

JANUARY AND FEBRUARY.*

SHORT, dull days; long, cold, dark nights; snow varied with rain, the drops of which are as chilly as the feathered flakes; winds that roar and moan about our homesteads as if they envied us possession of the warm hearth, and tried to enter as they shake the doors and casements until joists and window-frames clatter again—are sure signs that Winter still reigns, and that Spring has yet a long way to come, through the cold, before she can reach us. Out of doors, except the sharp bracing air, which forces us to keep up a brisk walk, there is but little to be found, on a downright winter's day, that affords us pleasure. The fields are barren and silent, the hills misty and dreary, the woods naked and desolate, and the roads that stretch far away from the villages are all but lifeless; and sometimes, for a mile or two, you seem as if walking through a country uninhabited. The waterfowl send a piercing cry from out the frozen sedge amid which they are sheltered; while here and there you see a few fieldfares sitting huddled up beside the blackened and shrivelled berries in the hedges, as if they tried to mould themselves into balls of feathers, to avoid the cold. What few sheep are left out beat pitifully as they huddle under the naked pollards, and leave the frosted turnips to gather around the empty troughs which the shepherd will at night fill with more savoury fodder. All the sounds we hear, which tell we are not wholly companionless, come from the sportsman's gun; and if we see any other figure in the landscape it is such as our artist has drawn—some poor cottager gathering faggots to eke out the scanty sack of coals which the parish has allowed her, and make it last through the whole long winter. If we pass the hedger or ditcher he only asks what hour of the day it is, or continues his cheerless work in silence, wishing the day were at an end; while the woodman glances at the sky to see if it is beginning to darken. There is no ringing of children's happy voices in the lanes, no humming of busy insects in the air, no warmth in the brief burst of sunshine that lights up for a moment or two the melancholy scene, like a taper flashed upon the haggard face by some hand tending the dying.

Sometimes at this season the wind blows and the snow falls for long hours together without ceasing, and on dreary wastes and wild moorlands it drifts into waves that lay white and ridgy as a frozen sea when the murmur of all its billows is silent. Everything that is covered with snow has assumed a new form: the hedges look low, the stiles seem to have sunk, the outhouses are but sloping banks, and the hayricks in the fields seem diminished to a mere load or two where before they showed like goodly stacks, while the footpaths are more likely to stumble into a snow-covered ditch than find your way to the buried stile. At such times the village streets seem silent. Those who come out to the woodstack or the well hurry back again in a moment or two, while the rushing wind closes the door behind them with a loud bang. All out-of-door sounds are muffled; even the striking of the village clock, the ringing of a bell, or the far-off barking of a dog fall in a deadened tone upon the ear. The very waggon seems to move as if its wheels were tired with felt, recalling to mind the poetical image of the Psalmist, "He giveth the snow like wool," and you scarcely hear the beat of the horse's hoofs before the rider is upon you, almost before you have time enough to step out of his way. The warm breath of the cattle, steaming on the wintry air, comes upon you like the pleasant waiting of a summer breeze, as they are driven by to the village pond, or while standing in the midst of them in the strawyard, where, if not, they ought to have been sheltered three months ago.

A good farmer will get his cattle into the foldyards as soon as the weather is cold, for he knows that they only lose flesh if left out late, when autumn is wet and chilly. To prevent this he will begin to thrash his corn early, so that they may have a good supply of straw fodder, which, with from six to eight pounds of linseed-cake a day, will keep the stock in prime order; warmth almost adding as much to their improvement, as food, especially if cleanliness is attended to. A little over three-year-old steers and heifers, says a great authority, are to be preferred for stock. As there are tidy and slovenly housewives, so there are careless and negligent farmers: a glance at the strawyard or cattle-shed, like a dirty, unswep hearth, is enough to satisfy an experienced eye that neither pains nor care are bestowed there. From these come those half-starved, ugly, dirty, and miserable brutes that disgrace our fairs and markets, not having a limb amongst them that looks as if it had pastured in green England. They keep some great hulking fellow, who, with a fork over his shoulder, goes to the stack—the first thing in the morning, and nearly the last thing at night—from which he takes three or four forkfuls of fodder, throws it down among the cattle, to be either eaten or trampled under foot, and that is all they get, except a little water, during the twenty-four hours. If fodder is getting short, and they must be sold, they do, perhaps, get a little better food once or twice a day for a week or two before they are driven to market. Such feeding is like filling an empty bladder with wind, and then holding it up to show how full of fat it is.

