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AMERICAN RURAL FESTIVALS.



OF most respectable antiquity is the custom of celebrating Nature's largess to Mother Earth, at midsummer, by a pageant in which the beneficiaries adorn themselves with garlands, to ride, drive, or walk in joyous procession. "O, 't is the merry time!" wrote old Stevenson in 1661, "wherein honest neighbors make good cheer, and God is glorified in his blessings on the earth." Variants of this custom were familiar in many parts of England, and, curiously enough, their gradual disappearance from the soil of the mother-country seems to have been followed by their appearance in full vigor in Puritan America. For some years past, our country, from Maine to California, has witnessed a series of summer rural fêtes, variously conceived, carried out with more or less attention to detail, each stamped vividly with the color of the region that gave it birth, and all seeming to have been fashioned without reference to a common original.

Of those which I have seen, and those of which I have been able to gather accounts, the one smacking most pleasantly of old-time rustic revelry, and therefore to be offered honorable precedence in this recital, is the "Salt Water Day," or "Wash Day," of the New Jersey farmers, that since time out of mind has been celebrated on the second Saturday in August, upon the coast at Sea Girt.

To make this Jersey holiday, assemble a thousand back-country vehicles, of all sorts, from the hooded farm wagon, which has not greatly altered its pattern for centuries, to

the rude buckboard and the pert sulky. The horses are withdrawn from shafts or pole to be tethered behind the wagons, or picketed at a little distance in the rear. Around the impromptu camp gather people enough to blacken half a mile of the sandy shore—people who for months have been looking forward to the occasion as the chief holiday of the year. Cedar chest and camphor-trunk and flowered bandbox have been called upon to disgorge their treasures; but there is no other attempt at costuming than the assumption of mere Sunday best. An odd feature of the great concourse is the seriousness with which it takes its pleasure. A solemn, even strained, expression of determination to revel or die sits upon the majority of faces. During the unharnessing of the wagons, which have been arriving upon the scene since early dawn,—camping overnight being not infrequent,—the good wives unpack their luncheon-baskets, take tally of their pies, and, if need be, while away the time by methodically administering punishment of the good old-fashioned variety to their impatient youngsters.

Around the outskirts of the concourse are seen the booths and rostrums of the fakirs attracted from New York by the promise of rich harvest from the farmers' wallets. There is also a rifle-range, a merry-go-round, and a doll target at which balls are thrown for prizes. Many another cheap diversion offers itself during the explorations of the farmer and his wife and clamoring progeny, and more than one pinch of dire experience falls to the lot of the paying member of the party. The na-

sal cries of the Yankee Autolycus offering his inks, caddises, and lawns, are continually heard above the swelling murmurs of Jersey joviality.

Fairing over, there is a general retreat to the tent dressing-rooms, improvised with shawls and canvas curtains in connection with the vehicles. The great annual bath of the pilgrims is next in order, and down to the shining reach of ocean, where the crisping billows hurry in, presently troop the queerest processions of bathers ever seen out of a caricature. Many of the men and boys, disdaining change of dress, go into the water in their ordinary clothes, sunning themselves afterward in the hot sand until toasted dry again. Others put on shirts from which sleeves have been removed, and trousers cut off at the knee. The bathing outfit of the women reveals droll miscellanies of bygone fashion in cut and texture, some of the more coy among the matrons including pantalets, sunbonnets, and gloves. With sober mirth, demure smiles, suppressed cries of excitement, the phalanx moves into the surf, taking hands to jump discreetly up and down in long lines, safe within the danger-line. To the greater number this venture into the sea is actually no more than an annual experience.

After the bath, noontime turns all thoughts dinnerward, and the camp settles down into one vast picnic. Pies of all kinds suggest the litany — chanted without taking breath — of the feminine hotel-waiter in the ear of the summer boarder: "Apple-pie, mince-pie, custard-pie, lemon-pie, squash-pie, and pie-plant-pie." Doughnuts (called "nuts" in the vernacular), cheese in liberal wedges, ham sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, and pickles, supply the favorite menu; and lemonade and root-beer — perchance a stronger beverage — are produced in bottles each confessing by label to a different intention in its earlier career.

