

**THE HAND-BOOK OF THE VALE
OF NEATH, ITS RAILWAY AND
WATERFALLS; BEING A GUIDE TO
THE PICTURESQUE BEAUTIES OF
THE DISTRICT**

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The Hand-Book of the Vale of Neath, Its Railway and Waterfalls; Being a Guide to the Picturesque Beauties of the District by Various

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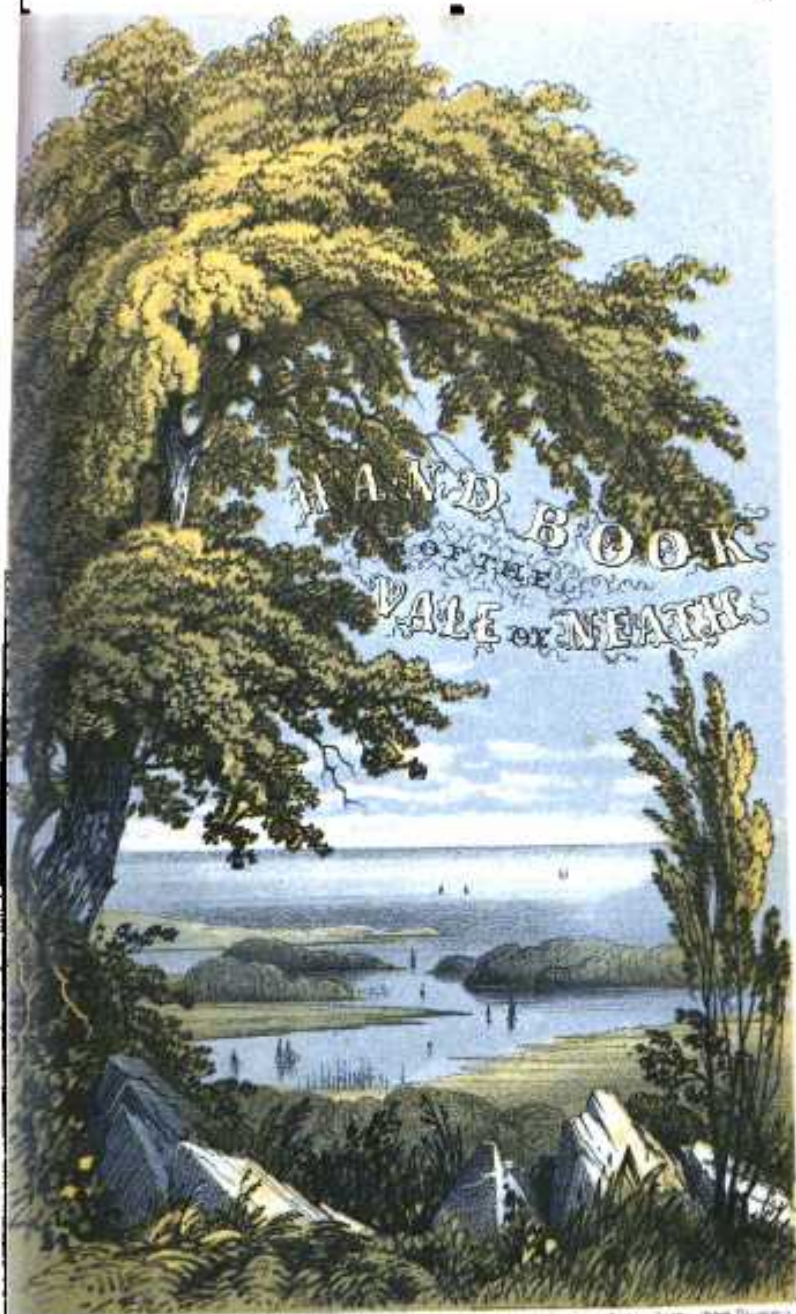
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VARIOUS

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Entrance of Mack River, at Grand Ferry, from Plymouth

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OF THE
VALE OF NEATH,

ITS
RAILWAY AND WATERFALLS;

*BEING A GUIDE TO THE PICTURESQUE BEAUTIES
OF THE DISTRICT.*

ENTERED AT STATIONERS' HALL.

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY T. THOMAS, JAMES STREET,
SOLD BY W. HIBBERT AND A. HAYMAN,
NEATH;
ALSO BY ALL BOOKSELLERS, AND AT THE RAILWAY STATIONS
THROUGHOUT THE PRINCIPALITY.

1852.

THE
H A N D - B O O K
OF THE
V A L E O F N E A T H .

INTRODUCTION.

IN this Iron Age of Railways, no nook of the world can be certain how long its echoes may remain undisturbed by the shriek of the steam whistle; or its beauties unveiled to the pleasure seeking multitude of a cheap excursion train.

The late Mr. Wordsworth, although himself famous for his own particular "Excursion," sonnetised his indignant sorrows, at this tendency of the Age to lay down a railway wherever there were sufficient attractions, mercantile or picturesque, to render such a speculation likely to be profitable. He seemed to consider, that had Mr. Keats lived in our day, he must have alter'd his opinion, that—

"A thing of Beauty is a joy for ever;"

because, evidently, it could not remain so, with a Tunnel through it, or an Embankment over it—although, doubtless, if the Railway paid the share-

holders, *they* would consider it "a thing of joy," if no one else did.

