



## THE PIC-NIC.

UMMER time, glorious summer time, asserts its full maturity in the month of July. Its hot sunshine, its penetrating light, its close streets and still closer houses, the busy Babel of sounds so distinct in the dry atmosphere, all weary the senses to a degree that makes the most determined lover of the town sigh for quiet, and admit that, however agreeable a London life may be, it is hardly the scene one would fix upon for full enjoyment in the dog-days. Society itself begins to discover that a life of mere pleasure may become as wearisome as a life of actual labour; and that nothing short of an occasional glance at Nature herself can enable it to

endure unto the end of the season, when fashion shall dismiss it to "fresh fields and pastures new."

A day in the country! How pleasant it sounds to the busy idler, weary of the trouble of finding amusement for himself. "A day in the country! how charming it would be!" chime in certain soft voices. "Ay, a day in the country, with a gay party to enjoy it, would be worth anything just now," eagerly responds some active promoter of excitement of any kind. "Why, the mere sight of green fields would be more refreshing than anything London has to show. What is a dance of shepherdesses on the stage to a dance on the greensward by ourselves?" "Or the Sax-horns in Kensington-gardens," interrupts another, "to French horns on the water?" "And how easily it could be managed," exclaim both together, "if only one or two goodnatured matrons would take the matter in hand; the trouble would be little, and the pleasure would be great; so why should it not come to pass?" Active canvassings and earnest petitions are preferred on all sides; slight difficulties are overcome, and great ones are set at naught; and eventually

something like consent is extorted from the powers that be, and finally a decision is arrived upon.

On the first blush of the affair, the mere fact of a favourable award seems enough to satisfy all but the most exacting. The least selfish of the party offers her house and her services; and the next day is set apart for preliminary considerations, for the barometer must necessarily be consulted, and the extent of the party ascertained. Where they are to go—what they are to do—and where-withal they are to be fed, remains a problem to be solved; and it would hardly be a matter of surprise if, before the close of the evening, the person most implicated in the affair should have arrived at a conclusion of never again doing a good-natured thing without taking twelve good hours to consider of it. The to-morrow arrives in due course, and with it many suggestions for carrying out their plan. The gentlemen are unanimously of opinion that taking provisions with them is always found to be a bore; and declare that the only way of passing a day pleasantly in the country is to order a handsome *déjeuner* at the Star and Garter, securing to themselves, afterwards, as large a portion of Richmond Park as rapid railroads, rival steam-boats, with their usual concomitants, may leave at their disposal.

Anything so common-place as a cold dinner at an inn—for in such disparaging terms is the proposition characterised by the ladies—is voted impracticable and not to be thought of. Do they suppose that any one could consent to drive fifteen miles under a hot sun, merely to dine on mahogany and be waited upon by people who know their business? Such a consummation is not to be entertained for a moment; they would rather dine at home, or even not dine at all, than lend themselves to anything so common-place and prosaic. "What, then, is to be done?" demand the lovers of good cheer well served. "Listen, and I will tell you," responds the boldest of the fair dissentients, with a pretty air of mock gravity. In the first place we must find out some secluded valley, unprofaned by the feet of the multitude, where we may take our rest; hemmed in on every side by a belt of waving woods, with a clear

stream meandering through it, a smooth green bank for our table, and a wilderness of feathery boughs for a canopy, under which shall be spread such fare as the free-will offerings of our friends may bestow, with no attendants besides each other. Such is the picnic England once delighted to honour, and such is the picnic which we can alone enjoy."

"But the bill of fare—There really must be a good bill of fare!" persists the more material of the conclave. Even a short drive is usually found provocative of a good appetite. Grazing sheep may have a rural appearance, but are sometimes found to be rather suggestive of roast mutton; cows in the distance may be picturesque, but creams nearer at hand may be thought to have the advantage. Ice and ivy go well together, though the ancients may have limited their union to wine alone; and, in short, their own suggestions for the entertainment of their fair friends having met with little favour, they feel justified in making rather particular enquiries into the commissariat department, which they are prepared to offer. Under other circumstances they need hardly say they should not venture to trespass on ground not their own."

