

An extract from the diary of John Stuart Mill

July 1832 walking the Isle of Wight.

23rd July.

From Portsmouth we started by the steam packet for Ryde, which we reached in about half an hour. From the channel or Solent as it is called, Ryde has something of the air of an Italian town, or perhaps of Scutari in the *Panorama of Constantinople*.²⁴ It stands upon the side of a hill directly facing the water; its white house's look at a distance like stone, and are partly built of a loose sandstone; they are intermingled in every part with trees. There is now a pier; previous to its erection the shallow sandy approaches rendered it difficult to land. Ryde has two main streets, both of which run directly up the hill; and two, or more, new streets running parallel to them to right and left, for it is a rapidly increasing town; with the necessary number of cross communications.

The town has the cheerful air which a town on a hill always has, especially when mixed with trees; it is neat and clean, and has little of the watering place pretension about it; but almost every house of whatever quality has its little planted garden, and it is encircled by numbers of elegant villas with pleasure-grounds, particularly along the coast on both sides. The country enjoys the rare advantage of being richly wooded down to [569] the water's edge: the wood is chiefly oak, with some ash, this side of the island being a stiff clay, which, from the dry weather, is now open in cracks into which you might almost put your foot. Overlooking the Solent about a mile east of Ryde is Simeon's Place, belonging to Sir Richard Simeon,²⁵ one of the chief landholders of the island. We trespassed upon the grounds, and reached a beautiful terrace, parallel to the beach, and overlooking it, the Solent, and the opposite shore.

We returned by the beach, where I found various maritime plants: it is sandy, and a common covered with furze joins on to it, very pleasant to look upon and to cross. In the evening I strolled out in the opposite direction towards Binstead, a village close down by the shore: first following the road, which though separated from the sea by a series of beautiful residences, commands at different points delightful views of it; then turning off to the right by a broad field path, which as it slopes down towards the sea, (crossing in its way a hollow dell) shews the Solent directly in front with the northern promontory of the island near Cowes projecting into it, backed by the Lymington and Exbury coast, and beyond that by the clear and ruddy evening sky. Binstead church yard commands no view, but the Parsonage and its views are celebrated: the public are admitted, according to the Guide-book, on Mondays before ten and on Fridays after five;²⁶ but not having the fortune to go there during either of those favoured intervals, we saw it not.

An unfrequented path leads down to the sea-side, hard by a pretty, little, gentleman's cottage, though separated by what, if the tide did not enter it, I should term a ditch. There is no track along the beach, but I nevertheless followed it, threading my way between the water and the oak copse woods which come down to high water mark and almost dip into the sea: the wood flowers which will grow on a clay soil, grew down to the water's edge in amazing luxuriance and profusion, mixing with the maritime plants. As I walked along the solitary and sequestered beach, shut in by wood and water, I was forcibly reminded of the shores of Ulleswater and Windermere. The Solent was not bluer; it was somewhat wider; the opposite coast was not lofty and mountainous; but the long projecting headlands jutted out into the water much in the same manner. In this respect however the resemblance was still greater to the south coast of Cornwall. In this twilight walk along a part of the beach where few persons resort, I found a still closer resemblance to the Cumberland lakes in one or two quiet landlocked bays. When I got near Ryde I was stopped by the wall of the grounds of one of the marine villas, and was forced to commit a trespass in order to get back to the road.

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We walked towards Binstead and to the beach and back before breakfast, as my companion had not seen it and I was desirous to take a second view of what had [570] pleased me so much. We left Ryde well pleased with our accommodation at the Star Inn, which is at the very summit of the town, and though not the most showy of the inns, is very neat and well managed. I here separated from my companion, who being indisposed and unable to walk, proceeded to Newport by the coach.²⁷ For, (laugh who will) there are coaches between Ryde and Newport, and between Newport and Cowes. I made directly for the sea-mark on the top of the range of chalk hills which crosses the middle of the island from east to west.

The geological composition of the Isle of Wight has often been remarked as curious and interesting: all the tertiary formations of Great Britain being crowded into this narrow spot. The chalk range which crosses the island through the middle, is part of the circuit of a chalk basin bounded in part by the Downs of Sussex and Hampshire, and broken through by the Solent sea. This basin being exactly similar to the London basin, of course the northern part of the Isle of Wight is composed of the strata ordinarily superincumbent upon the chalk, viz. the plastic clay and the London clay:—On the other side of the chalk hills again, their course is followed by the green sand and the other formations which accompany the English chalk in its whole extent: but on the south coast of the island appears superincumbent upon these, another line of chalk hills still higher than the former; the continuation of the range which crosses the isle of Purbeck; and these form the cliffs of Niton, St. Boniface, Bonchurch, etc. This crowding of all the formations into a small space throws the hills close together, and is therefore very favourable to beauty of scenery. All the inland views near Ryde are backed by the central chalk range, towards which I was now proceeding. Though I was confined between two hedges, and had my back to the Solent, the only part of the sea then visible; yet owing to the elevation of the ground,

every gate, or gap in the hedge, on either side afforded a fine sea view at the price of merely turning round to behold it.

The finest of these was, I think, the view from the windmill at Aldermoor, the highest point, I suppose, of the clay hills immediately adjoining the coast. This view is the finest solely because it is the most extensive, and comprehends all that is contained in all the others taken together: for a view is fine here nearly in proportion to its extent, the variety of beautiful objects being such that they set off each other's beauty, and the monotony and sameness which so frequently takes off the effect of extensive views are altogether absent. Even at this distance from Ryde I was astonished at the number of elegant cottage residences with gardens. From the Aldermoor windmill, the ground begins to descend; and I crossed a rather wide, and deepish valley, first keeping the road, and afterwards striking into corn fields, by footpaths which cut off a very great bend of the road. By these footpaths I believe I might have gone straight to the sea-mark, that is, to the foot of the down immediately below it; but I preferred keeping a path which slanted gradually up the hill to the ^[571] right of the sea-mark, though corn fields (for this upper side of the down is, in this part, cultivated) and so enjoying the view of the Solent channel and the varied and well wooded country between; for I know no prospect from a hill so enjoyable as that obtained by walking along the side of it.

I presently reached the road which goes over these downs in their whole length; and turning to the left, came out upon Ashley Down, the top of which I soon reached. It is pointed out by the sea-mark already alluded to, which is the frustum of a triangular pyramid, erected, as an inscription states, in 1735, and formed apparently of no more solid material than chalk; much of which has been cut or has mouldered away, and the remainder as far as arm can reach, is scribbled over with the names of sundry John Browns and Dick Smiths, who with that aspiring desire so general among Englishmen, that something of them though it be but a thumb-nail shall survive them, have taken the trouble of informing posterity of the name of the Norton or Sutton or Greatham or Littleham which they inhabited: This point commands a truly magnificent view. I could now see quite to the east end of the island, and the sea beyond, with the inlet called Brading Harbour;²⁸ then round on the south, Sandown Bay and the immensity of the boundless ocean beyond. Further on, the sea was concealed by the other range of chalk hills, still higher than this, consisting of three great hills connected into a range, Wroxall, Week, and St. Catherine's.

On the two latter were lofty sea-marks. St. Catherine's, the highest eminence in the island, is called a Hill; the other two like all the other chalk hills in the island (however perfectly insulated,) are called Downs. Other chalk hills less bold in appearance, and more connected together, trended away near the coast on the south-west, out of the reach of sight. These belonged to the central range of chalk hills, not to the southern range. But the immediate continuation of the chalk down on which I stood, consisted westward of Arreton Down, a fine long ridge sloping gradually up to a considerable height, and eastward of Brading Down and Bembridge Down, the last of which terminating in the sea and forming Culver Cliffs, is the boundary of Sandown Bay. All these hills are not part of the same ridge, but are separated from each other; Bembridge Down still more completely than the rest, as a little river runs between it and Brading Down, to disembogue itself into Brading Harbour. An

excellent road goes along the summit of Arreton Down, skirts the side of Asheys Down, then crosses Brading Down over the top and descends to the river side to join the road which leads from Ryde and Brading to Sandown and Shanklin.

