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A description of the principal picturesque beauties, antiquities, and geological phenomena, of the Isle of Wight

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CHAPTER VI.

PICTURESQUE ACCOUNT OF THE ISLAND.—WOODS, ROCKS, CHALK-CLIFFS, CHINES.

So much has been within these few years written on the beauties of the Isle of Wight, that it may appear presumptuous to rank it lower in a picturesque view than these authors have uniformly placed it.

The picturesque beauties of the Isle of Wight are in general nearly confined to the coast and the country immediately adjacent to it; for small as the superficies of the island is, what may be called the interior part of it, is in general as destitute of beauty as any tract of the same extent in England. The objects of curiosity in this view may be classed under four general heads; woodlands, rocks, chalk cliffs, and chines. With these are constantly connected the views of the sea, whether of the Solent sea, or British channel. Of each of these we shall in its order attempt a description.

The woodland tract extends from East Cowes to St. Helens. The woods are principally oak. The country on which they grow is in general beautifully varied by gentle rise and fall, and from almost every eminence, the most interesting views of the Solent sea, with the magnificent addition of the harbour of Portsmouth and the road of Spithead, present themselves. On quitting Newport on the road towards Ryde, a very beautiful view is soon obtained of the Medina river from Newport quite to its mouth at Cowes. At high water this river is of considerable breadth,

and winds with ample sweeps between banks, which though of no great elevation, are of good shape, and varied with arable and coppices; the towns of East and West Cowes, form a very interesting termination to its course: and there are generally a sufficient number of vessels at anchor in the river, and road opposite to its mouth, to give animation to the scene. The Solent sea, like a noble lake, bounded by the luxuriant woods of the New Forest, with the very distant blue hills of the northern part of Hampshire, form a most beautiful termination to the view. The little village of Whippingham commands a nearer view of the Medina, with the same beautiful distance which has been already described. Mr. Nash's new house, built in imitation of a small ancient castle, is most fortunately situated on an eminence above East Cowes, and commands the best views of the Medina of any spot in the neighbourhood. The opposite shore is covered with a very beautiful coppice of wood, hanging down a gentle declivity quite into the water. St. Catherine's hill closes the view to the south. West Cowes, built on the steep descent of the opposite hill, is seen from this point to the greatest advantage, and the mixture of trees with the houses, gives the town an appearance of consequence which it loses on a nearer approach. The little castle with the grove of large elms hanging over it, forms an happy termination to the coast. The Solent sea, as before, is the never-failing source of beauty. The immediate fore-ground of this very elegant residence, is not less happy than the more distant views, falling with a steep descent to the water of the Medina, and covered with oaks, which, though of no great size, are of great luxuriance, and over their tufted tops the water glitters with a beautiful effect.

At no great distance from Mr. Nash's house, Lord Henry Seymour has built a magnificent structure, from the designs of Mr. Wyatt, and professing to be in imitation of an ancient castle of no small dimensions. Seated on the steep descent of the coast to the Solent sea, it perhaps commands a view of that strait, superior in beauty to any other point in the island. To the east, Portsmouth, crowded with shipping, is in full view; and the richest line of the woody coast of the island from Barton to Nettlestone, appears in long and varied perspective. To the north, the Southampton river is seen in its whole extent, and the town of Southampton, with its spires and towers, though at ten miles distance, is no inconsiderable object. The woods of the New Forest clothe the view to the west; while Calshot castle on the point of its long bank of shingle, stands boldly out amidst the waves, and marks the separation between the Solent sea, and Southampton river. The house is of a very noble general form, and its clustering towers in every point of view, particularly when seen from the sea, are a striking and commanding object, and a most splendid addition to the general scenery of the coast. The choice of both the form and site of the mansion, reflects the highest honour on the taste of the noble owner. Of that part of the detail which is the peculiar province of the architect; the less is said, the better.

The mouth of the little inlet called King's key, has some pretty scenery about it. The inlet itself runs in a winding course through thick overhanging groves for more than a mile.

From Wotton church there is a fine view of the Wotton river, and the very extensive woods through which it runs. These woods are almost entirely the property of Mr. Fleming, and extend over

several thousands of acres, with very small portions of arable interspersed among them.

Fern hill, a seat of the late Lord Bolton, commands an extensive view over these woods and the Wotton river, which when filled by the tide, is a beautiful sheet of water, winding among rich groves of oaks. The house is another instance of the singular infelicity of attempts to imitate the style of our despised ancestors, whose works, while modern science strives in vain to rival, modern insolence brands with the appellations of dark and barbarous.

At the mouth of the Wotton river, on its eastern shore, is a small dockyard called Fish-house cove, where the building and repair of the lesser coasting sloops are carried on beneath the shade of some fine oaks. The scene is of course very interesting.

From hence, a beautiful walk of about a mile, leads to the sequestered little valley in which the small remains of Quarr abbey stand, overcanopied by a grove of most magnificent elms. The spot is extremely beautiful from the richness both of the turf and open grove; but the ruins are so small, and what remains is so far modernized by being turned into the outhouses of a large farm, that scarcely a subject for the pencil can be found.

From Quarr to Binstead, the road runs through the thickest of the woods, shady and pleasant in the heat of summer, but of no peculiar beauty. Binstead itself is a celebrated spot, and not without reason. The shore is very steep, and wooded absolutely into the water; a small cove forms the nearest distance, and beyond the projecting point of this cove, the shipping of Portsmouth harbour, now seen in a nearer view, is a noble assemblage of all that the commercial or armed navy of England can

exhibit. The anchorage of the Motherbank reaches quite to Binstead, and even beyond it to the west; and when the great convoys were collecting, the channel from hence to St. Helen's, a distance of eight miles, has often been seen covered with vessels to the amount of many hundreds. The sailing of one of these great convoys in a beautifully clear day, with a light air which permitted every sail to be spread, was one of the most interesting sights I ever beheld. The blue waters in the distance were almost hidden by the snow-white cloud of sails, which, as the vessels approached, separated into detached groups, and still nearing, passed in rapid succession, almost under my feet, as I viewed the scene from the heights above Cowes.

From Binstead to Ryde, the views of the sea are nearly similar, and the shore is broken into little hills and valleys, all well wooded, and all unlike in nature, though scarcely to be discriminated in description.*

Ryde is now but the naked carcass of what, not many years ago, it was. The rich plumage of its woods is nearly gone, and in their place have arisen red brick houses narrow and high. Yet still a small grove of fine oaks just above the chapel, affords a most pleasing retreat, commanding to the east and west, beautiful views of the coast and Solent sea: † several of the farm houses in the upper town are shaded with large elms, between the stems of which, glimpses of the blue waters of the Solent are caught at every turn; and some of the old brick buildings of Lower Ryde, with rough timber sheds and platforms, projecting far on the

* Between Binstead and Ryde, Earl Spencer has lately built a villa on a most beautiful spot.

† Since this was written, most, if not all, of these trees have been cut down.

sands, and when the tide is in, rising out of the water, combined with boats of different sizes and shapes, afford some very picturesque subjects. The shore is singularly covered with old anchors, proofs of the insecurity of the anchorage, when a strong gale from the east brings with it a very heavy swell, and seldom fails to drive some of the numerous vessels collected in the roads of Spithead and the Motherbank, from their moorings.

The footpath from Ryde to Appley and St. John's, crosses a small and rather marshy meadow, with a streamlet passing through it, having a stone arched bridge, and a sluice to keep out the tides. Near this stream several rows of graves still rise above the general level of the turf. These I had often noticed without a suspicion of what they really were, till one day meeting an old fisherman, I asked him why those heaps so like graves, had been thrown up. The man in a low tone, and with a sort of sullen look said, "They *are* graves—The bodies cast ashore " after the loss of the Royal George, were buried here. We " did not much like drawing a net hereabouts for some weeks " afterwards. We were always bringing up a corpse." The sudden and melancholy effect of this narrative; the peculiar contrast of the cheerful, though very retired look of this little green flat, with the sad records which almost ceased to mark its surface, suggested the following lines, which I hope my readers will excuse me for inserting. They were written in 1801: perhaps in 1814, the graves, like their tenants, are effaced from the earth.

INSCRIPTION
FOR A MONUMENT

To the Memory of those Sailors, whose bodies were (after the Wreck of the Royal George, who sunk at her anchors, at Spithead, in the year 1782) cast up on the Beach at Ryde, in the Isle of Wight, and buried in a small meadow under the Woods of St. John's, near that place.

