



MAY.

## JACK-IN-THE-GREEN.

Now the bright morning star, day's harbinger,  
Comes dancing from the east, and leads with her  
The flow'ry MAY, who from her green lay throws  
The yellow cowslip and the pale primrose.  
Hail, bounteous May! that dost inspire  
Mirth and youth with warm desire.  
Woods and groves are of thy dressing;  
Hill and dale doth boast thy blessing:  
Thus we salute thee with our early song,  
And welcome thee and wish thee long!

So sings Milton to the sweet bird-mouth—he whose mighty mind, "nigh spher'd in Heaven," hymned the soft beauty of the first day that dawned upon the infant world, which surely must have been a May-morning—

Sweet day, so calm, so pure, so bright,  
The bridal of the earth and sky!

The custom of welcoming in May-morning has been observed in various manners in different countries. We say "has been," for the refinements of civilization have in a great degree banished all the festival observances of our merry ancestors. But, perhaps, although Nature forgets not to bestow "her custom'd liveliness on the fields and groves" at the usual time, no season has lost its poetic charm so much as the sweet May. A solitary bonfire, with a May-bush and pole are yet to be seen here and there in retired nooks and corners of Old England, to the delight of the children, "your only chronicles of merriment" now-a-days; but the games of this delightful season have nearly all vanished away from the general scene of the country. "Jack-in-the-green," the gay scene represented in our engraving, is one of the few relics of the May festivals.

Time was when from the court to the cottage all "rose up early to observe the rite of May." Some went "a-dew-gathering," a sort of rustic love-spell that was sure to enchant every village-maiden, gentle or simple; others to "fetch in May," a rivalry that "rob'd many a hawthorn of its half-blown sweets;" while others set their wits to work to get up some pretty device, some rural drama, the purpose of which was to bring *The Ladie of the May* into a termination of her last year's coquetting between two rival suitors.

One of the additions to "The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia," written by Sir Philip Sydney, Knight, is an account of a rural mask, or May-game, performed at Wanstead, in honour of Queen Elizabeth, which begins thus:—"Her most excellent Majestie walking in Wanstead Garden, as she passed down into the grove there came suddenly among the trees one apperled like an honest man's wife of the country; where crying out for justice, and desiring all the lords and gentlemen to speak a good word for her, she was brought to the presence of her Majestie, to whom upon her knees she offered a supplication," &c.

May-poles, May-fairs, and May-games, are as old as any English sports we have on record. May-poles may still be seen in some of our villages, decorated with garlands, for young people to dance round. Formerly the inhabitants of London used to go out early in the morning to fetch May from the neighbouring fields, and return with it in triumph. The church of St. Andrew-under-Shaft, in Leadenhall-street, is so named from a pole or shaft which used to be set up there on May-day, higher than the church-steeple; and this May-pole is mentioned by Chaucer. Another, alluded to by Beaumont and Fletcher, flourished in the Strand, nearly upon the site of the church of St. Mary-le-Strand. This May-pole was removed in 1713, and a new one erected July 4, opposite Somerset House; it had two gilt balls and a vane on the summit, and was decorated on festival days with flags and garlands. This second May-pole was taken down in 1718, when Sir Isaac Newton procured it from the inhabitants, and afterwards sent it to the Rev. r. Pound, rector of Wanstead, Essex, who obtained permission from Lord Castlemaine to erect it in Wanstead-park, for the support of the then largest telescope in Europe, made by Mons. Hugen, and presented by him to the Royal Society, of which he was a fellow. Soon afterwards, the following limping verses were affixed to the May-pole:—

"Once I adorned the Strand,  
But now I've found  
My way to Pound,  
In Baron Newton's land:

Where my aspiring head aloft is rear'd,  
T' observe the motions of th' æthereal herd.  
Here sometimes raised a machine by my side,  
Through which is seen the sparkling milky tide:  
Here oft I'm scented with a balmy dew,  
A pleasing blessing which the Strand ne'er knew.  
There stood I only to receive abuse,  
But here converted to a nobler use;  
So that with me all passengers will say,  
I'm better far than when the pole of May."

A third pole must have been set up in May-fair, where a fair, which still gives name to the spot, was held for fifteen days.

Stubs describes the "May-pole" as the "chiefest jewel," which the people "bring home with great veneration, as thus—they have twentie or fortie yoke of oxen, every ox having a sweete nosegay of flowers tied to the tip of his hornes, and these oxen draw home the Maie-pole \* \* which they covered all over with flowers and hearbes, bound round with strings from the top to the bottome, and sometimes it was painted with variable colours, having 200 or 300 men, women, and children following it with great devotion. And, thus equipped, it was reared with handkerchiefs and flagges streaming on the top, they strawe the ground round about it, they bind green boughs about it, they set up summer halles, bowers, and arbours hard by, and then fall they to banquetting and feasting, to leaping and dauncing about it."

Sir Henry Ellis quotes an old pamphlet, in which we find the May-pole mentioned in a new and curious light. We gather from the writer that our ancestors held an anniversary assembly on May-day, and that the column of May, whence our May-pole, was the great standard of justice, in the Ey-comons, or fields. Here it was that the people, if they saw cause, deposed or punished their governors; their barons, or their kings. The judges' bough or wand (at this time discontinued, or only faintly represented by a trifling nosegay), and the staff or rod of authority in the civil and in the military (for it was the mace of power, and the truncheon of the field officers), are both derived from hence. A mayor, he says, received his name from this May, in the sense of lawful power; the crown, a mark of disparity, was also taken from the May, being representative of the garland or crown, which, when hung on the top of the May, or pole, was the great signal for convening the people; the arches of it, which spring from the circle and meet together at the mound or round ball, being necessarily so formed, to suspend it at the top of the pole. He also tells us of a mock-battle custom between youth, the one party in winter and the other in spring livery; when spring was sure to gain the victory.

Washington Irving says: "I shall never forget the delight I felt on first seeing a May-pole; it was on the banks of the Dee, close by the picturesque old bridge that stretches across the river from the quaint little city of Chester. I had already been carried back into former days, by the antiquities of that venerable place, the examination of which is equal to turning over the pages of a black letter volume, or gazing on the pictures in Froissart. The May-pole on the margin of that poetic stream completed the illusion. My fancy adorned it with wreaths of flowers, and peopled the green bank with all the dancing revelry of May-day. The mere sight of this May-pole gave a glow to my feelings, and spread a charm over the country for the rest of the day; and as I traversed a part of the fair plains of Cheshire, and the beautiful borders of Wales, and looked from among swelling hills down a long green valley, through which the Deva wound its wizard stream, my imagination turned all into a perfect Arcadia. One can readily imagine what a gay scene it must have been in jolly old London when the doors were decorated with flowering branches; when every hat was decked with hawthorn; and Robin Hood, Friar Tuck, Maid Marian, morris-dancers, and all the other fantastic dancers and revellers were performing their antics about the May-pole in every part of the city. I value every custom which tends to infuse poetical feeling into the common people, and to sweeten and soften the rudeness of rustic manners, without destroying their simplicity."

## ANGLING.

PERCH, ruffe, bream, gudgeons, flounders, dace, minnow, eels, and trout, may be taken. Carp, barbel, tench, chub, roach, and bleak, spawn.