

COUNTRY SCENES—JANUARY.

(FOR EVERY MONTH, BY THOMAS MILLER.)



Oh, bitter chill it was!
The owl, for all his feathers was a-cold;
The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold. KEATS.

JANUARY is called the Gate of the Year—the Entrance Hall that leads to the seasons. We must pass through the grey leaden-coloured portico, supported with glittering pillars of ice, before we can reach the flowery doors of Spring, beyond which the dark green gates of Summer open, while far behind Autumn swings wide upon its golden hinges, revealing a landscape that looks like the ocean basking in the yellow sunshine, its waves the ever-moving uplands, waving drowsily with eary corn.

The walls of this solemn hall, which open indistinctly upon a longer twilight, and silently diminish the darkness that hangs upon the edge of the expanding day, are formed of grey snow, propped up by the mighty bulk of naked forest trees; the knotted and iron elbows of which are linked one within the other—while around hang life-like pictures, all in keeping with the scene—landscapes of ice and snow with cold looks that are half warmed by the dark foliage of the evergreens, and cheered by the rounded crimson of the holly berries, while the trailing ivy, from which the snow flakes have melted, clasps the cottage chimney whence the curling smoke ascends in trails of blue and silver, like clouds that have lost their way, and are wandering back again to the sky. There, spreads out a lonely mere, seeming darker through contrast with the snow-wreaths which surround it, while, deep below, the trees lock down, as if cut out from solid ebony: and the crisped reeds, the ghostly skeletons of Summer, whisper to each other with a frozen breath, as if they dreaded that the bleak north wind

should overhear their husky rustling, or with his cutting shears lay them prostrate, blanched, withered, and dead.

In another picture, we see a rustic stile; the snow, that rests upon the barked bars, is imprinted with the robin's feet, while his scarlet breast, harmonising beautifully with the cluster of crimson hips that droop from the leafless spray of the wild rose, form a cheerful foreground to the desolate moorland that lies behind; and as we look upon the open beak of the bird, and his black-beaded and fearless eye, we can fancy that we hear him singing as sweetly as if Summer still stood on tiptoe with her hair unbound, and held between her rosy fingers her streaming garland of long green leaves.

Further on we behold the blue titmouse, hanging by its hooked claws, back downward—yet never fearful of falling; peeping with curious eye, beneath the level-clipped broad-thatched eaves in search of insects, while the white cat, motionless, as if cut out of marble, sits watching upon the smooth-bricked window-sill, sometimes feigning sleep, yet ready to spring up, if only a straw fall from the beak of the busy bird. Past the church porch, whose steep roof is covered with unruffled flakes, an old beggar-man in his thread-bare coat moves slowly along, his head bow-bent—the cutting wind that comes sweeping round the low square tower, blows back his long silver hair, on which the unmelted snow rests, and he pulls his weather-beaten hat lower over his forehead, and grasps his long staff firmer, with his cold blue hands, as he faces the eddying gust.

Whichever way the observant eye turns, this great Hall that opens upon the year is hung with pleasing pictures, and filled with interesting objects. On the dark beams that span above, the bat folds up his leathern wings, and with his head drooping, soundly sleeps; the little dormouse, coiled up like a ball, rests in its burrow, beneath the roots of the antique oak, and should it chance to awaken before the warm days come, feeds upon the hoard it has secured, then folds itself up again in its dark chamber, and waits until it sees the sun-shine streaming from the chinks of the inner door of Spring. High overhead, though still below the heavy snow-filled clouds, is heard the shrill scream of the wild geese; their arrow-pointed ranks cleave the chilly air, as they sail at night far over the silent town to where the reedy marsh and the sedgy morass stretch out, intercepted by melancholy streams, on the surface of which, excepting themselves only, the shadow of the solitary fowler in his boat is seen to move. There, when the wind stirs the ridgy ripples in the calm moonlight, the wild swan sleeps majestically upon the rocking eddies; the underdown of his silver plumage bared by the fitful gusts that come by sudden starts and then are still, although the rocky motion uncoils not his arched neck, nor unfolds the black beak which is thrust for warmth under his wing.

Without, on the frosted branches, the fieldfares sit huddled together in their feathery coats, looking with hungry eyes upon the few withered berries, black and hard, which the wintry wind has left; while, in the distance, the poor sheep pause every now and then to give a plaintive bleat, as they cease for a moment their cold labour of burrowing for food amid the knee-deep snow; for every-way the country around is covered with it, the fields are all but silent, the high roads are no longer alive with busy figures, and where the heavily laden waggon moves slowly along, it comes with a dead and muffled sound, unlike the cheerful tramp and gritty creak which grinds down the wayside pebbles into summer dust.

Few, excepting they are true lovers of nature, would be tempted to climb the summit of a steep hill to witness the strange and beautiful appearance the landscape below presents if covered deeply with snow. Ascend, and you seem as if looking over a country that is silent and uninhabited. The hedges rise, like white walls, built up as boundary lines through a vast expanse, that one way presents no other landmarks, excepting a few trees, and the black line of a winding river; all beside is one wide outstretched territory of snow. Objects which, at other times, are familiar to the eye, have assumed new shapes; the thatched roof of the cottage and the hayrick, the shed in the field and the high pile of winter-faggots, have all put on a strange disguise; and, but for the smoke which is distinguishable above the low chimney, there is no stir of life to proclaim the existence of man. To the left, the village-spires rise like a lonely monument above a buried country, which seems to tell that all below are dead; for the roads are no longer visible, and what motion there is in the little hamlet is unperceived. It seems as if it had drifted far away, and was fast sinking in the centre of a great and silent sea of snow, the church-spiro alone visible above the floating and far-off wreck.

Formless, the pointed cairn now scarce o'er tops
The level dreary waste; and coppice-woods,
Diminished of their height, like bushes seem.

What a picture of the wild and fearful winters of ancient times is presented in the name our Saxon ancestors gave to January, which they called Wolf-month: on account of the ravages made by that animal at this dreary and desolate season of the year. Then our island abounded with huge morasses, swampy wastes, lonely moors, and vast tracts of dreary forest-land, and over these snowy solitudes, in the dark midnights of winter, the howl of the wolf was heard, as, ravenous for prey, he ventured nearer the Saxon huts, and prowled about the doorway of the habitation of man. Dismal and dangerous were the paths then traversed by the lonely wayfarer, for towns and villages lay long and wide apart, and there were but few roads, excepting the long, straight, monotonous highways made by the Romans, or the broken and uncertain bridle-paths, which wound along the dangerous and precipitous banks of the rivers, or at best, in later times the narrow ways traversed by the ancient merchants, with their trains of pack-horses, who went, carefully picking their way through the storms and snow, and darkness of winter. Even now in the vast wolds of Yorkshire, and over the wild broad marshes of Lincolnshire, there exists many a miry and dangerous cross-road, where even a traveller well acquainted with the country, is, in winter, in momentary danger of foundering.

Although January is one of the coldest months of the year, it is accompanied with the consolation of knowing that the shortest day is past, and that every sunset brings us nearer to the flowery land of Spring, for on each morrow we hear the chirrup of the sparrow sooner under the eaves, and we find the grey dawning peeping in earlier and earlier at the lattice, and looking upon the earth as if to see if any bud has yet broken through its brown sheath, or whether the snow-drop has ventured forth into the cold waste, to shiver alone and wait companionless for its warmer attendant the yellow crocus of spring.

At this season of the year a bitter black frost sometimes sets suddenly in, which makes itself felt everywhere; the few green things that remain, curdle and wrinkle up as if they had been scorched, nothing seems to grow, the little hardy bud makes no progress, the earth looks as if it had changed to stone, and beneath it, nature lies dead and buried. The poor birds, as if for condolence, come nearer to the habitation of man—upon the palings, upon the garden-hedge, and about the farm-yard, we see many whose plumage is new to us, and whom hunger alone has driven from the deep seclusion of the woods.

In one bleak biting night the pond is frozen over, and, deluded by the dazzling surface of ice, the cattle, more thirsty through the dry, hard, moistureless food which forms their winter diet, hang down their heads to drink, when, instead of the cold yielding water, their hot breath comes in contact with the chilly marble-like ice, and after several vain attempts to penetrate it, they raise their heads and low piteously, nor cease until the farmer-boy either comes with a mallet or a long pole, breaks through the hard mass, and leaves them to drink their fill. Numbers of fish perish at this time of the year in the ponds and reservoirs through want of air and food, both of which it is easy to supply them with, by breaking holes in the ice, and throwing in bread, grain, or the offals of animals, for unless this is done they will soon begin to devour each other. It is a well-known fact that fish will come at the call of those who are accustomed to feed them, take food from the hand of their keeper, and allow themselves to be touched without attempting to escape, or displaying any symptom of fear. Eels will bury themselves in the mud as a protection from cold, and the carp, it is also believed, seeks the same retreat in severe weather.

Yet, under this vast winding-sheet, that seems to cover the dead, nature is still at work; the seed that remains invisible is silently swelling and bursting below, and in a few more weeks pale lines of green will show where the spring corn has broken through the furrow. The little brown rounded bud is forming, coil within coil, and will ere long thrust its emerald point from out its confined cell, as if timidly peeping forth, and waiting until the rain and the sunshine called it, to bare its broad green beauty to the breeze; for then the woods will no longer be alone filled with

Those boughs, which shake against the cold
Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.

The Winter-sleep of many animals is a wonderful provision of nature—although we are perhaps wrong in giving the name of sleep to such a state of torpor, for it is neither produced by over-exertion, nor caused by a want of repose. Some prepare for this uncertain state of slumber by storing up food against they awake, or revive—for either hunger, or a sudden change from cold to heat, or causes which are to us unknown, and against which several of our hibernating quadrupeds appear to guard, often rouse them at mid-Winter, and there is no doubt that they would perish were it not for this fresh supply of food. Some, like the dormouse and harvest-mouse, coil themselves up like a ball, and may be rolled about without evincing any sign of life while in this state—so may the hedgehog—although the latter ever assumes such a form when in danger, and presents the same lifeless appearance at pleasure, while, unlike the former, it lays up no store against Winter. The squirrel also passes a great part of the cold season in a torpid state, taking care, however, in case he should feel “the hungry edge of appetite,” to have a dozen or two of well-stored larders in readiness, which he very often finds robbed, when he comes to visit them. But no one seems to lay up such provision for Winter as the long-tailed field-mouse, which consists of acorns, nuts, corn, and seeds of various descriptions, the accumulation of many a journey, which, when garnered, and nicely arranged, is often rooted up by some hog, as he comes grunting and smelling about the ground, where this little hoarder has concealed his treasure. How he manages to pass the Winter when his house is thus broken open and robbed, we are at a loss to divine, for we can readily imagine that one who has made such bountiful provisions in his chamber, would not be able to rest long together when it is empty. The bats also hibernate, huddling together for warmth, and not only holding on the roofs, and beams, and caverns, and in the hollows of trees, by their claws, but crowding one over another, until it is really wonderful what numbers are congregated in so small a space, as they are often found to occupy. On the habits of some of these animals, we may dwell more lengthily as we pass through the different changes of the year, for now they may be compared to the seed, which, though not dead, is hidden in the earth, to appear again in due season.

There is something beautiful to a fanciful mind in the varied forms which the frost-work assumes, and although we must venture out of doors to witness the most wonderful productions formed by this strange and silent hand, still those who are too fearful of the cold, or too indolent to venture forth, may discover within doors, traces of the finger of this Hoary Worker—shrub, and flower, and leaf, as of network and cunning embroidery, all wrought in one night by this silent and unseen enchanter. What wild landscapes does he put together! mountains, and deep gorges, and steep precipices, with overhanging pines that seem ready to drop into the dark gulf below—for such are among the many wonders which this artist produces. Strange effects are also wrought by a sudden freezing shower; when the rain encloses all it falls upon, as if with a glass covering, or clings to larger objects, and hangs them about with gems of the clearest crystal, until—

In pearls and rubies rich the hawthorn show,
While through the ice the crimson berries glow.

These showers also produce a startling effect upon birds, causing them to flutter and shake out their wings to get rid of the cumbersome jewels, that only impede their free and natural motions. Yet this very power slowly produces the mighty glacier that, in its thunderous fall, shakes the whole valley into which it descends. January is considered a dead month, and in a severe winter, is one of the dullest in the whole circle of the year: still the out-of-door naturalist will find many objects to instruct and interest him, and may become acquainted with the habits of many living things which the full-leaved summer enshrines. Birds, which at other times seldom venture near the abode of man; insects, which a fine day of sunshine has aroused from a torpid state; and animals which the floods or hunger have forced from their hiding places; for even the little harvest mouse, either driven from the barn by the removal of the corn, or disturbed from its winter slumber in the earth, may sometimes be seen hurrying off through the shelter of a leafless hedge to its retreat, for

Nature in her sleep is never still.



COUNTRY SCENES.—FEBRUARY.



We oft mistake the ivy spray
For leaves that come with budding Spring,
And wonder "on each sunny day,"
Why birds delay to build and sing.

JOHN CLARE.

WINTER! still Winter! but cheered with occasional glimpses of such bright sunshine, and revealing now and then such beautiful patches of clear blue sky, that we know Spring is somewhere at hand behind the clouds, and keeps withdrawing the curtain that conceals her, to look down upon the earth, as if she were eager to return. But Winter grasps not his icy sceptre with so firm a hand as he did in January; the bleating of the young lambs alarms him; and the merry cawing of the noisy rooks tells him that his reign is drawing to a close; for sometimes he feels a rounded daisy stirring beneath his naked feet, though it is still invisible to the human eye; and all these things warn the hoary and bearded old Monarch that he must soon resign his throne, to the beautiful young Queen, who only awaits the opening of the flowers before she is crowned. Now and then he raises "his old right arm," and compels us to confess his power; but the golden crocus dazens his dim eyes, and the daisies grow larger in spite of his anger; the elder puts out a few green buds, and the willows begin to show their silvery catkins; and while he sleeps, the sunshine is ever peeping out—signs which proclaim the hour of his departure is drawing nigh; for—

Shadows of the silver birch
Sweep the green above his grave.

On fine days, the cottage doors and windows are thrown open, and we hear once more the merry voices of children in the village streets; for the sweet Sunshine who maketh all glad and innocent things his companions, hath beckoned them forth to play, though it be but for the space of one bright brief hour. As you walk down the narrow green lanes and along the broad highways, you inhale the cheerful and refreshing aroma of the fresh earth, as it is turned up by the ploughshare; and, as the healthy smell is wafted upon the breeze, you might fancy that it had been scented by the hidden flowers which still lie asleep and sheltered, beneath the ridgy furrows, and sometimes, when—

Through the sharp hawthorn blows the cold wind,

you hear the faint bleating of a little lamb, that stands shivering beside the naked hedge, looking as if conscious that its troubles had already commenced, as if fearful that it should not be able to pick up a living in such a bleak, cheerless, and flowerless world. At intervals, the lark springs up; and, although he is carried far aside by the strong wind, he boldly breasts the storm with his ruffled plumes, and tries a few notes to see how they will sound after the long silence of Winter—then descends again to nestle beside the little daisies that are just beginning to see. Now and then, the blackbird and thristle strike up a few notes from the

leafless brake, then pause, with their heads hanging aside, as if listening in wonder that they are not answered by their former companions, whose sweet voices were wont to swell out the full-throated anthem of Spring.

In the ancient neighbourhood of the busy rookery, the work of Spring has already commenced. In the trees they are building and quarrelling, in the fields they are "scratching" and foraging from morning till night. You see them close upon the heels of the ploughman; they follow the footsteps of the sower; they are ever sailing downward in search of worms or insects, then returning again to their "old ancestral trees," with an additional beam for their house, and filling the whole air around with their low, dreamy cawing, which gives such a Spring-sound to the still flowerless landscape.

Every time we walk abroad, we see the slow and sure progress which nature is making. First, a bud or two appears of a larger size; then we discover one already green; and it is wonderful, after a shower, and a day or so of sunshine, to witness the bulk to which the little ones have grown—though the last time we looked at them there was scarcely a sign to tell, that they would so soon display traces of their green beauty. The gooseberry-bush shows a dim glimmering of green, more like the reflection of a colour, than the real hue which it afterwards assumes; yet this grows bolder and brighter every day, and at last we find the full form of the leaf revealed, on a tender and tiny bud, which the sun has tempted to open. Winter, and the first dawning of Spring, afford the best opportunities of witnessing the rich effects produced by moss, lichen, fungi, or liverwort, upon the trees. Here we meet with the gaudy and mingled hues of the rich green, the glowing orange, the pale primrose, the silver grey, with browns of every tone, that go deepening down from dusky amber to the dark hue of the chestnut, until they sink into the jetty blackness which mantles the stem of the oak. Beside these, the dark green winding outline of the ivy is fully revealed, giving a Summer look to the trees it clothes, and trailing, here and there, in beautiful and slender lines, among their naked branches. The little water-runnels, which have also been silent and ice-bound during the Winter, now come tinkling down the steep hill-sides, and roll in pleasant murmurs through the dim green meadows, as if they were hurrying along in quest of the flowers. The little leaves which point out where the modest primrose will soon appear, are already visible; and in our walk through the woodland, we can discover the pale green blades which tell us that the blue-bells have already come up, and that ere long the ground will be covered with a hue bright and beautiful as the face of heaven; for every way we discover traces of that unseen hand which is busy with its silent work. You might fancy that a snow-flake still lingered here and there upon the meadows, until you find on a nearer approach that it is

The daisy scattered on each mead and down,
A golden crest within a silver crown.

You also perceive the cottagers employed in their little gardens, making preparations for the approach of Spring; the spade is brought forth from its hiding-place; seeds, which have been carefully preserved, are hunted up, and even a few of the earliest sown; while, in the garden fence, the little hedge-sparrow, not less industrious, prepares the nest which is to contain its "sky-stained eggs." Even the very changes of the weather, which seem for a time to check these operations, are silently forwarding them. The snow that occasionally falls, warms and nourishes the tender buds; the winds dry up the over-abundant moisture; mists, fogs, and rains, all bring their tribute to enrich the earth, and do His bidding, who gave us "seed time and harvest." The rank decay of vegetation—the exhalations that are ever arising—the insects that burst from their larvæ state—and the poor blind worms that burrow through and loosen the soil, are all doing their allotted work, and, though disregarded, are assisting man to prepare the soil, while

Surly Winter passes off
Far to the north, and calls his ruffian blasts;
His blasts obey, and quit the howling hill,
The shatter'd forest, and the ravaged vale;
And softer gales succeed.