Thou! who dost tread this smooth and verdant mead,
Viewing delighted, the fair hills that rise
On either hand, a sylvan theatre:
While in the front with snowy pinions closed,
And thunders silent, Britain's guardian fleet
On the deep bosom of the azure sea
Reposes awful; pass not heedless by,
These mould'ring heaps, which the blue spiry grass
Scarce guards from mingling with the common earth.
Mark! in how many a melancholy rank
The graves are marshall'd.—Dost thou know the fate
Disastrous, of their tenants?—Hushed the winds,
And smooth the billows, when an unseen hand
Smote the great ship, and rift her massy beams:
She reeled and sunk.—Over her swarming decks
The flashing wave in horrid whirlpool rushed:
While from a thousand throats, one wailing shriek

Burst ;—and was heard no more.—

Then day by day,
The ebbing tide left frequent on the sand,
The livid corpse : and his o'erloaded net
The shuddering fisher loathed to drag ashore.
And here ; by friends unknown, unmarked, unwept,
They rest.—Refuse not thou a passing sigh ;
And wish of quiet consummation :
For in thy country's service these men died.*

* The facts above mentioned are historically true. The ship, when first she filled, fell over so as to dip the flag at her masthead in the sea. Then rolling back, she fell over to the other side till her yard-arms touched the water. She then righted, and sunk nearly upright. While she was sinking, nearly every soul on board came on deck ; and I was told by Admiral Sotheby, then a Lieutenant on board the next ship, that as she went down, this mass of people gave a cry so lamentable, that it was still ringing in his ears. It was supposed that at the time of the accident, above a thousand persons, men and women, were on board ; not four hundred were saved. The eddy made by the sinking ship was so great that a large victualling barge which lay along side was drawn in, and lost with her.

About a mile to the eastward, on an hill of very happy form, whose sides are clothed with luxuriant woods, stands St. John's, a small house built by the late General Amherst, and now the property of Edward Simeon, Esq. Few places can boast of more striking beauties than this. To the east, the Solent sea gradually widening, unites with the British channel, and the coast of Hampshire and Sussex dies away in blue distance. Directly in front is the noble spectacle of Portsmouth, and all its navies, and to the west the Solent sea, of a milder character, from its confined dimensions, forms a fine contrast to the open eastern view. Every species of plant, from the hardy oak to the most tender flowering shrub, grows in the highest luxuriance near the house; and the profusion of roses and woodbines which enamels the turf round the mansion, diffuses cheerfulness over the noble scene.

Between St. John's and the sea, on a platform about fifty feet above the water, stands the lovely mansion of Appley, the property of Dr. Walker. This is, perhaps, the most enchanting of all the spots in this beautiful tract of country. Its elevation above the sea is sufficient to command in the most perfect manner every object on it, while it is not too much raised to enjoy the near view of the waves in all their varieties breaking on the shore, or the enchanting sound of their murmur as they die away on the beach. This coast is so sheltered that it very rarely happens that the most violent storm excites a great swell on it, which, however sublime, would ill suit the quiet and peaceful character of this sweet retreat. The house is of old brick, grown to an extremely pleasing grey tint: a small velvet lawn in its front, separates it from the brow of the cliff, which is very steep, and covered with the most beautiful vegetation. With the oak,

ash, and hazle, the universal growth of the shore, are happily mixed most of the hardy flowering shrubs and evergreens, which, without formality, not only add variety to the woods, but mark cultivation, so essential near a dwelling house. A small cove to the east, called Puckpool bay, forms the nearest distance of the sea. This bay is overhung by a noble wood which rises in a great mass up the side of an hill of no inconsiderable height. From this steep bank, a long point of lower land projects into the sea, not however flat or marshy, but having a rocky front from thirty to forty feet high. Over this land the sea is again visible, and Nettleston point forms another bay. The anchorage of St. Helen's is just beyond, and every vessel which comes to Portsmouth from the eastward, is seen for a long time passing this part of the view. In front, Portsmouth, so often mentioned, is viewed to the greatest advantage, and the western prospect commands the village of Ryde, with the busy scene of its small craft and numerous wherries. Lord Henry Seymour's house on its bold projecting point closes the view very beautifully.

Puckpool, a farm of Dr. Walker's, about half a mile to the eastward of St. John's, is well worth seeing. Its beauties are of the same general character as those already described, but the combinations of such materials are in nature continually various and ever new. Very near the farm-house there is, however, a small pool which probably gives its name to the spot, so singularly beautiful as to demand a particular mention. Its water is very clear, its banks steep, broken, and covered with pendent festoons of wild rose and bramble; an open grove of luxuriant trees overhangs it, and during the heats of summer, its seclusion and quiet are animated, not disturbed, by the silent movements

of the herds which seek the shade of its woods, and the coolness of its waters. In a tract of country, whose mild and gentle beauties fit it for the haunt of fairies, this little spot seems marked for their favourite resort, and its name cannot but bring to mind that merry goblin in the description of whose harmless mischief Shakspeare "wanton as in his prime."

Fairy hill, a small mansion of Mr. H. Oglander, is also extremely beautiful. The character of the view of the sea here changes considerably. Little of the Solent is seen, and much more of the British Channel is commanded. The whole anchorage of Portsmouth is, however, visible, through beautiful hanging groves of elm, which cover the sides of an hill rather higher than those about Ryde. At the foot of this hill, the shore which, from East Cowes to Binstead, is in most parts muddy, and at the recess of the tide unpleasant, puts on the true character of sea coast. The sand is of the most beautiful colour, smooth and hard, and diversified in many parts by no inconsiderable masses of rock, the fragments of the stratum which, at a little height above the sea level, seem to underlie almost the whole of this part of the island. The woody hills which rise steep from the beach from hence to St. Helen's priory, form a noble screen to the right hand, while the Bembridge land projects far out, and gives this view the character of a deep bay.

Seagrove joins immediately to this spot, and well deserves the encomium bestowed on it by Mr. Windham in his Picture of the Isle of Wight, though a fall of timber has stript it of great part of its beauties.

We are now arrived at the north-eastern point of the island; and from hence the coast makes a sudden bend to the south, and

is of course exposed more fully to the influence of the sea breeze. The woods feel the change of exposure sensibly, and for this reason I cannot rank the beauties of St. Helen's priory among the most striking of this tract. The steep descent from the lawn to the sea, is indeed woody; but the trees are blighted and mossy, and the general effect of the whole, is extremely injured by a row of Scotch firs, which must be out of harmony with the forest trees behind them. Still the shady walks on the side of the cliff, and the beautiful sands at its foot, are well worth visiting. From St. Helen's priory to Brading, there are some very pretty scenes, and here the views assume a character intirely different.

Brading haven, which at high water is a beautiful lake of eight hundred acres, with varied and pleasing shores, is the principal object; and from one point, the white cliffs of Culver rise most majestically over the lower land of Bembridge.

At Brading, or near it, the woodland tract may be said to terminate to the eastward, but the southern limit of it yet remains to be mentioned. Sir William Oglander's seat, at Nunwell, is surrounded by his extensive woods, which he guards with most laudable care. The roads through them, present continual variety of forest scenery; thickets, open groves of fine oaks, and scattered habitations; and from some favoured eminences the view of the sea suddenly breaks upon the traveller, through the near trees and over the tops of the more distant woods.

But to enjoy in all its glory the complete view of the tract, which in its detail has presented so many separate beauties, we must ascend the chalk range which rises immediately from the woods of Nunwell. When the weather is clear, it is impossible to describe the magnificent scene which these hills command, from Brading

down, by Asheys sea mark, and soon quite to Arreton chalk pit. The range is so narrow at its summit, that the views are at once uninterrupted on either hand. To the north, the woodlands form an almost continued velvet carpet of near ten thousand acres, broken only by small farms whose thatched buildings relieve the deep tints of the forests. The Wotton river winds beautifully among them, and beyond the whole, the Solent sea spreads its waters, which in clear weather are tinged with an azure more deep and beautiful than any I ever saw. The Hampshire land rises in a succession of hills quite lost at length in blue vapour. The inland view to the south, is far from destitute of beauty, though less striking than the northern scene. The vale between the chalk range and the southern hills, is seen in its full extent, and the southern hills themselves rise to a majestic height. To the eastward, the sea is again visible over the low lands of Sandown, and by its open expanse forms a fine contrast to the Solent channel. The nearer objects on the southern slope are also very interesting; Knighton with its venerable grey fronts mantled with luxuriant ivy, and bosomed in the richest groves, is as beautiful at a distance as it is interesting on a nearer approach. Arreton is also surrounded with trees, which group happily with the pretty church and an old mansion now converted into a farm; and from the western end of the downs, the country about Newport and Carisbrook is seen to advantage. Such is the faint outline of a scene which in richness of tints, and variety of objects, surpasses any thing I ever saw.

Although the tract now described comprehends by far the most interesting part of the woodland scenery, yet there are some other parts of the island which possess considerable beauty of

the same sort. Of these, one of the first is the view of the shores of the Medina, from the road between West Cowes and Newport. At about a mile from Cowes, near a blacksmith's shop, this scene is viewed to the greatest advantage.

The road which runs along the brow of the steep shore between West Cowes and Gurnard's bay is varied in a beautiful manner with hanging coppices, and the Solent sea has in this part the appearance of a noble river flowing with a rapid stream, as the current of the tide is from this eminence most strikingly observable. The rich woods of the New Forest are seen from a nearer distance than from any point before described, and the few habitations seated near the shore, sparkle in the sun, and relieve the deep green of the groves which surround them.

The immediate neighbourhood of Gatcombe possesses some very pretty wooded scenes. The hills rise quick and high, and are of extremely various forms. The trees which clothe their sides are principally elms, and of uncommonly luxuriant foliage, as well as considerable size.

The neighbouring vale of Bucombe, through which the road runs from Newport to Shorwell, is for nearly three miles a continued series of light open groves of elm, and from almost every part of the road, Carisbrook castle is seen rising above the trees, in the most advantageous points of view.

