## SUMMER BY THE SHORE.

REMOTE from smoky cities, aged and grey,
We pass the long-drawn summer sea-side day ;
Now reading in the garden arbour, where
In light and silence comes the freckled morn,
When dews are on the leaf, and cool the air ;
The faint wave-wash is heard the beach along,
Whence a warm wind waves languidly the corn ;
And poised in haze the lark shakes out his song ;
Now hearing in deep grass the sweeping scythe,
And in the sultry stillness voices blithe,
Till day is done. Blue coolness comes once more ;
The reapers bind in twilight the last sheaf,
And the fresh spring tide foams along the reef,
As floats the white moon up the lonely land.

T. C. IRWIN.

## A CURIOUS MIDNIGHT CUSTOM.

MIDNIGHT in an English forest is suggestive of little that is either wild or strange. Imagination may conjure up and bring vividly before the mind's eye many a fantastic scene in association with forest coverts or fairy-haunted moonlit glades ; but in reality the setting of the sun in our native woodlands ushers in a season of singular quiet and calm, unbroken by few sounds save the faint occasional "whirr" of a bat, the dismal cry of an owl, or the sweet bursting melody of a nightingale. Oftentimes, however, the nocturnal hours which precede the rising of the moon are absolutely still—

> "No sights are seen—no melancholy bird
> Sings tenderly and sweet ; but all the air
> Is thick and motionless,"

and holds a "solemn" stillness. Especially does silence reign throughout our woodlands during the dreary nights of winter, except when the wind mournfully sighs through leafless branches.

In one, however, of our English forests, the quiet of midnight has been annually broken during the last 300 years, in a very singular manner, by the exercise of a custom which will in all probability be extinguished by an Act of Parliament, to which the royal assent will be given during the present session of 1878. Comparatively few persons, however, not inhabitants of the straggling Essex villages which lie in the neighbourhood of Epping Forest, have ever seen this curious custom exercised, and some description of it will probably be interesting to those who love to link the present in picturesque association with the past.

It was on the night of the 11th of November, 1873, that the present writer, forming one of a little band of "Friends of the Forest," found himself at the small forestal village of Loughton. The night was cold but clear, the brightly glittering stars adding to the subdued light from a waning moon. A point of departure had been fixed for the "Friends of the Forest"—

defenders of public rights to common lands and jealous guardians of the finest recreation-ground of the largest city in the world—at the "Crown" inn at Loughton. Thence they plunged into the cold night-air, and as the hands of the church-clock neared the mysterious hour of twelve, they left the village and made towards the forest.

Following the course of a winding road, the houses are soon lost from view, and a dusky, wooded knoll comes into sight beyond a small expanse of gorse-covered turf. The road from Loughton winds round this upland; but access to its sides from its fence-encircled base—the mark of illegal enclosure—is gained through a gateway on the Loughton side.

Entering this gateway, the "Friends of the Forest" are not long in reaching their destination at the knoll-top. Here a curious scene is lighted by the pale beams of the moon. Lone and dreary as this upland crest would be on every other winter's night in this sparsely inhabited district, it is now covered by a crowd of dusky human forms. Whose they are cannot be discerned by the dull light of the waning moon; but figures are moving everywhere—not alone, however, on the turf, which is damp with the night-dews. There is a strange movement in the trees. Leaves unfallen yet in the late autumn are stirring gently, touched by the breeze which reaches the knoll-top from the dark expanse of woodland stretching far away into the night. But it is not the motion of the leaves which makes the strange movement from the tree-tops. Big branches are swaying with a force which the soft night-wind could not produce, and there is a strange glitter of reflected moon-rays between the leafy interstices.

Presently all is still. The moving forms on the greensward are motionless; the tree-tops cease to sway to and fro. A dead silence falls upon the scene, broken only by the husky rustle of the seared leaves. Listen! One other sound now strikes on the ear. It is the first stroke of the village clock announcing midnight. The further strokes are drowned by a deafening shout from human voices rising clear and sharp into the crisp night-air. Another shout; a sound of cracking branches; a hurried movement to gather them; a blaze of light; then smoke and flames as a bonfire lights up the hill-top and shows an assembled crowd of people of both sexes, of all ages, and of various ranks in life.