Then, while the summer sun slants in the cloudless heaven, the merriment goes on to its climax, more dips in the ocean are taken, more money changes hands, more solid food is consumed, till at last the shades of evening close upon the scene, and a general "hitching up" of teams betokens the end of Salt Water Day at Sea Girt.

In point of seniority, the Ice Glen Procession at Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and the Tub Parade at Lenox should be awarded first place among the festival pageants of our country undertaken and carried out by the cultivated class of society.

That the Stockbridge affair dates back to long ago we were pleasantly reminded by a reference in Mrs. Hawthorne's letters published in *THE CENTURY* for November, 1894. It appealed

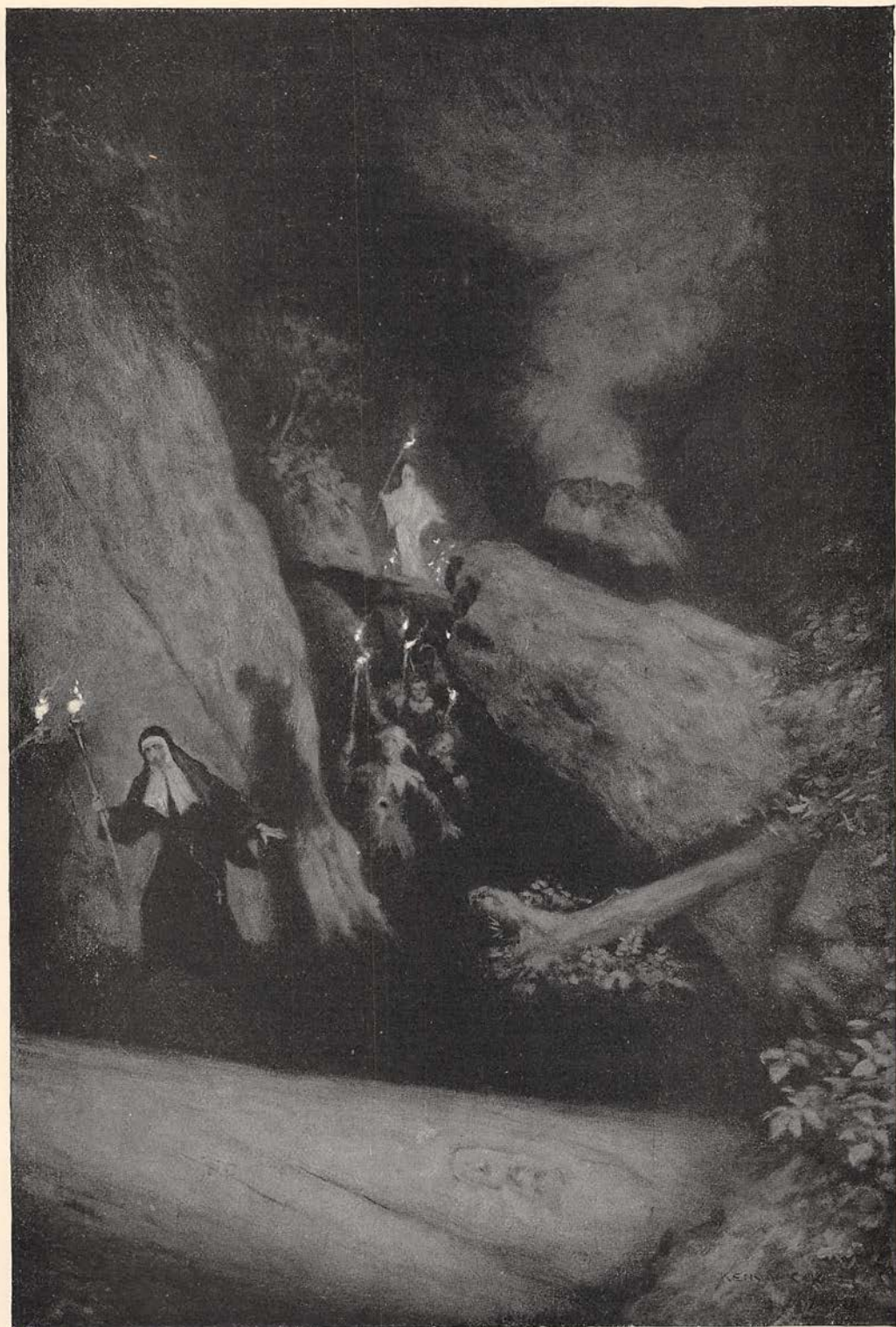
first to my sense of the beautiful and picturesque in the summer of 1874. We drove over to that "loveliest village of the plain" from Lenox, her rival loveliest village of the hills, to rendezvous at nightfall with a gay party of people in fancy costume, in an open grassy space at the entrance of the glen, amid an amphitheater of hills purpled with twilight and lighted by a youthful moon. The host of revelers was marshaled, I remember, by a fair leader clad in the bravery of stars and stripes, wearing a liberty-cap, and carrying a long alpenstock tipped with another American flag. I recall but one other costume — the filmy draping of an East Indian woman, through which faintly gleamed silver bangles and native ornaments. But in no ball-room, under no gas or lamp or candlelight, could have been produced the effect of that group of fantastic torch-bearing figures among the scattered boulders at the mouth of the glen, where in chill recesses ice can be found, it is said, even at midsummer.