About Swainston, the ancient seat of the Barrington family, there is a large extent of woodland, which has a character considerably differing from that of the corresponding tract to the east of the Medina. The ground which it covers is lower and less varied than that tract, yet it is by no means a flat; the woods, which are almost entirely oak, are much affected by the

action of the sea breeze, yet not so much as to have a blasted appearance: the trees are low, very much tufted, and their broad spreading heads are covered with an almost impenetrable foliage. When seen from an eminence, in the autumn, there is a very peculiar richness of effect in these woods.

Several other spots in the island might be mentioned as having beauty resulting from their woods, but they will come more properly into notice on other accounts, and therefore will be here barely enumerated; Freshwater, Mottiston, Shorwell, Kingston, Niton, Arreton, Knighton, Yaverland, Sandham, Shanklin, and Apuldurcombe, form this list.

As the principal woodland scenery of the island forms nearly a continuous tract on its north-eastern part, so is the rocky scenery confined to the south-eastern division of it, belonging entirely to the great southern range of hills. Yet as the coast from Sandown to Luccombe, where the rocky scene properly commences, is high and perpendicular, it cannot be foreign to the subject to begin the review of the scenery of this tract, from that point.

Sandown fort commands a very fine view of the bay, the northern point of which is the white line of the Culver cliffs, and the southern, the black and broken series of clay cliffs, the substratum to the rocks of Dunnose. During the greater part of the day this whole promontory is entirely in shadow, and it has a singularly gloomy appearance. From Sandown the road passes through the hamlet of Sandham, among open groves of very fine elms, and then traverses Sandown heath. The road then descends into the singular valley, which is separated from the sea by a line of hills sloping directly inwards from the brow of the cliff, which

is every where very nearly perpendicular, and from an hundred to an hundred and fifty feet in height. A footpath runs from Sandham to Shanklin on the extreme edge of this cliff, commanding views very beautiful, and still more singular from their contrast. To the west, the path skirts rich arable fields, waving with luxuriant corn, and gently sloping into a very quiet and retired vale; while on the east, an almost unbounded sea is seen directly under the traveller's feet, and from an height that scarcely permits the murmur of the waves to reach his ear. The sensation is absolutely that of looking into another world. Several parts of the carriage road command pleasing views into the island towards Apuldurcombe, which, with the woods in the park and those which cover some adjacent steep hills, is seen to great advantage.

As we approach the village of Shanklin, its appearance is equally singular and interesting. It is seated in a small vale hanging towards the sea, though at a great height above that level; the houses are detached from each other, and almost buried in groves of very flourishing elms, and nearly every cottage, however mean, being in the habit of letting lodgings in the summer season, is surrounded by a neat garden full of flowering shrubs, and is itself adorned, perhaps too much for real beauty, with whitewash and green paint. The whole spot has, however, a most cheerful and uncommon character. The little church, which is of a pretty form, stands on a broken knoll open to a beautiful pasture, with groups of elms carelessly disposed about it, and it is backed by the high hill of Dunnose, whose lower parts are covered with thickets or open groves hanging down its steep sides; from among these in one part a range of rocks starts out, the northern face of the same great stratum to which the Undercliff owes its

existence and its beauty. These rocks are too much broken by perpendicular fissures and thin horizontal strata, to have that character of massiveness which so much contributes to the grandeur of rocky scenery, yet still they have a great degree of beauty, and as seen from Shanklin village, are a fine feature in the landscape.

Of the chine, the principal object of curiosity to the travellers in this tract, we shall now say nothing, as it will be described, together with the others, under a separate head; but pursue our route from the church, by a road which winds most beautifully through the open groves just mentioned, up the flank of Dunnose. From every part of this road the views as we ascend are eminently fine. The village with its groves forms a charming first distance, the bay of Sandown with the Culver cliffs present a noble winding shore, and beyond the low land of Sandown, in the direction of Brading haven, a part of the anchorage of Portsmouth with its shipping is visible. From the top of the ascent the elevation of ground is so much greater than the chalk hills of Yaverland, that the sea is visible over them; and the distant blue heights of Hampshire and Sussex form an uninterrupted line, till to the eastward they are blended with the horizon of the sea; emerging out of whose waters the white cliffs from Brighthelmston quite to Beachy head, are distinctly visible, though from forty to sixty miles distant. The road then takes a southern direction, and very soon descends into the sequestered little valley of Luccombe, which forms a semi-oval bason open to the sea to the eastward, and enclosed to the south and west, by the highest part of the chalk hill of St. Boniface and Dunnose. A farm and a few dependent cottages are scattered over this little dale, which is not

destitute of wood, and in which rise several copious springs, whose united rills fall into the sea through the chine, of which more will be said hereafter. The road winds round the head of the valley, and again ascends the great hill which forms the southeastern point of the island.

This is the proper beginning of the rocky scenery, and the first view of the southern coast from this elevated point, is extremely striking, and not the less so from its great contrast to all the country hitherto passed over. The views of the sea had been hitherto landlocked more or less; but the eye now ranges suddenly over a boundless expanse of waters, from an elevation of at least six hundred feet; and the road is so steep and winding, among vast broken masses of rock, that for a moment the traveller does not perceive how he is to descend from the giddy height on which he stands, and which has all the appearance of a precipice overhanging the sea. This, however, is by no means the case; for the range of perpendicular cliffs, not very far from whose margin the road runs, is not above an hundred and fifty feet in height, and from their foot, a series of slopes covered with wood, and interspersed with enormous masses of fallen rocks, descends towards the sea, terminating, however, in an high and precipitous bank of confused fragments of clay, rock, and chalk, the ruins of the original cliff.

From Luccombe hamlet, a footpath leads through this romantic and very beautiful scenery, quite to Bonchurch; and perhaps there is no part of the Undercliff better worth seeing than this, though no Guide takes notice of it, and very few travellers have ever heard of it. The cliffs rise to a most noble height, and are in many parts beautifully mantled with

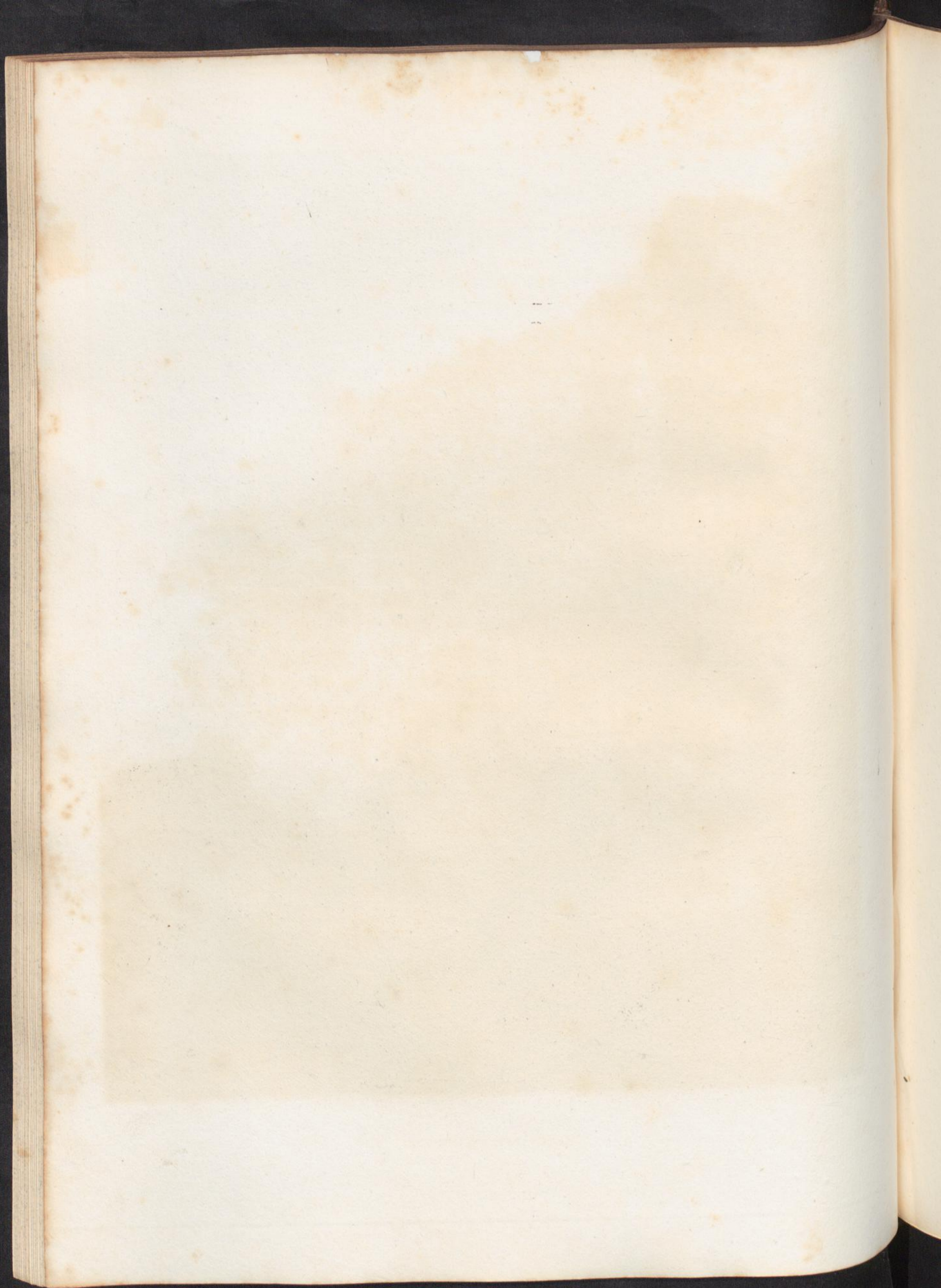


Drawn by Sir H.C. Englefield, Bart.