The blazing branches reveal the figures of many a lusty Essex peasant ensconced in the tree-forks, and applying axe to branch with enthusiastic rapidity. The work of lopping, or "top-lopping," as it is locally called, goes on apace for a short period, until the turf has become littered with the fallen wood. This is hurriedly gathered into heaps, which provide the food of many other bonfires. When these have burnt out, the crowd subsides. Loughtonians and visitors descend the hill in various directions in search of their homes, and smouldering embers alone tell of the curious scene which has disturbed the quietness and solitude of this early winter night in Epping Forest.

A right, however, has by this singular initiation been acquired by the poor inhabitants of Loughton—the right of wood-cutting for their supply of winter fuel, from the 12th of November, 1873, to the 23rd of April, 1874. The "lopping" has been performed—and uninterruptedly performed—in the face of the presumptive possession of the wooded knoll by private persons whose fences surround it. For more than seven months preceding this 11th of November, the passing of these fences would have constituted a "trespass" in the eye of the law, for it was a year later before the Court of Chancery declared that this enclosure and many another—encircling in all nearly 2,000 broad acres of the metropolitan forest—were illegal and unwarrantable. On the 24th of April in each year, the right fell through, and could not again be claimed until November, and then only by the initiatory process already described—initiatory to the exercise of a custom which had acquired the force of law.

Authorities differ amongst themselves as to the circumstances which gave origin to this custom, and as to the date of its origination. By a preponderance of opinion the latter, however, is fixed in the reign of Elizabeth. The virgin queen, it is well known, was a frequent visitor to Epping Forest. She hunted there, and built at Chingford a hunting-box, a portion of which still remains, and bears the name of "Elizabeth's Lodge." It is said that on one occasion, during a sojourn in the forest—her own royal forest, be it remembered—she so much compassionated the miserable condition of the poor in the forestal manors immediately surrounding her residence—the manors of Loughton, Theydon Bois, Epping, and Waltham—that she gave them permission to cut firewood from the forest-trees for their winter use. But to the royal permission she attached—probably under the influence of a whim—the condition that the lopping should commence each winter at midnight of the 11th of November. The terms of the arrangement between Queen Bess and the Essex peasants living within the four forestal manors already referred to were, indeed, very precise. The axes of the wood-cutters must be struck into the trees at that moment which was exactly between the 11th and 12th of November. This prescription being duly attended to by any one, or by more than one, of the inhabitants in any part of either of the four manors named in the royal charter, the privilege of wood-lopping would continue until the 23rd day of the ensuing month of April, after which—during spring, summer, and autumn—it would cease, as already mentioned. If, however, by the slightest mischance or forgetfulness the explicit instructions of the queen failed to be carried out, the right to cut wood would be forfeited, not for one year only, but for ever.

The royal wood-cutting charter, however, gave great displeasure to the lords of manors in Epping Forest. These persons looked with a jealous eye upon a practice which promised to be a serious interference with their manorial rights. But they dared not object to what the sovereign had, with so much of kind consideration for her poorer subjects, ordained; and the royal will overrode for the royal pleasure at all times, within the royal forests, manorial rights and

customs. No enclosure in those days could bar access to royalty or to those armed with the royal permission. There was, however, the chance that, by artifice or cunning, the fulfilment of the one condition on which the right of wood-cutting had force might be prevented.

One of the lords of the manor of Epping offered to perform the lopping for the poor inhabitants of his district. He represented to them that by the irregular and unsystematic lopping practised by the wood-cutters, great injury was done to the forest-trees. He promised, therefore, that not only would he undertake to have the work done by his own people in due form and under the requirements of the royal charter, but that he would further have the wood carted to the doors of the poor residents within the boundary of his manor. Deceived by the plausibility of this proposal, the cottagers consented to accede to it. For a time all went well. The wood was regularly cut according to royal prescription, and sent round as promised to the recipients. Soon, however, less regularity was observed in cutting and delivering the wood, and after awhile the supply ceased altogether, and the "lord," who had cozened his poor fellow parishioners into believing in his sincerity and generosity, then not only refused to continue the practice, but forbade them to cut for themselves.