A procession being formed, led by a band of musicians, we penetrated the forest gloom, to follow a steep, mossy path "thorough brake, thorough briar," the length of the glen, emerging finally in a meadow-path at the farther end. As the "fairies black, grey, green, and white," the "moonshine revellers and shades of night," defiled between the black tree-boles, the tender green of moss and leaves in the arcade turning to vivid emerald in the glare of the torches, the scene was wonderfully fine.

On another occasion I drove away from the meet of the masqueraders to a point in the village whence we had a view of the procession as it came out of the glen to wind like a fiery serpent over the meadow on its return.

Once a year the placid little Housatonic River, which beneath the elms of Stockbridge meadows contorts itself fantastically into the famous Ox-Bow bend, — a bit of American rural scenery that awoke enthusiasm in the gentle soul of Dean Stanley, — is bright with a charming procession of decorated boats. Tracking the mirror-like bosom of its narrow way hardly more than would a swan in its imperial progress, the flowery chain of boats glides between sheets of verdure sown with wild flowers and dotted with grazing cattle. To see it come and go, and finally vanish beneath low-hanging boughs of willow, is to sigh for the briefness of this glimpse of Arcady.

During a recent season Stockbridge added to the annual attraction of the Ice Glen Procession an outdoor play, — the "Masque of Comus," — given upon the lawn of a dwelling in the village. The play, revised for the use of modern amateurs, and accompanied by music part of which was from an original manuscript of 1634 lent by Harvard University for the



DRAWN BY KENYON COX.

ICE GLEN PARADE. THROUGH THE GLEN. (STOCKBRIDGE.)

occasion, is said to have furnished a picture of ideal beauty.

The famous Tub Parade of Lenox, in spite of its name, has nothing in common with the fêtes of the *lavandières* along the Seine in Paris. It is an array of decorated two-wheeled pony-carts equipped and driven by women and children, and is given in September, the first month of the Lenox season, partly that its adornment may include the first glory of autumnal leafage—the crown of Berkshire beauty.

Under the vaulted elms of the village street—the point of convergence for everything in Lenox—the dainty vehicles come trundling along in the wake of brisk little garlanded, cockaded, and beribboned ponies, which appreciate to the full their own importance and the confidence the public has in their good behavior. Upon the decking of these dainty chariots, and upon the harmonious toilets of their occupants, is bestowed such choice care as to make the whole array seem fit for the marriage of some prince of elf-land. At a given signal from a marshal on horseback, the procession is set in motion. Passing through the village twice or thrice, it goes out to some chosen spot in the environs, and back, the charioteers meeting afterward for tea and compliments in the drawing-room of one of their leaders.