(Brading)

I struck into this road, which crosses the deep hollow between Asheys Down and Brading Down by a kind of isthmus elevated high above the adjoining valleys though depressed considerably below the summit of either hill. The southerly slope of Asheys Down and Arreton Down is mostly in sheepwalk, but Brading Down is mostly cultivated: there is however on the south side of the road at the further point of the hill, a kind of open common. The hedges which previously hid [572] from the pedestrian part of the splendid view below him, enhance his enjoyment when they now disappear all at once. The sweep of Sandown Bay is now immediately below him: bounded at one extremity by the hills about Shanklin, at the other by Bembridge Down: I do not say by Culver Cliffs, for the side of the hill which fronts the sea was not, from the landside, visible. Within the concavity of its gentle curve, this bay embraces boundless space. Here for the first time the eye swept round, and perceived in an ample sector of the horizon nothing of the earth, except one small vessel.

The curve was just sufficient to take off the monotonous regularity of a rectilinear shore, while it did not greatly diminish the extent of the watery horizon. Inland this bay is bordered by a greater extent of level or almost level ground, than is often to be found in the southern part of the Isle of Wight; and has no very marked hills to form its boundary, being backed by some wild heathy uneven country but by no elevations of a boldness or height to match those at and near its extremities: this certainly diminishes its beauty, and to some, it might appear less interesting than many other parts of the southern coast; but to me it was consecrated by the touch of genius: it had been the subject of one of the most beautiful sketches in our recent literature, which, though it appeared in a fugitive publication (the *Monthly Repository*) will, I trust, some time or other be reprinted, and will hold a distinguished place among the works of its author, be he even the person he is suspected to be.²⁹ To the left of Bembridge Down lay Brading Harbour: the tide unluckily was out, and the harbour dry, with scarcely any appearance of water but the course of the river through it to the sea: at other times it must appear an inland lake.

The village of Brading, between the Down and the harbour was under my feet, and beyond it, the road of St. Helen's, with the coast of Hampshire and Sussex behind; Goodwood included, from which we had seen these hills two days before. After surveying this delightful prospect to satiety, dressed out in all the splendour of a sunny sky, I retraced my steps to the beginning of Asheys Down and then by taking the inside of a hedge instead of the outside, enjoyed my favourite walk along the turfey sides of a hill, directly overlooking the valley at its base. The green sand formation, to which the southern counties of England are indebted for so much of their most beautiful scenery, is here not unworthy of its reputation: it fills up the space between the two ranges of chalk hills, with much broken ground of various beauty, the

raggedness of which contrasts gracefully with the smooth surface and waving lines of the chalk.

The north side of the chalk hills on the coast has also in some degree the character of sand hills, the lower part of them probably consisting of the various sand formations. The inequalities of ground in the broad valley were something like those between the chalk and the Leith hill ranges in Surrey; the valley betwixt is not [573] *quite* so wide, nor the intervening eminences *quite* so high, but as the two ranges themselves are also a little inferior in height, the proportions are well preserved. To give any idea of the variety of beauty created by the combinations of these large and small hills with one another and with the sea, would be impossible. I will merely mention one of the finest. I was standing on the steep turfy side of a chalk hill: under my feet was a deep narrow bottom: facing me, the long side of a sand hill completely clothed in copse, with a great number of oaks of larger size and more scanty foliage rising among the copsewood, apparently of great age: over the tops of these the waters of Sandown Bay, but without the shores; with Brading and Bembridge Downs in a continued line to the left, and the chalk hills of the southern coast, higher, but more distant, on the right.

It is pleasant to observe the great variety of field paths by which this beautiful scenery is intersected, allowing easy access from all sides to the finest points, and facility of crossing by the most direct route, from one to another. I now traversed the hollow between Ashley and Arreton Down, which are separated rather by the length of slope on both sides of the dell than by its boldness or depth; and ascended Arreton Down in the line of the road, which follows the summit of the hill, open always on the south side and generally on both. The scenery of Sandown Bay is gradually left behind; so are one after another of the high chalk hills which bound the island on the south: and the road gradually nears the more thickly scattered and less boldly marked chalk hills of the south-western part of the isle. These are connected with the range of Arreton Down by St. George's Down, an insulated chalk hill which stands between Arreton Down and the beginning of the south-western hills, at no great distance from either but nearer to the former. This like most of the other chalk hills of the isle, is considerably more long than broad, forming a kind of ridge. The little village of Arreton with its church stands near the foot of both hills and makes no inelegant figure in the landscape. As we approach the end of Arreton Down a new and fine prospect gradually discloses itself in front and on the right hand. Ryde and Binstead with their woody tract and even Wootton with its creek are left behind.

The whole estuary of the Medina shews itself, from Newport down to the sea; with the town of West Cowes glittering with its white houses in the sun, on the left bank, and Cowes harbour, an expansion of the estuary, included between two promontories, the most northern points of the island. Several vessels were entering this harbour or at anchor in it. Directly in front the only object of any considerable size between us and the Solent is an insulated wild hill, of moderate height, all which now remains of the once extensive waste called Parkhurst, which formerly ranked as a royal forest: it is well placed where it is, as it fills up respectably what would otherwise be a blank in the prospect. At its foot or rather (so far as could be judged at

a distance) a little way up its slope, is an immense barrack, which at a distance might be taken for a small town or a village: To the left of this, and nearer, in the valley of the Medina river, just where it ceases to be a river and becomes an estuary, lay stretched out the town of Newport, a place of considerable size, and [574] the capital of the island.

Directly in a line beyond it, at a considerable distance, I could see the little town of Newtown (one of the contemptible boroughs in Schedule A)³⁰ with its river or harbour and the coast beyond it trending away almost to Yarmouth. The western half of the Solent was all spread out before me, with the opposite Hampshire coast from almost the entrance of the Southampton water, nearly to Hurst castle itself. This magnificent prospect did not all come into view at once; and I am not sure that the whole of it is visible from any part of Arreton Down itself, but from another long hill, along the summit of which, the road passes on leaving Arreton Down. This hill is not of chalk but of the clay which is over the chalk: (I speak only now of the surface, for I did not narrowly inspect it): and lies a very little out of the straight line of the other downs, deviating from it about as much to the north as the neighbouring St. George's Down does to the south. It is the last of the hills; beyond it there is no other hill in this direction except Parkhurst. On coming to the end of it the road turns round a little to the left, descends through some wild heathy ground, and enters Newport by a bridge over the Medina, which here looks like nothing but what it in fact is, a mill pond. This is probably the only ugly part of it. Above, it is, no doubt, a brook; below, it is an estuary; a large tide river, navigable up to the town.

Newport is a place of some size, having several long streets crossing one another at right angles, and covering a considerable extent of ground. There are many handsome shops, and the streets are broad and tolerably regular, with good foot-pavements. This place is now like all others a focus of electioneering: it retains its two members and Mr. Hawkins is standing on the Reform Interest and Sir Willoughby Gordon on no particular interest nominally, through really on the Conservative.³¹ Col. Torrens was here with Hawkins, but the reformers of the place have dropt him, because he is as the Irishman said "Bethwixt thwo minds," is standing for Bolton in Lancashire and does not know how to give up either place: so William Ord is coming, with a strong recommendation from Hawkins.³² The walls and shop windows are full of placards from both parties as well as the electioneering addresses and placards of the two candidates for the new county of the Isle of Wight, Sir Richard Simeon of St. John's, who is an admirer of the great statesmen to whom we owe the restoration of the ancient principles of our Constitution,³³ and Mr. Campbell, of Gatcombe, who is averse to those violent [575] innovations and changes which some call for.³⁴ Our landlord at the Wheatsheaf, who is a radical, shewed us a great quantity of electioneering correspondence.³⁵ A weekly penny paper in the radical interest, has been produced by this contest, and we saw the first two numbers. They are very tolerably written and in a good spirit enough. We had much conversation with our landlord, who is a reading man, and something of an artist, and takes great interest in natural curiosities.