In the manor of Waltham, within the bounds of Epping Forest, a *ruse* of a different kind, but one which proved equally effectual, was adopted by a crafty "lord," with the object of depriving the poor of the right to lop. A short time before the arrival of the 11th of November, in the year 1641, the manorial lord of Waltham sent an invitation to all the inhabitants—not a very large number—within his manor to attend a great feast which he announced his intention of giving on the night of the 11th. No suspicion of any ulterior designs appears to have been entertained, and the *convives* came in force—there being no absentees from the manorial board, save those compelled by illness to keep their beds. Nothing was wanting at this sumptuous feast. Viands were piled up in profusion, and wine without stint flowed merrily. The time, too, passed rapidly, and it was long past midnight before the carousing assemblage thought of leaving. Then, however, and not till then, it flashed upon them that it was the initiatory wood-cutting night. But it was too late; the time had gone by for qualifying for the privilege; and their late host informed them that their right had lapsed by *non user*. They had, in truth, sold it for a mess of pottage, and there was no redress or appeal from their own thoughtlessness.

The inhabitants of Theydon Bois, by dint of watchfulness and by scrupulous attention to the stipulation regarding the midnight lopping of the 11th of November in each year, managed to secure and retain the privilege of wood-cutting until a few years since. But owing to the power and influence of some of the later lords of manors, and to the timidity or fear of the inhabitants of that particular district, the practice gradually became reduced in extent, and has finally become almost extinguished, its exercise being only attempted in a furtive way.

Perhaps it is because the poor of Loughton have been mostly fashioned of sturdier material than the poor inhabitants of the sister parish of Theydon Bois, that the Loughtonians have succeeded in maintaining their privileges intact, in spite of threats, intimidations, and *ruses*. The fact that they have retained their lopping rights in the Loughton portion of Epping Forest is the more remarkable because of the circumstance that the whole of the forestal portion of the manor of Loughton, and not merely the wooded knoll referred to in the early part of this paper, has been enclosed in these recent years; and the lopping, consequently, has been performed during the period from November to April in spite of the enclosing fences, and each year during their existence. Loughtonians, however, have had to fight against the craft of lords of manors who have sought to deprive them of their privilege of wood-cutting. One instance of an attempt to deprive them of this privilege is interesting because, whilst it recalls the attempt made by the manorial lord of Waltham in 1641 to deprive the poor loppers of that manor of their right, it differed from the Waltham case in being unsuccessful.

A lord of the manor of Loughton, as the readiest and most likely means of preventing the poor villagers from qualifying for their right to lop, gave an invitation to all and sundry to attend a great banquet at the Loughton Manor House on the 11th of November. The time fixed for the commencement of the entertainment was late in the evening. No expense had been spared in the preparation of the feast, and the ostentatiousness of the invitation brought a very large gathering. Pains, indeed, had been taken to prevent any one from refusing to come. There were some of the wassailers, however, on this occasion who did not forget, even when the festivity was at its height, that the "lopping" would have to be done at the appointed time. To avoid obliviousness of the occasion they refrained from quaffing too freely of the flowing bowl. Their host, however, pressed them; but, with a keen eye to the important business of the night, they resisted his importunity. A little before midnight they rose to go to the forest; but, on reaching the doors, what was their astonishment to find that they were heavily barred and that the egress of the guests was obstructed! Their cunning entertainer smiled maliciously on witnessing the confusion of the would-be loppers, and refused to allow the doors to be unbolted, in spite of the entreaties of his guests. But his triumph was very short-lived. The men, rendered desperate, resorted to an expedient which the manorial lord had not taken into his calculation. Either suspecting treachery or, what is perhaps more probable, anxious to combine business with pleasure, and to make the most of the latter, a number of them had concealed their axes about their persons, so as to stay as long as possible at the banquet, and avoid the necessity of returning to their homes ere proceeding to the forest. With such effective instruments they made short work of the wooden doors of the Manor

House; and, regaining their liberty, made for the wood with all possible speed, and reached it before the hour of midnight.

