SEPTEMBER.—A COUNTRY FAIR.

They climb the po'e, 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 oves 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 carrien '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 nuts, 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 pastry 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:—

> Ass I wass a walkĕning out one ĕ-vĕ-nine
>   All down by a river si-dĕ,
> And a gazening all around me,
>   A I-rish girl I spi-dĕ.
> Its red and ro-sĕĕ was her lips,
>   And so coal-black was her hair,
> And so cost-lĕ 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 gowden 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 mander 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 soaped 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 palings 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 "launch 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 chesnut, 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 tramping deep and loud,
>   Have left no footmark there.
>
> The village bells, with silver chime,
>   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.
>
> 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.
>
> 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 eves as sweet as this
>   Will close upon as 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 reign'd,
>   And will when time's no more.
>
> 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 intercepting 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 bee-hives, and his cottage is often situated by the side of a running stream; and there he steeps his straw, and splits his long straight skains of bramble with which he binds his golden-coloured domes together.