We walked in the afternoon to see Carisbrook castle, which is about a mile S.E. from the town, as nearly as possible in the centre of the island. It is situated on an insulate chalk hill, the first of the south-western chalk hills; looking round upon the other

chalk hills, and upon Parkhurst, between which and itself, in rather a deep dell, is the pretty village of Carisbrook. The remains of the castle are more considerable than usual: the portals are complete, the wall is a complete circuit, and the keep towers above the rest to a great height; you ascend it by a long rude flight of steps. There is a habitable house within the inclosure, constructed by the late Governor of the Island: the present, and let us hope the last, Governor, Lord Malmesbury, never inhabits it.³⁶

The late Governor also planted a number of trees within and without the inclosure, which mix well with the ivy which has overgrown the ruin. The panoramic view from the keep is fine, but not equal to that from Arreton Down. The immediate environs struck me much more, and particularly the aspect of the ruin itself from the Newport side, which, aided by a particular state of the atmosphere, appeared of the deepest and richest green. In the interior there is a well which goes quite through the chalk, being 210 feet down to the water and 90 feet below. Its depth was exhibited to us in two ways, by throwing down water, which after about five seconds sent up a thundering noise; and by letting down a bucket containing a lamp. The water is drawn up from it by an ass: and the asses thus employed have usually lived to a great age, but the present incumbent is a youth.

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Being for the present disqualified for long walks by the continued indisposition of my companion, we hired a vehicle to carry us to the southern extremity of the island. Our road lay for a considerable space among chalk hills, up the valley of the Medina: St. George's Down with its chalky sides and fern-clad summit to our left, and a succession of chalk hills on our right, sometimes bare, sometimes wooded, and most elegantly shaped. This early part of our morning's journey was [576] exceedingly sequestered and beautiful. As we advanced we came first upon the green sand, and next upon the Weald Clay; and though we continued to pass over eminences, it was clear that we had left the central range of chalk hills completely behind us: the question was now settled about the continuity of the south western downs with the central range, for a deep and broad valley, mostly level, separates those downs from the higher hills which we were approaching and which we reached by crossing the strata below the chalk. We soon entered into the valley which separates two of these hills, Week Down and St. Catherine's Hill: we found it much longer than we expected, the hills stretching far away lengthwise to the south.

The range consists mainly of three hills, Wroxall Down, Week Down and St. Catherine's: the northernmost point of Week Down is marked by an obelisk, and there is another and higher one on a smaller chalk hill connected with it which fronts it to the north: on this last and between the two is the celebrated Appuldercombe Park. On St. Catherine's Hill there are three beacons; that on the highest point is the sea-mark, a truncated pyramid somewhat like that on Ashey Down; it is comparatively little seen from the land side. Near the end of the valley between these two hills, but nearer to St. Catherine's Hill, is the village of Niton; a common-place rustic village: but beyond this, quite down to the sea, has grown up a village of quite a different character, one of the most elegant cottages of which is the Sandrock Spring Hotel, where we stopped.

This is not the least like an inn; it is a long cottage with a long veranda covered with ivy and clematis, standing on a lawn surrounded by a border filled with choice flowers and directly overlooking the sea, across an irregular descent of waste and cultivated ground.

It is a cottage very much in the stile, and about the size, of Polvellen, Mr. Buller's place, near Looe, in Cornwall.³⁷ It derives its name from a spring, impregnated with sulphate of iron-and-alumina, which a medical man has found out here, and recommends as possessing great virtues; I suppose it is neither better nor worse than the Tunbridge-wells water, or any other strong solution of any salt of iron.

This place is near one of the extremities of the Undercliff, one of the curiosities of the island. The range of high hills along the coast, which I have termed chalk hills, are chalk only at the summits: the far greater portion of their height consists of green sand, or sandstone, and Weald Clay. Owing to the softness of the material, and the great number of land-springs, this stuff is constantly falling down, and has been known to fall in landslips of several acres. By this process a quantity of material has accumulated on the beach, forming a cliff below a cliff; and on this houses have been built, gardens laid out, fields sown and reaped.

This Undercliff as it is called extends seven or eight miles in length, and is generally of the breadth of several corn fields: it consists of earthy matter from the hills above [577] with large masses of the sandstone, and of the conglomerates of pebbles and various other masses of stone formerly imbedded in the Weald Clay, scattered about and mixed with the softer matter in a manner which defies description. Above is the line of the original cliff, composed of sandstone and whitish clay; the chalky summit not being visible. Below, a beach coloured by an infinite quantity of minute red pebbles; and forming a succession of beautiful little headlands and coves. In general, the Undercliff terminates towards the sea in a sort of low cliff (indeed this is indicated by its name). This cliff is of loose clay. At low water the quantity of seaweed displayed is prodigious; it adheres to the blocks of stone of various degrees of hardness which have fallen not upon the Undercliff but beyond it into the sea.

Immediately after our arrival we found our way down to the shore, not without some difficulties arising from cornfields, hedges, etc., and I searched for maritime plants, of which I succeeded in finding the rare *Mentha rotundifolia*. We walked for a short distance along the beach, which though better than one formed of larger and sharper stones, is on the whole not very pleasant footing. At a little bay called Puckaster Cove, we reascended the low clay cliff, and looked along the Undercliff to the east, on which were visible two houses with pleasure-gardens; up at the bolder cliff overhanging the lower one; and round at the sea. Here for the first time we felt really on the seashore; half our horizon was of ocean. There is no spot in this vicinity which does not afford a fine view; the differences are all in degree: from every place you can view more or less of the sea, can descry the summit of some lofty hill, or the precipitous side of a cliff; and a greater or less extent of the wild rugged slip of land between the high cliffs and the sea. But the palm must be given to the series of views which we saw in our evening's walk, along the summit of the high cliff, west from the Sandrock. The

Undercliff being here near its termination, is very narrow and is composed chiefly of a considerable landslip which fell in 1799, and which lies in the most grotesque shapes: it consists of two long hillocks of considerable height, though from the summit of the cliff they appear but insignificant.

The cliff forms part of St. Catherine's, the highest hill in the island; and, at its point of greatest elevation, seems not very far below the summit. The sea views from the various points of this cliff are glorious: sea views from a high cliff always are so; but on this occasion we were favoured by the hour (evening) and the state of the atmosphere, which on the west side covered the sea with a dun haze, not so unearthly and Avernus-like as what I once saw on Ulleswater,³⁸ but sufficiently thick to invest the prospect with an indefinite and mysterious gloom; yet with occasional streaks of light: while on the opposite side, far to the east, the clouds were drawn off, leaving the sky clear and serene, and a bright light falling on the sails of the few vessels made them look like dazzling white specks in a field of bright blue. The sea in both directions was as smooth as [578] the surface of an inland lake; and on the bright side presented as calm and seductive a face as it did to the shepherd in the fable, who having ruined himself as a mariner and gone back to tend for wages the flock which had once been his own, looked out upon the smooth glassy surface of the deceitful element, and exclaimed, No, smiling traitress, thou shalt never deceive me again.³⁹ In the front of this cheerful prospect was the Undercliff, coasting away to the east; from our high station we saw it in its larger features, the smaller details not concealing them, as is very much the case when you are on the very spot; we saw it as it really is, a cliff beneath a cliff, backed by a higher precipice, but itself also boldly fronting the ocean.