A good farmer will also give his stock cake the first thing in the morning; after that straw from seven to nine o'clock, and a little bedding about ten; for when a beast has eaten what is needful it wants to rest, and will lie down upon the clean bedding at once, be it ever so little. Next to food rest is fattening. If he has chaff he will give them a little of that about eleven, and straw again at one o'clock, pretty plentifully, when they will rest, and require nothing more until supper-time. Attending to a score of beasts as punctually as this will not occupy more than two-thirds of the herdsman's time: the rest he will fill up with other matters. What little extra food they eat, together with the man's wages, will be doubly repaid in spring when the cattle are sold, for they will fetch a pound or two a head more than those a slovenly herdsman had been paid wages for having neglected, and which disgrace the markets they are driven to.

Bedding also given in this careful manner is well manured, while that which is taken into the yard by cartloads at a time, and left for the cattle to trample about and spread, is seldom half manured.

It is a good old saying, "A kind man is kind to his horse;" and all dumb animals, like children, soon learn to know who is kind to them. A rough, brutal fellow makes rough cattle. He strikes the animals under his care; then they attack one another instead of turning upon him, which would be a benefit to the owner, providing a kind attendant was put in his place. Quietness is one great essential towards the well-doing of cattle; they soon become accustomed to their attendant, and a kind man, who takes a pride in looking after his stock, goes amongst them, whether they are standing or lying down, without disturbing one; for such a man moves about almost as silently as his shadow. Farmers ought to be as careful in looking out for kind keepers for their cattle as their wives are in selecting kind nurses for their children.

* The Descriptions of the Twelve Months are by THOMAS MILLER.

As a good gardener is careful about his seed, so will a good cattle-rearer be careful about his calf. On good management a great deal depends whether or not it shall be made a first-rate animal or a stunted, misshapen brute, that becomes a disgrace to the breeder. Like a child with the rickets, you may put on splints and bestow all the pains you can after the mischief is done, but nothing will ever repair the first bad management. Good food and warmth are not enough, for these, without plenty of light and pure ventilation, will go but a little way towards producing a perfect animal. Light, warmth, and ventilation are too much disregarded, and the want of these is generally the cause of the disease of calves. Nothing flourishes that is excluded from sun and air, and if a calf is intended to be reared and to become a fine steer or heifer, it must be left like a child to scamper in the sunshine as soon as it is strong enough, and enjoy the great green world, which was created for all things.

As opinions vary respecting the time a calf ought to remain with the cow, we leave the question undecided, giving from a practical farmer his method of feeding calves. When the calf is a week old he scalds in two quarts of skimmed milk one large spoonful of wheat flour and one of "farinaceous food for cattle," and this he gives the calf twice a day. When the calf is a month old each sort of meal is gradually increased, and two quarts of water added to the skimmed milk; and in this way he keeps his calves for five months, the milk never exceeding four quarts a day.

Many farmers weaken and ruin their dairy stock by breeding with their heifers too young, forgetting the old adage of our forefathers, which says, "A calf at three right good will be," showing that they thought three years old the very earliest period at which a young cow ought to have her first calf. Good suitable food is cheapest for milk cows in winter, and the produce more than covers the extra outlay, to say nothing of the wholesomeness of the milk. The finest cheese is got where cattle feed off rich old turf; and it requires greater care in making than that from milk which cows yield that are fed on land richly manured, though on the latter the produce is greater. What care will do was shown at Canterbury, in 1860, in the twin heifers the Duchesses, bred in-and-in for many generations, one girtling 7ft. 4in., and in every way showing increased beauty. There was also exhibited the famous bull Royal Butterfly, which, though under three years of age, was 8ft. 3in. in girth, and was considered in many points superior to his far-famed namesake which realised £1250, and was shipped to Australia, for price is the last consideration with our spirited colonial breeders when such cattle are to be had for money. Now and then at a country fair a few superior animals are sometimes seen, owned by farmers who are unknown as breeders, but are soon talked about; for there are sharp eyes now in every corner of our island, and nothing that is good escapes notice long, though the breeder may not have "a handle to his name." Some will give a great price only on account of pedigree, though that has long since fallen into disrepute, not forgetting that the child does not always inherit the virtues of the parents, but through time becomes only "the tenth transmitter of a foolish race."

