

JANUARY.—PLOUGH MONDAY.

THE DESCRIPTIONS OF THE TWELVE MONTHS BY THOMAS MILLER



He ploughs the hills and ploughs the dale,
He ploughs through field and fallow:
Who does not wish the Ploughman well,
Is but a sorry fellow.—Old Ballad.

MANY of the old games, and masques, and mummings, which were in accordance with the simple habits of our homely forefathers, have long since passed away. A few only remain, out of those which it was their delight and amusement to witness; and even these are shorn of their ancient splendour; for, though still picturesque, they have a faded look, and seem no more in keeping with the manners and customs of the present day, than the murrey-coloured coats, and slashed doublets, and trunk hose would be, if dragged forth from the old oaken recesses in which they have lain, disturbed only by the moth for many a long year, and worn again by the present generation. Such as have survived the stern mandates of Cromwell, lived through the Restoration of Charles, and withstood all the stormy revolutions which at last settled down, when the House of Hanover was securely seated upon the throne, we shall occasionally glance at in our descriptions of the months; for they are still within the ancient boundary-line which every year is rapidly cutting up, and into the opening of which the steam-boats and railroads are entering, and overturning nearly all that is picturesque and primitive, that has for centuries given such life and beauty to the rural landscapes of England.

January, with its short days and long nights, though it still comes as of old, with frost, and snow, and cold, and darkness, brings with it once a year its merry Plough Monday, and in a few out-of-the-way country places the village street is all astir with the little crowd of gaping rustics, just as it was, except for the changes in costume and architecture, three or four centuries ago. The old fiddler, who dates every incident in his life from the many country wakes, feasts, and statutes he has attended, is again in requisition, although the snow lies deep upon the ground; the drum, which only sounds at the club-feast, or on such occasions as these, is again dragged from its hiding-place; and sometimes the old-fashioned pipe and tabor, which have been blown and beaten by the descendants of the same family, through many generations, are called in to awaken the sleeping echoes of winter. You hear the noisy group long before they heave into sight along the winding lane, engirded with its high and leafless hedges—green only where the ivy trails, or the prickly holly shoots up; they are announced by the loud huzzas which rend the air, and are followed by all the loiterers who have congregated from the villages for miles around.

Heralding the way, come the healthy-looking round chubby-faced country lads,

waving their hats and caps, regardless of the cold; their heavy boots crunching the snow at every step, and their hard naked hands nearly blue or purple through exposure to the frosty air. They are followed by pipe and tabor, fiddle and drum. Then appears a strong healthy-looking ploughman, with his heavy ankle boots, worsted stockings, stout corduroy breeches, and thick plush waistcoat, over which he wears a gown, borrowed for the occasion of Nanny or Molly, and the skirt of which he generally tucks up under his waistcoat until he enters the village, to keep it from dragging; and thus arrayed, with bonnet and cap on head, he comes dancing along, about as gracefully as a brown shaggy bear, and rattling the money-box, which he carries in his hand, at every step, for he is the Betsy, so famous in the olden time as the chief *figurante* on a Plough Monday. Next follows the plough, drawn by ten or a dozen stout countrymen, by ropes either thrown over their shoulders or fastened around their waists, while their hats or white smock-frocks are decorated with ribbons of almost all colours, amid which are placed bunches of ears of corn; he who guides the plough being ornamented like another Ceres, and, doubtless, like her, intended to represent the emblem of plenty. Next appear the threshers with their flails, and reapers with their hooks, waggons with long whips dangling over their shoulders; bringing before the eye the whole procession of harvest, from the plougher, the sower, the reaper, the thresher, down to the dusty miller, who has covered himself with an extra coat of meal for the occasion, and has come to take toll out of the proceeds of the day.

While writing, the scene rises before the eye as distinctly as when in our boyish days, above twenty years ago, we stood a happy spectator, regardless of Winter—

Clothed all in freize.
Chattering his teeth for cold, that did him chill;
Whilst on his hoary beard his breath did freeze.—SPENSER.

We again see the big farm-house, with its ivy-covered porch, in which the jolly farmer, with his top-boots, blue coat, and pipe in mouth, stood beside his buxom and merry-faced wife, looking on with as much apparent pleasure as the little children, who rested with their hands on the top-most and frost-covered bar of the gate which they had climbed. What he dropped into "Betsy" the ploughman's box, fell with a heavy sound, causing the bonneted bearer to rattle it with extra force, and to cut a variety of most mnlady-like capers. Then came the great brown jug, piled high with foaming mighty ale, which seemed quite a load even for the strong arms of the stout dairymaid who bore it; little Jack, the farmer's boy, followed with large drinking-horns, and a basket filled with such huge lumps of bread and cheese as showed the worthy giver knew right well how to measure a ploughman's appetite. Then pipe and tabor, and drum and violin, were mute for several minutes, and all the sound heard, excepting an occasional huzza, was like that of a dozen horses crunching and feeding together. The jug was again refilled and emptied; and so they passed on from house to house until they at last came to one where a noted miser resided. They knocked at the door—there was no answer. "Betsy" rattled his box louder than ever, but no one came; drum, tabor, pipe, and violin thundered and screamed in vain; huzza after huzza was sent forth by the assembled crowd, but excepting a stealthy peep from behind the blind, and which would have cost the waiting-maid her place had she been discovered by the old curmudgeon, no other sign of life appeared within. "Gee-ho! Come-up!" exclaimed the man who held the stilts or handles of the plough, and in a moment the deep bright share was into the ground: backwards and forwards it went, cutting deeper, and the men pulling stronger at every furrow they made, until the whole lawn at the front of the miser's house lay brown, bare, and ridgy as a newly-ploughed field.

When the mischief was done the old miser made his appearance, and threatened the ploughman with law, imprisonment, transportation; but no one seemed to advocate his cause. It was an old custom thus, to plough up the ground at the front of the doors of those who gave not "largess" on Plough Monday; nor do we remember a single instance of prosecution for the misdemeanour. Such abuses, however, we doubt not, have been instrumental in abolishing these old and useless customs. What we have here presented is a faithful portraiture of rural England only twenty years ago; and there are still, we believe, a few green quiet corners in our island, where Plough Monday is kept up in the present day. We have here preserved the outline of a faint and faded picture, the rich colouring of which began to decay from the very hour when Cromwell and his Roundheads shut up the ancient gallery of old English amusements. It was opened again at the restoration of Charles; but the damp and the mildew had settled down upon it. A new race of men had sprung up, and a mighty change, which is still advancing, began to show itself throughout the land—the merry England of our forefathers was growing into the working and thinking England in which we now live.

The race of roys,
Who danced our infancy upon their knee,
And told our marvelling boyhood legends store,
Of their strange ventures happ'd by land or sea;
How are they blotted from the things that be!—SCOTT.

Few, unless they are well versed in geology, would dream of the appearance which our island presented in those early years that have passed away unnumbered by man, but which have left traces of their existence beneath the hills and vallies we daily tread. The landscape, which at this season of the year is leafless, and sometimes buried in its winding-sheet of snow, was thousands of years ago adorned with flowers, and fruits, and trees which now only blossom and ripen, and wave in the far-off sunny lands of the East. Then the huge hippopotamus wallowed in our rivers, and the mammoth and the mastodon shook those old (and ages ago buried) forests beneath their tread. In the excavations of railways, in the very heart of our ancient hills, and in the deep beds of our beautiful rivers, do we find the remains of these extinct monsters. The dam and its offspring sometimes buried side by side, a convincing proof that here the young was once bred, lived, and died. Amid the giant ferns of this early world, which have dwindled down to the knee-deep bracken through which we now tread, did the striped and sabre-toothed tiger couch, ages before his angry growl ever fell upon any human ear. Then the great-cave bear went prowling about our island; and herds of wolves and jackals pursued the maned and shaggy bison through the forest fastnesses. The huge elk, whose remains have been discovered, and the span of whose antlers from the tip of each horn was above thirteen feet, fed upon our hills, and stooped down to drink by the sides of our rivers, in those undated ages; for the shadow of man had not as yet been mirrored upon the face of those waters. Birds, whose gaudy plumage is now only to be seen in tropical forests, then plumed themselves in the sunshine on the boughs of such trees as never again threw their green shadows over that deep-buried and untrodden soil. Then our island was houseless, our seas mastless, nor had the print of any human foot as yet indented the sand upon our shore. Such a knowledge as this, wherever we may wander, never causes us to feel solitary; to vary a few lines by Keats:

though
Keen fitful gusts are whispering here and there,
Among the bushes, half leafless and dry
And stars look very cold about the sky,
And we had many miles on foot to faire:

Yet felt we little of the cold bleak air,
Or of the dead leaves rustling drearily;
Or of those silver leaps that burnt on high,
Or of the distance from home's pleasant lair.

Wild, silent, and uninhabited have we found places which we have traversed in England during winter in our own day—the far-extending cliff country of Lincolnshire, backed by the high and villageless wold, that seemed in the distance to go climbing up until it was lost in the grey and leaden-coloured sky. On the huge table-lands which ascended, ledge above ledge, telling where for ages the locked-up waters had remained stationary, we have seen the snow lie white, deep, silent, and untrodden, just as it had been blown over the broad and shelterless vallies, and left there, height above height, like alp on alp. The flocks of sheep, that picked up a scanty subsistence in summer on those stony barriers of dried-up oceans, had been driven miles away by the herdsman into the lowlands; and thus all along the ridges of those high and silent wolds no living object, excepting some solitary bird, was seen to move. Neither hedge, nor shed, nor fence were there on that high and heaving ridge of wild hills, nor aught which bore sign or imprint of the hand of man. The few naked trees that hung leaning over the steep precipice-like ledges, looked as if they had been washed there ages ago, and left motionless one above the other by the sudden subsiding of those mighty waters. The gathering night, and the blinding snow-storm, with the howling wind blowing full in his face, would even now make the stout heart of a stranger quail, if, unacquainted with the country, he found himself there alone in the dusky close of a cold brief January day.

Along the woods, along the moorish fens,
Sighs the sad genius of the coming storm;
And up among the loose disjointed cliffs,
And fractured mountains wild, the brawling brook
And cave presageful, send a hollow moan,
Resounding long in list'ning fancy's ear.—THOMSON.

Descending from those heights, we came to the banks of old lonely rivers, whose waters were only ploughed by the keel of the fowler's boat, while he, stretched out at the bottom, glided in silence along, between the high armies of tall and tufted reeds, and sharp-edged water-flags, that glittered like scimitars through the hoar-frost; and tall naked rows of osiers whose stocks or roots were buried beneath the snow, until he arrived within shot of the whole flock of wild bird, when, springing up on the sudden, like an apparition, bang went both his barrels in a moment, making a sudden splash upon the surface of the water, which the next minute was covered with the feathered bodies of the wounded and the slain. You saw the smoke rolling away like a silvery cloud above the heads of the tufted bulrushes—heard the echoes of his gun die along the hill-side—just caught the low lapping of the water as it was disturbed by the motion of his boat—then, saving the wind that whistled over the frozen sedge and blew bleakly through the naked willows, all again was still.

You wander along by the road-side spring, which is never frozen over, and see the little wagtail striding about, the very smallest of all our birds, which appears not to have its legs tied, which looks as if it scorned to go hopping along like many of the feathered race, but boldly lifts up one foot after the other, and struts, and looks around, as if it were marching at the head of a whole regiment of wagtails. True to the country in which he was bred, he disdain to number himself among the feathered gentio who hurry off, long before the approach of winter, to seek a warmer climate; but, like his companion the robin, he braves our severest seasons, and trusting to chance and his own industry, picks up his living as he best can, about spring-heads and water-courses, where a few insects are still to be found; and so between hunting for a living, sleeping, and amusing himself, he wiles away the dull winter, until spring throws her primrose-coloured garment over the sky.

The only sound, except the wind, that appears to give a voice to the wintry landscape, is the murmuring of the river: when that is frozen over and silent, it seems as if the pulse of nature had ceased to beat—as if the last stir of life was motionless—earthed as in a grave; that Hope had at last sunk down in very despair—she who had so long

Patient with bow'd head silent stood,
And on her golden anchor leant,
And watch'd below the sleeping flood,
Where winter, mid the dreariment,

Half-buried in the drifted snow,
Lay sleeping on the frozen ground;
Unheeding how the wind did blow,
Bitter and bleak on all around.



FEBRUARY.—VALENTINE DAY.



'Twas on the morn of Valentine, when birds begin to prate,
 Dame Durdon's servant-maids and men, d'd each betake a mate.
 There was Moll and Bet, and Doll and Tot, and Dorothy draggie tail,
 And Kate who was a charming girl to carry the milking-pail.

Old Song, entitled "Dame Durdon."

FEBRUARY brings with it Valentine Day. It is the month of billing and cooing when youthful lovers have a most mysterious affection for hearts and darts, wings and rings, Cupids and altars, and no end of nameless emblems surrounded with lace-edged paper, and borders of flowers in all kinds of unnatural colours, which hang temptingly in the windows, and greatly bewilder the senses of both youth and maiden, while they gaze. What a fluttering there is amongst young hearts, what a trembling bashfulness do the fairer purchasers display if the vendor of these cherished love-tokens chances to be a handsome young shopman, assuring him, should he request permission to write the address, that they have only purchased it to please a young friend, and that on no account should they themselves think of sending such nonsensical trifles. "Oh, dear, no! on no account." But St. Valentine's is a day of little harmless deceptions; it seems to have been dedicated to disguised handwritings and false signatures; when letters that are only sent to the next door are posted a mile or two away, yet, strange ending of all, each fond lover hopes to be detected through this thin disguise. What a knowing and important look does the postman assume on the morning of Valentine Day, especially in the country, where almost every rustic maiden is known

to him personally, and where he is as confident as if he had opened and read the missive, that it is not the only messenger of love that has been sent, but he can give a shrewd guess as to whence and from whom the little packet has been despatched. The country barmaid seems rather more demure on such a morning; and even hard-handed and red-armed Betty looks brighter about the eyes than the tin and copper utensils which she daily scours—coming to the door ever and anon—peeping down the road, and wondering whatever it is that makes John, the postman, so late. Then the ostler has a struggle with Betty in the kitchen, endeavouring to get a peep at her Valentine; while the postboy looks with eyes askance upon Jane, the barmaid, on whom he is, as they say in the country, "rather sweet." He finds more to do than usual in the stable amongst his horses, whistles a great deal to himself, and when asked by the pretty flirt what is the matter, answers "Oh, nothing at all!" wondering all the while to himself who can have had the impudence to write to Jane, and only wishing that he knew. She, perhaps, to make him a little jealous, has bought and posted the Valentine, and addressed it to herself, for such manoeuvres are occasionally practised by the maidens when they wish to bring a distant lover to the point at

issue. Another picture which we have seen of Valentine Day would have looked well in the minute painting of a Wilkie. The fond old mother, with her spectacles on, reading the Valentine to her husband, who smiled as he listened attentively to every line, which said

The rose is red, the violet's blue,
Carnation's sweet, and so is you.
The ring is round and has no end,
So is my love to Mary, my friend.
First we eat lots, and then we draw,
Kind fortune said it must be you.

While the pretty daughter to whom these old-fashioned lines were directed sat with her hands clasped together on her knees, looking thoughtfully in the fire and wondering to herself whether or not William really meant what he had written, and if he loved her truly, as much as he pretended to do. Then when she had retired to rest, the old people would sit down and think over what they could spare Mary towards housekeeping, when she married, and they would enumerate nearly everything they possessed, and deprive themselves of many little necessary articles, to add to the comforts of Mary, for ten to one they knew William's mind much better than she did: as the lover and the intended father-in-law, had often met on a Saturday evening at the Plough, where, over a pint and a pipe, they had discussed the whole affair even down to what they should provide for dinner on the wedding-day.

Many antiquarians have endeavoured in vain to unravel the origin and mystery of Valentine Day, but their labours have hitherto been in vain; if discovered, it would likely enough be as unmeaning as the source from whence so many of our old customs have sprung, and not worth the labour wasted. Our ancestors were pretty close observers of nature, and there is but little doubt that, as they noticed the birds, which first begin to build and pair at this period, when the weather is favourable, so natural an occurrence might lead to youths and maidens imitating the custom by selecting lovers, glad of any amusement after the dark mid-winter had passed, and that Valentine Day had no other origin. As far back as we have been enabled to trace this love-making day, we find it linked with the mating of birds, which seems inseparable from St. Valentine; and we are at a loss to imagine how the worthy bishop, whose name is associated with it, first fell into such company.

The earliest Valentines were nothing more than slips of paper, on which the names of both sexes were written: they were placed apart, the men drawing from the pile on which the women's names were endorsed, and they again taking the first they touched from the opposite heap. These names were worn for a number of days—sometimes inside the coat, waistcoat, or bodice—sometimes only on the sleeve, just as the feigned or real lover intended to express his passion; and there is no doubt but that such a game, begun in jest, ended at times in earnest, and that by this means many of our forefathers won their fair brides.

Even in our own day (and in the country the harmless superstition still exists), the first maiden we met on this auspicious morning was considered our Valentine, and as such was hailed; and no little trouble do the rustic lovers put themselves to occasionally, to meet the one on whom their choice has before been fixed. We can remember ourselves in the hey-day of youth being foolish enough to walk two miles in the snow and darkness, and waiting until the cottage door opened, to claim a cherry-cheeked farmer's daughter for our Valentine. Too poor, perhaps, to purchase the printed epistle, with Cupid's altar, hearts, and doves, we presented the original, and thereby saved both paper and postage. Gay, in his "Shepherd's Week," thus describes this old superstition:—

Last Valentine, the day when birds of kind
Their paramours with mutual chirpings find,
I early rose, just at the break of day,
Before the sun had chased the stars away.
A-field I went, amid the morning dew,
To milk my kine (for so should housewives do)
The first I spied: and the first swain we see,
In spite of fortune, shall our true-love be.

We have in our possession, framed and glazed, a Valentine, which was sent to a dear old lady we well know, more than half a century ago. It must have taken many hours to have cut out the hearts and diamonds in scissor-work, and printed the border which surrounds the unsailor-like looking gentleman, who is standing under a tree, and pointing to his ship. Both Chaucer and Lydgate make mention of Valentine Day, for the "Morning Star of Poetry" says—

Blessed be Saint Valentine,
For on his day I chose you to be mine—
Without repenting, my heart sweet.

—proof that five hundred years ago it was celebrated in England.