At the top of the cliff along which we walked, were cornfields; but the summit of St. Catherine's Hill is chalk down. As we advanced to the end of the cliff, we came in view of the whole line of the western half of the central chalk range quite to its junction with the sea, where it forms the celebrated Freshwater Cliffs: these bold white precipices extend in a long promontory far out into the sea, and two insulated masses of chalk surrounded by the waves prolong the line into the ocean itself. All this we could distinctly see from the top of the cliff; and either from thence, or from another point lower down, we saw the entire sweep of the coast; a hollow segment of a circle, of which our own cliff and the extremity of Freshwater Cliffs were the crescent horns; yet varied by a succession of smaller bays, and projecting headlands betwixt; the bays of Chale, Brixton, and Freshwater. The village of Chale, at the foot of St. Catherine's Hill, we saw directly below us. The descent of our hill at its extremity was gradual, and it had other smaller eminences clustered about it: beyond which was a broad level, quite to the foot of the chalk hills. In the base of one of these smaller eminences is the celebrated Black-gang Chine, which we descended in order to see. What are called Chines in the Isle of Wight are the clefts in the line of hill or cliff, where a spring or rivulet forces its way out: these are very numerous owing to the nature of the hills, which consisting of chalk or sand at the top, allow the rains to filter through and they are stopped by the clay below.

We found a little boy on the Downs, who waits there to shew the Chine to persons coming in this direction. He took us round by what seemed rather a circuitous course and struck into the rough path which leads from Chale to the chine, across the broken ground which lies at the foot of the hill, just above the sea: this ground, in some places is clad in fern and the sea with the cliffs shews well from it in the one direction, as the line of coast to Freshwater Cliffs does on the other. At last we reached the Chine, which is a kind of semicircular cavity, scooped out of the perpendicular rock over the middle of which drips a scanty rivulet, which after rains

may make a considerable waterfall: if the water were more abundant it would [579] be very fine, as the stream does not run down but falls over the cliff. To this, indeed, it is probably to be ascribed that the cliff is not worn away; composed as all the cliffs hereabouts are of loose earth, which easily yields to the action of running water, and which the landsprings are in fact perpetually washing down; but here the round cavity preserves its regularity, and even looks like hard stone. It is of rather a deep black colour, whether owing to some incrustation, to some vegetable substance, or to the action of the air: if it were liable to be washed away, the fresh white clay would be perpetually uncovered. We returned by the pebbly beach, immediately under the loose cliffs, which are here entirely composed of Weald Clay; thus proving that this is the lowest formation of the island. The guide-book, by a man named Albin, certainly one of the best guide-books I have seen, and which has been of much use to us on various occasions, says that these strata rest on schistus:⁴⁰ but he has here been misled by a smattering of geology; what he calls schistus is the clay itself, drying into very loose friable blue shale, just as pieces of this same Weald Clay, taken from the roadside at Den Park near Horsham, in Sussex, have hardened into shale of the very same kind in my pocket.

Here we saw the clay in lumps of various size and hardness, in all the intermediate stages of drying into this shale, much of which broken into very small fragments lies about the side of the cliffs: it will not hold together in masses of any size. The red pebbly beach, which by the way is a very beautiful object in all the views from the heights above, is here strewn with masses of hard stone which have fallen out of the clay: they are mostly conglomerates of mere pebbles, with fossil impressions. I think this would be the most favorable situation a geologist could have, for studying the Weald Clay; a large vertical surface being exposed, and the beach strewn with the debris of the formation. We arrived at a little shed used by fishermen for keeping their nets and tackle, and from which there was a path over the argillaceous cliff; this we struck into, and crossed the landslip; we were surprised at the height of its more elevated points, which seemed so insignificant from the heights above. We presently reached the plantation which surrounds the aluminous chalybeate spring; the road which passes the Sandrock inn comes down to this point, and we soon reached home, after the most delightful evening stroll we had yet had.

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My companion finding himself somewhat recovered and able to venture upon the walk to Shanklin, we set out this morning, and I have now to give an account of the most delightful day we have yet spent. It began as many hot summer days do with a fog, and from our windows we at one time could not see the high cliff at all; but it

cleared off, and though it never became a very clear day, so that we could see far seaward, it became perfectly cloudless, and gave us all the beauty of sunny seas. We took the road along the Undercliff, which we saw from one end to the [580] other. I say the road, because we really did keep the road; and in this narrow slip of land, much could not be gained by any deviation from the carriage road: it affords as fine a line of positions as any other direction would, unless we either ascended the downs above the cliff on the left, or descended the Undercliff to the beach below; and had

we done either of these we might have seen fine scenery but it would not have been the scenery of the Undercliff, which is of quite peculiar character. The ground is rough and broken in the extreme studded with high points mostly topped with masses of rock or intersected, again, by little dells: the road winds over this, sometimes passing across wild ragged ground, sometimes crossing plantations of trees surrounding the little shrubberies of little pleasant houses overlooking the sea.

The lower cliff, and the beach, afford a succession of projecting points and little coves: and these headlands rising into the sea, with woods, plantations, heathy commons, single trees, flag-staff stations, and the cliff above, combine with the sea in an inconceivable variety of harmonious pictures, which change at every step. Among the most delightful parts of the Undercliff is the village of St. Lawrence. The church, which may almost vie with that of Buttermere in its pretensions to being the smallest church in England,⁴¹ stands on one of the highest points of the Undercliff; it commands one of the finest sea views as well as fine views of the Undercliff itself, both backward and forward. The little church itself is a pretty object—one side of it which in the character of a belfry, has pretensions to being rather loftier than the rest, is completely covered with ivy. The village of St. Lawrence lies a little further on in a hollow below; it is shrouded in trees; the cottages which compose it, even common labourers' cottages, are surrounded by greater quantities of flowers than I think I ever saw in similar situations.

We saw myrtles growing in the ground up the walls of cottages both here and at Bonchurch; they are known to stand the winter in this part of the island, and indeed if there were any place where one would attempt to naturalize the plants of a better climate, it is on this Undercliff, which is open to the south, and hot with the sun's rays reflected from the white cliff, while it is sheltered from the northerly and easterly winds. After passing St. Lawrence, and Steephill, where a new house has been built with a strange round tower, the character of the cliff began to change; the chalk down above now immediately overtopped us, forming what is called St. Boniface Down; and at the foot of it the Ventnor inn, standing at the edge of the chalk and above a narrow undercliff composed almost entirely of the sand, overlooked immediately a beautiful little inlet of the sea called Ventnor Cove. The village of Ventnor is further on. Here the Undercliff is more fertile, and more richly cultivated, but less woody, less irregular in its forms, and more open towards the sea.

The line of coast is terminated by the beautiful village of Bonchurch, in which the houses are mixed with well-grown trees. Here the abundance of water is still greater than along the other parts of the Undercliff, and [581] the clear limpid springs form a

little lake similar to those at Wendover and at Carshalton, though smaller. Here the Undercliff ends and the chalk down slopes down irregularly to the sea, separated from it only by another considerable landslip covered with wood. The road here slants upwards and winds round the chalk hill, which forms a hollow or sinus, round the hamlet of Luccombe, which has, as usual, its rivulet and chine. Here the character of the views at once changes. Sandown Bay bursts upon us, separated only by part of the irregular declivity of the chalk hill: beyond the bay, Culver Cliffs rise

boldly out of the sea, to a great height, terminating the shore of Sandown Bay, and with it, the line of coast. The hollow before us, and the opposite side of the hollow, with scattered trees, formed a fine foreground to the bay and cliffs. In winding round the hollow of Luccombe chine, and descending to the other side of the opposite edge of the hollow, towards the village of Shanklin, we found more fine points of view than it is possible to enumerate. The blue sea, the fine sweep of Sandown Bay, the brown cliffs which bound it at the foot of Bembridge Down, terminating in the taller white cliffs of Culver, formed as many beautiful combinations with the foreground of grass, cornfields, trees and cottages, as we had seen formed out of rather different elements on the Undercliff all the morning: and looking back, the chalk down which we had partly ascended, and which points far north towards the centre of the island, afforded home views of a different but still a beautiful character. From some points we could also see the line of the central chalk downs, which I had traversed two days before; including Arreton, Ashe, and Brading Downs with Bembridge Down and its white Culver Cliffs for the termination.