Those who are not accustomed to study the habits of birds, would conclude that it is difficult for them to survive in England during our hard winters, especially such as are called the soft-billed; but were they to watch their habits narrowly, they would perceive that, outhouses, stables, holes in old decayed walls, gate-posts, the stems of large hollow trees, spring heads, which seldom freeze, places where cattle are kept up and foddered in winter, all abound in food of various descriptions, suitable to their nature; such as insects in their aurelia state, flies and spiders that have concealed themselves until the cold weather is over, and numberless insects that abound under the layers of dead leaves. The vision of birds is extremely acute, and it is probable that what we should not be able to discover without the aid of a microscope, is to them perfectly visible, and that they find food in the eggs of insects, &c., which we are totally unacquainted with.

Amongst the few birds which sing at this season of the year, is the missel-thrush, or, as it is called by the country people, the storm-cock, whose early song is considered to denote a tempest. Its favourite food is the berry of the mistletoe; and there is a superstitious notion that the seed of the berry of this curious plant, which was gathered with such solemn ceremony by the ancient Druids, will not grow until it has first been swallowed by this bird; a belief, which it is almost needless to state, is wholly erroneous. The song of no bird has called forth more discussion among naturalists than that of the missel-thrush; some even asserting that it has no voice, saving the harsh predictive note which it utters before the approach of a storm. This, however, I believe to be the cry it makes when it is alarmed, or in pursuit of its prey; for, if I err not, I have frequently heard it sing amongst old orchards in the midland counties in February, and that, although its song is much inferior to that of the thrush, or common throstle, it is loud, pleasing, and harmonious, nor do I think it is easy to mistake the bird, as it is nearly twice the weight of the thrush.

During the cold weather, the mole is busy working his way still deeper underground, for the further the frost penetrates, the lower he digs in quest of the worms which the cold has driven so far down; these are its favourite food. In the north of England, it is still called the mould-warp, mole being a common expression for soil, and warp for the earth which is turned up. Thus, the silt, or mud which is left by the tide on the side of rivers, is invariably called warp in the midland counties; the furrows in ploughed fields are also called warp; and newly-ploughed land, warp-land. I am thus particular in giving the full meaning to the word, as it is pure, unaltered Saxon; and I have no doubt that the mole was called the mould-warp, long before Alfred the Great sat upon the throne of Wessex. Those who are unacquainted with that curious structure called a mole-hill, have but a faint idea of the chambers and galleries, and courts, and streets, which branch out beneath the little hillock they so often meet with during a country ramble. The encampment of the mole is its hunting ground, its forest, its chase; in some one or another of these long, winding, underground avenues, it is sure to meet with prey; and the mole is a most persevering hunter, visiting his preserves many times during the day. It is always in excellent condition; and in the North, "fat as a mould-warp," is an old and

common saying. It is not only a great eater, but also a great drinker; and, although it is not more than five inches long, will not hesitate to attack either a mouse, a bird, a lizard, or a frog. It will even prey upon its own species, when hard driven, as has been clearly proved, by placing two in a box, without a sufficiency of food. We consider that the experiments which were made by the celebrated naturalist, Le Court, have sufficiently proved that the mole is not blind, although there is an imperfection in the development of the visual organ. The mole generally produces four or five young at a time, and even as many as seven have been found in one nest.

The carrion-crows, which begin to build at the close of this month, vary greatly in their habits from the social-building and gregarious rooks; the former are regular pirates, ever keeping a sharp look-out from the mast-heads of the tall tree-tops, and ready with their great black wings to hoist all sail in a moment, and to give chase to whatever they see passing; for, to use a homely and expressive phrase, there seems nothing either "too hot or too heavy for them." Let either a hawk or a raven attempt to board them, and they will fight to the death; and so high were their pugnacious qualities estimated, when the cruel practice of cock-fighting was in vogue, that trees were often climbed, and the eggs of the carrion-crow taken away, and those of some hen which had been brought up in company with the most celebrated game-cock in the neighbourhood, were left in the nest to be hatched, under the belief that the young cocks thus produced possessed more courage, and proved the best fighters. The carrion-crow, unlike the rook, is a very gross feeder, and will prey upon any offal or decayed animal matter it may chance to alight upon. The wood-pigeon is an early builder, and its slight, open, slovenly nest, is often found with the two white eggs shining through the ill-covered bottom, long before Spring has thrown over the naked branches its garment of green.

The starling is another of our early builders, and the following anecdote related by the Rev. Mr. Sladen, in the "Zoologist," is a strong proof of the reason, or instinct, which this bird possesses:—He states that one built under the eaves of a roof in the basin of a drain pipe, and that the young, in their eagerness to obtain food, fell out of the nest. One was killed; the remaining two he picked up, and placed in a basket covered with netting, which he hung up, near to the nest. The next morning one of these disappeared—the last one he carefully watched, and saw the old bird approach it with food in its bill; but, instead of feeding the little prisoner, she tempted it, by hunger, the sight of the food, and its attempts to reach her,—to struggle, and force its way through the netting, when it fell to the ground unhurt. She then enticed it into a corner of the shrubbery, to the very spot where she had also concealed the other young one, which had before been missed.

There is something very pleasing in looking upon the earliest flowers of Spring, in the snowdrop, the crocus, the first primrose, and the violet, that seem to stand upon the edge of Winter, coming, as it were, with timid and fearful looks, like "unbidden guests," who, instead of receiving a warm welcome, dread being driven over the threshold again by Winter; who sometimes claims to rule as host, although he hath already, in promise, given up possession to the sweeter-tempered Spring. The early flowers of Spring also bring with them sweet and sorrowful recollections; they are fraught with the memories of childhood and youth; they bring promise of brighter days, and we know that for a thousand years they have stood dreaming by the old waysides of England as they do now, for on them Time leaves not his grey foot-mark. The daisy that peeps forth at the end of February is the same, to look upon, as that which Chaucer worshipped, when, nearly five hundred years ago, he went forth, and knelt lowly by its side, to do "observance to the Spring."

Beneath the green mounds which bury the remains of many a grey old abbey, and once-stately castle, the innocent daisy still whitely waves. Time, which has, ages ago, hurled down the holy shrine and the strong battlement, has no power over the humble flower that yet blows above the ruined barbacan and fallen keep. Though he hath levelled many a proud city to the earth, and dug the graves of many a stately temple, yet Spring has again visited the spots he left desolate, and thrown over them a beauty he is not permitted to destroy.

Time came again, and so did Spring;
The sp. t once more with flowers was strown;
Nor could he see a ruined thing,
So tall and thick the buds had blown.



COUNTRY SCENES. — MARCH.



Daffodils that come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets, dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
Or Cytherea's breath!

SHAKSPER: —

MARCH is the first month that treads upon the flowery border of Spring; it is the beginning of that sunny season which again brings back the birds to our green old English woods, and calls forth the sweet buds from their hiding-places in wayside banks and upland leas, hedge-girded lanes and broad sweeps of meadow land; where the lambs are already trampling upon the daisies, while high above the lark "at Heaven's gate sings." What a burst of music will there, ere long, be in the groves and copses! What a variety of "silver-throated singers" are already on their way to join the great Spring-band, whose melody will awaken the echoes of our flower-haunted woods! For now we may exclaim with Solomon, "The Winter is past—the rain is over and gone—the flowers appear on the earth: the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."

How cheering to hear neighbour greet neighbour, over the little garden-fence, as they exclaim, "Oh! what a lovely Spring-day this is!" To walk forth and hear the gentle murmur of the bee, and to see it settling among the few early flowers which have already opened! To notice the green leaves growing longer and broader every day! and, while the village clock is chiming six, to see the red round sun rising up above the green-shouldered hill! The very streams seem as if they had broken forth into song, and were in haste to tell every flower that is asleep upon their banks, it is time to awaken—that birds are building in the bushes they have hurried past—and the small fry chasing each other around the smooth pebbles they have murmured over.

The dry winds of March come strong and thirsty, and drink up the dregs which Winter has left in the cup. But for the brisk breezes which accompany this month, many of the seeds and roots that have remained in the earth would decay and rot; and the buds, if not hardened by the nipping blast, would blow before they had retained a firm and deep hold upon the stem. If the weather is mild, the elder, in favourable situations, will by the end of the month be covered with leaves, and wear quite a green and summer-like livery; and under the shaded hedge-row the golden celandine will be found in flower, beside that modest nun, the pale-faced primrose, the smell of which is so faint, though sweet, that it is, perhaps, the most delicate fragrance of all the flowers. Under their canopy of broad rounded leaves the violets are also discovered, betraying themselves by their own pleasant smell, which every vagrant breeze seems to delight in exposing —as if the wind had but little more to do than blow aside the old withered leaves, and carry away the healthy perfume. Although these flowers generally blow not until April, yet they may often be found at the close of a mild March month. The anemone, too, that bows its beautiful silver-grey bell to every breeze, and the leaf of which is of the most exquisite form, now carpets the woodland; and no further off from London than the wood above Dulwich, it may be found in countless thousands. Equally near to the great Metropolis of England, the wild blue-bell waves and grows; and children may be seen, about the lanes near Camberwell, returning with handfuls of these early flowers, which they have travelled no far-

ther than the end of Lordship-lane to gather—but little more than an hour's journey, for a good walker, from the busy stir of Cheapside.

Now the forests ring with the heavy blows of the woodcutter's axe; and the bark-peelers are busy at work; and from the chips, the bark, the saw-dust, and the rising sap, there comes streaming upon the air the most healthy and cheering aroma that floats over the earth. It neither resembles a bed of flowers nor a hay-field, nor can it ever be inhaled anywhere but in the woods where such healthy labour is carried on. There is something very primitive and picturesque in this forest labour—we can imagine no employment more ancient—from the time when the first early settlers, the old Cynry of Britain, landed upon our island, and called it "The Country of the Sea Cliffs," hewed down the trees, and built themselves rude huts in the gloomy old woods, which the wolf, the wild boar, the maned bison, and the antlered stag, had hitherto inhabited;—even from that remote period may the occupation of the woodman be dated. We watch him at his work, and see the giant oak, that will ere long bear the thunder of the British cannon to some foreign shore, fall prostrate with an awful crash—loud enough to startle every Dryad, that

Haunted spring and vale, edg'd with poplar pale,
With flower inwoven, tresses torn,
In twilight shades of tangled thickets mourn.

Nor is it possible for a healthy man to inhale this delightful aroma, or watch these hardy foresters at their work, without feeling almost as strong a temptation as they do, to taste the contents of their baskets, and drink from the huge stone-bottles which they are ever lifting up, with bare, brawny arms, to their lips; for in such scenes as these, wholesome and homely hunger is to be found.

While rambling through the woods in a fine sunny day, at this season of the year, the snake may often be seen, basking on some dry warm bank, having quitted its Winter quarters, and come out from among the dead leaves, or the roots of the tree under which it had so long slept. It will, however, generally be found in the neighbourhood of a water-course; and woe be to the mice, birds, or lizards that first fall in its way, after so long a fast! The snake is an expert swimmer, carrying its head beautifully erect, as it glides rapidly through the water, easy as an eel. The skin which it casts off may sometimes be found turned inside out, among the thorns of a furze-bush, or in the entangling brambles of the underwood. The viper, which is the only venomous reptile that is found in our English forests, is not so common as the snake; and, when met with, is always in a hurry to escape. It is a question open to much doubt, whether any one ever yet died through the bite of a viper:—if a small portion of ammonia is swallowed, and the wound rubbed over with oil, there is but little to be dreaded from the fangs of this reptile.

Amid all the pleasant out-of-door pictures which the hand of Spring produces, not one excels that of a daisied field, in which is seen the snow-white lambs at play. There is such a Spring-sound about their bleating!—it is much more plaintive and innocent than the deep baa they give utterance to in the height of Summer. How amusing to watch some little long-legged woolly fellow, that has lost his dam! How like a child he acts, that has missed its mother, running here and there, with a low plaintive cry, and not even hearing, for the noise he himself makes, the distant answer of the old sheep, who is calling to him in the best way she can to come to her! The instinct, or reason of these "silly sheep," as we are apt to call them, is wonderful; and I cannot resist quoting an instance in proof of it, as it comes from such high authority as the "Magazine of Natural History":—"I observed a young lamb," says the writer, "entangled among briars. It had, seemingly, struggled for liberty until it was quite exhausted. Its mother was present, endeavouring with her head and feet to disentangle it. After having attempted in vain, for a long time, to effect this purpose, she left it, and ran away baaing with all her might. We fancied there was something peculiarly doleful in her voice. Thus she proceeded across three large fields, and through four strong hedges, until she came to a flock of sheep. From not having been able to follow her, I could not watch her motions when with them. However, she left them in about five minutes, accompanied by a large ram that had two powerful horns. They returned speedily to the poor lamb, and as soon as they reached it, the ram immediately set about liberating it, which he did in a few minutes, by dragging away the briars with his horns." A stronger proof of sheep possessing reason was never adduced than this: it must have been something more than mere instinct that urged the poor dam to force her way through four strong hedges. But the most wonderful of all consists in communicating her distress to the ram, and bringing him back with her. What human mother could have done more, after having endeavoured, but in vain, by her own exertions, to rescue her child from danger?

Bloomfield, after giving a beautiful picture of young lambs trying their speed with each other, down the slope and up the hillock, describes them as stopping to gather breath for a few moments, yet so eager to pursue their play, that—

A bird, a leaf, will set them off again;
Or if a gale with strength unusual blow,
Scattering the wild-brier roses into snow,
Their little limbs increasing efforts try."

There are few places in England that wear a more delightful appearance than the meadows near Nottingham at this season of the year, many acres of which are covered with the lilac crocus; and there are, I believe, but few spots in our island, where this early spring flower is found wild in such profusion. And it is a pleasant sight to see the little children "todlin" from the meadows, with their wicker baskets filled with crocuses and daisies, or to watch their actions while gathering them—how one will throw itself full-length among the flowers, and stretching out its little hands, attempt at once to grasp all that are within its reach; while another, equally happy, with its long hair blown back, sits apart, singing to itself, and strewing the lilac petals about its feet in very wantonness. In a wood, near this neighbourhood, primroses were found in flower on New Year's Day, by one of those humble poets, who goes "crooning to himself" by rural hedges and greenwood sides; and the beautiful thought awakened by the discovery of these early daughters of Spring, huddled together in the lap of Winter, must be our apology for introducing the following eight lines, written on the occasion by Samuel Plim, of Carlton:—

Old Winter came with fierce destructive sweep,
And shook the woods, and turned the green leaves ere,
When, as if wearied in his wild career,
He paused awhile, and couchant seemed to sleep:
From a southern covert, warm and deep,
Came Spring, and looked upon his front austere,
And lightly slept about like one in fear;
And where she trod, the flowers began to peep.

The poet concludes his beautiful sonnet, by stating that he took up the flowers and gave them to a fond and sorrowful mother, who planted them over the grave of a beloved child.

What a different appearance the lanes and highways now present to that which we pictured in January. You see the ploughboy seated sideways on the well-fed horse, the harness jingling at every step, and with the whip drooping idly over his shoulder, and his napless hat placed jauntily aside, he whistles and sings, alternately, some rustic lay, about the "Jolly Ploughboy, who wouldn't be a

King." You see the little butcher-boy in his blue frock, followed by his dog, a villainous-looking mongrel; now urging on the three or four lambs he has driven from the white farm house in the valley; now pausing to peep into the hedge to see if he can discover the nest of a hedge-sparrow; anon, giving a whoop and a hallo, which is often accompanied by a heavy stone, hurled with all his might, at the flock of rooks who are busy breakfasting in the ploughed field. The carrier's grey tilted cart comes rocking slowly along between the budding hedge rows, and you see the village dame seated in front, carrying to the next town her little produce of new-laid eggs and home-made butter, and calculating to herself, how long it will be before she travels on the same road with her baskets heavily laden with the first fruits of her carefully tended garden.

The wryneck, a beautifully marked bird, may frequently be seen at the end of this month busily foraging for food, amongst the ant-hills, but starting off, the moment it perceives any one approaching, and concealing itself in the bottom of the nearest hedge or ditch until they have passed. It procures its food by thrusting its long glutinous tongue into the ant-hill, and to this the insects instantly adhere and are easily and greedily swallowed. The little willow-wren, hay-bird, or ground-wren, as it is called in different parts of England, also makes its appearance about this period. It builds a domed nest, leaving a small opening near the top by which to enter. It lays from six to seven small white eggs spotted with dusky pink at the larger end. This beautiful nest is composed of moss and dried grass, wearing outwardly a neat oval shape, while the inside is carefully lined with the softest feathers. It generally builds in the hole of a bank or at the foot of a tree or bush, often under a low bush. Chaffinches, though we believe very rarely, its nest is found in a low bush. Chaffinches, which remain with us all the year, may now be seen in the fields where the sower has cast his seed. In sheep-walks and dry uplands the stone-curlew is busily engaged looking for insects and worms; this bird builds no nest, but lays its two light-brown coloured and blotchy grey flints, which, bearing a close resemblance in colour to its young ones, are of great use in protecting them from danger.

To a lover of nature it is an agreeable study to watch the habits of birds, to note down, like Gilbert White, of Selborne, their incomings and outgoings, beginning with the date of when they first appear in Spring, and are last seen before their departure in Autumn. From the earliest ages have the migration of birds attracted the attention of man. We find the turtle, the swallow, the crane, and the stork mentioned in the Holy Bible, in the book of Jeremiah, as "observing the time of their coming," and Solomon marks the seasons by the return of the singing of birds. Some come to build and bring forth their young—they then depart until the following Spring—others visit us in the Winter, and as the fine weather approaches disappear, "each knowing their appointed time." The swift seldom stays with us longer than while its young ones are enabled to fly well—the swallow has been known to leave a late brood to perish in the nest when they have not been ready for migration, so strong has been the impulse in the parent-bird to depart. Without being beholden to man for either food or home, without any preparation, saving the momentary act of spreading out their wings, they set out, and return from their long journeys—pass over mountains and seas, cheer us by their songs and delight us by their beauty, yet ask for no return from our hands. They are at once the inhabitants of the earth, the air, and the water, having all the elements at their command, without the incongruity of that heavy machinery which man is compelled to have recourse to. In their songs we discover the sound which indicate sorrow and delight, love and melancholy, the low sad wailing of grief, and that happy gladness of the heart which seems ready to burst for very joyousness—for such tones can the fanciful mind gather from their varied lays—such emotions do these "little angels of the trees" awaken in susceptible hearts. For our part, we should almost as soon think of shooting at a little child as it sat singing to itself, and playing with the lapful of flowers it had gathered, as we should at a sweet song-bird perched upon a spray, and filling the wide green vallies with its silver music. Listen to what an old poet, who was contemporary with these little choristers, has said of the delight he felt in listening to the lays of these little choristers. He was wandering beside a river, and fancied that the first bird he heard was chiding the ripples for the murmuring sound they made, which seemed to drown the echo of his own sweet song, when

There seemed another in his song to tell,
That what the fair stream said he liked well;
And going further heard another too,
All varying still in what the others do;
A little tience, a fourth, with little pain
Conced all their lessons, and then sung again:

So numberless the songsters are that sing
In the sweet groves of the too careless spring,
That I no sooner could the hearing lose
Of one of them, but straight another rose,
And perching deftly on a quaking spray
Nigh tired herself, to make her hearer stay.