Engraved by W.B. Cooke.

DUNNOSE CLIFF, I.W.

London, Published by Payne & Foy, Pall Mall, 1815.



ivy. The coppice woods are very rich in foliage, and not in the least injured by the sea air, to which they are so much exposed; and the masses of fallen rock among which the footpath winds, are of vast size, and some of them of very beautiful forms. The springs which break out in many places at the bottom of the rocky stratum, though not copious, yet have formed some small pools overhung with wood; and very rugged paths, probably formed by cattle, lead through the thickets in various directions, and open unexpectedly on several scenes of the wildest character. After passing this beautiful tract, the footpath leads through a few less interesting fields to the village of Bonchurch, where it joins the carriage road.

Bonchurch is situated in a very narrow valley formed by an immense mass of the fallen cliff, and watered by copious springs. In this little hollow many elms flourish with great luxuriance; and the whole spot has so singularly a secluded air, that it is difficult to suppose that a narrow ridge of rock alone, separates it from the boundless sea view. Two or three small seats of gentlemen (by the courtesy of the country called cottages) give a dressed and cheerful appearance to the spot. Of these, the house built by Colonel Hill is the most beautiful, uniting in an uncommon degree the comfort of sheltered retirement, and the magnificence of a sea prospect. Immediately behind the house rises an immense hill, of a character totally different from the rugged cliffs just passed; it is a smooth and extremely steep chalk down; beautiful indeed only by its contrast with the surrounding scenery, but not extensive enough to be, like most of the chalk hills, displeasing from its unvaried surface.

Half a mile brings the traveller to the neat hamlet of Ventnor,

where the chalk hills end, and the wall of rock again commences. A fine spring rises at Ventnor, and after a very short course, turns a mill, and then falls into the sea by a succession of cascades, which want nothing but wood to render them very beautiful.

Steephill, which is less than a mile from Ventnor, is seated on a terrace near the foot of the great cliff. Some wood and much rich shrubbery grows round the house, and adorns the masses of rock, which every where start from the uneven surface. One of these, called the Devil's bridge, is in form, colour, and position as romantic as can be conceived. It lies projecting nearly horizontally from a bank, is of very great size, and the strata being of different hardness, the lower parts are so worn away, that the upper part overhangs like a vast cornice, and in this, there is an excavation deep enough to afford room for a bench quite covered over head, and accessible by a rude staircase built against its flank. Ivy winds over its surface, and shrubs clothe its sides. From the bench, the view of the ground descending to the sea, and the great ocean beyond it, is extremely fine. From the house, a path leads to the sea shore, accompanied by the cascades of a pretty spring, and the cove into which it falls, called the Western lines, has afforded subjects for the pencils of many draftsmen, and is one of the most interesting spots on the whole shore.

Another short mile brings us to St. Laurence, a very small village, closely covered with wood of flourishing growth, which quite embowers the rugged road that leads through it. Two fine springs water this very singular spot, and their streams run through the grounds belonging to Sir Richard Worsley's cottage in a series of little falls. This is one of the places where improvement has in a great degree destroyed natural beauty; yet the

shady little groves, and the views of the ocean through their boughs, with the bubbling streams that wind round the roots of the trees, give a fairy character to the whole place, which it would require uncommon ingenuity totally to destroy. The church of this parish, seated on a great mass of the fallen rock, deserves notice for its very diminutive size. It is probably the smallest parish church in England. Its dimensions are twenty feet long, twelve broad, and six feet high. In its little eastern window is a painting of the Resurrection, only mentioned as having been the gift of a late amiable resident at the cottage, whose universal benevolence will be long remembered in that neighbourhood, but whose superior qualities of mind and heart will never be forgotten by those who are so happy as to enjoy her friendship.*

A little beyond this church, in a dell marked by a small tuft of beautiful young ash trees, there is a most singular echo, which, to a person standing there, repeats the noise of carriage wheels from a small distance, with a roaring which appears to issue from the overhanging cliff. Even the sound of the wings of crows and daws flying near the rocks, is repeated as a loud rushing noise.

As the road approaches Mirables, the scene grows more rude and majestic. The wall of cliff is more lofty, and the series of slopes from its foot to the sea, is covered with innumerable great masses of fallen rock. Nothing of larger growth than brushwood finds place among them; these, however, serve to break the uniform green of the turf, and soften the ruggedness of the rocks. On a terrace far below the level of the carriage road, is

* The excellent person here alluded to, is now no more: but the name and virtues of Mary Carter will be long and tenderly remembered.

the little ruin of the chapel of Wolverton undercliff, and not far from it Mirables, a cottage, the summer residence of Mr. Arnold. The common road now quickly leaves the undercliff, and winds by a pretty hollow way to the village of Niton; but those whose activity does not fear the fatigues of a very rough and laborious walk, will enjoy scenery of a more majestic character than any other in this whole range of country, by following the road to Buddle farm, and Knowles, and from thence quite round the precipitous face of St. Catherine's hill to the village of Chale. The distance is perhaps three miles, and it may be performed in two hours; nor is there any danger in any part of the path.

At Buddle farm a most noble view opens of the cliffs on the eastern flank of St. Catherine's, which far exceed in height and grandeur any hitherto seen: on approaching Knowles, which is now only a farm, though once an ornamented cottage, the wall of rock seems to rise to the clouds, and the whole ground is covered with naked fragments fallen from it. Beyond Knowles a path, on the very edge of the lower cliff overhanging the sea, leads by a gradual descent to a spot called Rocken end, a small cove formed by a large rill which, issuing from the face of the cliff above, here runs into the sea. A very grotesque mass of rock, something resembling an enormous mushroom which has rolled from the cliffs above, stands on the sand, and forms a good foreground to the sea view. From hence a steep path, rendered still more rugged by the late subsidence of the earth, leads to Pitlands, a small cottage which was destroyed by that convulsion. The ground lies in waves and folds like the billows of an agitated ocean; or perhaps it still more nearly resembles turf broken up by the action of an enormous plough. The scenery is as void of

beauty as it is curious ; but the view from this spot is very magnificent. The cliff of St. Catherine's is not only perpendicular the whole thickness of the rocky stratum, but the clay strata on which it reposes, are bare to a great depth below the rock. The spring which falls into the sea at the cove already mentioned, forms several falls, which are more considerable than any in the island ; to the eastward lies at a great height a mass of the fallen cliff, more gigantic than any we have seen ; towards the west is a confused heap of ruin, every day changing its form ; and as we ascend, the whole south-western coast of the island opens to view, with the long range of chalk cliffs terminated by the Needle rocks, which on this side of the island are to be seen only from St. Catherine's projecting land. The scenery rather improves as the path rises up the steep slope quite to the foot of the great rocky cliff, whose southern face terminates by a sudden turn at right angles to its former direction. The path continues to pass under it for a short distance, and then descends towards Chale, passing by the head of the great chasm called Blackgang chine. Here the rocky scenery of the island terminates, as the cliffs west of St. Catherine's, though high and perpendicular, are composed of clay much resembling those from Sandown to Luccombe, already described, and contain little of picturesque beauty.

It now remains to describe the scenery dependent on the Chalk range, as it forms cliffs rising out of the sea : and as the range crosses the whole island, terminating in the sea at either extremity, each end of the island affords beauties of this description. The eastern cliffs are called in general by the name of Culver, and are seldom visited except from Sandown, from which place the sand at low water affords a most commodious and beautiful

walk quite to the foot of the chalk cliffs. Before we arrive at the chalk, a very noble range of perpendicular cliffs rises to a considerable height above the sea; probably not less than two hundred feet. These are composed of very various materials; sandstone yellow and red, and clay of different colours and hardness; and the strata lying in a very inclined position, and being many of them of great thickness, the effect is singular and beautiful. The chalk, at which we arrive after a walk of about a mile, is not perpendicular; and its steep slope is covered in parts with a scanty vegetation, which gives the whole rather a dirty look, and takes off very much from the uniformity of tint which constitutes the chief beauty and character of this species of cliff. Besides this defect, from the exposition of this face of the chalk to the south, the whole is in high light during the greatest part of the day; and the glare of the sun on the white surface, has a raw and unpleasant effect to the eye; but in the little bay of White cliff, which is formed by the northern face of the chalk, these defects do not exist, and the effect is in the highest degree magnificent. The chalk rises directly out of the sea, very nearly perpendicular to a great height; and being totally in shadow, when opposed to the blue sky above, and the pellucid green of the sea at its foot, it has a sort of aërial tint, which looks as it were semitransparent; while here and there a projecting sharp point of the terminating edge of the cliff catching the sunshine, is of a whiteness so resplendent, that it seems to sparkle by its own native light. The clay cliffs which form the other side of this little bay, and which have been already minutely described as an object of natural curiosity, are also highly interesting in a picturesque point of view. Their forms, colour, and the streams of

