

JANUARY.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE TWELVE MONTHS, BY THOMAS MILLER.



A wrinkled, crabbed man, they picture thee,
Old Winter; with a rugged beard, as grey
As the long moss upon the apple-tree
Blue-lipt, an ice-drop at thy sharp, blue nose;
Close muffled up, and on thy dreary way
Plodding alone through sleet and drifting snows—SOUTHEY

JANUARY comes with his awakening hand, and shakes grey-bearded old Winter in his chilly sleep, causing the icicles, which bind him down, to rattle again, while breathing into his frozen ear tidings that the days are lengthening, and bidding him hold himself in readiness to rise and make room for the tender snowdrops, which are already forcing their way through the earth his cold form presses down. How wearisomely would the year pass away, but for these changes!—but for the opening and shutting of the days—the coming and going of flowers—the arrival and departure of birds—the ever-varying races of insects—the wan coldness of Winter and the ruddy warmth of Summer—all giving to the year forms which correspond with our own changing existence! Hence we have the green and pleasant Childhood of Spring, the full and flowery Youthfulness of Summer, the ripe and fruitful Manhood of Autumn, and the garnered Old Age of Winter—not the “wrinkled, crabbed man,” in the opening of the beautiful sonnet which heads our present month, but such as forms the conclusion, as:—

They should have drawn thee by the high-heapt hearth,
Old Winter! seated in thy great-armed chair,
Watching the children at their Christmas mirth
Or, circled by them, as thy lips declare
Some merry jest, or tale of murder dire,
Or troubled spirit that disturbs the night
Pausing at times to rouse the mould'ring fire,
Or taste the old October, brown and bright.

Still, there is something joyous and bracing in the cold air of Winter, to those who are fond of out-of-door exercise; it sets the blood dancing merrily through the veins, and gives to the cheeks a colour which rivals the rich red of the apple-blossom. Only watch a parcel of boys snow-balling each other, and see what a summer-like glow there is on every countenance. They feel not the cold, unless

it be now and then a slight tingling at the finger-ends; and this they soon get rid of, by beating their hands lustily against their sides: rely upon it, this is better for their health than sitting doubled up, like old men of eighty, by the fireside. Give them a thick comforter round their necks, a pair of warm worsted gloves, see that their boots are also well laced, then bundle them out into the open air, and let Winter stamp their cheeks with his rosy fingers.

Supposing they go a few miles away, to see a coursing-match, or the hounds throw off, where's the harm? or even if they have got a gun out “on the sly,” why let them blaze away: all these things will save doctor's bills, expand their chests, and lay the foundation of a life of “green old age.” Every country-lad believes that hares and rabbits were made to be hunted and eaten: how can they think otherwise, when they see their elders so eagerly pursuing them? They are inspired with the spirit of hunting from the first hour when they see the ferrets let loose in the barn, and stand breathless watching the slightest stirring of the straw, which is the signal that the rats are on the move. Then comes a wider chase—the removal of a stack in the field or rick-yard, leaving a whole colony of vermin houseless, and causing them to run no end of ways for very life, while every boy in the village is hallooing—every mongrel barking with all his might—and an hundred sticks going like one, and pounding rats and mice “and such small deer” into paste.

Talk about poaching, bah! every lad who has the chance is a poacher; we ourselves were, soon after we were thrust into our first suit of corduroy. We well remember the first leveret our mongrel killed, and what delight danced about our heart at witnessing the act: true, it was on a wild waste of common-land, such as had never been cultivated since the first morning sun broke upon it; and we, in our boyish simplicity, believed that we had as much right to the bosky solitude as the proudest earl that ever broke its echoes with the sound of his bugle-horn. We would not have stolen into Squire A——'s preserves for the world;

a lamb or a chicken, or any thing that was really his, we coveted not, but as neither the hares nor the rabbits that run in the wilds were his or any other man's property, we caught them wherever we could. And so will they be caught when we are dead and gone, unless the blood-stained Game-Laws are altered. Poachers will be shot, and the brains of gamekeepers scattered about, while ever this contention exists; neither has any one living man a right to the wild game that runs free over the heaths, downs, commons, and unenclosed wolds and moorlands of Great Britain, free as when they were first formed by the Creator—they are, and ought to be, the property of all. Private parks, preserves, and cultivated estates are different. Look at the prison returns, at what the chaplains of jails have stated: you cannot convince a man that killing wild game in the open waste country is a crime. They would not even touch a pigeon if they knew it had an owner; but hares and rabbits, that are here to-day and far away to-morrow, they will never believe can be the personal property of any one, until caught. By Heaven, it makes our very blood rebel, when we think of the many beautiful wives that have been left husbandless, children fatherless, and parents childless, through these sanguinary and merciless Game-Laws. What a red catalogue it would be, that enumerated the names of all whose blood they have caused to be spilt. Why does not friend Bright move for such a return, extending over the last half-century?

If our law-makers think that the killing and eating of either rabbit or hare lies heavily on the consciences of the peasantry, they are woefully mistaken. Old Betty Bowser, who attends church regularly, will not boggle at placing the hare her son Bill's lurcher killed on her form, comfortably in the iron pot, between layers of mealy potatoes and onions, and reading her well-thumbed Bible, while puss simmers gently on the hob for two or three hours. We are no advocates of poaching, but we do feel that it is wrong for the rich to monopolise the game on all the waste lands and wide open breezy wolds of England, and contend that these and large portions of our old rivers ought to be free to all, even the raggedest urchin that wanders with his half-stripped and ugly cur at his heels.

Sommerville, in his "Field Sports," even while "toadying" to the "Gentlemen of England," cannot rein in the poetical spirit which is carrying him away, but is compelled to admit that even the poor enjoy rural sports equally with the rich, although their share of the sport is only to look on. He says:

Observe the attentive crowd; all hearts are fixed
On this important war, and pleasing hope
Glows in each breast. The vulgar and the great,
Equally happy now, with freedom share
The common joy. The shepherd-boy forgets
His bleating charge; the labouring hind lets fall
The grain unsworn—in transport lost, he robs
The expectant furrow; and in wild amaze
The gazing village stands.

Although this extract alludes to Falconry, it applies equally to all other rural sports, and is a true picture of the interest the peasantry take in all such recreations. Thank God! we have now no such scenes as Pope describes in his "Windsor Forest," where

A beast or subject slain
Were equal crimes in a despotic reign—
Both doom'd alike, for sportive tyrants bled;
But while the subject starved, the beast was fed.

Hare-coursing on a fine frosty day is a glorious recreation. There ought not to be any snow on the ground. It is a sport that both horsemen and pedestrians can enjoy, as the turnings are often made in sight, in a fine open country. A wild wide heath is a beautiful spot to select, with patches of gorse here and there, and straggling clumps of bushes. Those who sneer at coursing ought not to forget that it is a classical sport, and was followed by the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Look at that brace of greyhounds in the leash: saw ye ever anything more beautiful? "the speed of thought is in their limbs; no antelope was ever seen lighter of foot than they are, no doe more graceful, no race-horse more perfectly built for running: look at their fore-legs, they are straight as arrows; their loins bent like the bow Diana herself bears; their necks elastic as a swan's; their ears long and soft as silk purses; their heads sharp as a snake's, and their eyes bold, bright, and beautiful as a mountain maid's when she first recognises the form of her lover through the golden mist; and their chests are broad and full as Donald's, who, wrapp'd in his plaid, comes to return her greeting. When at full speed they cover the ground like the shadow of a graceful branch, tapering away until it is invisible like their tails, which honest Mat Prior must have been thinking about when he wrote the so-often-quoted line of

Fine by degrees, and beautifully less.

True he applies it to the bosom and graceful waist of a lady, the only object in creation we can place above the beauty of a greyhound, especially such as one of those we have now in our eye, so alike, that one could not be distinguished from the other, saving for the collar, which the laws of coursing require one should wear when there is so close a resemblance between them, as if they had grown together,

Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
But yet a union in partition—
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem;
SHAKESPEARE.

and, above all, of that rich fawn-colour which we so much admire. Look how the beautiful creatures tug at the leash, all eye, all ear.

Hush! hark! that "Soho" comes from the finder; there the hare goes—a true racer by the build of her, she steals away and does not appear to be much alarmed. The dogs have heard the "Soho;" they see the hare—look how they rear up and tug at the leash. The judge has his calm eye on poor puss, he will at least give her fourscore yards start, and his practised eye can measure the ground almost to a yard. Look how steadily both the dogs bear on the collar. The word "Go" is given, and just "at the self-same beat of Time's grey wings" they are off together, nose to nose, ear to ear—there is not the thickness of a walking-stick between them in distance at the moment of starting. Now the hare pricks up her ears—she caught the halloo given when the slipper started them. Danger and death dog thy heels, poor hare; and unless thou shouldst reach yonder distant covert, seen dimly from hence, thy fate is sealed. How they gain upon her, how they cover the ground! They seem to touch her: one has overshot himself and she is turned; he must have been some distance ahead to keep the lead as he still does, or he would have driven the hare into blue-collar's mouth. See! she is making back to the covert whence she was first started: this the inside dog perceives, by the short cut he is making—that is hardly fair, my fine fellow, although you will gain a point by your policy. Well done! he has got the lead by that manoeuvre, and blue-collar is now behind, though he has followed her fairly and not missed a yard of ground she went over, excepting when he overshot himself. Hurrah! blue-collar gains on the other dog, and see he has turned her again; he is the swiftest and the stoutest dog, for at that speed such sudden turning must be distressing—no race-horse in the world could jerk round so instantaneously—it is done before one has time to say "It lightens." Now they are doubling back; there are fences for you—saw you ever so clear a leap? That was no wrench, but a fair turn—the third blue-collar has made. Where is the hare making to? if to yonder high old hawthorn hedge, and she has a run only known to herself, she will escape, unless the gap is large enough for the dogs to creep through it. That old, high, thick, long hedge has never been cut within the memory of man, and there is neither horse nor dog in the world able to clear it. It is as we expected; she has escaped—there is no kill, and there the course is ended—the point's in favour of blue-collar beyond all doubt, whether the prize be for a silver collar, a cup, or five hundred good pounds. We will not trouble our readers with an explanation of all the technical phrases used in hare-coursing, beyond stating that the points are "A go-by, a cote, a turn, a wrench, a tripping, a jerking, and a hill of merit;" as some of these appear to be synonymous, and the true meaning of one or two is doubtful, being as old at least as the time of Queen Elizabeth, we can only refer our readers to the rules of Mr. Thacker, which are acknowledged by all coursers to be the fairest clearest, and most satisfactory that were ever drawn up.

Although, during the past Winter, the North of England and some parts of Scotland were rendered impassable by heavy falls of snow, yet, when compared with such as Hogg describes in his "Shepherd's Calendar," it seems as if the old Winters had for ever fled. He makes mention of a snow-storm which drifted to such a depth in the mountain passes as almost to have reached to the tops of the trees. For thirteen days and nights did the snow fall without ceasing, causing hundreds of sheep to sink into a heavy, cold, motionless sleep, from which they never again awoke—that so many died, walls were made of their dead bodies, to screen those from the cold which remained alive—that whole flocks were buried beneath the snow, and no one could tell where they were lost until the drift melted away, when the bodies were found with the heads all turned one way. "Numbers," he says, "were swept away by the floods which followed, and near one place, at a stoppage in the river, nearly two thousand sheep and one hundred and eighty hares were found dead. Shepherds went about," he tells us, "boring into the snow with their long poles, and scarcely found a single sheep in a quarter of an hour; until, at last, a shepherd dog seemed clearly to understand what they were searching for, and running about upon the snow, he began to scratch and look at the shepherds, as if to draw their attention to him, and in every spot he pointed out they found a sheep beneath, and through the assistance of the dog were enabled to save two hundred, which, without his sagacity, must have been lost."

There is something very solemn in the appearance of a country covered with snow on a cloudy day, especially if you look over some point of it that is uninhabited; for there are none of those sounds heard, or rural objects seen, which float and move the same scene in Summer. The birds are either silent or hidden, and the cattle which gave such a charm to the landscape are driven from the fields. You miss the figures that dotted the scenery while following their rural employments; scarce a whistle or a shout are heard amongst the woods and hills; the voices of the children are silent in the green lanes, and the echo of a gun only seems to make the stillness more solitary, after it has died away. Nor is it less interesting to watch the snow falling upon the face of a river: to see flake after flake settle down, float along for a brief second, and then dissolve for ever; or to see the large flakes descend in seeming lines across each other, while two come in contact, cling together, then fall softly to the ground. Sometimes you see a countryman, in his heavy-nailed boots, pause to kick off the hard "cakes" of snow which have clung to his boot-soles, or notice the lumps lie on the highway after he has shaken them off, with the mark of every nail stamped upon them. All these are little morsels of the great Picture of Winter out of doors; while within

The cottage-hind
Hangs o'er the enlivening blaze, and tattlef there
Recounts his simple frolic: much he talks,
And much he laughs, nor reckes the storm that blows
Without, and rattles on his humble roof.

THOMSON.



Thou lingerest, Spring : still wint'ry is the scene ;
The fields their dead and sapless russet wear ;
Scarce does the glossy celandine appear
Starring the sunny bank, or, early green,
The elder yet its circling tufts put forth.—SOUTHEY.

FEBRUARY looks out with its leaden-coloured sky from between the trees in the beautiful Engraving which our talented Artist has sketched for the heading of the present month : the fallow field, with its brown barren ridges, tells us that even the celandine has not yet bared its golden bosom to the sun, and that what little is seen of the daisies resembles dark green beads, scattered carelessly among the low, thin grass. It is the month in which Nature begins to awaken, in which she yawns, and blinks, and feels about as if trying to find a flower or two ; in which she rubs her arms and finds that they are becoming a little rougher through the bursting of the buds, and through her "dazed vision" catches glimpses of the dim green of the elder, and feels at times a warmth upon her cheeks which tells her that she is not forgotten by the sun. At times one may fancy that we hear Spring sighing somewhere, as if she longed to be set free, but was still retained a prisoner ; that it was on some cold day in this month when she first formed the snowdrop, as her warm breath blew through the bitter wind and gave the form of the flower to some falling snow-flake, which, impregnated by her flowery lips, fell, and took root in the earth ; and that ever after she sent the little flower as her herald to Winter, to tell him that the time of his departure was at hand, thus making it the

Pensive monitor of fleeting years.—WORDSWORTH.

Still this dreary season has charms for the sportsman, and we will now carry our readers away to the wild water-courses, and melancholy meres which run and expand over wide marshes and reedy fens, where the bittern booms, and the heron stands solitary and silent for hours, while the tufted plover flies with a wailing sound over the lonely landscape. In the low fens of Lincolnshire and Cambridge-shire, where wildfowl are most plentiful, there are hundreds of acres of land covered only with reeds and rushes and broad water-flags ; between which deep sluices boil and murmur as they hasten on with headlong speed to empty themselves into some neighbouring river ; and as the deep waters roll and tear along, they rock the black bulrushes and the tufted reeds, and give a wavy and dreamy motion to the overhanging willows, under which you glide noiseless as death, and making no more sound, as you drop your oar into the deep sullen water, than if you were cleaving a silver cloud with the feather of an eagle. Here and there ever keep rising the full-fed mallard with its head and neck of the richest velvet green, or the delicious teal, which only to mention sets the mouth a watering,

while clouds of lapwings and plovers sweep above the far-stretching forests of reeds, and sometimes the wild swan springs up like a sheeted ghost amid the solitude, and flaps

The clouds away with playful scorn.—BYRON.

And in these lonesome marshes and houseless fens, the sportsman must make up his mind patiently to endure cold and wet, and be content to feed upon the half-frozen sandwiches he carries with him, and to raise his eyes thankfully every time he sips his cheering cognac, blessing the maker of it from his heart, whether he be a Frenchman or an Englishman, and knowing that but for his still he would have to lean over the edge of his punt, and sip the chilly snow-water of the sluice, which only to think of makes one shiver. As for dress, the nearer you approach a sea fisherman's in that the better : huge water-boots you must wear ; and if you never donned flannel before, you will in such scenes, and at such a season, pronounce it as comforting as a couple of extra blankets thrown on the bed on some such bitter night as when the water freezes in your chamber.

The almost noiseless dip of the paddle will sometimes startle these quick-eared inhabitants of the fens and marshes ; and when you are drawing near to the spots which they most frequent, the boat must be pulled along by clutching the overhanging weeds and willows—nor must the sportsman shrink from seizing them, though they are as cold and keen as steel, and seem to cut to the very bone. One handful after another must be grasped and loosed gently, while the boat is drawn along her soundless way ; and if a sharp-edged water-flag, stiff with hoar-frost, smites the cheek like the edge of a sword, it must be borne without a murmur, and not an echo awakened louder than that made by the wind, as it goes whispering through the ever nodding sedge. The dawn of morning and the moonlight of evening must also be taken advantage of by the sportsman, as many of the birds only come into the open spaces which abound in coarse grass to feed at these periods. This, however, is of more importance to wild-fowl shooters on the sea-coast. But, before firing a shot, we must honour our pages with the following beautiful picture, by the American poet, Bryant, o.

A WATER-FOWL.

Whither, midst falling dew,
While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,

Far through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue
Thy solitary way?

Vainly the fowler's eye
Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,
As darkly pointed on the crimson sky,
Thy figure floats along.

All day thy wings have fann'd,
At that far height, the cold thin atmosphere,
Yet stoop not, weary, to the welcome land,
Though the dark night is near.

And soon thy tolls shall end,
Soon shalt thou find a summer-home, and rest
And scream among thy fellows; reeds shall bend
Soon o'er thy shelter'd nest.

This is indeed the true word-painting of poetry, in which every touch bespeaks a master-hand.

Hold! and we will try a shot at yonder heron which seems standing in a deep study on the little rounding ledge that projects beyond the background of reeds. That bird will stand for hours motionless as a monument, fixed as a mile-stone—so still that the young fry swim to and fro over his shadow in the water as if it were the stem of a tree, or a clump of reeds mirrored therein. He appears to regard them not, although his bright piercing and immovable eye is awake to every motion, for well he knows that their full-grown fathers and mothers will soon venture amongst them to see how they are behaving themselves. He is right; anon they come, when quick as thought the father of the family is in his long bill, where he has no more chance of escape than a rat in a new sharp-toothed trap; the mother and her plump sisters are perhaps at the same moment writhing under his feet, from which escape is also hopeless, such secure hold has he with his saw-like centre claws.

Bang! there he goes, he little dreamed we were so near at hand; his rich plumes are already dabbled with mud. Keep back the dog, on your life, unless you want the bill of the dying heron to be driven through his brain: you know not what danger there is in approaching him, his dying struggles are like a giant's; were you near enough, and he had the chance, he would plunge his keen bill into you with as much force as the arm of a strong man would drive a dagger into your body. The only safety is as we have him now—the foot planted on his neck, like conquerors of old.

The bittern is also a dangerous bird to approach when wounded, and very difficult to shoot, wheeling round rapidly as it rises; and when it has reached a considerable altitude, off it goes, straight ahead, like a shot. No more dolorous sound can be heard in the fens on a dimly dark night than the boom of the bittern. Milton might have made his fallen angels imitate it, from their "innumerable tongues," when Satan

Would have spoke,
But hiss for hiss return'd with forked tongue
To forked tongue.

Colonel Montague, in his "Ornithological Dictionary," says, "It is like the interrupted bellowing of a bull, but hollower and louder, and is heard at a mile distance, as if issuing from some formidable being that resided at the bottom of the waters.

That shot at the heron has startled all the wild-fowl for a full mile round, so we must make our way deeper into the fen, through these extended armies of rushes, that stand like ranged soldiers, bowing their heads to their commander as he passes. In many places the edges of these banks will shine like bosses of gold a month or two hence, when the huge marsh marigolds are in flower, and many a rare aquatic plant may then be found here, which you might wander weary leagues in search of in vain elsewhere. The white stem of that pollard in the distance looks like the ghost of some old fen-man, which has risen up from the deep hole in which he was drowned hundreds of years ago, to oppose our further passage. See, out there, how the eddies boil round and round! That spot cannot be fathomed. I only know another like it, and that is in the river Mole, behind the Academy at Leatherhead. There, underneath the shadows of the tall trees, the proprietor assured us that he had endeavoured in vain to find a bottom.