—Broune's Britannia's Pastorals.



COUNTRY SCENES.—APRIL.



Cuckoo—cuckoo—ah, well I know thy note,¹
 That far-off sound the backward years doth bring
 Like Memory's lock'd-up bark, once more afloat,
 It carries me away to life's glad spring—
 To home with all its green boughs rustling.—*Summer Morning*

Upon the daisied green of April Spring hath at last planted her sunny eest, and many a sweet flower has stepped forth to form a couch for her fair form to recline upon. The leaves have grown longer to shelter her from the silver-footed showers, and many a bird that had made its home in a foreign land, has returned to welcome her with its song. Her eyes are blue as her own April skies; her cheeks dyed with the delicate crimson of apple-blossoms; her white and blue-veined neck, beautiful as a bed of lilies-of-the-valley, intersected with blowing violets, while her silken hair streams out like her own acacias, that throw their gold and green upon the breeze. Around her brow is twined a wreath of May-blossoms—pearly buds, but yet unblown. High above her head the sky-lark soars; in the lowly brake the linnets warbles; from the tall tree tops a hundred birds are singing; and she comes with music above, below, and around her. The primrose-coloured sky, the insects that hum and wanton in the air, the flowers that rise above the bladed grass, the bursting buds that are daily peeping out among the trees, all proclaim that Spring is come again.

But high above all, is heard one voice, that which the little child with its hand over its innocent forehead, to shade off the sunshine, endeavours to mock; and every hill, and wood, and vale, and river, rings out, loud and clear, like the tone

of a silver bell, the piercing note of the Cuckoo. The school-boy loiters on his way, and forgets his hard task, while he tries to imitate her voice; and grey-headed old men, bow-bent with age, uplift their wrinkled hands to their dull ears and listen to her song. Even the superstitious old grandam thrusts her hand into her huge, patched pocket, when first she hears that sound, and presses the silver coin between her fingers that she may have good luck all the rest of the year. Let us not seek to stir a leaf in that dim grove, which is hung with these old twilight superstitions.

Now is the time for the angler to be up and out by the breezy river-sides, where the tall green willows are ever swaying to and fro, and the shadows of the trees quiver and twinkle in the water, while the sunshine streams down through the network of half-expanded leaves, and chequers the ripples below, with ever-moving shadows of dusky purple and molten gold. Far out, beyond the rapid eddies, may ever be heard the fish rising and falling with a solemn plunge, and forming circles upon the water that lengthen and broaden, until the remote ripples of the expanded ring break upon the reedy shore. What numbers of calm nooks that lie like sleeping mirrors, may be found on a clear April morning between the bending embankments, at the corners of jetties, on the little table-land with

its solitary tree, which, but for its narrow neck, fieldward, would be an island, and by the deep, precipitous sides of which, the largest of the finny tribe love to shelter. Dark, cloudy pools, which the perch, the carp, and the roach frequent; haunts of the chub and barbel, and broadsided bream, whose very names call up pictures of bridges, and mill-pools, and sluices, and grey old flood-gates, opening under gloomy arches, where the long-jawed and strong-bodied pike loves to lie in wait for its prey. Of all out-of-door sports, angling is the pleasantest; if weary, there is the pleasant bank to sit down upon; the clear river to look over; the fresh breeze ever blowing about one's face; the arrowy flight of the water-loving swallow to watch; in short, all the lazy luxuries to be found together that throw such a charm around open-air amusements. Fly-fishing, it is true, leaves the angler but little time to dream; but where the old-fashioned, well-weighted float stood perpendicular, for nearly the whole hour together—where no bite came to drag it down, nor any current to carry it away, but still, calm, and motionless it stood, excepting when the breeze just stirred the slender line—there was nothing left but to gaze upon the sunny sky, the calm water, and the out-stretched landscape: to think of Izaak Walton, the milkmaid, the draught of red cow's milk, his shelter under the honeysuckle hedge while it rained, his breakfast of powdered beef and radish, the fish he ate that was fried in cow-lips, the room he slept in, that smelt so sweetly of lavender, and the flowers, which he said were too pleasant to look upon, excepting on holidays. No other amusement left while fishing in such a spot, but to call before the eye the image of that happy-hearted old angler, or to hum a verse of that joyous old song which he composed, entitled "The Angler's Wish," beginning with—

In these flowery meads would be,
These crystal streams should solace me;
To whose harmonious bubbling noise,
I with my angle would rejoice.

By the end of this month, many of the trees will be in leaf; the elm will have put on its green and graceful garment, and the oak be covered with its new foliage, whose bright red hue looks not unlike the decaying tints of Autumn. The beech, which has been called the loveliest of all forest-trees, begins to show its sprays tinged with brownish purple, and the chestnut to open its fan-like sheath; while in almost every garden the dim green leaves of the lilac are outspread, and on the ends of the boughs we can see the forms of the up-coned flowers; while over all, the emerald softness of the lime throws its shadow of tenderest green. But of all my forest favourites, for grace and beauty, for most stands the lady-like birch; although it possesses not the massy grandeur of the oak, nor the tall stately majesty of the elm, there is something so delicate in its slender sprays, in the brown and silver of its stem, and, above all, in the neatness of its foliage, that I marvel our artists do not place it oftener in their quiet pastoral landscapes. Now, the hedges are covered by the milk-white blossoms of the blackthorn, and the fruit trees in orchards and gardens are laden with loads of beautiful blossoms—the apple trees looking as if Heric's Parliament of Roses and Lilies had assembled upon the boughs. Over the cottage porches we also see the dark leaves of the honeysuckle trailing. Whichever way we turn the eye, we behold the Earth attiring herself in beauty, and from head to foot robing herself with leaves and flowers. 'Tis as if Nature called upon man to quit his walled cities and visit her sequestered haunts—to come where the buds blow and the bees murmur, and the birds are never weary of pouring forth their music; to where Imagination listens—

Attentive, in his airy mood,
To every murmur of the wood;
The bee in yonder flowery nook,
The chidings of the headlong brook.

The green leaf shivering in the gale,
The warbling bilian, the lowing vale,
The distant woodman's echoing stroke,
The thunder of the falling oak.—MILTON.

Delightful is it now to wander forth, like Solomon of old, "into the fields, or to lodge in the villages, to see the fruits of the valley, and to go forth into the gardens to gather lilies;" and, like the wise King of Israel, whose words we have here quoted, to make ourselves acquainted with all the green and living wonders of Spring. What a bleating is there now amongst the sheep along the uplands! What a delicious aroma do we inhale during a woodland walk, where the crisped leaves of the hazel overhang the pathway, and the banks, "painted with delight," are gaudy with the pale gold of the primrose and the deep-dyed azure of the blue-bell! Pleasant is it to wander amid lanes that lead nowhere, except into fields, or to the entrance of some dreamy old wood, beyond which green hills arise, whose boundary seems the sky. Past little sheets of water, which seem only made for the yellow flags and bulrushes to grow in, and which Nature with her own hand has dug there, for the birds that inhabit the woods to drink of, when they are athirst; and in these sequestered haunts you sometimes startle the black water-hen; or, if it be later in the season, you see her floating about at the head of her dusky and downy young ones, or you hear the deep splash of the water-rat, which you have frightened from his banquet, as he was swimming round and round the broken branch that dips into the pool, and nibbling a leaf here and there, just at it pleased his dainty fancy.

Now white and copper butterflies make their appearance; the emperor moth may also be seen, and the dull, low, jarring note of the mole cricket heard. The saw fly, the dread and terror of all gooseberry growers, awakens from its Winter sleep, and commences its work of destruction. Many are the beautiful names given to the butterflies and moths in the Midland Counties; such as the tortoiseshell, the primrose-coloured, the green-veined; and, amongst moths, the winter-beauty, the cross-wing, the oak-beauty, orange under-wing, garden-carpet, brindled-beauty, red-chestnut, angle-shaded, the triple-spot, the fox-moth, and numberless others, whose very names suggest pleasant thoughts, now begin to flutter about in the sunny days and warm evenings that come in with the close of April. The wood-ant makes its appearance this month: it is the largest of our British ants, and is readily distinguished from the others by the rich brown with which it is marked in the middle. Their nests are frequently found in the woods around London; and, though at first you would fancy the rounded nest was only a heap of loose litter, yet, on a closer examination, you will see it is regularly formed, and admirably adapted for carrying off the rain, and on a fine day the roof will be found all alive with busy workers. Every avenue which leads to the nest is securely closed at night, and opened again on the following morning, excepting on rainy days, when they remain within their covered habitations, and never stir abroad. If the avenues are only partially opened in the morning, it is a sure sign that there will be rain in the course of the day, for there is scarcely a more unerring indicator of the weather than may be found in watching the motions of the wood-ant.

The "household-loving swallow" has again returned, and, with the first dawn of day, we hear its cheerful twitter upon the eaves; and, however early we may set out to angle, there it is, darting through the arches of the bridge, and skimming over the water, as if its whole life was one continued holiday. Still, it is one of the most industrious of birds. By daylight it begins to build its nest, and often before the indolent slug-a-bed has arisen, it has done its day's work, for it rarely erects more than half an inch of its nest at a time; then leaves it all day, to harden and set, before commencing again on the following morning, for, if too much of the work was executed at once, the very weight of the material it uses would cause

it to fall. To prevent this, the swallow never builds up more than a layer or two at a time, and, when this is thoroughly hardened, works again upon it on the morrow. It is a pleasing sight to watch a swallow at work; to see it plastering away with its little chin, moving its head rapidly while it labours, and clinging firmly to the wall, as it works with its feet, and the pressure of its tail. Excepting when feeding its young, it labours but for three or four hours a day; the rest of its time is spent in playing with its companions, and seeking for food, which appears to form part of its amusement. These birds have often been observed in a dry season to wet their plumage, and shake themselves over the dust, which was not moist enough for the purposes of building, until they have got it into such a plastic state that it will readily adhere—such an action surely evinces a reasoning power. "One swallow does not make a Summer" is an old adage, and to see two or three skimming about, is no proof of the general arrival, and frequently a week or more will elapse, and it will be drawing towards the close of April before they are seen in large numbers. It is the opinion of most naturalists, that the old swallows—being young and inexperienced, who commence housekeeping for the first time, are often the latest in rearing their broods. There are some people who do all they can to prevent swallows from building. I number none such amongst those whom I am proud to call my friends.

To one who, like myself, has for years found pleasure in studying the works of Nature, it affords great delight to witness the number of excellent works which are every year increasing on this inexhaustible subject, no department of which seems to arrest more attention than the habits of Birds. They are indeed the ancient builders, and in their plans may be traced the grand outline of many an art, which man has only improved and enlarged upon. They are the original masons and miners, who hew their way into rocks, and make their homes in caverns, burrow in embankments, and in every way seem equal to all we know of the habits of the early inhabitants of the earth. In them we find the early carpenters, who saw, and measure, and fit, make joints, rear up rafters and beams, and throw over all a vaulted roof. They are the primitive plasterers, who mix up cement, and spread it out smoothly over the rough work they have prepared to receive it, giving to the whole a level, hard, and even surface, which the builder of a palace can scarcely excel. The hatter and the clothier but felts and weaves after their example. The basket-maker only twines into new forms the smoother and longer oslers which he avails himself of; for the brittle materials which they cross and intertwine together, would become a sightless and useless mass in his hands. Hurdis, a country parson, who lived at Bishopstone, in Sussex, about half a century ago, where he had his own press, and wrote and printed most of his truly beautiful poems, has, in his "Village Curate," left us the following exquisite passage on the building of birds:—

Mark it well, within, without;
No tool had he that wrought; no knife to cut,
No nail to fix, no bodkin to insert;
No glue to join; his little beak was all,
And yet how neatly finished! What nice hand,
With every implement and means of art,
And twenty years' apprenticeship to boot,
Could make me such another?

To watch the habits of these "little nuns," that haunt our old cathedral-like forests, is one among the many delights which come with the return of Spring—the season which of all others seems to bring with it the greatest pleasure. From the desolate and barren boundary-line of Winter, Spring advances, starting up from a bed of snow, and cold, and darkness. Summer has but to awaken, and she finds herself in a land already covered with flowers, and overhung with green leaves. Her coming startles us not; she seems to approach almost noiselessly. Nor is the rustling Autumn makes among the leaves more audible. It is Spring that, from the cold grey granite of a primeval looking world, starts up, and begins to clothe the naked waste with verdure; that arrests both eye and ear; and somehow we seem to love her better than any of the other Seasons, for we know through what a dreary and perilous waste she hath travelled; that night and day she was journeying on alone, when the snow was beating in her fair face, and the cold winds blowing upon the pale snowdrops which she held in her hand as she came along:

Before the red-cock crowed from the farm upon the hill,
When we were warm asleep, and all the world was still.



COUNTRY SCENES.—MAY.



There's not a budding boy or girl this day,
But is got up and gone to bring in May.
A deal of youth ere this has come
Back, and with whitethorn's laden home.

HERRICK.

BEAUTIFUL as May will ever be, it was a much merrier month in the olden time than it is now. Our forefathers, though brave as lions, were still children at heart: they loved all ancient customs that contributed to happiness, and considered that time well spent, which drew them closer and endeared them more to each other: they had their mustering grounds, where Wealth and Poverty often congregated on the same equal footing. May was one of the chief months in which this happy assemblage took place. The Lord of the Soil gave the tallest tree upon his estate for the May-pole; and the lowliest labourer that lived under him was for one day in the year happy, and danced around it, and loved all the more the kind master, who had gladly granted him his May-day holiday, and who, with his fair wife and lovely daughter, came down from the old ivy-covered hall to look at the rustic sport. It was a holy and kindly feeling that first established this reverence to Nature, this worship to the sovereign Month of Flowers. If, as is said, it first originated amongst the Pagans, it, nevertheless, revealed glimpses of the Great Divinity, then but dimly seen; for, distant as the approach may be, those who feel a love for the things created, will at last carry their adoration to the Creator.

Our ancestors rose with the first dawning of day, to fetch home boughs from the woods, with which they decorated the fronts of their houses, formed into green arbours, and twined into their May-day garlands. Both Spenser and

Herrick, two of our old poets, have left us descriptions of this ancient custom, which is mentioned by older writers who lived long before their names were known; and we could quote pages of beautiful passages from many ancient works, illustrative of old May-day customs—

But they are dead and gone, lady,
They are dead and gone;
And at their head a grass-green turf
And at their feet a stone.—

we have but glanced at them as belonging to the things that have passed away.

If May brought not another blossom excepting those which she hangs out upon our thousands of miles of hawthorn hedges, we should still hail her as Queen of the Year. Oh! is it not a pleasant thought to know that even "looped and wind-dowd raggedness," the poorest beggar that ever wandered in want by the wayside, now inhales a fragrance worthy of the gardens of Heaven—that around the homeliest cottage, whose thatched roof covers contented Poverty, there now spreads an aroma such as never floated into the marble halls of city palaces, such as the roses of Summer never shed. I have before, while given the rein to my fancy, described how these beautiful blossoms were first formed, in my "Poetical Lan-

guage of Flowers," from which I again copy the following lines, showing—

HOW MAY WAS FIRST MADE.

As Spring upon a silver cloud,
Lay looking on the world below,
Watching the breezes as they blowed,
The buds and blossoms to and fro,
She saw the fields with hawthorns walled;
Said Spring, "Now buds I will create,"
She to a Flower-spirit called,
Who on the month of May did wait,
And bade her fetch a hawthorn spray,
That she might make the buds of May.

Said Spring, "The grass looks green and bright;
The hawthorn hedges, too, are green;
I'll sprinkle them with flowers of light,
Such stars as Earth hath never seen;
And all through England's girdled vales,
Her steep hill-sides, and haunted streams,
Where woodlands dip into the dales,
Where'er the hawthorn stands and dreams;
Where thick-leaved trees make dark the day;
I'll light each nook with flowers of May."

Spring shook the cloud on which she lay
And silvered o'er the hawthorn-spray,
Then showered down the buds of May.

Now the woods ring again with the loud chattering of the jay, and the merry shout of the woodpecker; and the golden furze-bushes are all alive with flocks of busy linnets. The golden-banded bees are out upon the broom-covered heath, and, where the clover-fields are in flower, they keep up a continuous murmuring, like a river that ever rolls singing to itself beneath its flowery banks.

"Tirra-lirra, tirra-lirra, jug, jug, jug!" List! that is the song of the nightingale. How delightful to wander forth on a sweet May evening, and listen to that enchanting lay, while the star of eve is planted like a gem upon the forehead of the sky. Although we can scarcely see what flowers are at our feet, or distinguish the May-buds, from which such a rich aroma arises, from the leaves, we know that the tawny-brown head of the little chorister is somewhere at hand, "in shady covert hid," and will never wander far from the spot, unless captured, until the Summer flowers begin to fade. It is believed that the nightingale sings sweetest in the neighbourhood where the spotted cowslips grow; and that never, until the time of his departure arrives, can he be allured from so sweet a spot. What rapid notes; how his music gushes forth, like a stream that is eager to empty itself; he sings as if Summer were far too short for him to reach the end of his song; as if, even with all his hurry, he should not have half time enough to say all that he intended, although he came before the pearl-flushed blossoms of the hawthorn had opened. See where the bright round moon heaves up above the distant hill! Oh, who would not leave the glitter and glare of the crowded city for such a scene as this? Saving for the song of the nightingale, how still the whole landscape seems; between the pauses that he makes to regain his breath, we can hear the lapping and rippling of the river; not a branch wavers without the rustling sound becoming audible; and far off we catch the melancholy booming of the bittern—that strange, sad, and solitary sound, which, when heard at midnight, in the midst of lonely and desolate marshes, causes the stoutest heart for a moment to quail.