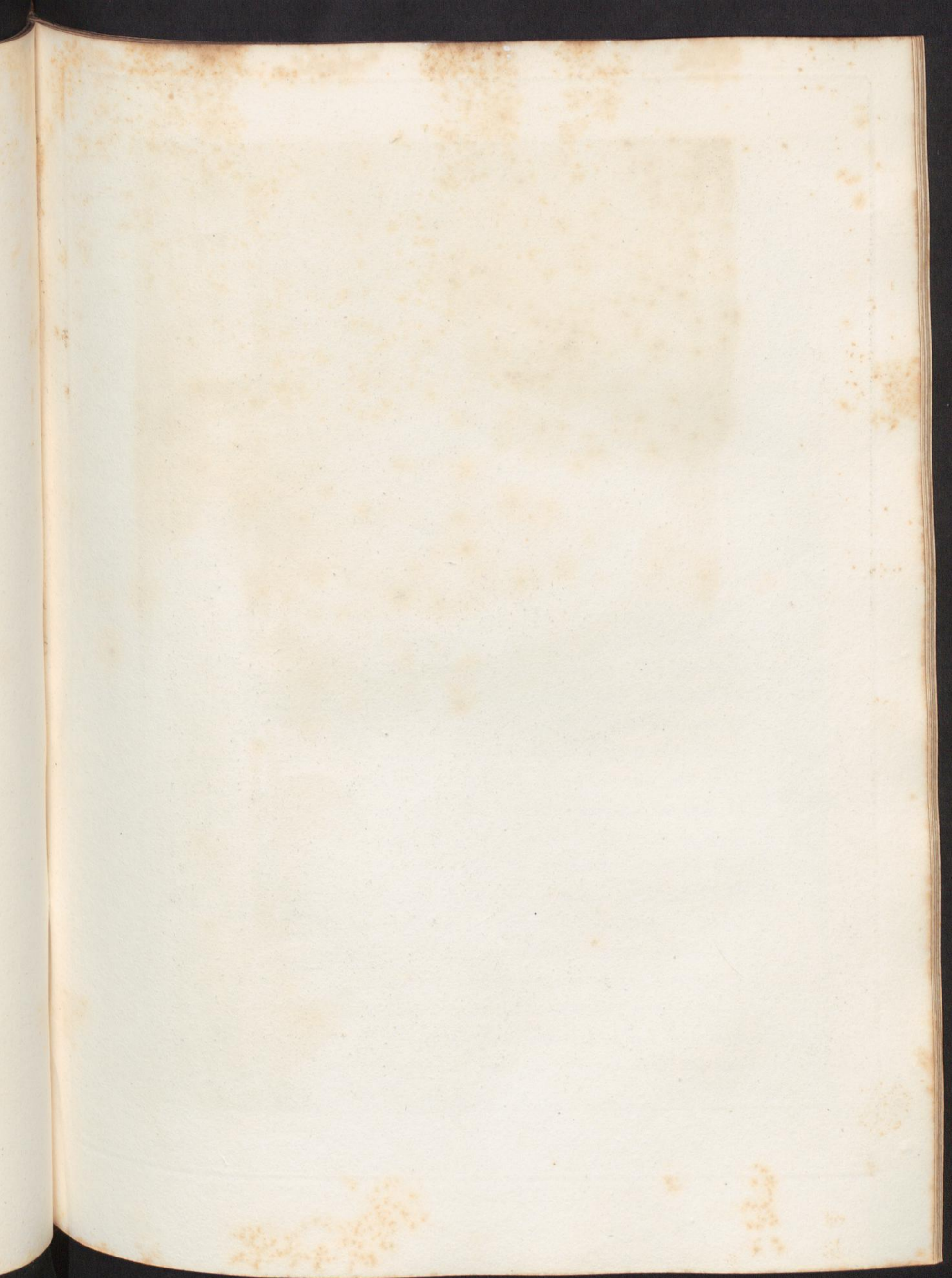


PLATE 5.



Drawn by Sir H. C. Englefield, Bart.

FRESHWATER CLIFF, I.W.

London, Published by Payne & Foy's, Pall Mall, 1826.

Engraved by W. B. Cooke

light which pour through the deep and narrow ravines that separate them, give them altogether a most romantic appearance, and they certainly have to the fullest extent the merit of singularity, as there is nothing similar to them on the island, nor, as far as I know, on any other part of the coast of England. Some of the views in Sir William Hamilton's *Campi Phlegrei*, have a considerable resemblance to these very extraordinary cliffs.

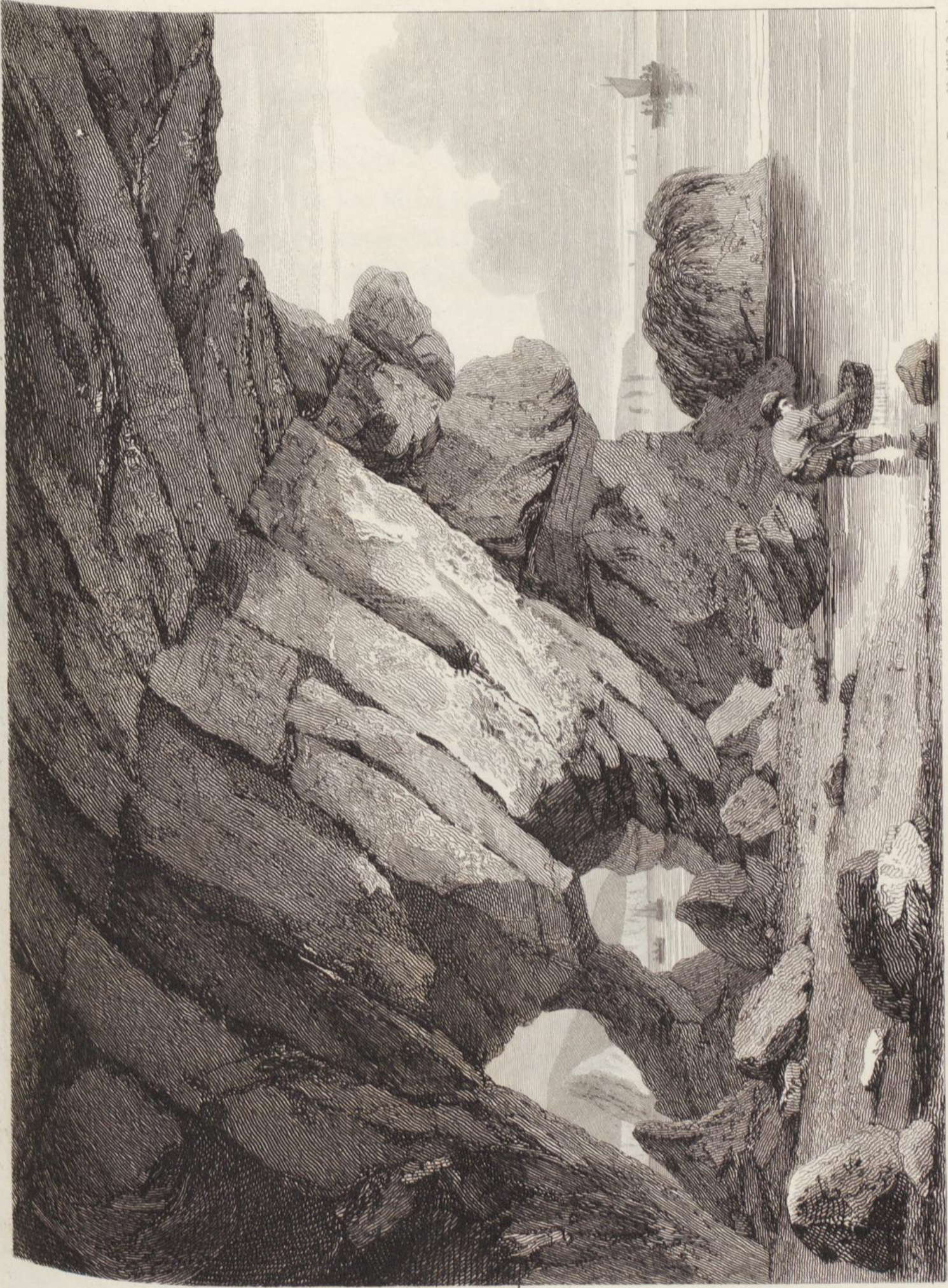
The chalk cliffs which extend from Compton chine by Freshwater gate to the Needles, and so on to Allum bay, at the west end of the island, are those which principally attract the attention of travellers, and they are in many respects superior to the scenery already described. Freshwater gate is the point to which most people first go, and indeed the cliffs to the eastward of that place are not much worthy of notice. The little bay of Freshwater exhibits in many respects most magnificent scenery. To the eastward, two large detached masses of the chalk rock stand boldly out amidst the waves, and beyond them the coast is seen in perspective quite to St. Catherine's hill, whose steep profile forms a fine termination to the view. To the westward the cliff rises nobly out of the sea, in form and size very similar to that in Whitecliff bay; but as the cliff here is in a direction at right angles to that of the strata, the parallel inclined ranges of flint are seen marking the white chalk with a series of black lines, which can only be compared to a ruled sheet of paper. From the shore near the masses of rock already mentioned, this cliff is seen to the greatest advantage, and beyond it opens the succession of tremendous precipices quite to the Needles point. These in some parts are absolutely perpendicular, and not less than four hundred feet in height; in one place they soar to the vast

elevation of six hundred feet, but in that spot, though extremely steep, their face is not absolutely vertical.

