

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 eaken 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 plump 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 chestnut-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 "stout" 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 "shock" 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 halt 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 of 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 enoble 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 beast, 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 tudeily doth disorder.