"Too-who, too-who!" Ancient haunter of ruins, lover of darkness, I know thy voice. Fitting abode for the owl is yonder "ivy-mantled tower," on which the moon-light is now falling; for the bower which beauty once adorned is now desolate; the floor of the banqueting-hall is now haunted by the toad, and among the rank weeds which overgrew the court-yard the red fox oftentimes shelters. From those crumbling battlements the call of the warden will never more sound.

Next to the study of birds, the habits of bees ought to rank chief amongst that of insects; those "singing masons" that build "roofs of gold," who go out with "merry March," to rob the velvet buds. How naturally comes to the mind that beautiful description of Shakspeare's, which everybody must be familiar with who reads his works. With what state the queen bee sets out, when she quits her hive; what pursuivants, heralds, outriders, attendants, who wear belts of gold, swell her train, and "go sounding" through the "flowery towns" she passes. What order rules her household, filled as it is with nurses who feed the young, and waiters who bring provisions to the builders, and busy scouts who are ever running to and fro, and carrying in food; kneaders of wax, and skillful architects, who work with mathematical accuracy, and display the greatest knowledge both in the saving of material and labour, though their work is completed in the most perfect manner. Thanks to the naturalists who have made the habits of these English "humming birds" their study, we are daily becoming more familiar with the "government" of bees.

Flowers are now abundant, the trees become more beautiful every day, and all the singing birds that visit us are now assembled in the fields and woods, and, as the old women in the country say, "it is almost a sin to stay in-doors, if we can get out;" for this is the month which our Saxon ancestors called "Milk Month;" and, from the very name, we know that beautiful English maidens rose early in the mornings of May, and went out into the very fields in which our country maids still sing, to milk their cows, just as the village girls do in our own day. An old grey-headed man once told me that he had heard his grandfather say, the hills which rise above Gainsborough, in Lincolnshire, were in ancient times called the Milk Hills; but they never retained that name after they were enclosed; and I have often thought that they bore the same name when my native county formed a part of the Saxon kingdom of Mercia; for I deeply love these old associations; for I knew that Alfred, when young, had marched over those very hills, when he joined his brother and the King of Mercia and they crossed the Trent to attack the Danes, who occupied Nottingham. May, and milk-month, and the old green milk-hills, were always in my mind associated with Alfred, and the Danes, and the destruction of Croyland Abbey, and no end of "old world histories." Nor can England furnish many prettier little pastoral pictures than a comely village girl milking a beautiful red-and-white cow under a shady tree, with a reedy pond at hand, half darkened by shadowy foliage, and, in the background,

A green English home—a land of ancient Peace.

It is not all poetry that such a scene conjures up. No; there is mingled with it visions of sweet butter and new cheese; yellow cream, in which a spoon will almost stand upright; cheese-cakes, curd-and-whey, syllabubs, and endless good things, which convince a sensible man that Taste is not confined alone to the fine arts. Fain would I present my readers with Sir Thomas Overbury's description of a "Fair and Happy Milkmaid," if want of space did not prevent me. As it is, I hope they will bear it in mind, and if they have never read it, remember that it is one of the most beautiful poetical-prose paintings in the English language. Those who have seen my "Beauties of the Country" are already acquainted with the extract. The following is all I have room for:—"She knows a fair look is

but a dumb orator to commend virtue, therefore minds it not; though she is not arrayed in the spoils of the silk-worm, she is decked in innocence—a far better wearing; she rises with the cock, and at night makes the bell her curfew. Her breath is her own, which scents all the year long of June, like a new-made hay-cock. She makes her hand hard with labour, and her heart soft with pity." So he runs on, piling one beautiful conceit upon another unto the end of the sketch.

The young corn has now risen high above the furrows, and looks like slips of green silk waving in the wind. Wild roses droop their pearl-flushed cups beneath the weight of morning dew. Along the wayside hedges, the chestnut begins to show its cones of flowers; while the laburnums stand like foresters, in their rich liveries of "green and gold." The oaks put on their new attire, but slowly, as if to show that their hardy limbs have less need to don their new clothing than their more effeminate brothers of the wood, but condescending at last to act like the rest, if it only be to shelter the birds, and keep the woodbine and wild flowers that grow around their knotted knees from withering.

What pictures now float before us—what glimpses of rural objects has that old knotted oak called up! The hawk which we once saw poised almost motionless above it—the hare we startled from the fern that grew at its feet—the gipsy camp, a few yards distant, which we first discovered by the smoke curling above its foliage—the ringdove we heard cooing, while lying idly in its cool shade—the brook that seemed to sing for a moment, and then to become silent again, just as the wind went and came among the green oak-leaves—surely, man was never intended to spend his days in walled cities, without beholding the beauty with which the hand of God has clothed the earth, to instruct and delight him.

Even a life of toil and suffering is sweetened by the remembrance of scenes like these, for they are pleasures that pass not away, but are ever stepping un- aware upon us, throwing sudden bursts of "sunshine upon the shady place," and cheering sorrow in its solitude. By my own hearth I can traverse hundreds of miles of pleasant scenery, can call up an hundred Landscapes of forest, hill, river, valley, and pastoral plain; of village, and tree, and stile; of winding high- ways and pleasant field-paths, even to the very figures that dot the scenery, and the parting boughs above my head, that let in little patches of clear blue sky; and during such rambles as these, England has seemed to be my own great freehold. If the selfish lord of the soil refused me admittance through his gate, I sought the nearest eminence that overlooked it, peeped at his deer, and his avenues, his sheets of water, where the white swans floated, and carried off in my heart images of pleasure that delighted me for days after, while he moved only before my "mind's eye," like the ill-formed scare-crow, that gave "disgrat, but hurt not;" nor did I love Nature less, because he was placed there for a time, though I sometimes sat down beside his wall, and "taxed Heaven with unkindness;" but this feeling soon passed away, my wrath reached not through fourteen lines of a sonnet.

Are our rulers aware that the miscalled tea-gardens around this huge Metro- polis, which contains two millions of human souls, are but little better than out- of-door gin-shops?—that every vendor of spirits, who can command an acre or two of land, a tree or two, a few benches, a licence, and a little "harsh-music," can, by law, half-poison, or make drunk, all who choose to call "Waiter," and have the wherewith to make themselves comfortably drunk? I believe not! Yet, what scenes I have witnessed in my rambles around these suburbs! as I have wandered an unknown wayfarer, with my stick in my hand, and sat down on the nearest bench, to my glass of ale and crust of bread and cheese; and I have sighed to think that, ere long, when the infamous Enclosure Act is in full force, these will be the only places where the future men and women of England can resort to. But then—happy thought!—our city-streets will be well-trained, and our close courts well ventilated; we shall be able to ruralize in cellars without fearing the fever; our garrets will be sweeter than gardens; we shall be delight- fully situated in the neighbourhood of Wash-houses and Model Lodging-houses; and see May with all its flowers—in the flower-pots—exchanging vegetation for ventilation, the latter an improvement truly. Would it not be wiser to divide it—to let us have a little less of the "villanous compound," and a little more of May in the country? A knowledge of the beautiful can only be obtained by an ac- quaintance with nature. We may throw open the doors of our exhibitions, and hang the walls with pictures, but if we enclose the green, rural, and out-of-door world, we shut up the reality, and all the glimpses that can be got of those cool verdurous old English nooks will be limited to such as can be seen on the canvass. To alter the language of Cowper, we may then exclaim, "Man made the town, and the artist the country," at least so much of it, as, excepting the dusty high- ways, we shall be allowed to see. Such is the wisdom of our modern Legislators.



where the half-piled rick is seen on the opposite bank; and ever from where the grass still stands uncut, comes the loud creak of the landrill, still heard at the same distance, however near we may draw, for the bird seems to glide as noiselessly through the verdure as an eel does along the water.

Sometimes during our rambles beside the river in this pleasant month, we may catch a glimpse of the otter in pursuit of its prey, now stemming the rapid current, and breaking the foam-bells amid the eddies, as he swims to and fro, then darting down in the direction of the stream with the rapidity of an arrow, or again disappearing in the twinkling of an eye, and ere one can number twenty, rising up at an immense distance from the spot where it went down, and bearing a large fish in its jaws, as it cleaves its way towards the shore; when beginning at the head, it quickly eats its way down to the tail of the fish, until the whole is devoured. The attitude of the otter in water is really beautiful; its short legs and web-footed feet, its long flattened body, and broad tail by which it can steer itself in any direction it pleases in a moment, together with its broad flat head, are all admirably adapted for swimming, and enable it to turn aside and float as rapidly under the water as when on the surface—frequently, while under the river, it will drive a shoal of fish towards the shore, narrowing the circle every time it swims round them, until, finding they cannot escape, they throw themselves out of the water, and become an easy prey to their pursuer. Sometimes, beside a quiet stream, you come unawares upon the little water-shrew, as it oars itself gently along, its black glossy back shining like velvet, looking, after it has dived for a moment, as if it was covered all over with beautiful white pearls, then in an instant as smooth, and dry, and glittering, as if its silken coat had never touched the stream. When alarmed, it either rushes into its little nest, or plunges to the bottom of the water for safety, although, if you watch narrowly, it will not be long before you see its little sharp snout and long whiskers peeping out above the surface; for it is compelled to re-appear quickly, and draw in a fresh supply of air. In beautiful contrast to its deep glossy back, its under parts are of the cleanest and clearest white; and while it swims, its smooth silky sides seem to broaden out, and its tail to shift suddenly as it turns about in its rapid motions, in pursuit of the insects that feed upon the aquatic plants, so that it is almost impossible for the eye to catch the rapid changes of its tiny rudder-like tail, as it amuses itself by swimming round and round the floating leaves that are suspended from the drooping spray. The dancing motion of the foliage caused by the rippling of the eddies, and the elegant attitude of the little swimmer, as he is borne away a moment by the current, then makes head against it in an instant, then keeps gliding in and out between the leaves of the drooping branch, form as pleasing a picture as the dreaming eye of a poet, or patiently-watching naturalist would wish to alight upon.

The blossoms are already falling from the trees, and the milk-white buds of the fragrant hawthorn seem as if rusting away, and in the waysides and gardens the flowers of Summer begin to blow, in the places of those which are disappearing with the Spring. Nor must we pass over the beauty of the grasses which are now in flower, many of them drooping and rising in the richest forms of silken tracery, plumed and pendent, here running out into the form of a beautiful branch, there resembling the most graceful foliage; and when brought home and examined apart from the gaudier-looking flowers, many will be astonished at the silken beads of the graceful quaking-grass, and the floating plumage of the downy-feather grass, and many another which for delicacy of tint, and beauty of form, are worthy of being placed beside the fairest flowers that grace our garden borders.

At the close of this month the "green-robed senators of mighty woods" are clothed in all the beauty of their Summer array, and those who wish to know what the gloom and silence of a full-leaved forest is, should penetrate its shades before the end of July, when the whole scene is shadowed with its deepest Summer verdure. They will then see in what graceful forms the dark masses of foliage hang, what beautiful effects of light and shade are to be found amongst the trees—here an impenetrable wall of branches, dark as the grave; there, the whole side of a long range of trees, fluttering in a sunlight of golden green, and descending into hues of bronzy brown, until all below fades into the deep purple hue of twilight; excepting where, bald and bare, the silver light streams down from a white and fleecy cloud, and falling upon the trunk of some giant tree covered over with hoary lichen, gives to the mighty mass a dazzling and silvery hue. For this is

Nature's ancient cathedral, where
The lute-voiced birds—burst of the summer band—
Green-hooded nuns, 'mid the blossoms sing—
Their leafy temple gloomy, tall and grand,
Pillared with oaks, and roofed with Heaven's own hand.
Hark how the anthem rolls through arches dun,
"Morning again is come to light the land."
The great world's Comforter, the mighty Sun,
Hath yoked his restless steeds the golden race to run.

The pale gold of the woodbine, and the pearly blossoms of the trailing bramble, mingled with the drooping crimson of the fox-glove, and the dazzling sunshine of the gorse, throw their beautiful masses of colour upon the green of the underwood, and lie in bright relief beneath the vaulted gloom of the overhanging branches—and sometimes you hear the lowing of cattle amid the deep umbrage, or the jingling of sheep-bells in the remote distance; sounds that come like a cheerful voice amid the silence and solitude of the forest; and sometimes you find yourself standing

Under an oak, whose antique root peeps out
Upon the brook that brawls along the wood.

And in such a spot, with a volume of Chaucer or Spenser, Shakspeare or Milton, or any other, out of a hundred names that tremble upon the point of our pen, the hours will glide happily away, and the intellectual wanderer pine for no other companionship.

The whole face of the country now wears a most beautiful appearance; here the corn is already beginning to show its ears, there the meadows are mown and cleared away—further on, the grass still stands in all its rich luxuriance of flowers. The tall bugle is in full bloom—and all the orchises, from those that resemble the bee to the butterfly, are in blossom, looking as if they were weighed down by the crowded insects from whence they derive their names.

Both in Summer and Winter, all who have narrowly observed the changes of the seasons, must have been struck by the abundant moisture found under trees. Pace only a common footpath, dry, high, gravelly or sandy, on a frosty morning after the sun has shone for an hour or so, and wherever a tree overhangs your walk, there, the ground is saturated with wet, while all beside is comparatively dry. So it is in June—in foggy weather, beneath the trees the road is a perfect puddle, when all the land around is dry as a desert, especially if it is covered with ivy. In hilly countries too, we find ponds, which are not overhung with foliage, empty and dry, while others which are shaded with branches, that are filled with water, and nearly everywhere is this the case, unless the pools draw their supplies from springs. Those who travel in the night are well acquainted

with the quantity of moisture which descends in the form of dew or fog, and that scarcely leaves a trace of its "whereabout," excepting on the trees and plants, an hour after the sunrise.

Moist and damp places naturally call up the figures of frogs and toads, "nasty things," as pretty mouths are in the habit of puckering up and calling them. I will not argue that they are the most agreeable-looking objects, nor very likely to be made pets of, though this has been done before now, and by ladies too. All I wish to prove is, that they are perfectly harmless, and inoffensive. They are beautiful leapers and expert swimmers, and I am sure I have seen frogs so exquisitely marked, that the finest lady in the land would have coveted a dress that was variegated with such rich black and yellow greens, as I have seen the frog wear. Nor is there a more useful creature in a garden than a toad—he is unequalled as a destroyer of worms and insects, and may be rendered so tame that he will take his food out of the hand of his keeper; as to its being poisonous that is a foolish idea, long since exploded. Watch a toad when it is about to seize upon an insect, and its method of attack will astonish you—the insect is, perhaps, motionless, when it first arrests the eye of the reptile—the toad sees it, and becomes motionless, also, its head drawn back and its eye fixed and bright as a star. The insect moves, and is gone, how you know not, so rapid is the action, that, however narrowly you might watch, you could not see the toad strike it with its tongue—a touch, a motion quicker than human sight, and the prey disappears. Few animals have more persecutors than the poor frog; little or big it is either the prey of bird, beast, or fish, as if it was only created to be devoured. Surely it ought to meet with mercy at our hands, for, according to the theory of the author of "Vestiges of Creation," it is more nearly allied to us than "we wot of," and Esop it will be remembered made it long ago an eloquent pleader against persecution. For my own part, I have always made it a rule during my walks, either to step aside, or wait until either the poor beetle or frog have got out of my way, or else to lift them amongst the grass, where I thought they would be safe, but never to kill either the one or the other wilfully upon its own freehold. The toads are such venerable old hermits, too; living, nobody can tell how long, in the hollows of trees, and blocks of stone, and deep down in dark coal pits; and, like the fly in amber, sadly puzzling our poor ingenuity to tell how ever they came there at all.

In a work which has just fallen into my hands, entitled "Illustrations of Instinct deduced from the Habits of British Animals," there are some striking instances almost proving that animals are gifted with a reasoning power, which, though inferior to that of man, clearly shows that they at least form a link in that great intellectual chain which extends from the created to the Creator. I have not sufficient space to do more than recommend this interesting book to all lovers of Nature. The following extract will go far to prove that, what to the human eye may appear useless or unnecessary, will be found to answer a wiser end than that of mere ornament; and I am sure my readers will look upon the gaudy plumage of the peacock with other thoughts than that it is nothing more than a "luxuriance of Nature," after reading the following brief extract:—

"The tail of the peacock is of a plain and humble description, and seems to be of no other use besides aiding in the erection of the long feathers of the loins; while the latter are supplied at their insertion with an arrangement of voluntary muscles, which contribute to their elevation, and to the other motions of which they are capable. If surprised by a foe, the peacock presently erects its gorgeous feathers; and the enemy at once beholds starting up before him a creature which his terror cannot fail to magnify into the bulk implied by the circumference of a glittering circle of the most dazzling hues, his attention at the same time being distracted by a hundred glaring eyes meeting his gaze in every direction. A hiss from the head in the centre, which in shape and colours resembles that of a serpent, and a rustle from the trembling quills, are attended by an advance of the most conspicuous portion of this bulk; which is in itself an action of retreat, being caused by a receding motion of the body of the bird. That must be a bold animal which does not pause at the sight of such an object; and a short interval is sufficient to ensure the safety of the bird: but if, after all, the enemy should be bold enough to risk an assault, it is most likely that its eagerness or rage would be spent on the glittering appendages, in which case the creature is divested only of that which a little time will again supply. A like explanation may be offered of the use of the long and curious appendages of the head and neck of various kinds of humming-birds, which however feeble, are a pugnacious race."



COUNTRY SCENES.—JULY.



Joined to the peatls of the purling rills
 Were heard the lowing herds along the vale,
 And flocks, loud bleating from the distant hills,
 Or stock-doves' plain amid the forest deep;
 And still a coil the grasshopper did keep.—Castle of Incho'nce.