Perhaps a farm never looks in such miserable condition as during a cold thaw in February, when the snow has melted, though the frost still remains in the ground, causing the water to lodge on the surface. Everywhere there are slips, puddles, and ice. The sheep cannot find a dry spot to lie down on, and must have lairage at any cost, or they will be attacked with colds and other inflammatory diseases, which will hang about them all the summer, or, perhaps, not be got rid of at all. The ploughed lands are hard with ice and water in the furrows; as for the wheat, it makes you cold to look at it as it just shows through the frost-bound earth, amid patches of slush, puddles, and ice. Sometimes after a long frost and a heavy fall of snow, when a thorough thaw commences, the inland streams and narrow rivers overflow their banks, and for miles the long, low level lands will be flooded. Often the water will rise in a single night, and next morning the cattle be standing knee deep in it, and the sheep clustering together on every little eminence they can reach, while some are carried away by the current, and are picked up dead. A strange look has the once familiar landscape—all the roads under water, haystacks three or four feet in it, hedges only showing their tops, into which water-rats, field-mice, and many other little animals that had been washed out of their nests and burrows had swam for shelter. Then venturesome men would ride through the water and miss the road, and the horse would be carried off its legs and get into the strong eddies, and now and then both horse and rider be lost. Whole fields of turnips would be flooded and rotted, and the sheep, left without food, would have to be sold at any price; for in those old winters the farmers had not such stores of dry food as they have in these days, though five-year-old mutton—joints we never see now—were often placed on the table. And sometimes the low cottages would be flooded, and the inhabitants have to live in their little chambers for days together, while boats went to and fro to supply them with necessaries. We remember on one occasion seeing the fowls on the thatched roof, while the pig, which they had managed to get up stairs somehow between them, shared the chamber with the old cottager and his wife, until a butcher became the purchaser, when it was rowed away in the boat. And yet what heavy crops have we seen get during the following summer off lands that were flooded, especially if spring set in fine and warm. The quantity of spring-sown corn per acre was almost fabulous; and as for grass, it used to be a jocular saying that those who went in search of lost cattle among it, or to look after the mowers, had to climb into a tall tree and look down to see where they were, for that it grew higher than either heads or horns. The silt left by the subsided water made a richer manure than any farmer could put upon the land. Should the weather be favourable almost every kind of grain crop may be safely sown, especially beans and peas; but it must be a very fine February if barley is thrown in. Land for peas and beans requires 8 or 10 two-horse cartloads of manure to an acre, which should be ploughed in at the close of January or, at the very least, three weeks before sowing, for the frost will save a deal of labour in harrowing. Ten inches between the rows is space ample enough for beans, and, if the soil is good, six or eight pecks of seed is plenty per acre, for, when every plant is separate, almost every flower is sure to bear. Peas require more seed, as so many fall.

February ill-dike" was the distinctive addition given to the name of this month by our ancestors, so far back that we cannot discover its origin, showing that from a remote period it was marked by wet, melted snow, thaws, rains, and floods. But February departs not without leaving behind it some signs of the slow-coming spring. Here and there a few early flowers put forth; there are buds on the alder and the willow; the days are longer, and there is a warmth in the sunshine, and a stir of life among the birds that have wintered with us; while, more than all, the farmer is once more busy in his fields, and we again hear the cheerful whistle of the ploughman among the brown furrows. The lark, as if weary of the long silence that has reigned over the land, soars into the sky and drowns the plough-boy's whistling, as he rains down a shower of music that seems set to the words sung by Solomon of old, when he exclaimed, "The winter is over and gone!"

MARCH AND APRIL.

FULL-CHEEKED March blows so strong a blast on his windy horn that he shakes the building rocks in the tall, naked elm-trees, and causes the little lambs to run bleating for shelter to their dams in the bleak and daisyless meadows. Well may March come in grumbling and gusty when he sees how much work February has left him to do, in drying up the long leagues of land which he left flooded, so as to get it ready for the spring sowing, and to make firm and hard the high roads, which the rain and melting snow have almost left impassable. He wakes up the golden celandine where it lies sleeping on its bed of dead leaves beneath the hedges, and, shaking the pale primrose, bids it look up at the sun once more, instead of hiding itself among the withered stems that once bore the flowers of a spring that is numbered in the grey roll of departed years. He drops patches of blue, and red, and yellow, here and there, as if he tried to form such a garden as Spring in a month or two, in all the bloom of her beauty, will look upon, but succeeds not beyond scattering the bright blue of the ground ivy and periwinkle in places, making a mellow light with beds of yellow coltsfoot, and a faint, warm gleam with the red flowers of the dead nettle. The burning gold of the crocus and the white, cloudy edge of snowdrops are his richest border. March also lures the bee from its hiding-place by opening a little cluster of fragrant violets in some sunny nook, and just puts honey enough in the bellied baskets of the dazzling gorse-flowers to keep it murmuring about his ears until emerald-clad April comes tripping up and warns him that it is time to depart. The lark is now soaring and singing somewhere among the loosened silver of the clouds, under the unbounded and star-flowered plains of heaven; and the cottage doors and windows are thrown open to catch the comforting sunshine which comes streaming from the golden gateway of God "on the just and on the unjust."

