

# THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE.

## CHAPTER I.

Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.

*Mort d'Arthur.*

ANYONE who has read the *Mort d'Arthur* can hardly fail, if he traverse the Combe of Edge in early summer, to be struck by its resemblance to the fairy Valley of Avilion.

A spot still by good fortune remote from rail, and therefore lying fresh and unsullied between its protecting hills, waiting, like the pearl of great price, to reward the eye of the diligent seeker after beauty. It seems hard, at first glance, to believe that the rigors of an English winter can ever sweep across its sunny uplands.

"Where falls not rain, nor hail, nor any snow,  
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies  
Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns  
And bowery willows, crowned with summer sea."

As regards the falling of rain and hail, and the buffeting of winds, it is to be supposed the place does not, literally speaking, resemble the mystic Isle; but it was a fact, as Allonby had just elicited from the oldest inhabitant, that snow had only three times lain on the hills within his memory.

To the young man himself, as he sat in a patch of shade just outside the rural inn, with a tankard of cider in his hand, and his long legs extended in an attitude of blissful rest, it seemed as if the remainder of the description must be also true.

Up over his head, the sky was blue—how blue! An unseen lark trembled somewhere in its depths, and its song dropped earthwards in trills of melody.

It was that loveliest season of the English summer which