Towards the close of the month, if the weather is fine, the gardeners begin to bestir themselves. You see the little children out beside the cottages, with their tiny spades, assisting to clear away the withered boughs, and delighted at the fire that is kindled to burn up the rubbish, into which they thrust almost everything they can lay hold of that will burn. Days are longer, and they remain out to the very last minute, it is light, to play in the village street. Such a picture have we now before us. The scene is a rough-hewn wall dividing a church-yard from the high-road: on the opposite ascent stand a row of little cottages, which overlook the low stony barrier, and command a view of the resting-places of the dead. A plot of grass, that already wears a green spring look, slopes down to the edge of the high-road; beside which a clear water-course goes tinkling into the distant valley, then empties itself into a deep sluice, which goes murmuring along through the dark flood-gates that open into a neighbouring river. The stream is crossed by a strong plank, which leads to the cottages. Some of the children are throwing stones and bits of sticks into the stream; others are watching them float away, and anxious that this boat, as they call it, should beat the other. Cold as it still is, a little boy and girl are sitting on the sloping greensward: their mother, who stands sewing at the cottage-door, has twice warned them that they will take cold unless they get up; but they pay no regard to her. Two others are sitting astride the low church-wall; a third is jerking stones into the brook. Lower down another group are running after each other. Beyond these you see the light from the blacksmith's shop falling faintly across the road. Most of the cottage doors are open, for, although only as yet February, the air is as mild as if it were April. An artist might sketch such a scene for a summer evening, were it not that the trees are still leafless; for the little green on the elders beside the brook, and the tiny buds on the gooseberry-bushes, are as yet the only heralds that proclaim the coming of Spring.

The cloudy brow
Of winter smooth'd, up from her orient couch
She springs, and like a maid betroth'd, puts on
Her bridal suit, and with an ardent smile
Comes forth to greet her lover. Gracious 'tis,
Ay, passing sweet, to mark the cautious paces
Of slow-returning spring, e'en from the time

When first the matted apricot unfolds
Its tender bloom, till the fall orchard glows.—HURDIS.

In our description of February last year we only made slight mention of the rooks. We will now endeavour to do more justice to the habits of these dusky gentlemen, who go marching over field and furrow as if they were alone the sole proprietors of the land. Like many other social communities, they are made up of good and bad, and, in spite of a tolerably vigilant police, are not free from the depredations of their own light-fingered gentry, who do not hesitate to carry away the whole of a neighbour's house when his back is turned; or sometimes instead of removing it, they take possession, and although generally turned out in the end, they have been seen to maintain their ground with a spirit worthy of a better cause. Sometimes a young married couple having laid a good solid foundation for their future home, return with a couple of rafters in their beaks, which, after a careful survey, they have borne over hill and valley, with weary wings, an immense distance; when, lo! instead of finding the half-finished house as they left it, the very foundation is gone, and nothing but the naked fork of the branch on which it was laid remains. Well may they bob their heads and caw to one another, and wonder what impudent thieves have been so busy during their absence. They set out on the search, and find on the next tree every stick and stake twisted into another nest, on which one of the plunderers is resting, while the other robber, a down-looking dark-faced rascal, is perched on the branch beside his companion. After exchanging a word or two of a sort on each side, the battle commences: the whole neighbourhood is alarmed; the police interfere; and being beaten the culprits are driven out—transported to some solitary tree—and not allowed during that season to return to the rookery.

Your rooks are not a proud people, who refuse to mingle with strangers, for they will frequently allow the noisy Jackdaws to build beside them, and are not above dining with the starlings in winter, so long as they conduct themselves respectfully. Every one who has rambled out in spring or summer must have noticed the hundreds of small caterpillars which are often seen suspended by their own threads from the trees, especially the oak, the beautiful foliage of which they soon destroy. Here the rooks find a rich repast; and instead of waiting until the insects have spun their way to the ground, these birds alight upon the trees, and, fluttering their great black wings, send down the caterpillars in thousands, and having strewn the greensward with a plentiful banquet, the rooks then descend and eat their fill.

Although the hooded crows do not live and build together in common like the rooks, but in pairs, and generally at some distance, yet they hold what naturalists have called a Crow-Court. For two or three days may they be seen assembling together on some particular hill or field; and Dr. Edmonson, in his work on the "Shetland Islands," describes them as delaying the trial for a day or two, until sufficient numbers have arrived to form the court. Whether the prisoners are driven thither by force, or come to defend themselves, are found guilty by witnesses, or what, cannot be known, though it is an undoubted fact, that the whole assembly are heard to croak as if in argument; that this lasts for some time—when the court rises like one *crow*, and begins to peck and beat the prisoners to death. Sometimes three or four of these victims are left dead on the floor of the court; and when the execution is over, the whole tribe disperse, betaking themselves in couples to their solitary trees, nor ever assembling together again in numbers until the next great crow-court is summoned.

The swallow and the martin, if the weather is very favourable, often arrive by the end of this month, and we hear the old familiar twittering under the eaves in the early morning.

"The nest of a bird," says Mr. Crouch, "is so interesting an object, so curiously and admirably contrived for an evident purpose, of materials apparently so little calculated for the formation of such a structure, and its form and position are so varied according to the aptitude for comfort of its inhabitants, combined with security from discovery and danger, that it has ever been contemplated as a surprising manifestation of skill and intelligence in the little beings engaged in its fabrication."

Some to the holly hedge
Nestling repair, and to the thicket some;
Some to the rude protection of the thorn
Commit their feeble offspring.—THOMSON.



MARCH.—PRIMROSE AND PALM GATHERING.



O Spring! dear Spring! thou more dost bring
 Than birds, or bees, or flowers—
 The good old time, the holy prime
 Of Easter's solemn hours:
 Prayers offer'd up, and anthems rung,
 Beneath the grey church towers.—*Fasts and Festivals.*

PALM-SUNDAY, was an old holiday which our ancestors kept with great reverence, in remembrance of Our Saviour's entrance into Jerusalem; and it is still a custom to ornament the houses in the country with the silvery buds of the willow (which are called palm) in the present day. These buds, which lie like great oval pearls upon the slender stems of the osiers, are the earliest heralds of spring, and often come out long before the hawthorn has put forth a single speck of green, and may frequently be seen in the cottage windows overtopping a border of sweet primroses, snowdrops, or violets, which have blown before the coming of Easter. Many a mild March day has seen us out with our youthful companions in the fields beside the river Trent, gathering the buds of the willow and the white blossoms of the blackthorn, which also hang upon the hedges, like a cloud of flowers, long before a green leaf, exciting that of the alder, has shot out of its wintery sheath. Although it was not the palm of Palestine we gathered, yet it was such as our forefathers had for centuries chosen as the emblem of those green branches which were scattered before Our Redeemer; and to us it brought back an old and holy

picture, carrying the imagination into that ancient city of the East, and bringing before the "mind's eye" one of those impressive scenes which are linked with the establishment of the Christian religion. It also calls up the figures of those pious pilgrims who wandered into the Holy Land and visited many a distant shrine, bearing the palm-branch in their hands—the acknowledged token of peace and prayer.

The abolition of these sacred emblems, which once adorned our churches, and were borne in our Easter processions, could be of no benefit to the progress of religion. They were the productions of Nature, not the work of man: they served to show that He who ruleth the seasons had again sent Spring with all her flowers; and with these were linked the memory of the Son of God, who rode not forth in regal purple, crowned with gold, but "meek, and sitting upon an ass." Such associations did the silver buds bring to the early Christians, and the custom of palm-gathering was kept up until the Reformation in England.

With what delight did we hail the first appearance of these pearl-like buds—

they told us that spring was near at hand; the sun also came to throw his light upon them two hours earlier than he did a few weeks ago, and in the budding hedges we had already discovered the sky-stained eggs of the hedge-sparrow. Well can we remember the woods where we gathered the first primroses, and which were soon to be green with lilies of the valley. What a refreshing smell there was about the earth we dug up to get at the moss-covered roots of those early primroses, for they were the first treasures which we transplanted to our little gardens, where, day by day, they lost that beautiful bloom which they only bear in the solitude of the wildwood. The sounds of youthful voices seem in accordance with the opening of this happy season, as they fall at intervals upon the ear, filling up the pauses which occur between the singing of the blackbird or the thrush, and wafting pleasant memories to the wanderer, telling him that eager eyes are already watching the opening beauties of the flowers.

I love to see the little goldfinch pluck
The groundsel's feather'd seed, and twitting, twit;
And soon in bower of apple-blossoms perched,
Trim his gay suit, and pay us with a song—HURDIS.

Above a thousand years ago, our Saxon forefathers had no other landmarks to distinguish the boundaries of their estates than the objects of Nature—a tree, a bush, or a water-course, served them instead of walls and hedges; and we can almost fancy that we are overlooking those old English landscapes while reading one of their ancient deeds of conveyance. One estate is mentioned in a deed, dated 886, as stretching along from Sheep-lea to the Broad Bramble, past the Old Gibbet-place and the Old Ford, along the Deep-dell, to the Thorn on the Mere, thence to the Red-cross, by the stream of Alders, up the Milk-valley by the Foresters' Mark, and along the Hay-meadow. Another goes from the Bridge by the Oak-ditch, past the Bourn and the Great Willow, from the Hoary Thorn to the Eel-tree, by the Three Hills and the Thorn Maple to the Three Trees, the Deep Brook and the Clear Pool, by the Black Willow, the Nettle Island, the Sedge Moor, past the Burrows, the Hillock, the Ship Oak, the Great Aspen, by the Reedy Slough, and onward to the Hoary Apple Tree beyond the Wolf-pit.

What an assemblage of old poetical names have we here: we can see the half-drained and half-cultivated country; we can picture it in miry March with its reedy meres and impassable sloughs—the rude wooden bridge by which the ploughman crossed over the quaking bog to get at the rich land which lay beyond. Yet amid these wilds and old forest-fastnesses the violets and primroses blowed as they do now, and the Saxon serf was cheered by the skylark's song while he laboured in those old hedgeless wastes. The beating of young lambs was then heard upon the wold—the ice-freed brooks rolled merrily along; and though he fared hard by day, and at night had a block of wood for his pillow, Nature was still his comforter, and he found solace in the sights and sounds, that greeted his eye and ear, when he wandered along over the opening daisies.

Although the trees are leafless, there is something about a mild sunny day at the close of March which tells us that all the out-of-door world is alive—that the very air which seemed so silent in winter now murmurs with life, while a thousands insects are dancing about overhead, as if rejoicing that the time of flowers is so near at hand. The winding roads have on such days a dry, warm, summer look, and you can scarcely peer under any hedge without discovering on the sun-lit bank the silent progress that spring is making; for here and there the starchycelandine has thrown open its golden-rayed flower, and the furze hung out its burning blossoms, which shoot up like a thousand flames from a green chandelier. Now the first bee comes blundering abroad, and running his black head against everything, as if not yet thoroughly awake. You wonder where he has hidden himself all the long winter, for you see at a glance that he belongs to no hive, but has his home somewhere in the neighbouring wood. What a summer sound his booming gives to the air; depend upon it he knows where the broadest primroses and sweetest violets blow; but he has gone to ransack yonder furze-bush, and will soon be busy rifling the yellow blossoms;

While the ploughman, near at hand,
Whistles o'er the farrow'd land,

giving all the air a "countryed smell," as he turns up the sleeping furrows, and causing you to sigh as you think of badly-drained streets and ill-ventilated houses, which you are doomed to breathe amongst in the City, places which rosy Health rarely plants her foot upon, for if she alights there the bloom upon her cheek at once begins to fade, and unless she hurries back to the breezy hills and greenwood sides, she will be compelled to bow her head in wan consumption's sickly lap.

So conducive to health is the aroma arising from the newly-ploughed earth, that we have frequently seen an invalid seated in a chair, secured to a kind of truck which was attached to the horses, and dragged along behind the ploughman, whose labour was not at all impeded by his passenger, excepting that it required more care when turning round at each end of the field. What heavy masses of clay at times cling to the ploughman's boots. You wonder how he manages to get along with such a clog to his heels; every stride he takes, the man's accumulates; and when, after many shakes, he gets rid of it, there lies a clod weighing pounds upon the furrow, the upper part bearing the impression of every nail in his boot. His hands are hard as horn through holding the plough; and if he has followed the same labour for years, there is a peculiar roundness about the shoulders which tells that the continued grasping of those bright shafts is no easy work.

The roads have a different appearance now from what they had a few months ago; there are more moving figures in the landscape, especially when it is market-day—such a scene as we have attempted to describe in a little poem, where

Busy forms move o'er the landscape brown
In twos and threes, for it is market-day,
Beyond those hills stretches a little town,
And thitherward the rusties bend their way,
Crossing the scene in red, and blue, and grey,
Now by the hedge-rows, now by oak-trees old,
As they by stile or low-hatched cottage stray,
Peep through the rounded hand, then you'll behold
Such scenes as Merland drew in frames of sunny gold

A laden ass, a maid with wicker maun,
A shepherd's lad driving his lambs to sell;
Gaudily-dress'd girls move in the sunny dawn,
Women whose cloaks become the landscape well
Farmers whose thoughts on crops and prices dwell.
An old man with his cow and calf draws near.
Anon you hear the village carrier's bell;
Then doth his grey old tilted cart appear.
Moving so slow, you think he never will get there.

But "slow and sure" has been for years his motto; and he will not only get there in time for the market, but stop and bait at a little road-side house, the swing sign of which you can just distinguish by the white post that supports it, on the left at the foot of the hill.

Now in the ponds and ditches may be seen hundreds of little frogs, and tadpoles with their round heads and long tails, bearing, at present, no more resemblance to a frog, than an egg does to a living bird. They are devoured in millions by the fishes. If they miss the jaws of the funny tribe, there are the newts ready to prey upon them: if they escape the newts, there are no end of water-fowl on the look-out: the snake feeds upon them as soon as they can leap: stoats and weasels dine of them, when nothing better can be had; and they can scarcely move anywhere without meeting with an enemy. On no account ought frogs to be driven out of gardens that are infested with slugs; for these are a favourite food; and wherever frogs are found, the slugs soon disappear. The way in which the frog seizes its prey is by throwing its tongue forward. The action is quick as thought—no sooner is the tongue out than the slug has vanished: it is almost impossible for the eye to detect the action, it is so momentary. In winter the frog buries itself in the mud, at the bottom of ponds and ditches, where it remains until spring, when it comes forth; and you may then see on the top of the water a number of black spots floating in a jelly-like substance. These are the spawn, or eggs, in which the tiny tadpoles are enclosed. They possess the power of breathing through the skin; and it is no easy task to either hang or drown them. It is now stale information to state that the toad is not venomous, but is as perfectly harmless as the frog, and equally useful in gardens. It is an unnecessary cruelty to destroy these inoffensive reptiles: they have sufficient enemies without man waging war against them; he, of all, ought to be their protector.

I have a great love for those little dirty and noisy vagrants, the sparrows; who hide, and build, and breed under the smoky eaves, and come out, sometimes, as black as soot. Wherever man rears his horse, they follow. They are always ready with their "good morning" as soon as it is light. They take possession above, and the mice below; both are painters that will have no "ray." If man can contrive to live, they are resolved to live with him. For ages they have been his constant companions. The sparrow hops down and breakfasts with the fowls, without needing an invitation. He takes possession of the corn-rick, and helps himself bountifully. In summer, he goes into the harvest field, if it is near at hand; nor is he very particular about waiting until the corn is ripe, before he commences his banquet. In vain does the farmer set a price upon his head; he contrives to live, and die, and leave a large family of sparrows behind him, who know how to pick up a living as well as he did. The sparrows, like the rooks, have their mode of punishment: and when any culprit has committed himself, they raise a clamour loud enough to alarm a whole neighbourhood. It begins in a moment—they all set to at once; and when they have had their say, they leave the offender to his own reflections. They are hasty, but it is soon over with them: nor do they ever put their victim to death; but having beaten him, and told him their minds, they treat him as kindly as before. In one instance, when the house sparrows had undergone a long persecution, they beat a retreat, and built their nests in some adjoining trees—a proof, that, when compelled by danger, they could change their habits; and, like other birds, build amongst the branches, instead of under the thatch or beneath the eaves.

One of the great pleasures which a lover of nature finds in a March ramble, is the arrival of the birds, which keep dropping in by twos and threes, we know not from whence. Nearly first comes the little wryneck, with its beautiful plumage, so richly marked, that it is almost impossible to describe its varied colours. You know it at a glance; for it is always twisting the dark-lined head and neck over the shoulders. Then we see the tiny willow-wren, whose chirp may be heard until September. It is also elegantly marked—yellow, brown, and white, and fond of frequenting the osier-beds. The titmouse and yellow-hammer also begin to sing; and together with the skylark, blackbird, thrush, woodlark, wren, and several others, there is already such a spring concert opened, as makes a lover of nature leave his chimney corner, and go forth to listen to their "sweet piping."

Sweet were the sounds which through the green vale flow'd:
The gentle lambs bleated all summer long;
The spotted heifer from the upland lowed;
The speckled thrush struck up its piping song;
A mournful "coo" the blue wood-pigeon made,
Now high, now low, now lost—just as the spring breeze played.



APRIL.—ANGLING.



A fool! a fool!—I met a fool! the forest.
A motley fool! a miserable world!
As I do live by food, I met a fool.
"Good morrow, fool," quoth I.—SHAKESPEARE.

WHAT merry "quirks and cranks" have we seen played on April-fool Day! What gushes of laughter have rung out, as one after another was beguiled by this harmless foolery! Who ever forgot the old shoemaker's shop by the roadside, where we sent some witting for a pennyworth of stirrup-oil, and who invariably got thrashed by the old cobbler's stirrup-leather? At any hour we can picture the sheepish look of the boy—see him holding out his saucer, while a twinkling of merriment gathered about the wrinkled corners of the old man's grey eyes, as he unloosed the strap from his foot and knee; and, although the hardest blow he struck would scarcely have killed a fly, yet what roars of hearty laughter we sent forth as we saw the little simpleton scamper off, and beheld the merry shoemaker shaking his strap as he stood at his shop-door, in the sunshine of an April morning. Then there was pigeon-milk to be sent for at the milk-house; and here, perhaps, the tables were turned upon us, for the youth we sent, although he pretended ignorance, took the mug and the penny, and going in at once, asked for a halfpennyworth of milk, put the other halfpenny in his pocket, then came out boldly, and said, "Here it is;" while we looked at each other, and confessed that he had made April fools of us. Then what shoes we said were untied—handkerchiefs dropped—hats crushed—black spots on the face,

which we sent them to the glass to look at—where they only got laughed at for their pains.

Wicked and not always harmless errands did we also send others upon. Mr. Somebody wanted to borrow the large brewing tub, and the lender went toiling with it in a barrow: the load was almost more than he could wheel; and when he arrived at his journey's end, the pretended borrower only called him an April fool. He had his joke, and we our laugh; but never again had he the loan of the brewing tub. We sent the doctor post-haste to some one who was hearty and well, and probably busied in his garden. We had the fire-engine brought a mile or two; then laughed at the old man as we pointed out the leaden pump for him to play upon. Pigs had fallen into imaginary wells; horses and donkeys we pounded, then laughed at the owners, who never for a moment thought of looking into their own fields or stables until they returned. Yet very rarely did these tricks provoke any anger; all was considered fair on April-fool Day, for every one was disposed to be merry; and very often the laugh was as loud on the part of the deceived as the deceivers, and small sympathy did he obtain who lost his temper on the first of April.

