

This question brought Allonby's thoughts home to a sense of forgotten duty. The spot he had yesterday selected, whence to paint his projected picture, was a mile along the valley, and the day was passing; so far he had been conspicuously successful in his efforts to become a lounge.

"I wonder if your mother would tie me up some dinner in a handkerchief?" said he. "I had none yesterday, because it was too far to come back."

Then, as the girl disappeared, he rose, stretched, and told himself that he was a fool to have put off his tramp till the hottest hour of the day, when it would be quite impossible to get an inch of shade, either side of the way.

However, he had come to Edge Combe brimful of good resolutions, and he meant at least to try to keep them, in spite of the strange fermentation which seemed to be taking place in his brain. As he shouldered his camp-stool and other paraphernalia, it occurred to him to bestow a smiling pity on a poor fool who could allow all his ideas of life to be revolutionized by a sudden plunge from London dirt and heat into the glamor of a Devonshire summer.

"However," he reflected, "it won't last. I've been over-turned in this way before. Look what an ass I made of myself in Maremma! It doesn't increase one's self-respect to recall these things. But, after all, either I am a singularly unappreciative person, or my insular prejudices are very strong, or—I like best to imagine this third—there is something in the fickle beauty of an English summer which surpasses even Italy. I don't think anything there ever moved me quite as the Valley of Avilion does. There is something so pure, so wholesome, in this sea-scented, warm air. There is no treachery, no malaria lurking under the loveliest bits of foliage—no mosquitoes either," he suddenly concluded, somewhat prosaically, as he lifted his soft cloth helmet, and wiped his big forehead. "Only one drawback to an English summer," he continued, as he started on his way, with his dinner tied up in a blue handkerchief, and began to tramp, with long strides, along the curve road, with its low stone wall, which skirted the deep blue bay. "Only one drawback, and that one which enhances its beauty, and makes it all the more precious: one is never sure of keeping it for two days together. Its uncertainty is its charm."