The village of Shanklin, one of the prettiest villages in the Isle of Wight, straggles down a part of the gentle declivity almost to the sea side; and joins the extreme boundary of Sandown Bay; which terminates with the very first headland of Wroxall (otherwise called St. Boniface) Down. The village consists of a considerable number of cottages, with every appearance of comfort, intermixed with elms and other trees: it does not seem to be so much inhabited by people of the rank of gentlemen, as the Undercliff; there are however a few gentlemen's cottages, and apparently several places where people are boarded and lodged. We met with many such places also on the Undercliff, especially at Sandrock, Ventnor and Bonchurch. There is at Shanklin an excellent inn, called the Hotel, where we stopped for the night, my companion not being equal to a longer journey.

In the evening I sallied out alone for an excursion round Sandown bay, partly in the hopes of finding rare botanical specimens, for which the place is celebrated; in this however I had small success: but I was amply rewarded by the beauty of the scene, enhanced as it was to me by the charm which true poetry whether metrical or not gives to all which it has touched, endowing it with beauties not its own. The descent from Shanklin to the beach is wonderfully fine, though it is difficult to say in what its beauty consists, except in having before you a bay of the blue sea with the sun shining on it, and its winding shore backed by tall white cliffs. Culver Cliff [582] seems terminated by a kind of ledge; that is, where the top of the cliff breaks off by an abrupt nearly perpendicular line, the lower half of it seems to prolong itself a little farther towards the sea in the form of a ledge.

Perhaps this ledge adjoins the Hermit's Hole, a small cave in the perpendicular side of the cliff, inaccessible from below and accessible with difficulty from above, by a path in which once engaged you cannot turn round till you have accomplished the perilous descent. This cave, as any one may learn from the sketch of Sandown Bay to which I have already more than once alluded,⁴² is believed to have been once tenanted by a recluse: and a more suitable abode for one who shuns the face of man cannot be contrived; halfway down the side of a wall rising directly out of the sea,

where nothing can be seen but the blue waves, nothing heard but the screaming of seagulls and cormorants; floating in the air about their rocky dwellings suspended like his between ocean and heaven. The curve of Sandown Bay is considerable, much more so than it appeared when I viewed it from Brading Down. The village of Sandown is situated about the middle of it, and is, I think, the least interesting village I have yet seen in the island, though not without some kind of beauty too. From Shanklin to Sandown the shore is skirted by a line of sand cliffs (the green sand formation) which though they look inconsiderable from any of the numerous heights by which they are commanded, seem lofty when you look up at them from the shore. Between these cliffs and the waves is one of the finest and broadest sandy beaches I ever saw. I mean, the broadest at low water; for at high water I suppose the sea everywhere comes up nearly to the foot of the cliffs where there *are* cliffs: but as the shore slopes less rapidly than in most places, the sea recedes at low water to a considerable distance, and leaves a fine hard beach so ridged by long deep furrows almost close to one another, that I seemed to have never before known the meaning of the lines which Wordsworth lent to Coleridge for the "Ancient Mariner," "For thou art long, and lank, and brown, As is the ribbed sea-sand."⁴³ The edge of the moist sand, which was the softest part of it, and not much ribbed was punctured with innumerable little holes by a very small kind of shrimps or prawns, not larger than woodlice, who jumped as if they could fly, and swarmed in such myriads that it was impossible to walk without crushing some of them.

I never saw such a lively fish, or one that could jump so high for his size. He may be very common for aught I know, but I never observed him before, and certainly never can have seen him in such numbers.—On the other side of Sandown village the ground is flat, and indeed part of it is marsh, and below the level of the sea, which is shut out by an embankment. To protect this accessible part of the coast, there is a fort about the middle of it, which looks like a small gentleman's house, surrounded by a rampart and ditch. I should think half a dozen [583] shot from a second-rate man of war would blow it down, but I suppose no ship of any size could get near

enough, and it may be a good position for firing at anybody who attempted to effect a landing by means of boats. This flat shore is not of much length; the sand cliff soon rises again, and rapidly attains a considerable height till it joins the white Culver Cliff which is still higher. There is a foot path from the beach quite along the edge of the cliff, affording noble views of the bay, and of St. Boniface Hill which terminates it at the other extremity—as for Culver Cliff it looks much shorter than it is, being⁴⁴ seen sideways from part of its own line. I ascended this path till I actually set foot upon the chalk, and heard the sea-birds shrieking in the cliff; I did not like to turn back

sooner, and it was too late in the evening to go further on towards the extremity of Culver Cliff. The beach at the foot of these cliffs seems much narrower; and under the chalk cliff, though the sea was far from high tide, it was only for a short distance that there was any dry land at all; the shore dwindled into less and less till it disappeared and the white cliff rose majestically out of the very sea. From this eminence the range of chalk downs towards Newport, and of the long side of Wroxall Down stretching out and presenting its northern extremity to face them, formed a beautiful picture under the evening sky, though inferior to the sea views on the left.

I returned to Sandown village by the same footpath and along the beach; at the village I turned into the carriage-road to Shanklin, which (after passing a long building which looks like a row of alms houses and which I suppose has something to do with soldiers and Sandown Fort) becomes comparatively tame and uninteresting, or at least seemed so in the dusk of evening. There are fewer trees about Sandown Bay than anywhere between Shanklin and Niton. But one does not miss them. The island altogether is well wooded; wonderfully so, for a maritime district; nor do the trees seem to suffer at all, in any part of it, from the vicinity of the sea.

27th

I went down before breakfast to the beach, and coasted it to the western extremity of the bay, or as nearly so as I could; for it was high water, and the sea came up nearly to the foot of the cliff. Though this cliff is formed by what I have termed a chalk hill, it is composed of the lower strata which are of the green sand formation. By the way, this would never have been called *green* sand if it had everywhere resembled what it is here; I have not been able to detect anywhere in the island the smallest vestige of that green earth which gives its name to the formation. The sand is intensely ferruginous sometimes red with iron, sometimes black, and colours deeply most of the streams which issue from it; while those which come out immediately under the chalk are, on the contrary, here as everywhere, exquisitely crystalline and limpid. The sand also abounds in those plate-like veins of silicated oxide of iron which is characteristic of this particular [584] formation. I likewise ascended to the top of the low cliffs which bound the bay between Shanklin and Sandown: here also there is a path along the edge of the cliff; and the morning view of the bay and its opposite shore exceeded, if possible, in beauty, the evening view of the preceding day. After breakfast we walked down to Shanklin Chine.