We are now viewing a likely spot for finding wild ducks; a fen-boy knows how to distinguish them from tame ones, by their black claws. We will land here: keep the dogs behind—for the present they will be more useful in fetching than finding—for here "they most do congregate." Here they come against the wind, and fortunate we are that they fly so low. Aim a little ahead. There you go, my beauties, head foremost! and your sleek, speckled-bosomed dames are following you, topsy-turvy. What a scattering of rainbow-hued plumage! Saw ye ever an emerald richer than the colour of this mallard's neck; look also at this ring, white as ivory. Ah, Ponto, you may wag your tail—you know no better: we do; and hardly know whether or not we have a right to deprive these beautiful creatures of life, under the plea that we are the "Lords of Creation."

After all, they are not equal to the teal in flavour, although he is the smallest of the whole duck tribe, and the most difficult to kill. He seems to think that his safety depends upon flying as low as possible; and, when started, will content himself with skimming over the surface, where he becomes a sure mark. Col. Hawker says, "If you spring a teal, he will not rise up and leave the country, like a wild duck, but most probably keep along the brook, like a sharp-flying woodcock, and then drop suddenly down; but you must keep your eye on the place, as he is very apt to get up again, and fly to another, before he will quietly settle. He will frequently, too, swim down stream, the moment after he drops; so that if you do not cast your eye quickly that way, instead of con-

tinuing to look for him in one spot, he will probably catch sight of you, and fly up, while your attention is directed to the wrong place."

All diving birds are hard to shoot, for they are so quick of sight, that the instant the flash of the gun is seen they are under water; this is called "ducking the flash," and the surest plan to kill is to aim under, instead of at them. Nor are they easily killed, but will stand some pretty hard knocks before they fall, unless they happen to be struck on the head, or winged.

Widgeons and dun-birds are now so common, that it would but be a waste of space to dwell upon the means adopted for their capture. Decoys are now generally used; and in one pond in Essex, as many dun-birds were taken at one "drop" as filled a waggon, and so densely were the birds crowded together in the pens, that the very weight of the poles and nets which fell upon them squeezed the undermost birds quite flat as they lay upon each other like a "cloud of bees."

To shoot a water-hen or a water-rat is the first exploit of a fen-boy when trusted with a gun; for the water-hen is a rapid diver, so is the water-rat, and both are believed to be so sharp of hearing, that the very sound of the click of the lock reaches them before the shot is fired. Then if the moor-hen chanced to be winged in a field, what a glorious race we had to overtake her: talk of a "Jampighter" running! he moves like a cripple compared with the water-hen.

All who know the pewit or lapwing, with its beautiful crest of feathers, are aware of its manner of darting, jerking, and wheeling on the wing; as an old Lincolnshire fen-shooter used to say, it was as "hard to hit as a gnat." When boys, we captured the young ones by fastening strings round their legs and pegging the string into the ground, leaving the parent birds to feed the little prisoners until they were well penned and ready to be taken; for if we once left them in the nest free until they could run, we seldom saw them again. In our young days they were kept commonly in gardens, their wings cut to prevent their escape; and handsome fellows they looked with the tuft of plumes blowing about their heads. It is said that this bird is so artful, that it will make a noise on the ground like a mole, and that the worm, hearing the sound, mistakes it for his underground enemy, and comes out and is swallowed by the watchful lapwing. Golden and grey plovers, god-wits, coots, water-rails, and the whole tribe of birds that frequent marsh and mere, rivers and reeds, fens and flats, we must pass over, our only apology being the limits of our page. The wild fens are no longer what they were; the broad beds of reeds and oster-holts are disappearing, and over some of our once hedgeless Lincolnshire marshes the railway engine now hurries with fiery speed.

Many an old river-bed is now dry, over which the ancient Britons paddled their wicker coracles, or boats covered with the "black bull's hide," and you now see only the dry high banks upheaving on either hand, and walk in the water-less river-bed, where centuries ago Saxon and Danish vessels sailed. You might in such places fancy that you were wandering through an uninhabited world, or that every trace of those who had formerly lived in those lonely solitudes was swept away. Rude huts overlooking the river, from which, in early days, the skin-clad fisherman watched the huge sturgeon swim, and the black porpoise roll, while the salmon glanced past like a ray of moonlight, as it showed its silvery scales; and where the huge pike darted upon its prey, while the bittern murmured in the marsh, and the plover wailed above the willows, and sharp-edged water-flags rustled together and made a melancholy sound, amid the fretting of the waters.

'Twas a wild spot: for there, old legends say,
In ancient days a rude stone bridge had stood;
And that two thousand years had pass'd away,
Since first its arches spann'd the rapid flood.
And there, they say, the Roman troops pass'd o'er,
And drove the ancient Britons from the opposing shore.

And huge gigantic blocks, all quaintly wrought,
Half-buried here and there, still lie around;
And battle-weapons rude, with which they fought,
In that old river-bed are often found;
Bucklers, and bows, and clubs, and dead men's bones
Have been dug up beneath those mouldering stones.

T. M.

I shall conclude my description of this month with a picture of the Village Carrier, from my "Book of Winter:"—

Lonesome and dreary are many of the places which the old carrier has to pass in winter—the lengthy road between the low fir plantations which a quarter of a century ago was infested by highwaymen—the weary marsh with its long sluice of water which looks as black as ink when the surrounding scenery is covered with snow, and the great frozen reeds and rushes stand up stiffly, and the water-flags looking as if they would cut you with their sharp edges, while the bushes, that bend over the pool, have a cold white forbidding look, making you feel that if you were to fall into the water, you would hardly like to lay hold of the keen, biting, frozen sprays to save yourself, so bitter cold do they appear. We can fancy that the old carrier feels this when returning home by himself on a dismal Winter's night, for he has been heard to remark that the mere in the marsh "would be a nasty place for a man to have a night's lodging in." On dark nights he hangs his lantern at the point of his cart; and if the air is clear and you stand on some embankment, you can see the light, and you fancy for a time that it is stationary, so slowly does he move. And sometimes the wide marshes are flooded; but unless the waters are above what he calls "girth-deep," he still continues his journey to the market-town, for a tree, bush, or post are to his accustomed eye safe landmarks. He can even tell by the depth of the water whether his horses are keeping the right path or not. We have presented him in the pages of the ILLUSTRATED LONDON ALMANACK as a relic of a past age, for the railways will ere long sweep his occupation from the face of the earth.



The cock is crowing, the stream is flowing,
The small birds twitter, the lake doth glitter,
The green fields sleep in the sun.
The oldest and youngest are at work with the strongest;
The cattle are grazing, their heads never raising;
There are forty feeding like one!

WORDSWORTH.

MARCH is very beautifully and graphically described by our late Poet Laureate, Wordsworth, in the above lines; nor is the exquisite breezy Engraving which heads the verses less true to nature; you can almost hear the piping March wind whistling through the trees and the rents of the old mill sails. We could almost fancy that the talented Artist had had a stanza of our own in his "mind's eye" when he drew this exquisite sketch; but, on looking at the verse again, we find our description is too early in the morning for the present scene, neither have we the wagon, and the figure which appears all but blown "off his legs" in the Engraving. Here, however, are the verses, which we wrote ten long years ago:—

On the far sky leans the old ruined mill,
Through its rent sails the broken sunbeams glow
Gilding the trees that belt the lower hill,
And the old thorns which on its summit grow;
Only the reedy marsh that sleeps below,
With its dwarf bushes, is concealed from view.
And now a struggling thorn its head doth show
Another half shakes off the misty blue,
Just where the dusty gold streams through the heavy dew
And there the hidden river lingering dreams,
You scarce can see the banks which round it lie.
That wither'd trunk, a tree or shepherd seems,
For so the light, or fancy, strikes the eye;
Even the very sheep which graze hard by,
So blend their fleeces with the misty haze,
They look like clouds dropp'd from the unsunn'd sky,
Ere morning o'er the eastern hill did blaze:
The vision fades as they move further on to graze.

In spite of the almost numberless pages we have written on the approach of spring, the subject seems inexhaustible; for the flowers that come are new flowers, although from the same bulbs and roots, and we still fancy that they never looked so beautiful before. If we greet them not with this feeling, we look upon them as old and very dear friends which have been long absent, and which are endeared to us all the more through this separation. Even the very bees, when they first come out, during the fine days of this month, fly around the flowers "as if they loved them," and seem to murmur into their cups sounds expressive of recognition.

What delight does the first appearance of young buds bring to the heart! When we grow old, we remember the eagerness with which we looked for Spring

in our younger days; when, day after day, we watched the green buds growing larger on the hawthorn, and knew that before long we should be able to gather the bunchy blossoms of the sweet-smelling May; when we went peeping into every dark hedge for that darker substance in which the "sky-stained" eggs of the hedge-sparrows were sure to be found. These were amongst the many delights which come with Spring, and in which memory still finds happiness, as we sit with her brooding over past scenes.

If the passage which follows has ever before met the eye of my readers in my "Book of Spring," I am sure they will pardon me for again introducing it, for the sake of the stamp of truth it bears, and the earnest feeling with which I must have written it. It was originally addressed to boys, and my heart must again have wandered to my old companions when I drew this picture of my boyish haunts and boyish feelings. Death has been busy there since I wrote the following; and now, in the beautiful lines of T. K. Hervey (quoted from recollection, and perhaps not correctly)—

Memory, when she names that vale,
Speaketh low and looketh pale;
And pale Regret, with unbound hair,
Sits ever like a mourner there!

Yet here memory contradicteth the feeling; but when I had written what your eye, reader, will in another minute be dwelling upon, the gloomy shadow of death had not settled so harshly down upon the landscape as it hath since done.

Happy were the days we spent in the primrose season of Spring, in rambling down Humble-car-lane, through Lea-marshes, in the bend of the old river Trent, which Shakespeare has described so truly in the quarrel between Hotspur and Glendower, up Pingle-hill, and Double-hill, and Foxby-lane, away to Lea-wood and White's-wood, or through the long plantation, Caister-wood, Castle Hills, Thonock, and Corringham-skroggs, the wildest scene of all. Or, perchance, we crossed Gainsborough-bridge, and went along the "Ramper" by the Delf, or turned off at Cape's old ropery into the marshes, elbowing our way to Bole, or Sawby, or Wheatly; or it might be keeping on the hauling-path by the river banks, beside osier-holts and wild river foregrounds of feathery reeds, and green rushes, and tall armies of flags which were ever waving to and fro; or, turning our faces towards the broad Humber, and leaving Beckingham to the

left, we went on towards Parnell's osier-holt (so called from the dear old doctor—one of the last gentlemen we remember wearing a pig-tail), where we stood leaning over the parapet of the crumbling brick bridge, and watching the fish as they went in and out through the old weather-stained sluice gates. Even now I feel as if I could leap up from my wearisome armed-chair, if I were nearer those beloved spots, and visit them all again between sunrise and sunset, without once feeling fatigued, and hunt every familiar hedge and bush, as I have many a time done a quarter of a century ago.

My heart, whilst ever it beats, can never grow old or cold, or cease to pant and yearn for those delightful spots which are ever green with the pleasant memories of my boyish days; for I believe that they will never cease to be covered in Spring and Summer with milk-white daisies and sun-stained buttercups, and ever hemmed in with pleasant green hedges powdered and perfumed with the pearl-dyed blossoms of May; I can never believe but what the river sings and murmurs as sweetly through its winding banks as it did when I a boy angled in its bright rapid waters; and that those silver-sounding church bells ring as sweetly from that grey and weather-beaten old Norman tower, as when I a child shaped words to their music, and which I fondly fancied every babbling hill and valley repeated. I can never think that the water-flags around Cavendish-bog will in Spring ever be without a reed-sparrow's nest, or that the hedge-sparrows will ever cease to lay their blue eggs in the tall hedges of Humble-car; I believe that the thrushes will never forsake the dark firs in the long plantation, nor the linnet cease to build in the gorse-bushes beyond it.

Though I have grown older now, the fond remembrance that is ever rooted in the haunts of my childhood is still young, and dances its green leaves in the wind and sunshine as gaily as if it were still a sapling, with its tender bark uninjured by the rough rubs of the passing world. I would gather all the birds that ever sang around me in my boyish days, if I could, and they would remain my companions without repining or complaining: then I could fancy when they sang that they were telling me all about the old woods and lanes we wandered through, long, long years ago; and sometimes we should seem very glad, and at others very sorrowful together, and close our eyes in the same twilight, and dream about the same old familiar scenes, for we should feel all alike prisoners, they and I—longing for the same Spring and Summer-green, and sending many a sigh after things that had for ever ceased to be. And yet, not so! for even now I can look, with closed eyes, through the dim avenues of old years, down the grey twilight of time: for nothing in that hazy past is wholly dark; even the sinking sunset is gilded over with pleasant memories, into which the spirit steals forth in sleep, to visit those old haun and bring me back tidings about the buds and flowers that are blowing, to comfort me when I awaken; for Memory, like the island in Shakspeare's "Tempest,"

Is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.

Lest we should pall our readers with too long a description of rural scenery, we will attempt to draw another picture of country sports, which more properly belongs to Winter, although still followed in the present month, and that is Rabbit Hunting with the assistance of ferrets. No animal is so useful in driving the rabbit from its burrow as the ferret, providing the ferret is muzzled; if not, it will gorge itself with the blood of the rabbits, and sleep in the bottom of the burrow until aroused by the call of hunger. Some sew up the mouths of the ferrets, while employed in driving out the rabbits; but this is an unnecessary and cruel precaution, as the following plain and simple directions for muzzling or coping the ferret will prove—we copy it from the "Dictionary of Sports:"—"A piece of soft string, not too thin, is tied round the neck of the ferret, close to the head, leaving two longish ends; another piece of string is tied round the under jaw, passing it under the tongue, and brought round over the upper jaw, and tied there, leaving the ends long. This will keep the mouth closed. The four ends are then brought together, and tied in one knot on the top of the head, which makes all safe from slipping. It gives the animal no pain, as it appears to hunt as eagerly as without a muzzle."

The female ferret sometimes devours her young (a brood of which generally numbers from six to nine), of which she has two broods a year.

Few are aware what a plague the rabbit would be, unless kept under. Like the locusts of old, it would eat up "every green thing," were it not destroyed by man, and preyed upon by both birds and beasts. To see the havoc the rabbit makes amongst even the hardy gorse, one need not journey further from London than Epping Forest. But it is amongst the young corn and young trees that their destructive powers are most serious, as they devour the one and bark the other, and prevent it from ever becoming valuable as timber. A rabbit warren is a perfect subterranean town, full of hollow and bending streets, through the mazes of which the lithe-bodied ferret-weasel is well adapted to wind its way, and drive out the destructive populace, when their inroads on the neighbouring fields become serious. It is on record that a town in Spain was once undermined and destroyed through their burrows. Their favourite time of feeding is in the evening twilight, though they may be seen abroad during all hours of the day. As for their fecundity, Daniel, in his "Rural Sports," says—"Rabbits will breed at six months old, bear seven times annually, and bring five young ones each time. Supposing this to happen regularly during the space of four years, and that three of the five young at each kindle are females, the increase will be 478,062. The calculation has been made from eight young at each of the seven kindles, amounting to 1,274,840; but that is much too high, for the wild rabbit was never known to have eight at two successive kindles. Under the first statement, being overstocked with these animals might justly be feared; but man, birds, and beasts of prey make great devastation among them."

The rabbit, like most animals that burrow in the earth, has more than one entrance and exit to his house, and it may be readily imagined how unceremoniously he hastens to escape from his front or back-door when the ferret is in possession. That is the moment for the sportsman to take aim, for the dart of no animal is so quick as that of the rabbit; the gun must be ready raised and the finger on the trigger when he appears, or he is across the path and off amongst the windings of the furze-bushes in a twinkling, and gone through runs so small that no dog can follow him. One writer says:—

More difficult than the hare to hit,
They frequently appear to flit
Like shadows past one.

Care must be also taken not to hit the ferret, which is likely enough to be close upon the scent of the rabbit.

If there is one animal more than another that ought to be the common property of all who choose to capture it, it is the rabbit, which should ever remain the poor man's game, without the interference of any law. We speak, be it remembered, of old, open forest-land, heaths, moors, and commons; for we consider a private rabbit warren as much the property of the owner as a flock of sheep. Hear what the late witty canon of St. Paul's, the Rev. Sydney Smith, has to say on these matters—a man whose spirit still walks the earth in his works, and is ever abroad doing good:—

"We really cannot believe that all our rural mansions would be deserted, although no game was to be found in their neighbourhood. Some come into the country for health, some for quiet, for agriculture, for economy, from attachment to family estates, from love of retirement, from the necessity of keeping up provincial interests, and from a vast variety of causes. Partridges and pheasants, though they form nine-tenths of human motives, still leave a small residue, which may be classed under some other head. Neither are a great proportion of those whom the love of shooting brings into the country, of the smallest value or importance to the country. A Colonel of the Guards, the second son just entered at Oxford, three diners-out from Piccadilly, Major Rook, Lord John, Lord Charles, the Colonel of the regiment quartered at the neighbouring town, two Irish Peers, and a German Baron—if all this honourable company proceed, with fustian jackets, dog whistles, and chemical inventions, to a solemn destruction of pheasants, how is the country benefited by their presence? or how would earth, air, or sea be injured by their annihilation? There are certainly many valuable men brought into the country by a love of shooting, who, coming there for that purpose, are useful for many better purposes; but a vast multitude of shooters are of no more service to the country than the ramrod which condenses the charge, or the barrel which contains it. We do not deny that the annihilation of the Game-Laws would thin the aristocratic population of the country, but it would not thin that population so much as is contended; and the loss of many persons so banished, would be a good rather than a misfortune. At all events, we cannot at all comprehend the policy of alluring the better classes of society into the country by the temptation of petty tyranny and injustice, or of a monopoly in sports. How absurd it would be to offer to the higher orders the exclusive use of peaches, nectarines, and apricots, as the premium of rustication; to put vast quantities of men into prison as apricot-eaters, apricot-buyers, and apricot-sellers; to appoint a regular day for beginning to eat, and another for leaving off; to have a Lord of the Manor for greengages, and to inflict a penalty of five pounds on the unqualified eater of the gage! And yet the privilege of shooting a set of wild poultry is stated to be the bonus for the residence of country gentlemen! As far as the immense advantage can be obtained without the sacrifice of justice and reason, well and good; but we would not oppress any order of society, or violate right and wrong, to obtain any population of squires, however dense. It is the grossest of all absurdities to say, that the present state of the law is absurd and unjust, but it must not be altered, because the alteration would drive gentlemen out of the country. If gentlemen cannot breathe fresh air without injustice, let them putrefy in Cranbourne-alley. Make just laws, and let squires live and die where they please." (Vol. II., p. 56—57, edit. 1840.)

What misery have we witnessed that sprang from these Game-Laws! miseries only known to such as have lived in the country, and looked upon the bitter blood which they have engendered. We have seen the bleeding face of the dead man, brought home at midnight from the woods, a victim offered up to these disgraceful laws—have heard the shriek of the young widow, and the hopeless wailing of the fatherless children: these things we have seen with our own eyes, and heard with our own ears, and felt that it would scarcely be murder to avenge the death of the poor poacher, who but went out to provide his family with food. Even we, peace-loving men, felt this, while looking upon the deeds done under the sanction of these blood-stained laws. Upon the grey old tombstones of the village churchyard where we stood and wept, as we have in turn seen poacher and gamekeeper consigned to an untimely grave—men who a few days before were ruddy with health and strength, murdered in a midnight brawl while struggling for the possession of a poor hare. This have we witnessed in the nineteenth century.

Alas! the low valleys and sloping hills and waving woods of green England are not what they seem; amid them death-blows are dealt at midnight, and dying groans heard in lonely coverts: the gloomy gullies or the forbidding prying rise up amid the landscape, where the victims swing or mean away their days—sufferers for the preservation of worthless game. Would that we could blot out these laws for ever from our statute-books, and that they might only be remembered amongst the thousand of barbarous customs abolished centuries ago.



Emblem of life! see changeful April sail
 In varying vest along the shadowy skies,
 Now bidding Summer's softest zephyrs rise,
 Anon recalling Winter's stormy gale,
 And pouring from the cloud her sudden hail;
 Then smiling through the tear that dims her eyes,
 While Iris with her braid the welkin dyes,
 Promise of sunshine, not so prone to fail.—HENRY KIRKE WHITE.

APRIL has ever been associated in our mind with Angling, from our boyish days. No sooner did the silvery down show itself on the willows, than we hunted up our fishing-tackle, and betook ourselves to our old favourite angling-places in the free and open river Trent, where we had the uninterrupted range of many miles, without any fear of trespassing. The whole river, far as we ever wandered (with the exception of private grounds, that were enclosed), was as free to poor and rich as when it first ran through its green and winding banks after the subsiding of that undated ocean, the ebbing of whose waters are yet visible in the ridges of the hills which on either side hem in the broad valley of the Trent.