Of late years a boating festival is given on Lake Mackeenac, or "Stockbridge Bowl," the pretty bit of water lying equidistant between Stockbridge and Lenox. Hard by, where in earlier days a willow grew "aslant a brook," that showed "its hoar leaves in the glassy stream," near a certain marshy spot where the first cardinal-flowers used to send their crimson beauty flaming into the air at midsummer, where lazy cows wending their way to the water and occasional fishermen trolling for black bass were usually the only figures within range, a smart new club-house has arisen. There, during the season, hosts of gay folk gather to embark in a fleet of flower-bedecked rowboats, and make the circuit of the lake with music, song, and laughter. But "the season" over, the club-house dismantled and locked, the summer visitors fled away to their distant homes, old Mackeenac remains, as long ago, in almost primeval solitude. The blue hills, denuded of their foliage, look down on her; the meadows around her take on—till snow comes to cover them—a silvery sage-green; the bright stars are reflected on her mirror; sometimes a wild furry creature, frightened from its haunts in summertime, returns to steal through the winter-bound landscape to her borders; farmers jog by in their traps and wagons, without giving a glance or a thought to the forsaken beauty. By and by, when ice locks in her waters, and skaters congregate, there is a renewal of life; but after this

again a blank till spring sap, stirring in woods and fields, gives cheerful promise of another gala-day to come.

Turning from Lenox and its environs to the far northeasterly end of our Atlantic coast-line, we find on the rocky shores of Mount Desert new and elaborate examples of the rural festival. Long years ago, before that rare and charming isle had been formally adopted as the chosen resort of summer pilgrims from all parts of the continent, athletic contests, foot-races, and canoe-races among the Passamaquoddy Indians, were known to Bar Harbor. By the descendants of those Indians was aroused the interest in canoeing shown by visitors of recent times, which resulted in the formation of the Canoe Club, now numbering hundreds of members.

The first public parade of the club was arranged in honor of an expected visit from Matthew Arnold, who, in discussing his anticipated expedition to that Eden of the Sea, had expressed a hope that he might there find some spectacle possessing the true local color which he had failed to discover elsewhere in America. Marshaled in line, with bows toward the south, upon a fortunately glassy stretch of Frenchman's Bay near the westerly point of Bar Island, gathered a number of flower-wreathed canoes to perform a series of manœuvres as dexterous in execution as ingenious in the planning.

The canoe parade, repeated the following year, was followed in another season by an illuminated fête. To this midsummer night's dream Nature lent herself in all graciousness. The sun had set upon a sea of opal. As the moon rose, and the tide flooded the bar, people living along the shore on each side of the Eden road sat in their verandas to wait for the coming of the boats, in an atmosphere as soft and caressing as that of a June night in Venice. From the starting-place at the chief landing of the village, out of darkness streaked with columns of light from the electric arcs above the town, and from the lamps of a flotilla of yachts and other boats at anchor in the harbor, came silently stealing a long train of mysterious black craft tossing leashes of fire-bubbles into the air, or wreathed from stem to stern with multicolored lanterns. Their destination was a dwelling situated upon the shore at some distance up the bay, where the performers in these mysteries of the expedition were expected ultimately to congregate at supper. For an hour the meanderings of the fire-laden boats gave delight to many watchers ashore. At last, answering the signal of dance-music from the house, the cortège fell again into line, and proceeded to disembark upon a floating wharf lighted by Bengal fires and strung with colored lanterns. The boats, deserted by their crews, were then strung together by boatmen, and towed back to the



DRAWN BY KENYON COX.

ICE GLEN PARADE. AROUND THE BONFIRE.

starting-point, the revelers electing to return by the highways. Those who participated in this excursion had reason to congratulate themselves upon the absolute calm of the bay; for two nights later, when the same affair on a large scale was attempted at the club-house on Bar Island, the winds blew and the waters raved after a fashion that permitted no philandering abroad in small boats. I saw last summer at Arrochar, upon the northernmost shore of Loch Long in the Highlands of Scotland, an affair of this kind; and looking up over

the file of lighted boats to the towering summit of the Cobbler outlined against the starry sky of an August night, it required no great stretch of the imagination to fancy myself again at Bar Harbor, and in view of the rocky battlements of Newport Mountain.

