

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, honorable 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

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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 firing, 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 nearly 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, waggon, &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 befel us.

Oh! what blazing and firing 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 matin 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 contrivance. 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 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."