Born within a stone-cast of that river, we were anglers in our childhood, and can well remember with what delight we hooked our first bleak on Mortram's wharf, with the farthing willow fishing-rod bought of Tommy Duncan, while as yet we figured in frock and pinafore—for tunics and trousers, and such like Frenchified fal-the-rals were not then known, and we were whipped all at once out of our baby-like free-and-easy costume into all the horrors of tight corduroys, without any intermediate stage of transition: nor have we yet forgotten the first twelve months, during which, although we broke our nails over and over again, we never could for the life of us button them behind. Our first fair stand-up fight was long before we were breeched, because a lubberly boy had, in the presence of our little sweetheart, who was nursing her doll and sucking her thumb at the same time, dared, on account of the petticoats we then wore, to call us "lad-lass." Even at that age we were anglers; and by the time we had attained our seventh year, we were initiated into the mystery of "bottom-lines," and had brought home a pike whose tail dragged on the ground, as borne upon the shoulder of our "giant height." The truth is, a professed fisherman was our next-door neighbour—a man "to the manner born;" for he obtained his livelihood by fishing in the Trent—and, what with accompanying him, and aided and abetted by his promising son Bob, stealing off at times with his boat and tackle while he was drinking (for he was a thirsty fish), it is not to be wondered at that there was no lad, from the rise of the Trent to its fall in the Humber, who better understood the "gentle art" than ourselves at that early age: as we grew older we realised not the promise of our boyhood.

Fly-fishing we were never able to make much of, and we fear our best efforts

never rated higher than "whipping" or "flogging" the water: we could never attain that fine masterly stroke of dropping the artificial fly upon the water, as if it had been a real insect that had mistaken the glassy surface for the green grass, and alighted there of its own accord. To throw the fly on the exact spot fixed upon by the eye of the fisherman, has ever appeared to us a greater accomplishment than to hit the bull's-eye in a target with a rifle, at a distance when the mark scarcely appears larger than a pin's head; such a nice calculation does it require in the former to allow for the wind acting upon the line, which affects not the bullet. As to being able to throw the fly with either hand, that we gave up in hopeless despair; for when we attempted it with the left, it was "over the left" indeed, according to the fullest sense of the Cockney vernacular.

We well remember our early lessons on land, in the art of fly-fishing, in poor old Palmer's garden, and how at the first throw we hooked his inexpressibles, and at the second, while he stood with his mouth open, we threw the fly into it; also, how he danced, and capered, and roared out ten thousand murders; and how we ran for the barber to cut out the hook, and which, when done, left our "master of arts" redder about the gills than ever we saw a salmon. The worst of it was, at the very moment of the disaster, he had so much applauded that particular throw as to call "Strike," which we were in the act of doing when the wind blew the fly into his open mouth, and we did strike to some purpose. He was the largest fish we ever hooked; although we once carried away Miss Ogleton's cap and peruke by a similar throw, much to the annoyance of that middle-aged lady, and greatly to our own astonishment, for we left her pate as bare as a bladder of lard: no one ever after wantoned with her long ringlets.

To attempt a description of all the artificial flies used throughout the year would be as dry and uninteresting a subject to the generality of our readers as if they were to sit down and read a dictionary backwards, by commencing at the end of the definition of each word. It is, in fact, all hackle and cackle, red-dun and dead-dun, oak-fly and choke-fly, grey-lake and may-drake, and leaves the mouth after enunciation as husky as if one had tried the flavour of each; we feel a kind of hairy featheriness about the palate, such as a man feels in a dream when he is busily engaged in breakfasting off the inside of the feather-bed he is sleeping upon. Even that portion of Walton's work dedicated

to this subject we invariably skipped, much as we worshipped the old man's exquisite word-painting and his inimitable sketches of rural scenery. The ingredients which Shakspeare's witches throw into the cauldron in "Macbeth" have ever seemed to us about as "comatable" as many of the materials necessary for the manufacturing of artificial flies, for which it seems indispensable to have—

Eye of newt, and toe of frog,
Wool of bat, and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork, and blindworm's sting,
Lizard's leg, and owlet's wing.

Nay, we are not sure that we did not once miss a singular legacy—namely, a drawer full of hair, wool, and feathers, because we were too dull to learn the art of making properly large March-duns, cream-coloured duns, mealy-white moths, &c., all of which the worthy old fly-fisher bequeathed to another, together with an old stocking filled with bran and spade-ace guineas, because he had more patience than we possessed.

The great essentials for fly-fishing are a sure eye and a true hand, so as to throw the fly upon the exact spot on which the eye has fixed, and these qualities can only be attained by much patience and considerable practice. The fly-fisher must also be able to use either hand, not only to take advantage of the wind from whichever point it may blow, but also to save one hand from tiring, and the wrist from being sprained, as it would be, were all the work to be done by one hand. A beginner should commence practice by throwing against the wind. The instant a fish seizes the fly, he should be struck; for no sooner do his jaws close upon the artificial bait, than he discovers the mistake, and "blows" it out of his mouth, for he no more mistakes the hardness of the hook than we should were we to attempt to bite a stone peach, however much it might deceive the eye. A strike may, however, be so quick as to draw the fly out of his mouth before his jaws have closed, though this, we believe, but rarely happens. "After a fish is struck," says the "Encyclopædia of Rural Sports," "if it be of a tolerable size, immediately throw up the point of the rod, and, if the fish give signs of being a very heavy one, then actually force the butt of it so forward as to carry the point over the shoulder, which will transfer the strain on the line to the elasticities of the joints of the rod; and this direction must be pursued until the fish be sufficiently exhausted for landing; we may also take occasion to caution the angler never to let a fish strike towards the weeds, nor up nor across the stream; but, if possible, down the stream only, keeping his head high up in the current, to tire and drown him. Likewise avoid letting your shadow, as well as that of your rod, fall on the water when fishing."

A salmon weighing fifty-four pounds has been taken in Scotland with an artificial fly, and splendid must have been the tackle to land such a monster, especially if he sulked, and lay like a stone at the bottom of the river, with the hook in his mouth, as he sometimes will after he has been struck, and finds that he cannot escape. There is no help for it then, but to throw in stones, as near as you can to where he lurks, without hitting him. Neither ought a salmon-fisher ever to be without his gaff, or landing-net. "We remember well," says Mr. Blaine, in the work just quoted, "to have seen a gentleman, but unknown to us, who, although he seemed to handle his tackle well, and, indeed, threw a beautiful line, as it is called, yet with single gut he struck, and was playing a very heavy fish, without having either landing-net or gaff-hook. We saw that an hour or two would be spent ere he could be landed without some assistance and much manoeuvring. We enjoined him to be patient, in which he acquiesced, and suffered the fish to sulkily settle himself in the bed of the river without disturbance for ten minutes, as though sulking with his sore mouth, and his incapability of swallowing his prey. A few shakes of the line rather roused him, but it was not until some heavy stones were thrown towards his bed that he again got him afloat; the captor drew him in with much judgment, keeping the line stretched on him, but not sufficiently to allow even his floundering to disengage it. It was now that the fisher saw in full force his negligence in having come out without either gaff or landing-net; indeed, the landing-net would hardly answer his purpose, so much did the banks hang over the water; but, after many efforts, our gaff was fastened into his shoulders, and by its means he was, with our assistance added to that of the angler, safely landed on shore."

But, were we to occupy the whole of the space allotted to the description of the present month to the subject of fly-fishing, we should not be able to convey to our readers a tithé of the information which it is necessary to possess to become a good practitioner in the art; we must, therefore, glance at other matters.

Spring has now really arrived; and, as the song of the skylark is heard in every field, we shall, as a relief to the somewhat prosy article on fly-fishing, insert a poem which we composed twenty years ago, on Bluebell Hill, near Nottingham, on

THE SKYLARK.

Whither away, companion of the sun!
So high this lovely morning? Are those clouds
Of floating silver, which appear to shun
Day's golden eye, thy home? or why, mid shrouds
Of loosen'd light, dost thou pour forth thy song?
Descend, sun-loving bird! nor try thy strength thus long.
Æthereal songster! soaring merrily,
Thy wings keep time to thy rich music's flow,
Which rolls along the sky celestially,
And echoes o'er the hill's wood-waving brow
Along the flood, that back reflects the sky;
And thee, thou warbling speck, deep-mirrored from on high.

And thou hast vanish'd, singing, from my sight;
So must this earth be lost to eyes of thine;
Around thee is illimitable light:
Thou lookest down, and all appears to shine
Bright as above! Thine is a glorious way,
Pavilion'd all around with golden-spraying day.

The broad unbounded sky is all thine own:
The silver-sheeted heaven is thy domain;
No land-mark there, no hand to bring thee down.
Glad Monarch of the blue and starry plain!
To thee is airy space far-stretching given,
The vast unmeasur'd floor of angel-trodden Heaven.

And thou hast gone! perchance, to catch the sound
Of seraph-voices, heard far up the sky,
And wilt return harmonious to the ground;
Then, with new music, taught by those on high,
Ascend again, and carol o'er the bowers,
When the wild-rose waves sweet, and the bee beads the flowers.

Lo! 'st thou to sing alone above the dews,
Leaving the nightingale to cheer the night,
When rides the moon; chasing the shadowy hues
From the dark trees, and scattering far her light
O'er wood and town—while thou art with the sun,
Looking on hill and vale, where low-voiced rivers run?

I hear thy strain, now thou art nearing earth—
Like quivering aspens moves each fluttering wing;
Rising in glee, thou comest down in mirth:
Hast heard the angels to their Maker sing
The morning hymn, and com'st to teach thy mate
The anthem thou hast brought from heaven's gold-lighted gate?

Lute of the sky! farewell, till I again
Climb these cloud-gazing hills. Thou must not come
To where I dwell, nor pour thy heaven-caught strain
Above the curling of my smoky home.
Others may hear thee—see thee—yet not steal
That joy from thy glad song which it is mine to feel.

Numberless are the beautiful passages scattered over the works of our ancient and modern poets, descriptive of the present month. The alternate cloud and sunshine of this season have furnished them with images of the uncertainty of happiness, the vanity of fleeting pleasure, and the fickleness of all earthly things. The sunshine and showers of April are by them compared to the smiles and tears of woman, and the variability of the weather to her changing passions—perhaps wrongfully. For our part, we love April, with her fleeting showers, which, falling like golden drops through the sunshine, look as if Spring was scattering millions of yellow flowers upon the earth, or the sun was showering down, from his own golden gardens, seeds for the coming Summer.

April showers
Bring May flowers,

is one of those old couplets which were "household words" with our ancestors—probably, centuries ago; and, from the descriptions of our early poets, we are almost led to conclude that the flowers and leaves of Spring blowed and put forth earlier than they do in the present day. The "backward" springs which we have had of late seems to have struck Coleridge, for, in his matchless poem of "Christobel," he says—

'Tis a month before the month of May,
And Spring comes slowly up this way.

I have, on a former occasion, alluded to the beauty of the morning skies of Spring and Autumn, as being so richly blue, and so variously marbled, when the clouds are scattered like sheep over the downs of heaven, and every hillock by which they seem to rest is stained with the hues of sunrise. I have often fancied, as I have noticed the clustering clouds gathering about the east, that they were humble almsmen, waiting for the approach of the sun, who, as soon as he arose, cast off his garments, and threw his rich drapery of blue and gold and purple and crimson and silver amongst the suppliant clouds, and never deigning to appear twice in the same robes; but that all night long the golden looms of heaven were busy in preparing a new dress for his departure, on each new day—colours which no painter could ever imitate, and robes streaming out in such forms of beauty as no poet was ever yet able to describe. The picture I have here attempted in prose, I long since painted in verse, and here give my readers their choice of the two designs:—

Morning again breaks through the gates of heaven,
And shakes her jewell'd garments on the sky,
Heavy with rosy gold. Aside are driven
The vassal clouds, which bow as she draws nigh,
To catch her scatter'd gems of orient dye,
The pearly ruby which her pathway strews—
Argent and amber, now thrown useless by.
The uncolour'd clouds wear what she doth refuse—
For only once doth Morn her sun-dyed garments use.

Mr. Gale, the celebrated aeronaut, assured me that all these beautiful visions are confined to the earth; that, when he reached an altitude of a mile and a half, he saw none of those richly coloured clouds above him; but that there all was calm and serenely blue, he having then passed through all that painters love to imitate, and poets attempt to describe. Some "fine day" I may venture nearer the "floor of heaven" and from thence paint my own picture of "this spot which men call earth."



The sweet season, that bud and bloom forth brings
 With green bath clad the hill, also the vale.
 The nightingale, with feathers new she sings;
 The turtle to her mate hath told her tale.
 Summer is come, for every spray now springs.

HOWARD EARL OF SURREY (Beheaded 1547).

MAY ever brings pleasant memories in its very name, or the fragrant blossoms of the hawthorn have for ages been called May. Kings and Queens went forth with splendid retinues, "in the days of other years," for a rural holiday into the sweet green country to gather May. Beautiful maidens left their tiring bowers in the turreted castle, and crossed the moat in the grey of morning, to bathe the roses of their cheeks in the unsunned dews of May. The tallest and straightest tree in the hoary forest was felled, and brought home with loud shouts, and merry songs, and sounds of rustic music, and was erected on the village green, and hung with garlands in honour of May. The "prettiest low-born lass" in the village was selected, and crowned with flowers in a green arbour, and called the Queen of May, in the old days of "Merry England." And little children and young lovers still come home in the sweet evenings of the present months, bringing with them branches of May.

Then came Cromwell and his Puritans, preaching against long love-locks and May-games, and holding them up as the worst of sins. They were the death of merry-hearted May. As I have elsewhere observed, May-day was then dead and gone: they tried to revive her again on a later day; at the close of her own flowery month did they endeavour to bring her to life, to celebrate the Restoration of King Charles. Vain attempt! they dressed her pale corpse with flowers; pale, and wan, and dead, did they drag her forth, even after her soul had fled and her beauty perished: but that bright and merry sunshine of the heart, in which she could alone exist, had left the land. In vain did the Parliament make laws to restore her; she came not to life again: in vain did they pass acts, and make a parade of her through her old haunts; she stirred not, she breathed not: and the multitude soon ceased to follow the bier, when they saw that their own dear May was borne senseless beneath the garlands which were hung up to honour her; she looked not up to admire them, and then they knew that she was dead.

We have in our day danced upon the spots which her flowery garlands once overshadowed; for there are two May-poles still standing within five miles of our birth-place—one at Martin, and the other at Wheatly: the river Trent flows between them. They stand on the very spots where May-games were celebrated

in the time of Elizabeth. And now they look like skeletons of a past age—landmarks of an old, rude, but happy period. One might fancy, while gazing, that they were at times visited, in the glimpses of the "young May-moon," by the spirits of the departed village maidens—those who "died unmarried," and who in the hey-day of youth and beauty were crowned Queens of May, and looked upon with admiring eyes by many a "grey forefather of the hamlet," whose very names have ages ago been forgotten.

But the remembrance of May-day can never cease, while such artists throw around it the pleasing and life-like form which it wears in the Illustration at the head of our present month. We look upon the picture, and exclaim with Keats—

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.

It would make a beautiful, an interesting, and a most pleasing volume, if all the best passages which have been written on May and May-day games were collected; and there are plenty of well-read gentlemen in England who have both the leisure and the taste to make such a selection, and also to enliven the extracts by their own remarks, and to enrich the whole with notes. Such a work would do good, by keeping green the memory of old scenes and old associations—customs which drew the hearts of our forefathers closer to the works of Nature, and from those to the Creator—

Who hung these lands with green, this sky with blue,
 Who made the plains on which our cities grew;
 And all this prosperous island what it is,
 And ask'd but gratitude as His just due.
 The giver God, claiming the beggar's part,
 And asking in return a humble thankful heart.

This is the month for rook-shooting, and we can assure our readers that a pie filled with fine plump young rooks, properly seasoned, and well baked, is a good and savoury dish. I have in a former work, "Spring," attempted to translate the language of the rooks when they quarrel during the building season, for I have often fancied while watching them that I clearly comprehended what they said when falling out, as Washington Irving humourously says, "for a share of the blanket." Fancy a couple of poor rooks, returning home with a stick apiece

in their mouths (reckoning, no doubt, in their own minds how many trips they would have to make before their nest would be completed); fancy what must be their conversation when, instead of finding the nearly-finished nest as they left it, every stick and twig have been purloined during their absence by a lazy rascal and his wife, who have commenced erecting their house in the next tree. Perhaps the twigs brought by our honest and industrious rooks were the last that were required to finish their nest, and that, before starting off with them out of the neighbouring wood, Mr. Rook had said to Mrs. Rook, to encourage her, "Well, never mind, though it is rather hard work flying all this distance and returning to the rookery with such heavy pieces of timber, yet we shall now have a nice nest of our own, and can go to bed when we like, and get up again whenever we please, or at least lie awake and talk, for those low-bred people who live over our heads in the attics are always up and quarrelling at the first peep of day, and there is no getting a wink of sleep when once their tongues are set a-going; and—but bless me, how is this, we surely cannot be at home, or have we mistaken the tree? And yet that cannot be, neither! That must be Blackcap peeping out over the edge of his parapet at us; and that is Splayfoot, who lives next door—I know him by his squint; and the other nest belongs to that fellow I had such a battle with about building on this bough, I know him by his long bill and the scar above his eye, which I made with my sharp beak, and which he'll carry to his grave with him. Well, what a shame! I declare, some of the thieves out of the next street have been here during our absence and carried away every stick and stake, even to the very scaffolding. It's too bad; come along, we won't stand it any longer." So they spread out their broad black wings and away they sail to the next tree, and alight on the bough next to that occupied by the robbers, whom they have no difficulty in detecting, for the very bulk into which their nest has so suddenly grown tells that they never came honestly by the materials. "What do you mean, you black-looking scoundrel by coming and carrying off the whole of my house during my absence?" says the indignant and honest rook. "Beg your pardon," answers the dark rascal, whose very looks condemn him, "but I thought, as you were so long gone, you had perhaps left the place altogether, to live in some more peaceable neighbourhood, for this is but a queer place to live in; so, making sure that some other rook would be stepping in and walking off with the materials, why I took the liberty of coming first. Beg pardon, hope there's no offence." "No offence!" exclaims the injured rook, "take that, you thief-looking dog;" and he fetches him such a knock on the head with his beak as sends him spinning against his nest. "I will thank you not to strike my husband," says Mrs. Rook, now standing up on the edge of the unfinished nest. "Your husband deserves it, and you too, madam," replies the wife of the honest rook, "for you are both of you dishonest persons." "I would thank you to keep your impertinence to yourself, if you please," rejoins the robber's helpmate, "if you do not, I shall be under the necessity of compelling you." "You compel me, you bad, good-for-nothing madam you," answers the other; "I'd box your ears for twigs, that I would." "At your peril, dare to lift your claw against me, and I'll give you in charge." "Give me in charge!" says the other, hopping on the nest: "this stick's mine, and I'll have it; deny it if you can." "Not by my consent," says the other, also fixing her claws on the same stick; "we'll have a struggle for it." Then the battle commences: they pull, peck, strike, thrust, then stop a moment to take breath, and at it they go again. Meantime, their husbands are also fighting; the whole neighbourhood is up; from every nest a pair of eyes are peeping out on the combatants; some crying out "Serve 'em right: well done! give it 'em!" Others running off for the police; some endeavouring to separate the quarrellers; and others talking about leaving such a low neighbourhood, and retiring into some quiet respectable park, amongst rooks that have lived with old gentlemanly families.

But to return to rook-shooting. Although it does not come under the head of sporting, it is nevertheless followed up by the farmers in the country; and is as much talked of by them as the commencement of pheasant-shooting by their aristocratical neighbours. The best time to shoot young rooks is when they have quitted their nests, but dare not venture upon a further flight than from one branch to another, which they do not always reach safely, but sometimes miss their footing, and down they come, between flying and falling, and looking anything but graceful as they descend. Cross-bows, bolt-bows, and air-guns are commonly used in rook-shooting, and if the trees are pretty high it requires a good marksman to pick off one of those lumps of "budding blackness" with either bolt or bullet, for the branch is often as likely to be struck as the bird. Then what a rumpus there is amongst the old rooks, as they keep wheeling round and round—no doubt, in their own language calling the sharpshooters "murderous villains," and everything else they can "lay their tongues to." The boys also enjoy the sport, rushing in to pick up the young rooks when they have fallen, or catching them before they touch the ground in their hats or caps. In short, rook-shooting in one part of the country used to be a kind of rural holiday; for the proprietors of the rookeries cared not how many were destroyed, wrongfully believing that they did more harm than good. It has, however, been proved that where extensive rookeries have been destroyed, the corn has been devoured by insects in the following year to such an extent in some neighbourhoods as almost to produce a famine, so much have the fields been overrun by the cockchafer. This alone ought to be a plea urgent enough for the preservation of rookeries.