Now there is a busy stir in the little gardens; spades, hoes, and rakes are brought from their hiding-places, packets of seeds hunted up and examined, for there is a primrose colour at times about the sky which tells that Spring is somewhere close at hand. Children are also there with their too ready help, finding great delight in feeding the fire—kindled to burn up the weeds—with the refuse winter has not soddened and rotted, or quarrelling at times about whose turn it is to ride in the barrow. We hear their happy voices while at play later in the village streets of an evening, and they are delighted to find that the days are warmer and longer. During the long winter nights they were packed off to bed at dark, to save the loaf and leave more room before the scanty fire, and there they laid awake for hours in the darkness. Often they only saw their father's face once a week, and that was on the Sabbath, for during those short dark days he had to go a long way to his daily labour, leaving them asleep when he arose early in the dark mornings, and not returning at night until long after they had been sent to bed. Deep amid the Hawthorn fence are found the eggs of the hedge-sparrow, as blue as the flowers of the forget-me-not; while on the spray hang myriads of tiny green leafbuds which made no show at all a week or so ago, but now put on their spring-green array altogether, as if determined to be seen. On the gooseberry-bushes you see faint glimmerings of as emerald-coloured light, while the alder-bushes that overhang the stream already throw green shadows on its surface. And there the great marsh-marigold will soon be seen, throwing a yellow light upon the water, as if from a lamp of transparent gold. The little, round, green, daisy-buds are beginning to knock under the loosened earth, that they may be let through, when they will soon shake their silver frills amid the swaying of the springing grass. The lute voiced blackbird and speckled thrush now call to and answer one another as soon as the first streaks of dawn crimson the eastern horizon. Before long the great company of feathered choristers will leave empty their old orchestras over the sea and come back again to sing amid the moonlight-coloured mayblossoms, the blushing wild roses, and the honey-filled trumpet-flowers of the woodbine that will then impregnate every wind that blows around us with their delicious fragrance.

Spring brings back again pleasant visions of angling, and while making preparation we recall the old familiar river-side scenes, with their pleasant windings, where the willows as they waved seemed ever as if whispering other-world secrets to one another, quiet jetties, that seem to stand and dream as they ever look down upon their great shadows in the water, and beneath which the choicest pike are ever to be found. Shadowy pools with their rustling sedge rise before us, and we seem again to hear the voices of the glad streams that go singing over bright beds of sand and gravel through long miles of pastoral scenery. The rustic bridge over which the trees lean, with its background of sky all mirrored in the water, once more stands out, and to the "inward eye" becomes a picture of never-fading colours; and with many such is the chamber of memory hung—a great gallery that we can ever look upon even with closed eyes. There we dream dreams and see visions while the float rides idly upon the water, and we seem to hear nothing but the lapping of the waves speaking in the voice which was familiar to those solitudes ages before the sound of human footsteps had broken the river-side silence. Then there was the budding trees to watch week after week while angling, to see how March first came and made green dots where the future leaves were to come, and how after his departure April watered the bursting buds with her gentle showers until at last they formed leafy bowers green and beautiful enough for Spring and her sweet sister Summer to dwell in.

By the end of April many a well-known tree will be in leaf; the beech will show its dark purple foliage, and the oak be hung with red-brown leaves that look as if they were formed of thin metal. The chestnut will have shot out its green fingers, and above the foliage of the lilac high up, as if looking at the sun, we shall see that dull red flush which tells that the upwood and closely-folded flower-buds will soon be in blossom, while the lime-trees show the most beautiful green of all the many varied hues of spring. The early budding blackthorns are white over with bloom long before a single leaf appears on the branch, nor will it be long ere the graceful birch throws out its long trails of beautiful flowers that droop like branches of waving gold. Among the earliest of our trees the stately elm puts on its spring attire, though none excel in beauty the laburnums, which look like Nature's foresters that wear her ancient livery of green and gold.