Even grave sober matrons unbent their staid brows at our jokes; they recalled

the days when they also were young, and had their jokes—when they got their lovers to hunt for a needle they had never dropped, or to stoop for a cotton-ball which was safely deposited in their laps. Such tricks seem to sit lightly, even on the conscience of old age; they bring no regrets. Though we have known a swain sent ten miles to see his sweetheart, by an urgent letter, yet the laugh they enjoyed together seemed, somehow, to sweeten the long and unnecessary journey. April-fool Day was a merry time with our forefathers, who appear never to have lost a chance of making themselves happy whenever they could.

Spring-time stirred the blood of the great father of English poetry, Chaucer. He could not lie in bed when the daisies were opening. He tells us that he then found no delight in his books; that when he heard the birds sing, and saw the flowers beginning to blow, he bade farewell to his study; that he loved the daisies above all the flowers that grew; that scarcely a morning dawned in spring but what he rose early. As he himself says:—

—I am up and walking in the mead,
To see this flower against the sun spread.
When it upriseth, early on the morrow,
That blissful sight softeneth all my sorrow.
So glad am I, when that I have presence
Of it, to do it all reverence,
As she that is of all flowers the flower,
Full of all virtue and honour,
And ever alike fair, and fresh of hue.

And ever I love it, and ever alike new,
And ever I shall, till that mine heart die.
There loveth no one hotter in his life,
And when that it is eve I run blithe,
As soon as ever the sun sinketh west,
To see this flower how it will go to rest,
For fear of night—so hateful she darkness.
Her cheer is plainly spread in the brightness
Of the sun—for there it will unclose.

There has been a great outcry of late amongst many good and well-meaning people against the capturing and rearing of young birds. They have pronounced it barbarous and cruel in the extreme, however kindly they may be reared. Now this is a strange contradiction. Kindness cannot be cruelly, even if misapplied. Youth of both sexes who rear up birds do their utmost generally to keep them alive; and we have no hesitation in asserting that an attendance upon the wants of these little chirrupers cultivates kind and affectionate feelings, softens the heart, and contributes towards the making of better men and women than they would otherwise have grown into, had it not have been for these necessary attentions. A girl will weep, and a kind-hearted boy be sorry, for the death of a favourite bird. And while such things help to refine the feelings, and are unaccompanied by cruelty, it is surely better that a half-fledged nestling should perish, now and then, through excess of kindness, than such virtuous emotions be stifled. We dare not put the number of young birds that are carried off, and devoured by hawks, weasels, &c., against the few that die through over-nursing; although a good argument might be twisted out of such matter.

But, whatever may be said about birds, no such charge can be brought against flowers; and as the following passage, which we wrote some years ago in praise of these "bowing adorers of the gale," has appeared in several publications without the acknowledgment of our name, we think it but justice to claim our own:—

"Who would wish to live without flowers? Where would the poet find his images of beauty, if they were to perish? Are they not the emblems of loveliness and innocence, and the living types of all that is pleasing and graceful? We compare young lips to the rose, and the white brow to the radiant lily; the winning eye is blue as the violet, and the sweet voice like a breeze kissing its way through the flowers. We hang delicate blossoms on the silken ringlets of the young bride, and strew her path with fragrant flowers as she leaves the church. We place them around the marble face of the dead in the narrow coffin, and they become emblems of our affections—of pleasures remembered and hopes faded—wishes vanished, and scenes cherished in memory, all the more, because they can never return. We look to the far-off spring in other valleys—to the eternal summer beyond the grave, where flowers that never fade bloom in those starry fields, which no chilly winter ever blew off. They come upon us in spring like the remembrance of a pleasant dream—a vision that hovered above us in sleep, peopled with shadowy beauties and simple delights, embroidered with the richest hues of fancy. Sweet flowers!—that bring back again the scenes of childhood—faces remembered in youth—the love that knew not it was love!" Even in our rooms they conjure up images of the mossy bank by the wayside, where we so often gazed upon the early primroses. They recall the sheltered glen, darkly green, filled with the perfume of violets, that showed like another sky amid the scene. The sweet song of the village maiden again rings upon our ears while we gaze on them, and we remember those modest eyes "that ever loved the ground," and the time we first beheld them—

Fix'd as a pilgrim's—wilder'd in his way,
Who dare not stir by night, for fear to stray,
But stands with awful eyes to watch the dawn of day.—DRYDEN.

What a mystery seems to hang about an old wood when the trees are covered with leaves, and the underwood is thick and impassable. We know not what flowers are growing in those untrodden solitudes; we cannot tell what birds build and hide in those hidden coverts; what badgers, weasels, polecats, marten, and snakes burrow, hide, climb, and bask, under ground and in the hollows of trees, about the great mossy branches, and on the unexplored banks, which accumulated leaves, and natural water-courses, and huge fallen trees have formed. It is this very difficulty of seeing beyond the few feet around us, that makes a wood so solemn. A hill or a moorland may be lonely, but there the view is open, whereas in the heart of an old wood all around us is dim shadow, green, and mysterious. Many of the trees are large and aged; and we feel that we are in the presence of strange things, that have grown old in light and darkness for centuries; that they have outlived all other living things, and around them there hangs a kind of reverential awe, such as makes us marvel not that in the early ages, when England was first peopled, they were worshipped by the Druids and their followers. Then we come upon deep dells, over which the gnarled and withered stem leans, and the foliage darkens, and we marvel how these great hollows were first formed, for nowhere do they bear a trace of the hand of man. We know that the ancient Britons kept their corn in subterranean places, which have slept undisturbed through the silence of many centuries. All traces of the work of these early excavations is buried beneath the accumulated gatherings of a thousand autumns and winters, which have cast down and rotted their leaves.

Here quivering aspens bow before the gale,
And hawthorns blossom hid in sunless shade;
The mournful ring-love coos her tender tale,
The holly's shining leaves are here display'd,
While silver birches overhang the glade;
The towering elm shelters the dusky rook,
The hazel in green beauty is array'd,
The alder hangeth o'er the crisped brook
In which the willow flowers in silence ever look.

And in such a spot the sudden starting of a large pheasant from out the deep underwood, as it goes with a loud "whur-r-r" high up amid the foliage, causes the lonely wanderer to spring back unconsciously, though he smiles the next moment at this needless alarm.

As Angling has already commenced, we shall glance at a few of the finny inhabitants of our streams and rivers; first beginning with the stickleback, with its three spines, which can either be raised or lowered at will, and which seems

fit for nothing but food for other fishes and the amusement of boys. "I know not," says quaint old Izaak Walton, "where he dwells in winter, nor what he is good for in summer." He is, however, a great ornament to a glass globe; his colours are splendid; and by a constant changing of the water every two or three days, he has lived in his glass house for two or three years. The minnow, which first appears in March, although so small, has a flavour equal to many of our more celebrated fish, especially when fried with the flowers of primroses and cowslips, and the yolks of eggs and butter—a dish delicate enough for the most imaginative of poets, though it was at one time very common. In Summer they are full of spawn, and not so good as in spring. Everybody knows that a small red worm is a sufficient bait, that three or four hooks may be used at once, and sometimes as many fish be drawn out at a time, for they always bite eagerly.

The ball-head, or miller's-thumb, with its immense head, large mouth, and spiny teeth, though anything but pleasant to look upon, forms an excellent dish, and those who have never tasted it will be agreeably surprised when they partake of one, and regret that they are not to be met with oftener at the fishmonger's. He is very fond of hiding under a stone, beside which, if a worm be dropped down gently, he will dart upon it in an instant, for he never stops to consider a moment about the matter if the hook is well concealed.—The loche we have often caught in the river Trent; it is a long fish, without either scales or teeth, bearded like a barbel. It is often used as a bait, especially for eels. Next in succession comes the gudgeon, which, though "little, is good;" it is well known to the London angler, being plentiful in the Lea river—that river of old historical associations, where English Alfred drew off the water and left the fleet of Hastings, the celebrated Sea-king, high and dry aground. It is rather a handsome-looking fish, broad in the middle, with a beautifully marked tail and back fin, and may be caught either with worm, gentie, or paste. The bait must touch the ground. It is fond of a gravelly situation. The bleak, or whiting, is a well-known fish, always on the move; is about six inches long, with large eyes, a small head, and silvery gills: the back is of a beautiful green colour. They are famous fly-catchers, and, from their rapid motions, are called water-swallows. Two or three hooks may be used, as in minnow fishing, and the same baits as for gudgeons. The flavour is very indifferent.

The dace, dart, shallow, dare, or by whatever name it is called, is a fast breeder, and during the summer months, very partial to playing about on the sunny surface of the water. It is found in many of our rivers, and appears to prefer such spots as are in constant motion, through the rolling of rapid currents and eddies. In cold weather it prefers a quiet hole, or the sheltered part of a stream overhung by the tall water-flags or tufted rushes. Its body is rather long, the back of palish green, varied with dusky marks, while the belly has a silvery appearance, and the fins a pale red tinge. It will almost take any bait in spring; neither worms, larvæ of beetles, grubs, caterpillars, or even water-smalls, come amiss to it. They are sharp quick biters, requiring to be struck suddenly; and, as they are not to be drawn out without a good struggle, it is necessary to use strong tackle. Blaine makes mention of a pie made of dace and roach, which seems to have been

A dainty dish to set before a King;
For when the pie was open the guests began to sing.

And, according to his account, they would willingly have dined off such a pie, once a week, at least, as long as they lived. Roach-fishing so nearly resembles that of dace, that we shall not pause to describe it. The beautiful gold-coloured circle of the eye and the rich red fins are familiar to those who have seen the roach in good condition; nor is it to be mistaken, on account of its great breadth when laid on its side. It affords excellent sport to the angler, and has been caught from a pound to two, or more, in weight. We pass by the rudd, a fish which has led to much discussion, some considering it a species of dace, and others of carp, and come to the bream, with its high arched back, forked tail, and large eyes. When in fine condition and a good size, the bream has a rich golden colour, in place of the silvery hue it before wore. They are a cautious race, and the angler ought not to throw his shadow upon the water, but keep himself as much out of sight as possible. A warm, cloudy day is considered the most favourable for biting, and a red worm the best of baits. He is a fish rather too fond of sucking the bait, but this can be easily detected by watching the float: for our part, we never struck in too great a hurry when we detected this half nibbling; the better plan, we think, is to let him get well hold, or go if he chooses, though it is necessary to examine the bait after his departure. We must reserve a few remarks on this old and pleasant occupation for next month.



MAY.—MAY-DAY GAMES.



Hark ! how Delight
Knocks with her silver wings at every sense,
For merry May her pastimes doth commence.
Hark ! how the peasants, with their music loud,
Raise many an ancient ditty ; while a crowd
Of snow-clad maidens, crowned with garlands gay,
Are tripping lightly round the Queen of May.—*Cleveland's May-Day.*

ONE of the oldest and most poetical of all our country amusements was the celebration of May-day. Mention is made of it by our earliest chroniclers and poets ; and so great is its antiquity, that the very origin is lost. Some believe that it is a custom which has descended down to us from the times of the old Druids ; others, that it was introduced into England by the Romans. But, as it is not mentioned by any historians who have recorded the manners of that period, I shall leave the matter to rest where it is ; for it is sufficient to know, that, four or five hundred years ago, May-day was a great holiday in England. Our forefathers were great lovers of nature, had more holidays than we have now, and had few of those in-door amusements which we possess ; and I have always considered May-day as one of those joyous celebrations with which they welcomed the return of spring—the season which brought back the birds, and flowers, and long green leaves, and threw open once more, as it were, the gates which led to their summer amusements, their joyous out-of-door pastimes, which, during the long, dark winter, had been closed. It seemed but natural that they should set

out on their merry pilgrimage to the woods, when the trees were again putting on their green garments ; when they could, on the darkening hedges, point out the very spots where the May blossoms would be hung ; when the daisies were once more strewn, like radiant pearls upon the grass ; and, in deep woodland nooks, the blue-bells lay sleeping like an azure cloud that had fallen from heaven ; and primroses and violets nestled side by side on the warm and sunny banks. It was then that they sallied forth, with axe in hand, to fell one of the tall, straight, tapering trees which grew in the forest, for they always brought home the most beautiful one they could meet with for their May-pole. Sometimes it was dragged from the woods by oxen garlanded with flowers, and accompanied by music ; while men and maidens, bearing green boughs, swelled the procession ; and thus they brought home May. Spenser, who lived in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, presents us with the following description of bringing home May, in his "Shepherd's Calendar." The scene here painted he had, no doubt, often witnessed :—

Young folk now flock in everywhere,
To gather May-bushes and smelling brere,
And home they hasten, the posts to dight,
And all the church pillars, are day-light,
With Hawthorn-buds, and sweet celanino,
And garlands of roses, and sops of wine.
Even this morn'g—no longer ago,
I saw a shoal of shepherds out go,
With singing, and shouting, and jolly cheer ;
Before them went a lusty labourer,
That unto many a horrid play'd
Whereto they danced, each one with his maid.

To see these folks making such joyance,
Made my heart after the pipe to dance.
Then to the green wood they sped them all
To fetch home May, with their musical ;
And home they bring him in a royal
throne,
Crowned as king ; and his queen, fair one,
Was Lady Flora, on whom did attend
A fair flock of fairies, and a fresh band
Of lovely nymphs. O that I were there,
To help the ladies their May-bush to bear.

On the village green, the tall May-pole was reared, amid merry shouts and loud huzzas, and the deep sounding of music ; they built up arbours out of the branches they brought from the forest ; they decorated the fronts of their houses with boughs ; and on the tall May-pole hung many a garland of beautiful flowers. A bower was placed at the head of these arbours, which stood higher than the others. Within and without it was decorated with flowers, and set apart for the Queen of May, who was, generally, some peasant girl, selected by the unanimous consent of her companions. Sometimes the daughter of the Lord of the Manor presided as May Queen, and the whole family issued from their old ancestral hall to join in the May-day games. Then there were rustic youths dressed up in the costume of Robin Hood and his merry men, and Maid Marian ; recalling the days of old, when these daring outlaws were the dread and pride of Sherwood Forest, plundering the rich to feed the poor ; and chasing the dun deer through the thickets, in spite of Norman keepers and cruel forest-laws.

It was a season of rejoicing throughout the length and breadth of the land. Nor was London a bit behind in the celebration of this ancient festival. Even in the City, the tall May-pole was erected ; and any one who had passed along Cornhill on May-day a few centuries ago, would have seen green arbours erected there, and huge oaken boughs hanging over the street, and the milk-maids, and all the merry old citizens, with their wives, daughters, maids, and apprentices, congregated about the May-pole, many of them dressed in old fanciful costumes, and giving themselves up to all the fun and jollity of May. But time has not preserved even the names of the mazy measures which they danced ; and nearly all we know of the ancient pipe and tabor, the favourite music to which they timed their footsteps, is gathered from glancing at some scarce engraving. "Gone are the days of Gamelyn." "The May-pole," says an old writer, "was consecrated to the Goddess of Flowers, and the garlands were left upon it the whole year, without being disturbed by any one ;" and I well remember passing through a village, at the end of April, in which a tall May-pole stood, only a few years ago, and seeing the last year's garlands hanging upon it, all wan and withered, and beaten by the storms of the past winter.

In those times, it seems to have been a custom to set out for the woods soon after midnight, so that by sunrise the May-pole was felled, and the branches gathered, and the procession ready to start, on its way home. In a book written during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, it is stated that sometimes as many as forty yoke of oxen, each having a sweet nosegay tied to the tip of his horns, were employed to draw home the May-pole ; that they covered it all over, from top to bottom, with flowers and sweet herbs, which they bound round with strings ; fastening, at equal distances, cross bars upon it, to the end of which they attached garlands ; and thus decorated, it was hoisted up, amid the leaping and dancing and joyous shouts of the assembled multitude.

A sum of money was allowed in those days for the erection of green arbours around the May-pole. The King and Queen, or Lord and Lady of May, as they were called, were dressed out in scarfs and ribbons, and plumes of feathers, and made as fine as it was possible to array them.

Henry the Eighth, one morning in May, attended by several of his nobles, dressed in the quaint costume of Robin Hood and his merry men, suddenly entered the chamber where the Queen and her ladies were seated, much to the alarm of the latter, who were thus taken by surprise ; for it appears that the King and his followers were armed with bows and arrows, and swords and bucklers, like the outlaws of old ; and fine screaming there was, no doubt, amongst the Queen and her ladies, when their apartment was broken into by a troop of armed men ; who, however, instead of carrying them off, like the ancient freebooters of the forest, and keeping them prisoners under the greenwood tree until they paid down a handsome ransom in gold, contented themselves by performing several wild woodland dances, then taking their departure.

The same Monarch, also, once rode out with his Queen and a whole concourse of nobles, one fine May morning, to the top of Shooters-hill, above Greenwich, and there they were received by a large troop of men, amounting to about two hundred, who were all dressed as foresters, in a costume of Kendal green, and headed by a captain, whom they called Robin Hood. These May-day foresters, dressed up for the occasion, amused their Royal and noble visitors by showing them their skill in archery ; and when this was over each blew his bugle-horn, and conducted the King and his train into a wood under the brow of the hill, where a large arbour was erected of green boughs, consisting of a hall and two chambers, all decorated with flowers and sweet herbs ; and here a mighty feast stood ready prepared, quite in keeping with the scene, consisting of venison, venison-pasties, and a copious supply of the blood-red wine, for such, the old ballads say, often formed the forest-banquet of Robin Hood and his merry men. A joyous May-day must that have been, presided over by the King and Queen of England ; for Henry the Eighth was then a young man, greatly beloved by his people ; and in the laughing merry Monarch who presided over that woodland repast, who drank deep healths to the Lord and Lady of May, and was the foremost to lead off the joyous dance in that summer hall, roofed over with green branches,—few would have traced the future murderer, or read in the outlines of the then jocular Monarch the cruel beheader of so many of his wives. For the Royal tiger seemed then as harmless and playful as a lamb ; and those who were around him but little dreamed that his memory ever after, throughout all time, would be preserved in one of the darkest stains that ever fell, and lay an eternal blot upon the pages of history.

On their return from this woodland banquet, they were met by two ladies, richly attired, who rode in a beautiful chariot, drawn by five horses ; and on the back of each horse was also seated a lady, one of whom was called the Lady of Showers ; another, the Lady of Green ; the third, the Lady of Vegetation ; the fourth, of Pleasure ; and the fifth, of Sweet Odour. Of the two who occupied the chariot, one was called the Lady of May, and the other the Lady of Flowers ; and they entertained the assembled company with songs, as they returned to Greenwich. Such was an English May-day in the reign of Henry VIII.