A walk at the end of May through beautiful country scenery is a pleasure scarcely to be enjoyed at any other season of the year, for the hawthorn hedges are then in full blossom; at no other period is the air filled with such a delicious perfume as they shed abroad. The flowers of Spring have not then faded, and

many, that Summer will weave into her gaudy garland, are beginning to bloom. Then we have the cuckoo calling to us by day, and the lute-tongued nightingale sending her gushing music through the silence of the night, while

Her clear voice makes a loud ringing,
Echoing through all the greenwood wide.

And you wander on, as the same poet expresses it,

Till to a lawn you come, all white and green,
You in so fair a lawn have never been.
The ground is green with daisy powder'd over;
Tall are the flowers—the grove a lofty cover:
All green and white; and nothing else is seen.

CHAUCER'S Cuckoo and Nightingale.

The beautiful grasses have now grown tall, and stand waving their brown silky heads in the wind; or, while you gaze, a gush of light steals over them from the edge of some snowy cloud, and they seem changed, as if by the touch of a magician's wand, into a fairy forest of silver; that passes away, then the sunshine sweeps over their ranks, and they look like a large army all marching and keeping time, and shaking their plumes of gold, as they move in measured steps. The daisies too are now tall, and share in the breezy sport, though overtopped by the bold and brazen buttercups, who, like ordinary and over-dressed women, push themselves forward to be seen, and conceal the sweet and bashful beauties whom we would fain behold, and whom we know are near at hand.

In some such spot as this we composed the following lines:—

A chequer'd light streams in between the leaves,
Which on the greensward twinkle in the sun;
The deep-toned thrush his speckled bosom heaves,
And like a silver stream his song doth run
Down the low vale edged with fir-trees dun.
A little bird now hops beside the brook,
"Peaking" about like an affrighted nun;
And ever as she drinks doth upward look,
Titters and drinks again, then seeks her cloister'd nook:
Then varied colours o'er the landscape play!
The very colours seem at their ease to lean,
And the whole earth to keep glad holiday.
The lowliest bush that by a garden is seen
Hath changed its dusky for a golden green,
As if to honour the sweet May-day morn:
The rutted roads did never look more clean.
There is no dust upon the wayside thorn,
But every May-bud looks as if but newly born.

How different are the out-of-door sounds now from what they were a few weeks ago. Then, beyond the gritting of wheels on the road, the ploughboy's whistle in some far-off field, or the solitary cawing of the rook, the whole landscape slept in comparative silence. Now the hills and valleys are alive with cattle; from nearly every hedge and tree the birds are singing; on the banks, where before the winter grass lay wan and withered, the flowers are now blooming; and the bee is abroad with his approving murmur, as if sole surveyor over all. The hedges no longer look ruinous and rent; the unsightly gaps are filled up with pleasant leaves—like shabby houses, they are now put into good repair, for Spring, who "paints the meadows with delight," has once more made them habitable, and they are now all let for another season to the birds. Nature seems to delight as much in her new attire as the sons and daughters of man; nor is she without her admirers, if even human eye regarded her not. The wild rose in the forest solitude is visited by the bees and butterflies—they come like lovers to look upon her in her secluded haunts. Even so the mountain maid is found by the hunter at times in her own fastnesses, "a phantom of delight," standing with her pitcher beside some hidden spring, happy as a fawn in its covert, and having no sympathy with the sigh he heaves while grieving that so much beauty should be buried in those untrodden wilds.

Shakspeare, in one of his exquisite snatches of song, says,

Love whose every month is May;

as if even he could find no more beautiful comparison in the rich garner of his imagination for enduring love than the month of May reigning without change. In this he has pictured Love ever young—the spring-tide of courtship, when what the tongue cannot give utterance to, the looks express—a year of flowers—no endless May hung with blossoms—days without a night, only with a longer twilight drawn like a veil over "day's garish eye," as if to shroud the nightingale while she sings, or that we might behold for a brief hour the stars in their accustomed places. Were we to fill the page, it would but be with the thoughts drawn from these six living words—

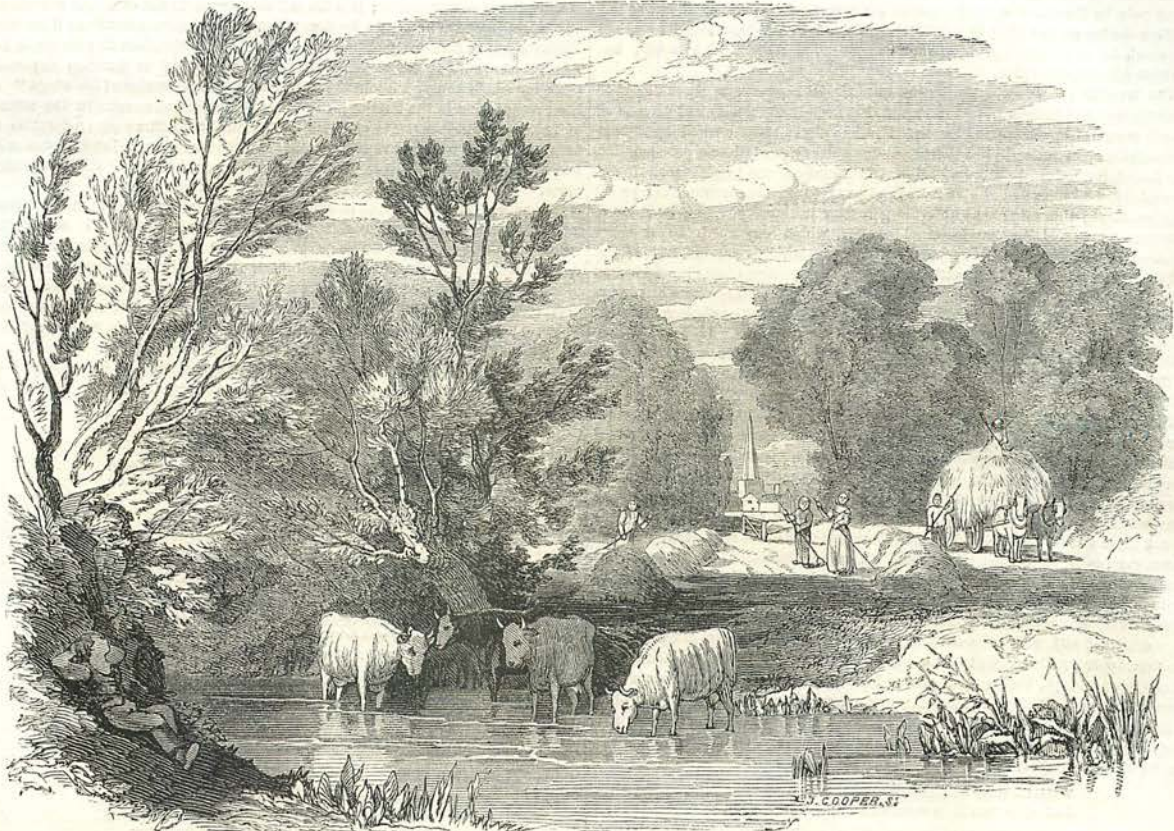
Love whose every month is May;

for, such are the master-strokes of genius, it but touches the canvas and passes on, leaving all ages to wonder at the imperishable outline it drew, doing in a moment what others could never accomplish were they to labour all the round of their dull lives. Shakspeare was a worshipper of Spring; it was the season he selected for the love scene between Venus and Adonis, for she says:—

Witness this primrose bank whereon I lie,
Those forceless flowers, like sturdy trees, support me.

As for his sonnets, they teem with beautiful descriptions of Spring-time; and over his plays they are scattered, "thick as stars,"

Each giving each a double charm,
Like pearls upon an Ethiop's arm.



The poetry of earth is never dead:
 When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
 And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
 From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;
 That is the grasshopper's: he takes the lead
 In Summer luxury; he has never done
 With his delights; for, when tired out with fun,
 He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.—JOHN KEATS.

JUNE ushers in Summer and the longest day. What a contrast to the middle of December, when, instead of closing the shutters and lighting the candles by four o'clock, we have at the same hour the sun high up amid the blue of heaven, and five long hours of daylight behind, before the purple twilight drops down. Yet these changes strike us not unless we look back, so almost imperceptibly do the days "put out" and "draw in," stealing like sleep upon us unawares—for so engaged are we in watching the changes the seasons bring, that light and darkness flit by like the passing moment, unheeded.

June is Nature's jubilee: on every hand we hear the birds singing; on which ever side we look we see the flowers in bloom; the bee and the butterfly hasten from blossom to blossom: the one slow and steady in his movements, scarcely leaving a bell in the neighbourhood in which he murmurs unvisited, seeming to know that Summer will not last long, and that he must gather honey while the flowers blow, and the sun shines: the other goes jerking his wings from bud to bud, and without any aim or object save to wipe away the passing hours, alights and swings himself just so long as he pleases, as if he knows that his reign will soon be over, and that, when the flowers are gone, his little day will be ended, and the part he has played in the masque of Summer forgotten. The poet Spenser has painted the life of a butterfly as one unceasing round of pleasure. He says:—

What more felicity can fill a creature
 Than to enjoy delight with liberty,
 And to be lord of all the works of Nature?
 To reign in the air, from earth to highest sky—
 To feed on flowers, and weeds of glorious feature?
 To take whatever thing doth please the eye?
 Who rests not pleased with such happiness,
 Will worthy be to taste of wretchedness.

It is ever pleasant to us, who are the "slaves of the lamp," to visit the steam-boat wharves and the railway stations, and to look at the happy, eager groups who are hurrying off to enjoy the air of the sweet country, or to blow off the smoke of London by the breezy sea-side. Although, at times, we can only accompany them in fancy, still our visions of the flowery meadows and heath-covered hills, and cool old forests, are fresh as in the days of boyhood. Not that

the neighbourhood of London—beautiful as it is—can ever charm us like the sylvan solitudes of Sherwood Forest, or the green uplands and wild wide marches and undated woods of our own native Lincolnshire. Dreamers we have ever been but, although the stern realities of life have thrown their forbidding shadows over the sunshine in which we basked, they have never wholly blotted out our brighter visions. Glimpses of far-off places are ever opening before us—"green nesting spots" which we have loved from childhood. Nature hath never wearied us, but the more we have looked upon her face, the greater has been our admiration, even as a child whose eye tracks the sunset across the sea, while it believes that the trailing pathway of gold ends only on the threshold of Heaven. And what are our dreams of Heaven here? but of a land

Where one eternal Summer reigns—

an endless June, without the carking cares of this busy life—an existence unbroken by sorrow, and unclouded by care—an Elysium in which sighs are never heaved, nor tears ever shed—a land in which there is no night, where the flowers never die—an abode of never-ending happiness. These are but the delights which a mortal mind can conceive—dreams more highly-coloured of earthly delights; and further we are not permitted to penetrate: "eye hath not seen, nor heart conceived," what lies beyond the grave.

To keep up our series of pictures of rural sports or each month, we shall now glance at hawking, which, from the quarry flown at, must have been followed up nearly all the year round, and can, therefore, belong to no particular month. Hawking was as popular a sport in the olden time as stag-hunting, and appears to have been followed almost as much by the ladies as by the other sex. Amongst the old pictures we often see the figure of some forgotten beauty, with a falcon perched on her wrist, her fair hand covered with her hawking glove. The hawks were taken to the field hooded on a frame, carried by one of the falconers, who was a man of some note at this period; a favourite falcon was now and then honoured by being borne to the field on the wrist of its pretty mistress. The legs of the hawk were also adorned with bells, which were frequently made of silver, and no expense was spared to render them soft and musical. The hawk was of course stripped of all its trappings when flown at the quarry. Hawking was fol-

lowed both on foot and on horseback. When on foot, he who followed it carried a stout pole, by the aid of which he leaped the water-courses and ditches. It was while hawking on foot that Henry VIII. got a good ducking: pity he was not drowned, for at that period his name was not then stained with blood; but Heaven willed it otherwise.

The laws for the protection of hawks were almost as severe as those passed to preserve vert and venison (forest trees and deer). Only the nobles and persons of wealth were permitted to keep hawks. If a hawk was lost, he who found it was compelled to give notice to the sheriff, under a heavy fine, when a proclamation was issued for miles around, and a description given of the hawk. If the finder concealed the bird, he had to give it up, and pay its full value or suffer two years' imprisonment; the value was no trifling matter in those days, as a good hawk was sometimes sold for one hundred pounds, which was worth about three hundred at the present value of money. Any one taking away the eggs of the hawk was imprisoned twelve months and a day. Kings sent choice hawks to one another as presents, and even grave judges were not proof against the bribe of a falcon. One of our Kings was so attached to hawking, that he could not invade a foreign country without being attended by his falconers. In France, our Edward III. was followed by thirty mounted falconers. Mews were the names of the places in which hawks were formerly kept, and many stables still bear the name.

The peregrine falcon appears to have been held in the highest estimation by our ancestors, as he was a bold, daring bird, possessing great courage, and never hesitated to pounce upon any quarry which he met in his high airy domain; he, however, never prolonged the sufferings of his victim, but once having seized his prey plunged his piercing bill into its vitals, and killed it in an instant. The grasp of his formidable talons was like that of a vice, and when once the prey was struck there was no escaping. The Gerfalcon was celebrated for attacking larger game, such as herons, cranes, bittern, and other birds that haunt the waters. His plan of attack was by outsoaring his prey, and when he had gained a sufficient altitude falling upon it like a thunderbolt. I do not know who is the author of the following passage, but it is one of the most graphic descriptions of hawking I have ever met with, and will convey to my readers a better picture of this, all but obsolete, sport than I am able to draw. I, therefore, give it entire. "When I have, in my youthful days, been as glad as ever I was to come from school to see a little martin, in the dead time of the year, make her way through the midst of a multitude of foul-mouthed ravenous crows and kites, which pursued her with more hideous cries and clamours than did Coll the dog and Malkin the maid, like the fox in the apologue,

When the geese for fear flew over the trees,
And out of their hives came the swarms of bees.—CHAUCER.

and maugre (in spite of) all their opposition, pulled down her prey bigger than herself, being mounted aloft, steeple-high, down to the ground. To hear one relate how he went forth in a clear, calm, and sunny evening, about an hour before the sun did usually mask himself, unto the river, where, finding a mallard, he whistled of his falcon, and how she flew from him, as if she would never have turned her head again, yet presently, upon a shout, came in; how then, by little and little, by flying about and about, she mounted so high, until she had lessened herself, to the view of the beholder, to the shape of a pigeon or a partridge, and made the height of the moon the place of her flight; how, presently, upon the landing of the fowl, she came down like a stone and renewed it, and suddenly got up again; and suddenly, upon a second landing came down again, and, missing of it in the down-come, recovered it, beyond expectation, to the admiration of the beholder. To hear him tell how he went forth to the woody fields and pastures to fly the cock, where having, by the little white feather in his tail, discovered him in a brake, he cast off a tassel-gentle (a hawk), and how he never ceased in his circular motion until he had recovered his place; how, suddenly, upon the flashing of the cock, he came down, and, missing it in the down-come, what working there was on both sides. How the cock mounted as if he would have pierced the skies; how the hawk flew a contrary way until he made the wind his friend; how, then, by degrees, he got up, yet never offered to come in until he had got the advantage of the higher ground; how, then, he made in, what speed the cock made to save himself, and what hasty pursuit the hawk made, and how after two long miles' flight killed it, yet in killing it killed himself. These discourses I love to hear, and can well be content to be an eye-witness of the sport when my occasions will permit." The whole extract might rank side by side with the finest descriptions of Izaak Walton, and we regret that we cannot give our readers the name of its old author, neither do we know at this moment where we first found the passage, although we have some dim recollection that it was while hunting for facts for our "Historical Romances," in the British Museum, several years ago.

The hobby is one of the smallest species of falcon, and was used for hawking at such birds as larks; and so daring is this little hawk (which is still very common in England), that it has been known to dash in at an open window, at a bird in a cage, when several persons have been in the room. In fowling, this bird was frequently thrown up to keep the birds cowering upon the ground while the net was thrown over them.

The kestrel is one of the most beautiful of the falcon tribe; it may still often be seen, hovering, apparently, motionless in the air, until it discovers its prey, when down it drops like a stone: its vision must be very powerful, when it can see a little bird, or a mouse, from such an altitude. A kite or glede will pounce upon a young hare or rabbit; it has been known to carry off a chicken from the threshold of a cottage, when the owner has been standing within arm's length. Its outspread wings have measured six feet from tip to tip. Buffon says, "One

cannot but admire the manner in which its flight is prepared; his long and narrow wings seem immovable; it is his tail that seems to direct all his evolutions, and he moves it continually; he rises without effort, comes down as if he were sliding along an inclined plane—he seems rather to swim than fly; he darts forward, slackens his speed, stops, and remains suspended or fixed in the same place for whole hours, without exhibiting the smallest motion of his wings." It is on record, that in the time of Henry VIII. kites were often seen in the streets of London gathering up the offal which the inhabitants threw out; nor is this to be wondered at, when we remember that the country around London was wild and open for miles. We have frequently seen the kite hovering above a country town.

The noblest quarry flown at in ancient times appears to have been the heron, as he showed the best sport by attempting to outsoar the hawk. It is said that when the hawk descended on its prey, the heron would sometimes turn suddenly round, and receive its enemy on its sharp bill, which, through the velocity of the descent, went, at times, clean through the body of the falcon. This, however, appears to be doubtful, although not impossible. Hawks must have been of great use before the invention of gunpowder, for the fowler's instruments underwent but little improvement during the lapse of centuries.

Having done humble homage in verse to the skylark, I must, before the "leafy month of June" passes away, and her song ceases, pay my tribute of song

TO THE NIGHTINGALE.

Sweet Nightingale! well doth thy lovely song
Accord with the hush'd breath of moonlight hours;
The green old trees thou warblest now among
Seem listening silent as the folded flowers:
A mute-lipp'd audience all, who bow profound
Beneath the whispering breeze that bears so sweet a sound.

What countless years, grey on the scroll of time,
Hath thy rich music charm'd the ancient earth!
When Eden's rosy vales were free from crime,
Even before the dark-brow'd Cain had birth,
Thy song was heard, bringing to Eve repose,
When her long unbound locks droop'd o'er the thornless rose.

That thou wert once a woman we believe,
Or such rich music never had been thine.
Poor bird! thou doubtless hadst much cause to grieve,
And vowed a vow at Melody's sweet shrine,
Before the echoing altar, through the night,
To keep harmonious watch, and warble back the light.

The moon, the stars, darkness, the oldest gloom,
Are all familiar with thy witching lay:
The brook, the trees, the Summer's opening bloom,
The silent wood, the blushing dawn of day—
These all have heard thee, and old forests dim,
Ere trod by man, rung back thy soft and silvery hymn.

And I have heard thee when my heart was sad,
And thy sweet notes have oftentimes soothed my woe;
Rising and falling, sorrowful and glad,
Just as the feeling seem'd to come or go.
In darkness, in old Sherwood, wild and lone,
I've heard thee sing until the crimson break of dawn.

What a truthful and countrified look has our Artist thrown into the Engraving which heads the present month! How happy the boy looks reclining on the shadowy embankment at the foot of the tree in the foreground of the picture. Nor do the cattle appear as if they were in any hurry to leave the cool water, while such hot sunshine is scorching up the hay-field. We know that the large dragon-fly is somewhere at hand, although we see it not; and that many a wild bird comes to drink and twitter in that shady pool, which has for many a long year reflected the stem of that ancient pollard. Such is the advantage art possesses over literature: it brings before the eye the whole subject at a glance; while the latter drags the scene forward by bits at a time, and line after line must be perused before the reader can comprehend the true meaning of the word-painted picture.