The more frequent fêtes given every Friday in August by the Canoe Club are familiar to all visitors to Mount Desert. They are varied by athletic contests, and races in canoes by Indians and members of the club, and are followed by tea and dancing in the club-house.

Perhaps the most extensive pageant of the sea yet seen at Bar Harbor was held a few years ago, upon the afternoon of a day that dawned under a downpour of heavy, pelting rain. At four o'clock in the afternoon the clouds parted, and the heavens bestowed upon many faces a glimpse of the benignity for which they had ceased to hope. During the remainder of the day, notably at sunset, the cloud effects were of an unforgettable beauty, and the air took on a sparkling and inspiring quality. By five o'clock the waters of the bay west of the bar were thronged with pleasure-craft—steam launches, sailing-boats of various sizes and patterns, a steamer or two laden with passengers to see the show, and, amid all these, a host of rowboats and canoes bedight with flowers and flags and garlands, and filled with pretty girls and handsome youngsters. To complete the aquatic display, the admiral of the White Squadron, then in port, sent a dozen ships' boats, manned by sailors in holiday attire, to row races back to their ships. During the space of an hour there was a scene of brilliant beauty. With nature in such accord, with a background of wooded islets and far azure hills of the mainland, a sky overhead continually varying its canopy of gorgeous color, the eye had nothing more to covet. From the shore, lined with spectators, people tried to single out for admiration some boat or canoe more to their taste than any other—only to abandon the effort in the kaleidoscope of color that was at no moment seen at rest. To conclude the day, a band ashore clashed out an invitation to the watermen to come in and receive the congratulations of their friends. The disembarkation was followed by a dance upon a carpet of turf close to the water's edge, and incidental tea-drinking brought the affair to a merry close. To the beneficence of Dame Nature was accorded the chief credit of the success.

Another fête, now a recognized feature of the season's festivities at Bar Harbor, is the Flower Parade in mid-August, on the grounds of the Kebo Valley Club. Here, away from the water, girdled by hill-tops that close in the pretty valley, about an oval course inclosed by a paling, with the spectators grouped on verandas and hill-slopes and in trees near by, the yearly procession makes its rounds. Originally planned to reproduce the Tub Parade at Lenox, it outgrew intention with a bound, and is now seen on a scale of elegant elaboration. It includes buckboards—the Mount Desert vehicle *par excellence*—and coaches, four-in-hands, drags, private omnibuses, wagnettes, dog-carts, victorias, phaëtons—all the vehicles imported for summer uses by private owners, down to the tiny donkey-cart, or a trap drawn by a sheltie little bigger than a

Newfoundland dog, and guided by a happy and important baby charioteer.

In comparing this display with the "battles of flowers" at Nice and Paris, the advantage of the foreign fêtes is in the prodigal abundance of flowers used and the greater number of vehicles in line. But in elegance of equipages, originality of decoration, and general refinement of controlling taste, our American parade outranks both the others. In Paris, as everybody knows, the affair is not patronized by the most refined classes of resident society, and has become a rather cheap-Jack opportunity for showing off spring finery in the blooming alleys of the Bois. As I saw it, a year ago, it seemed to me rather a contest of rival milliners and not too choice wits, though some of the carriages were pretty enough, with a Théâtre du Châtelet fairy effect.

The Bar Harbor Flower Parade lacks animation. Its promoters, having done their duty by the show, look bored inside their moving bowers of goldenrod, or leaning back upon cushions of marguerites and bluets. Of all the vehicles, the good old Bar Harbor buckboard—a vehicle so intimately associated with the early artless joys of the place—seems to me to look best under its foreign lendings. One of these native chariots appeared beneath arches of pink and white, with masses of the sweet-peas that grow so profusely about the island. The maidens upon the seats wore pink gowns and hats; the horses were harnessed with chains of sweet-peas. Another buckboard was similarly decorated with mauve and yellow, a third with green and scarlet, with a wild-wood garniture of "bunch-berries" and moss, while a fourth had white horses, with clusters of white hydrangea, its occupants being also in white. Under these bewildering conditions, with gallantry sustained by wisdom, the governors of the Kebo Valley Club have laid upon the table the question of awarding prizes in their annual Flower Parade. At Bar Harbor, also, the entertainments of the Village Improvement Society have of late taken the agreeable shape of outdoor parties. In a grassy square near the sea, surrounded by picturesque booths and tents for fairings, they have had village dances, encampments of gipsies, May-poles for the children, Dresden-china shepherdesses in attendance upon bona fide tethered sheep, with many like features of society at play after the manner of the Little Trianon—all good to see, and welcome successors to the usual hot and perspiring indoor efforts of amateurs in behalf of charity.