But few works are fraught with more amusement than our old English treatises on angling : there is such a simple cunningness about these honest old fishermen, that it is difficult to refrain from laughter while perusing the most serious passages. You almost fancy that many of these quaint writers must have had certain prayers, which they ever and anon repeated while following so peaceful an occupation—brief pious sentences, offered up in the full simplicity of the heart while dropping in the line, over a bite, or when the finny prey was landed. In one book the angler is recommended "to be

full of humble thoughts, when occasion offers ; to kneel, lie down, or wet his feet and hands, as often as there is any advantage to be gained thereby ;" nor is he to mind "a little dirty water or mud," if he can get anything out of it. He is also advised to render himself skillful in music, so that whenever his spirits are melancholy, or his thoughts heavy, "he may remove the same with some godly hymn or anthem, of which David gives many examples." Again, he is to be strong and valiant, not to be amazed at storms, nor frightened at labour. Nor must he, "like the fox which preyeth upon the lambs, employ all his labour and cunning on the smaller fry ; but, like the lion that seizeth elephants, think the greatest fish that swims a reward little enough for the pains he endures." He must also "be patient, not feel vexed when he loses his prey, although it is almost in his hand." Neither must he swear : and we still retain the old saying, "those who swear will catch no fish ;" besides it would hardly have been thought to have ripped out a thundering oath, after having chanted some "godly hymn or anthem." The angler also ought to be "a scholar and a good grammarian," as, no doubt, the fish being an ancient people, and from the earliest ages acquainted with respectable society, must have felt bad grammar grate again upon their ruddy gills. Further, he must have sweetness of speech, to entice others to follow his art ; have also a knowledge of the sun, moon, and stars ; be conversant with wind and weather ; and have a constant and settled belief that where "the waters are pleasant and anything likely, there the Creator of all good things hath stored up much of his plenty." How religiously did these old rascals set about a little quiet murder ! thanking Heaven when they succeeded, and as Cromwell said, "had good execution."

But we must not forget the business on hand, which is to continue our remarks on angling from April ; and these must necessarily be brief. From early spring, until the close of autumn, perch angling is pursued ; they are very fond of lingering in shadowy places, as bridges, old mill-dams, and flood-gates, and such like quiet spots, where they readily take the bait. The perch is a beautifully marked fish ; the back and a portion of the sides are of dark green, varied with black, while the belly is white and red. In form it is deep, arched, and has a large mouth, with rich golden irides. It will bite greedily at a worm.

As there are so many kinds of trout, I must confine myself to the common one, which is generally from twelve to fifteen inches in length, is of a dirty yellow colour, brownish on the back, and spotted. Early in spring the trout will take a ground bait, for which nothing can be better than a worm. Fly-fishing for trout would occupy the whole space we dedicate to the description of the month, so we must pass it by. Remember, in fishing for trout, to keep out of sight ; once throw your shadow upon the water, and away the shy visitor goes. As soon as you have landed a trout, kill it—a sharp blow on the head is pretty sure to finish it ; and this is better than leaving it to pant on the grass, or gasp in your fishing basket, to say nothing of the richness added to its flavour. The grayling is fond of clear, rapid streams, especially such as flow through hilly countries. It is rather less than the trout, beautifully formed ; the head small ; the eyes prominent, and circled with silver ; the teeth very small ; the head a dusky colour, and the gills a bright green, which in time become dark. The back is of a greenish blue tinge ; the sides of the richest silvery grey, though when first caught glittering in the sunlight like gold, and almost gandy, through the rich dark irregular spots which dot the shifting silver. It is a rapid swimmer, and is lost to the eye in a moment. When full-grown, it is about fifteen or sixteen inches in length ; and although taken all the year round, is not considered in season until September, and from then to February or the middle of spring. At the latter season, they will take almost any bait used in bottom fishing, such as worms, gentles, grubs ; nor are they at all particular, if they have had a narrow escape from the hook, of attacking the bait again, even with a torn jaw. The tackle ought to be fine. The flesh is very white, and the flavour highly prized. "No life," says Walton, "is so happy and so pleasant as the life of a well-governed angler : for when the lawyer is swallowed up with business, and the statesman is preventing or contriving plots, then we sit on crowslip banks, hear the birds sing, and possess ourselves in as much quietness as the silent silver streams which we see glide so smoothly by us."



JUNE.—WHITSUNTIDE PROCESSIONS.



When the merry bells ring round,
 And the jocund rebecks sound,
 To many a youth and many a maid
 Dancing in the chequer'd shade,
 And young and old come forth to play
 On a sunshine holiday —MILTON.

WHETHER Whitsuntide falls in May or June, it is always a season of great festivity; and, since so many old customs are dying away, we may consider it our greatest English holiday. In the country, nearly every club has its procession and feast at Whitsuntide; and almost every village and town is sounding with music; and in some large places half a dozen clubs may be seen marching to church, each with its band and banners, and every member in his holiday attire. We, who are dabblers in old black-letter lore, look upon these benevolent and useful institutions with great interest, knowing that such clubs or guilds, existed in England a thousand years ago—that the Saxons had their sick and burial societies, and that every brother who did not attend a funeral was then fined as now. According to these old Saxon laws, when a member died he was to be buried wherever he had desired; and, if any brother neglected to attend, he was fined a measure of honey: the club was to furnish half the refreshments consumed at the funeral, and each member was to pay twopence—a large sum, considering the value of money in those days, when a sheep could be purchased for a shilling, an ox for six, and four hens for sixpence. It is this very antiquity which renders these benefit societies so interesting in our eyes;

and as we know that they had their merry meetings as well as their "funeral marches," we never look upon them as they go "sounding through the town," without thinking that, above a thousand years ago, similar processions passed along the ancient streets of Saxon England.

Oh! what a jingling of bells is there on the morning of Whit-Monday. What a running to and fro from house to house—for the women have in many places their clubs as well as the men, and they are probably all going in procession to the same church. Nanny runs in to ask Betty how she looks in this or that; if her new gown "sits" nicely, or she should trim her cap with blue or pink; for it must be understood that no bonnets are allowed in the procession; if it rains, umbrellas may be carried. We shall commence with the ladies first. White dresses are, of course, prevalent, though they are agreeably relieved here and there with a gown or two of gaudy colours. The ladies who hold office walk behind the band, each carrying a neat white wand, adorned with ribbons and flowers; every fair member also bears a beautiful posy; you almost wonder where so many flowers could be gathered; but what they carry with them is nothing compared to the quantity which decorate the club-room in which they

will take tea in the afternoon. Gravely, stately, and good-humouredly do they proceed along, the single ones looking down as if ashamed, and seldom venturing to raise their eyes if passing by a house they are in the habit of visiting. Not so with the married women. They are on the look-out to acknowledge everybody they know; and at every recognition there is such a waving of handkerchiefs that you might almost fancy they were about to proceed on a very long journey, and were bidding farewell to their acquaintance. But the most amusing part is the children. They are stationed on every step or little eminence, the bigger brother or sister holding a lesser one in arms, and looking out eagerly for mother. The mother is all to them, and she also is watching as anxiously. At last you hear the little voices exclaim, "Here she comes!" "There she is!" "That's her!" and she is sure to rush out of the ranks to give them something out of her pocket; and no end of kisses, with numberless admonitions to take care of themselves, and so on. And many a turn of the head will she give before she is out of sight. Among such processions as these we have seen faces and forms that would have arrested the eyes of both painter and sculptor, and shown them that the beautiful belongs not alone to either antiquity or Greece. We have also seen the hair arranged in such a chaste style, and so gracefully adorned with natural flowers, that many a haughty heiress would have been proud to have risen with her ringlets so arranged from the hands of a fashionable tiring-woman.

Their overpowering presence made you feel
It would not be idolatry to kneel.

But, bang, bang! *tirra, tirra!* here they come—the "United Brothers." The blacksmith who beats the big drum will assuredly drive the ends in; he wields the drumsticks as if he had got a sledge-hammer in each hand, and the anvil before him. Oh! what a banner—it takes four men to support it, and two others to keep it steady by holding the tasselled strings. It was painted by Paul, the house-painter; and he has been much prouder ever since he did it. It would hardly be admissible into the British Institution—but let that pass; were any one to venture to criticise the performance, he would be indignantly told that it cost above twenty pounds. Although the tailor is a little out of both time and tune, yet he blows lustily at the clarinet; and the young butcher is not to be found fault with, considering he has only practised on the fiddle for about twelve months. What a jolly fellow that is who shakes the cymbals—his very eyes laugh again; and what a clashing he makes; he cares nothing about time; "Make yourself heard, neighbour," is his answer. You can tell from his looks that he has already been busy with the ale-cup, and that he is not the only one. And those are the stewards. "Deary me!" exclaim the women, "who ever would think that was Trippet, the tripe-seller; or the other, Johnny Lee, who goes round repairing umbrellas?" but they are though; and are resolved to let you see what they can do when they choose: a nod from either of them is something to be thought of to-day, I can tell you; for they are the stewards, and were elected for the first time at the last meeting. Next club-feast-day two others will march, with the same staidness, in their places. When Trippet and Lee have served their twelvemonth, should they live fifty years after, everything they can remember will be recalled either as having transpired so many years before or after they were the stewards.

Bang, bang! All the windows are up; the whole street is crowded; women with children in their arms, and boys and girls, close in and follow the procession: the men walk two and two—there is about a yard's space between each couple. What a length the procession reaches! There are at least one hundred members "strong;" and the latter word is pronounced with something like an emphasis. True enough, they march oddly: a few are very careful, but these, no doubt, are younger members; the old United Brothers seem to jog along "cheek by jowl!" anyhow as they can—they look as if they were used to it; they wear their honours without blushing, some, you see, with a flower held between the lips. This is very common in the country; every one has a posy in the button-hole of his coat, for that is in accordance with club orders. Now they near the church; they will never be able to get that large banner within the porch—but they have: it required great care; and there will be a good deal of talk about after how the wind caught it at this corner, and how they staggered at that, and you would go away with an idea that a man must be to the "manner born" before he is ever able to bear a banner.

The clergyman invariably preaches a sermon, in which the words unity, brotherhood, good-fellowship, charity, duty, &c., occur a great many times. He also dines with the club, a sure guarantee that for some time after the cloth is removed good order will be maintained. There are two old club-mates who have sat together at the dinner for years, and have always introduced the same argument. One maintains that "Whatever is Right;" the other takes the opposite side, and argues that, if it is so, "then Murder is Right." They always have a little knot of listeners, and are thought rather clever. The clergyman has, on one or two occasions, entered the field; but now he seems to be weary of it, and if appealed to admits "that much may be said on both sides." The dinner we pass over; the health of the retiring stewards is of course drunk, then Trippet and Lee have to say a few words; and if it is late in the evening a few of the brothers are sure to get rather boisterous, and to cry out "Go it Lee!" or Trippet. Some of their wives also occasionally drop in at the close of the day.

Summer has now thrown open her green doors; the whole landscape is richly hung with the most beautiful foliage; the fields are ankle deep in flowers, and the earth will never look more lovely than now. Nature everywhere holds high jubilee; bird and bee and brook have each found a voice, and all day long are calling to and answering each other. Beautiful are the mornings and evenings of June, when the dew hangs upon the blossoms, and all that sweet aroma, which the hot sun will exhale, floats about the earth. Thomson, in his "Castle of Indolence," has beautifully described the luxury of green fields at this season:—

Was nought around but images of rest—
Sleep-soothing groves, and quiet lawns between,
And flowery beds that slumberous influence cast,
From poppies breathed; and beds of pleasant green,
Where never yet was creeping creature seen.
Meantime unnumber'd glittering streamlets play'd,
And hurled everywhere their waters sheen,
That as they bicker'd through the sunny glade,
Though restless, still themselves a lulling murmur made.

Join'd to the prattle of the purling rills,
Were heard the lowing herds along the vale,
And flocks loud-bleating from the distant hills,
And vacant shepherds piping in the dale;
And now and then sweet Philomel would wall,
Or stock-doves plain amid the forest deep,
That drowsy rustled to the sighing gale;
And still a coil the grasshopper did keep;
Yet all these mingled sounds inclined to sleep.

A wanderer in the country not only finds pleasure in the beauties of Nature, but feels a delight in witnessing the enjoyment of others, and in none more than seeing the children of the poor—those who have about them the stamp of City-courts and crowded alleys—running for once free and happy along the

green lanes and over the pleasant field-paths. It makes a kind-hearted man sigh to think how those little creatures, ordained naturally to be happy, are shut up in stifling rooms, or left to wander at will through the hot and suffocating streets, in too many instances without any one to care either for their moral or bodily wants. Such have we sometimes had around us for the distance of a mile or two. They were rummaging every bank, peeping into every hedge, and plucking every flower they came near; they seemed to run over as much ground as a dog: they were never still—but here, there, and everywhere; ever discovering some object, new and wonderful to them, such as they had never before beheld in their City alleys; a molehill prettily marked, or a little clump of moss, were marvels in their eyes. Then, what a long consultation would there be at the door of some road-side ale-house. They perhaps mustered three or four pence amongst the whole half-dozen; the hungriest were advocates for half-penny-loaves—the extravagant for a pennyworth of cheese. What a half-bashful joy played about their little dirty faces, if any good-natured pedestrian stepped in, and, by contributing a few halfpence, settled the dispute, and for once allowed them to revel in (to them) a rich banquet of bread and cheese. City-bred although they were, there would be a look of mingled gratitude and delight, which proclaimed, in unmistakable though silent language, that those young hearts were not yet wholly corrupted, but that there lay the soil which might be made either to bear poisonous weeds or goodly fruit. In a City street their very language might perhaps shock the stranger; but here they are often met with in their best and gentlest moods. We have somewhere said—though we cannot now lay our hands upon the passage—that God still adorns the earth with trees and flowers as beautiful as ever waved in Eden, as if to prove to man, that however low he may have fallen, the lovely objects of field and wood have not degenerated; but that the rose is still as sweet, and the leaves as beautiful and green, as they were before man offended his Maker. All remains as lovely as when first fashioned by the great Creator. Nothing ever pained us more than the great sweeping Enclosure Act. It seemed as if the last link was severed that united man to the wonderful works of God—that he was no longer to "consider the lilies of the field how they grow."

There is a rural scene which somehow seems to linger upon our memory more than any other. We can recall it any time, from the trees that overhang the foot-path and throw their shadows into the water, to the very bend the river makes as it goes broadening out between the meadows, or circles like a belt of silver around the foot of the hills, until it diminishes like a bright cloud in the distance. We have often described it as seen in the early morning, or in the golden noon of day, and when the blue twilight has thrown over it a shadowy veil. Here sheep barked, and jingle their musical bells as they crop the wild thyme from the bewitched hillocks, or browse amongst the luxuriant clover in the neighbouring pastures; knee-deep the plump-sided oxen graze, or, chewing the cud, lie buried among the flowers of summer. The heavy waggon goes slowly rumbling up the steep acclivity, on the summit of which stands the old weather-beaten mill, through whose rent sails we can see patches of the bright sky behind. On every hand figures are crossing the landscape. We see the angler with his wicker basket borne on the end of his folded rod, which rests upon his shoulder. We see figures moving every way.

They come from still green nooks—woods old and hoary,
The silent work of many a summer night,
Ere those tall trees attain'd their giant glory,
Or their proud tops did climb that cloudy height,
They come from spot which the grey hawthorns dignify,
Where stream-kiss'd willows make a silvery shiver.

Who can ever fully express the pleasures of a country life? says an old author, with the various delights of fishing, hunting, and fowling, with guns, greyhounds, spaniels, and several sorts of nets. What refreshment it is to behold the green shades—the beauty and majesty of the tall and ancient groves; to be skilled in the planting and training of orchards, flowers, and pot-herbs; to temper and allay these harmless employments with some innocent and merry song; to ascend sometimes to the fresh and healthful hills; to descend into the bosom of the valleys, and the fragrant dew meadows; to hear the music of birds, the murmur of bees, the falling of springs, and the pleasant discourses of the old ploughman. These are the blessings which only a countryman is ordained to, and are in vain wished for by the denizens of smoky cities; they are, indeed the "sights and sounds that give delight, but hurt not."



JULY.—SHEEP-SHEARING FEAST.



Since finish'd our shearing, in feasting we're met,
 And our master before us this plenty has set;
 While gaily and glad some we holiday keep,
 Let us give the praise due to the fleece and the sheep.—*Old Song.*

SHEEP-SHEARING Feast is one amongst the oldest of our English holidays; and appears to have ranked with the earliest celebrations of the olden times. It is frequently alluded to in the Bible, where we meet with the names of those who celebrated it; and we even find enumerated the many good things which were consumed at the feast. It is pleasant to dwell upon such ancient customs, to recal scenes which were in existence thousands of years ago, long before the shepherds assembled in the fields of Bethlehem, or the "star had arisen in the east" that illuminated a dark and benighted world. It was so natural, when mankind had gathered in the wool which was to clothe them, and the corn which was their principal food, to return thanks to the Giver of all good, and to be joyful and merry on such occasions. It is a pleasure to know, that in summer time there was the same bleating of sheep and lambs beside the brooks in the pleasant vallies of Palestine, as there is now in our own green English pastures; and that, ages ago, the shepherds washed their flocks in the hallowed waters of Jordan.

There is nothing more lively than Sheep-Shearing, where all the idlers in the village are assembled: where the crowded pens are filled with bleating sheep; while the shearers are bending as earnestly over their work as if it were a matter of life and death, though the lookers-on only consider it as a pleasant

amusement. There is, also, something pleasing in the sound, as they every now and then pause to whet or sharpen their shears—in the very attitude of the clipped sheep as they turn away, as if they scarcely knew themselves, or their companions, for they all seem lost together; so strange do they appear in their ridgy jackets; for wherever the edge of the shears has clipped there is a mark which goes round and round, as if the sheep were bandaged in fine wool. Then there is something pleasing in the scenery amid which this labour takes place, in the large old barn in the background with its opening door, or the farm-yard surrounded with stacks, sheds, and out-houses, and carts, painted blue or red, on the shafts of which the fowls are perched. But the most cheering sight of all to the "clippers," for such are the sheep-shearers called, is the preparation under the oak before the farm-horse door, or within the barn itself, for the feast; for they not only look forward to a merry time, but there is the consciousness that their labour is brought to a close; and when the last sheep is sheared, then comes the loud huzza! for no end of good things are inviting them.

The great copper is filled with firmity, made of boiled wheat, which, when cold, cuts like jelly; currants, raisins, spices of every kind; sugar shot in in pounds, which, when boiled enough, is emptied out into basins and pans, and

cooled with new milk. Round this delicious mess assemble the young—three or four, with huge wooden spoons, eating out of one pacheon, or large earthenware vessel, about two feet wide. Sometimes, they quarrel, like pigs around a trough; one has thrown a spoonful of firmity into the others' face; others have set off, and gone into the orchard to swing. The great kitchen is a very Babel of sounds.