Pleasant is it now to wander into the solemn woods—those grand cathedrals which God himself has erected. To us a holier religion seems at times to reign over the forest solitudes than in the temples built by the hand of man. The deep roaring of the winds through the mossy branches have a sound in our ears unlike aught earthly: the rustling of the leaves, stirred by gentle gales, awakes the heart unaware to prayer; we feel not as we do at other times, when alone in the midst of forest scenery. The pillars hewn, and carved, and upreared by mortal hands, look not so grand and reverential, in our eyes, as an aisle of ancient oaks such as may be seen in Birkland or Sherwood Forest, tossing their gnarled and weather-stained branches above our heads, and admitting, through their mossy tops, glimpses of the sky, the stary ceiling which God hung up. The organ never falls upon ears in such solemn tones as the roaring of the ocean, and the breaking of the waves upon a rocky shore. Between the walls of high and lonely mountains we have felt an inward awe, which the vaulted abbey could never awaken; for, over the one hung the great image of the Creator—above the other, we saw, standing on his scaffold, the builder, man.

To climb the trackless mountain all unseen,
With the wild flock that never needs a fold;
Alone o'er steep and foaming falls to lean;
This is not solitude—'tis but to hold
Converse with nature's charms, and see her stores unroll'd.—BYRON.



And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interposed,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.—WORDSWORTH.

READER, of either sex, if thou wert ever in love thou wilt heave a gentle sigh, and a faint smile, like that of an April sunshine streaming with subdued brilliancy through a cloud, will light up thy features, while gazing on this beautiful Engraving. If a man, and thou didst woo and win her in the country, thou wilt again hear the murmuring of the waters, and see her form once more mirrored on its surface, even as it is before him who here sits beside her on the bank, pouring tender vows into her heart, while that heart beats like the bosom of a bird amongst the blossoms which overhang its callow young. If thou art a lady, thou wilt remember how tenderly he led thee by the hand through the deep underwood, lifting up every hooked bramble and straggling thorn, lest thou mightest stumble; and, where cool shadows sheltered thee from the hot sun of July, he made thee a seat of the rustling fern, just where a branching hazel, overtopped by a giant elm, drooped over thy beauty, and how here thou didst, with blushing cheeks and downcast eyes, swear to become his for ever. That day thou canst never forget; that scene has floated between thy dreams and heaven thousands of times, even to the very quivering of the sunlight through the leaves as it played upon his cheek, when he clasped thee (nothing loth) in his arms, and called Heaven to sanctify his vow.

Our summer sun may squander
A blaze serene, grander;
Our autumn beam may, like a dream
Of heaven, die calm away;
But, no—let life before us
Bring all the light it may,
'Twill shed no lustre o'er us,
Like that first trembling ray.—T. MOORE.

Who lives in that dear old cottage now? What face peeps between that leaden diamond-shaped lattice round which the roses climbed to peep at thy beauty? Is the little bed of mignonette still cultivated that grew below, on which the small gravel often fell when we threw it on the moonlit casement, nor ceased until thy beauty, like a reflecting star, appeared between the envious blinds? Oh, Love! Oh, Time! Oh, Death! A trembling hand parts the thick sweet-

brar over a daisy-covered grave, and below sleeps all that was once so lovely. We lingered not behind to weep, but, with staff in hand, wandered many a 'lonely mile among the ruins of castles over which the wall-flowers waved, by the shadows of mighty cathedrals, among the crumbling monuments of forgotten pride, and returned, after many months, sad but calm, half broken-hearted, but resigned, burying ourselves for days in the bowers of the Muses, until they listened to our low lisping, and hearkened, with heads aside, while we told them all our sorrows in song. In vain do we still inquire

Whence those feelings rise,
Sorrowful mornings on the darken'd soul;
Glimpses of broken, bright, and stormy skies,
O'er which this earth, the heart has no control?
Why does the sea of thought thus backward roll?
Memory's the breeze that through the cordage raves,
And ever drives us on some homeward shoal,
As if she loved the melancholy waves,
That, murmuring, shoreward, break above a reef of graves.—T. M.

How calm and beautiful is a Summer Sunday in the country! The very village seems asleep, and a holy quiet rests upon the fields unlike that of any other day. No sound is heard but that of Nature, which falls upon the ear in the softened whisper of the leaves, the fainter singing of the brooks, the feeble murmur of the bee, the lower warbling of the birds, and the subdued bleating of the sheep; for so does her voice seem hushed by the peal of the silver bells, which float from the old grey tower, half hidden by trees, on the green hill-side, whose winding path is dotted with the figures of the villagers, here alone, there in little groups, all journeying towards the church with thoughtful and reverential looks. You cannot help contrasting this scene with the noise and tumult of London at the same holy time; the rattling of vehicles, the cries of milk, shrimps, and water-cresses, all breaking the Sabbath charm, and grating harshly upon the ear, while they disperse our better meditations. In the country we look over the landscape at the spire in the distance; and, while we think of those who sleep beneath it, we exclaim—

Where soars that spire, our rude forefathers prayed:
 Thither they came from many a distant dell
 Year after year, and o'er those footpaths strayed,
 When summon'd by the pealing Sabbath bell,
 For in those walls they deem'd that God did dwell:
 And still they sleep within that bell's deep sound.
 Yon spire doth here of no distinction tell:
 O'er rich and poor—marble and earthly mound—
 The monument of all, it marks one common ground.—T. M.

From Love and the tranquillity of Sabbath scenery to horse-racing is a strange transition, yet not more so than the real changes in life, in the occupations and amusements of mankind; so we shall, without any apology, plunge at once into our description of that fine old English sport, which is still witnessed with delight by both peer and peasant. In our boyish days we, somehow or another, were connected with races, especially those of Doncaster and Lincoln. The grandstand at Lincoln was a temporary wooden building in those days, with nothing grand about it, except the Gold Cup on the great race day, and the beauty of the Lincolnshire ladies. It was a wooden building, erected for the spectators at the races, and taken down as soon as they were over, and in its erection and removal we had an uncle who played a very prominent part. We still remember with what pride we took up our station in the low, ricketty wooden grand-stand, getting as near to the Gold Cup which was about to be run for as we could, and somehow fancying that it was our duty to see that no one whipped the prize into his pocket, which, if it happened, we thought would be a great stain upon the character of our uncle. Not that we now think such a loss would have concerned him in the least, for we believe that, instead of being steward of the course, he was merely a kind of overlooker over the men who erected the shabby-looking grand-stand; but if any boy not above the head taller than ourselves had dared to assign to him so humble a position at that period, we do think that we should have been disposed "to show fight." However, this link was sufficient to cause us to talk as familiarly of the Yarboroughs and Thorolds as if we had been sworn cousins; also of our favourite horses, on which we even went so far as to bet six to four—in pence.

But Doncaster was the great point of attraction, after all, and only a few miles distant from our birth-place; there the grand-stand and course were worth looking at, and, we must confess, somewhat diminished our admiration of uncle's greatness. What a careful boarding was there amongst us boys, in those days, to raise sufficient to carry us to Doncaster and back, to see the great St. Leger run for. It was twenty miles each way, yet we walked it, saw the race, and got home long before midnight—tired enough, it is true, but we never thought of that while talking over what we had seen. Then we knew the man who carried the scales to the race-course, in which the jockeys were weighed—and proud were we when he allowed us to pay for the pint of ale he drank. We thought it something to know the man who touched the board with his own hands on which sat the very jockey who won the Leger: our delight was equal to that of Peter Pindar's antiquary,

Who showed on holidays a sacred pin
 That touch'd the ruff that touch'd Queen Bess's chin.

What running have we seen there! We cannot believe that there ever was or ever will be such another race-course in the world, or that any bird or railway engine ever went the speed those horses did. All things, to us, seem slower now for we have no longer the quick eye, the bounding step, and the rapidly-racing blood of boyhood to accelerate that imaginary speed, and we exclaim with a sigh—

Somehow, the flowers seem different now—
 The daisies dimmer than of old;
 There's fewer blossoms on the bough;
 The hawthorn buds look grey and cold.
 The pansies were another dye
 When we were young!—when we were young!
 There's not the blue about the sky
 Which every way in those days hung.

Our limits will not permit us to do more than glance over the subject. Chariot-racing was no doubt practised by the Romans when they invaded England: the Britons themselves were celebrated for their skill in driving their scythe-wheeled chariots in battle, which we have dwelt upon at some length in our "History of the Anglo-Saxons." The first chariot-races in England are supposed to have taken place at York, centuries before horse-racing, as now followed, was known, for at this period it does not appear that the horse was either used for riding or even as a beast of burthen. The first mention made of "running horses," in English history, is in the reign of the Saxon King Athelstan, who received them as a present from a foreign Prince. It was Athelstan who first improved the breed of horses in this country, by increasing their size. At the battle of Hastings the Saxons had no cavalry, while horsemen formed the chief strength of the Norman invaders. The first mention made of anything approaching a race-course is by Fitzstephen, an historian who lived in the reign of Henry II. Races, he says, "were then common" on the spot now occupied by Smithfield market, or near that neighbourhood. The horses in those days were ranged in a row, and when ready, started by raising a shout. It was not, however, until the time of Henry VIII. that horse-racing became a popular amusement in England, or that a regular race-course was formed. Chester is mentioned as being celebrated for its races in the reign of James I. Croydon also boasted, at that period, of its race-course, which was probably more fashionably attended than any other in England. It was here, if we remember rightly, that one of King James's favourites was horsewhipped during the races: the whole transaction is narrated by Osborne. Attention was now paid to the training and feeding of horses, also to the weights of the jockeys,

which hitherto seem to have been neglected. Charles I. established races at Newmarket, also in Hyde-park; and he was the first to give a silver cup for a racing prize, in place of the gold or silver bell which had formerly been run for. Cromwell did little more than encourage improvements in the breeding of horses; indeed, it was a point in the character of the Puritans to discontinue sports of any description.

After the Restoration, horse-racing became one of the most popular of English sports, and Charles II.'s stud of mares was held in high repute. His favourite race-course appears to have been Datchet Mead, near Windsor, though, like his unfortunate father, he patronised Newmarket, where he entered his horses in his own name. William III. gave but small encouragement to the sport, though he was favourable to improving the breed of horses; while Queen Anne gave Royal plates for prizes, and her Consort kept an excellent stud, and encouraged the importation of racing stallions. George II. was no patron of the turf; all he appears to have done for racing was substituting the one hundred guinea purses for the Royal plates. George III. encouraged the sport for the sake of procuring a better breed of horses, although he cared little about racing, which had now become so popular as to be independent of Royal patronage; for Eclipse, whose "name was a tower of strength," already occupied the race-course, and from him one hundred and sixty winning horses are said to have been produced. The King's brother, the Duke of Cumberland, bred several excellent racers; amongst which was the celebrated Monck, from whom came Eclipse and Herod, the "giants" of their day. Meteora and Violante were two famous mares of this period, and the property of the Earl of Grosvenor, who is supposed to have won £200,000 on the course, though he was a loser at the last. The Duke of Bedford was the owner of Grey Diomed, which ran at Newmarket against Eclipse and the Traveller. Nor must we pass over the Duke of Queensbury, whose sporting qualities are so admirably painted in the "Quarterly Review," by Nimrod, from which we extract the following:—"His horse Dash, by Florimel, bred by Mr. Vernon, beat Sir Peter Teazle over the six-mile course at Newmarket, for 1000 guineas, having refused 500 forfeit; also, his late Majesty's Don Quixote, the same distance and for the same sum; and during the year 1789 he won two other thousand guinea matches, the last against Lord Barrymore's Highlander, eight stone seven pounds each, three times round the 'Round Course,' or very nearly twelve miles. His carriage match, nineteen miles in one hour, with the same horses, and for the four of the highest bred ones of the day, was a great undertaking." For Sir Peter Teazle the Earl of Derby refused £10,000. The following racy extract on racing men, from "Nimrod," dates some dozen years back; yet we know nothing in which so much is done in so small a compass. Some of the characters have departed, but their memories will long live in the following passage:—"Of Messrs. Crockford, Gully, Ridsdale, Sadler, the Chifneys, &c., we need not say much, their deeds being daily before us. But, looking at the extraordinary results of these men's deeds, who is there that will not admit racing to be the best trade going? Talk of studs, talk of winnings, talk of racing establishments; our Graftons, Richmonds, Portlands, and Clevelands, with all their 'means and appliances to boot,' are but the beings of a summer's day, when compared with these illustrious personages and their various transactions and doings on the turf. Here is a small retail tradesman, dealing in a very perishable commodity, become our modern Croesus in a few years, and proprietor of several of the finest houses in England. Behold the champion of the boxing ring, the champion of the turf, the proprietor of a noble domain, an honourable member of the Reformed Parliament, all in the person of a Bristol butcher. Turn to a great proprietor of coal-mines, the owner of the best stud in England, one who gives 3000 guineas for a horse, in the comely form of a Yorkshire footman! We have a quondam Oxford livery-stable keeper, with a dozen or more race-horses in his stalls, and those of the very best stamp, and such as few country gentlemen, or, indeed, any others, have a chance to contend with. By their father's account of them, the two Messrs. Chifney were stable-boys to Earl Grosvenor, at eight guineas a year and a stable suit. They are now owners of nearly the best horses, and, save Mr. Crockford's, quite the best houses in their native town. There is the son of the ostler of the Black Swan, at York, betting his thousands on the heath, his neckerchief secured by a diamond pin. Then, to crown all there is 'Squire Beardsworth, of Birmingham, with his seventeen racehorses and his crimson liveries, in the same loyal but dirty town in which he once drove a hackney-coach."

A jockey, according to the high authority we have quoted above, ought to be devoid of all passion. He must work hard, and, worst of all, upon an empty stomach; must ever be ready to risk his neck for five guineas, if he wins, and three if he loses. One jockey, on the Deacon-course, rode eleven races in one day, a distance, altogether, of eighty-eight miles. The following is the life of a jockey while in training:—"Breakfast, a small piece of bread and butter, and a moderate quantity of tea; dinner, a small piece of pudding and less meat; no fish allowed, very little wine and water; tea in the afternoon, with a little or no bread. After breakfast, they put on five or six waistcoats, two coats, and as many pairs of breeches, and in these walk ten or fifteen miles. If they return wet through with perspiration, they put on dry clothes or go to bed. Glandersalts they have free access to, whenever they like, and that appears to be the only run they have of the cupboard."

Nor does the poor devil seem at all to have an easy time of it in the saddle. In Scott's "British Field Sports" we are told, "The spine or back-bone of the jockey must always be prepared to bend in the middle, since in the horse's running there is a necessity for some inclination of the body forward, and nothing can be more awkward and ridiculous than a horseman leaning forward with a back as straight and stiff as a stake, his posteriors protruded in the same degree."

AUGUST.



The unpeopled dwelling mourns its tenants strayed,
 E'en the domestic laughing dairy-maid
 Hies to the field, the general toil to share;
 Meanwhile the farmer quits his elbow chair,
 His cool brick floor, his pitcher, and his ease,
 And braves the sultry beams, and gladly sees
 His gates thrown open, and his team abroad.—ROBERT BLOOMFIELD.

August is a lovely month, with its harvest-fields and harvest-moon, and rich sunsets that gild the tops of the broad-branched oaks with gold, and throw over the corn-fields a deep yellow light, making them look like vast beds of marigolds unbroken by a single patch of green. Pleasant is it in the cool evenings of this month to quit the sultry streets and close courts of London, and to find one's-self wandering in the delightful fields of Surrey or Kent, over old brown foot-paths which have been a free highway for the villagers for centuries; to meet laden gleaners and sun-tanned reapers returning home with sickles thrown over their arms, or bearing bottles and baskets, now emptied by the keen and healthy appetites which labour and sweet air bring; to turn your head when they have passed you, and see them branch off to little thatched homesteads that stand here and there, one nestled amid trees, another in the green lane you have just passed, or at the end of the slip of cultivated land fenced in from the broad high-road; while the farmer and his men and maids turn to the large grange, surrounded with its goodly and capacious out-houses and huge barn, through the doors of which the high-piled waggon can be driven, without a plummy sheaf touching the spanning beam above.

Then to think of the sweet unfevered sleep those happy peasants will enjoy in their lowly chambers, through which the pure breeze has all day blown, and wafted healthy perfumes from corn-fields, and old woods where the woodbines bloom, and clear streams by which the meadow-sweet still flowers, and windy hill-tops, and broad wastes where the purple heather now blossoms "musical with bees." Surely it is better to rest with contented poverty in these humble abodes, than to share

What they amid the leaves have never known,—
 The weariness, the fever, and the fret,
 Here, where men sit and hear each other groan
 Where palsy shakes a few sad last grey hairs;
 Where youth grows pale, and specter-thin, and dies;
 Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
 And leaden-eyed despair;
 Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
 Or new Love pine at them beyond the morrow.—KEATS.

With them, if our air is coarse, it will be eaten uncontaminated by the nauseous smells of cities; free from the reek and heat of gin-palaces, and the hot air which miles of brick that have been baking all day in the sun throw out; far away from rooms into which only dust and foul smells enter, where, if we throw up the casement to look at the stars as a relief, we are compelled to close the window in disgust, and exclaim with *Hamlet*,

And smelt so? pah!

Alas! that it should be so. Those rural cottages, that look so beautiful in the eyes of a lover of the picturesque, often shelter sorrow and suffering, poverty and hunger; the poor labourer during the winter season is scarcely able to provide for the wants of the coming morrow, or to keep the dreaded "wolf from the door," which ever comes howling about the threshold in the form of gaunt and meagre hunger.

I need but again glance at that night-scene which the moon looked upon at Goatacre, a few years ago, to prove this, when, as she seemed struggling from cloud to cloud, her pale rays fell for a moment upon some forlorn and furrowed countenance, or gave a wanner and paler hue to the hunger-bitten features of the miserable peasantry. I need but again picture the naked hedge, through which the cold wintry wind whistled, while the candle flickered in the night wind, which blew about the ragged denouncer of wrongs as he stood on that rude hurdle, and addressed his suffering brethren: all this I might do, but it would be with painful feelings that I should again lift up the curtain and paint the looks of those determined men, who were then clamorous for cheap bread. Thank God! we have obtained that, though I fear it has bettered but little the condition of our suffering peasantry, while it has fallen with somewhat of a heavy hand on the honest and high-rented farmer.

The large ox-eye daisy is now in flower, and, together with the wild scarlet poppy, forms a rich covering of silver and crimson on waste and uncultivated places. By the borders of brooks, the arrow-head may now be found with its white pearl-like flower centred with gold and purple. The corn-fields also abound with the beautiful pheasant-eye, called the rose-a-ruby, and still known

by that poetical name in a few out-of-the-way villages. But amongst the last of the summer flowers our favourite is the light and graceful harebell—a flower so delicate that we wonder the breeze does not blow its light blue cup from the slender stem, and bear it away amongst the leaves, which are now falling on every hand. The blackberries begin to show amongst the armed brambles like miniature bunches of grapes, which want but a few frosty nights to complete their gushing ripeness. When boys, we never tasted blackberries without first blowing on them, believing that, by so doing, we should drive out the insects which at times lodge in this oldest of all wild British fruits.

In my "Book of Summer" I have sketched a true corn-field character, the Bird Boy, or corn-tenter, his business being to scare the birds from the corn either with his wooden clapper or by his voice, the latter of which he uses until he is quite hoarse at times, through hallooing and screaming at the birds. You almost wonder how the little fellow manages to pass the day by himself in those solitary fields before harvest-time, far removed from either village or homestead. Above his head he sees the broad grey clouds floating silently along across the wild wilderness of the sky, silent saving the hoarse "caw" of the dusky rook, that flaps its black wings while it floats like some subtle spirit between earth and heaven, on its way homeward to the woods. Around him rise tall trees, and while he looks up at them he wonders how many years they have stood rooted in silence on that self-same spot, where they reach to such a cloud-like height. Sometimes he is far away from any road, and in the heart of old extensive fields which are shut up all the year except at harvest-time. He sees the grey rabbits emerge from their burrows in the bank, and watches the young ones as they run in and out amongst the standing corn; and he makes all kinds of curious snares, and is sadly puzzled to know why he can never catch them. He peeps through the hedge, and is delighted to see the hares play together in the long grass; and sometimes he finds a nest of young hedge-hogs, which he passes half the day in feeding, giving them everything that comes to hand, and which if they will not take willingly he forces gently down their little throats, which he fancies are full of prickles like their backs, because they swallow what he gives them with such reluctance. While the cuckoo remains with him he mocks her, and often imitates her cry after she is gone, for it is a treat to him to hear his own voice in those silent and solitary fields. He rattles his wooden clapper until his arm aches, and sings the very song which his forefathers sang two or three hundred years ago, when they tented the corn like him, and thus called to the birds:—

Away, birds, away! and come no more to-day,
 Away, birds, away!
 Take an ear and leave an ear,
 And come no more again this year.
 Away, birds, away!

