

THE ENGLISH STONES.

BY GEORGE AGAR HANSARD.

THE sun shone upon the magnificent landscape which adorns the shore of the Severn in the vicinity of Blackrock Ferry, on the morning of the 16th of June, 1617, where it displayed the face of nature yet tranquil and serene, also revealed a scene highly illustrative of the dreary and desolating effects of civil war. The village of Caldecot presented to the view a mass of smouldering ashes. The broad and once verdant pastures that once surrounded its walls, till then deemed impregnable, were broken up, cut and hollowed into innumerable trenches, and covered with mounds of earth and stones; sufficiently indicating the spot where the besieging army had fixed its leaguer. Dead carcasses of men and horses, filling the air with pestilential odors, lay scattered up and down, and choked up the Severn brook which ran the green knoll on which stands the once stately residence of the 'haughty Bolinbroke;' all magnificent in its decay. From the sole remaining corner of a massive square tower, the principal part of which had been blown up with gunpowder, rose a lofty flagstaff bearing the Parliamentary ensign, the cross of St. George; that seemed to wave, as it were, in laughing mockery of the few tattered fragments of the royal standard which still hung beneath.

At a short distance, and close to the brink of the New Passage, stood a capacious hotel, in more peaceful times the scene of extraordinary trade and animation; this ferry being the only medium of communication between South Wales and the opposite English coast. Strangers of all rank; Welsh drovers, with large herds of horses and cattle, bound for the great ports of Bristol and the neighbouring marts; country gentlemen, with short frize cloaks and rusty rapiers, having their wives and daughters mounted on pillions behind them, according to the fashions of the age; military officers in the castle garrison, in embroidered buff coats, plumed steel caps and jingling spurs; with a proportionate number of beggars, gypsies, and itinerant traders, constituted the motley assemblage that generally congregated around the inn for about two hours before the time of low water. But now the city of Bristol, closely besieged by General Fairfax, no longer afforded a safe or desirable market; the garrison of Caldecot were either killed or taken prisoners; the native gentry had either fallen in the field, or languished in poverty and exile; the ferry was almost deserted; the boats lay rat-

tling at their moorings; and the once flourishing hotel of Blackrock became an asylum for the swallow and the jackdaw, that flew fearlessly in and out of its battered windows and doorless porch.

Among the most material sufferers by the unhappy change which the country had undergone was Giles Gilbert, the well-known fisher and ferryman of the New Passage. Returning home along the wide expanse of sands which the ebbing tide leaves dry, melancholy and disheartened, with his little son, the constant companion of his labours, after many hours of unsuccessful exertion with his nets, he encountered upon the edge of the verdant area of Sunbury Camp a couple of his neighbours, equipped with the usual implements of those who are employed in collecting shell-fish. Like Giles Gilbert, they had formerly been engaged in the double occupation of fishermen and sailors, and like him too, they bore all the external indications of the enervating effects of poverty.

"Good morrow, Giles," said the elder of the two, "what sport toward? but it boots not to enquire; the empty net is proof enough. Methinks the thunder of old Noll's batteries have scared away the very fish from these shores, as well as the travellers from the Ferry—these be terrible times."

"Sooth," replied Gilbert, "things are sadly changed; 'tis hard, for instance, to believe that yon black and battered pile, through which the kine and horses now make their passage as carelessly as through the old parson's barton, be the same stout old castle of Caldecot, where, ten days ago, a hundred tall fellows kept watch and ward, with shotted culverin and arquebus in rest? 'Twill be long, methinks, ere cavaliers again come curving beneath its iron portcullis."

"Hist! hist!" said the younger, starting from the ground on which he had been stretched, "I hear the tramping of horses. Cavaliers or Round-coats, 'twere ill to bide their coming; so I'll just conceal myself behind yon rock, until they be passed."

"Stand fast, neighbour," said Giles, "they may be honest wayfarers bound to the Ferry; and will in that case want our assistance—these be no times to throw a chance away."

"And get repaid with the pommel of their swords upon thy costard, as thou hast before experienced," said the first speaker, hurrying away towards the place of concealment; "they shall swim the Severn, as old Wintour of Withecross did the Wyre for me."

Giles and his companion hastened toward a