Besides the scenery of the cliffs, Freshwater possesses a cave, which is no small object of curiosity to those who have seen nothing of a more romantic cast; those who have, will not find this excavation answer to all that has been said of it, though the scene is undoubtedly curious. To those who have the rare good fortune of visiting it at high water in a perfectly calm day, when it is accessible by a boat, it must certainly exhibit in high perfection the peculiar beauties which the reflection of its dark roof in the water, and the tremulous twilight diffused on its recesses by the ever-changing mirror of the waves, afford in such situations.

From Freshwater, in serene weather, it would be highly advisable to go by water to the western point of the island called Scratchel's bay, which is a very small cove entirely surrounded by vast chalk cliffs, whose edges are worn by the action of wind and weather to an extraordinary thinness, and from thence, passing between the Needle rocks enter Allum bay, which is the counterpart of White-cliff bay at the eastern end of the range; being formed like it on one hand by the northern face of the chalk hills, and on the other, by the clay cliffs with vertical strata dependant on the chalk.

The scenery of Allum bay is very superior in magnificence to that of any other part of the island. The chalk forms an unbroken face every where nearly perpendicular, and in some parts formidably projecting, and the tenderest stains of ochreous yellow and greenish moist vegetation, vary without breaking its sublime uniformity. This vast wall extends more than a quarter of a mile, and is probably near four hundred feet in height; its

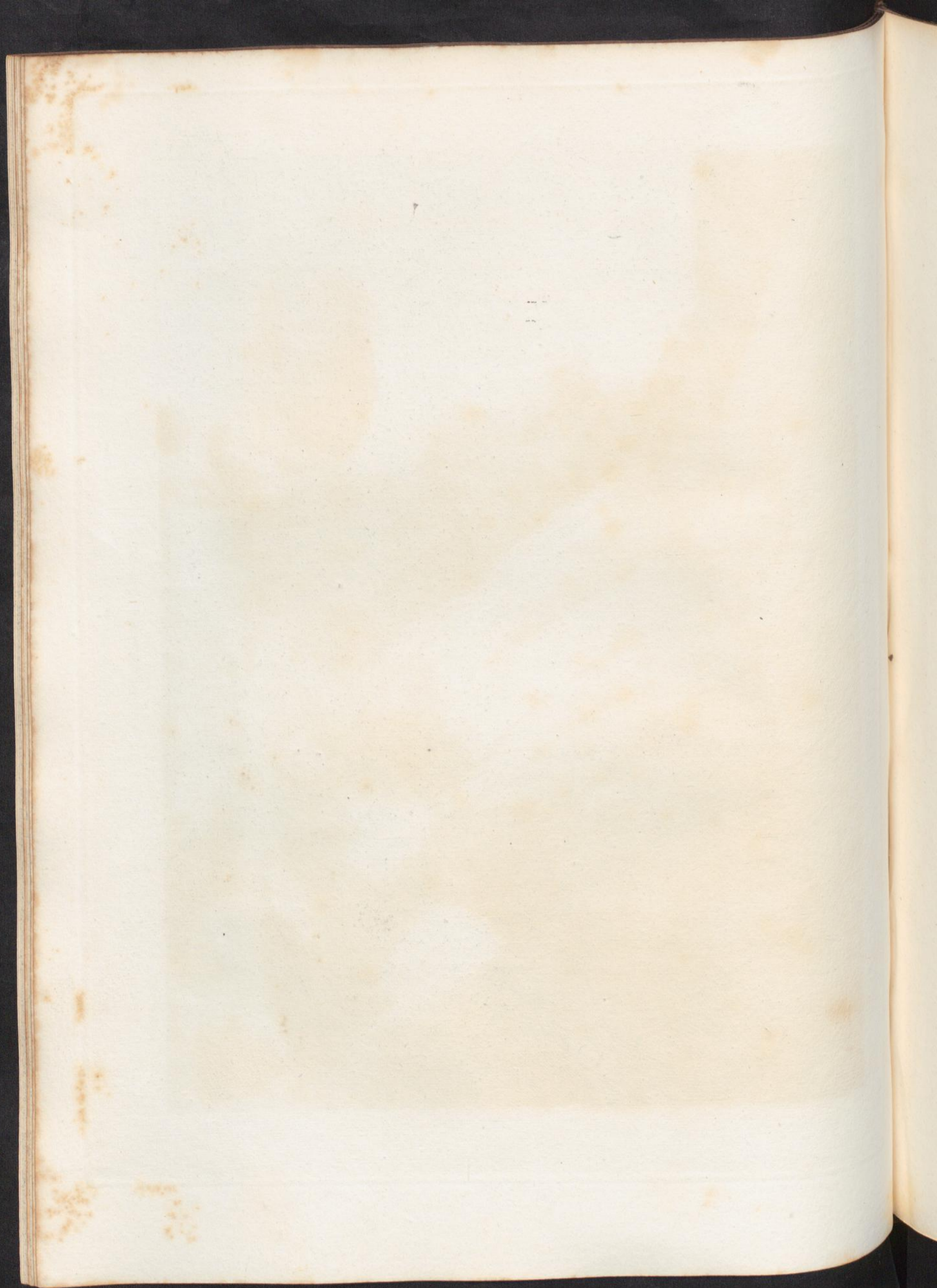


Engraved by W. B. Cooke

FRESHWATER CAVE, I.W.

London, Published by Payne & Foy, Pall Mall, 1816.

Drawn by Sir H. C. Englefield Bart.



termination is by one of the thin edges before mentioned, which is not perpendicular, but of a bold broken outline; and the wedge-like Needle rocks rising out of the blue waters, continue the cliff in idea, beyond its present boundary, and give an awful impression of the stormy ages which have gradually devoured its enormous mass. The shadowy effect mentioned before, in Whitecliff bay, is here seen in a still more striking manner. The range is both longer, higher, and more immediately rising from the sea, and the pearly hue of the chalk is beyond description by words, probably out of the power even of the pencil.

The magical repose of this side of the bay, is most wonderfully contrasted by the torn forms and vivid colouring of the clay cliffs on the opposite side. These do not, as at Whitecliff, present rounded headlands clothed with turf and shrubs, but offer a series of points of a sort of scalloped form, and which are often quite sharp and spiry. Deep rugged chasms divide the strata in many places, and not a vestige of vegetation appears in any part. All is wild ruin. The tints of these cliffs are so bright and so varied, that they have not the appearance of any thing natural. Deep purplish red, dusky blue, bright ochreous yellow, grey nearly approaching to white, and absolute black, succeed each other, as sharply defined as the stripes in silk; and after rain, the sun which, from about noon, till his setting in summer, illuminates them more and more, gives a brilliancy to some of these, nearly as resplendent as the high lights on real silk. Small vessels often lie in this bay for the purpose of loading chalk, and they most admirably shew the majestic size of the cliffs under whose shade they lie diminished almost to nothing.

From the shore a very steep but safe path leads up to the light-

house on the Needle point, and the view from that spot is well worth the labour of the ascent. The land is so narrow, and descends with so rapid a slope on either hand till the turf terminates in the tremendous cliffs, that a weak head will feel giddy at the situation. West of the Lighthouse the cape shoots out almost to a point; and to those whose nerves are proof against the horrors of the position, the view into the bays beneath, and of the cliffs which are as it were left behind, is extremely sublime. The agitation and sound of the waves below are hardly perceived, and it is scarcely possible to imagine that the quiet expanse which now seems stretched in boundless repose under the eye, is the same turbulent element which had but lately been seen bursting in clouds of foam, and thundering on its rocky shore. In hard blowing weather the fury of the wind on this promontory is scarce credible. Very large flints and fragments of chalk are blown from the cliffs, so as to endanger the windows of the Lighthouse; and for many days in succession it is scarce possible to open the door. Yet here the light-keeper has brought up a family of ten children, who, with the fearless agility of goats, explore the cliffs by paths hardly visible, and make it their daily amusement to descend by the perilous aid of ropes, in search of the sea-birds' eggs.