The English sport we have selected for our present month is Cricketing, which, although not known by the name it now bears more than one hundred and fifty years (as far as we have been able to discover), has made such rapid progress during the last half-century as entitles the game to take high rank amongst our field amusements. In our eye there is something very pleasing in this healthy, noiseless, and out-of-door game, especially in those spots where we have witnessed it, in the calm coolness of a sunny summer evening, when we have come upon the players unawares on some ancient common which, time out of mind, has been the play-ground of the villagers. True the players were "unknown to fame" in the great world of cricket, but it was sufficient for them that their sweethearts and acquaintance were looking on to induce them to "do their best;" and now and then we have seen some villager display such natural science, that we have had no fear of seeing his name recorded amongst the ranks of those who dare to give the challenge to All England, and generally gain the victory. Pleasant too is it to recline on a green hill-side, overlooking the vale in which the cricketers are assembled; and all the more enjoyed if the village bells are sending forth a silvery peal from the old church-tower, beneath which some celebrated father of the game sleeps, who, years ago, was the pride of the village cricket club. You need but go at night into the cool parlour, with its red brick floor, after the game on the green is ended, and there you will hear, while enjoying your jug of home-brewed ale, how he could bat, and how he could bowl, for the land-marks are yet remembered which his balls reached, and never have fieldsmen had need to stand so far out since he died. Ask how many wide balls he threw, and they will stare at you in amazement, or say that he could have thrown the ball through the eye of a needle had it been big enough.

Pleasanter still is it to look at a grand cricket match, when "Greek meets Greek"—when every man respects the play of his adversary—when the wicket is guarded as cautiously as the outer barbican of a castle, the battlements manned with the best bowmen; for the word had gone before, that the hero with the eye of fire and the arm of iron would ere long be battering at the gates. Then there is a breathless hush over the wide field, and when some wonderful point is made the applause rises not beyond a deep low hum, for he who seems to have an understanding with the ball—who leans upon his bat as if it were his "familiar," is about to deal another "witching" stroke, and they dare neither shout nor keep their eyes away for a moment, so spell-bound are they by the power of the player. Had cricketing been known to the matchless sculptors of ancient Greece, what lifelike forms of manly beauty would they have left in imperishable marble—graceful attitudes and muscular developments, and god-like groupings, far surpassing in beauty anything we now possess; for no sport gives finer play to the limbs, no game places the body in more graceful attitudes than that of cricket. Then how beautifully the snow-white tents contrast with the green of the overhanging trees, while the turf below, over which the strikers

run, light as fallow-deer, is "all one emerald," as if an "eternal April" kept constant watch over it, and sprinkled the grass with her gentlest showers. The cricketers in their white dresses, as seen from a distance, break the green of the landscape like spots of light that fall upon the eye. Few, we should imagine, can see this manly game played without feeling delighted, even when they do not understand the rules of it, such life and animation is there in the contending parties—the keen eye, the ready hand, the rapid strides, the fieldsmen who to a yard or two seems to calculate the distance the ball will be struck; every man, in fact, moving in his place, like the true harmony of music, without a jarring chord.

Our space prevents us from doing more than barely glancing at a few rules of the game as it is now played. A ball must not weigh more than five ounces and three-quarters, nor less than five ounces and a half, while the bat must not exceed four inches and a quarter in breadth, nor more than thirty-eight inches in length. The stumps must stand twenty-seven inches above the ground; the ball be eight inches in length; the distance between the wickets to be twenty-two yards. The bowling-crease must be in a line with the stumps, and in length six feet eight inches; the popping-crease, unlimited in length, to be four feet from the wicket, and parallel to it. The wickets to be pitched by the umpires. During a match the ground must neither be rolled, watered, mown, nor beaten without the consent of both parties. The bowler must deliver the ball with one foot on the ground behind the bowling-crease, and within the return-crease; he must also bowl four balls before changing wickets; the ball must be bowled not thrown or jerked, and the hand must not be above the shoulder while delivering it. The bowler may require the striker at the wicket from which he is bowling to stand on whichever side he may direct, &c. We find the following remarks in Blaine's "Rural Sports." The passage is there marked as a quotation, but from what author is not mentioned—a rare omission on the part of this honest writer:—

"The wicket-keeper holds an important station in the game. He stands opposite to the bowler, and behind the wicket at which the striker is playing. Beside the bowler and wicket-keeper, who are the two most serviceable men in the field, there are the slips or stops, short and long. The first short slip, who stands near to the wicket-keeper, consequently behind the wicket, yet diagonally in front of the batter. The point directly faces the striker: his station is about seven yards from the popping-crease. The middle wicket stands on the off-side, and about twenty-three yards from the striker's wicket. The leg or hip has his appointment about sixteen yards from the popping-crease, behind the batter. The long-stop is placed behind the wicket-keeper, to save the balls he may miss as they come from the bowler, for the batter may take the advantage of running when a ball has been overthrown, or has not been stopped after the bowler has delivered it, although it may not have been struck. The long-slip stands in a line with the striker, and between the point and short-slip, but further out in the field. A man to cover the middle wicket and the point stands on the off-side of the striker; and it is his duty to save those balls that either of the above may have missed. The long-field on the off-side stands between the middle wicket and the bowler, but at a considerable distance, to save the hard hits. The long-field on the on-side is stationed at a great distance from the striker, and on the other side of the bowler from the man last mentioned. After every four balls have been bowled the umpire calls 'Over,' when the whole party who are seeking out (with the exception, of course, of the bowler and wicket-keeper) change their positions to the opposite quarters of the field."

For instructions how to bowl, &c., we must refer our readers to an admirable little shilling work, a *multum in parvo*, published by a gentleman who signs himself "Bat," where they will find all that is interesting and necessary to be known for the proper playing of the noble game of cricket; it is cheap, concise, and contains everything appertaining to this fine manly sport. We will close the present month with two rural pictures of our own in verse—a cottage-girl crossing a brook, and a troop of soldiers passing a village.

A cottage-girl trips by with sidelong look,
 Steadying the little basket on her head;
 And, where a plank bridges the narrow brook,
 She stops to see her fair form shadowed.
 The stream reflects her cloak of russet red;
 Below she sees the trees and deep blue sky.
 The flowers which downward look in that clear bed,
 The very birds which o'er its brightness fly:
 She parts her loose-blown hair, and, wondering, passes by

A troop of soldiers pass with stately pace—
 Their early music wakes the village street;
 Through the white blinds peeps many a lovely face,
 Smiling, perchance unconsciously how sweet!
 One does the carpet press with blue-vein'd feet,
 Not thinking how she her fair neck exposes,
 As with white foot she times the drum's deep beat;
 And when again she on her pillow doses,
 Dreams how she'll dance that tane 'mong summer's sweetest roses.

So let her dream, even as beauty should!
 Let the white plumes athwart her slumber away
 Why should I steep their swaling snow in blood,
 Or bid her think of battle's grim array?
 Truth will too soon her fiery star display,
 And like a fearful comet meet her eyes.
 And yet how peaceful they pass on their way!
 How grand the sight as up the hill they rise!
 I will not think of cities reddening in the skies.



See how the well-taught pointer leads the way:
The scent grows warm—he stops—he springs the prey;
The fluttering coveys from the stubble rise,
And on swift wing divide the sounding skies.
Not closest coverts can protect the game:
Hark! the dog opens—take thy certain aim.
The woodcock flutters—how he wavering flies!
The wood resounds—he wheels, he drops, he dies!

GAY'S Rural Sports.

SEPTEMBER is a sad or a cheerful month, according to the feelings with which the eye looks out upon it. The silent harvest-fields may recall a deserted banquet-hall, through which the solitary guest walks on the following morning, and contrasts its loneliness with the life and stir and joyous happiness which reigned there on the previous night. Such, on a dull rainy day in this month, appear the dreary harvest-fields, amid the stubble of which the swine are grunting and rooting, and the geese gabbling and feeding. You no longer hear the shrill silvery laugh of the rustic maiden, which sounded so merrily when, while reaping or gleaming, love and labour went hand in hand, as she jested with her sun-burnt swain. The creaking wagon and the jingling harness are gone: a broken bottle where the last "stouk" stood, is all that tells you of healths pledged in brown home-brewed ale; and a few straggling ears which the birds have emptied, hanging on the withering hedges, are the only melancholy relics of the happy harvest. The rain patters on the hips and haws, and poisonous berries of the nightshade; and instead of the beautiful way-side flowers, you see now only the brown dry seed-vessels, that droop their heads, and seem to wait anxiously for the autumn winds to blow them abroad, the fallen leaves to bury them, and the dead-sounding rain to beat upon their graves. On some low, damp, swampy waste you see a few solitary corn-sheaves standing, which no sun could ever reach to ripen, but which were cut while green and small, when all the upland crops were ripe and golden; and these have been rained and blown upon, and now stand black and rotten on that swampy and sunless spot, while the poor proprietor sits sighing and shivering with the ague in the ruinous hovel at the end of his blighted field. This is the dark side of the scene.

Turn we now to bright, sunny September, with a sky as blue and clear as ever hung over Italy; while the trees, in all the richest dyes of Autumn, hang like curtains of crimson and gold and purple and green along the woodlands, where the voices of the merry nutters are heard, while in the hidden windings of the lane we hear the prattle of children busy blackberrying. Or glance at the pop-

grounds, where Summer songs are yet chanted over the last of out-door labour which all can share in, and then September becomes a joyous month.

It is the soul that sees; the outward eyes
Present the object, but the mind describes;
And thence delight, disgust, or cool indifference rise.
When minds are joyful, then we look around,
And what is seen is all on fairy ground:
Again they sicken, and on every view
Cast their own dull and melancholy hue.

The above extract is from "nature's sternest painter," Crabbe; and finely does he preach from this text in that splendid poem entitled "The Lover's Journey." In love, and happy with himself and all around him, Orlando starts out to visit Laura, and his journey lies through a miserable country; but he is in such a state of happiness, that he pronounces everything he sees beautiful. He rides over a barren heath, and is in raptures with the ling, and gorse, and cup-moss, the scarlet tinge of which he compares to Laura's lip. Onward he goes through lanes of "burning sand" and thin crops of withered rye, variegated by the waste-loving poppy; and although the very lines seem to fill your throat with dust, and to make you thirsty while reading, in his eyes the scenery is lovely. He reaches a common "wild and wide," on which a few half-starved, dirty, black-legged sheep are feeding on the "meagre herbage;" and though he sees nothing except a few "scattered hovels" and "brown, square stacks of turf," with a mill, a smith's shop, and a low roadside inn, yet he joyously exclaims, "Ay, this is nature!" He next comes to a "level fen, with dykes on either hand," that roll "through sloping banks of slimy mud," in which a rotten boat is sunk. There is no vegetation in this desolate place, saving "sharp rushes, salt lavender, dark shallows, and the slimy marsh-mallow;" the sounds are the rush of the muddy water, and the roar of the sea—neither tree nor hedge to keep off the sun; yet, with all

these marsh vapours curling and reeking around him, and poisoning the air, he exclaims:—

All that grows has grace;
All are appropriate: bog, and marsh, and fen,
Are only poor to undiscerning men.

So he goes on admiring everything, until he reaches the end of his journey, and learns that Laura has gone. She has, however, left a letter, and he must follow her. This time his way lies through a beautiful country, but in his eyes it is hateful—he is disappointed and displeased with everything he sees. The scene beside the river is one of the most beautiful bits of pastoral painting in all Crabbe's poems. This we have not space to extract, our object being to make our readers acquainted with the lover's feelings; and then he breaks out:—

I hate these scenes!
And these proud farmers!—yes, I hate their pride!
See that sleek fellow, how he strides along—
Strong as an ox, and ignorant as strong!
Can you close crops a single eye detain
But his, who counts the profits of the grain?
And these vile beans, with deleterious smell,
Where is their beauty?—can a mortal tell?
These deep fat meadows I detest: it shocks
One's feelings there to see the grazing ox
For slaughter fatt'd; as a lady's smile
Rejoices man, and means his death the while.

I hate these long green lanes—there's nothing seen
In this vile country but eternal green.
Woods! waters! meadows! will they never end?
'Tis a vile prospect—Gone to see a friend!

What a fine dramatic touch is that abrupt turn of thought from the landscape to Laura—"Gone to see a friend!" And so he goes on, grumbling and finding fault with all he sees, until he arrives at the house where Laura is visiting, &c.

As Shooting commences in September, we shall, in accordance with the plan we have adopted throughout this year's Almanack, take a rapid survey of the feathered game which affords the sportsman amusement during the present and the following months; commencing with Grouse-Shooting, which begins in August.

We commence with black-grouse, or the blackcock, which is, we believe, "Royal game." This bird is seldom found in any quantity except in Scotland, where it frequents moist covers and lower situations than that chosen by the red-grouse, for the latter is fond of heaths and moorlands where the berries of ling are plentiful. The red-grouse is a true British bird, and is said never to be found on the Continent. Once it was plentiful in Yorkshire, and above forty brace have been shot by one man by the noon of day: though a few are yet found there, Scotland is the chosen residence of this much-coveted bird. There are some extensive moors in Westmoreland where grouse abound, many of these wilds stretching to a distance of thirty or forty miles; and unless a stranger has a keen eye and a retentive memory of landmarks, he will be likely enough, while shooting in these solitudes, if he is not provided with a pocket compass, when night comes, to take up "his lodging on the cold ground," if he ventures too far without a guide. The ptarmigan or white-grouse is only to be met with in the Highlands of Scotland, appearing to be fond of cold situations: its flavour is considered inferior to that of the red-grouse. The grouse localities in Scotland let for high rentals, nor are they always well stocked. There have been loud clamours lately respecting a deficiency of game; nor do we think the facility of railway travelling at all likely to lessen the outcry, for hundreds will, no doubt, now rush to the moors, whom time and the expense of the journey formerly kept at home.

To those who are wealthy, and can afford to encamp on the Scottish moors, attended by their servants, and surrounded with all the "good things" conducive to the comforting of the outer and inner man, grouse-shooting is most princely amusement. There they can "eat, drink, and make merry," take healthy exercise by day, and enjoy sound sleep under their canvass roof at night, without experiencing any greater trouble than that of a bad day's sport. Splendid hunting grounds are those wild and pathless moors, where the eagle is seen wheeling overhead, and the stag standing sentinel on some lofty summit, as his antlered forefathers did a thousand years ago.

But to come to the practical. Daniel recommends "the old English spaniel or setter, in preference to the smooth pointer, in shooting red-grouse; they are better nosers, and their feet are defended by their long hair from the ling, which in dry weather cuts like wire." A cold rainy season is unfavourable for grouse, as the birds do not pair so freely. The best time to find them on their feeding grounds is in the morning; when having gorged their fill they fly away to little knolls, and sheltering banks on which the sun shines, and there, half-hidden by the heather, they stand and preen themselves or doze away the hours. But little sport is to be had in the middle of a very hot day; although when the morning has been misty, and it clears off, the birds will again begin to feed, especially if in a locality where plenty of berries grow. Many who have gone out grouse-shooting for the first time, have been greatly disappointed at finding that the birds are far from easy to hit. They have not been prepared for that perpendicular rising to an altitude of twelve or twenty yards before the bird made off in a straight course; nor have they understood catching him in what is called the "outward-turn." Colonel Hawker says, "For shooting grouse, select a fine sunny day, from about eight till five in August or September, and from about eleven till three at the latter period of the season, as they are then extremely

wild, and will only lie tolerably during the few hours which are favoured by a warm sun. Unless the weather is very fine, you will see them running and getting up five hundred yards before you. In this case let one person take an immense circle, so as to head them, while the others remain behind, to press them forward when he is ready: and, above all things, you should, for killing them at this time of the year, use either No. 1, 2, or 3 shot, in the largest single gun that you can possibly manage. Grouse take a harder blow than partridges, and do not fly quite so regular and steady."

In partridge-shooting, a sportsman, if at all acquainted with the ground, generally knows where to "prick" for his coveys, having often watched where the birds alight and feed. Once on the spot, if game be pretty plentiful, it will not be long before the dogs are seen stationary and "mute as marble." The marker will also have his eye on the scattered covey the moment the trigger is pulled, though sometimes, after alighting, they will run fifty or one hundred yards through the stubble, but this will not mislead you, if your dogs and men understand their work. Sometimes a covey parts, and if you have two dogs they will each follow a division, and then point their own game: then you

Must make yourself happy with either;

but be sure to decide on one, "while the other dear charmer's away." No true sportsman will follow the same birds many times in one day, but allow them to rest and recover themselves from the alarm, for they soon regain confidence, and rarely fly their haunts for long, for the loss of a member or two of the family. The old birds, though, are regular "artful dodgers," and a sportsman stands the best chance when they have gone out for a holiday, and left the young ones to enjoy themselves at home. The sight of a bird of prey breaks a covey into more pieces than the report of a gun, for then every one seems to look out for himself, and creeps into the first hole or corner it can find. To conclude, partridges shelter everywhere.

Although pheasant-shooting has not yet commenced, it is so closely allied to grouse and partridge-shooting, as to fall in regular succession. All know that the pheasant is a beautiful bird, and his eyes look as if they were set in rubies, so richly coloured is the scarlet rim with which they are encircled; while a dark patch of purple feathers relieves them underneath. The head and neck assume such a variety of gaudy hues, when seen in the shifting light, that it is almost impossible to tell where the blue or purple begins, or the rich, ever-varying green ends. Sometimes we have seen this beautiful bird flying across an open glade, in the sunshine, and, as the blaze of light fell upon it, the plumage was tinged with every imaginable hue of gold and green and purple and violet and crimson, barred and flecked and speckled with rich umbery brown and glossy black—far more splendid than the mingled tints of the rainbow. When the King of Lydia was seated on his golden throne, and covered with priceless jewels, he asked the wise Solon, if he had ever beheld anything that equalled the splendour with which he was surrounded? "The plumage of the pheasant excels it all," answered the great philosopher.

Yet, against this beautiful bird, almost more than any other, is brought the murderous system of battue-shooting. We do believe that many English gentlemen have set their faces against this unfair practice of sporting, of late, which is really no better than converting the woods and preserves into a wholesale slaughter-house. The poor birds have no chance of escaping, when a dozen barrels are aimed at them from every direction. It is as cruel a system, in our eye, as the once barbarous custom of pinning a cock to the ground at Shrove-tide, and shying at it with heavy sticks. If the bird is missed by one, it is sure to be hit by another—like the poor pigeons in the shooting matches in Batterssea-fields, who are waylaid in every direction, and fired at by every Cockney snob that can pull a trigger.

There is something very startling to a novice in the flushing of a pheasant, the first time he takes aim at it, and there is great odds against his hitting the bird, for its manner of rising is unlike that of any other feathered game—so sudden is the spring, so loud the noise, so unexpected the rattle and rustle of the branches and dead leaves it sweeps through, that we have seen men of iron nerves start aside when the silence of the deep woods has been all at once broken by the unexpected "whirr" of the pheasant. One of our humorous contemporaries has described it as a sudden display of fireworks, which, if such a thing were to be met with suddenly in the gloomy glen of some dark old forest, would, we think, cause the bravest of us to take to our heels, and leave a certain nameless old gentleman to "take the hindmost."

Spaniels broken in for pheasants ought never to be allowed to spring any other game. If they are not broken from questing other game, says Daniel, "they disturb the pheasants, who just fly up and perch upon the lower boughs; and the ground of the covert is in vain traversed and beaten for birds that are already some yards above it." On very wet mornings pheasants frequently quit the woods, and shelter in the neighbouring fields, annoyed, as some believe, by the continual "drop, dropping" of the rain from the leaves. "A foggy day," says Blaine, "is not unfavourable to pheasant-shooting, and the birds then stray abroad, and rove to considerable distances. Nevertheless, we have always observed that on these days pheasants are doubly alert with their ears; consequently, spring spaniels are not good to quest with. . . . On the contrary, when a very bright day shines overhead, having tried the morning feeding-grounds, we would advise the gunner to scour the woods well. . . . The morning's scent, also, when almost evaporated, makes it necessary that your selves, dogs, and beaters should hunt the closer. Try every part of the cover; pheasants are capricious; but in the forenoon are often found under the bushes and brambles, which frequently surround the larger trees of the forest."