But lambs at play have ever been placed in the foreground as one of the prettiest bits in the great picture of Spring; and Bloomfield, who in his childish days must have noticed narrowly their ever-varying motions, gives a graphic description of their racing, and how when they are out of breath they pause for a moment or two until the darting of a bird, the fall of a leaf, or a breeze which scatters the petals of the wild roses, sets them running again, a little alarm spreading in the midst of their play. Few know what care and trouble the shepherds have during the lambing season—which often takes place very early in the year—and the many bitter cold nights they spend in the open air in the lambing-paddocks looking after

the ewes, which too often have to bring forth their young unsheltered, though five common straw-wattled hurdles are sufficient to make two capital pens—two forming the outside, while the middle one makes the division, and two others are placed one at the back and the other at the front, like a small "m" standing on a line with the top straight. The expense is nothing compared with the benefit both the ewe and lamb derive from so warm a shelter. On fine moonlight nights they may be left out in the paddocks, and so every now and then the pens be left empty to sweeten. Their lairage must be clean, and no tainted straw be left about. If the shepherd's cottage is not very near the lambing-fields a shed ought to be erected for him: for when the lamb is born he ought to be in readiness to cleanse its nostril and free the ewe's udder from wool, so that young Muttonchops may be able to "take a slight repast" as soon as he sees the light.

A breeding flock cannot be kept too quiet. Repose does a great deal towards keeping a breeding flock in good condition, and then they are pretty sure to have a good supply of milk, and without that no lambs can ever thrive. Cost of food ought not to be a consideration at lambing-time, and lambs soon show a change for the worse when the ewes are not properly fed. Many prefer lambing in turnips or among coleseed where the ewes were fed before, which is not to be objected to, provided the turnips are neither frozen nor decayed: that they have also a change of dry food and plenty of dry lairage, for cold turnips are but chilly beds for new-born lambs. Many losses have occurred through changing from turnips to swedes, for there is something in this changing from white to yellow-fleshed turnips all at once that injures both ewe and lamb, though what it is is hardly thoroughly understood. Ewes lambed in and kept to one kind of turnip generally do well if the weather is favourable and they are carefully watched and supplied with dry food as they require it. Lambed in grass lands, they must have plenty of cake, corn, chaff, cut straw, and milk-yielding roots carried to them daily, though some have given them mangolds when turnips were bad, and the ewes have thrived, especially if they have been used to the root before lambing-time. Nothing that a farmer rears requires more care and attention than his flocks in winter.

Young sheep should be turned over to their winter keeping as soon as they have eaten off the best of the hay and clover eddish, which will be about the close of September or early in October. They will be restless at first, and not take at all kindly to their winter food; but they must be broken in to eat it; and, as they have neither been allowed to suffer from damp nor cold, they will be all the stronger to stand this change of diet, which might affect them seriously if left out later in the year. Once get them to take to the turnips or coleseed, varied with cake and corn, cut chaff, hay, and cut straw, and autumn may close in as cold as winter: the weather will do them no harm, as strong food prepares them to endure it. As we once heard an old Lincolnshire breeder say, "It's like putting a pair of extra blankets on 'em." They must, however, when the weather is fine, be turned back into the eddish for a day or two before the season is too far advanced, especially at first: they will then return to their winter keep again with renewed appetite, having found the eddish is getting older and not so palatable as it was. When winter has set in they can have no such change, nor will they need it, as they will be thoroughly used to their new diet, which it is not amiss to give them a little of even before they are driven off the eddish in September, for a sudden change is not good. On coleseed sheep ought to have a large range, though it is best to begin with moderately-sized folds at first, lest it should be trampled down and wasted before half eaten, but they must not be kept there until it is bitten too close: if they are they are apt to overfeed and injure themselves when folded in a fresh piece. The best plan is to turn them back again into the old a little while, then let them re-enter the fresh fold and make a hearty meal and fill themselves the second time. A daily supply of turnips is best, and if carried to them they ought to be well washed and sliced, and the troughs kept clean, for the cleaner food is the more good it does them. Food ought also be given them at regular times, cake and corn first in the morning and last at night, the rations to be gradually increased. Dry lairage is as essential as food, and if they cannot be folded dry at night in the fields where they feed they must be driven to where they can lie down comfortably, or their food must be carried to where there is dry lairage. In very severe winters foydards ought to be erected: they can be run up cheap enough, as we have shown in the case of ewes, with straw-wattled hurdles made large enough to inclose a great number. When they are too confined a gentle walk now and then—like a gentleman stretching his legs to get an appetite—will do them good, and prevent them from becoming sluggish. They seldom get on too fast; the complaint is generally on the other side: we will endeavour to show why.