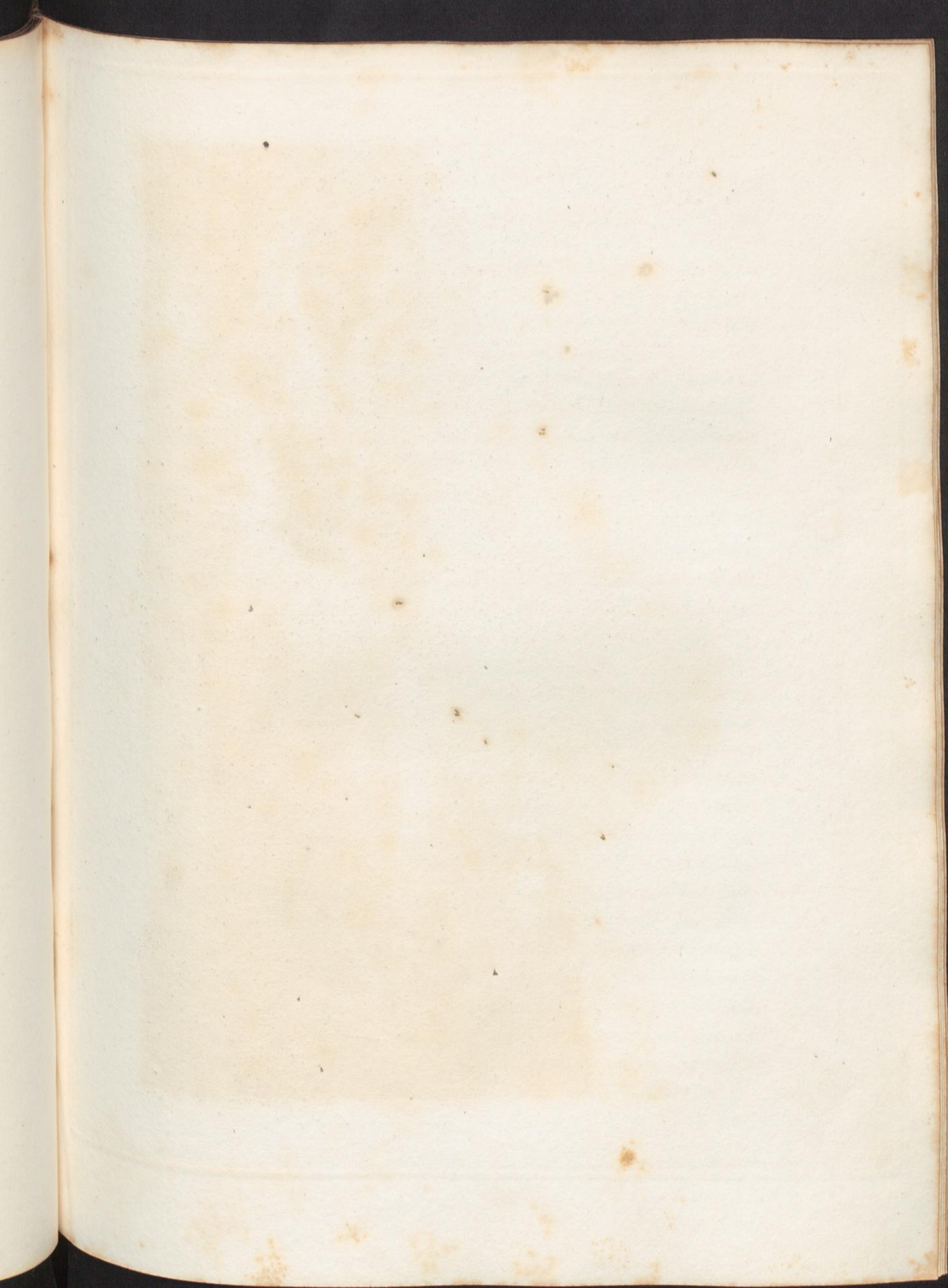
The contrast of the clearness of the air towards the land, and over the sea, is more striking from this point than any other, though it can scarcely fail of being observed from most of the elevated spots in the island. Towards the land, the whole prospect, when I viewed it in a very fine day, was bright and distinct. The Solent sea, of a deep azure, was studded with white sails shining like silver, and the distant hills of Hampshire melted

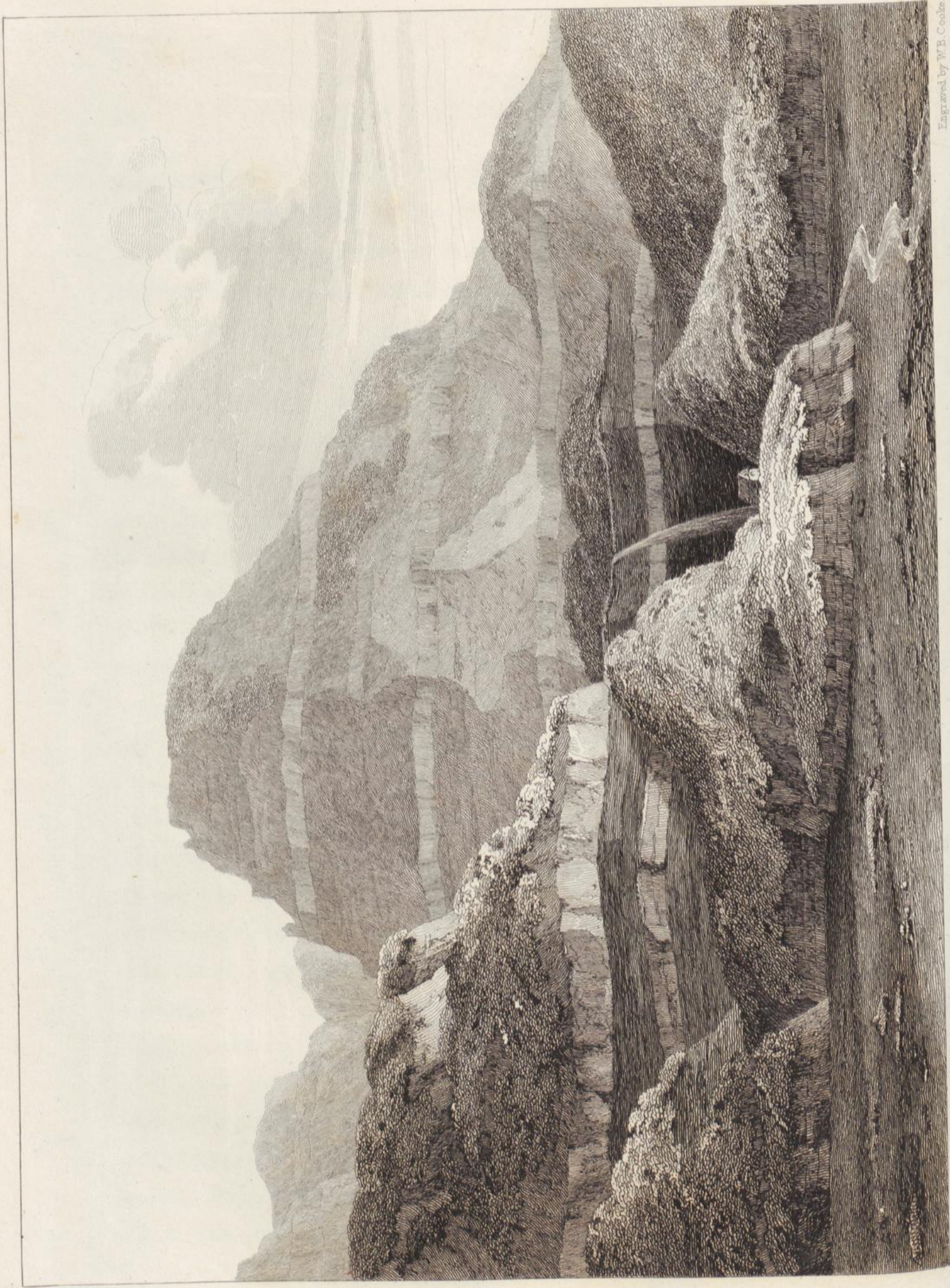
into the air in the most pearly clearness. Over the sea hung an haze which dulled every object, and its horizon was faint and indistinct. It is a very remarkable fact, that although the land behind Cherbourg is as high as Beachy head, and full ten miles nearer to St. Catherine's hill, no person ever saw, or heard of its being seen from thence; while, in clear weather, Beachy head is almost constantly visible. It seems not easy to account for this, particularly as the line of vision to both these points passes directly over the sea, without any land whatever intervening; so that any vapour arising from the water, ought to operate equally in each case.

Before we quit the subject of the chalk scenery, it may not be improper to mention, that from the road which ascends Afton down immediately after quitting Freshwater gate, there is a most noble view of the whole line of cliffs from the Gate to the Needle point; which perhaps gives a better idea of their size and figure, than any other view of them.

The chines seem to form a species of scenery so much apart from any other in the island, and they are so scattered along the whole exterior coast, that it appeared more convenient to consider them under one separate head, than to describe them as they occur in the parts of the island already depicted. They all owe their origin to one common cause, the gradual action of the small streams of water which descend from the elevated level of the island into the sea, and falling over the edge of the perpendicular clay cliffs, have worn for themselves deep gullies, some of which recede to a considerable distance within the shore, and are in fact continually increasing in their dimensions, and frequently changing their form. The most eastern of these, as well as the

most celebrated, is Shanklin chine. The cliff, where the stream which forms it enters the sea, is about one hundred feet in height, and the chasm is perhaps one hundred and fifty feet wide at the top, and at the bottom not much wider than the channel of the stream. The sides are very steep, and in most places thickly clothed with rich underwood overhanging the naked scars. At a small distance within the mouth, on a terrace just large enough to afford a walk to their doors, stand two small cottages at different elevations. Rude flights of steps descend to them from the top, and an excavation from the sandy rock forms a skittle ground to one of them, overshadowed by the spray of young oaks. During the war a centinel was placed on a prominent point of the slope, and added much to the scenery. After proceeding about an hundred yards in a direct line from the shore, the chasm makes a sudden bend to the left, and grows much narrower. Its sides are nearly perpendicular, and but little shrubbery breaks their naked surface. The chasm continues winding and decreasing in breadth till it terminates in an extremely narrow fissure, down which the rill which has formed the whole, falls about thirty feet. The quantity of water is so small in general, that the cascade is scarcely worth viewing; but after great rains it must be very pretty. The sides of the gloomy hollow in which it falls are of the blackish indurated clay, of which the greater part of the soil hereabouts is composed, and the damp of the waters has covered most parts of it with shining green lichens and mosses of various shades. The brushwood which grows on the brow on either side overhangs so as nearly to meet, and the whole scene, though it cannot be considered as magnificent, is certainly striking and grotesque. Above the fall the stream continues to run in a deep and shady





Engraved by W.B. Cooke.