In my "Pictures of Country Life," I have drawn the following picture of a Sheep-Shearing Feast, which is sometimes held in the barn: the immense door is turned into a table, and almost bends beneath its load of provisions. We talk of roast beef; taste what is set before them! Small of that chine: what a nosegay! it is stuffed with all kinds of savoury herbs; it tastes like duck, goose, pork, veal, as if all good things were rolled into it, and made one. It would make a sick man well only to smell of it. What slices! What appetites! What horns of brown ale they empty! A waiter in a London eating-house would run away horror-stricken, and proclaim a coming famine throughout the land. They eat their peas by spoonfuls: a new potato vanishes at every mouthful; dishes are full and emptied ere you can turn your head. That was a whole ham ten minutes ago, now you behold only the bone. Who ever before saw such enormous plum-puddings? Surely they have eaten enough. Why, that broad-shouldered sun-burnt fellow has clapped a solid pound upon his plate—it is burning hot: look how he holds that large lump, and blows it between his teeth; the tears fairly start into his eyes. Where are those legs of mutton, the chines, and sirloins, and ditch-bones of beef? Gone, for ever gone! And now come the custards, and cheese-cakes, and tarts. The men will assuredly burst. See, they loosen their neckerchiefs and their waistcoats, as if they were going to begin again in downright earnest. Every man seems as if he had brought the appetite of three, as if he were resolved to do his utmost; for "eat, drink, and spare not," is the order of the day; there is no one by to begrudge them.

The following beautiful song, which we found in a collection published nearly a century and a half ago, has, no doubt, often been carolled by many a voice, long since silent, at the old English Sheep-Shearing Feasts. We regret that we are unable to discover the Author's name, for every line is stamped with the impress of true poetry:—

Tarry wool, tarry wool,
Tarry wool is ill to spin!
Card it well, card it well,
Card it well ere ye begin.

When 'tis carded, rolled, and spun,
Then the work is almost done;
But when woren, drest, and clean,
It may be clothing for a queen.

Sin, my b'mny harmless sheep,
That feed upon the mountains steep,
Bleating sweetly as ye go
Through the winter's frost and snow.
Hart and hind, and fallow deer,
Are not half so useful here.
From kirks, to him the plough does pull,
Are all obliged to tarry wool.

Up, ye shepherds! dance and skip,
O'er the hills and vallies trip;
Of tarry wool sing ye the praise,
Sing the flocks that do it raise:

Harmless creatures without blame,
That clothe the back, and feed the home;
Keep us warm, and hearty full;
Let us love the tarry wool.

How happy is a shepherd's life!
Far from courts, and free from strife.
While the ewes do bleat and "bae,"
And the lambskins answer "mae,"
No such music to his ear,
Of thief and fox has he no fear:
Shepherd will watch—dog round and pull,
And well defend the tarry wool.

He lives content and envies none,
No, not a monarch on his throne;
Though he the royal sceptre sways,
He hath not sweeter holidays.
Who'd be a king, can any tell,
When a shepherd sings so well?
Ere's so well, and pays in full,
With honest heart and tarry wool.

"It is a poor heart that never rejoices;" and when we think of the many bleak bitter nights at the close of February and the beginning of March which the shepherds have passed in the open fields, and on the windy hills, in the "lambing season," it gives one pleasure to see them still so happy. Many a lamb would have been lost, but for the care they took of them; for there they waited night after night, amid sleet and storm, in their little temporary huts, ready to rush out in a moment, and pick up and shelter the young lambs, which would otherwise, perchance, have perished in the cold. Proud were they, when finer days came, and they looked on and saw their new-born flocks racing in the meadows.

Now let us peep into that pretty parlour. There sit the farmer's daughters at tea. What piles of cakes, honey, butter, eggs, ham, cold fowl! What smiling faces! and some of them are really beautiful pictures of rosy health. Now they are singing in the kitchen; now the fiddle is heard in the barn; there is giggling and laughter in the orchard; whisperings somewhere in the garden; children playing at hide-and-seek in the stack-yard. See where those dark-eyed seducers, the gipsies, have congregated outside the farm-yard; somehow or another they have come in for their share of the feast: by and by, they will become bolder; or, bearing a child, will venture into the barn; another will follow; and as the ale-horn circulates, it will, long before midnight, be "Hail fellow! well met!"

Then come the morris dancers, "Robin Hood," and "Maid Marian," with such poetry as is not to be found in the old ballads. Well, there is plenty for all; the ale for Sheep-Shearing Feast was brewed many a long month ago; and there are still half a dozen barrels untapped in the cellar, all of which were brewed from an extra allowance of malt, for the great occasion of "Sheep-Shearing."

But where is the old farmer? He bade his men fall to, and welcome; and we have not seen him since. No, he is in the large, old-fashioned summer-house at the bottom of his garden, with the butcher, and the miller, and the maltster, and the doctor, and the landlord from the "Black Bull;" and they have drawn the corks of a few bottles of choice port, and are enjoying themselves in their own way. The young lawyer has brought his fiddle, for he is a gentleman fiddler; and the young ladies in the parlour will come soon, and dance on the lawn, for even there the line of distinction is drawn. The wealthy farmer's daughter may condescend just to dance a turn or two in the barn; and when they have gone, the old one-eyed hired fiddler will strike up "Bob and Joan," just to show his contempt for such proud, stuck-up "thingumterrys," as he will call them; "with their waltzes, and quadrilles, and such like outlandish fal-the-rals, as their grandmothers would have been ashamed to have been seen in."

All who have wandered into the country, about the beginning of summer, must have heard the unusual bleating amongst sheep in the neighbourhood of rivers and water-courses; and if they have never beheld such a scene before, must, when they have reached the spot, have looked both with interest and pleasure at a sheep-washing. There stand three powerful sun-burnt fellows, up to the middle in water. A sheep is forced in by a man on the bank; it is seized by the first washer, who, laying fast hold of the fleece, souses the poor creature about, as if he would shake it to pieces; he then looses his hold, and the bleating animal, as he begins swimming towards the shore, is seized by the second washer in whose hands he fares no better than he did whilst an unwilling prisoner to the first. He bleats more pitifully; and just as he is within a few feet of the shore, souse he goes over and over for the third time, and then he is at liberty. He reaches the bank, and there stands bleating, while the water flows from his heavy fleece. Others who have undergone the same fate bleat in reply; while the unwashed ones are not a bit behind-hand in their complainings, for a hundred sheep "baa" like one.

Then, what a roar of laughter comes ringing upon the air, at the sturdy sheep-

herd boy, who, while thrusting and forcing along some obstinate sheep to the edge of the water, is carried in, headlong, with his woolly companion; and, by an unexpected plunge, both are sent head over ear together, and land alike with a kindred and sheepish look, for Jack is passed from hand to hand, amid loud "guffaws," which are heard half a mile off.

Sometimes the village girls will come down to the sheep-washing, and then there flies round many a rough random shot of country wit: the girls trace strange likenesses amongst the sheep to some envied rival; and, in allusion to the number of lambs, "more is meant than meets the ear." The frailties of some fair Phyllis are shadowed forth; while Damon, although midway in water, burns up to his very ears. You find that Dianas are not the only nymphs who haunt the neighbourhood of these pastoral Arcadias.

We have before spoken of Sheep-Shearing as being an ancient festival, and in the Book of Samuel, we read of Nabul, a man in Ma'n, whose possessions were in Carmel, who had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats; "and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. And David heard in the Wilderness that Nabul did shear his sheep. And when David's young men came, they said to Nabul, 'We come at a good time.'" We read again, in the same book, of Absalom having sheep-shearers, and inviting all the King's sons to the feast; and David was afraid to let all his sons go, lest they should cause Absalom too great an expense; and further on we find that they made merry with wine. For in our own English poet Herrick, we have it recorded that on such occasions there was always plenty—that the table was strown with no niggard hand.

They should see first and chief
Foundation of the feast—fat beef;
With upper stories mutton, veal,
And bacon, which makes full the meal:
With several dishes standing by,
As here a custard, there a pie,
And here all-tempting firmity.

Summer now reigns in the full womanhood of her beauty. The roses of her lips now put in the rounded sweetness of their bloom; and the sun has stained her cheeks with the richest dyes of heaven. Her hair is wreathed with the last blossoms of her choicest flowers; and when these are faded, she will begin to look round for her place of rest, for the beautiful summer has attained her full beauty, and is already doomed to die. Slowly, slowly, you see the flowers and leaves falling, to make her death-bed; and soon the sweet songsters will take their departure, for they cannot stay to look, while one so beautiful is about to gather up her gaudy garments in "dying dignity," and stretch herself upon a grave of faded flowers, to die. And yet, once again, Time will meet Summer

At this same place.
She'll look as lovely as of old.
For there will spring another race
Of flowers from out the upturn'd mould,
That have been buried long ago.

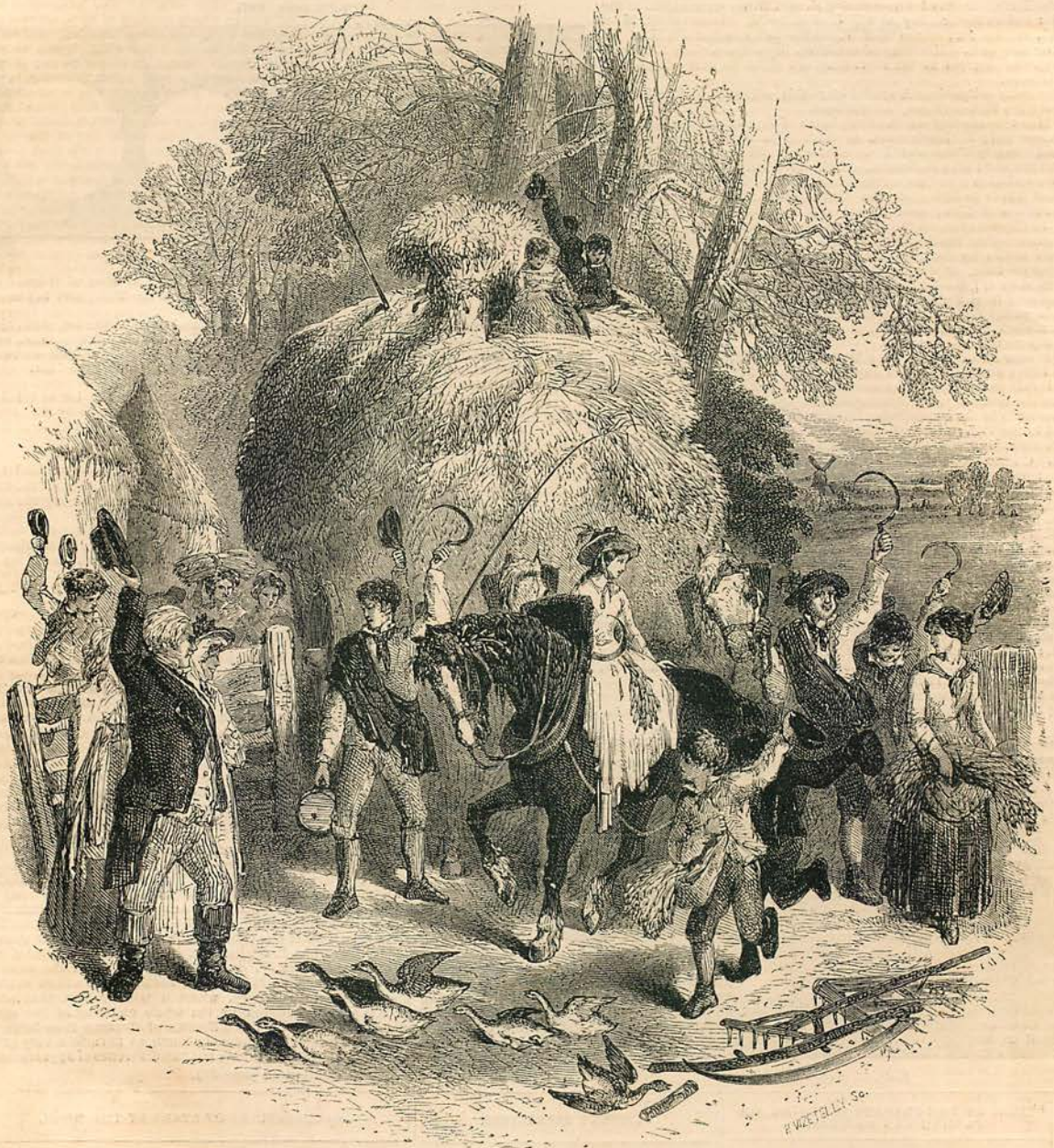
This has ever been our favourite month for angling. Not that we ever stood high as disciples of the "gentle" craft; but rather loved to let our rods lie idly amongst the reeds and flowers; or to watch the float riding lazily upon the ripples, while we whispered to the silvery shiver which the willows were ever making; or, with half closed eyes, lay drowsed beneath the perfume that came floating from some neighbouring bean-field. What a music there was in the lapping of the little ripples, as they came, one after another, to warm themselves on the sunny shore, bowing the reeds that grew a little way out as they passed. Or to watch (as I have, in my poem entitled "Summer Morning," described a scene), when it rained,

The leaves "drop," "drop," and dot the silver stream—
So quick each circle wore the first away.
To see the tufted bulrush stand and dream,
And to the ripple nod its head away;
The water-floats with one another play.
Bowling to every breeze that blows between,
While purple dragon-flies their wings display;
The restless swallow's arrowy flight is seen,
Dimpling the sunny wave then lost amid the green.

Such sights were more pleasing to us than the capture of a thousand fish.



AUGUST.—HARVEST HOME.



About the cart hear the rout
Of rural younglings raise the shout;
Pressing before, some coming after,
Those with a shout, and these with laughter;
Some bless the cart, some kiss the sheaves,
Some prank them up with oaken leaves.—HERRICK.

NEITHER the harvest-supper nor the sheep-shearing-feast present such poetical features as the rural employments which terminate in their celebration, for both in the end are but reduced to the common and necessary acts of eating and drinking. In harvest-time we see an old and beautiful picture; it was the same thousands of years ago; it is familiar to us in the pages of Holy Writ. Abraham and the early patriarchs have looked upon such scenes, for it has ever been a time of rejoicing. What rich pictures, mellowed with the sunsets of ages, rise before the eye as we look upon the sun-browned reapers! scenes not there presented, but such as have sprung from the events caused by good or bad harvests. We see, in Egypt, Joseph and his brethren; Abraham and Isaac overlooking the harvest-field from their tents; lands sold for measures of corn; David's household busy in the fields; Ruth "weeping amid the alien corn;" Our Saviour gathering the ears of wheat on the Sabbath; and a hundred other incidents which are connected with the sacred history of our religion.

But beautiful as may have been the harvest-fields of Palestine or Egypt, they could never have excelled in picturesque effect those which we have seen in our own England, hemmed in every way by rich and park-like scenery. Here vast

breezy uplands, that come sweeping down into broad pasture-lands, all waving golden with eary corn. Reapers and gleaners—men, women, and children—clothed in every variety of homely costume, standing, stooping, or sitting down beside the piled-up sheaves, or half-buried in some little hollow behind the standing corn. Little village urchins, whose bare hard legs are pierced all over with the sharp stubble, and who thrust straw and all into their small cleaning-bags, so that they may appear full against the given time of either luncheon or dinner, the only difference in the meal consisting in the name given to it, for the homely viands are the same. Nor are the actions of the reapers less interesting; there is a peculiar art in making those straw bands in which the sheaves are bound, in twisting the heads of corn together so as not to shake out the grain, in placing them nicely upon the stubble, and, finally, in tying up the sheaf itself, and securing the stubble ends of the band, and giving to them all, when bound, a free and plumpy appearance. We see such scenes as bring before the eye Keats's splendid description of autumn, where he says:—

Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,

Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reaped furrow round asleep,
Drowsed with the fume of poppies; while thy hook
Sparres the next swathe, and all its twisted flowers;
And sometimes, like a gleaner, thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook.

But the bringing home of the last load forms the subject of our present Sketch, such as we have witnessed, and has received all but life and motion from the hands of the artist. The farmer's daughter, an interesting girl, was selected for the Harvest Queen, and dressed out very becomingly for the occasion, her little round straw-hat wreathed with ears of corn and convolvuluses; she was seated sideways on the leader, a fine chesnut-coloured horse, whose head was decorated with bunches of corn-flowers and blue ribbons; the hat of the driver was also adorned with bows of the same hue, "true blue" being your rustic's favourite colour; every horse in the team was distinguished by similar ornaments. The last "stook" is, however, still standing in the field, the topmost sheaf of which is buried beneath bunches of rich-coloured ribands and flowers; long streams of blue and yellow and crimson have been floating out from the top of that "stook" ever since morning, and now the whole row along the furrow has disappeared, excepting that. At last the waggon approaches it, the gleaners and reapers rend the air with their loud huzzas, as the "harvest-sheaf," the crown of the field, is held high on the long pitching-fork by the labourer; it is then received by the man on the top of the load, and then reared on end, the most conspicuous object, through its gaudy colours, in the whole landscape. A few lines from our "Book of Autumn" will close the scene:—"Onward comes the waggon—the last load reaches the village—at the end of which the worthy farmer lives, and every cottager rushes out with a hearty welcome to hail the procession as it passes. The little tailor uncrosses his legs, throws down his gosse and sleeve-board, and with his hose ungartered and hanging about his heels, his spectacles thrust high up his forehead, raises his child-like voice, and brandishes his shears above his head, causing them to snap together at every shout, as he joins in the loud jubilee. The smoke-grimed blacksmith leans his naked and brawny arms across the half-door of his smithy, while his man John stands in the middle of the road swinging his heavy hammer in the air, and grinning from ear to ear with delight. The wheelwright leaves the tire half-driven in the smoking wheel; and, untying his painted and dirty apron, shakes it out with all his might, causing the chips, dirt, and shavings to fly in every direction, while his deep voice rings out like the peal of a trumpet. The lame shoemaker next appears, bearing in his hand one of the farmer's heavy top-boots, which he was repairing when the waggon came up. He seems almost as much delighted as if the whole load were his own; his wife and children have been allowed to glean ever since the first day the reapers put their sickle into the standing corn, and the poor fellow is grateful for such kindness. The deaf old grandmother, who seldom quits her creaking wicker-chair and spinning-wheel in the chimney-corner, comes out, with her withered hand raised to shade the sunshine from her furrowed face, and, followed by the old grey cat, she raises the tin trumpet to her ear, and drinks in the glad sounds which she has been accustomed to hear through fourscore bygone harvests; and all the long evening the deaf old woman will be happy and talkative, telling about the May-days, and sheep-shearing feasts, and harvest-homes she attended when young, what she wore, and with whom she danced; and before her dim eyes will pass in long array the scenes of sixty years, and she will again recal the features of many who are now no more.