Swedes on the whole have for some years past been a failure, and mangolds, kohlrabi, cabbages, coleseed, common turnips, &c., have been grown as a substitute, though great complaints are made about the latter food not being healthy. This many attribute to the new artificial manures now in use, and experienced farmers argue that, no matter how bulky and beautiful these crops may appear, the sheep do not thrive so well upon them as they did on the food formerly raised by the old-fashioned farmyard manure; that the vegetables imbibe some nauseous element from the food raised on this new mixture, though what that is has yet to be proved; that young sheep fed on these crops are not what they were when fed on the old manured fields in former years; that the food is deficient of those qualities which made bone and flesh, and that they do not thrive well on it; that they are now compelled to give the sheep expensive food, containing, on the one hand, lime, chalk, and phosphate, to make bone, and, on the other, containing gluten, starch, albumen, and sugar, to make flesh and fat. There are scores of experienced old breeders who use the new manures and argue in this way when their young sheep do not thrive. If food thus raised is really pernicious, and farmers are compelled to go to extra expense to counteract these injurious effects, it is surely worth while to have a careful analysis made of crops grown on the new and the old principle, to find out where the evil lies. It is heartaching to see lambs that have done well all summer and autumn pining away on food which, in our eyes, looks wholesome enough, but nevertheless contains something deleterious and no doubt in the end destroys hundreds of young sheep. This must be looked into. Last year (1861) a trial commenced with different breeds of sheep on the Porlington estate, to see which are best adapted to the soil of the district. Before turning them out into the sixteen-acre field the sheep were all weighed and numbered, and 600 hurdles put up to divide the field into two-acre plots. The sheep consisted of ten Cotswolds, twelve Leicester (pure Sir Tatton Sykes blood), ten pure Shropshire Downs, the next Lincolns, from each of which 15lb. of wool was clipped; also a cross between the Leicester and Cheviot, and another lot between the Leicester and Teeswater. All these were procured from first-class breeders, and the result of the feeding trial will, no doubt, lead to considerable change in the plan of rearing. One division of the field contains a single sheep from each lot, which will all be fed alike.

THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON ALMANACK FOR 1862.

MAY AND JUNE.

MAYBLOSSOMS and wild roses droop for long miles along our field and lane hedges, and fill the wide air with their healthy perfume during these beautiful and pleasant months. Everywhere we see flowers in bloom. The meadows are white and yellow with the children's favourite garlands, while some of the grasses already display their fathered heads, telling that before long the early mower will be there with his sweeping scythe, and leave them all a withered heap. Even then, from their dead beauty, we shall enjoy a fresh delight, for every wind that blows will be scented with new-mown hay, mingled with the fragrance of bean-fields in bloom, which of an evening they will waft into our city streets, as if to tempt us to visit the sweet places they have swept over. The young lambs bleat strongly and cheerfully; the green corn sways to and fro with a pleasing motion; the happy birds are singing all day long; the bees go about telling one another where to find the sweetest flowers; while the long leaves whisper low tunes to themselves, which the streams pick up and repeat as they go rippling through the knee-deep pastures where myriads of flowers bend from the banks to look at themselves in the clear, bright waters. Nature has now put on her most beautiful attire—a green so fresh, and bright, and new, that her mid-summer drapery will look dusty, and shabby, and faded compared with that which she now wears. We hear the ringdove cooing from among the cool shadows of the dark fir-trees; the milkmaid chants some love-song as she rests her head against the red cow's side while filling her pail beneath the overhanging elm-tree; the labourer in the next field whistles some merry tune, and there is a joyous ringing of children's happy voices in the hidden lane, where they are busy dragging down branches of mayblossoms, for everywhere the air around is filled with music. While listening to these joyous shouts we think of the thousands of children who are pent up in city streets and stired in hot factories, who never saw the hawthorn waving its milk-white buds, nor heard the rustling of brown harvest on the breezy uplands; who only know it is spring through hearing the cry of "Primroses!" In the dirty streets and alleys where they dwell; and can tell when it is summer only by the days being long and hot, and autumn because they sooner darken, while winter they feel through every bone.

