



### THE SEA-SIDE.

OW frequently are we reminded of the remark of Sir Walter Scott, in one of his letters, that he never felt the breezy breath of September but he yearned to be off to the Moors; and that, if deprived, for a whole season, of the smell of the wild heath and the tread of the crackling fern, he felt as though the best month of the year had been blotted out, and he himself cheated of his chief pleasure. This feeling is one in which we all more or less participate;

there is a season of the year when it becomes almost a necessity of our being to cast aside the trammels that bind us to cities; to lay down for a time our burthen of artificial habits and manners; and to behold the face of nature unveiled; luxuriating, like the good steed turned out to grass, on idleness and green pastures. Some, like our great novelist, choose the wide heath as the scene of their pleasant

pastime; others select the solemn wood and renew their acquaintance with mother earth in her hidden recesses; but more, far more, seek the broad ocean, as though it were only in contemplating its illimitable space that their spirits found true freedom. Amidst the rugged rocks, and apparent monotony of the scene, they discover a variety of aspect unknown save to the true lover of the sea and its manifold associations. It is to this genus of wanderers, we confess at once, that we attach our sympathy, and it is with their experiences that we shall have chiefly to do on the present occasion.

If we seek the verge of the "tight little island," on any side but the sunny south, we are reminded of our progress by the gradual disappearance of the woods, which are ill-supplied by the trim little coppices, studding here and there the breezy downs. But the downs themselves, how broad and pleasant

they are, shining alternately like emerald and gold as the sun gleams on them, and is again obscured by some passing cloud. See how the bright light irradiates the mighty plain, and how the shadow rolls away from upland and lowland, as though pursued by some invisible enemy. It is only in scenes like these, where there exist few fixed objects to cast a permanent shadow, that this beautiful phase of nature is visible in perfection; nor is the broad expanse without its still-life interest. Flocks of dreamy sheep wander at will, cropping the thymy herbage, and seeming to invite us to a life idle and pleasant as their own.

Sooth 'twere a pleasant life to lead  
 With nothing in the world to do  
 But just to blow a shepherd's reed  
 The silent season through;  
 And just to lead a flock to feed—  
 Sheep, quiet, fond, and few.

But we must linger no longer over the landscape, for the ocean itself is spread far and wide before us, smiling and dancing as gaily as though it held no guilty secrets in its bosom. Vigorous, too, and buoyant it is, as on the day of its creation, without one added wrinkle on its furrowed brow to babble of by-gone ages. Far away in the offing, a fleet of merchantmen are peacefully pursuing their way; bearing to other lands the produce of our own; whilst here and there a long line of smoke marks the track of some vessel independent of wind and tide. "The sea with ships is sprinkled far and wide." Groups of fishing smacks seem sleeping on the waters, the owners of which are silently plying their craft, like those of old on the Sea of Galilee before they were called to become fishers of men; whilst ever and anon some gay pleasure-boat is crossing and recrossing that line of light, but still "hugging" the shore, as though its best security lay in the sheltered bay.

Turn we another angle, and the town will be visible. There it is, rising terrace above terrace, on the face of the chalky cliff. What godly rows of clean

methodical looking houses! From the complete absence of verdure they cannot seem otherwise than garish, and matter-of-fact, although a profusion of green verandahs, jalousies, and striped sun-blinds affect to bestow a modest appearance upon them, and hold forth promise of grateful shade to be obtained within. In one of these domiciles, despite its deficiency in romantic attractions, we must be content for the present to take up our quarters, and as we are too philosophical to be fastidious, we will set up our staff at the first we come to. But, alas! that the indispensable negotiations as to terms, and the supply of plate and linen, with the additional directions for fish at breakfast, fish at dinner, and fish at tea, with which we do not fail to conclude the bargain, should occupy so much time: ere we have finished, the sea is at full ebb, and the renewal of our intimate acquaintance with it must be deferred until to-morrow. Who could be content, after a long absence, to follow its retreating footsteps, as though speeding a parting guest, instead of meeting with the boisterous welcome due to an old friend, feeling its salt breath on the cheek, and only escaping a closer embrace by a timely and dignified retreat. For the rest of the evening, therefore, we are satisfied with testing the comforts of our new home, resolving on the morrow, despite our solitary condition, to spend a social day amidst our fellow wanderers, and to see something of their occupations and amusements.