Now, Autumn comes in solemn gold,
 And on the earth the flowers are strown;
 The trees are thin and bare, and cold;
 The clouds above the landscape frown:
 'Tis dreary on the lonesome wold,
 But cheerful on the mountain brown,
 Where stands the deer with antler'd head.
 Hectic, and grey, and green, and red,
 Are the dead leaves on which we tread.—DUNSTAN DORMOUSE.

OCTOBER comes like the first battalion of the enemy from the yet distant army of Winter, and forages the borders of the land, stripping the trees of their foliage, to make room for the march of all his millions of flaky followers of snow and hail, who, in a few weeks more, will be moving from their frosty quarters in the north. The advanced guard already go howling through the land, and the trees roar and moan in their great agony, seeming to writhe with pain and anger while stripped of their leafy covering, and striking with their gnarled branches as if endeavouring to beat back their destroyers. Where the violets bloomed, and the yellow primroses lay like smiling faces on the sward, the dead brown leaves are gathered in heaps, as if, weary of endeavouring to escape further from the enemy, they had made a sullen halt, lain down and perished together. Where the blackbird, and linnnet, and thrush stood and answered each other amid the "embowered green," the wind now pipes through the naked branches, and the round rain-drops rattle on the bare skeletons of Summer. By the bank-sides, where the flowers blowed, and the bee hummed, and the wing-folded butterfly balanced itself upon the blossoms, the long grass hangs wan and withered, bowed down by the wet rotting leaves and the crumbling earth which slips away from the dead roots. The Summer band of birds has departed from the woodland theatre, and gone over the seas; and the robin sits humming a dirge among the empty stalls and boxes, as if he were alone—the sole occupier of the mansion they have deserted. The brooks no longer roll along with gentle murmur, but come tearing and chasing down the hill-sides, as if angry at having to drag along with them the heavy rain-torrents, and seeking in vain to escape from the bursting clouds.

"What a blessed order of nature it is," says Professor Wilson, "that the footsteps of time are 'inaudible and noiseless,' and that the seasons of life are like those of the year, so indistinguishably brought on, in gentle progress, and imperceptibly blended the one with the other, that the human being scarcely knows, except from a faint, and not unpleasant feeling, that he is growing old. The boy looks on the youth, the youth on the man, the man in his prime on the grey-headed sire, each on the other, as on a separate existence in a separate

world. They seem sometimes as if they had no sympathies, no thoughts in common, that each smiled and wept on account of things for which the other cared not, and that such smiles and tears were all foolish, idle, and most vain; but as the hours, days, weeks, months, and years go by, how changes one into the other, till, without any violence, lo! as if close together at last, the cradle and the grave! In this how Nature and Man agree, pacing on and on to the completion of a year—of a life! The Spring, how soft and tender indeed, with its buds and blossoms, and the blessedness of the light of heaven, so fresh, young, and new; a blessedness to feel, to hear, to see, and to breathe. Yet, the Spring is often touched by frost, as if it had its own Winter, and is felt to urge and be urged on upon that Summer, of which the green earth, as it murmurs, seems to have some secret forethought. The Summer, as it lies on the broad-blooming bosom of the earth, is yet faintly conscious of the coming-on of Autumn with 'sere and yellow leaf'—the sunshine owns the presence of the shade—and there is at times a pause, as of melancholy amid the *transitory mirth*. Autumn comes with its full or decaying ripeness, and its colours grave or gorgeous, the noise of song or sickle, of the wheels of wains, and all the busy toils of prophetic man gathering up against the bare cold Winter provision for the body and for the soul. Winter! and cold and bare as fancy pictured, yet not without beauty and joy of its own, while something belonging to the other seasons that are fled, some gleanings as of Spring-light, and flowers fair as of Spring among the snow-meridians, bright as Summer morns, and woods bearing the magnificent hues of Autumn on into Christmas frost, clothe the Old Year with beauty and with glory not its own; and just so with old age, the Winter, the last scene of man's ever-varying, yet never wholly changed life."—(*Blackwood's Magazine*, June, 1828.)

Having, in a former Number of the ILLUSTRATED LONDON ALMANACK, dwelt upon the winter-sleep of animals, and the provision many of them make against this dreary season, I shall now describe more fully than I have hitherto done the habits of the bats, the most curious of all our British quadrupeds, and still believed to be birds by many of the simple country-

people, who have no idea that they bring forth their young alive, and suckle them. Who has not seen the bat flitting by of a summer evening in pursuit of insects, in the dim and purple twilight, sometimes skimming along so low as to be within a few feet of the ground? We had an old rhyme, when boys, which we repeated as we tried to capture this leather-like winged little animal—hat in hand—which was,

Bat, bat, come under my hat,
And I'll give you a sitch of bacon.

We did not then know how it concealed itself in winter; but looked upon it as a kind of winged mouse; nor can I spell the name nearer that we called it by than that of "devil-dewlin"—a name for which I can discover no origin beyond that of this little quadruped bearing some resemblance to Old Harry, as we find him represented in our old books. During the winter months the bats enter caves, old churches, hollow trees, or any other dark solitary place, and hanging on by the claws of their hinder-legs, head downwards, sleep away the hours until Spring again appears. In this manner will dozens hang together, one lapping over the other, like the scales of fishes. Wings is hardly a proper term for the membranes by which the bat is enabled to fly: so differently constructed are they from the wings of birds, that an eminent naturalist has compared them to the silk stretched upon the ribs of an umbrella; nor are the fingers which support this leathery membrane, and which the bat can open or close when it pleases, unlike, in construction, the whalebone and covering of an umbrella so far as regards the machinery by which it is opened and shut. That which appears like the arm or hand of the wing, and which when opened enables the bat to fly, has a hooked nail, or thumb, as it is called, by the aid of which it walks both on the ground and up any steep ascent, no matter how perpendicular it may be, providing it is rough enough to enable the bat to hold on by this hooked thumb. But we know of no animal that walks so ungainly as the bat: these hooks act as levers, and by their aid it lifts itself along—it is unlike the motion of any other living object that we are acquainted with.

Ugly as the bat is to look at, it is one of the cleanest of animals; it uses its little head as easily as we do a brush, and pokes about under its wings, and parts the hair down its back, and smooths and brushes it with as much pains as any fair maiden ever bestowed on her long silken ringlets. The bat is believed to have only a single young one at a time; she is a most careful and affectionate mother, and she will wrap up her little bantling in the hinder part of her membrane, and carry it with her. The bat has four ears, but what use she makes of the extra pair has not yet been clearly discovered. It is astonishing into what graceful folds the long-eared bat can throw its ears; and how it shuts them up when asleep, with not a vestige visible except what is called the tragus, or secondary ears. The horse shoe bat is without these secondary ears, while its nose is so interlocked that it would baffle the best naturalist to describe it. Among the twelve species of bats already discovered are the notch-eared, long-eared, lesser long-eared, horse-shoe, mouse-coloured, parti-coloured, reddish grey, pigmy, whiskered, flitter-mouse, besides two others. The common bat, or flitter-mouse, is best known, and is almost as common a haunter of our houses as the sparrow, and may often be seen with its short ears "peaking" about under the eaves. Bats have been considered birds of ill-omen, for no other reason than that the old poets have chosen them as images to illustrate evil. We have, in a former Number of the ILLUSTRATED LONDON ALMANACK, interceded in behalf of the poor persecuted toads, and trust that what we have now written about bats, will cause them to be regarded with interest, and not wantonly destroyed. We know not how many millions of insects they rid us of.

Having before described the fox and the earth-stopper, I must now give a picture of Fox-hunting. It is an agreeable sight to witness the assembled horsemen riding leisurely up and down some extensive heath, beside the cover; or to see little groups rein up their horses, and conversing together; or to catch sight of a scarlet jacket a mile away—now seen, now lost by some winding of the road, high hedgerow, or clump of trees; or to gaze on the figure of some lovely lady—

The cynosure of neighbouring eyes—

as her palfrey ambles to and fro, while the dogs express their impatience by whining and looking up at the huntsman, who at last gives the signal, and exclaims "Eu-in, Eu-in there, dogs," and into the covert they leap, in all kinds of picturesque places—one by the withered fern, another by the stem of the mighty oak, some beneath the gorse bushes, others over the moss-covered railings, and all in a few moments lost to the eye, while the huntsman listens with his head aside for the opening cry of the hound which will first proclaim that Reynard is found. Mr. Beckford says:—"Many huntsmen are fond of having hounds at their horses' heels; and it is a modern fashion for the huntsman and whippers-in to ride into the cover, and by their noise, in some measure, to find the fox for their hounds; but this proceeding is apt to render hounds bad drawers, independent of the great chance of stubbing the horses, which, in a strong cover, too often occurs, without needlessly courting the danger. It is liable, also, where there are but few finders, to have a fox found by them which goes down the wind, and they are heard of no more that day. Besides, hounds never get so well or so soon together as when they spread the cover."

There can be but one opinion on this point; and if hounds will draw of themselves, it is the duty of every huntsman to save his horse from the sharp thorn-bushes, and the hooked brambles, and the piercing gorse, which tear the skin of a horse, enter his feet and legs, and make him restive all the day after. All eye, all ear, the head huntsman draws up beside the cover: he knows the voice of a skirter from that of a well-trained and stanch hound: all is for a time again silent; there is not a false babbling in the pack. Listen! now you hear them

open! one bark is followed by another, then the whole pack joins in the cry, like the crash of a band of musicians. The fox is found, but he is in no hurry to start, though

He often takes leave, but is loth to depart;

for he must have a skulk or two somewhere, to mislead the hounds, and obtain a good start. Hark! that was the "Tally-ho! tua-loo! Away, away!" He is seen making off from the cover, and now the chase commences. The following is from one of my former works on the country:—

Now we see the first hound leap the low fence and clear the covert; he pauses for a moment, scents the spot, then throws back the joyous cry:

Another and another still succeeds,

each baying to his companion, who flings the tidings behind him, but has not time to stay, until, at last, the report reaches the farthest hound, and on they rush like a mob when the cry of "Stop thief!" is heard. Now the hounds are drawn together, and away they go over hedge and ditch, clearing everything at a bound; for the whippers-in have done their work well, and not a dog lingers in the wake. The head huntsman keeps well up with his leading hounds. Now the fat old Squire is thrown into the hedge, and one hardly knows which is the reddest—the hips of the wild-rose or his own "jolly nose." The young lady's veil has caught in the branch of the tree which overhung the hedge she cleared in such gallant style, and now streams out like a banner in the breeze. Now a newly-booted young farmer attempts to clear a "nasty-looking fence," which every one hitherto has wisely shunned, and, like "vaunting ambition," he comes down head foremost, breaks his horse's knees, plunges up the earth with his head, and gets laughed at for his fool-hardiness. Now the old farmer, who is at work in his fields, places his hands in his pockets, utters a few deep curses to himself, and mumbles something about broken pecks, while calculating the cost of repairing the fences which the hunters have broken down. Now a group of famished pedestrians who came out to see the "hounds throw off," invade the first turnip-field they reach, and looking with hungry eye on the sheep, think of gipsies, wood fires, and huge pots suspended from three stakes, simmering gently in wild green lanes. Now little boys run to open gates for timid horsemen, and if a few pence are not thrown to them, begin to whistle long, low, desponding notes, and to kick about the dead leaves dreadfully. Now some old publican, whose house stands on a distant eminence, hopes that the fox may be killed near his door, or that some gentleman may be brought in with a broken collar-bone, whom it will be dangerous to remove for a month at least; he also reckons up the profit of a few British cheroots at threepence each, which cost him eight shillings a pound, then steps inside to add a little more water to the brandy in his decanter. Now a check occurs, at which some of the followers of the chase swear, while others feel thankful, as their horses were already blown. Some, who have lost their hats, the handkerchiefs round their heads; and those who have been thrown, laugh very loud, though they look rather pale; and when they think they are not noticed, vince and writhe under hurts which they are ashamed to confess to. Now the gentleman who staked the hunter, which cost him one hundred guineas, comes up on foot, biting the end of his whip, while he exclaims "Devilish good sport to-day."

Gone away! in sad earnest the peals are commencing;

Here a farmer and stood prominently roll;

There a Leicestershire blade, on a glutton for fencing,

Takes a bullfinch and breaks a buck's neck in a hole.

My lad! pull that stake out—whoey! gently! od rot it,

(While the mare's in a fidget, the man's in a fright);

Do just stand aside, sir, and let me come at it.

Forward! forward! my boys! he's away to the right.

We must let Mr. Beckford come in at the death, which he does in true sporting style, as follows:—"Hark! they halloo! Ay, there he goes. It is nearly over with him; had the hounds caught view he must have died. He will hardly reach the cover; see how they gain upon him at every stroke! It is an admirable race; yet the cover saves him. Now be quiet, and he cannot escape us; we have the wind of the hounds, and cannot be better placed; how short he runs; he is now in the very strongest part of the cover. What a crash! every hound is in, and every hound is running for him. That was a quick turn! Again another; he's put to his last shifts. Now Mischief (the hound) is at his heels, and death is not far off. Ha! they all stop at once; all silent, and yet no earth is open. Listen! now they are at him again. Did you hear that hound catch him? they overrun the scent, and the fox had laid down behind him. Now, Reynard, look to yourself! How quick they all give their tongues. Little Dreadnought, how he works him! the terriers too, they are now squeaking at him. How close Vengeance pursues; how terribly she presses; it is just up with him. What a crash they make! the whole wood resounds! That turn was very short. There! now! ay, now they have him. Whoop hoop!" The above description is excellent; you fancy as if you were at his elbow all the time—that he could see into the covert, and knew every dog by sight and name; and—and—after all you feel sorry for the poor fox.

After the fox is killed, he is generally seized by the huntsman, who cuts off his brush and feet; sometimes his head also; then throws his carcase to the hounds. Formerly, the body of the fox was suspended from the branch of some tree, at the foot of which the hounds congregated and chanted such a dirge round the dead body, as must have been very trying to the ears of a sensitive man. What a scramble is there amongst the hounds for the carcase; each one trying to seize a portion, yet finding it impossible to reach the poor fox, without first eating their way through their companions of the pack. The work of destruction seldom lasts beyond four or five minutes, and at the expiration of that period not a vestige of Reynard remains.



There is strange music in the stirring wind,
 When lowers the autumnal eve, and all alone
 To the dark wood's cold covert thou art gone,
 Whose ancient trees on the rough slopes reclined
 Rock, and at times scatter their tresses sere.
 If in such shades, beneath their murmuring,
 Thou late hast pass'd the happier hours of Spring,
 With sadness thou wilt mark the fading year.—W. L. BOWLES.

NOVEMBER, with its fog and darkness, and Lord Mayor's Show, and the multitude who stand wheezing and sneezing while looking at it, has so little that is interesting in scenery which I have not before described, that I shall now endeavour to carry my readers into a past age—to the gloomy old forests whose vert and venison were guarded by grim and savage laws, which condemned a man to suffer death if he killed a deer within the forbidden forest boundaries. The stag was hunted in those days with kingly pomp and grandeur, through forests that darkened many a long league of land, and such as will never wave over green England again. Never more will there be such a mustering of verderers, regarders, agistors, woodwards, forest-keepers, and retainers of every degree, as then assembled amid the sound of horns, the baying of hounds, and the tramp and neighing of horses, mounted by monarch, and baron bold, and maiden fair, whose long locks streamed out on the morning breeze, or while she bent her neck to speak to some unmounted knight beside her, mingled their silkeness for a moment with the mane of her palfrey.

Sometimes the hunters rode through lonely glens, where all was silence, saving the brawling of the brook—where the echoes were never broken by human voice, except when the antlered monarch of the forest led the hunters into these solitudes. For weary miles a deep twilight ever reigned at noonday in this dreamy land of trees, where boughs, the growth of many a century, overhung the underwood, in which the hind concealed her young until they were strong enough to trot by her side over the velvet sward, under the waving woodbines, and the tall spotted fox-gloves, and the broad fan-like leaves of the bracken.

It is now the morning of the chase; and we will forget the present day of railroads and steamboats, and place ourselves amongst the spectators who five hundred years ago assembled to witness the departure of the hunters. For miles around the forest men are stationed at given distances to drive back the deer that may attempt to escape; others are holding huge stag-hounds in strong leashes—hounds gaunt and shaggy, yet swifter of foot than the fallow-deer, and possessing strength enough to pull down the proudest leader of the antlered herd. The horses keep arching their necks, and pawing the ground, and scat-

tering the white foam on the bystanders, while they champ the bit restlessly, and jerk their heads impatiently, as if eager to be "sniffing the wind" afar off. And now the train issues from the grey postern of the old castle, over which the drooping ivy waves like the green "garland of eternity." Lady's scarf and knightly plume bend in the breeze, as they ride out side by side—forgotten beauty and forgotten bravery, once seen where only the wild wall-flower now waves.

Hark! the horn sounds: the hounds which have lain among the heather spring up; others strain at the leash; the horses become more impatient; hunters follow the foremost hounds into the forest; there is heard a loud crashing of branches; then the horn is again heard. Those three piercing blasts proclaim that the deer is started, and now the whole cavalcade dash into the wide grassy opening that winds for miles into the forest, marked by the wheels of wains and the hoofs of bullocks that have dragged many a stout gigantic tree from the solitude in which it stood for centuries. Fresh from his forest covert bounds the noble stag, looking around a moment in wild amazement; then springing through the underwood, he trots at first leisurely along some well-known path; then the baying of the hounds reaches his ear, and through the entangling thicket he thunders, parting the branches as if they were but mist, while they close again behind him with a force strong enough to sweep a lady from her palfrey. By the forest-brook, which has so often reflected his branching head, he now hurries along: the baying of the hounds draws nearer; he has already run miles, his mouth is now dry, his tongue hangs out, his horns fall back on his neck, and his eyes seem only to look behind, as if measuring the distance between him and his pursuers, and so, panting heavily, he passes along, and at last dashes across the stream. He shakes his antlered head, pauses again for the twentieth part of a second; and, while the wet drops which he scatters around fall on the brown fern and the gorse, and the bramble black with berries, and the briar red with hips, and the wild-rose, away he goes again into a still denser thicket, making the branches rattle again as he cleaves them asunder. A minute after, and the foremost hounds come up: for a moment they are at fault—they have lost the scent—in another second the

slot is found; they dash through the stream, and the forest again rings with their deep-mouthed clamour. Far behind come the horsemen, through openings of the wood, the bells of their bridles jingling with a pleasant sound, the horses stepping almost noiselessly on the forest turf, as they hurry along in their headlong course. Where the shadow of the broad oak falls, onward plunges the deer; he passes like a phantom through the sunshine between the trees. Onward come the hounds in pursuit; then the close branches shut out the scene, and all you hear are the echoes and the faint tramp of the last of the cavalcade. Later in the day, and far beyond the forest, you again see the poor wearied stag, dragging his limbs heavily along, while only two or three of the stancher hounds have been able to follow him, with one lonely hunter, whose jaded steed looks as if it would founder if urged on another step; the rest who followed have long ago drawn in their rein, and abandoned the chase. You look behind, and there see a noble hound panting on the ground, a rider standing beside his fallen horse; further on, a steed that has dropped down dead; nor have the hounds which have now reached the stag strength to pull him down, but, as they tug at his throat and haunches on the spot where he fell through sheer exhaustion, they are compelled to pause every moment to recover breath. See, the hunter alights, and with his knife ends the miseries of the poor stag.

The following beautiful song, descriptive of the chase, is from the pen of the late P. T. Fraser, the celebrated historian, and is one of the best modern compositions we have seen on the subject, excepting always that inimitable scene in the "Lady of the Lake":—

Hark, through the greenwood ringing,
Peals the merry horn;
On gallant steed, o'er dowy mead,
Sir Aquelin is borne.
Many a brave and noble knight
Franceth proud on left and right;
With beauteous hoods they draw the wood
And loud and shrilly raise
The music of the chase.

Deep within the forest,
Fast by a fountain clear,
With Jewdrop dink upon his flank,
Stands the noble deer.
See, he starts! for, heard afar,
Come the notes of woodland war;
And up he springs, and on the wings
That mock the mountain wind,
Leaves hound and horn behind.

Sweet, sweet upon the mountain
Sinks the setting sun;
The coursers fleet scarce drag their feet;
The weary chase is done.
But where's the antler'd king who late
Ranged his realms in fearless state?
Alas! alas! upon the grass,
That his best heart's-blood dyes,
The captured monarch lies.