What beautiful situations some of our old English villages occupy, showing, however little our forefathers studied the picturesque, they had a fine natural taste for quiet, shady places, as many of our grey country churches testify. Some we find looking from the distance as if they extended into the woodland behind, so thickly is the receding road overhung with trees which bend over the thatched cottages that are covered with richly-coloured mosses and lichens, amid which the stonework shines like gold. Between the stems of the trees diamond-shaped lattices and whitewashed walls throw back a pleasing light from the sunshine that comes streaming in through the branches, telling where cooling shadows sleep at the close of day. Even the paths that fence in the garden are richly covered with silver, green, and gold coloured liverworts, such as an artist would hesitate about transferring to canvas, less such gaudy hues should be thought unnatural. Those timbered tenements, that are only divided from the churchyard by the narrow highway, are very old, and numbers must sleep in that green resting-place who once inhabited those ancient cottages where a few paces only divide the living from the dead. The sound of the organ and the voices of those who join the village choir must be almost as distinctly heard in those low rooms as in the church. Those old windows must have looked out upon hundreds of christenings, weddings, and funerals; and Beauty, with her long hair blowing about her sweet face, have rested her arms on the window-sill as she gazed on some bridal party, wondering how long it would be before she should be led to the altar. There, too, when her hair was grey, she sat and watched them burying the dead, while the voices of her grandchildren at play fell harshly on her ears, and perhaps she thought they would be just as merry when she too was borne over the way, and the tramping of their little feet would echo over her grave. Further on, surrounded with rustic seats, stands the aged oak in the centre of the village green, which time out of mind has been the mustering-ground for rustic gossip; and where young and old still assemble on fine evenings when their labour is done. And there, while you listened, you might hear tell of who had done well and who had done ill, who had got up and who had gone down; while of the dead they ever speak kindly, whatever their faults might have been while living. For in a village they sooner miss one "whose place knoweth him no more for ever" than in a busy town. Some little child is never again seen in the street—some pretty maiden no longer crosses the way—you never again see the old man who was accustomed to stand in the sunshine by his door; there is a something wanting—a something gone, and for days after you cannot help seeing the empty place. They look with kindly eyes upon the resting-places of the departed, seeing only what awaken good and charitable feelings, and thinking how in many things they were more to blame than the poor departed.

The grey old head has long been laid low that planned that rustic stile which is so difficult to clamber over. They tell how he spent hours in selecting that crooked piece of timber for the upper bar, which has caused so much laughter through the many that have tumbled over it. Lovers, in their uncouth way, have whispered soft words there as they handed over their sun-tanned lasses; and those who were giddy girls then, but are grey old grandmothers now, still laugh as they tell how the young buldier's first sweetheart fell head over heels as she attempted to pass it, and how she never spoke to him afterwards, but was seen walking that very same evening with his rival. And now they both lie where the shadows of the overhanging elms sweep over their graves, and his memory will be kept alive while ever A wkward Stile stands. Further away in those green solemn lanes there are hedges so high and old that only fire or long labour with the axe could clear a passage wide enough for one to pass. You cannot see through them during the leafy month of June, and there the birds build securely, for no arm can reach their nests; they spread so wide and are so deep that the centre is almost dark at noonday. And behind those ancient hedges that inclose the lane there are pleasant walks which here and there branch off to far-away farms and sequestered cottages, where you may see pretty faces peeping through the lattices, round which roses and woodbine twine, seeming to flourish nowhere so well as in those peaceful solitudes that almost look pure and beautiful enough for angels to dwell in, so far removed are they from the fever and the fret of busy cities.

The song of birds and the flush of flowers give a voice and a look of beauty to spring and summer which autumn, with all its changing and diversified foliage, cannot attain. And never does the face of the country appear more beautiful than now, when the corn is beginning to ear, the wide landscape is covered with flowers, and most of the graceful grasses still remain unmown. The air is all alive with the hum of insects, and one might fancy that passing bee had just made himself a golden belt out of the yellow of the buttercups—that yonder white butterfly had been slivering its wings among the frills of the daisies, while the dragon-flies had stained themselves blue through winging

their way in and out among the forget-me-nots that seem ever to stand gazing at their own shadows in the water.

What a happy life young colts seem to pass when they are turned loose in a large paddock, and left to run wheresoever they please, and amuse themselves according to their fancy! Sometimes—to use a country phrase—they seem ready to jump out of their skins with delight, like children that have no knowledge of the troubles they are born to undergo. The horse is interesting from many points of view; he has been an inhabitant of the earth through long ages of which we have no record, and grazed beside the mammoth and the mastodon in the fields of an old world which the voice of man had not then penetrated. Beside finding his fossil bones amongst those of extinct animals, we also discover them in ancient mounds among human remains, showing that the horse was buried with his rider. It is on record that among the early inhabitants of our own island it was a custom to bury the warrior on his war-horse, by piling the earth high over both, even beyond the point of the spear which the hand of the dead hero upheld, and that the horse was there slaughtered as a sacrifice to the manes of his master. To kings only were equestrian statues allowed, and no other animal was considered worthy to support their marble memories but the horse, who, no doubt, often better deserved a statue than his royal rider, having fewer vices to answer for. Rarely says the horse has been the servant of man above four thousand years. The Numidians rode him in ancient times, without either bridle or saddle, and guided his course when at full speed by only placing a light rod between his ears. Less than half a century ago French ladies of rank sat their horses astride like our English foxhunters. All British boys love horses, and the promise of a long-tailed pony is often the reward of our story-books which begin with "John Jones was a good boy, who did not tell lies nor kill poor flies." Boys in the country learn to follow the hounds over rough-ploughed fields on little ponies, which is like riddling them down into a firm seat, so well are they shaken into the saddle. Our English gentlemen are the best and most fearless riders in the world: the hunting-field has made them such.