But the curious custom of "top-lopping" in Epping Forest is now doomed to extinction. The stunted appearance of the trees in many portions of this woodland—large numbers of them being mere pollards —is due to the long-continued, indiscriminate, and unskilful practice of cutting the trees in the manner which has been referred to. The future conservators of the forest—which now, in the size to which it has grown by the abatement of illegal enclosures, is to be preserved for the enjoyment and recreation of the public for ever—will be the Corporation of London, a body which defended the popular cause in the famous suit determined by the Court of Chancery in 1874. These conservators will have to undertake themselves to superintend the future work of lopping the forest-trees so as to get it done in a proper and systematic manner. But they will do no hardship to the poor, and for the privilege thus taken away they will substitute either a sum of money in compensation, or an equivalent in "kind" in the shape of fire-wood or coal.

FRANCIS GEORGE HEATH.

## HOW TO LISTEN TO MENDELSSOHN'S *HYMN OF PRAISE.*

TO enter into the meaning and appreciate the significance of Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang*, or *Hymn of Praise*, it is necessary to apprehend the occasion for which it was composed, and the place in which it was, by special intention, first performed. The occasion was a celebration of the 400th anniversary of the invention of printing: the place was that church, St. Thomas's, in Leipzig, which is for ever associated with the name and the sacred musical compositions of John Sebastian Bach. Out of an appreciation of the occasion Mendelssohn evolved the subject, which is allusive to the diffusion of knowledge over a world previously dark with ignorance, and expressive of gratitude to God for enlightenment; from the local association with the memory of Bach arose the propriety of treating the subject in the manner of that great father in music. And yet the treatment is not altogether that of Bach; but largely also that of Mendelssohn himself: for while the composer adopted from Bach, as in other works, the feature of introducing chorales, or popular hymn-tunes, into his work, he struck out in quite another and an interesting direction by making the work in large part a symphony. The *Lobgesang* is, in musical phrase, a sinfonia-cantata; having an important section—the first—which is purely instrumental, and leads, not as a mere prelude, but after considerable elaboration, to the section which engages both voices and orchestra.

Both sections, however, are bound together; and the link, the text-phrase to this symmetrically-planned musical sermon, is its first two bars:—

Let the listener, if he wish to satisfy his mind with the full significance and symmetry of this fine and finished work, be there to hear this "text," a text which the composer-preacher gives out by means of the pompous and imposing trombone; and which, like a dexterous occupant of the pulpit, he occasionally, but not too often, brings in again in later parts of the musical discourse, always with fresh context, and therefore with new significance as well as with recalled memories.

The first short portion of the symphonic division of the *Hymn of Praise*, is devoted entirely to the enunciation, with some repetition and variation, now in the higher, now in the lower part of the orchestration, of this key-phrase: after this has been duly enforced upon the mind, a quicker movement is adopted, and the band runs off into some animated discursive matter, soon, however, returning to the characteristic two bars, which again appear with renewed reiteration. This process is repeated from time to time, the discursive instrumentation getting more and more animated, and the opening phrase of the work making occasional more or less disguised appearance, till, at a point marked "Maestoso come primo," it is again solemnly enunciated at the original majestic pace, and the first part of the symphony melts through a fine but not showy cadenza, into a second movement. Here time, manner, and theme are all changed, and we hear one of the most elegant and fanciful, though strictly religious, movements which the repertoire of oratorio has to give us.

This "Allegretto un poco agitato" is one of the favourite pieces of the organ-player, and may often be heard in church; but never on the organ to so much advantage as when rendered by the full orchestra. There is something at once fantastic and pensive, agitated and melancholy, about this theme, which will live in the mind, when once heard, as only real creations do live. Some pages of this, and we revert to double rhythm, in the noble movement marked "Adagio religioso," with a solemn and impressive opening, the orchestration, however, soon becoming rapid and busy, and the symphonic section of the work being presently brought to a close.

Little more than two bars of the introduction to the first number of the cantata, or choral section, of the *Hymn of Praise* has passed when we hear again, and before the voices actually enter, the already quoted key-phrase, imbedded in the short orchestral prelude which introduces the broad outbursting first chorus, "All men, all things, all that has life and breath, sing to the Lord." The voices do not, at