This is simply the hollow made in the sand hill and cliff, by a rivulet of some size which has excavated it by lapse of years: the hollow begins at the village and ends at the sea, and being deep, of course makes high walls of sand on both sides, about the majestic character of which the guide-books rave, and quote the descriptions of puffing tourists. The chine certainly winds prettily, and at the top of it next the village there is a waterfall of some height, which, for a cockney cataract, is really not so much unlike a mountain waterfall as might be expected, though the poorest of the Forces in Cumberland and Westmoreland is much superior to it. So much for Shanklin Chine, its fall, and its "tremendous shasm" as Stock-ghyll Force⁴⁵ or some other waterfall in the Lake District was termed by somebody at the Ambleside Inn,⁴⁶

who having come into the neighbourhood I suppose with specimens of leather or rope-yarn, had deviated thus far from his route, and familiar habits, in order to be a wondering spectator of the glories of nature, and gave vent in these characteristic and appropriate terms, to the enthusiasm which had been kindled in his breast. For my part, ever since I heard the words, I have inwardly determined to hold them sacred for describing scenes similar to Shanklin Chine.—We then set off to walk back to Sandrock.

Under the direction of the guide-book, we returned to Bonchurch by a most beautiful path.⁴⁷ Instead of winding round the hollow of Luccombe Chine, we crossed it, and walked to Bonchurch under the cliff; through a fine piece of broken ground, covered with oaks and underwood, which is also a landslip, and fell down from the heights about the same time with the landslip formerly noticed: it is covered with fragments of the cliff, of all sizes and forms, and is altogether one of the wildest wood scenes I ever saw,⁴⁸ being at the same time sufficiently high to command fine views of the sea, both westward, and to the east, including Sandown Bay and Culver Cliffs. The wood is full of the finest flowers of the island, among others the *Lathyrus sylvestris*, or smaller everlasting pea, which covers the bushes and abounds even on the steepest sides of the cliffs. This, with the *Mentha* already noticed, and the *Rubia peregrina* or madder which covers the hedges like the white bedstraw, are the most characteristic and conspicuous of the rare plants which we found on the Undercliff.

After conducting us through the wood, the footpath led us across two little but rich meadows immediately [585] overhanging the sea, to the prettily situated little church of the village of Bonchurch, which being at some distance from the road and among trees we had not seen in our walk in the opposite direction. It is said to be as old as the Saxon times, but we saw nothing remarkable in it externally except its situation. We now struck into our former road, near the bright clear pond or lake which I formerly mentioned as being formed here by the water issuing out under the chalk. It swarms with perch, which we could see in perfect shoals sporting in the clear water. We stopped at Ventnor to dine;⁴⁹ I walked down to the shore of Ventnor Cove, which does not afford a very good beach for walking, and the heaps of seaweed are rather offensive in the bright sun; but it is interesting geologically, as there is here an evident derangement in the strata.

The chalk comes quite down to the seaside, which it does not in any other part of the Undercliff, before or after; but at the very foot of the chalk, quite on the beach the Weald Clay just shews itself, with its friable shale, without any intervening green sand. We walked a considerable way up a road which leads first along the side of the chalk hill (St. Boniface Down) and then over it, and which immediately overlooks Ventnor, with its cove, and the Undercliff for a large space east and west: the mixture of the finest scenery of a chalk country with the finest sea views would have rewarded us for a longer stay. In the whole line of the Undercliff we experienced I think still greater pleasure in this second view of it than even in the first: we seemed to discover many fine points of view which we had before overlooked, and the same spots

appeared finer than before. The sky was not so cloudless as the preceding day, which in some respects was an improvement: and the air was clearer. In passing the little church of St. Lawrence we this time found an old man who had stationed himself there to shew the church to strangers: its interior was of a simplicity corresponding to its minute dimensions: he told us it was twenty-five feet long. I regret that I contented myself last year with viewing only the outside of the little church at Buttermere, since I should have been better able to compare the size of the two. The old man told us that the proprietor of the whole parish is Lord Yarborough;⁵⁰ that the population at the late census was 36 males and 42 females; that they had not a single burial in the year 1831, and only eight marriages in the last eleven years. I was surprised to hear him say that even here the population is extremely fluctuating, and that very few of the families which were here in his youth, are here still.

28th

This morning we took our final departure from the Sandrock, and proceeded to Yarmouth to see the western part of the island, having hired a little light vehicle [586] to carry us thither, on account of my companion's indisposition and the comparatively uninteresting character of the route. The first village that we passed through was Chale; and the road which led us thither, passed over a rather elevated part of St. Catherine's Hill. We availed ourselves of this circumstance to leave the carriage, and ascend to the summit of the hill, the highest ground in the island. From this we saw clean over the tops of the central chalk hills, to the Solent, which we saw in nearly its whole extent, and the Hampshire coast beyond. Towards the east, our prospect was bounded by the long line of Week Down, which extends from the Undercliff to Appledurcombe: but to the west, besides seeing the line of coast to Freshwater Gate, and the lofty white cliffs of Freshwater Bay beyond, all of which we had seen from the top of the cliff just below our present position, on the evening of our arrival at Sandrock; we saw, rather from the greater clearness of the air than from our higher elevation, not only the entire Hampshire coast from Lymington to Christchurch and far beyond, but the line of the Dorsetshire coast trending away far south and the chalk cliffs of the peninsula of Purbeck, of which the chalk hills on the southern coast of the Isle of Wight are considered by geologists to be the continuation. The view, however, on the whole, is not, I think, superior, scarcely even equal, to that from Ashey sea-mark or Brading Down.

The tower on St. Catherine's Hill is round, tapering a little towards the top, and though now a bare wall, it would appear to have been originally the habitation of man. There is another tower apparently of older date; on another point a little lower down the hill, which looks more like a tall pigeon-house than any other object in heaven or earth. The guide-book says that one of the two is a light-house, and the other "an ancient tower of unknown date" which "appears to have been the tower of a chapel or oratory."⁵¹—After leaving Chale, we crossed the comparatively level country which lies between the two ranges of chalk hills; and we crossed it in a coasting direction, not far from the sea; but by a very zig zag route, there being no direct road to the place of our destination but various roads connecting the villages with one another. We passed through the pretty and prettily placed village of Shorwell, at the foot of the central chalk hills; and the villages of Brixton or Brightston, and Brook. In this part of the island as in all others, we were struck by the beauty of the cottages.

The soil is sandy, the green sand formation; its little elevations allowed us an occasional view of the sea, especially near Brook, but these views made little impression upon us after the Undercliff: the sea is but little in landscape, except where there is a bold coast. At Brook we turned to the right and passed through the chalk hills by one of the cuts or gaps in the range (though not without some climbing) leaving on our left hand a beautiful open road over Compton Downs to Freshwater Gate.

We now came again upon the clay above the chalk, and looked out across the north of the island to the Solent. The country was more open, and contained fewer houses, than any part of the Isle of Wight which [587] we had seen. We passed through the village of Thorley, and so came upon the beach, which at low water is muddy, as on the opposite side, this being the shallow part of the Solent.

They even suppose that till the sea broke in, it was a lagoon, in the New Forest, from the number of fine oaks which are found buried in it, with their roots firmly fixed in the bottom. The road now turns to the left, and runs for a quarter of a mile parallel to the beach, at a sufficient elevation above it to afford a good view across, and we then entered Yarmouth.

This ancient borough, now happily disfranchised, is a very small place, not larger than a village, but, being so old, it is compacted together like a town, not scattered like a place in the country, and the houses are joined together in streets. It has not therefore the cheerful appearance of a more modern country place. The George Inn, where we put up, (and were, *par parenthèse*, very well entertained) had evidently been a private house for a long time: the staircase is of old oak, and the walls are wainscotted to the top. The beach about the place is oozy, and there is an inlet of the sea called the Yar river, (for I cannot give that name to the little brook of fresh water which runs into it) which at low water is a mass of mud. This neighbourhood, consequently, is the only place in the island (except it is said, Brading harbour,) where there is any abundance of the plants which grow in salt marshes. Of these I found a great multitude, about the mouth and banks of the Yar,—and in the salt marshes higher up, towards its head. We walked about the town and its immediate neighbourhood, which is far from agreeable on the side next the harbour, and I should think cannot be healthy. I have never understood how people can persuade themselves to come for health among salt marshes and the muddy mouths of tide rivers, merely because they are near the sea.

