

“THE CLEAR WINDING DEVON.”

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IN the heart of the beautiful grass-grown southern Ochils, a few miles to the east of the battlefield of Sheriffmuir, rises the river Devon, which flows at first eastward through the charming pastoral solitudes of Glendevon, and, having turned southwards to escape from its native hills, then westwards parallel to its former course till, having travelled for somewhat more than thirty miles from its source it joins the Forth a little above Alloa, at a point little more than five miles distant from where it took its rise.

The Devon is one of the best known of lowland Scottish streams. It owes its fame partly to our national singer, Burns, some of whose deathless lyrics celebrate the beauty of our stream, while they embalm the memory of one of the poet's many loves. But apart from this, the charm of the loneliness, and loveliness, and restfulness of its upper reaches, and the romantic beauty through which it flows lower down, are quite enough to secure for it a place, not in the recollection only, but also in the affection of the wanderer to whom the fair spots of earth—be *owned* by whom they may—are a great and goodly heritage.

The best known though hardly the most delightful part of the course of the Devon is comprised within a short space of little more than two miles, stretching from its sudden bend to the westward, which has been already mentioned and is well named the Crook of Devon. Here the stream forces its way through a deep and narrow gorge lined with cliffs almost black in hue. The narrowness and the blackness combine to give an aspect of grandeur and sublimity which is very striking when first seen, and is not readily forgot.

The tourist may easily visit this delightful place by taking train from Stirling to Rumbling Bridge Station. Entering the grounds at the Rumbling Bridge Hotel, and seeking his way as far up the stream as possible, he comes to “The Devil's Mill,” a waterfall which gets its name from the likeness its noise bears to the falling of water on a mill-wheel, and from the fact that it works steadily on and pays no heed even to Sunday. For about a quarter of a mile after this the water is dashed and buffeted and churned between the enclosing wooded cliffs, which, covered with ferns and other moisture-loving plants, are overhung with loveliest greenery. The banks are threaded with walks which cleverly lead to all the points of vantage whence peeps of the surging foam-flecked stream—now wildly dashing, like an Arethusa, over a precipice, now lying exhausted, sullen and still, at its base—may be seen. A set of steps has recently been

formed to give access to a cave or grotto in the face of the overhanging cliff. This was for some time, in the end of 1745, the hiding-place of a Jacobite, Hector Maceachin by name, who had been imprisoned in Castle Campbell, but escaped by the help of his sweetheart, Hannah Haig.

A little lower down is the famous Rumbling Bridge shown in our illustration. The lower arch was built in 1713 by William Gray, a native of the neighbouring parish of Saline. It is about 90 feet above the water, has a span of 22 feet and a width of 12 feet, and now-a-days the crossing of it would be looked upon as somewhat of a feat, seeing that it was never provided with parapets. It was, however, used by foot and horse passengers, by day and by night, for upwards of a century. The new bridge was built directly above the former arch—which was not removed—at a height above the water of 120 feet. The bridge derives its name from the hollow rumbling noise made by the stream as it forces its way beneath and between the opposing rocks. On looking down, one cannot help shuddering, the whole scene is so gloomy and gruesome ; and it is a welcome relief to lift the eyes and look away down stream into the open where, should the sun chance to be shining, the cliffs, though grey with age, look kindly with the bright light of heaven.

From its giant struggle, the river escapes and sets out on the peaceful half-mile journey to its mad leap over the cliff at the Cauldron Linn to what is almost the level of the sea. Here it flows broad, placid, and clear as crystal, between banks beautifully wooded and brightly starred in their season with the summer-heralding primrose and the wind-tossed anemone. But, following the path on the left bank of the stream, ere long we hear the rush and the roar of the waterfall, and soon the stream gathers itself together as the rocks close in around, and the last wild terrible struggle begins. The water has worn out in the rock curious pot-holes, and in these, which communicate under the surface, it seethes, and boils, and bubbles as in some terrible cauldron like that in which Macbeth's witches brewed their devils' broth. Escaping at length from these cauldrons, the river plunges sheer over the edge of the cliff, and dashes itself to spray amid the broken fragments of rock some fifty feet below. The visitor should seek the path to the right, and so find his way to the bottom. The white waters seen against the black basaltic cliffs, which rise around the fall to a total height of about 100 feet, form a sight which well repays the toil necessary to regain the top. The stream has no further wild adventures. It flows for a little through a beautifully wooded glen, and then, finding its way into the almost level carse-land, it glides still and slow, past mill and coal-field, which despoil it of its crystal beauty, till it loses itself in the waters of the Forth, 2000 feet lower down than it began its life.