Each in his narrow cell or ever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

Every one at all conversant with history has read the sufferings and privation, which whole nations have endured in times of scarcity, and can well understand why in the olden time there was so much rejoicing over a plentiful harvest. The richest crop ever hangs upon a "slender thread;" the finest fields of corn that ever bowed in the breeze or glittered in the summer sunlight, a few days' rain may blacken and destroy, and render unfit for food. Man cannot protect his crop against the elements, until it is garnered. Although the broad seas are now open, and ships from every corner of the globe may pour foreign grain into every store-house in England, yet we shall be sorry to see the day when she puts her chief trust in such supplies. She is not yet prepared to turn her rich corn-fields into grounds for factories, nor to trust to other nations for her supplies of corn. England, from the very richness of its soil and beauty of its scenery, was ordained to be an agricultural country; and however far its great cities may in time extend, it must be the work of ages to blot out the farms, and homesteads, and green rural scenes which are still its greatest charms.

Our merchants and manufacturers struggle on for years in close rooms and crowded offices, in the hope of at last retiring into some little village with its orchard, garden, and green field, and there to end their days in peace and tranquillity. Such a wish has ever been foremost in the bosoms of our great poet, statesmen, and philosophers. It is a distinguishing feature in the character of an Englishman; and perhaps in no other nation in the world is there such a thirst for this green retirement and domestic peace.

Autumn is a busy time with many animals as well as with man. The squirrel and several kinds of mice store up provision against winter, for although they hibernate a great portion of that season, yet a mild, warm atmosphere often awakes them, when they have recourse to the larder, then turn round, and sleep again. Mr. Couch, in his "Animal Instinct," says, "Long before the period of hibernation, and while the degree of temperature, and the abundance of subsistence, occupation, and amusement, one would suppose, would postpone the anticipation of such a state, creatures ordinarily subject to it are found entering upon a series of labours which, to the eye of reason, are as clearly indications of prospective intention as the building of a nest for incubation, or the storing of food for a time of scarcity. In some parts of the Russian dominions, as early as the month of August, while summer is in its glory, and everything inviting to enjoyment of the present rather than care for the future, the rat-hare sets about collecting the herbs which are to form its winter bed, and spreads them out to dry in the sun. In September these dried vegetables are gathered into heaps, which are sometimes the fruits of the labours of a single individual, and at others the united efforts of a company. The hamster in the Alps, and, in our own country, the dormouse, the shrew, and, in a less degree, the hedgehog, have the same habits; in all their proceedings making a marked distinction between their ordinary summer residences, or the receptacles for their young, and those in which they are to pass the time of insensibility. After accomplishing these preparations, a long time is suffered to pass before these animals finally retire to their winter retreats, and then they wrap themselves up in the accumulated materials, with a care and skill that indicate how well they are aware of the danger of exposure. The dormouse and harvest-mouse (whose summer nests have been placed on elevated stalks of grass, or in the branches of a furze-bush) now wrap themselves up in a ball, so closely woven together as to admit of being rolled about without disturbing its slumbering inhabitant, and stow themselves away in some crevice or recess among the entangled roots of a tree, beneath the soil." Mr. Bell asserts that the hibernation of the hedgehog "is as complete as that of any animal inhabiting this country;" he further asserts

(and we know no higher authority) that it lays up no provision for winter. On the contrary, although the squirrel sleeps away a great portion of the cold season, it lays up ample stores—not all in one place, but concealing the different stores in the holes of several trees around its haunts. Autumn is, therefore, a busy time with this beautiful and clean little animal. The long-tailed field-mouse is a great hoarder of food for winter, which consists of nuts, acorns, corn, and a variety of seeds; and sometimes a pig will come smelling and rooting about, to discover the treasure, and devour it. The following, which we wrote some time ago, to amuse a juvenile class of readers, will not be out of place here; it is supposed to embody the feelings of a long-tailed field-mouse, who sits hiding himself in a dark corner while a great hungry hog is eating up all his stock of provisions. "I wish it may choke you," said the field-mouse, "that I do, you great grunting brute! There go all my nice acorns, a dozen or more at a mouthful. Twelve long journeys had I in a day to the foot of the old oak tree to bring home a dozen of those—such a hard day's work that I could scarcely sleep a wink at night after, so much did my poor jaws ache; for I was forced to bring home every one in my mouth; and now that monster is gobbling up the whole hoard. He devours what cost me the labour of a month in a minute or two! Whatever I shall live on in winter I don't know. There goes my corn, too, which I dragged home, by an ear at a time, all the way from the harvest field on the other side of the wood, and with which I was often forced to rest two or three times during my journey; and sometimes I was compelled to drop an ear, and fight some other field-mouse that had a longer tail than myself, who tried to take the ear away under the pretence of helping me home with it, when I knew well enough it was his own nest he intended carrying it to. I wish I were big enough to thrash that great, ugly, grunting brute; really it makes me feel savage to think that after so much fetching, and carrying, and striving from morning to night—packing all up so snugly together, and not leaving even a single grain littered about, that a great thief should come in this way, break into one's house, and eat up everything, rump and stump." Naturalists say, that, after such a disaster, the field-mouse will fight his way into another nest, and either oust the inhabitant, or fall in the attempt. Wilson has beautifully depicted the pleasure of wandering amongst the mountains at this season of the year. "The wanderer, or hunter," he says,

Now meets on the hill
The now-waken'd daylight so bright and so still;
And feels, as the clouds of the morning unroll,
The silence, the splendour canoble his soul.
Tis his on the mountains to stalk like a ghost,
Enshrouded in mists in which nature is lost,
Till he lifts up his eyes, and flood, valley, and height,
In one moment all swim in an ocean of light;
While the sun, like a glorious banner unroll'd,
Seems to wave o'er a new, more magnificent world.

The scream of the eagle, the bounding of the mountain-deer, and the thunder of the cataract, complete the picture, and add their voices to the solitude. "Insects still continue to swarm," says Forster, "and to sport in the sun from flower to flower: it is very amusing to observe in the sunshine of an August morning their animation. The beautiful little blue butterfly is then all life and activity, flitting over the flowers and grass with remarkable vivacity. There seems to be a constant rivalry between this beauty and another no less elegant little beau, though of a different colour, frequenting the same station, attached to the same head of clover or of hare-bell; wherever they approach, mutual animosity seems to possess them; and, darting on each other with courageous rapidity, they buffet and contend until one is driven from the field, or to a considerable distance from his station, when the victor again returns to his post in triumph; and this contention is renewed so long as the brilliancy of the sun animates their courage." We have an admirable description of a butterfly that went out for a day's pleasure, written by the author of the immortal "Faery Queen," who tells us how it at last reached a garden, and there

Arriving, round about doth flie,
From bed to bed, from one to t'other border;
And takes survey, with curious busy eye,
Of every flower and herb there set in order;
Now this, now that, he tasteth tenderly;
Yet none of them he rudely doth disorder.



SEPTEMBER.—A COUNTRY FAIR.



They climb the pole, they run the races,
They laugh to see the clown's grimaces;
They leave behind all grief and care,
And come light-hearted to the fair.

THERE is no place like a country air, wake, or statute, for getting a true insight into the characters of our English peasantry. There all reserve is laid aside, and Johnny and Molly do really enjoy themselves. A stranger might walk a hundred miles through the country, and never meet with a tithe of the character he will here pick up. Johnny invariably carries a stick in his hand, and, unless when talking, eating, or drinking, you find the knob thrust into his mouth. He wears high ankle-boots, laced very tight, and twines the lace three or four times round the ankle before he fastens it. He has on worsted hose, either blue or grey, and prefers having them ribbed. His breeches are either velveteen, corduroy, or velvet, with pearl buttons on the knees, and a large bunch of drab ribbon, the ends of which he likes to see hang a good way down; if these are new, he generally tucks up his smock-frock to show them. His waistcoat is either plush, or a light kind of fustian, stamped all over with spots, rings, squares, or diamonds; if he can get a pattern with half-a-dozen colours in it, he likes it all the better; for if it is large and staring he knows Betty will consider it very neat. His neckerchief is generally either red or yellow; and he likes the ends to hang out a good way, and to feel the "real India" blowing about his face. He rubs up the down on his hat the wrong way to show how

thick it is of "beaver;" or he owes to see everything he wears stick out and be conspicuous.

Molly has generally a pair of pattens in one hand, and a cotton umbrella in the other. It matters not how fair or fine it may be—she bought them a Michaelmas or two before, and she argues that it is no use having such things unless she brings them out. If she has a sweetheart, he generally carries the pattens, and they are the cause of a little attention on both sides, for she sometimes says, "Let me carry 'em a bit, John, to wresten thy fistes;" and he answers, "Noah, Molly, thankeen thee; I wool howd 'em mysen." Her gown is the gaudiest she can purchase—the pattern either a great unnatural flower, or a trailing sea-weed, bordered with shells. She likes a red shawl, because it can be seen a long way off. As soon as they get into the fair, John either buys a pound of gingerbread or suits, which he ties up in his handkerchief, leaving, however, one corner open, into which they can insert their hands; they crack and munch away while there is one left. Sometimes she says they're "mixed;" and he says "Hey?" They then saunter round and have a look at the shows and booths: he buys a knife with three or four blades, which is only fit to cut butter. Molly purchases a few yards of red or blue ribbon. Sometimes they are

asked to buy a rattle for a baby, a doll, or a cradle; and, oh! how they do laugh! Molly is compelled to dig her elbow into her sweetheart's sides, and to say, "A'done, John, wilt?" They then pay a penny each and have a look into a peep-show; when it is over Johnny wonders however they can get such long streets and big houses into such a little place, and Molly answers that "It's all magic." They next try their fortune in a penny lucky-bag, which they are assured contains "all prizes and no blanks." Johnny gets a cotton stay-lace, and Molly a row of pins. They purchase a song of the ballad singer, which is "all about love and such like;" they then get into a swing-boat, and are tossed up and down until they begin to feel very queer indeed, for they have eaten all the party they could fancy, to say nothing of apples, nuts, oranges, pears, plums, and ginger-beer. They then adjourn to the public-house "to rest and settle down a bit;" John meets a few acquaintance and tries to smoke a pipe; this, with a few glasses of ale, sets his tongue a-going. There is generally a recruiting party in the room, and as the ale gets into his noddle he talks about "listing, at which Molly pulls his sleeve and says, "Duna be a fool, Johnny." He then tries a song; and, to make the tune and the metre harmonise, lays his accents as follows:—

As I was a walkén out one è-vè-nine
All down by a river è-l-dè,
And a gazén all around me,
A I-rish girl I spi-dè,
Its red and ro-sèè was her lips,
And so cool-black was her hair,
And so cost-lèè was the robes of gowd
This I-rish girl did wear.

He offers to thrash, plough, reap, or mow, with "any man i' the room for a rowden guinea, and to put the money down." He gets his comrade who is drinking with him to feel his arm, and sometimes bares it to show the strength of his muscles. He tells how he once lifted a sack of corn into the waggon, without ever letting it rest upon him, only touching it with his hands. He would quarrel were it not for Molly getting up and popping her pattens between her lover and his opponent. Johnny gets half-mellow, is ready for anything, and will go out. Molly has picked up a female companion, whose sweetheart is as far gone as her own, and they follow arm-in-arm to see that nothing happens to their rustic lovers. Now John is either ready to climb the pole for a new hat, ride a donkey race, wheel a barrow blindfold, jump in a sack, or, as he says, "any manner of thing." There is soon seen a lot of sacks full of men, with only a head peeping out, and Johnny's about the most stupid of the whole lot, for he makes up the one of half-a-dozen who begin with jumping in the sacks. He gets in with great difficulty, has his arms thrust down, is tied up above the shoulders, and, when the word "Off!" is given, he is about the first that falls. Molly can hardly unloose him for laughing. "Better luck next time," says Johnny; and he enters the chase for the pig with its scaped tail, rubbing his hand well in the sand to make it rough before he starts. The pig is turned loose, and after him they start. Johnny is beginning to get a little sober by this time, and is, moreover, a capital runner. He seizes the pig by the tail, and is pulled headlong into a ditch, while the grunter escapes and "saves his bacon." Nor do we ever remember seeing a pig fairly caught in this manner, for the law is, that it must only be captured by laying hold of the tail. Molly has now a job to rub the mud off Johnny, which she does by pulling up large handfuls of grass. While she is cleaning him, he stands very still, and looks very sheepish.

The hat still stands high on the top of the slender pole, ornamented with blue ribbons. The pole itself is rubbed with soft-soap and grease from top to bottom. Those who have attempted to climb are as greasy as butchers. In vain do they try to reach it; sand and sawdust are useless; even the miller's attempt was a failure, although he went up with his pockets filled with flour, and rubbed the pole with it every inch he gained. At length a sweep came, with his soot-bag twisted round him. They shook the pole, but still he continued to ascend, and all the shaking was in vain, for whenever you looked up you saw him looking down, showing his white eyes and white teeth. He trusted to his soot, feet, and hands, together with his long experience in difficult chimnies, and seldom failed to bring down the prize. But the wheelbarrow race, blindfolded, was the best of all, for no one could see the mark he was running at. Some called "Left!" some "Right!" and, as each competitor had only the voices of the bystanders to guide him, away he went at full speed, obeying their directions as well as he could. Some foundered in a neighbouring pond, others in an opposite ditch. Johnny was the most fortunate of the lot, for he trusted to the clanking of Molly's patten-rings (a device of her own, before agreed upon), and won the new smock-frock, with all its garniture of sky-blue ribbons, the perquisites of his beloved Molly—for this stroke of policy was her own.

Nor was the donkey-race the least amusing part of a country fair; although we had bet ten to one on the favourite, there were the same odds against his moving at all—for it was ten to one if he would even start; if he did, we well knew that he could "win in a canter," as they say. Very annoying it was, after having risked all our pocket-money, to see the brute stick his head up against the pannels and show his heels at every one who had courage enough to approach him. Yet such was too often the case, for he seemed not to care a straw for the new saddle which was exhibited at the winning-post in the distance. Perhaps if he did turn his eyes in that direction it was with some such thought as "I wish you may get it; catch me at that; were I to win every varlet in the village would want a ride, and I should be compelled to carry him;" and the very thought caused him to "lanch out" more viciously than ever.

Such is the picture of an English country fair, or wake, which a traveller may sometimes stumble upon as he comes unawares upon a little village standing half-buried amid the surrounding trees.

The woods are now beautiful; and never did the hand of an artist throw such rich colours upon the glowing canvass as may now be found in the variegated foliage of the trees. The leaves of the beech are dyed in the deepest orange that ever the eye saw gathered in golden clouds around a summer sunset; the dark green of the oak is in parts mellowed into a bronzy brown, blending beautifully with the faded yellow of the chestnut, and the deeper hues of the tall elm; while here and there the sable fir settles down into dark shadows between the alternate tints; and far as the eye can range along the wide outskirts of the forest it revels in the mingled hues of mountain, field, ocean, and sky, as if the flowered meadow, and the purple mountain, and the green billows of the sea, the blazing sunset, and the dark clouds of evening, had all rolled together their bright and sombre hues, and gathered about the death-bed of the beautiful summer. Over the hedgerow trails the rambling briony; and we see bunches of crimson and green berries, half-tempting us by their gushing ripeness to taste the poisonous juice which lies buried beneath their deceptive beauty. The hips of the wild rose rest their rich scarlet upon the carved ebony of the luscious blackberry; while the deep blue of the sloe throws over all the rich bloomy velvet of its fruit, as it stands crowned with its ruddy tiara of hawthorn berries. On the ground are scattered thousands of polished acorns, their carved and clear cups lying empty amongst the fallen leaves until gathered by the village children, who deck their rustic stools with these primitive tea-services, and assemble around them with smiling faces and looks of eager enjoyment, while they sip their sugar and water out of these old fairy-famed drinking vessels. I have attempted to describe the

beauty and tranquillity of the calm evenings which we see at the close of summer and the commencement of autumn, in a little poem entitled

THE EVENING HYMN.

Another day, with mute adieu,
Has gone down yon untrodden sky,
And still it looks as clear and blue
As when it first was hung on high:
The sinking sun, the darkening cloud,
That drew the lightning in its rear,
The thunder trumping deep and loud,
Have left no footmark there.

The village bells, with silver chimps,
Come soften'd by the distant shore;
Though I have heard them many a time,
They never rang so sweet before.
A silence rests upon the hill,
A listening awe pervades the air;
The very flowers are shut and still,
And bow'd as if in prayer.

And in this hush'd and breathless pause
O'er earth, and air, and sky, and sea,
A still low voice in silence goes,
Which speaks alone, great God, of Thee!
The whispering leaves, the far off brook,
The linnet's warble fainter grown,
The hive-bound bee, the homeward rook—
All these their Maker own.

I know they must be holy things,
That from a r. of so sacred shine,
Where round the beat of angel wings,
And footsteps echo all divine,
Their mysteries I never sought,
Nor hearken'd to what science tells,
For, oh! in childhood I was taught
That God amidst them dwells.

The deepening woods, the fading trees,
The grasshopper's last feeble sound,
The flowers just waken'd by the breeze,
All leave the stillness more profound.
The twilight takes a deeper shade,
The dusky pathways darker grow,
And silence reigns in glen and glade,
While all is mute below.

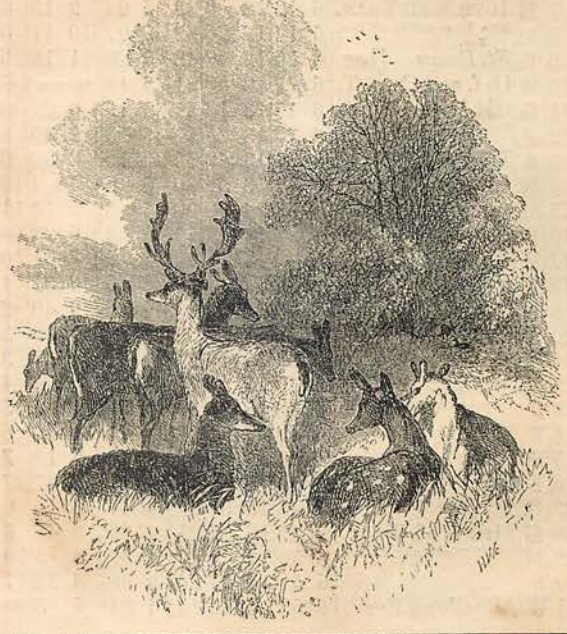
And other eyes as sweet as this
Will close upon us calm a day;
Then sinking down the deep abyss,
Will, like the last, be swept away
Until eternity is gained—
The boundless sea without a shore,
That without time for ever reigns,
And will when time's no more.

Now shine the starry hosts of light,
Gazing on earth with golden eyes—
Bright sentinels that guard the night,
What are ye in your native skies?
I know not—neither can I know,
Nor on what leader ye attend,
Nor whence ye come, nor whither go,
Nor what your aim nor end.