To our ears, excepting the songs of the birds, one of the sweetest or summer sounds has been the bleating of sheep, and the distant jingling of their bells, mellowed by the distance, and softened by an intervening river, or a green pastoral valley that went winding round the foot of the hill, on which the flock was grazing. Sometimes, loitering along a stream, we came to a cool spot, where the overhanging trees threw down their pleasant shadows; and in the water, and along the banks, were sheep moving every way, for it was the great sheep-washing day, and nearly all the villagers were assembled. From within and without the dreamy bleating of the sheep, as they call to, or answer each other—while the lambs keep up a continuous "baa," plaintive and piteous, and are quite at a loss to discover their dams among the dripping and noisy flock that are congregated on the opposite bank. There you see the swarthy and sun-tanned sons of the soil, standing mid-way in water, their sleeves turned up, and their bare sinewy arms

half buried in the woolly fleeces of the sheep they have clutched, and which, by main strength, they souse head over ears; and no sooner is the sheep released from the hands of the first washer, and swimming towards the shore, than it is caught by a second—has another hug and a souse—is passed to a third, and then the ablation is complete. It then lands among its drenched companions, and they seem to condole with each other, and to ask, in their way, "What is this for?"

Nor is such a scene without its harmless merriment. You see some sturdy little fellow grappling with a great overgrown sheep, which he manages to get to the edge of the water, when overhead they go together, to the great amusement of the bystanders—it being almost difficult to decide which has the silliest look of the two, the sheep or Jack. The peasants on the bank, the white flock contrasting with the green trees above, and the velvet sward below, the bright water, in which the whole picture is mirrored, the village-spire seen beyond the trees, a

grey thatched cottage here and there breaking through the openings of the foliage—all make up one of those quiet English pictures, which we ever, through the "mind's eye," recal with pleasure, when we are miles away from the spot.

Sometimes, we come, unaware upon a beautiful village, that stands partly within the entrance of a wood, for so thickly are the outskirts covered with trees that it is difficult to tell where the wood begins in such an embowered and park-like landscape. In such a scene as this, sheep-washing forms so sweet a picture that we envy the power of an Inskipp or a Collins, and sigh because we cannot carry a sketch of it away with us. The cottage-roofs and chimneys are covered with rich liver-worts, fungi, and lichen, of every gorgeous hue, that harmonize beautifully with the stems of the surrounding trees; yet are just rendered distinct enough, by a white-washed or red brick wall, the air which falls upon a diamond-paned window, or the smoke circling up, grey or blue, amid the green, to tell us that many a peaceful English home is nestled amid that "land of ancient trees." In such a spot, you fondly dream that old customs are still kept up—sheep-shearing feasts and harvest-homes, such as we read of in the Holy Bible, and such as David himself witnessed on the sunny slopes of Palestine.

It is now high Summer everywhere; in the deep woods and beneath the shady hedge-rows, in dell and dingle, where a twilight reigns at noon-day, her warm breath has penetrated, and her growing showers fallen. Wherever a root lay buried, or a tiny branch was hidden, there she has been, and hung them over with leaves and flowers; for it mattered not to her whether the eye of man fell upon her beautiful workmanship. There the red fox-gloves hang out of their speckled bells; while, overhead, the woodbine throws its trailing banners of floating green, and pale and ruddy gold. By the water-course, we inhale the fragrance of the meadow-sweet, that mingled aroma of hawthorn buds and new-mown hay—for such is the perfume with which this Queen of the Meadows enriches the passing breeze. Then, over all, comes that drowsy overpowering fragrance from a bean-field in full blossom, the very smell of which conjures up images of the fields of Enna and Proserpine among the flowers, which, affrighted, she let fall. On the banks and the hedges, the gracefully-formed convolvulus climbs and twines; and, in the fields, up the tender grasses, the same beautiful flower rears its pinky head, as it entwines the stems, and throws out its delicate scent. The briony, too, throws round everything it comes near its glossy trails, winding quite a contrary way to the convolvulus, as one turns towards the sun, and the other from it. Wherever the eye alights, the ground is covered with flowers, many of them entirely different from what we saw enamelling the banks and waysides at Spring, and looking as if Summer was at a loss which to wear upon her brow, amid such a profusion of beautiful wreaths;—sometimes growing in spots where

The silence there by such a chain is bound,
That even the busy woodpecker makes stiller by her sound
The inviolable quietness—

little nooks, where, above our heads, the grey clouds sail away to the far-off hills, as if they were hurrying off to other worlds beyond the horizon, and had only deigned to look down for a moment upon the lovely valley, in which we were idly resting, while looking at the flowers; spots which seem shut out from the world, as if the silence were never disturbed by anything louder than the murmuring of the stream, the rustling of the leaves, or the faint low whispering of the russet-coloured grasses—where green things only grow and wave. For now but few birds are heard, though all are not yet silent—the nightingale has ceased to sing; the cuckoo has left us; and, excepting in the cool morning hours, or when the evening shadows begin to lengthen, we hear not that woodland burst which went sounding through the flower-opening April, and the hawthorn-breathing May; for in the burning noons of July—

No warbling tongue
Then talked unto the echo of the groves,
Only the curled streams soft chidings kept,
And little gusts, that from the green leaves swept
Dry Summer's dust, in fearful whispering stirred,
As loth to waken any warbling bird.

Only the grasshopper—that sweet prophet of the summer—as old Anacreon called it—keeps up "a coil" among the green leaves that shelter it when

All the birds are faint with the hot sun,
And hide in cooling trees.

Often while looking for summer flowers in the hedge-bottoms and among the ditches you will discover the little hedgehog foraging for insects or snails, and if he find he has not time enough to escape he will roll himself up in a ball with his round bristly coat, like a person who is resolved to stand his ground and meet the worst, whatever that may be, until finding, as he thinks, the danger over, he will again uncoil himself and resume his task, searching for frogs, toads, or even mice; for it is only in such shady places that you will meet with him in the day-time, as his favourite feeding time is in the night. What naturalists assert about its sleeping under an old hedge in Thonock-lane, near Gainsborough, one summer afternoon, tied it up in a handkerchief, brought it home, and kept it a long time on bread and milk, vegetables, or whatever came to hand, for scarcely anything came amiss to it. It is true that it sleeps throughout the winter, but, unlike the dormouse, it is not liable to be awakened by an occasional fine day, neither does it lay up any store of food; but, rolled up into a perfect ball which you might throw many yards without the animal once uncoiling itself, it sleeps securely through frost, snow, wind, or rain, in its little nest, beneath the hollow root of a tree, or some old rabbit burrow in a hole of the bank.

The early garden fruits are now in great perfection—the glossy black currant that hangs like rounded beads beneath its covering of fragrant leaves; the huge gooseberries that scarcely can contain themselves for very ripeness within their glittering green, or red and hairy husks; red and white currants that hang like coral and pearl pendent and gracefully from their broad-leaved boughs; and strawberries that hide under every leaf they can find to shelter them, are all ripe, and ready for the lascivious banqueting table of Summer.

Now one of those rural pictures which artists in almost all ages have tried their hands upon, may frequently be seen where a clump of trees overhangs a pond, a stream, or some quiet shadowy pool which the sunbeams can scarcely penetrate. In such a spot may a group of cattle of various colours frequently be seen, standing almost motionless, excepting for the lashing of their tails to and fro, to drive away the swarm of buzzing insects, which are incessantly hovering around and alighting upon the horned herd.

They stand
Each in his place, save when some wearied beast
The pressure of the crowd no longer brooks,
Or, in mere vagrant mood, her station quits,
Restless.

The rye now wears a ripe and yellow look, and the horned barley makes a rustling sound, as its long plummy ears are blown together by the breeze. A white and quivering light plays over the pendulous oats, and the green upon the wheat

becomes whiter and paler every day—all silently proclaiming that the time of harvest is near at hand. The little mole-hills are purple and fragrant with the aromatic odours of the wild thyme, and the rich heath, the Summer livery of treeless hills and mountains, now looks like a crimson carpet which Nature has spread out for the honey-gathering bees to walk upon. All these, which are stretched out in countless millions before the eyes, scarcely do more from their very profusion than arrest the passing glance for a moment. Yet let us take any one, no matter how common, and examine it minutely, and we shall be struck by the grace and beauty of its form. Even the wayside elder, that throws its flowers over almost every stagnant ditch and dusty hedge, whose cream-like bunches of flowers we just glance at, and then pass on, if examined separately, will be found beautifully constructed: draw off a separate blossom, place it upon the palm of the hand, and you will see a marble-looking tripod, standing upon its ivory feet, and presenting an exquisite concave, a five-starred cup of pearl, a beautiful form which the hand of man has not yet imitated, and such as strikes but the eye of the poet, as he lies idly dreaming upon the grass, picking up, in his lonely mood, the nearest buds which the breeze blows within his reach. Nor is there a more beautifully-marked flower in the garden, than the pencilled geranium that grows wild, or any flower that wears a more delicate golden hue than the yellow, wild, wayside snap-dragon.

In green lanes and quiet shady places the blue speedwell is still seen lingering, as if loth to shake off its azure flowers; as if it still stood listening to the lispings of the young birds which were beginning to climb and flutter among the green hedgerows. The centuary, with its pink-starred flowers, now also puts forth its elegant bloom; and the tall wood betony heaves up its rich rose-hued blossoms above the scarlet cup of the time-keeping pimpernel, which opens its lowly but dazzling flowers at its feet.

When the streams are low through the summer droughts, many curious insects may be seen in the water, which would escape the eye when the runnels are swollen with the rains of Winter and Spring. Some of these form curious habitations of stones, shells, hollow seeds, straws, even mud and small particles of wood, which they cement together, forming a vaulted roof, or pent-house, over their heads, and with their buildings on their backs they move about in the little world for which Nature has adapted them, accomplish the ends for which they were created, and then die. Amongst these, stand foremost the caddis-worms, which compose the little cube-like cells they inhabit, out of stones, with all kinds of irregular angles, and such as would baffle the skill of any human architect to fasten together. Yet, all this is done by the little caddis-worm. The smooth side of every stone is placed in the interior, and the whole mass secured together by a cement which the water has not the power to dissolve. Even the portion of the body of the worm which is exposed, is hard and firm, while that part which the cell covers is soft; for so has Nature defended this curious insect. To an unappreciated eye, the whole of this wonderful structure would present only the appearance of a piece of reed or straw, which the water had discoloured, while the Naturalist would find in it the little insect, and the perfect habitation formed of many a loose particle as I have described; and which is so smooth and even at the bottom that the tiny architect can move about with its little house upon its back with ease.

The common stickle-back also forms a nest in which it deposits its eggs, and covers them up. The nest is formed of minute particles of straw, or wood, is not larger round than a shilling, while the ova, which scarcely exceeds the size of a poppy-seed, is of a bright yellow colour. Another of this species, called the fifteen-spined stickle-back, forms its nest, and deposits its ova in the sea-weeds, which are found suspended from the lower parts of rocks, and which the fish binds together by a white slender thread that resembles silk; and, wet or dry, it stands the action of the wind and sea, and keeps the eggs secure within, either when left dry or while tossed about by the violence of the waves. These eggs have frequently been taken, placed in water, and kept until the small fry have come forth.

The seed that falls upon the ground, again to spring forth in a new form—the rounded dew-drop that feeds the flower—the withered leaf, which the Autumnal rain decays, and forms into a rich nourishment for the buds of the following Spring, though disregarded by us, are all accomplishing their silent mission, and turning round that mighty wheel "on which the seasons roll."



COUNTRY SCENES.-AUGUST.



Thou shalt hear
 Distant harvest carols clear,
 Rustle of the reaped corn;
 Sweet birds antheming the morn;
 Acorns ripe down-pattering,
 While the Autumn breezes sing. KEATS

The dark green leaves that garlanded the rosy Summer, now begin to show upon their edges the waning yellow of Autumn; and on the skirts of the forest we can trace those rich hues which are too crimson to live long; that rise like the flushed roses on the consumptive cheek of the lovely maiden, looking too beautiful ever to be allied to death. In the oak, the elm, the chestnut, and the fir, we see the gloomy green, the burnished bronze, the fading yellow, and the dull red, lighted up between with masses of foliage that glitter like gold, all mingled and blended together so richly and harmoniously, that, in the distance, we cannot tell where the dusky green begins, nor the rounded yellow fades away; for leaves of all hues are now fast falling; the most beautiful to form a couch for Summer to lie down and die upon, while others remain behind until they are withered and shrunk by the cold and hollow winds of Autumn, then fall and bury her after she is dead. But there is yet work to be done in the fields; the great harvest has to be reaped and garnered; and now the sun-tanned sickle-bearers sally forth into the fields to cut down the golden grain which the Summer sun has ripened.

Pleasant is it to climb the verdant slope or some gentle hill that goes down with an easy descent into the valley, as if it had paused on its way to make a smooth slope here; and, lower down, to leave a little upland, as if it had there rested awhile, before it threw out the broad valley at its feet, leaving steps by which the wanderer might climb in after years, and view by degrees the beauty of the workmanship of those invisible hands. Delightful is it to ascend these table-lands; one after the other, to pause upon each easily-gained height, to raise ourselves just above the first corn-field, where the busy reapers are already at work, their rural and picturesque costumes forming a beautiful contrast to the yellow-waving and wide-spread field—to watch them half buried a moment amid the drooping ears, then to see figure after figure slowly arise, and the ripe corn tied with twisted bands into rounded sheaves, until, at last, the heavy shocks are gathered, and, above, the stubby and furrowed lands heave up at equal distances little stacks of eary corn, which, with their ten thousand of plump heads, are still looking cheerfully up towards heaven; then to climb the next range, which commands a view, wide out across the valley, and to see

patches of green and yellow in alternate contrast, dotted with gleaners and reapers—men, women, and children—sprinkled over the landscape, where horses are moving, and waggons laden with corn, grind down the ridgy glebe, as they rock like ships upon a sea, over the uneven furrows, and, like them, seem to roll along without a sound; for neither the creaking of wheels, nor the tramping of hoofs, is heard from the green slope which we have ascended. Nearer at hand, yet still far out below our feet, we behold the thatched grange, peeping from its little nest of trees, and can see the long or rounded stacks slowly rising higher, as the waggons come full and glide away empty; for there are human figures busy upon the corn-ricks; and the end of the bough, which, but a few minutes before, seemed resting upon the sky, is shut out by the piled sheaves which rise up so slowly and silently, that we can just perceive them grow, by keeping the eye riveted upon the increasing pile.

Higher we climb to the topmost ridge, where the eye ranges over the whole outstretched scene, to where afar off the distant hills melt dimly into the sky; and the soft outline is lost in the silvery mist of the clouds. A spire and village, a lonely grange, that seems to have wandered away by itself into the fields, are all mapped out beneath our feet; and the long hedgerows that bound the green pastures seem but higher masses of taller grass, with here and there a bush arising above them, for so are the trees dwarfed by the vast distance from which we gaze; and where between the corn-fields the same dark boundaries run, they look like little banks of green rising in Spring along a yellow fallow, a sunlit land, upon which no green thing bath as yet sprung up; amid which little cottages occasionally arise, whose sloping roofs seem almost to touch the verdureless ground, so deeply are they buried in that ocean of golden corn; and sometimes the head of a human figure peeps up, then is lost again, as if something dark was washed slowly along, above the dreamy and yellow waves. But we must descend, and thread our way through the narrow lanes, where the high hedgerows have taken toll of the laden waggons as they passed; and here and there hung their boughs with drooping ears—a feast for the few birds that yet linger behind, and occasionally cheer the fading green of their summer chambers with a song. Up comes the great rumbling waggon, filling up the whole road above and below, and we are glad to scramble up a bank, or shelter in a gateway that leads to some field, to let it pass; or we meet it at the turning of a village, see the reflection of the sheaves cast for a few moments upon the cool bright pond; it then passes on by the low grey churchyard wall, where death is ever slowly gathering in his harvest;—round the two yew-trees which stand like gloomy sentinels at the gate, under the tall coffin-looking elms that shut out the turning of the road, and then is lost to the sight.

Now the broad fern arrests the eye with its russet-coloured leaves; and in shady places we find rich groups of fungi and agarics, stained with the deepest orange, rich crimson, gold of the clearest hue, spotted and sprinkled and starred with silver, and clothed in gaudier colours than the richest flower that ever opened its fragrant petals to the sunshine. Others again lie like huge snow-balls among the grass, as if some tiny urchin had rolled them there on the previous winter, and the giant bulk, which far outgrew his strength, had not yet melted away.

The autumn-croons, which our ancestors set so much store by, as it supplied them with the saffron they used in dyeing, is now in bloom; and, in moist shady places, the wild mint may be found, with its round and lilac-coloured flowers, which fill the air around with an overpowering fragrance, and are musical with the hum of hundreds of congregated bees. The lavender, also, puts forth its twilight blossoms, looking, when in flower, like a vast moorland covered with heather, over which the last sun-ray is fading before the night drops down; for so does the sombre purple blend with the pinky hues, that throw a shifting and uncertain light over a lavender-field in full bloom. By the dry banks where the little green grasshopper still chithers, the blue and graceful harebell now blows; its delicate and azure cups trembling at every dallying breeze that breathes, as if they were ever afraid of being torn away from the fragile stem. On the waysides, we meet with the large ox-eyed daisy, that grows side by side with the gandy poppy, and where, saving the wild tansy, no other green or flowery thing shoots up amid the arid and broken ground. Wherever we look, we see the tall, golden rod, baring its yellow flowers to the sunshine; and, below, the beautiful eye-bright, nestling like an insect among the grass, its white wings interlaced with streaks of green and gold. In the corn-fields we find the rich red-coloured pheasant's eye, which our great-grandmothers called rose-a-ruby, and considered one of the most beautiful of Summer's last flowers. By the sides of streams we find the arrow head, gazing tranquilly at its own shadow in the water, as if like Narcissus of old, it was never weary of looking upon its three-leaved white pearly flower, with its eye of purple and gold. Our old favourite, the pimpernel, is also still out, counting the hours, which the meadow sweet still lingers behind to cheer with its perfume as they pass. In the hedgerows we find the green and crimson berries of the woody nightshade, hanging in bright and gushing clusters among the purple flowers which are still in bloom; while the ruddy hawthorn-berries begin to appear, as if May had carried with her all her delicate pearls, and Autumn, in remembrance of her loveliness, had hung the bowers her beauty once adorned, with pendant rubies.