Who can be a late riser at the sea-side? Seven o'clock, and one half the inhabitants are astir, for the bright light and the sonorous cry of fresh fish have long ago banished sleep. In accordance with the resolution of last evening, we descend to the shore, and strolling leisurely along, soon find ourselves in the throng of the fish-market. The night has been a still one, and hecatombs of scaly monsters are heaped upon the beach; women and children are eagerly numbering what would seem to be numberless, and hastily packing the supply for London consumption. Railway vans are in waiting, the drivers of which are impatiently looking on, for the train is almost due. At length they are off, and the more immediate demands of the bystanders now claim the attention of the vendors. More than one gentleman of domestic habits is here to be seen who covets the distinction of buying his own fish, and who, choosing the largest as the best, will inevitably incur a reproof on his return home, for purchasing twice as much as is wanted. Amphibious-looking women, in blue petticoats, are gazing about in search of patrons for their bathing machines, and triumphantly direct the attention to certain indistinct objects which are disputing themselves at a little distance among the waves. Now and then a group of laughing children pass by; some piteous-looking wight, perhaps, among them, lagging behind with his nurse, and claiming our sympathy from his evident disinclination for the salt-water breakfast before him: despite his new sorrowful aspect, he will, by and bye, be seen with a cloudless brow and fresh roses on his cheek, for his duty of the day will have been accomplished.

Having had full opportunity of observing the features of the early morning employments, we bend our steps homewards, gratifying our curiosity on the way by occasional furtive glances at the family parties which surround the more or less well-spread breakfast tables. That the amusement is not a dignified one must be admitted; but the open windows offer temptations almost too strong to be resisted; and, in palliation of the impropriety, it may be added, that in a few minutes more we are cheerfully contributing in a similar way to the entertainment of strollers like ourselves.

The first symptom of activity after breakfast is a general adjournment of the gentlemen to the news-rooms, to read the newspapers. Here they encounter many fellow voyagers: the discussion on politics, commenced on board the steam-packet is now renewed, and the stranger of yesterday progresses into the acquaintance of to-day. Meanwhile, groups of ladies and children have dispersed themselves along the beach—for what new-comers to the sea-side can ever resolve to turn their steps inland? Some we notice with fine telescopes, eager to see; some with fine clothes, willing to be seen. Here recline a family of distinction, to whom the sea-side offers repose, after a season of excitement. Their dress is studiously plain: the morning *negligé*, the wrapping shawl, the coarse straw bonnet, with its rich ribbon; the well-tended children, and scarcely less well-tended lap-dog; the clean, foreign-looking books which they read, or seem to read; the work or sketch leisurely pursued; all breathe an atmosphere of repose and May Fair. Other groups there are, far more showy in external seeming; and well it may be so, for their gay season is but commencing, and the preparations which it has cost them weeks of thought and labour to mature, here make their *début* for our benefit. The children, too, are more gaily attired than their aristocratic associates. But at the commencement of life human nature is the same: the young lord and little master dig with equal fervour in the sand, paddle with the same delight in their miniature canals, and attach the same inestimable value to shells and seaweed. Now and then a mysterious-looking personage, half sailor, half landsman, is seen to approach and address the various groups. He offers French shoes, veritable eau-de-Cologne, and hints of matchless shawls which can only be exhibited at their own residences.

Between working, reading, chatting, and walking, the morning imperceptibly wears away; the children find themselves hungry, and are even willing to go home; the shore begins to wear a deserted appearance, for every one is on the move. When the claims of lunch or dinner have been duly satisfied, and an hour's grace allowed for rest, the flymen begin to look alert, and donkey chaises obtrude themselves successfully on the notice. Carriages full of animated faces are soon driving leisurely along the coast, whilst some of the oldest inhabitants may turn their horses' heads inland. A few well-mounted equestrians are visible, and many a young aspirant to a good seat and graceful carriage is taking her first "road lessons" under the eye of an experienced guardian. Nor must we omit, amongst the various resources for killing time at the sea-side, its libraries and bazaars. At this period of the day all are crowded with idlers, searching for

new novels or raffling for wax flowers which they never win. So pass the hour of the day, pleasantly and uselessly enough. The scattered branches of the various families do not fail to re-assemble at the welcome early tea-time, for no attention is here paid to the regulation hours of town life; all eat when they are hungry—which, by the way, occurs very frequently; and fashionable papa and mamma enjoy a substantial six o'clock tea with their little ones, undisturbed by the fear of detection, and the consequent disgrace which might attach to such an act at home.