Now nature sinks in soft repose,
A living semblance of the grave;
The dew steals noiseless on the rose,
The boughs have almost ceas'd to wave;
The silent sky, the sleeping earth,
Tree, mountain, stream, the humble sod,
All tell from whom they had their birth,
And cry, "Behold a God!"

In many places in the fields are now found numbers of spider-webs, sometimes in two or three thicknesses, one above the other; they are very annoying to the dogs while hunting, who are frequently compelled to tear them off with their paws. Numbers of these webs may at times be seen floating in the air like huge flakes of snow, and shining like silver as they descend in the sunshine. Partridges now resort to the stubble fields, having been compelled to retreat to cover during the noise and stir attendant upon gathering in the harvest. They prefer, when they have young ones, to nestle in the open fields, as they have there a better chance of escaping from stoats and weasels. Wood-owls are now heard hooting in the night; and during a heavy gale of wind, which brings down thousands of leaves at a gust, the rattling of the branches and the hooting of the owls form a very solemn concert, especially at midnight to the ears of a lonely wayfarer who is making a short cut homeward through an old wood. The air is also now filled with winged emigrants, the down of thistles and dandelions, which go sailing away over many a broad field before they alight, and pitch their tents, in which they sleep throughout the winter—then rise up in a new form in the coming spring. What a beautiful picture is now presented in the Mirror of the Months, when the numerous flock is driven to the fold as the day declines, its scattered members converging towards a point as they enter the narrow opening of their nightly enclosure, which they gradually fill and settle into as a shallow stream runs into a bed that has been prepared for it, and there settles into a still pool. And, again, in the early morning, when the slender barrier that confines them is removed, they crowd and hurry out, gently interceding each other; and, as they get free, pour forth their white fleeces over the open field, as a lake that has broken its bank pours its waters over the adjoining land; in each case the bells and meek voices of the patient people making music as they move, and the shepherd standing carelessly by leaning on his crook—even as shepherds did in the vale of Arcadia.

Another pleasant picture of autumn is the busy thatcher with the clear bright yellow straw strewn about the foot of his ladder, while he, high up, is making a golden roof over the treasures which have been gathered in from the harvest-field. Your good thatcher is generally an excellent maker of beehives, and his cottage is often situated by the side of a running stream; and there he steps his straw, and splits his long straight skains of bramble with which he binds his golden-coloured domes together.



OCTOBER.—NUTTING IN THE WOODS.



Oft wandering by the woodland side
 You hear the distant laughter sound ;
 Or see the snow-white kirtles glide
 Where the green hazels most abound :
 All merry, noisy, nutters they,
 Who through the 'tangling forests stray.—*The Country.*

ALL the wood-nuts gathered before the commencement of this month are worthless, when compared with those that still hang upon the hazels. Like ripe acorns, a jerk of the branch sends them dancing out of their vandyked cups, and they come tumbling down upon the moss, or silky forest-grass, like large dark brown beads, every one ripe, and almost ready to burst out of its shell, while each kernel is covered with a rich russet cloak.

As I last year entered, somewhat lengthily, into our country nutting excursions, I need only refer to the present engraving as illustrative of a scene before described. I have before dwelt upon the solemn associations awakened by the close of autumn. For although all its varied hues are beautiful to look upon, still it is a melancholy sight to witness the falling leaves; to see all that rendered summer so green and lovely, unhooused—drifted from their shady dwelling-places, leaving their old homes behind, naked and desolate; and wandering, as it were, houseless along the brown highways, over the wet and withered grass, or lying down to die in the wayside ditches. Who can walk abroad at such a season, without thinking of that change which must, in the end, take

place—without turning our thoughts to those who have gone before us, like companions who but set out earlier in the day, and gained the inn where we must all sleep, and retired to rest before we arrived?

In my "Year Book" I have described a forest scene, familiar to me from the days of my childhood; and as a railway is overthrowing these old wild-wood fastnesses, I shall transfer this picture of a spot that had stood unaltered for centuries, to the descriptive pages of this Almanack, conscious that I should but weaken my word-painting were I to alter my first sketch.

Acres of huge gorse bushes stretched to the very verge of this wild forest-land, many of them standing higher than the head of a tall man; while upon the edge of the woodland grew thousands of wild brambles, that had trailed over the low bushes, and formed a broad impenetrable hedge, so wide that several wag-gons, could the underwood have borne the weight, might have been driven over them abreast. This waste had never been cultivated since the dawning of creation. For miles around, there was no vestige of the hand of man. Here grew hawthorns so huge, old, grey, and weather-beaten, that they looked as if a score

of stems had been twisted into one, and become so hardened by time, that you might fancy they were bars of iron fused together so closely, that neither storm nor thunder had been able to rend them. Here and there uprose giant crab-trees, their gnarled and knotted stems overgrown with green and yellow moss, and long flaky lichens, which hung like ragged drapery from the boughs. Even the sun-stained fruit, when mellowed by the mists of October, was sour as vinegar. Some of the trunks were hollow and decayed; and looked like strange skeletons that had lived at a remote period of time, when man was not, so white, bleached, and monstrous were their forms; and from the decayed centre had, in some places, sprung up another tree, that waved green above the old desolation. Scattered at picturesque distances, we saw immense oaks, whose shadows stretched far and wide, and struck the mind with wonder, to behold such gigantic arms spread out with no other support than the iron body from which they sprang; while, to pace the length of a single bough, seemed like treading a long gallery. Many of these had, centuries ago, been struck by the thunder-bolt, or blackened by the red-armed lightning; yet lived on, in spite of the blaze which had burnt their branches and singed their ancient heads—standing like monuments that marked some old world which had, undated ages ago, passed away, and left the skeletons of those mighty giants to proclaim the bulk and vastness of that unrecorded era. And all around this wild and wooded wilderness of hoary trees, there extended a pathless waste of entangling under-wood, where the hazel and the hawthorn, the black bullace, and the armed sloe were blended, and matted, and twisted with the holly and the bramble and the prickly gorse; while the woodbine climbed high over all, and, like a lady from her turret, looked out upon the wild and silent scene. It was only where the red fox, or the badger, or the daring hunter had forced a passage, that we were able to make our way along this bushy barrier. It recalled those graphic lines of Chaucer's, of a forest,

In which there dwelleth neither man nor beast,
With knotty, knurly, barron trees old,
Of stubby shape, and hideous to behold.

Above this vast covert of crooked branches, and spiked bushes, and trailing briars which seemed to have been struggling for ages for the mastery, there hovered scores of birds of prey—hawks of every species, dusky ravens, and horned owls that stared upon us from out the hollow trees at noon-day, and went sailing across the wild underwood, and between the ancient branches of the trees, like winged ghosts. And ever from the tangled thicket started some wild animal, the hux fox, or the grey badger, the savage wild cat, and the climbing marten; and we sometimes disturbed the stoat as he fed upon a young hare, or drove the weasel from his banquet, and picked up the ringdove, warm and bleeding, that he was feeding upon; or saw the fierce eyes of the polecat glaring upon us, as if wondering why we had disturbed his solitary dominions. Great hairy bats went gliding by in the twilight, with their leathern wings outspread; and black water-rats made a hollow sound, as they plunged into the forest brook, and were soon lost in the dark water, or among the black and rotten leaves. As I painted the same scene in verse, in my youthful years, I here present my readers with the other picture.

Majest'c grandeur stamp'd that solemn scene.
For weary miles an outstretch'd forest lay,
But seldom trod by aught of mortal man.
Here nature sat enthroned in wild array,
Profusely deck'd with thorns and witching bay.
Here broad oaks threw afar their shady arms
O'er creeping brambles that did wildly stray
Around the trunks, where dark-leaved ivy swarms
And none the ruddy squirrel 'mid its play alarms.

The sul'en crab-tree flourish'd 'neath the beech:
Above, the sable pine did rear its head,
As if the silver clouds it vain would reach
So high these dark and branchy boughs were spread
The rattling cones wild winds profusely shed:
Luxuriant box stood robed in gloomy hue,
And cypress nodded o'er the glen's dark bed,
Where stately ash o'ertopp'd the bow-famed yew—
All burst in silent grandeur on th' astonish'd view.

The glens and glades, and dells were sprinkled round
With healing herbs and variegated flowers,
No bell or bud of which a lording owl'd
No studied art bedeck'd those native bowers:
There nature's rugged breast bared to the showers,
Bore in its solitude the roses' bloom;
Where high the woodbines rear their painted towers,
There muscen violets 'mid the forest bloom
Blossom and die, and blow again above the tomb.

No habitation grac'd that rugged scene,
No pathway bore the track of man or steed;
Dark trees those dells from scorching sunbeams screen,
Where sharp-beak'd hawks and speckled songsters feed,
And diving otters shake the tufted reed.
No cultivation here smooth'd nature's face:
Nor waving corn, nor hedge-engirded mead,
Across this savage scene the eye could trace:
It stood as when the Cyniri here did lead the chase.

It has no doubt struck many, during an autumn ramble, how slowly and almost imperceptibly the changes of the months take place. The seasons themselves are striking enough, but to watch the slow progress by which they reach the different land-marks of the year, is like tracing the movement of the hand of a watch around the dial's face. Take a home garden, for instance—the smaller the better for observation—and recal the time when the first scarlet runner, nasturtium, sweet pea, or convolvulus sprang up, each a tiny speck of green above the mould. For days and days you can scarcely perceive them increase; the two little leaves grow larger by degrees; and then other tiny buds shoot out; and you are lost, between noting the expansion of the first, and the slow advance of the latter. Time rolls on, and they begin to twine and flower, one here, another there; you marvel why the one is so early, and the other so late. The first flowers attract your attention the most, and when the whole row is hung with bloom, you are anxious to find the first pod. It is the many stages through which vegetation passes that confuse observation, that induce us to take so little note of time, that causes autumn to steal upon us almost unawares. It is the same with the lengthening and shortening of the days: we see the hours, and not the minutes—the rock, but not the coral insect that was instrumental in raising it.

Nor less wonderful is the departure of the birds—which we find alluded to in the Old Testament—a proof that the habits of these winged voyagers were the same three thousand years ago. For in the Book of Jeremiah it is written, that "The stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed times: and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow observe the time of their coming." In Mr. Conch's interesting work on Animal Instinct, of which I have, more than once, made favourable mention, I find the following original observations on the migration of birds:—"The time of the withdrawal of the swallows and martens is more irregular than that of their coming, and begins with the swift, which usually

takes its flight in the first or second week of August—the whole colony disappearing at once—the actual departure being preceded, for a few days, by exercises in flying, which seem to be practising in sport what they soon expect seriously to execute. They may be witnessed ascending in a spiral manner, and in very close phalanx, with even more than their usual rapidity, to a very great height; and having two or three times executed this movement, they suddenly sink down to their nests, after which, till the next day, they are no more to be seen. A remark often made—that the swallow tribe go away earliest in the warmest seasons—appears to be correct; but whether there be any physiological reason for this, is a matter of doubt. The principal cause of their early readiness for migration seems to be, that less interruption has been thrown in the way of the formation of the nest; and that there has been a greater abundance of insect food for the support of the young, which has accelerated their growth. In an unfavourable season in these respects, or when other causes have occurred to retard the maturity of the brood, the birds have not only been kept later, but in many instances the migratory instinct has grown sufficiently strong to overcome the force of parental affection, and the brood has been left to perish in the nest. To attend on a helpless young one, a single swift has been known to remain for a fortnight after the departure of its companions; and it is a frequent occurrence for the swallow to leave its brood to perish in the nest. As autumn approaches the swallows return to their nests, only for the sake of sleep, or as a convenient resting-place; and about the middle of September, after having shown their social disposition by assembling in companies, the earliest of them enter upon their autumnal migration, for which the proper season is the month of October. The flight to their winter's destination is less direct than their coming; so that it is not uncommon for small parties to appear again, long after they have seemed to have left us. Such is frequently the case in November."

The golden woodpecker laughs loud no more;
The pye no longer prates; no longer scolds
The saucy jay. Who sees the goldfinch now
The feather'd groundsel pluck, or hears him sing
In bower of apple blossoms perch'd? Who sees
The chimney-haunting swallow skim the pool,
And quietly dip, or hears his early song
Twitter'd to dawning day. All, all are hush'd.—HERDIS.

I have before pointed out the beautiful days that often come with the close of October: the fine blue middle-tint that hangs over the landscape is never seen to greater perfection in England than at this season of the year, when the weather is settled.

Those who love to ramble in the country will find as much amusement and instruction now, as they did in the midst of summer. For many a lovely nook, then hidden by masses of foliage, will now break in new beauty upon the eye. Weeds and flowers have run into seed; and great is the variety of forms they have assumed in this new stage of existence. Urn, and cup, and bell, and ball, and vessels of almost every shape, stand laden with the flowers of another summer; and but wait for the strong winds to blow open the doors of their garner, that they may scatter their seeds upon the earth. But these will soon pass away, and then, instead of the faded foliage of autumn, we shall see the hedges shorn of their withered leaves, and all bare and naked, saving where they are hung with hips and haws, or where the bright holly and the dark-leaved ivy throw over them a patch of green. We shall soon hear the wind howling about the house at night, like a hungry wolf, and trying the doors and window shutters, as if determined to enter; but finding no way there, getting into the chimney, and there bellowing, and moaning, and growling, as if it stuck fast. And while we listen to such sounds, we shall recal the darkness that reigns over the sea: the ships that are driven like autumn leaves before the mighty storm, of shoals, and sand, and wrecks, and huge promontories lashed by the mountainous waves, that roll away, and go moaning along the beaten beach, as if hungry for their prey. We shall think of desolate moors, and lonely roads, and solitary toll-gates that stand on the edges of treeless commons, or between the wild sweep of lonesome woods where groaning branches ever utter deep dolorous sounds, as if moaning for very pain—places where travellers have been way-laid, and where gibbet-posts stand, whose irons ever swing and creak. Spots that have—

A weird-like and dreary look,
As, if murder lurk'd anywhere, there it would be:
Ruinous, shadowy, fearsome, and lone,
Abounding with whispers that seem not its own,
Where sounds, not of earth, shake each grey old ash tree.



NOVEMBER.—GUY FAWKES DAY.



Please to remember the Fifth of November
 Gunpowder treason and plot;
 I know no reason why gunpowder treason
 Should ever be forgot.—Old Ditty.

NOVEMBER brings with it Guy Fawkes Day, which, twenty years ago, in the country, was a common holiday; and not to burn Guy at night, and spend all the money got during the day in fireworks, would in our boyish days have been considered treason by the worthy parson, churchwardens, overseers, and every other "good man and true." We had some very misty notions about Guy Fawkes and King James and King William—not that we obtained our knowledge from history so much as the Common Prayer Book, which, although it taught us to pray for our enemies, said not a word against the burning of Guy Fawkes; indeed, this we considered the most important proof of our paying "due observance" to the day. Our notions of the aforesaid Guy were also very peculiar. We believed him to have been a very ugly sort of a fellow, with a long red nose, who levied blackmail, in his day, by being carried about from house to house, with a lantern in one hand, a match in the other, and we knew not how many pounds of gunpowder in his pockets; and that people gave him money to prevent him from blowing up their houses; further, that he at last grew so bold as to beg of Parliament, which was, in itself, a not very uncommon act; that they either refused to relieve him on the spot, or to grant him a pension; and that he threatened to serve King, Lords, and Commons, as he had threatened to serve all other leges

subjects, and at last became so overbearing that all London rose up against him as one man; that he was banished the kingdom, and then burnt in effigy for having been found prowling about the vaults, into which no end of small casks had been smuggled; that some said they contained gunpowder; others that Guy knew as well as the members themselves what the concealed casks contained; and that a nose like his would never have been allured into such places had there been nothing better than gunpowder. Then the plot grew too thick for our boyish comprehension; there was something about hush-money, trap-doors, drinking-cups, honourable members slipping one after another into the aforesaid vaults, and not able to get out again without assistance, and, finally, that they were blocked up; and in the course of time Bellamy opened, who still carries on a snug business. That the whole affair obtained the name of the Gunpowder Plot, through the train that was laid to get at the barrels and quench the spark which the dry orations of King James created in every throat. As to the story about burning, torturing, and so on, of course we knew better than to believe a word about the matter—well aware that in a Christian country, like England, such brutal scenes could never take place. Having thus settled these "Historic Doubts" to our satisfaction, of course

We knew no reason why gunpowder treason
Should ever be forgot:

so at once commenced making a Guy, or sometimes stole one ready-made, which saved much trouble, for it was useless for the weaker party to offer resistance at a season when bon-fires, crackers, squibs, and powder in every form, were blazing and banging all over the country. It was a day dedicated to Invasion, and not a scarecrow could be found in the fields or gardens for miles around. Nor was this all: we established a committee of enquiry, days before this great annual fring, and they went round to see that all gates, fences, railings, posts, &c., were firmly secured, according to statute passed. They were entitled to bring away all that were loose, decayed, or broken, or could by any lawful means be torn off, up, or down. These were offered up at the shrine of Guy on the evening of the Fifth of November, and for this purpose were hoarded up in such places as the secret committee in their wisdom chose to appoint to be used for the "due observance of the day."

The best receipt we knew for making a Guy was, first to steal a coat—if rarely new, so much the better, it gave Guy a more respectable look. The village tailor was generally in the secret, and he so cut, altered, and trimmed it, after having cabbaged a waistcoat out of the skirts, that we could safely defy the original owner to swear to it again, even when it had undergone the most rigid examination. A pair of good leather breeches also formed a capital accompaniment to the above, and these we generally obtained by "hook or crook." Top-boots were then pretty plentiful; and as the old shoemaker had generally five or six pairs on hand to repair, all round-toed, and as like as two cherries, it was difficult to discover whose were lost. Hats were plentiful as blackberries, as every high wind blew off one or two at the church corner, and the best was invariably selected. We just knew enough of the laws to understand that horses, wagons, &c., were in cases of emergency to be pressed into service in the King's name; and, under the same plea of loyal necessity, we stuck at nothing for the honour of our country, and the celebration of the Fifth of November. Pity 'tis, 'tis true, but sometimes a real living Guy has been detected in the fact of wearing the lost boots, unmentionables, &c., and been compelled to throw down his matches and lantern and run for it, and that our friends have been mulct to the full value aforesaid. But such mishaps rarely betel us.

Oh! what blazing and fring was there in those good old times: men drank and swore beautifully in those days, to prove their dislike to Popery; and what if a rocket now and then alighted upon a corn-rick, and burnt up a few scores of quarters of wheat, was it not a proof that in our very zeal we neither respected persons nor property? Then what good we did for trade, breaking every window that was not illuminated, without inquiring whether the indwellers were Catholics or Protestants!