At Cazenovia, New York, a Flower Parade modeled upon that of Bar Harbor was successfully carried out, but with the difference that prizes were bestowed upon the carriages adjudged most original in adornment.



DRAWN BY A. E. STERNER.

THE "MASQUE OF COMUS" AT STOCKBRIDGE.



CY-TURNER-97

DRAWN BY C. Y. TURNER.

HARVEST PROCESSION AT ONTEORA.

The Grass Parade, or Harvest Festival, at Oteora had the advantage of Mrs. Wheeler's inspiration, and the fostering care of Mrs. Keith and of Mr. and Mrs. Sewell, in placing a series of lovely *tableaux vivants* upon a background of the misty hills of the Catskills. What wonder the sylvan train of ox-carts—their meek conveyors harnessed with oak-leaf garlands or chains of daisies, their loads of yellow sheaves or newly cut grass surmounted by groups of figures in picture garb—transported bodily those who looked on into some bygone age of poetry? Leading the van of the procession, Savoyard musicians, fantastic with flower and leaf and ribbon, played upon flutes and violins. After them, harvesters and gleaners carried emblems of their toil; and then an embassy from fairyland—a band of gauze-winged sprites and saucy gnomes served as *avant-coureurs* to a tiny "Culprit Fay," who drove alone in a flowery chariot befitting his proportions. Next, a vision of maidens—Persephone and her attending nymphs, in classic drapery of saffron hue, carried stalks of tiger-lilies plucked in the garden of a veritable fairy godmother. And then, in sharp contrast to the suave lines and tender tints of its predecessor, came a presentment of old Hendrik Hudson and his swart rovers, in company with the "mild-eyed, melancholy" spirit of the Catskill Mountains, the immortal Rip Van Winkle. To them succeeded a cart-load of babies with their *bonnes*, a true "Bagage de Croque-mitaine" in its most enticing aspect of health and happiness out of doors. And when all had proceeded to the place of rendezvous, a halt was called for a dance "under the greenwood tree." Here elves and gnomes joined in a frolic ring around the musicians, and hidden choirs broke into music behind leafy screens.