The slanting rays of a glowing sun now proclaim that it is about setting, and this beautiful sight will prove an irresistible attraction to the meditative, the romantic, the poetical, and indeed to the enthusiastic of every description. We ourselves once more seek the shore, wander dreamily onward, thinking of the eyes that so long ago watched with us the glories of a scene like this; of friends far away, the estranged, the dead, till a merry laugh and the passing odour of a cigar snap the chain of thought; but the musing mood continues, and we turn to speculate on the group before us. It consists of two gentlemen on the sunny side of thirty; three graceful girls from five to ten years younger, and four children—a goodly family, were they all of one household; but this can scarcely be. The little ones are playing somewhat too harmoniously together to be brothers and sisters, and he of the light wide-awake is listening too anxiously and deferentially to the words of the dark-haired lady to be aught nearer than a cousin. But what is the subject under discussion? The donkey-boy and his mother are urging a lengthened ride for the youngest girl, who, whip in hand, has already taken possession of her Rosicante. There is apparently some objection on the part of the elder sister, but who could resist such eloquently-pleading looks and words? She has all but yielded, when the announcement of the boy, on the authority of the telescope, that what they supposed to be the smoke of the steamer is only a cloud, finally decides the question. Papa is not likely to arrive for some little time, so they start on their expedition, the elder sister going, of course, to take charge of the younger, and the cousin to keep watch and ward over herself. Meanwhile the black wide-awake, notwithstanding his listless air and attitude, will make the most of his time with the stately beauty. They will talk poetry, if not sentiment; she will listen to his words, and wonder that the same quotations never sounded so sweetly before; they will at last relapse into the silence that is eloquent, and the children will ask questions in vain.

We must linger no longer near them, but tread softly onward, lest the words of the poet which are on our very lips should break the spell which the gathering twilight casts over us all.

One evening as the sun went down,  
Gleaming the mountains bare and brown,  
I wandered on the shore;  
And such a blaze o'er ocean spread,  
And beauty on the meek earth shed,  
I never saw before.

I was not lonely: dwellings fair  
Were scattered round and shining there;  
Gay groups were on the green,  
Of children, wild with reckless glee,  
And parents that could child-like be  
With them, and in that scene.

And on the sea, that looked of gold,  
Each toy-like skiff and vessel bold  
Gilded, and yet seemed still.  
While sounds rose in the quiet air,  
That, mingling, made sweet music there,  
Surpassing minstrel's skill:

The breezy murmur of the shore—  
Joy's laugh re-echoed o'er and o'er,  
Alike by sire and child—  
The whistle shrill—the broken song—  
The far-off flute notes, lingering long—  
The lark's strain, rich and wild!

'Twas sunset in the world around,  
And, looking inward, so I found  
'Twas sunset in the soul;  
Nor grief nor mirth was burning there,  
But musings sweet and visions fair  
In placid beauty stole.

But such sweet moods the human mind,  
Though seeking oft, may seldom find,  
Or, finding, force to stay;  
Like dews upon the drooping flower,  
They, having shone their little hour,  
Dry up—or fall away.

But though all pleasures take their flight,  
Some few can leave memorials bright  
For many an after year;  
This sunset, that dull night will shade,  
These visions, which must quickly fade,  
Will half-immortal memory braid  
For me, when far from here.

In a few hours more the sea will assume its last and loveliest phase beneath the beams of the rising moon. At first we shall only suspect its presence from the glittering ripples of the expanse before us, but gradually the whole scene will be bathed in the cold silvery light; and innumerable stars peeping forth, one by one, will be reflected in the mighty mirror beneath them!