It was one of those blessed days in which all loyal subjects who had allowed their nails to grow to a goodly length were expected to scratch, bite, shout, and blaze away at everything they came near. Alas! there are now "most biting laws" against the celebration of Guy Fawkes day. Into that very House which was all but blown up little more than two centuries ago, men of all sects and creeds are admitted; there is now no burning, no drawing, nor quartering in the name of religion; no traitors' heads grinning on London-bridge; no burning in the bars of Smithfield. Men seem to have lost that spirit of sweet savageness, and to have laid aside the charms of former cruelty. Poor Guy is himself doomed to be numbered amongst the things that were; and the time will come when the remembrance of Gunpowder Treason, and the martyrdom of Charles I., will not be found in our "Forms" of Prayer, nor be allowed to mingle with that holier incense which is alone worthy of ascending to Heaven. We shall then leave "the dead past to bury its dead," and destroy every trace of those old barriers that have so long separated man from his brother man.

As painters of the past, we have glanced at an old custom which is now fast sinking into desuetude, and which, excepting as an amusement for children, will ere long die away—a consummation devoutly to be wished.

But we must now turn to where

Autumn rends her yellow hair,
And weeps the more that tears were vain to save;
The sorrowful robin sings her requiem,
And strews her hearse with all his favourite leaves;
The sprightly lark somewhere in silence grieves
And will not chant his wonted matins hymn;
And Nature, her proud mother, mourns her child
With that unutter'd grief which is not soon beguiled.—WEBER.

Although the close of autumn is somehow associated with the images of decay and death, there are fitful and cheerful glimmerings thrown around, "like hope upon a death-bed;" and we feel that this natural destruction of the remains of the beautiful summer is necessary for the production of another and a fairer spring. There is also something pleasant in the appearance of the well-filled rick-yards and barns; and we seem armed against the coming winter when we look upon the stores that have been gathered from field, orchard, and garden, and garnered against the time when "the wind and rain beat dark December." Nor do we seem to care so much to see the leaves rotting and the long grass withering, and the low leaden-coloured sky ever raining, in these busy autumnal days, as we should in the almost nightless season of summer; the lengthened darkness brings with it the very necessity that confines us within doors.

There is something very beautiful about the great high heath-covered hills in autumn, that come dipping down with crimson-clad feet into the open valleys. Scott used to say that he could never live unless he set his foot upon the heath once a year; and we know few spots that retain their dry elasticity so long as those on which the heath-bell waves; for, when all besides is saturated with moisture and decay, these are comparatively dry. Some such spot we once knew that ran high above the surrounding woods; for, saving one narrow field-like entrance, woods encircled it every way. It had never been cultivated within the memory of man, nor probably ever had been. When the ling and heather had withered on the more open hills, here it remained as fresh as if it had but just bloomed; and even when December began to draw the curtain upon the close of the year, we have still found it as fresh as it seemed to have been in other places a month or two before.

The following humorous description of autumn was written between two and three hundred years ago, but by whom we know not, though we think it is attributed to Decker:—"Autumn's the barber of the year, that shears bushes, hedges, and trees; the ragged prodigal, that consumes all and leaves himself nothing; the arrantest beggar amongst all the four quarters; and never well, but always troubled with the falling sickness. This murderer of Spring, this thief to Summer, and bad companion to Winter, seems to come in according to his old custom, when the sun sets, like Justice, with a pair of scales in his hand, weighing no more hours to the day than he does to the night, as he did before in his vernal progress, when he rode on a ram. But this bald-pated Autumn will be seen walking up and down groves, meadows, fields, parks, and pastures, blasting of fruits, and beating leaves from their trees. When common highways shall be strown with boughs in mockery of Summer and in triumph of her death."

The resemblance the seasons bear to life, death, and resurrection, have not escaped the eyes of our old poets. They ever compared spring to youth; the

blowing and blossoming of the buds and flowers to the promises of future manhood, the fruits which the full Summer would bring forth and ripen. Autumn, which brought perfection, was also the forerunner of dissolution; the same which caused the rose to shed its beauty as soon as it was attained, for such was ever Nature's course. Winter was that sleep in the grave which awoke to life in another spring, whose flowers were eternal, and where there was neither death nor change again. Even so far back as the days of Homer, we find the decay of autumn suggesting these very images, nor have we in any way been able to improve upon them. Shelley seems to have felt this when he said:—

Oh! wild West Wind! thou breath of Autumn's being—
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red—
Pestilence-stricken multitudes. Oh! thou
Who chariotest to their dark and wintry bed
The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the spring shall blow
Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds, like flocks, to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill!
Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like his own:
The tumult of the mighty harmonies
Will take from both a deep autumnal love,
Sweet though in sadness! Be thou spirit-fierce.
My spirit, be thou me, impetuous one!
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,
Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth.

How wild and solemn must have been the autumns in our primitive old English forests, three or four thousand years ago! when there was no human voice to cheer the solitude; but, according to the earliest records we possess, nothing but bears, wolves, and the oxen with the high prominence. The badger is another of that ancient family, which has outlived the mammoth and the mastodon; for we find his fossil remains side by side with these huge and extinct monsters. He is the only representative of our cave bear, and seems not to have bated a jot of bruin's valour. It appears that in the present day the badgers migrate from one part to another in large companies, sometimes numbering from ten to seventeen; that they move along in the night, rank and file, in seemingly and marching order, placing their young ones in the centre. In one or two instances, when they have been confronted, both man and dog were compelled to beat a retreat.

The favourite haunt of the badger is the gloomy centre of a wood, or that part where the thicket is impassable; possessing long powerful claws, he there digs for himself a deep den, forming a somewhat winding and intricate entrance, into which he works his long hardy body, not caring a straw for rubbing his coarse skin against the outer brambles or rugged sides of his subterranean dwelling, so long as he has but plenty of room to turn himself when he reaches his inner chamber. Here he couches all day long, and never ventures out to feed until late in the evening, or late in the night. Though dull, heavy, and lazy, it is, upon the whole, a harmless brute, doing no injury to any one, but feeding upon roots, pig-nuts, acorns, beech-mast, and occasionally a long-tailed mouse or two, or even a few frogs or insects when nothing better may be had. Some naturalists assert that he is a great destroyer of wasps'-nests, and feeds upon the larvae. He is, beyond doubt, the strongest jawed animal of his size in Britain, and, even when baited by half-a-dozen dogs, if he once chances to get fairly hold, woe be to the assailant. When taken young he is said to be easily tamed, and to become as attached and affectionate as a dog; ready, also, to follow his master anywhere. Glad we are that the cruel custom of badger-baiting is now abandoned. Almost every inn-yard in the country had, a few years ago, its badger-tub, or box, in which dog and badger were mutually tortured, the dog which seized the badger the oftenest, and still retained his hold each time he went in until he was drawn forth by the tail, when the badger was made to release its hold, and the dog again sent in, according to its "bottom," was the winner. The method used for capturing the badger is by placing an open sack, with a running noose, in the earth where he harbours. This is done while he is out feeding. When all is prepared, a loud hooting and whistling is made, and half a dozen dogs are also turned loose. The badger, alarmed, hurries off home, rushes into the sack that closes behind him, and is regularly "sacked."



DECEMBER.—CHRISTMAS WAITS.



Good Christians, rise: this is the morn
 When Christ, the Saviour, He was born;
 All in a stable so lowly,
 At Bethlehem, in Galilee.
 Rejoice! our Saviour He was born
 On Christmas-day in the morning—*Old Christmas Carol.*

Hush! hush! These are the village waits, not your noisy musicians, whose clamour arouses a whole neighbourhood, but those who bring no other instruments excepting their voices—who go from hamlet to hamlet all night long, chanting such carols as our pious forefathers loved to listen to in those good old days when Christmas was not only a holiday, but a holy time. Let us uplift the corner of the white blind gently. Although they hope that all are listening, they would but feel uneasy to know that they were overlooked. We shall be very glad to see them on boxing-day, when they will come round and simply announce themselves as the waits; then we can reward them for the pleasure they have afforded us. A few old-fashioned doors will be opened, where they will be cheered with elder wine, spiced ale, and plum cake; they know the houses. There are those who make a point of sitting up to receive them; cold although the night may be, they will not lack bodily comfort. How sweetly the moonlight sleeps upon the untrodden snow; it kept falling until twelve o'clock; and then the queen of the stars came out adorned with more than her usual brilliancy. It is just such a Christmas morning as a lover of old customs would crave for—cold, frosty, and bright. How the snow will “crunch” beneath the feet

at daylight! But they are gone; you can just hear their voices at intervals, sounding faintly over the snow, when the red cock that crows from the far-off farm is silent, for they are now singing at the lonely grange beside the wood. The old farmer who resides there would never fancy that it was Christmas unless he heard the waits. Rumour, who is a slanderer, does say that when they have left his old-fashioned parlour they never again sing in tune—that bass is heard in place of tenor, and treble gets over his part before the others have well begun—and that, when complaints are made the next morning, the only answer is, “Christmas comes but once a year.”

Then comes the church service in the morning; nobody either thinks or cares about the sermon on that day—all feel good enough without it. No! their thoughts are with the friends they hope to meet; they need no other sermon than the snow which lies on the graves of those who are still dear to them in memory—the dead, who, perhaps, only the year before, were guests at the Christmas board—those whom

The breezy call of inebriate-breathing morn.
 The swallow twittering from the straw-luited shed,

The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening car;
No children run to slip their sires' return,
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to sharo.

In vain are the beloved portraits decorated with holly and ivy: the same calm faces look down upon the Christmas festival, but the eyes no longer brighten, neither do the lips move, nor will the merry laugh that rung like music over the scene ever more be heard.

High up the vapours fold and swim,
Above him floats the twilight dim,
The place he knew forgetteth him.—TENNYSON.

They mistake Christmas who state that it is a merry day; on the contrary, a Christmas dinner is more often a solemn assemblage of those who live, and whose thoughts are occupied with those who have departed. In England, with but few exceptions, it seldom consists of more than members of the family. If a friend drops in it is generally one who has no other friends to meet; or if he has, they lie too far and wide away for him to visit them. It is a time when grandchildren and grandfathers and grandmothers meet together; when old times and old scenes are recalled; when the hidden household gods are brought forth; and the young bride, often for the first time, meets the family of which she is now a member; when old crusty men, who after much persuasion have at last agreed to attend, shovel off the cold crust from their hearts, as the good old port comforts them, go home, and alter their will, and sleep more comfortably after it than they have ever done for years before; when hands which have never been clasped for many a long day lie enfolded within each other, and marvel however they came to be separated. No! Christmas is not a merry season; it makes a man think of how few such days he can remember, and how few more he can hope to see. He begins to think that a brief year of days spent so happily, dating from the time he first slept an infant in the cradle, and but kept up once a week, would tell him that he had lived beyond half a century; and he feels no wish to number as many more, although he knows that

In the grave there is no company.

"From the first introduction of Christianity into these islands," says the Book of Christmas, "the period of the Nativity seems to have been kept as a season of festival, and its observance recognised as a matter of state. The Witenagemots of our Saxon ancestors were held under the solemn sanction and beneficent influence of the time; and the series of high festivities established by the Anglo-Saxon kings appear to have been continued with yearly increasing splendour and multiplied ceremonies under the monarchs of the Norman race. From the Court the spirit of revelry descended, by all its thousand arteries, throughout the universal frame of society, visiting its furthest extremities and most obscure recesses, and everywhere exhibiting its action, as by so many pulses, upon the traditions, and superstitions, and customs which were common to all or peculiar to each. The pomp and ceremonial of the Royal observance were imitated in the splendid establishments of the more wealthy nobles, and far more faintly reflected from the diminished state of the petty baron. The revelries of the baronial castle found echoes in the hall of the old manor-house, and these were again repeated in the tapestried chamber of the country magistrate, or from the sanded parlour of the village inn: merriment was everywhere a matter of public concernment, and the spirit which assembles men in families now congregated them by districts then."

Such, indeed, was the merry Christmas of the olden time. The whole wide country was then filled with rejoicing: in the bannered hall the long tables were spread; on the ancient armour and the antlers of the wild deer, holly, and ivy, and mistletoe were placed; the huge yule log went roaring up the wide old-fashioned chimneys, and cold although it might be without, all was warm and comfortable within. The large wasall-bowl—a load of itself when full—was passed round, and each one before he drank, stirred up the rich spices with a sprig of rosemary, while the cooks (says an old writer) "looked as black and greasy as a Welsh porridge-pot." Roast goose and roast beef, minced pies, the famous boar's head, plum porridge, and plum pudding, together with no end of sausages, and drinks of every description, but, chief of all, the "bowl of lamb's wool," seemed to have formed the staple luxuries of an old Christmas dinner. But even more than two hundred years ago the cry was raised, "Is old, good old Christmas gone?—nothing but the hair of his good, grave, old head and beard left!"

Were I to paint a December day, such as I wandered out in last year (1847), it would read more like a description of spring than winter. The sky was intensely blue, and the sun shone with a summer brightness. The wide Downs which lie to the left of Sanderstead seemed to bask in the sunlight of May. On either hand, between the woods, the holly and ivy hung aloft in the richest green, while hips and haws glittered in the hedgerows in thousands, like beads of the brightest coral. The woodlark (which, it is well known, sings nearly the whole of the year, and is only silent in June and July), and the robin were singing as cheerfully as if it were a fine day in February; and, unless my ear deceived me, I caught the notes of the thrush. The day was, indeed, so beautiful that I could not resist the temptation of venturing into the wood, for there was a dryness about the fallen leaves such as I had but rarely seen in winter. Wandering onward, I arrived at a little dell. One side was in shade; on the other the golden sunshine slept. Strange, there was also a rich yellow light on the shady side of the dell. On a nearer approach, I saw hundreds of primroses in full flower. Pale and beautiful, there they stood, throwing a sweet fragrance all around; the new green leaves and the old ones, brown and decayed, all adhering to the same root. Such a discovery would have been a little fortune to a London flower-seller; and had they been dug up by the roots, and offered for sale in Cheapside (which is not more than twelve miles from Sanderstead), no doubt the whole dell-full might have been disposed of in one day, for it was just upon the verge of Christmas.

At no season of the year is the hare in better condition than now. He has got over his full autumn feeding, and there is a firmness about the flesh which will be lost after January. Hare hunting takes the precedence of the fox chase. It was followed by the ancients, and we have a description of it by Xenophon, long before the Christian era. By many it is also considered to afford more true hunting than the fox chase. The hare is no sooner found than it starts off and makes a circle; and as the scent is very weak until the hare is warmed, the harriers are often at fault, and driven over, and sometimes run backward instead of forward, hunting, as it is termed, "heel-ways." The hare should never be pressed upon too closely when first found, nor should the hounds be followed too near, as they sometimes turn back to regain the lost scent. Besides, by remaining behind, the motions of the hare can be better observed at a reasonable distance, and all her foils and doubles detected. It is wonderful what doubles the hare will sometimes make, when the scent has become warm: instances are on record of her feats on a dry road, when, having run all sorts of intricate ways, she will at last make a clear spring several feet from the spot, which occasions

many a fault; and while the harriers are beating widely about, or are far ahead, she will lie motionless in the very spot where she at one spring threw herself until the hounds have passed, when she will return again to her old starting point. When the hare begins to make more contracted circles, it is a sure proof that the hunt is pretty well over, for it is sure to come soon within the "spread of the pack," and it will not then be long before her death-cry is heard. Although the hare sleeps, the eyes are never closed: it is the same with fishes—they also sleep with the eyes open.

The following description of winter, written about three hundred years ago, will be new to thousands of our readers; it was written by a good old Scotch bishop, named Gavin Douglas, and first rendered familiar to English readers by the poet Warton, to whom we are indebted for the following beautiful modern version:—"The fern withered on the miry fallows; the brown moors assumed a barren mossy hue; banks, sides of hills, and bottoms, grew white and bare; the cattle looked hoary from the dank weather; the wind made the red reed waver on the dyke. From the crags and the foreheads of the yellow rock hung great icicles, in length like a spear. The soil was dusky and grey, bereft of flowers, herbs, and grass; in every holt and forest the woods were stripped of their array. Boreas blew his bugle-horn so loud that the solitary deer withdrew to the dales; the small birds flocked to the thick briars, shunning the tempestuous blast, and changing their loud notes to chirping; the cataracts roared, and every linden tree whistled and bowed to the sounding wind. The poor labourers, wet and weary, dragged in the fen, the sheep and shepherds lurked under the hanging banks or wild broom. Warm from the chimney side, and refreshed with generous cheer, I stole to my bed, and lay down to sleep, when I saw the moon shed through the window her twinkling glances and wintry light; I heard the horned bird, the night-owl, shrieking horribly with crooked bill from her cavern; I heard the wild geese, with screaming cries, fly over the city through the silent night. I was now lulled to sleep, till the cock, clapping his wings, crowed thrice, and the day peeped. I waked and saw the moon disappear, and heard the jackdaws cackle on the roof of the house. The cranes, prognosticating tempests, in a firm phalanx pierced the air, with voices sounding like a trumpet. The kite, perched in an old tree fast by my chamber, cried lamentably, a sign of the dawning day. I rose, and half opening my window, perceived the morning, livid, wan, and hoary; the air overwhelmed with vapour and cloud; the ground, stiff, grey, and rough; the branches rustling; the sides of the hills looking black and hard with the driving blasts; the dew-drops congealed on the stubble and rind of trees; the sharp hailstones, deadly cold, and hopping on the thatch." We know no description of winter so beautiful as the above; nearly every word is a picture, every epithet is well chosen, and the whole as fine a piece of word-painting as ever appeared in descriptive poetry.

We have again arrived at the close of another year, and in our journey through it have glanced at many of the old manners and customs which are fast fading away. The railroads, that have cut up the ancient highways of England, will soon uproot the few rude and rural customs that remain: the rapid interchange will revolutionise the habits of our simple villagers, and they will become ashamed of following the ancient amusements, which for centuries have been the delight of their ancestors. As for ourselves, we seem to have lived on the verge of important changes. We have with our own eyes beheld the old May-games, harvest-homes, sheep-shearing feasts, wakes, statutes, Plough-Mondays, Palm-Sundays, and other ancient festivals and ceremonies, as they have no doubt existed for at least three or four centuries. We have also been dragged at the rate of two or three miles an hour in the creeping market-boat and heavy stage-wagon, and been waded fifty miles in the same space of time in an express train. We can also just remember when a steam-boat was a marvel, and the banks of the river were lined for miles with wondering spectators. What changes another generation may witness, the future can alone unravel; if they keep pace with those that have marked the last memorable quarter of a century, scarcely a feature of the England which we have here depicted will remain. All the wonders of the "Arabian Nights" sink into insignificance beside our iron roads and electric telegraphs. As for Puck's exploit in the "Midsummer Night's Dream," of "putting a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes," we shall ere long be able to send a message around the same circle in less time than the fairy boasted of.



(The Descriptions of the Twelve Months are from the pen of Thomas Miller.)