BLACK-GANG CHINE, I.W.

London, Published by Payne & Poy, Pall Mall, 1845.

Drawn by Sir H.C. Englefield, Bart.

channel quite to the foot of the hills in which it takes its rise.

Luccombe chine is next in succession, and scarcely more than a mile distant from Shanklin. The chasm which it has formed does not run so far inland as that of Shanklin, nor is it quite so narrow; but the depth at its mouth is much more considerable, the trees which grow in and about it are of larger size, and better grouped; and as the soil here approaches to the rocky stratum, many very large stones interrupt the current of the stream, which is larger than that of Shanklin. Were a little pains bestowed on cleansing the bed of the stream from the aquatic weeds which totally choak it up and prevent all access, this chine would afford scenery superior in many respects to its more celebrated neighbour.

The next chine is that at Blackgang, directly under the western flank of St. Catherine's hill. This is a chasm of a character totally different from those already described. It does not wind so far into the shore, neither are its sides quite so steep, but it is much more considerable in depth, as one of its flanks is four hundred feet high from the sea level. The chasm does not, however, descend quite to the sea, as at seventy-four feet above the water, a thin stratum of very solid iron-stone forms a bed to the little rill which runs through it. No vegetation clothes any part of this rude hollow, whose flanks are in a state of continual decay. They are mostly composed of very dark blue clay, through which at intervals run horizontal strata of bright yellow sandstone, about twelve or fifteen feet thick, which naturally divide into square blocks, and have exactly the appearance of vast courses of masonry built at different heights to sustain the mouldering

hill. What has been hitherto described may be called the upper part of the chine, for on descending to the seashore we find that the stratum of ironstone already mentioned, forms a cornice from whose edge the rill falls perpendicularly seventy-four feet. As the substratum is of a softer material than the ironstone, being a black indurated clay, the action of the fall has worn it into an hollow, shining with a dusky polish from damp, and stained with the deep greens of aquatic lichens, or the ferruginous tinge of chalybeate exudations. The silver thread of water which falls through the air in the front of this singular cove, is, when the wind blows fresh, twisted into most fantastic and waving curves; and not seldom caught by the eddy and carried up unbroken to an height greater than that from whence it fell, and at last dissipated into mist. When a south-west wind creates an heavy swell on the shore, the echo of the sound of the waves in this gloomy recess is truly astonishing, and has exactly the effect of a deep subterraneous roar issuing from the bottom of the cave. When sudden heavy rains or the melting of snows increase the quantity of water in the fall, the scenery of this spot must be more striking than most in England. The access to the chine is generally extremely difficult, as the whole coast is in a continual state of subsidence, and the path winds among slippery fragments, from which a fall might be seriously dangerous.

Within less than a mile of Blackgang chine, to the west, is Ladder or Chale chine, an excavation in the black clay cliffs, which in this place are about two hundred feet in height. This runs deep into the land, is extremely narrow, and its sides in many places quite perpendicular. It is as naked as Blackgang chine, and though much less deep, more gloomy; but the most striking

peculiarity of its character, is the copious exudation of chalybeate springs from its sides, which are stained with ochreous tints to a very great extent, and their dusky red on the black clay ground, gives the appearance of a vast extinguished furnace to the deep hollow.

About a quarter of a mile further on, is Walpan chine, very similar to the last, in its general features, yet from the different shapes of its winding sides well worth visiting. Between these two chines, is a singular excavation in the cliff in the shape of half a deep bowl, from whose bottom a small chalybeate rill trickles out. The remaining chines are to the westward of Atherfield point, and as the shore is considerably less elevated, the chines will diminish proportionably in grandeur. Brook chine, which is the only one I have seen, is a mere open ravine, through which the stream runs in a quick descent; but has no beauty whatever.

Several of the parish churches in the island stand in situations of considerable beauty; as these will, however, be mentioned under the class of antiquities, it is scarcely worth while to speak of them twice, and their situation will be described together with their structure.

There are few gentlemen's seats in the island which possess any peculiar picturesque merit independent of the antiquity of the mansion; those of modern erection on the beautiful parts of the coast, scarcely rise above the character of villas; none being seated in any thing like a park. Indeed, in the whole island there is but one seat which can rank with what is generally called an improved place, Sir Richard Worsley's house at Apuldurcombe. This was modelled at a very great expense by Mr. Browne, and

possesses in an eminent degree the defects common to most of the works of that once celebrated artist. This, although at present entirely modernized, will be mentioned with the older manor-houses, in the next Chapter.

Almost all the other houses alluded to above, have been mentioned in the description of those parts of the island in which they are seated.

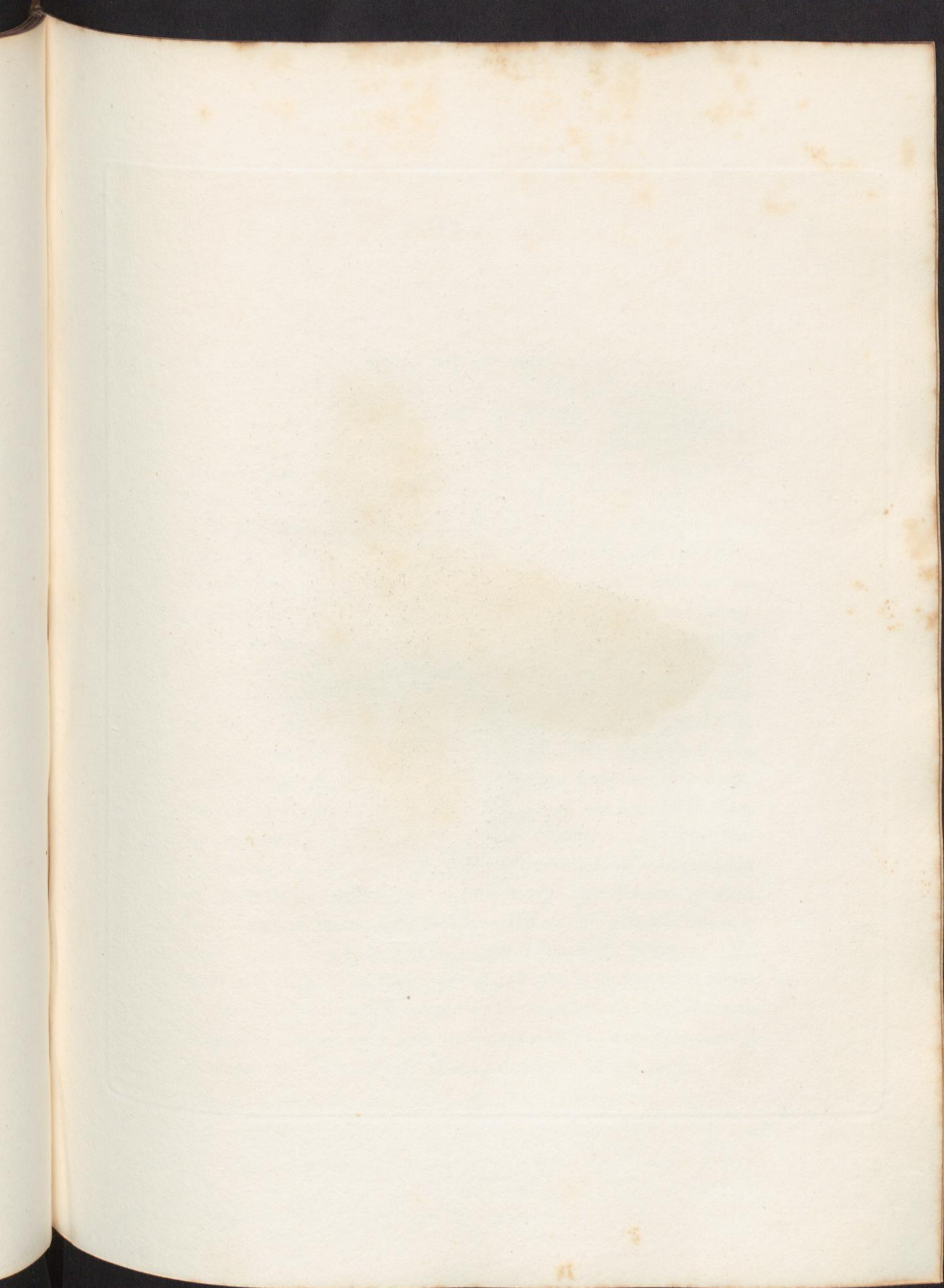


PLATE II.



LONG STONE, I.W.

London, Published by Payne & Poy, Pall Mall, 1815.