The Earl of Athol, in 1563, had a grand hunting-match, at which the unfortunate Mary, Queen of Scots, was present. Two thousand Highlanders were employed in driving the deer from the hills of Athol, Badenoch, Muir, Moray, and the neighbouring counties, and nearly the whole of the Scottish nobility were present on the occasion. Upwards of two thousand deer were driven together. But we must let the author, William Barclay, who witnessed this "Royal hunt," as it was called, describe what he himself saw:—"The Queen, the great men, and a number of others, were in a glen, when all these deer were brought before them. Believe me, the whole body moved forward in something like battle order. This sight still strikes me, and ever will strike me, for they had a leader whom they followed close wherever he moved; this leader was a very fine stag, with a very high head. This sight delighted the Queen very much, but she soon had cause for fear, upon the Earl's (who had been from his early days accustomed to such sights) addressing her thus:—"Do you observe that stag who is foremost of the herd? There is danger from that stag; for, if either fear or rage should force him from the ridge of that hill, let everyone look to himself, for none of us will be out of the way of harm, for the rest will follow this one, and, having thrown us under foot, they will open a passage to this hill behind us." What happened a moment after confirmed this opinion; for the Queen ordered one of the best dogs to be let loose on one of the deer: this dog pursues; the leading stag was frightened; he flies the same way he had come there; the rest rush after him, and break out where the thickest body of the Highlanders was. They had nothing for it but to throw themselves flat on the heath and allow the deer to pass over them. It was told the Queen that several of the Highlanders had been wounded, and that two or three had been killed outright, and the whole body (of deer) had got off, had not the Highlanders, by their skill in hunting, fallen upon a stratagem to cut off the rear from the main body. It was of those that had been separated that the Queen's dogs and those of the nobility made slaughter. There were killed that day three hundred and sixty deer, with five wolves and some roes."

Many, no doubt, imagine that wolves were extinct in Great Britain at a very early period, and are not, perhaps, aware that England was infested with this formidable animal in the reign of Edward I., and that this Monarch issued a proclamation ordering the destruction of wolves in the counties of Gloucester, Worcester, Hereford, Salop, and Stafford, and that great rewards were paid to

those who destroyed these dreaded animals. The last wolf seen wild in Britain¹ was killed about one hundred and seventy years ago, at Lochaber, in Scotland. A few centuries back, Yorkshire was so overrun with wolves, that places for shelter in case of attack were erected on the wolds and other wild and lonely parts of this extensive county; and parish-books yet exist, of a comparatively modern date, which show the sums paid to different individuals for destroying wolves. In those days they bred on the wolds and "caves," and found shelter in the vast forests which spread over England; and from these retreats the wolves issued forth at night, and devoured numbers of sheep.

Such, reader, was the England in which our forefathers lived, while as yet railroads, and steamboats, and electric telegraphs "lurked in the womb of Time." Then the slow pack-horse, and the heavy rumbling wain, often drawn by oxen, were the only modes of conveyance—the one with its packs and jingling bells, or wicker panniers, then called "dorsers" (and we have still in London the sign of the "Horse and Dorsers"); the other heavy and cumbersome, with wheels that moved on wooden axles: and when the miry and rutted roads are taken into consideration, our slow-paced carriers' carts are, comparatively speaking, four-horse coaches to the speed of travelling in those old primitive times. Then there were no lamps to light the streets on the dark November nights; but only an open cresset, not unlike a chafin-dish, stuck on a pole here and there, and which, being open, was soon blown out on a windy night. And, saving the drowsy voice of the feeble old bellman, heard at intervals as he went his rounds, and the occasional flicker of his horn-lantern on the unpaved streets, the old towns would lie asleep in dreary darkness and unbroken silence. When we glance at the past, then turn to the England of the present day, and think seriously of the changes which have taken place, even within the last half-century only, they are a thousand times more marvellous than the fabulous wonders wrought by the magicians in the story-books we perused in our boyish days.

My description of "Rural Sports" having infringed somewhat largely on the space I have generally dedicated to Natural History, I will, by way of change, endeavour to give some account of the habits of Newts and Lizards, a class of reptiles which are but little known, though so common in England. Water-newts are called by the country-people efts, and are generally supposed to be venomous—a most absurd notion; for a more inoffensive reptile does not live than the newt. He is an excellent and an elegant swimmer, and can steer himself in any direction he pleases to go by the aid of his rudder-like tail; he also turns back his legs to propel himself forward, as a swimmer does when he throws back the water, after having struck out with his hands. He can also walk as well under water as on land, nor is there anything ungainly in his motion. They lay their eggs in the leaf of some water-plant, which they afterwards fold together with their hinder feet, and fasten as securely as if it were glued; the young ones are able to swim the moment they quit the egg. Newts do not always confine themselves to water, but run and play upon the ground in moist damp places, and climb about the aquatic plants. Their principal food is water-insects and worms, though they are not all particular about devouring one another, especially the large water-newt, who is rather partial to making a meal off the smooth or common newt.

The common lizard is a beautiful little reptile, often most exquisitely marked with green, brown, white, and yellow spots; the white sometimes springing from the centre of large black spots which run the whole length of the back and sides. It is commonly found on banks which lie open to the sun, on the edges of heaths and commons, or by the sides of woods. The belly of the lizard bears no bad resemblance to chain armour, while the throat looks like the scales of a gorget of mail. So rapid is the turn of the head of the lizard when it seizes an insect, that it is almost impossible for the human eye to detect the motion, so suddenly is the prey seized and swallowed. Its speed along a footpath is so rapid, that, had it a bulk in proportion to its powers of flight, it would be able to run ten miles in less time than the swiftest race-horse that ever lived went over a mile of ground. Lizards have been rendered so tame as to eat out of the hand, though generally they attempt to bite the finger. The blood of the lizard, like that of all reptiles, is cold; nor does it show any sign of life, or require any nourishment during the long months of Winter, but remains in a state of torpor, immoveable as a stone, until the return of Spring.

I must not conclude my description of the present month, without directing the attention of my readers to the beautiful Engraving at the head of it, which is so faithful a picture of a dull, melancholy November day, that we almost feel "the low sky raining" while we look at it. We pity the passengers outside the coach, for we know that they are wet through, and feel thankful that they are so near the end of their miserable journey. How the water pours down the road that crosses the bridge, we not only see by the torrent in the ruts, but also by the reflection of the coach-wheels—a masterly touch, which only your true-born Artist would have thought of. To look over those gloomy arches into the river on such a day gives a man the horrors; there is a cold clamminess about the stones of the parapet, and a deep smoky fog upon the water, which you seem to feel while leaning over and looking at it, as if it were slowly searching through your garments, while an hundred old colds and coughs were trying to penetrate you, and find within a shelter.

Humid evening, gliding o'er the sky,
In her chill progress, to the ground condensed
The vapour throues. Where creeping waters ooze,
Where marshes stagnate, and where rivers wind,
Cluster the rolling fogs, and swim along
The dusky-mantled lawn.

THOMSON'S Seasons.



Oh, Winter! ruler of th' inverted year,
Thy scatter'd hair with sleet-like ashes fill'd,
Thy breath congealed upon thy lips, thy cheeks
Fringed with a beard made white with other snows
Than those of age; thy forehead wrapt in clouds;
A leafless branch thy sceptre; and thy throne
A sliding car indebted to no wheels,
But urged by storms along its slippery way.—COWPER.

DECEMBER brings the shortest day; the lessening daylight has now reached "the utmost limit of its narrow sail;" the longest night has had its reign; for that mighty Power which gave to the ever-moving ocean its boundaries, said also to Darkness, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." What solemn poetry our Artist has thrown around the picture of Winter which heads the present month, by throwing the ruins which Time has made into his wild waste of December snow, a roofless and venerable pile that no longer affords shelter, but makes the loneliness of the landscape, at such a season, appear more lonely. We look upon it, and exclaim—

Pause here awhile! and on these ruins look,
Worn with the footsteps of forgotten years;
Peruse this page in Time's black letter'd book;
Gaze long, and read how he his trophies rears!
See how each shatter'd shrine and sculptured nook
The dinted impress of his footmark bears.
Who was it rear'd this crumbling pile of stone?
Ask Time! he only knows who now reigns here alone.

Gaze on that window now! 'tis shorn of all
Its saintly forms, and gaudy colourings;
The sky-dyed tunic, and the purple pall,
The glowing gold that form'd the vests of kings,
No longer flash at sunset on the wall;
Gone are the chequer'd angel's rainbow'd wings.
The Winter wind alone blows bleakly there,
And on the graven stones masses of snow appear.

Snow in the streets of a city cannot be endured; it has scarcely fallen before it wears an old, grey, dirty look on the pavement; it is mingled with the mire trod by ten thousand footsteps; it is swept into the middle of the road by the shopkeeper, then wheels roll over it, and it is trampled beneath the hoofs of horses, and you can scarcely bear to look out of the window at the "slushy" and filthy streets until the dirty mass is swept

up and carted away. In the country it lies like a "wintry veil" upon the face of the landscape; the banks appear in the distance like barriers of white marble; the hills, like ranges of silver clouds; and when the sun shines you can scarcely discern the rim of the horizon, so beautifully are the snowy summits of the hills and the fleecy edges of the clouds blended together—harmonising, like the lips of a sleeping maiden with the rose-leaf which blew from the bush and settled upon them while she slumbered.

Winter nips the fingers of the woodman until he can scarcely bend them round the handle of his axe, so stiff and benumbed do the joints become. During the keen frost the ditcher tries in vain to force his spade into the ground, for the earth rings like iron, and gives back a "strange alien sound" at every stroke. In one night the gardener sees his winter-greens shrivelled up as if they had been scorched by fire, his "potatoe pie" is frozen, and icicles hang beneath the glasses that shelter his tenderest plants. Spring is asleep deep down beneath the cold.

But of all the scenes which I have so often described as belonging to this season of the year, the wildest I ever witnessed was the breaking of the ice after a long frost in a large navigable river, a word-picture I have painted as follows in my "Winter:—" "First there came a gentle thaw; then the tide or heyre began its silent work beneath the ice, gradually lifting it higher, hour after hour, as the body of water arose underneath, unperceived save by the loud cracking it occasionally made. In the still night you heard that crackling sound run across the river, and often during the day after the tide had subsided; and sometimes where the long fissure ran along, the edge of the ice was slightly raised, so much so as to impede the progress of the skater: then sounds were heard like sudden gun-shots in rapid succession; water here and there welled through the crevices of the ice; though the large green black mass, save for these outlets and slight elevations, for miles away lay hard, thick, and unbroken. Men stood together conversing in low voices; in little groups by the river-side, sailors devising the best measures to save their ships when the ice broke up and the great crash came; wharfingers examining the piers which supported their wharves, and wondering whether or not they would stand the tremendous shock

which they would soon have to contend against: captains and owners arguing whether it would be better to let their vessels drift a little way with the mass, or moor them firmly and trust to the strength of their stoutest hawser. Some contended that there would be time enough left to decide on such matters when the ice began to move, others that there was not a single hour to lose. The reckless said that it would be two or three days before the ice broke up; the timid, that it would be on the morrow; the cautious, that the ships ought not to be 1 ft without a watch for a moment. Some said that the ice had lain so long, it was rotten and would be torn up and swept away by the next tide; others argued that, as it was so thick, it would be the work of many tides to split it asunder: a few experienced old seamen said that if the night-tide ran up strong, the whole mass would be shivered before morning. A gloom seemed to hang over the little town, and many, from motives of curiosity, and a love to see the wild work of Winter, went not to bed that night. I remained up amongst the number.

"Midnight came, and with it the tide. The moon threw a dim woolly kind of light over the river. We listened, and heard the ice breaking up miles away, as the wind and tide came growling and roaring along. Nearer and nearer drew the sound, like approaching thunder. The sailors who had gone to sleep on shore were now aroused to hurry aboard and take charge of their vessels. Between each thunder-like crash of the ice, we heard the cry of human voices from the men on board the ships, which were already tossing as if an earthquake heaved beneath them. Further down the river, signal-lights were hoisted amid the rigging—torches blazed and moved along the shore. Several of the sailors had not yet reached their ships, when one long, loud, continuous crash was heard, which told that the tide had already reached the town-side, and was now shivering up the river like glass. That sound was not like thunder—unlike the quick firing of cannon—but as if the earth had split asunder, and went on opening and shutting amid the fall of thousands of buildings, and the hissing, and surging, and boiling of the troubled waters, which it swallowed up with the ruins, while the rending thunder rived along its desolating course. So did the sheets of ice crash and grind together as they were tossed upon and over-rode each other; so were the ships torn from their moorings, and borne along by the overwhelming tide and the masses of ice which broke by and impelled them onward: water, and ice, and shipping whirled away to where the massy stone bridge threw the shadow of its arches over the wild turmoil, and there the mass was locked together—ships, boats, sheets of thick ice too big to pass through the dark arches, while the foundations of the bridge shook beneath the deafening roar."

Although woodcock and snipe-shooting commenced above a month ago, it still affords amusement to the sportsman, and will do throughout the whole Winter. Woodcocks generally come over in the night, and on their arrival are very lean; this, no doubt, is caused through their not having alighted anywhere to feed while on their journey. As we have stated in a former work, they bring no luggage with them when they return from their long sea voyage, but put up at the first road-side inn they reach, and which is generally a hedge, or ditch, or some waste, covered with furze; and without awakening either boots, ostler, chambermaid, or innkeeper, they take up their quarters for the night. Sometimes they remain a day or two before proceeding further into the country, for they have neither had steam, nor sail, nor plank to assist them in crossing the stormy ocean; nothing but their poor little wings to beat up against the wind, and dash aside the sea-spray—that is, if they ever reached so high an altitude as that through which they flew: and they have encountered all these perils, and come all that distance only to enjoy a banquet of worms.

They leave the woods in the evening to feed, and at such times may be heard making a shrilly noise, which resembles the sound made by the snipe. Aided by their keen sight, delicate touch, and probably fine scent, they are enabled to find their food in the dark, and to pick up the smallest worm in such black benighted places, that we should need the light of a strong "bull's-eye lantern" to be able to see it at all. "The woodcock," says Colonel Montague, in his "Ornithological Dictionary," "is naturally a shy and retiring bird, rarely taking wing by day, unless disturbed; but just at the close of day all, as if by common consent, quit the wood nearly at the same instant, and wander over the meadows in search of splashy places and moist ditches for food, retiring to their hiding-places again at the dawn of morning. Thus, when most other land-birds are recruiting exhausted nature by sleep, these are rambling through the dark, directed by an exquisite sense of smelling (?) to those places most likely to produce their natural sustenance; and, by a still more exquisite sense of feeling in their long bill, collecting it. Their eye is not called into use; and, like the mole, they may be said to feed beneath the surface; and, by the sensibility of the instrument which is thrust into the soft earth, not a worm can escape that is within reach. The eyes of the woodcock are large in proportion to their general bulk of body, and, like those of some other nocturnal birds, are particularly formed for collecting the faint rays of light in the darkened vales and sequestered woodlands during their nocturnal excursions; thus, also, they are enabled to avoid trees and other obstacles which continually occur."

According as the weather changes, so will the woodcock shift his quarters, sometimes to the opposite side of the wood; or, if a sheltering hill intervene, he will cross it, and in some warmer solitude wait until the wind changes, then return to his old feeding-ground. He does not like cold, neither will he expose himself to it, if there is shelter to be found in the neighbourhood. We have heard a gentleman boast that he could always tell where a woodcock could be found by the marks of the dead leaves, in searching for worms beneath them; he says, the bird throws the leaves aside with its bill, alternately right and left but never two leaves together on the same side. He is a close observer, and the

above fact may be relied upon. There is an outcry that woodcocks are becoming scarcer every season, and this, we think, can be accounted for by the extensive march of cultivation, and the great network of railways, which intersect England in every way, cleaving through woods, cutting between hills, and running over heaths and waste lands, and breaking up the silence where the birds formerly sheltered. We know nothing so likely to scare birds from their haunts as the thunder of a railway train, and the shrill screaming of the whistle.

As the woodcock is so seldom on the wing in the daytime, the sportsman is compelled to hunt for him, in his own shadow and solitary haunts. Even when found in the thickets of a wood, and flushed, unless there is some opening near at hand; it is difficult to hit him. When flushed, the woodcock generally flies straight ahead, and goes blundering between the close and twisted branches, as if he did not care a straw what he ran against, so long as he escaped. Some sportsmen argue that this is the best time to aim at him, and that he is easier to hit than when he rises perpendicularly, and goes twisting and turning above the trees, when to aim at him would be like trying to hit a shooting star. Blaine (we think jocularly) recommends novices to go over to Ireland for a few weeks, and to try woodcock-shooting in the alder hedgerows, before they venture at it here, if they are anyways flurried. In an extensive wood it is necessary to have both beaters and markers: these, it appears, one gentleman kept clothed in leather suits from head to heel—the material so thick that the shot he used could not pass through it; so that, if he hit his man instead of his bird, he did him no harm. Cocking spaniels, when well broken, are generally considered the best dogs for woodcock-shooting.

He who is afraid of getting wet, or has a dread of cold hands and feet, must never hope to become a thorough good snipe-shooter; for the familiar haunts of this bird are the reedy and slucy marsh, and the low, damp, meadow lands, fringed with pollard-willows, where a man of a delicate constitution is more likely to catch the ague than anything else. Onward the downright sportsman must plunge, if he hopes to start his birds, up to the knees in mud or mire; and he may thank his stars if at the next step he is not up to his neck, imitating the boom of the bittern as he sputters back the oozy mixture with his lips. Neither must he wait for a fine calm day; but when it blows "great guns," sally out, for then the snipe lie well, and the best sport is to be found. A snipe, when it first rises, is more difficult to hit than a woodcock—giving so many twists and turns, that for the life of you you cannot tell what direction it will take for a second or two, except that it is sure to fly against the wind. The best plan is to wait a bit, until he has made up his mind what course to steer, and has become a little steady in his movements: that is the time to take a steady aim at him. A cross shot is preferable, when it can be had. The author of the "Oakleigh Code" says: "The shooter will bring down a snipe with much less difficulty at from fifteen to twenty paces than at any other distance. The aim is thus taken just before the bird begins to make its cross-flight, but before it has attained its full speed. The irregularity of its flight is of little consequence during the first and second twisting, before the bird is safely on the wing, since its flight is then comparatively tardy. But let the snipe fly ten yards from whence it spring—let it be, for instance, twenty-five paces distant from the gun; it is then at the top of its speed, and in the very midst of its sidelong, elliptical gyrations, and more than a match for the majority of shooters."

In snipe-shooting the ground ought to be gone over twice or thrice during the day, so apt is the bird to return to the spot from whence he first started. We know an old sportsman in Lincolnshire, who always went over the same ground at least twice in the same day, and few shot more birds than he did. When he chose his own day, he often brought home ten or twelve brace. He never went out without his favourite retriever (the only dog he took), to save himself from getting a wet jacket, as the birds, when shot, often fell into the deep and wide water-courses with which these extensive marshes abound.

Reader! we have again, for the third time, journeyed with thee through the twelve months of the year, and now turn to bid thee farewell on the threshold, ere we enter and close the door. This year we have carried thee over new ground, and made thee acquainted with many of our English Sports. We have shown thee how the poor hare is coursed in January, and what shifts she has recourse to, to escape from her pursuers. In February, we have borne thee company to the wild meres and marshes of England, where the bullrush nods, and the bittern booms, and the wild-fowl shooter lies in wait for his prey. In March, April, and May, we have shown thee how rabbits are shot, fish caught with the fly, and young rooks brought down, before they are buried snugly under tempting crusts, and made into savoury pies. In June, we have opened the doors of the past, and shown thee the sports of another age, before the murderous gun was heard, and when bird was taught to prey on bird, and crowned Kings eagerly pursued the noble sport of Hawking. Racing, Cricketing, Shooting, and Fox-hunting fill a large portion of the following months, and we have pictured them all as they exist in the present day. In November, we have again looked backward at the past, and endeavoured to bring before thine eye one of those noble staghunts which, in former years, so often awoke the echoes of our old English forests. By these changes we have brought forward something new for every month, not only from our own knowledge, but enriching our descriptions with occasional extracts from authors better acquainted with the subjects than ourselves, and to whom we hope we have, in every instance, given "honour due" and faithful acknowledgment. And now, with many thanks for the hours thou hast borne us company, we once more, Reader, bid thee farewell.

THOMAS MILLER.