The nest of that smallest of all British animals may now occasionally be found securely attached about midway to two or three corn-stems; for so small and light, and graceful is this little animal, that it can run with ease up the rounded straw without shaking the heavy ear that surmounts it. Two of them, when full-grown, will scarcely weigh a quarter of an ounce; and the nest, which you might enclose and shut up in the palm of your hand, is almost as round and perfect as the ball which has been turned in a lathe; and though sometimes containing as many as eight or nine young ones, may be rolled across a table without decomposing a single blade of grass or leaf of which it is formed. How this tiny creature contrives to give nourishment to so many young ones, crowded, as they are, in so small a compass, was a puzzle to that clear-headed English naturalist, Gilbert White, and he came at last to the conclusion that she must make holes in different parts of the nest, and feed them one at a time. If kept in a cage it will feed upon corn, lap water like a dog, and amuse itself like a white mouse or a squirrel, by turning round a wheel. From the head to the tail it scarcely exceeds two inches in length. Among quadrupeds it may be classed as the least and most beautiful, as the humming-bird is amongst the feathered tribes.

Swallows, at the close of this month, begin to assemble by the sides of rivers, and prepare for their departure. There is a noise from morning until night amongst the willows. They are ever wheeling to and fro in search of food, then returning to the same spot, when the evening shadows begin to darken, to roost. They seem as if loth to go, yet are afraid to remain. There is an evident uneasiness amongst them, like tenants who have received notice to quit, and can no longer look upon the houses in which they have passed so many happy hours as their own. The sweet rivers and green meadows of Old England have still a charm for them, and fain would they, were it not for our bleak Winters, remain with us all the year. So have we interpreted their twitterings, as we have watched them for hours in our younger days, while idling happily along the banks—now throwing in the line where we saw the fish playing—then stooping down to gather some beautiful autumn flower; or listening to the sounds which were

ever falling upon the ear, while we exclaimed—

How sweet those rural sounds float by the hill.
The grasshopper's shrill chirp rings o'er the ground,
The tinkling sheep-bells are but seldom still,
The clapping gate closes with hollow bound;
There's music in the church clock's measured sound.

"It is now," says the "Mirror of the Months," that debateable ground of the year which is situated upon the confines of Summer and Autumn; it is dressed in half the flowers of the one, and half the fruits of the other; it has a sky and temperature all its own, which vie in beauty with those of the Spring. May itself can offer nothing so sweet to the senses, so enchanting to the imagination, and so soothing to the heart, as that genial influence which arises from the sights, the sounds, and the associations connected with an August evening in the country, when the occupations and pleasures of the day are done. There is no delight equal to that felt by a true lover of Nature, when he looks forth upon her open face silently, at a season like the present, and drinks in that still beauty which seems to emanate from everything he sees, till his whole senses are steeped in a sweet forgetfulness. The whole face of Nature since last month has undergone an obvious change. Everything is still green; but it is not the fresh and tender green of Spring, nor the full and satisfying, though somewhat dull green of Summer; but many greens that blend all those belonging to the above-named seasons.

There is a peculiar beauty about the fields at the close of August, where the hay has been cleared off early, and the second crops of grass have sprung up. They look like a rich green velvet carpet, for there are now but few flowers to break up the sweep of the smooth emerald surface. On the trees, too, we behold a new crop of leaves, as tender and delicate in hue as those which first burst from the buds and trembled in the mild breezes of May. It seems as if the foliage of Summer and Spring were blended together, for the buds wear the same pale April green. At a first glance, the young leaves do not strike the eye; you imagine that the sunshine falls brighter upon these patches of foliage, until you see that it is impossible for the Sun-rays to light up the branches in such a direction; and it is then that you discover this new bursting of tender leaves—that you have found out "a new delight."

Nothing can exceed the beauty of the sky at this season of the year. The deep blue of boasted Italy cannot surpass the azure vault in which the silver clouds now seem to lie and dream, while the sunsets of Autumn are magnificent. And as we gaze we call up those visionary palaces which rise up in the pages of the Arabian Nights, and almost fancy that we see thrown open, the great ruby-pillared and golden gates of heaven. And the moonlight, though no longer cheered by the dulcet harmony of the nightingale, has a peculiar charm at this season; nor is there a grander object than the broad round harvest moon, heaving up bright and full above high green-shouldered hills, while

All heaven and earth are still, though not in sleep,
But breathless, as we grow when feeling most.

The ladybirds are now seen in hundreds; and this last summer, clouds of them came over from the coast of France, and were swept from off our piers into the sea. There is also a beautiful little blue butterfly now abroad, that goes flitting like a pea-blossom from flower to flower, and sometimes seems to mount the harebell as if only to rock itself for a few moments, and then again depart to alight upon the distant heather. Sometimes the woodlark rises in this "season of mist and mellow fruitfulness," singing like the lark in Spring, as it soars. Nor is the rich-toned blackbird, nor the speckled thrush, as yet silent; while the linnet and whinchat keep up their merry song, as if Summer, instead of departing, was only just making her appearance. But this chorus only breaks out when the weather is unusually fine, and the month of August in its infancy. Amongst moths, the spotted wood-leopard may now be seen; and the goat-moth, whose larva pierces the knotted ball of the giant oak, is now abroad; while the splendid tiger-moth expands its gorgeous wings; but these are only to be found in spots where

the birch
Displays its glossy stem amidst the gloom
Of alders and jagged fern, and evermore
Waves her light pensile foliage, as she woo'd
The passing gale to whisper platitudes.



COUNTRY SCENES.—SEPTEMBER.



With ruddy fruit the orchard now is hung;
The golden hop droops pendant in the breeze.
For Autumn from her ample hand hath thrown
Her richest treasures on the laden trees.—*Hæthoradale Revisited.*

AUTUMN, yet with her hand grasped in the feeble clasp of Summer, as if the latter was loth to depart, while there is still so much green hanging about the woods, and so much blue and sunshine about the sky and earth. But the leaves are rustling in the forest paths, the harvest-fields are silent, and the heavy fruit that bows down the branches, proclaim that the labour of Summer is ended—that her yellow-robed sister has come to gather in and garner the rich treasures she has left behind. Beautiful are the old English orchards during this month, with their gnarled and twisted branches, and moss-covered stems, standing upon a thick carpet of grass, that looks green all the year long—a verdant sward, spread purposely for the fruit to fall upon, when they have drunk in their fill of mellowness, and dyed their cheeks with the rosy hues of the sunshine. Pleasant is it to look upon these fine old deformed trees, whose shoulders are round and backs are bent, through the heavy loads which they have borne year after year, and who still seem to glory in their hale and hearty old age, and to boast of the weighty burthens which have sunk their grey old heads, yet still left such sunny streaks behind. What forgotten feasts have they supplied! What old-fashioned,

heavy, oaken tables have they helped to furnish, sending forth, a century ago, high-piled dishes of rich, ruddy, and golden-rinded fruit to the happy guests, who now lie in the village churchyard, opposite the moss-covered orchard wall—yet so near, that Spring sometimes blows her blossoms upon their graves—perhaps on the narrow bed of the “grey forefather” who first planted that hoary stem. What sweet faces have looked up from beneath those aged boughs! What merry voices have sounded within that ancient enclosure! The gladsome shout of childhood—the silvery laugh of the modest maiden—the deep-chested chorus of the bluff old farmer—all met to gather into the dry and wide store-rooms, the weighty fruit that ever came of its own accord, and neither asked for man’s attendance or labour.

Now rustic groups may be seen wandering far away to the woods and sunny lanes, to gather blackberries and nuts; and these are amongst the pleasantest of all Autumn excursions. What wild places do we sometimes stumble upon during these rambles! Some such we have now in our eyes, which we visited years ago, which we had to make our way to through narrow paths, hemmed in with

broad fern and prickly gorse bushes, many of which rose high as our heads—for they had never been cut down within the memory of man. And every now and then we came to the old hedgerows, covered with golden and silver-coloured moss, and dark through the clouds of sloes and bullaces that grew above, and the huge carved-like ebony blackberries that hung below. There are few such hedges to be found now; for many and many a year had they grown on, and no one had heeded them. The bramble had spread out before, and the sloe bushes behind; and the hawthorns and crab-trees had gone on deepening, Summer after Summer, until the hunter was compelled to draw his rein when he approached them; for they had at last formed such an impenetrable barrier, that neither

Dint of hoof, nor print of foot,
Did mark that wild luxuriant soil—
No sign of travel or of toil.

What haunts were these for the Naturalist! Here he might rest concealed for hours, and watch the habits of beasts, birds, and insects—see them feed, build, and burrow—lead forth their young from spray to spray—and note a many things which are now slowly finding their way into books. Such spots called up the England of ancient days, when the skin-clad Briton, with his javelin in his hand, and his long hair blown back, pursued the chase through the wooded wilderness; ages before the Roman galleys had ploughed up the sand on our storm-beaten shores. They filled the mind with poetic images, such as seldom float before the eye in walled cities—such as only rise up where Nature still reigns in all her primitive grandeur. I rambled through them, and dreamed of the old Autumns which reigned over England a thousand years ago—pictured the forests which Harold marched through, when he met William of Normandy on the field of Hastings—and heard the tramp of the Saxons as they passed for the last time over those ancient fields.

'Twas a wild spot; for there old legends say,
In former days, a Druid's altar stood.
And huge, grey stones are stretched out every way
Among the moss-grown stems of that wild wood.

This is the month that partridge-shooting commences; and many an eager sportsman now hurries off to the empty corn-fields, to waken those echoes which, but a week or two ago, rang back the song of the reaper, with the roll of his murderous gun. Not, we trust, that all are tempted by the work of destruction alone; for we believe that numbers go with as keen an appetite for the beauties of nature as we ourselves possess. Yet there is something very spirit-stirring in this manly sport—in the attitude of the dog as he throws up his head, and makes a dead stop—in the pleasure with which he sets out to seek the bird after the shot is fired. After all, I prefer seeing the old birds at the head of their young ones, as they half fly and half run, about the close of Summer, hiding themselves among the corn or long grass, until the intruder has passed. I never looked upon the beautiful plumage, so richly diversified with brown, black, and ash-colour, without regret, when I saw all these mingled hues dabbled with blood; to me it was ever "a sorry sight."

Hop-picking is about one of the last, and the most beautiful of rural employments. There is something so green and clean about a hop-plantation, and such a soothing aroma arises from the smell of the bine, that it seems like the last sweet smell that Summer has left behind. Nor can anything be more graceful than the drooping vine-shaped leaves, and the golden cones, that have twined in all kinds of fantastic shapes around the tapering poles. What picturesque groups do we see at work! What a gipsy-like emppment has every little family formed! While picking, washing, cooking, and nursing all go on together in harmony at the same time. And a pretty picture did we once see of an innocent child, asleep in its little crib—while in its rounded face the shadows of the hop-leaves flickered and played in the trembling sunbeams—

Like the last smile of Autumn,
Beaming above the yellow woods.

I have often fancied that a herd of deer never appear more beautiful than when seen, amid the changing foliage of Autumn, either standing or lying down. They harmonise with the brown russet hue of the fern, above which their lofty antlers and graceful necks arise with a forest-like majesty—all in keeping with the rich and varied tints of the verdurous roof above their heads. How stately they seem to march between the broad avenues of trees; and how fine is the attitude when, with outstretched neck, one pauses to reach the red cluster of hawthorn berries, which just sweep below the tips of his antlers. But, above all, how beautiful to see them crossing a sheet of water, that spreads out like a mirror in some ancient English park.

We now see riding leisurely upon the air the light and graceful downs of the dandelion and thistle, gliding noiselessly along, like transparent and winged insects, now alighting for a moment upon the leaves, then floating away high up in the clear air, until they become invisible to the eye. Spanning from branch to branch, we see the light, silken network of the spider bending in the breeze, while the little mechanist sits safely in the centre of his own mazy structure, his airy walls beaded with pearl—for such seem the rounded dew-drops that glitter on the star-like points of the closely intersected wheel on which he rests. We see the bee moving drowsily and listlessly along, like a weary traveller who almost despairs of reaching his next resting-place, so wide apart now lie the road-side flowers—those beautiful half-way houses which he met at every step, as he went singing merrily on his way through the land of Summer. Hope, who looked with a cheerful countenance upon the landscape of Spring, has departed; instead of watching each green and flowery object day by day as they budded and blossomed, we now see only the traces of slow and sure decay, the green fading bit by bit, until the leaves become like the skeleton wings of an insect, the wind blowing through those places which were before marked with azure, and crimson, and gold. The Sun himself seems growing older; he rises later from his bed in the morning, and returns to rest earlier in the evening, and seems not to have that strength which he possessed when he rose in the youthful vigour of Spring, and the bright and cheerful manhood of Summer; for his golden eyes seem clouded, and his breath thick and heavy, as he struggles through the surrounding fog. All these are marks of the seasons, telling us that the year is growing grey, and slowly tottering towards the darkness and grave-like silence of Winter.

But September brings with it one great rural holiday to those who keep Nature's carnival, and enjoy the changes of the seasons. To us, who dwell in the neighbourhood of old woods, our Nutting-day was an excursion often talked of for weeks before it arrived. It was the pleasantest of all our gipsy feasts, for it was held in the centre of a wild wood, in one of Nature's own summer-houses, in a bower, not by art,

But by the trees' own inclination made.

A spot which, even to reach, we had to pass through one of Earth's Paradises; for never did more beautiful hills rise up above a pastoral country, than those we ascended on our way to the woods. No grim board ever disgraced those ancient oaks, warning the lover of nature not to trespass; for, excepting the underwood, and the wild fruits, there was nothing we could have carried off there,

for the bole of the smallest tree would have been a load for half a dozen horses. Game we meddled not with, and this the old Squire well knew; we trampled nothing down but the entangling thicket, bramble, and sloe, and hazel, and wild rose, which generally took toll of our drapery as we passed, giving a scratch for a pressure, and a rent for a tug, which only increased our merriment the more. There was ever some lady's shawl to disentangle; some heavy and well-filled basket to extricate from the bushes; a long rent to pin up; a trailing brier to cut away, before we could pass further; a brook to leap, and a circle to take, which sometimes only led to more impenetrable shades; a stray companion to hunt up, whose "whereabout" was only known from the direction in which the voice came, for these petty perils were the very charms of Nutting. What stooping, and creeping, and pulling, and dragging, was there, where neither gig nor chaise could move a foot, unless the wild underwood and weeds had been cleared. Then what a beautiful glade we at last came to; one which the foot of man had seldom passed; which the richest carpet that was ever spread out never exceeded in softness—the very turf was elastic; it had been formed by the fallen leaves of many centuries. And the oak that stood in the centre! You marvelled how a single stem could bear such majestic branches; for Architecture, with all the skill and means of art, could never invent a pillar to support such a projecting weight, as that which sprang from the bole of a single tree. At the foot of this venerable monarch of the forest we piled our baskets and bottles, doffed all superfluous drapery, then sallied into the thicket with our hooked sticks, to drag down the hazel boughs, and strip them of their brown shellers, which fell from out the deep bordered cups, as the boughs were shaken. As we wish to make all true worshippers of Nature acquainted with Browne's "Britannicus Pastorals," we shall present them with another rural picture. The scene is "Nutting," and this exquisite word-painting was first produced about the close of the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

A wandering boy sets out to gather nuts,
A hooked pole he from a hazel cuts:
Now throws it here, then there, to take some hold,
But bootless and in vain; the rocky mold
Admits no cranny where his hazel hook
Might promise him a step; till, in a nook
Somewhat above his reach, he hath espied
A little oak; and having often tried
To catch a bough, with standing on his toe,
Or leaping up, yet not prevailing so,
He rolls a stone towards the little tree,
Then, getting on it, fastens warily

His pole into a bough, and at his drawing,
The early-rising crow with clamorous caw-
ing,
Leaving the green bough, flies about the rock,
Whilst twenty twenty couples to him flock.
And now within his reach the thin leaves
Wave;
With one hand only then he holds his staff,
And with the other grasping, first the leaves,
A pretty bough he in his hand receives;
Then to his girdle making fast the hook,
His other hand another bough hath took;
His first a third, and that, another gives,
To bring him to the place.

We must not pass over the beauty of sea-side scenery at this season of the year, for we are children of the ocean; and, next to our matchless English landscapes, do we love the rocks that guard, and the waves that are ever washing around our lovely island. Pleasant is it now to stand upon some tall headland, and watch the ever-moving waves, as they roll through the shifting shadows of the clouds, purple, and green, and golden, onward and onward, until they are lost among the indistinct haziness of the distant sky. Then how solemnly falls upon the ear that never-ceasing murmur of the waves—that voice which for countless ages has never been silent, but day and night, for evermore, beats time with its melancholy music upon the pebbly-beach. Or to walk under the tall white cliffs, which have stood for undated centuries, above! above! when that wide sea was mastless, and neither the shadow of man nor ship had ever been mirrored upon its waves; for even then they stood, as they do now, reflecting back the bright autumnal sunshine. Like things of life, the tiny fishing-boats mount above the waves, diminishing in the distance until they appear mere specks—until you can only just discern the spots of light which indicate the white sails, and you can almost fancy that they are "Birds of calm brooding on the charmed wave." What great golden pathways seem at times to stretch over the deep—reaching to the very verge of the sky—smooth to appearance, yet, when trodden, rough and perilous, as that which the pilgrim traverses on his way to the shrine of his saint—on his journey towards Heaven. Who can imagine those terrible convulsions which severed England from the opposite coast of France; that stormy hour, when the sea rushed in between—when the mammoth and the mastodon stood moaning upon the severed cliffs; and no human eye beheld that mighty crash? Who that gazes upon the sea can for one moment doubt that such changes have taken place?



COUNTRY SCENES.—OCTOBER.



The trudging sow leads forth her numerous young,
Playful, and white, and clean, the briars among;
And o'er their heads, loud lash'd by furious squalls,
Bright from their cups the rattling treasure falls.

BLOOMFIELD.

