about 1700 inhabitants, has a handsome market house, is governed by a corporation, consisting of a mayor, a recorder, 2 aldermen, 2 bailiffs with the power of sheriffs, 25 capital burgesses, a town clerk, and two serjeants at mace, gives the title of earl to the family of Fielding and sends one member to Parliament. Its parish church is a mile distant, but the inhabitants generally attend service at St. Hilary's Chapel, which is situated near the castle. Denbigh had formerly an abbey of black Benedictines, and near the present town stood a White priory. This place is

27 miles from Chest., and 210 from London. Denbigh is noted for good ale, has manufactures of leather stockings and a few glovers.

## HOLYWELL.

After stopping all night here in not the very best of bedrooms, tho' in good beds, we set off for Holywell. The morning being very fine we had a pleasant ride thro' the valley, which seems very fertile; producing a great contrast to the steril Alpine hills whose dreary appearance seemd to soround this highly cultivated vale. After going to one end of it we stop'd at a small Welch ale house to water the horses; and I asked the landlady for a little new milk, but not properly understanding my request she brought some buttermilk. We had to ascend a very high hill, up which we were obliged to walk, and I think in the winter season it must be very dangerous to venture down it either on horseback or in a carriage.

About halfway up is a very nice well of clear water, and we met a young woman coming with her can to fetch some. She would have passed us, but my companion wished that I would speak to her to ascertain if she could speak English, for we frequently found many that we addressed, that their English was confined to a very few common words; but she replied to us without the least hesitation, and spoke with the greatest propriety and pronounced our language correctly. I ask her how she had learnt to speak English so well. She informed me it was taught her at school. I enquired if she had a Bible; she answered that she had two, one in English and the other in Welch. I wished to know from her which of them she preferred reading in, when it was entirely left to her own choice. She told me that she preferred reading the English one. I had got my hand into my pocket to make her a small present, thinking she was the servant to the house we saw near us, but my friend, enquiring her station in life, she said she was the daughter of the farmer who lived at it. I therefore drew out my hand lest my intended gift might hurt her feelings. We considered her as the beautifulest young woman we had seen in the Principallity and the fairest, of the middle size, and slender made. After we had parted we could not help stopg. to look after her, as she tripped down the hill. So much does a pretty face, when accompanied by civility and modesty, gain upon the feelings.

Upon arriving at the summit we had a view of the vale we had left, but now on the other side, as there was another hill behind



prevented it. A little further on the left is a very neat village; from it the prospect must be very extensive. We had now got to the end of the other hill and in descending we had a distinct view of the Irish Cannel, High Lak, Parkgate and the Cheshire coast as far as Chester, and I think a house would stand very pleasant here about half way down this hill; no doubt the summit would be too bleak a situation. As we came near the bottom we found the houses to stand pretty thick, especially near some lead mines, and as we drew near Holywell we saw some neat houses, and the country seem'd well inhabited—a thing we had not seen since we were in Wales—and a distant view of the town and factories made us almost imagine we were in Lancashire. We drove up to the head inn, a very dirty place, tho' a convenient house. The street in which it is situated is tolerable wide. After eating a very harty breakfast, we went with a Mr. S——, to look at the celebrated holy well called St. Winifred's Well, one of the finest and most elegant cold baths in Britain. Its water, of which we tasted, is uncommonly cold and pure, rushes up with impetuosity from the foot of a hill at the rate of 22 tons p. minute, and its stream, in a short course to the Dee, gives motion first to a corn, then 2 cotton mills and afterwards to several other works. At the spring is a bath 12 feet long, 7 broad and 4 deep, surrounded by a wall, covered with an exquisitely carved stone roof supported on pillars, and supporting a beautiful Gothic chapel erected by the Countess of Richmond, mother of King Henry the 7th. This well is resorted to, not only by valetudinary Protestants on account of its well attested natural salutary qualities, but also by Popish pilgrims for its supposed supernatural virtue, and which no doubt it was the interest of the town to encourage and is in a small degree at present by those who take care of the spring. . . . . There was an experiment made on the 12th July, 1731, by Mr. Price, the rector of Holywell, Mr. Williams, Mr. Wynne, Dr. Taylor, and several other gent., being present, when they found by the gauge that the bason will hold 240 tons of water, which was emptied, and to their great surprise it was filled again in rather less than 2 minutes; according to this experiment the spring raises more than 100 tons of water in a minute. This bason is 6 feet deep and yet the water is so clear that a pin may be seen at the bottom, where there is several large perple stones part red; which may at all times be easly picked up along the sea shore and drop'd into the bason and then to the eye appear as if besprinkled or besmeared with blood.

After inspecting the well and the waterwheel turned by its water of a large factory we returned to our inn, discharged our bill, and procured a person to carry our luggage, while we walked down to Baggilt lead works, which was about 2 miles off, to the packet boat. We went thro' the works, saw the lead ore as it came from the mine and afterwards went to some works above to look how the sheet lead was rolled out from the thickness of 2 inches, to any thinness, which we found was done by the power of steam engine by successive applications. We saw a large quantity of pigs of lead ready for exportation; all these were made or smelted from bits of the ore; the large and pure lumps we were told were sent to the potteries. All the way from Holywell to this place, was down to the edge of the water and the view of Highlake and Pargate delightful. Near Holywell we passed some pretty neat cottages where we heard the looms going. We had the curiosity to step in to see what they were weaving, and were invited upstairs, where we found two young women weaving silk ferreting, a kind of narrow ribband; each loom had about 15 reeds, about the breadth of a hand each, and as many shuttles went. The plain is simple but judicious one, and after making them a small present for their civility, we went forward to the public house, where the packet boat passengers stop, to get some refreshment. We set off about 4 o'clock and had a very pleasant sale of 5 miles across. Flint Castle had a very pretty appearance, and the Parkgate shore, from the middle of the river. As soon as we landed there were two coaches waiting for us, being afraid of being too late for the Eastham Ferry. We arrived safe at Liverpool about 8 o'clock with our fellow passingers, one of which was a poor middle-aged man, who had left a wife and 5 small children the day before, 30 miles in the interior of Wales, to try to get work about the docks in Liverpool; but what appeared to us most singular was that he could not speak a single word of English. I paid for the poor fellow's passage over the river. We got this information from him by the means of a Welch woman who could speak English.

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