But neither Wordsworth nor Colonel Sibthorp, could have objected, on picturesque grounds, to the South Wales, or the Vale of Neath Railways—they do not destroy beauties, but offer tempting facilities for visiting them. The Vale of Neath Railway Co. have indeed handsomely and judiciously added to their other inducements to Excursionists, an elegant and commodious carriage, for the convenience of parties wishing to visit the Waterfalls and other beauties, to which this little Book directs the attention of the Tourist. Parties engaging this Carriage may be put down at any part of the line most convenient them, and be met there, or at any other appointed place, by the same carriage attached to a return train. Those who wish to be independent may obtain an Express, when they can go, stop, and return, at their own time and pleasure.

Railways have hitherto everywhere induced an increase of traffic, promoted mercantile enterprise, and opened new channels to the flow of gold and civilization; carrying capital and industry into before unknown districts, and peopling them with intelligence and life. There is every reason to suppose that the Vale of Neath Railway will emulate its predecessors in this respect: for, altho' a large district is already opened to it, and by it, much more remains to be developed. And when the "practical," "go a-head" man of our times glances at these pages, the chances are, that he will be induced to visit the localities of our Cascades, for the purpose of calculating the "horse

power" of each Water Privilege now running to waste, and of reckoning up the value of some grey and ivied precipice, per cubic foot, as building material.

At present only two of the Waterfalls—one at Neath Abbey, and one at Aberdulais—have been sacrificed to "the spirit of the age." But with the facilities offered by the Railway, who can say how long the others may remain fit subjects for the pencil of the Artist, and the eye of the lover of the picturesque?

Up to the present time, these almost solitudes, have been known and visited, but by few; and there are many "bits" of rock and river, which, though never seen by tourist, will repay the sketcher for many a solitary ramble among the ravines and mountains. Who knows, also, but that here, the lonely artist may yet obtain glimpses of those fairies, yet believed to be the inhabitants of the glens, and whose legendary lore has been so gracefully preserved by their fair historian, Miss Williams of Aberpergwm. But even if the fairies appear not to outward eye, he will find scenes which "the mind's eye" will involuntarily people with these "tricksy spirits," as Beings inevitably belonging to the place according to "the eternal fitness of things."

Information as to the means of reaching the Waterfalls, and as to accommodation in the neighbourhood, will be found at the end of this volume, in the advertisements of the Vale of Neath Railway, and of the Hotel proprietors.

NEATH.

(*In Welsh, CASTELL-NEDD.*)

Protected by lofty hills, which shelter without confining it, this ancient Borough Town stands pleasantly on the eastern bank of a navigable river, terminating in a convenient port at Britonferry, the point of embouchure with the Bristol Channel. The shipping trade of the port, already considerable, is likely to be greatly extended by the construction of floating docks, at the natural Terminus of the Vale of Neath Railway, whereby Neath will be placed in a position of honourable rivalry with any port in the channel. At this time the annual export of coals exceeds 200,000 tons, hitherto principally brought down the valley by the Neath canal, one of the most highly remunerative lines of inland navigation in the kingdom.

The river Neath flows through the beautiful Vale to which it gives its name, a Valley rich in scenery, and in mineral wealth. Its abrupt mountains, and deep ravines, fringed with wood, and its streams of the most bewitching seclusion, broken into numerous cascades, can never weary the eye of taste. Tourists, painters, poets, anglers, and meditative lovers of the romantic, are alike charmed by the attractions of this Vale, which only requires to be better known, that its fame may equal its beauty. When Drayton cele-

brated the rivers of Great Britain, in his Polyolbion, he did not forget the Neath, and its tributaries :—

———“When nimble *Neath* anon,
 (To all the neighbouring nymphs for her rare beauties known,
 Besides her double head, to help her stream that hath
 Her handmaids *Melth* sweet, cleare *Hepsey*, and *Tragath*),
 From Brecknock forth doth breake; then *Dulas* and *Cleddanugh*,
 By *Morganwg* doe drive thorough her watery saugh.”

If we understand by *Morganwg*'s “watery saugh” the wooded and shady character of her mountain streams—quasi *shaw* a word of Saxon derivation meaning *shade*—the quaint old Bard could not more happily describe their course. The epithet *drives* well expresses their headlong rapidity.

For many years past, Neath has been rising in importance. Houses of a superior order, new streets, and handsome shops, have gradually superseded the uncouth irregularities of the old Town. A spacious Townhall, in which the County Court, Police Court, and Town Council Meetings are periodically held—one Room being exclusively devoted to the purposes of a Commercial News Room, where the “Times” and “Daily News” may be seen at four o'clock on the day of publication, together with the principal Daily Evening, and Weekly papers, metropolitan and provincial;—a large commodious Market place, a public Library and Museum, a Philosophical and Antiquarian Society; also a Mechanics' Institute and a Masonic Hall; denote a thriving and intelligent population, rationally making progress with the times, and manfully resolved not to be left behind in the race of provincial competition. The streets are well