Forest scenery never looks so beautiful as in Autumn; and at no period of this season can it be seen to better advantage than between the shutting in of September and the opening of October. It is then that Nature seems to have exhausted all the fantastic colours of her palette, and to have scattered her richest red, brown, yellow, and purple, upon the foliage. Every gust of wind that now blows, brings down thousands of golden-coloured acorns, that come pattering like little feet among the fallen leaves, leaving empty their smooth, round, hollow cups, from which the old poets in their fables framed the drinking vessels of the fairies. We need not wander further than the New Forest to witness one of those scenes which Scott, in his "Ivanhoe," has steeped in the sunniest hues of poetry, and where we can see realised the vision of Gurth, the swineherd, tending his noisy and grunting charge, as they feed upon the fattening acorns. It is only amid forest scenery that hogs have a poetical appearance; there is then a clear, silvery look about their bristly hides, which is beautifully brought out by the green of the underwood, and softened by the shadows of the overhanging branches. The picture is also more endeared to us through its antiquity; for, excepting in the change of costume of the swineherd, we know that our old English forests presented just such another scene above a thousand years ago. We find it recorded in the earliest descriptions we possess of the manners and customs of our Saxon forefathers. In Doomsday Book it is frequently mentioned; and, among the old Forest Laws, we find the seasons of mast, and pannage, and fence-month, regu-

lated by Regarders, Verdurers, Agisters, and all those grim guardians of the green wood, who knew

Each lane and every alley green,
Dingle, or bushy dell of that wild wood,
And every bosky bourn, from side to side,
Their daily walks and ancient neighbourhood—

Who were ever wandering about with bolt and bow in hand, ready to shoot a shaft at either dog or man, if they were found trespassing upon the Royal chace.

Those who live on the borders of the forest have the privilege of feeding their hogs upon acorns or beech-mast throughout the month of October, and they are still intrusted to the care of a swineherd as they were in the olden time. The modern Gurth, however, first sets out to reconnoitre the forest; and, having found a shady and favourable spot, where acorns or beech-mast are abundant, and water is near at hand, he next commences erecting a habitation for the reception of his ravenous herd. Having selected some huge, gigantic oak, he encloses a large space around it with a wattled fence, makes a warm bed inside, of fern, weeds, and withered forest grass, then covers it over with branches and entangling underwood. After this is completed, he collects his herd amongst the neighbouring foresters, who generally pay a shilling a head for all they intrust to his care; and, driving them where there is a plentiful supply of food, he allows them to eat their fill, and after this urges them on to the clear water-course,

when, having drank, he forces them back to the large sty he has erected, and leaves them, in all their swinish ease, to repose until the following morning. After a day or two they require but little looking after; for, although they will wander away two or three miles into the depths of the forest, and be divided into numerous parties, yet each division of the herd has its leader, who is sure to return at nightfall, trudging before his followers, to the accustomed resting-place, beneath the huge, broad-branching oak. By the end of the month, the whole herd is in such excellent condition that but little food is required for fattening them before they are slaughtered.

One of the most beautiful pictures in Bloomfield's "Farmer's Boy," is a description of swine coming to drink at the forest-pond, and startling the wild duck from her lonely haunt, who, in her turn, alarms the whole herd by the noise she makes with her wings, as she rises, when

With bristles raised, the sudden noise they hear,
And ludicrously wild, and wing'd with fear,
The herd decamp with more than swinish speed,
And snorting, dash through sedge, and rush, and reed.
Through tangling thickets headlong on they go,
Then stop, and listen for their fancied foe:
The hindmost still the growing panic spreads—
Repeated fright the first alarm succeeds.

Now the villagers are busily employed in gathering the last clusters of the ripe elderberries, which, having picked, they either make into wine, or carry to the neighbouring market town, where they dispose of the fruit at eightpence or tenpence per gallon. A few groups of men, women, and children, may yet be seen in the fields, blowing their fingers for very cold, during the first frosty mornings of October, while they gather the heavy potatoes, pile them in their baskets, and carry them off to the lumbering cart to be stored up against the coming Winter. The ploughman and the sower are now in the fields, making ready and casting in the seed, which shoots up so early in the following year, and is the first to give that green and velvet-like look to the opening landscape of Spring. As the flowers die away, the evergreens seem to come out with a Summer-like freshness; the holly and ivy have a greener and glossier look; the alder still retains its vernal hue, and the hedges are hung with the crimson hips of the wild rose, the dark red berries of the hawthorn, and the gushing scarlet and emerald branches of the nightshade; while below, the arums have risen up, stiff and perpendicular, like stems carved out of the richest coral.

Fieldfares, and redwings, and snipes now visit us, and we already see the woodcock, with his long bill, and his black and grey plumage, hurrying across the open glade, to conceal himself amongst the trees, for he has returned from his long sea voyage, and contrived to land, somehow, unseen by any one, during the night. Now the whole landscape is occasionally buried beneath a mist, the progress of which can be traced as it first slowly arises from the river, spreads over the low meadows beside its banks, burying in its folds hedge, and stile, and tree; and looking as if the clouds had dropped down, settled upon, and shut out the scenery. The meadow paths are now wet and damp; there is a clammy moisture about the fallen leaves—a slipperiness on the footways which the trees overhang—a reeking of vapours that ascend in the air—all telling that the work of decay is slowly progressing, and that Nature is busy preparing a bed for the far-distant flowers of Spring. But, amid all this silent desolation, at no season of the year have the objects whose shadows fall upon the water so beautiful an appearance as now, when the sky is clear. Masses of foliage no longer darken the deep mirror, but far down falls the sharp outline of the trees, and in depths which look unfathomable, we see the clear blue of heaven, and the white silver of the moving cloud beautifully reflected. Sometimes we see imaged, as they sail slowly across, long lines of water-fowl, which are ever shifting their ranks into arrow-headed shapes and broken triangles, as the vaulted sky rings back the harsh scream which they now and then utter, while they,

Ranged in figure wedge their way,
Intelligent of seasons, and set forth,
Their airy caravan, high over seas
Flying, and over lands with mutual wing,
Easing their flight. The air
Floats as they pass, fanned with unnumber'd plumes.

Squirrel-hunting is an exciting amusement amongst boys in the country during Autumn; for when the leaves have fallen from the trees, this beautiful and graceful little animal can then be seen leaping merrily from branch to branch, or sitting contentedly on some moss-covered bough, holding the ripe brown nuts in his fore paws, and quite enjoying his woodland repast. What shouting, and hallooing, and tearing of clothes, and losing of shoes, and getting entangled in the briers, is there amongst the boys while hunting him: and no sooner has some little fellow, after much labour, climbed up the tree on which the squirrel is perched, when, just as the adventurer is about to extend his hand, and, as he thinks, seize the prize by the bushy tail, at one leap, and without any apparent effort, away bounds the squirrel to the next tree, which is probably so strong that all the united efforts of the hunters cannot for a moment shake it. It is only while leaping from branch to branch, when the squirrel sometimes misses his footing, and falls upon the ground, that there is any chance of capturing him. Then it is that a dozen hats come off like one, every boy eager to catch, or cover up the little animal; and many a hat-crown gets crushed amid the scramble in their eager endeavours to seize him. Scarcely any bird forms a more beautiful nest than the squirrel. The moss and leaves, and the fibres of trees, are all neatly interwoven together, and generally placed so artfully at the fork of some branch, as to look more like a knot of the tree itself than a nest. There is scarcely any inhabitant of the wild wood that pays more attention to its young than the squirrel; for, although they are brought forth about the middle of June, the parents never leave them until the next Spring. The following exquisite description of Squirrel-hunting is so truthful and life-like, that any one who has seen a parcel of noisy boys busily pursuing the little forester, will, while reading it, have the whole scene again as vividly before the eye, as when they last witnessed it; although it was written above two hundred years ago, by that most truthful of all rural landscape-painters, William Browne, from whose writings we have before made a short extract:—

A nimble squirrel from the wood,
Ranging the hedges for his libert food,
Sits partly on a bough, his brow a nuts cracking,
And from the shell the sweet white kernel taking:
When with their crooks and bags a host of boys,
To share with him, come with so great a noise,
That he is forced to leave a nut nigh broke,
And for his life leap to a neighbouring oak;
Thence to a beech, thence to a row of ashes;
While through the quagmires, and red water plashes,
The boys run, dabbling on through thick and thin;
One tears his hose, the other breaks his shin;
This, torn and tattered, hath, with much ado,
Got through the briers—and that hath lost his shoe;
That drops his band, that headlong falls for haste;
Another cries behind for being the last:
With sticks and stones, and many a rounding hollow
The little fool with no small sport they follow;

Whilst he, from tree to tree, from spray to spray,
Gets to the wood, and hides him in his dray [nest].

In what pleasant situations do we sometimes find those old-fashioned wayside houses, where the tall sign-post steps far out into the road, as if it had come to meet the traveller, and tell him that there he can find both welcome and refreshment. There is something cheerful in the very creaking of the old weather-beaten sign, which is probably the "Blue Bell," or the "Old Bull's Head," or perchance the "George and Dragon," or it may be the "Black Bear;" for these are among the most ancient emblems of mine host. It is generally a long, low house, with a bay-window, or two, projecting out, along the angles of which comfortable seats are placed in the inside, so that, on whichever side you look, you have a pretty view up the road or over the fields, which you have not twice to glance at to tell you that you are at last far away in the country. The doorway is generally covered in with a porch, with its pent-house roof; and on each side there is a seat between the pillars, which are painted with green or red-and-white checkers, or sometimes encircled with a rose-tree, woodbine, or jasmine. Facing the bay-window, is a long trough filled with clear water, near to which stand curious baskets, placed on long slender legs, ready to contain a few handfuls of hay or corn, in case the traveller should not choose to have his steed stabled. Either beside this trough, looking up and down the road, or in the centre of the porch, stands the healthy-looking landlord, with his pipe in his mouth, ever ready to give a welcome good-day to his customers. The bar, in which his pretty daughter, perhaps, presides, is a perfect pattern of cleanliness and tidiness: everything, down to the very bird-cage, is as clean as hands can make them; and it would fill a catalogue to enumerate all the things which are stowed away in that small space. But it is the great, ample, and sanded kitchen which attracts the eye of the cold and hungry wayfarer. Oh! how different to a smoky, beer-deluged tap-room; for it is here where mine host and his family dine, excepting on rare occasions. The floor, though sanded, is white and dry; the tables have also been scoured with free-stone; and he who has walked ten miles cannot refrain from throwing hungry glances at the juicy hams, and large fitchables which are hung around the wall. Then, the cooking utensils, of brass, copper, or block-tin, all wear such a bright and tempting appearance, that you cannot help looking first at them, then at the couple of plump pullets which are pecking about the door, and the ham which has just been cut off, and the sweet-looking greens which you catch a glimpse of through the window in the garden; and, taking off your hat, and rearing up your stick, you have a glass of ale and a crust of bread and cheese, while these good things are in preparation. After this, you saunter about for an hour or two, and the landlord, finding that you are about to dine with him, shows you over his garden, orchard, or stables, points out his choicest trees, tells you the quantity of fruit each has borne; and so you while away a pleasant hour; enjoy a comfortable dinner; and, when refreshed and rested, proceed on your journey again, with a light and happy heart.

Sometimes, in the twilight at evening, you come unawares upon a group of gipsies, who are now huddled around the large camp-fire, which throws a warm glow upon their nut-coloured countenances, while their black eyes roll upon you like rounded beads as you pass. On turning the corner of the village, you see the blacksmith's ruddy forge, and the country gossips who assemble nightly around the smithy fire, to talk over the news of the day. You meet with quiet foot-passengers, who exchange a friendly "good night"—or a light cart hurries past you at a brisk pace, filled with a merry party, who are returning either from market or a visit; and you hear their joyous laughter ringing upon the silence, until the clapping of a gate, or the barking of a dog, next arrests your attention. And you wander on, long after "twilight grey"

Has in her sober livery all things clad
until, high above the dim wood-crowned hill, "Hesperus that leads the starry host" appears with dazzling front upon the blue vault of Heaven; her beauty only dimmed when the Moon,

Rising in clouded majesty, at length
Apparent Queen, unveils her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silver mantle throws.

You wander along in wonder, while gazing upon those mysterious worlds which lie mapped out upon the face of Heaven, revolving round and round for evermore—for, whether inhabited or silent, we know not—for He who formed them and hung them in the vast realms of never-ending space, alone knoweth "their end and aim."



COUNTRY SCENES.—NOVEMBER.



In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods are waning,
The head stream in its banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining. TERRYSON.

WINDY, rainy, dark November, which seems as it sent purposely to make us more in love with home. What a roaring there is now in the woods—what a rattling of branches and clashing together of great grey iron boughs, that groan again in their mighty agony, as the storm tries in vain to tear them from their gnarled and knotty stems. The streams foam and dash and hurry on in their headlong course, as if they had now no cause to linger—no flowers to mirror back—no green shady sprays to cover them, but were eager to reach their journey's end, and empty themselves into river or sea, to escape from the blinding rain that is ever coming down heavily. The gardens have a desolate and dreary look; and if a flower still linger behind, it looks like a mourner bending over a grave, and envying the dead that lie below: it seems lost in the world without its companions, and you are glad when it is gone.

November is the pioneer of Winter: he marches foremost, and gathers all the decayed leaves into dark hollows and dreary places, where they lie to be blown and snowed upon, until the work of decay and death is completed. The song-birds

that gladdened our woods and hills are now ar away over the sea: the twitter of the swallows no longer falls upon the ear between the showers, as it did in Spring; nor is there even the murmuring of a bee to vary the monotonous moaning of the wind, and the dull dead plashing of the rain. The cattle stand disconsolate beside the leafless hedges, looking wistfully towards the well-stored farm-yard, as if wondering why they are kept so long from the snug, warm, and well-filled stall. The woodman drags his way wearily towards the forest, trying in vain to whistle the cheerful tunes which seemed to shorten his journey in Spring, and glad when the short day has drawn to a close. There is a ragged and vagrant look about the clouds, and they seem to wander homeless about the sky, as if they had no resting-place, but were driven hither and thither at the will of that harsh Overseer the wind. Such are the objects we pick out amid the gloomy shadows of November; but there are spots in the picture which are not wholly dark, and these we will now turn to—scenes which lay on the outskirts of "the forest world of shade"—

The gleamy vales,
And sunny lawns, and streams in hazy light,
Glittering, when that peculiar stillness reigns
As Nature kept a Sabbath; when the leaf
Shed from the aerial spray, scarce quivering drops
Through the lulled atmosphere.

The Autumn has torn down the green curtains of Summer. She has revealed little morsels of beautiful landscape which had long been shut out, patches of green fields, and stretches of winding roads, the white-washed front of a distant cottage, or the grey spire of some remote village church, which all Summer long had been hidden behind the trees. Between the openings of the naked boughs we see where the vales dip down, and the hills rise up. We see many beauties in the form of the surrounding landscape which have long been concealed. We observe the forms of the evergreens which had been dwarfed by their taller brethren of the grove; we see numberless nests in the hedges and bushes which we have frequently looked into during the Summer, without being able to discover anything more than the dark masses of leaves. We observe a beauty in the grouping and falling of the berries and wild fruits which hang upon the branches, and marvel that their elegant forms have never before arrested the glance; and, above all, the eye is attracted by the number of strange birds which are continually coming over to winter with us. We discover that a flock of sheep in a green turnip-field, with the distant hayrick, the thatched shed, the picturesque fence, and the pond of water which the naked trees overhang, would, if well painted, form a pretty foreground in a picture of Autumn. The few hard winter apples that are still left upon the trees, though only a few weeks ago they seemed to set the teeth on edge by looking at them, have now a rather tempting look; and we perceive that the dark purple berries of the ivy are in keeping with the sombre green of the closely-matted leaves, and the beautiful colours of the fungi that still remain now attract our attention. We see many a rich tint in the falling acorns, and trace in the surrounding mosses forms and colours as beautiful and delicate as may be found in the choicest flowers; and sometimes, when the weather is mild, we discover flowers that are again blowing, although they have none of the fragrance of Spring. And in such spots—

The bramble bends
Beneath its jetty load; the hazel haugs
With auburn bunches, dipping in the stream
That sweeps along, and threatens to o'erflow
The leaf-strewn banks,

from which the piping winds are ever sweeping thousands of the "pale and hectic leaves" into the torrent. Naked and leafless as the woods now nearly are, there is something grand about the great November wind, uplifting its mighty voice, and pealing like an organ through these ancient cathedrals of Nature—these huge temples which God's own hand erected. Who can walk beneath those wide-spread avenues—that vaulted and trellised roof—those gigantic pillars, which the hand of man reared not—the silent workmanship of thousands of Summer nights, without feeling that they are in the presence of Him by whom all things were created? Who can look upon the mountains and hills, the workmanship of His hands, then glance at the little piles which the builder Man erected, without acknowledging how feeble is the human arm compared to the Power that erected those stupendous monuments? Nature is ever beautiful. Even now the reeds are rocked, and wave their plummy heads beside the forest brook, and we see a grace in their form and motion, which was lost when the leaves of Summer threw their shadows over the scene. The tall bulrush, that feathered chieftain of lake and mere, now dances his sable plume upon the wind, and proudly overlooks the vassal-like reeds which rustle about his feet. The fallen leaf sails over the current, like a fairy bark sporting with every whirling eddy it meets with by the way—then, darting along again with eager speed, as if to make up for the time it had lost. What a babbling the brook here makes, seeming to hold parley with the pebbles which have checked its course, then muttering to itself as it rolls along to where the stem of the mighty tree, which the wind hath torn up by the roots, lies prostrate, and athwart its channel, and there it chafes and churns, and vents its wrath in maddening foam, and endeavours in vain to overleap the bulky barrier. What a desolate air hangs around the ruins of that old wooden bridge, which years ago has been impassable; what piles of moss and weeds have gathered around the dark and slimy planks, some of which rock and sway beneath the force of the torrent, and, though shorn of their strength, still defy its power; for—

The piles that they stand on are green with decay,
And half buried with weeds that to and fro sway
In the eddy and foam, both by night and by day.

Sometimes the landscape is enlivened during this month by the loud whoop and hollow of the fox-hunters; and we see streaming along the hill-side the mounted horsemen in their scarlet coats, while the mottled hounds show like a patch of dusky white upon the sloping shoulder of the uplands. Away they sweep over hedge and fence in their headlong career—they pass the mill—they leap and swim the brook; they are shut out for a moment by the large farm which rises up on the edge of the valley; then away they burst again in the direction of the little hamlet which they can just distinguish by the tapering spire that "points its tapering finger to the sky." But see, they are at fault! Reynard has doubled somewhere beside yonder little coppice, and for a time bidden defiance to all his pursuers. That cold eastern wind is unfavourable to the scent.