But even from this disagreeable place there are good views of the line of chalk downs which form Freshwater Bay, and which are at a very short distance, this being the narrowest part of the island. And towards the east the road by which we had entered, and a path which continues in the same direction, are very beautiful. The coast is formed by a line of gentle eminences clothed with wood, as at Ryde; and the woods descending the hill to the water's edge would form a walk between wood and water exactly similar to that between Binstead and Ryde if the different nature of the beach did not render it impossible to walk upon it without wet feet.

29th

We set off this morning to make our last excursion in the island, for the purpose of seeing the curious cliff scenery at this extremity of the island. We reached Freshwater Bay before breakfast, having crossed the entire width of the island, which in this place is not more than an hour's walk. The country is pretty: we left the village of Freshwater to our right, about half way across, and reached the line of chalk hills, which is not of any very great height, but forms in this place a long nearly straight ridge, with wavy sides and covered with a smooth turf. We stopped to breakfast at a neat inn in the hamlet of Freshwater Gate, which stands in an [588] opening in the range of chalk hills between the long down I have mentioned (called Compton Downs) and the High Down, as it is called, which forms the high cliffs of the bay, visible from so great a distance. There is here almost a perfect level from the one coast to the other, and not much above the level of the sea. Freshwater Bay is a pretty little cove, not a fourth of the size of Sandown Bay, bounded on both sides by chalk cliffs.

The beach itself is all shingle, though we were told that it was not so until what they call in the neighbourhood the "November Storm,"⁵² which they say was all over England five or six years ago, (I wonder if it was that which injured the Plymouth Breakwater) and which among various other changes which it made on this coast, drove the sea up to the inn itself, and on retiring, left the beach covered with shingle. We climbed Compton Down, which is of no great height; and walked along the top of the cliffs for a short distance; the cliff is chalk, but the top of the down is overlaid with a sandy clay like Ranmer common. The opposite cliffs rose with a commanding air from beyond the bay, which glittered with the brightest blue as we looked down at it from between it and the sun. The Dorsetshire coast in the distance, also a chalky coast, was seen sufficiently distinctly to be even beautiful, and St. Catherine's Hill with its tower bounded the view on the opposite side. In the inaccessible parts of the cliff over the sea grew a great quantity of one of our common garden stocks, apparently the *Matthiola incana*; but quite impossible to be got at; which I regretted, though I had reaped an abundant harvest of plants in a marsh at Easton between Freshwater Village and Freshwater Gate; a place mentioned with honour in Albin's *Flora of the Island*,⁵³ and deservedly, as it contains the *Ranunculus lingua*, *Oenanthe pimpinelloides*, *Epipactis palustris*, *Cladium mariscus*, *Comarum palustre*, *Menyanthes trifoliata*, *Scirpus maritimus*, various *Potamogetons*, *Genista tinctoria*, *Eriophorum angustifolium*, and various other interesting plants, all of which I collected in a very small space, by about half an hour's search.

I may also mention that I found the *Inula helenium* by the road side near Freshwater village growing plentifully, and that there is a sandy beach near Yarmouth, on the opposite side of the Yar river, which contains in great plenty the *Convolvulus soldanella*, *Eryngium maritimum*, and *Asparagus officinalis*: near the same place the *Statice limonium* also grows abundantly, in places occasionally covered by the tide: and the *Althaea officinalis*, *Juncus maritimus*, *Triglochin maritimum*, *Plantago maritima*, *Salicornia herbacea*, *Aster tripolium*, and various kinds of *Atriplex* and *Chenopodium* (with that universal tenant of our coasts the *Beta maritima*) abound in the neighbourhood. I have also found near Yarmouth the *Borago officinalis*, I think certainly wild, and the *Tamarix gallica*, apparently so: nor is this improbable, as it is known to grow at Hurst castle on the opposite coast, and Albin has put it down as growing wild in the [589] Isle of Wight.⁵⁴

While mentioning Albin's *Flora Vectiana*, it is but just to say that I found it highly useful, and that it is almost the only local Flora I ever saw, which was really useful to me: when I have gone to the places indicated by him, I have generally found all or most of his plants.⁵⁵—Leaving Compton Down, we returned to Freshwater Gate, and hired a boat to take us round the extreme point of the island, as it is hardly to be seen with advantage except from the sea. We coasted the high cliffs of Freshwater Bay, the highest point of which, our boatman told us, is 617 feet perpendicular above the sea. The cliffs are nearly perpendicular, in some places very nearly, and continue of little less height for a considerable distance, than at the point which he told us was the highest. They look surprisingly mauled, as if the waves had been beating about them twice as long as about any of the other cliffs. They are undermined by a multitude of caves, some very long and large, others smaller; into one of these our boat entered, and went a little way in.⁵⁶ Of course many large pieces of chalk have fallen off the cliff into the sea (there is no beach, the sea washing the foot of the cliffs).

One immense solid mass looked as if it had not fallen off, but had been left standing while the cliff farther inland wasted away; and such, the boatman told us, is the fact. I omitted to mention that there also stand in the sea, at many yards distance from Compton Cliff, two tall masses of chalk, nearly as high as that part of the cliff itself, and even retaining on their summits a portion of the turf which had rested on them when perhaps centuries ago, they were part of the continuous mass of Compton Down. One of these masses is curiously perforated and arched, and makes a very picturesque appearance from the cliff. The sides both of Compton Cliffs and Freshwater Cliffs are covered with samphire, and the noise of sea-gulls about Freshwater Cliffs was incessant; though nothing, we were told, to what it is in April, May, and June, the breeding season. We saw many young gulls swimming; they are brown like cygnets: along with some solitary specimens of a bird which the boatman called a shag, who seems quite black at a distance, and swims with his whole body under water except a long erect neck. The old gulls do not seem to swim, but they are perpetually flying, with that beautiful smooth flight, superior to all our common English birds except the swallow tribe, their extended wings seeming to float over the air without the slightest motion. We saw some ravens, who frequently build in these cliffs, and as we reached the extreme point of the cliff, we raised a flight of [590] cormorants. We did not see the puffin, whose eggs are often sought and found in the cliffs by adventurous persons, and are much prized for their beauty, and are also eaten.

Notwithstanding the height and steepness of the cliffs it seems that smugglers frequently succeed in landing goods there; they sometimes let down ropes, but sometimes also they manage, God knows how, to scramble up the cliff with a cask of brandy attached to their bodies. Two fishing boats with smuggled goods had been seized the day before, and the revenue cutter which had effected the seizure was towing away the empty boats at the very time we were in the bay;⁵⁷ we saw her again the same evening at anchor in the Solent with the boats at her stern.—After turning the corner of the cliff, we came in sight of the Needles, from which however we were still separated by another bay of no great size but great beauty, called Scratchell's Bay. This inlet, which forms a considerable curve, looks about south-west, and is exactly at the turn of the coast. It is entirely bounded by high chalk cliffs, which are curiously marked by lines of flints at a very little distance from one another, looking

like the dotted lines on a map; these lines are not quite vertical, but nearly so; the strata of this bay partaking in a great degree of the derangement of those of the neighbouring Alum Bay.