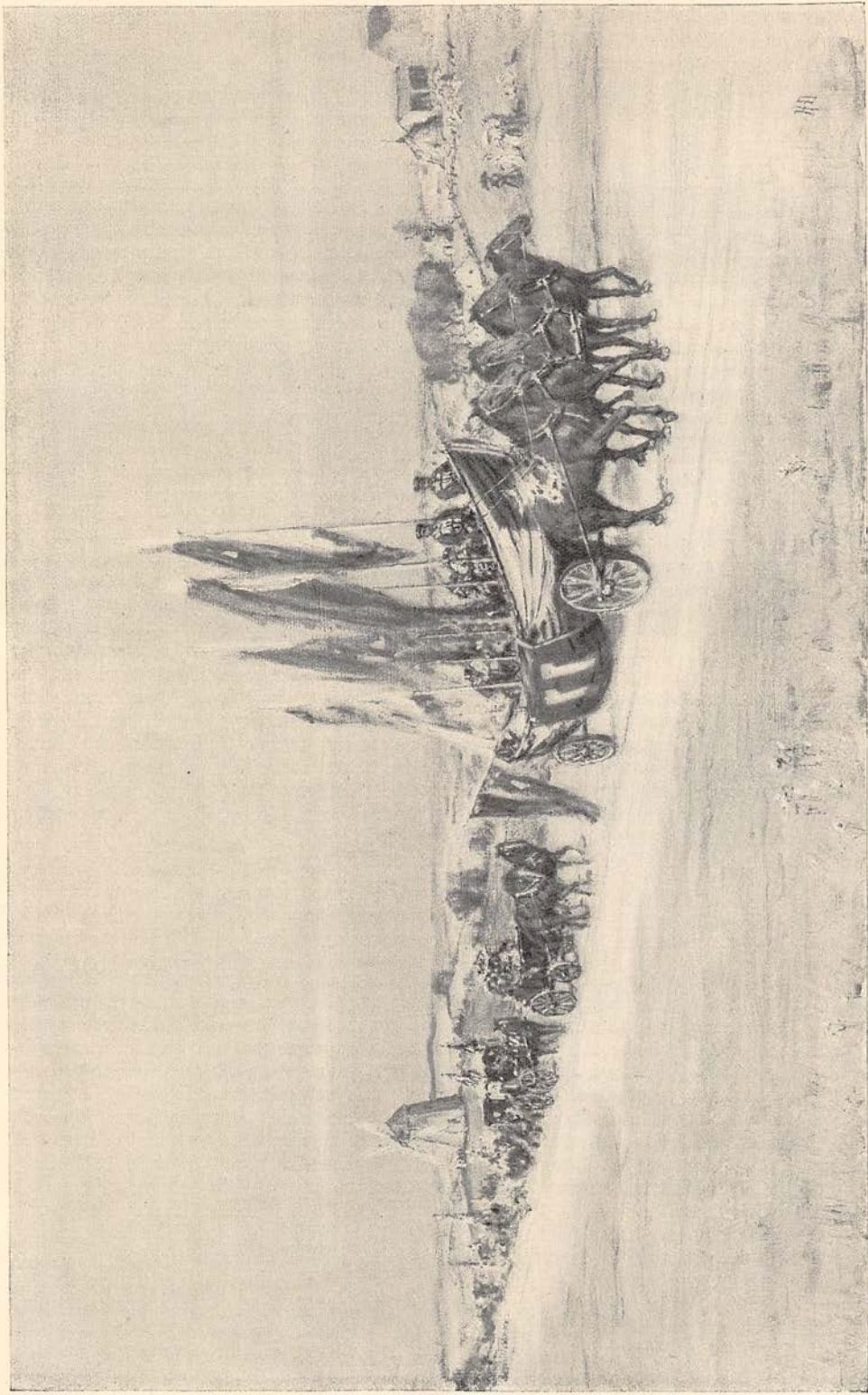
At Pasadena, in southern California, at a season when we Easterns are hugging our fire-sides, or muffling ourselves in furs to go abroad into frosty and nipping air,—on the first day of the new year,—a carnival is held, called "The Tournament of Roses." By way of prelude to athletic contests, races, and revivals of ancient French and Spanish games played on horseback, there is a "battle of flowers" thrown from decorated vehicles. Here, as on the Riviera, nature comes royally to the aid of the celebrants. Orange-blossoms, lilies, golden wild poppies, the feathered foliage and scarlet berries of the pepper-tree, marguerites, carnations, and an inexhaustible variety of roses, are bedded on panel, wheel, and arch, or sent flying through the air. Across the way of the intending procession is erected a toll-gate presenting a solid façade of the welded blooms of the calla, the same flower being used in the same fashion

for the hurdles that serve in the fence-jumping at the races later on.

At East Hampton, the quaint village of green lanes and windmills on Long Island, a fête was given last summer which had the merit of combining estheticism with the joy of the inhabitants over their new watering-carts. This function had also the supreme recommendation of uniting all classes of the summer population. Nowhere in America is anything heartily enjoyed wherein the rich and leisurely pass by on wheels to be gazed upon by their less prosperous countrymen afoot. There is more carping than praise bestowed by such lookers-on upon the people who make the show and who are keenly alive to the spirit of the crowd. And where such celebrations are not the occasion of general merrymaking, the so-called rural festival is a failure.