The gentlemen dismissed on their embassy to find a locality that shall embody every possible advantage, the ladies are at liberty to proceed to the business before them. There are few occurrences in actual life that cannot be easily arranged when each party is equally willing to be obliging and to be obliged. One lady offers to contribute the *pieces de resistance*—a second promises such *entrées* and *hors d'œuvres* as can be served cold—whilst a third undertakes to produce the dessert, and a Ganymede of character so discreet that his ministry shall only be inferred by the perfect arrangement of the whole affair.

The morning of the great day at length arrives, bright and balmy, as though no unusual event were on the tapis. A shower had fallen in the night, as though to lay the dust and spare the millinery. The tempered sunbeams shone through a veil of gauzy mist, as if in deference to the fair faces about to confront them. The gentlemen have fortunately been successful in finding a *locale* beautiful, in their florid description, as the Happy Valley itself; and, having whispered the secret in confidence, are relieved of the burthen of the *comestibles*. Everybody is in good looks and in good spirits. The carriages come when they are ordered, and the ladies are scarcely less punctual. The right people are packed into the right conveyances, and the amateur Phœnixes are harmonious, having settled their differences among themselves by the way. The detachment that is to join on the road falls in at the right place, and everything promises well for a happy day. The drive is taken leisurely through bowery lanes (such are to be found even near London). Why should they hasten to abridge one pleasure merely to anticipate another, when they have the live-long day before them for the perfect enjoyment of both? They linger on the road to avail themselves of such picturesque points of view as may happen to present themselves. Wayside flowers, boasting the charm of novelty to the wearers of exotics, are discovered, and must be secured, at any cost; and whips and parasols are in requisition to catch the last straggling woodbine that haunts gaily on the topmost branch of the hedgerow.

Where is the scene that can show pleasanter nooks beside its still waters than the county of Surrey? England, in comparison with foreign nations, may have little to boast of, of a very romantic character. But where abroad is the pastorage scenery that can match our own? Warm and eager expressions of admiration are lavished on all sides. The gentlemen, encouraged by the encomiums bestowed on their taste and judgment, take advantage of the flood-tide of favour to hint that a "slight reflection" at once, by way of inauguration, would by no means be amiss. This suggestion, though hardly falling in with the programme of the festivities of the day, is, with a laughing protest, conceded. Scarcely are the steeds stabled, and the party assembled together, when a low whistle is heard from an adjoining copse. The lady in chief, followed by her satellites, adventures into the shady glade, and finds beneath the leafy screen an impromptu *déjeuner* spread before them. Blessings on the cunning hand that can conjure up hot coffee the moment it is wanted, and good digestion wait on the appetites that can be content with such simple fare!

But they are not suffered to linger long at the sylvan repast, however disposed they may be to enjoy the present. They must be up and be doing, for certain energetic spirits are amongst them, who aver that the picturesque must always be sought out to be fully enjoyed, and that nature will not reveal her hidden treasures to the careless and the indolent. Fortunately, they have not far to look for objects of interest on the present occasion; for there, perched high on a craggy steep, scarcely two miles distant, is a country church of very primitive design, which may contain "rich stores of antiquity well worthy a large perusal;" and forthwith a lover of ancient brassy volunteers to be clericone, inviting the ladies collectively and individually to accompany him on an archaeological survey; promising them, on the faith of an antiquary, that should the church be found but commonplace in itself, the prospect from its turret would amply repay their pious pilgrimage. A more modish cavalier next prefers his suit. He proposes a visit to some show-house, nearer at hand; and, though not exactly aware of its situation or actual distance, is quite certain it cannot be far off. It is, he assures them, well worth seeing; has gardens that cost untold sums of money; and boasts a picture-gallery, said to rival the national one, both within and without. A gallant sailor, with his dashing lieutenant, points to two trim wherries sleeping on the stream below, which his provident care had secured for the occasion, and urges a sail or a row. A grave taxophilite hints of "bow and target," when the wind lulls; and triumphantly produces on the spot a travelling chess-board, that has won honourable mention at the Great Exhibition. Who could lack amusement with such varied resources at their command. The difficulty seems rather to lie in the selection. After a brief scene of vehement importunity on the part of the rival showmen, that might have done,

honour to a group of French *commissaires*, the party break up into little groups: the sentimental declare for the aquatics; the adventurous for the house of exhibition; whilst the grave and sententious go in search of the antique. The married ladies, dividing the quick-eyed children among them, thus perform the duty of *chaperons* by deputy. They, however, accompany the party down the hill; and, if the truth must be told, gladly, if slowly, return to the point of observation from which they had set out. All are at liberty to seek their own amusement in their own way for three good hours, when the result of their various peregrinations is to be recounted for the general benefit on their return.