In one part of Scratchell's Bay the cliff is curiously scooped out into a convex recess, with a vaulted roof: it is curious, as the work of nature and accident, though I think not quite so perfect a circular arch as Mr. Brannon has made it in his otherwise accurate and interesting *Views*.⁵⁸ We landed on the pebbly beach of this bay, which is inaccessible except from the sea. We then sailed up to the Needles, which are two large masses of chalk which have been left insulated as the sea has broken its way across the long narrow promontory of chalk cliff of which they once formed part. They are in a direct line with the promontory, which is called the Needles Point, and to which they exactly correspond in height; the lines of stratification also exactly tally. There was once in the same line of cliff a high pillar of chalk, which was thrown down sixty-four years ago by a tempest.⁵⁹

The [591] remaining two needles will some day perish in the same manner, or be worn away by the sea: but other needles may be formed to succeed them, for the line of cliff for some distance, which exactly resembles them, may again give way as it must have done before, at some other point than its extremity. Both it, and they, are of perfectly white chalk, quite free from turf, and bristling with all kinds of sharp points: a flight of cormorants, seated on the points of the furthest Needle, had a very curious effect.

The lower strata of the chalk seemed uncommonly hard—and indeed if it were not, it would I suppose have worn away gradually instead of being broken into these curious solid fragments so unlike any thing which is commonly afforded by chalk cliffs. Of its hardness, indeed, there is complete proof, for on the other side of Needles Point, in Alum Bay, the fissures in this very cliff give out water, copiously, in a number of springs, which I have never seen any where else in chalk hills: the porous nature of the chalk commonly allows the water either to be absorbed or to filter through and come out beautifully clear and pure from underneath. Having passed through the Needles, we turned about round, and Alum Bay was before us. This singular bay is familiar to geologists, from the perfectly vertical stratification, which exhibits a great number of strata all at once. The cliffs which bound it form as it were the two sides of a right angle; the one (which is the cliff of Needles Point) faces the north; the other, or coloured cliff, faces the west. The chalk cliff is massive and majestic, and the stratification, as evidenced by the lines of flints, becomes, as it approaches the angle, vertical, or nearly so. But the greatest singularity is that of the other cliff, which is composed of numerous thin beds of variously coloured sand, clay, and marl, standing so perfectly erect as to present a series of perpendicular stripes, of the most gorgeous colours; sometimes a deep pink, sometimes a bright, almost saffron, yellow; sometimes a strong brick colour; sometimes brown, sometimes a kind of blue: with countless slight shades and varieties; altogether the most brilliant specimen of nature's colouring, except an occasional sunset; more beautiful by much than the rainbow. It comes upon you at once after passing through the Needles, and increases in beauty as you approach it. Of course it is not a uniform surface, but very irregular in its outline when you are near it, from the unequally perishable nature of the strata;

and furrowed by various miniature chines and hollows; but in the main it is nearly perpendicular.

The continuation of the high ground to the left of it is the common clay of the Isle of Wight basin, and is stratified in the ordinary manner. Our boatman landed us in Alum Bay, and we spent a considerable time on its beach, making a collection of fragments of the different beds, and picking fossil shells and shark's teeth out of the cliff. Some of the beds are so full of fossils that you cannot take a handful of the soil without finding some small shells, and if you [592] take up a large lump which sticks together, and pull it asunder, you are pretty sure to find a shell of some dimensions in the place where it breaks. At least such was our experience, and we collected a great number of specimens. Native sulphur also effloresces on the side of the cliff, in such quantities as not only to tinge it with many bright yellow spots, which add to the diversity of its colouring, but in one place actually to give an odour of brimstone to the air. As far as respects colour, however, its effect is much aided by a vegetable substance of a colour very like its own, which I never saw anywhere else, and which here adheres to the cliff in great quantities.

The cliff is also quite full of little bright acicular crystals of something, probably sulphate of lime: they were not alum, nor did we find any of that substance, though the bay is named from it, and it is said to exude from the cliff.—When we left Alum Bay, we ascended to the adjoining clay eminence, the top of which as well as of the coloured cliff forms an extremely pretty verdant ferny heath, abounding in rabbits. On the border of this, adjoining the chalk down, an inn has been recently established, and must be a very convenient station for those who wish to explore Alum Bay at greater length than we have done. We proceeded to Yarmouth through the hilly country of the coast, which is well wooded, and altogether much prettier than the comparatively level country which we crossed in the morning in our way to Freshwater Gate. It also commands various good views of that level country, of the chalk hills behind, of the Solent and of the opposite coast, with Hurst Castle in the very centre of the picture, nearer to the island than to its own coast, placed at the very extremity of a long line of shore or *spit* as it is here called, projecting far into the sea and narrowing the channel to not more than a mile in width. On the northern coast of the island there are here two very pretty gentlemen's seats with wooded pleasure-grounds. We returned to Yarmouth by being ferried across the mouth of the Yar, in a fisherman's boat. Here we concluded our tour of the island, and having dined, took boat for Lymington. Before leaving Yarmouth, I ought to mention its Castle, which is a tall but little old fortified building immediately overlooking the sea and the entrance of the harbour: the walls are covered with red valerian and wall-flower, growing, according to Albin, spontaneously:⁶⁰ there is a little garden on the roof, with flowers and culinary vegetables, for the use, I suppose, of a family which resides in the building and takes care of it: on the roof are several small cannon, which look as if they were still intended to be used, though I hardly think an enemy would attempt a landing here, unless as formerly some English nobleman should be crowned king of Wight,⁶¹ and the island-monarch should go to war with the continent of England.

In leaving the Isle of Wight I must remark generally that nowhere in so small a space have I seen collected together so great a quantity and variety of all the [593] beauties

of scenery of which this part of England is susceptible. The country about Dorking is indeed superior to it in some respects, but is wanting in perpendicular cliffs and sea views. I am not so ardent an admirer of the sea as some are, to whom it compensates for the absence of all other beautiful or striking objects: Such a coast as that of Bognor or even of Yarmouth in Norfolk, has small attractions for me; one straight, monotonous line of low beach, bounding a dead flat, or a marsh below high water mark. But the sea with a bold line of coast, stretching into headlands and receding into bays, clothed with trees down to the water's edge, or frowning over it in lofty cliffs, is the most striking of all combinations of natural scenery, except lofty mountains: and in this the Isle of Wight is surpassed by nothing, which I have ever seen, except the south coast of Cornwall; if even by that.

The beauty of the cottages in the Isle of Wight is as great as in any part of England; they are surrounded by flowers, the people who inhabit them shew no symptoms of poverty, and the children are often extremely beautiful; you constantly see them, as they are always running out to open the gates which cross the roads at short distances all over the island. We found much less neatness in the cottages, in the part of Hampshire to which we next proceeded: they were often of mud, and had but few flowers, though generally some potatoes and other garden produce about them. The children however seemed generally healthy and well fed, though scarcely so handsome as in the island.—The attractions of the Isle of Wight to the geologist are well known; to the botanist they are scarcely less. Besides the plants I have already mentioned, the shores abound with the *Cakile maritima*, *Chelidonium luteum*, *Arundo arenaria*, *Salsola Kali*, *Apium graveolens*; *Absinthium vulgare*; in Alum Bay we found (I think) the *Poa bulbosa*, and about Sandrock that rare mint, the *Mentha rotundifolia*. The island abounds with the *Linum angustifolium*, *Eupatorium cannabinum* and with an *Iris*, which was not in flower, but which is said to be the foetidissima. The *Chlora perfoliata* and *Chirinia centaurium* grow in all situations and on all soils, in such profusion as I have never seen. At Freshwater Gate the *Samolus valerandi*, and *Hyoscyamus niger*, abound. The common trefoil of the island is that elegant species, the *Trifolium fragiferum*, and on the sandy soils the arvensis is not unfrequent. We also saw the *Androsaemum officinale*, the *Cnicus eriophorus*, and *Erigeron acre*. All the fields, hedges, and banks are covered with the *Equisetum arvensis*, growing so luxuriantly and profusely as to be an object in the landscape.

We crossed to Lyminster in a wherry, the steamboat going only one day out of three, though on that one day it goes and returns several times. The island, with its backbone of chalk, the cliffs of Needle Point, and the Needles, had a fine appearance from the water.