In our eye, the fox is a beautifully formed animal; and we have never seen his red skin and bushy tail sweeping through the brown fern, or gliding stealthily along the edge of the forest, without a feeling of delight; for he is, beyond doubt, one of the oldest inhabitants of our ancient British woods. He went prowling about the roots of our primeval oaks, with his broad head and sharpened snout, ages before a Roman galley ever grazed the pebbles upon our beach; for we find his fossil remains amongst those of extinct animals, which, doubtless, lived in England long before the early Cymry sailed through the misty ocean, and named our coast "the country of sea-cliffs." Even then he burrowed in the ground during the day, and ranged abroad in the night, prowling about the forest-homes of the first ancient settlers, who erected their huts in the wild solitude of our gloomy old woods, and who, for aught we know, piled up the giant relics of Stonehenge. He is associated, in our mind, with many undated changes, and has a great claim on our respect for his antiquity alone. True, the fox is a thief; but it must live somehow; and who can tell what lesser vermin it may destroy, to make up for the few dozens of poultry which it occasionally carries off? That the fox is an affectionate mother we have proof, as she has been seen to carry off one of her cubs in her mouth, even when the hounds have been in pursuit of her: she has thus boldly endangered her life to save her young. Such a trait as this surely makes up for a thousand petty delinquencies. She is very partial to rabbits, and woo be to the warren on the ledge of which she is located. When the fox sleeps, he coils himself round like a dog; he has a great objection to light, and few animals can see better in the twilight or dark than he can. The fox has before now been known to run twenty-five miles without a check, and in several instances which are on record has kept the lead of the

hounds for an hour and a half. We have once or twice in our lives, while sojourning at a lonely road-side inn, come in contact with that picturesque and nocturnal character—an Earth-stopper; who, with his little pony, terriers, lantern, spade, and mattocks, has just pulled up to drink his pint, before he sets out on his nightly round. Poor old fellow! on the night which precedes a hunt, he is compelled either to turn out of his warm bed, or leave his comfortable fireside, and, while the fox is out feeding, to stop up the entrance of his burrow or hole; so that when Reynard returns, he sees the door of his house closed, and is compelled to find a shelter where he can. Sometimes the old Earth-stopper has to make a circle of miles, and it is only in the middle of the night that his work can be done, for were he to stop the earths either early in the evening or in the morning, he would be likely enough to fasten up the fox in his burrow, instead of keeping him out, that he may be in readiness when the hunters meet. It is the Earth-stopper's business to become acquainted with every hole which the fox hides in; and while he is out feeding, to stop these places up with thorns, furze-bushes, earth, or stones; so that during the hunt on the following day the fox may not be able to run under the earth, and baffle the hounds; and many a wintry night is the old man out alone, following this cheerless occupation. I am no advocate of fox-hunting; I like to see its black feet pattering through the fallen leaves, for I have always thought it unfair that there should be so many men, horses, and hounds, to one poor fox. It is so unlike that old English system of fair play, which allows only of one enemy at a time.

Frequently during Autumn the heavy rains which descend flood the low countries beside rivers for miles around, sometimes breaking through the embankments before any one is prepared for such a disaster, and rushing into the fields where the cattle are still left to pick up what they can. A strange appearance does a country present thus laid suddenly under water. You see cottages and hayricks half buried; hedges, whose outlines you can only trace by the topmost twigs which rise above the surface; and far out to the foot of the opposite hills, what was but a few days ago a green open landscape, is now, with the exception of a few half-buried objects, one wide watery scene. Footpaths and gates are no longer visible; you can only tell where the broad brown level highway went winding along, by the marks of some particular tree that grew here and there beside it;—and where the hay and straw and broken boughs have drifted and lodged against the trees, or the uncovered tops of the higher hedges; there water-rats and water-shrews, and mice of all descriptions, and weazels and ferrets, friends and foes, all huddled together, may be found sheltering, and at peace, amid the terrors created by such a wide spreading deluge. Here the naturalist may meet with objects which he has hunted for in vain for years, for all that burrows underground, conceals itself amid the reed-covered banks, or hides under the thick entangling hedgerows, is now compelled to brave the unwelcome light of day, for everything excepting man possesses the power of swimming for a considerable time; he alone finds it difficult to "keep his head above water."

This is the end of Autumn, and so few materials does the month present that I must draw upon one of my former works for the conclusion. "We now hear the busy flail in the barn, as the thrasher pursues his monotonous task from day to day, never lacking company, for he is surrounded by the whole family of fowls, who are ever ready to hunt up a neglected ear that has escaped from his hearty blows. In the farmyard, we see the cattle standing knee-deep in the broken straw which the thrasher has turned out, and lowing wistfully over the fence, as if they wondered what Summer had done with all its green, and seeming to say, as plainly as they can speak, that they like not the dry provender which is given to them, and care not how soon they are again ankle-deep in the rich luxuriant grass. We have now rainy days and foggy nights, that come so sudden and thick over the landscape we can scarcely see 'our way before us.' Travellers take the wrong road; and farmers, who have stayed a little too late at the market-town tavern, get into no end of queer bridle-paths, and all at once find themselves anywhere excepting 'at home.' Lamps in the streets bewilder one terribly, and it would be difficult to tell of our 'whereabout,' where it not for the old men, who cough one against the other as they pass, and give us warning that they are near the lane or turning which they are about to enter.—The fogs now close around one like a great coat that has been steeped in the river, seeming to fit all the better because no one can see it, but wrapping us all over in its uncomfortable cold—and we for the twentieth time discover that our own humble hearths are more comfortable than the crowded and fashionable rooms we have just quitted."





Full knee-deep lies the winter snow,
 And the winter winds are wearily sighing
 Toll ye the church-bell sad and slow
 And tread softly, and speak low,
 For the old year lies a-dying.

TENNYSON.

Those who have read that exquisite little song of Shakspeare's, at the close of "Love's Labour Lost"—and who is there that has not?—can never forget the perfect and finished wintry picture which every line presents. The icicles are first seen hanging beside the wall like great long, cold, bright-pointed spear-heads, which, only to look at, causes Dick, the shepherd, to blow his tingling nails more eagerly; to stamp, and jump, and shake off the clotted snow from his heavy shoes, as he beats his numbed feet upon the ground. Tom, who is seated beside the large old yawning kitchen fire-place, jumps up as if he were struck, by the head of a cross-bolt, when he sees Marian enter, with her nose "red and raw," her milk starred and frozen, in the clean white pail, running down over the bright, cold, polished hoops, on which it has congealed, like beaded pearls. Tom wants no summoning; but, leaping up, with a "God a mercy," hurries off to the log-house, and, shouldering a couple of such mighty blocks as could only be burnt in the huge old-fashioned fire-places of Shakspeare's day, rushes into the large hall without ceremony, well nigh stumbling over the great shaggy stag-hound, which lies stretched out at the foot of the old Knight, who, seated in his high-backed oaken chair, watches the sparks, as they go dancing above the quaintly-fashioned hand-irons, up the wide dark chimney, and rubs his hands for very cold. Without, the wind is blowing, bleak and bitter, whistling round the gable-ends of the ancient mansion, yet scarcely turning the frozen weathercock, while beside the hedges, which stretch along the "foul

ways," the birds sit shivering and brooding in the snow—cold, with all their feathers, and scarcely able to peck the frozen berries, though their pointed beaks are rendered sharper by hunger. Sunday comes, and in the old, cold, grey country church, where the figures of Knights are freezing in icy mail, as their grim effigies lie stretched out with folded hands, the old Knight, having left his hall, and his log fire, can scarcely hear a word the parson says, for the loud and incessant coughing. One aisle coughs against the other; north answers south—the sound is contagious; it is caught in the chancel, and all the rounded periods of the old Divine are lost amid that never-ceasing chorus; and the old Knight is thankful when he again places his feet upon his own hearth, and sees his bowl of smoking lambs-wool placed before him, on the surface of which the roasted crabs bob and hiss, as they are popped in hot, from the red logs which Tom had piled upon the fire. Outside, the staring owl is crying "To-whit, too-whoo," somewhere about the red-bricked twisted chimnies. Such is the picture which the immortal Poet has drawn of Winter in twelve brief lines, each of which would form a text for a longer passage than we have written as a summary of the whole.

Now the brief days are cold, cheerless, and gloomy; the woods are naked and desolate; there is a sad, leaden, melancholy colour about the sky; the open country is silent, the fields are empty, the lanes abandoned by the village children, and, excepting the robin, you hear not the voice of a bird amid the whole

landscape. You wander on in the direction of the village, and there, upon the large frozen pond, surrounded by a few aged willows, you behold a group of hardy rustics amusing themselves with the healthy exercise of sliding, and making a strange, hollow, and unearthly sound, as they run upon the ice. You see the sportsman far off, with his dogs and gun, and behold the white smoke rolling beside the hedge in the valley, while the report awakens the low and sleeping echoes. Further on, along the frozen and cheerless road, you see the village carrier's grey tilted cart, rocking between the naked hedgerows, as it moves slowly on past the cold white guide-post, by the embankment which is covered with withered and hoary grass, beside the long plantation where the snow is piled beneath the dark green fir trees, past the reedy pool where the flags stand with their sharp frozen edges, looking as if they would cut like a sabre, so cold, keen, and piercing do they appear.

Dreary would December be, did it not bring with it merry Christmas, with its holly, and ivy, and mistletoe, through the leaves of which peep the scarlet, and purple, and dull white berries, giving a green and snmmer appearance to our rooms, and throwing a cheerfulness around our hearths. We see the laden coach rolling past our window, piled high with game, hares, and pheasants, and great white geese, and black turkeys, whose plumage the wind blows back as they swing suspended from the roof; conjuring up visions of huge comfortable fires, well-spread tables, and happy faces, all congregated to do honour to good Old Christmas, whom Southey has beautifully drawn as seated beside the high-heaped hearth in his great armed-chair, watching the children at their sports, or pausing at times to stir the huge fire, and every now and then sipping the bright brown ale. For nights before the happy season arrives, we hear the village bells, awakening the surrounding silence by their silver music, and throwing a cheerful sound over the wild wintry landscape. When the morning of that old and holy day arrives, we hear the rustic waits chanting some simple Christmas carol, as they stand in the grey moonlight, at the front of the picturesque parsonage-house, telling how Christ was on that day born, and that while shepherds were attending their flocks by night, the Angel of the Lord descended, and proclaimed tidings of peace and good-will to all mankind. How plaintive and tremulous do those old chants fall upon the ear, sinking noiselessly and peacefully into the heart, and filling the soul with a holy and reverential awe; and, while the cock from the neighbouring farm makes answer to the carol of the village waits, we recall that exquisite passage of Shakspeare, in which, alluding to some old superstition, he says:

Some say, that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
This bird of dawning singeth all night long.

Or we turn to those bye-gone times, so beautifully and feelingly described by Irving, who says:—"Christmas seemed to throw open every door, and unlock every heart. It brought the peasant and the peer together, and blended all ranks in one warm generous flow of joy and kindness. The old halls of castles and manor-houses resounded with the harp and the Christmas carol, and their ample boards groaned with the weight of hospitality. Even the poorest cottage welcomed the festive season with green decorations of bay and holly; the cheerful fire glanced its rays through the lattice, inviting the passenger to raise the latch and join the gossip knot huddled round the hearth, beguiling the long evening with legendary jokes and oft-told Christmas tales."

In our eye, Christmas never looks so beautiful as when it has been ushered in by snow, and frost, and rime; when the thatched roofs of the cottages are whitened over, and the branches of the trees are laden with feathery flakes; when the ivy that covers the grey and weather-beaten church-porch is half buried beneath the weight of accumulated snow, as if

Nature, in awe to Him,
Had doffed her gaudy trim,
With her great Master so to sympathise,
Hiding her guilty front with innocent snow.

Such a scene, witnessed under one of those cold, clear, blue skies which sometimes hangs over the earth in December, with the cottage chimnies sending up their columns of pale silver smoke, and a group of happy faces emerging from the ancient village church, sighing or smiling alternately as they recognise a child or a relation who has walked miles to bid them a merry Christmas—or, as they glance at the surrounding graves, and think of those who will never more sit at the high-piled table, over which the mistletoe branch again hangs, as it did in the days of old. Scott, in the following lines, has graphically described these ancient festivities:—

The fire, with well-dried logs supplied,
Went roaring up the chimney wide;
The huge hall-table's oaken face,
Scrubbed till it shone, the time to grace
Rose then upon its massive board
No mark to part the Squire and Lord.
Then was brought in the hasty brown
By old blue coated serving-man

Then the grim boar's head frowned on high,
Crested with bays and rosemary.

England was merry England when
Old Christmas brought his sports again;
'Twas Christmas broached the mightiest ale,
'Twas Christmas told the merriest tale;
A Christmas gambol oft would cheer
The poor man's heart through half the year.

Those who have looked upon the shadows of the trees as they are reflected upon the ground at this season of the year, cannot fail at being struck by the beautiful forms which they present. Every twig and branch is as clearly made out as if drawn with a dark pencil upon white paper; there you see endless patterns for embroidery and netting—open-work, square, or diamond-shaped threads, that seem to run into squares and ovals, crossing and turning in every imaginable form. In frosty weather, almost every object we look upon is beautifully marked, from the ragged flakes that hang upon the moss-covered boughs—the crimson berries, that seem encrusted with the whitest silver—the dark leaves of the evergreens, a'long which run pearly lines of frost-work—the bladed grass, sprinkled all over with minute pearls, down to the stary and diverging rays, which every little hollow that contained water has assumed,—all are beautiful. But pick up the skeleton of a leaf, when only the fine fibres are left; hold it between your eye and the light, and you will confess that never did lady wear a lace collar woven in the finest frame, of so fine and delicate a texture as the network of the fallen leaf; and the graceful cup-moss, when closely examined, is shaped in the forms of the most delicate cups, and urns, and vases, pale and dark green, and chased with silver, and all as neatly wrought as if they had come from the hand of the most finished artist.

Sometimes, on a fine day in December, when the snow has disappeared, there is a green Spring-look about the meadows, where the grass has sprouted up afresh beneath the Autumn rains, especially in those pastures from which the cattle were driven away early in the season. Under the hedgerows, and among the shady copses, peeping from amid the fallen foliage, we see the hardy leaves of the primrose and the violet, looking as green and fresh as if it were already the first month of Spring, for neither frost nor snow has power to destroy them in these sheltered places. Near spring-heads, which seldom freeze, we see the little wagtail, the smallest bird that walks, planting one leg before the other, and surveying everything his sharp eye alights upon, in his busy endeavour to pick up a meal. The larks huddle together in small parties, and seem, by their

Wistful looks, to wish that the air was warm enough to sing in; and if an unusually fine day should break out by the close of the next month, they will be seen trying their wings a little way up amongst the trees, and scattering around a few stray notes; and sometimes, at this season of the year, we see the porch of a cottage wreathed with the China rose, whose pale blossoms throw out a faint sweet perfume, and, with the green foliage, form a Summer-like scene amid the gloom, and cloud, and darkness of mid-Winter. The author of "Waverley" has left us a most graphic picture of the *enmi* which sometimes besets the hardy sportsman at this season. It is full of minute and excellent painting, and abounds in those little touches which tell that it has been struck off from the life, and is worthy of a place beside the little gem which we have commented upon at the opening of the present month.

When dark December glooms the day,
And takes our Autumn joys away;
When short and scant the sunbeam throvs
Upon the weary waste of snows
A cold and profitless regard,
Like patron on a needy bard
When sylvan occupation's done,
And o'er the chimney rests the gun,
And hang in idle trophy, near
The game, pouch, fishing rod, and spear
When wiry ferrier, rough and grim,
And greyhound with his length of limb
And pointer, now employed no more,
Gumber our parlour's narrow floor

When in his stall the impatient steed
Is long condemned to rest and feed;
When from our snow-encrested home,
Scarcely cares the hardest step to roam,
Since path is none, save that to bring
The needful water from the spring;
When wrinkled news-page, twice conned o'er
Bequies the weary hour no more,
And dorkling politician crossed,
Inveighs against the lingering post;
And answering housewife sore complains
Of carriers' snow-impeded wains;—
When such the country cheer, I come,
Well-pleased, to seek our city home.

The kitchen garden is worth peeping into at this time, when there is so little to be seen in the out-of-door world. The earthed-up celery beds have a fresh and green appearance, and the lettuces which were planted late, wear a healthy Spring look; while cauliflowers, kale, brocoli, cabbages, and greens of every description, have now a crispy and tempting tenderness, which is fully appreciated when they come to throw their odour around the table, as they are placed beside the red and juicy ham, and the well-fed pullets. If a hare or rabbit cross our path, we scarcely regard them with the eye of a naturalist now, but think what a flavour there would be about the one jagged, and the other, with a few accessories, wrapt up under the comfortable crust of a pie.

The rosemary flowers this month; and there were few plants held in higher esteem than this by our ancestors. They used it to stir up the spiced Christmas tankard; it was also dipped in their drinking cups at weddings, and borne before the bridal party as they went to church. It was strowed upon the dead; and Herrick, in allusion to these customs, says that the rosemary

Grows for two ends, it matters not at all,
Be it for my bridal or my burial.

I shall conclude the description of this month by a snow-scene, taken from my "Pictures of Country Life," descriptive of a ride over a cold, cheerless common:—"The snow had fallen all night long, and continued throughout the day without ceasing. Over the wide, bleak, unsheltered common, it lay deep and untrodden, blown here and there into wild, fanciful ridges, just as the ground rose and fell, or where the wind had whirled it; and it was only by some white-covered hillock of stones, a furze bush of taller growth, the remains of an aged hawthorn, and the relics of an old finger-post, that a practised eye was enabled to trace the winding of the road. All around hung the low, dull, leaden-coloured sky, so low, that, as far as the eye could stretch, it seemed to rest everywhere upon the snow, save where, on the furthest rim of the horizon, the level monotony of the line was broken by a steep slate roof, now covered with snow; and that was all which stood visible of the Union Workhouse, for the rest of the building was lost in the distance. It was so cold and cheerless a day, that not even a donkey—the hardest defier of wind and weather—was to be seen in the whole wide range of the sky-bounded common, for even he had sought a shelter in some unseen hollow; nothing stirred amid the wild solitude of that wintry scene."

The close of December brings with it one great consolation—the shortest day is past, and, after a few more evenings, we shall see them slowly lengthen; and when the snow-drop appears, we know that

The storms of Wint'ry time will quickly pass,
And one unbounded Spring encircle all.



(Country Scenes for every Month in this Almanack are written by Thomas Miller.)