Nor are the less enterprising left entirely without certain small triumphs of their own. They have discovered a spot of the most perfect seclusion for the banquet, with a spring of pure water bubbling up nigh at hand. They have beheld nuts in profusion, half ripe, and gathered a basket of wild wood-strawberries. A botanist has found certain scarce plants to help perfect her herbal; and they have, in addition, had all sorts of good fortune promised them by a wandering Cassandra. And when, at length, the sun waxing warm, they begin to think what they shall do next, they have only to retire into the shade, read and converse at leisure, and taste the enviable enjoyment of watching their friends afar off, struggling through the long grass of a meadow into which they have overtakenly trespassed, and toiling up the steep ascent to join them. By twos and threes the weary wanderers drop in, hungry, and almost too tired to talk. At length the gallant sailors and the water nymphs, long looked for, make their appearance, and this time a clear, bold voice is heard to sing "Haste to the Banquet."

And trust me, gentles, never yet,  
Was sight a masquing half so neat,  
Or half so rich before.

The country lends the sweet perfumes,  
The sea the pearl, the alky the plumes,  
The town its silken store.

The wanderings o'er, the board is laid,  
And sicker such a feast is made  
As heart and lip desire;  
Withouten hands the dishes fly;  
The glasses with a wish come nigh,  
And with a wish retire.

And, when the rage of hunger is appeased, what a chorus of merry voices is heard. The adventurers in search of fine gardens and fine pictures pronounce themselves amply satisfied with the sight; although, when closely pressed, cannot deny that much better might be seen nearer home. However, by virtue of their belonging to the "quality," they had, by special favour, been admitted to the sight, as it was not the regular show-day; and then the hermitage was said to be really something quite unique. The antiquarians professed to have been even more fortunate; for, though they had not brought away with them anything that would make very much of a figure at the Archaeological Society, they had seen a very remarkable font in a rather dilapidated condition; had met with inscriptions, whose meaning could only be guessed at; and had been rewarded by finding, "in a high state of preservation," the tomb of an ancient Knight.

Songs were now sung, and wise saws were uttered; histories of bygone picnics were recounted, and suggestions for prospective new ones were offered; and no one seem disposed to move: indeed, the fresh cool fruits of the dessert were almost too good to be abandoned. But tea must be had, if only for the sake of boiling the water gipsy-wise. Even the weary walkers declared themselves unwilling to forego the dance altogether, for many uneasy glances at the delay began to be exchanged between the "flute" and the "French horn." Seeing this, some of the ladies were obliging enough, by way of sedative to their growing impatience, to request a rehearsal, that might act as a gentle reminder of their duty to the laggards. How delightful is a dance *sans cérémonie*: 'tis true the springy turf is hardly so pleasant a footing as springy boards; but then there is no comparison between the cool stroll between the dances and the hot promenade of the ball-room.

Before we conclude we must not omit to mention that the married ladies behaved with great generosity on the occasion, and were content to receive the homage of the least eligible of the cavaliers; they also made themselves particularly agreeable to such *ci-devant jeunes hommes* as needed partners. One of them even went so far as to learn chess, for the sake of using the migratory chess-board. Could complacency go farther than this? But virtue has its own reward; and an obliging offer was made by the happy possessor, to repeat the lesson whenever his fair pupil would give him an opportunity so to do.

And then the drive home, how soothing and pleasant it was, in the rich dewy twilight. The chief members of the party were merry, "within the limits of becoming mirth." A few were dreamy and silent, but none were sad. The ladies were congratulated on the perfect success of the entertainment; and, not to be outdone in generosity, they returned the compliment, by offering a willing and gracious tribute to the perfect chivalry of the gentlemen. And everything having gone off so well, the parties most interested resolved to repose on their laurels, and not risk the fame they had won, as most admirable managers of a Pic-Nic, by any second adventure. Entreaties for just such another day were either delicately evaded or adjourned to that more convenient season that is always so long in coming. Does the reader ask the secret of such unparalleled success? The day was fine, the fare was plenteous, the party happened to be well assorted, and each one had acted on the precept of Holy Writ—IN HONOUR PREFERRING ONE ANOTHER!