For the Water-cart Parade cottagers and shopkeepers took pride in adorning their homes and places of business to enhance a general effect, and in lending originality to their individual efforts by producing vehicles typical of their several crafts. The result was astonishingly good. The procession was led by a marshal upon horseback, followed by a local band, after which came fifty wheelmen, men and women, their bicycles decked with flowers and ribbons, their phalanx attended by a clown. Some riders in Continental uniform were followed by the new watering-carts,—the latter announcing, with much bravery of bunting, that they had "come to stay." Next came the village fire-company surrounding their flower-trimmed hook-and-ladder truck. Eminently picturesque was the life-boat from the neighboring station on the coast. For this occasion it was mounted upon a float drawn by four horses, manned by the gallant captain with his crew of six, and drawn with holiday deliberation along the joyous village street. The members of the crew, sitting in place upon the thwarts, held oars tipped with signal-flags, which, at the captain's orders, were simultaneously lifted in salute.

Next, a succession of floats gave to view the mercantile and industrial side of East Hampton's population. Such scenes as a house in process of construction, a village smithy in full blast, a mason at work building a chimney, butchers' and grocers' shops, a mart for vegetables mosaicked with fine skill, passed before the eyes of bystanders, to be followed in turn by nearly a hundred decorated carriages. When one takes into account the time, temper, money, pains, and taste that go into such a display, should not the good people of East Hampton feel themselves well entitled to the pæans called forth by their charming *fiesta*? And should they not be encouraged to go on and make of their Water-cart Parade an annual affair that



DRAWN BY H. G. DEARTH.

PARADE AT EAST HAMPTON, LONG ISLAND: THE LIFE-BOAT

men and women from other parts of the country may journey far to see?

Of outdoor plays, besides the one mentioned as occurring at Stockbridge, we have had beautiful and elaborate presentations of Shakspeare's comedies at Manchester-by-the-Sea, and at Castle Point, Hoboken. At Bar Harbor has been given a charming performance of François Coppée's "Luthier de Crémone," acted by clever amateurs in a garden. And again, on that same delightful Mount Desert island, in the deep shadowed fir-wood above a little beach of powdered sea-urchins, where the sea murmurs in past the stern rocks of Great Head, some of the "Proverbs in Porcelain" of Austin Dobson have been charmingly rendered in costume, the scene lighted from above by shafts of summer sunlight falling upon fresh young faces, after a fashion not to be readily forgotten by those who, seated on mossy rocks, or couched upon pine-needles, made up the assemblage.

I have left till the last a spectacle to be enjoyed by New Yorkers—Jupiter Pluvius consenting—every May Day in Central Park. There hundreds of children of various nation-

alities mingle their tongues of Babel upon the green reaches, the rocky knolls, and around the lakelets of our city's chief pleasure-ground. Of this kingdom of May there are numerous queens, and their subjects indulge in the old-time ring-a-round games which the grown folks of to-day fancy must have died out because Time has carried them so far beyond such levities. When, in the afternoon, the hosts of white-frocked and knickerbockered invaders melt away into neighboring horse-cars, the park goes back again into the keeping of gray-coated guardians of the peace, who remain ruefully gazing upon the *disjecta membra* of many feasts.

What I have cited may at least serve as a vindication against the charge, so often made, that Americans are, before all, an artificial and city-loving people. Here we have certainly examples of a healthy willingness to give Nature her due meed of homage. Taken in conjunction with the fact that people among us who can afford to do so now spend the greater part of the year out of town, we may fairly claim to have been more than "breathed on by the rural Pan."

Constance Cary Harrison.



ABANDONED.

THE hornets build in plaster-dropping rooms,
 And on the mossy porch the lizard lies;
 Around the chimneys slow the swallow flies,
 And on the roof the locusts snow their blooms.
 Like some sad thought that broods here, old perfumes
 Haunt the dim stairs; the cautious zephyr tries
 Each gusty door, like some dead hand, then sighs
 With ghostly lips among the attic glooms.
 And now a heron, now a kingfisher,
 Flits in the willows, where the ruffle seems
 At each faint fall to hesitate to leap,
 Fluttering the silence with a drowsy stir.
 Here Summer seems a placid face asleep,
 And the near world a figment of her dreams.

Madson Carwin.