There are people—may their shadows never be less!—who raise a loud outcry that foxhunting is a sin, and that the money spent on keeping hunters and hounds would, if properly applied, convert as many brethren as it costs to keep hounds. The great rifle movement is now finishing what foxhunting began; and who can tell how many young farmers have joined that loyal force through making the acquaintanceship of their wealthy landlords at the covers side? Foxhunting has done more to promote good fellowship amongst classes that otherwise would seldom have been brought together than anything beside, except the present volunteering. In the hunting-field men soon learn to understand and appreciate one another. All the half-and-all indoor meetings would never beget that familiarity which men of the upper and middle classes show to one another under the blue sky, in the free, open air, where joke, quiz, and retort are banded about like a ball for "all to catch who catch can." The poor man remembers the smile of the squire when he runs to open the gate which the old hunter could no longer leap, and repeats the few kind words he said to him to all his neighbours. There is seldom much rick-burning in a hunting country; for there the rich and the poor are found on a far more familiar footing than in places where the gentry keep themselves secluded. Nor can there be any doubt that, if racing and hunting were abandoned, we should soon cease to produce such horses as are now the talk and envy of almost all nations, and that make our cavalry the finest in the world.

Every horsebreeder knows that it is more expensive to breed bad horses than good ones, as the outlay is just the same; and unless good colts are reared the loss is very heavy. A colt cannot be reared for five years for a less outlay than eighty pounds if justice is done to it; and it must then be a riding-horse of some value only to bring back what has been expended on it. It is four or five years before any breeder of riding-horses can realise—a long time to keep stock compared with cattle and sheep; and should the horses then turn out worthless the loss is ruinous. Half a dozen brood mares, that breed pretty regularly, produce the most troublesome and least profitable stock that a farmer can rear, unless the colts are good; and for this there must be good sires and good mares. Racehorses are not what are wanted. Breeding such is putting in a lottery where the chances are a thousand to one against drawing a prize. It is not so with good hunters and roadsters. So long as they are strong and sound, with good pace, action, and power, they are sure to pay, and find a ready market. That good racehorses never make good riding-horses is well known. Bred for speed, they have been taught to go on their shoulders, and have none of that level action which makes a good riding-horse. They are not what are wanted for general use, nor are they a class of stock that pays; strength must be obtained, as well as blood, to make good riding-horses.

From thorough practical men we have ascertained the cost of keeping horses in good condition. One of them gives a horse 2½ bushels of bruised oats a week, at 3s. a bushel, and 10st. of hay, at 4d. a stone; which costs 10s. 10d. per week. Another allows his the same quantity of oats and hay, and adds half a bushel of boiled corn, making the cost 12s. A third gives only 2 bushels of oats, 7st. of hay and the same of straw, with 2st. of boiled beans, costing 11s. 6d. A fourth, by cutting the hay and crushing the corn, is able to keep a horse well on 10s. 5d. a week. The last, which is the highest, expends 13s. a week on keep; which amounts to fifty-two half-crowns a year, if we take 10s. 6d. as a sufficient outlay. One farmer allows each working horse 36lb. of food within twenty-four hours 14lb. of bruised oats, the same weight of cut hay, and 8lb. of cut straw, which he says, "is sufficient for any farm-horse doing a fair day's work." He also adds, "By feeding with the cut food in the manner I have mentioned, it will be properly ground by the horse (not bolted whole); health and condition will be improved; and only about half the time of the horse will be occupied in feeding, which will give him so much longer time to rest."

About the diseases and proper stabling of horses we have no need to write, for there are works on the subject whose names are legion. Were half as many books written on the best means of nursing and curing poor labourers, and showing how to build the healthiest and best-ventilated cottages, we should have hope that the day was drawing nigh when poor men would be as well cared for as horses. "I should think myself a king," said a poor cottar once in our hearing, as we were looking at a nobleman's stables, "if I had such a place to live in as that ere horse. I wonder how he would like my old tumble-down hut!" We answered that a dumb animal could not take care of himself, nor could he strike work very well if used badly. As to the secret of taming mad horses, has it not been made known by the conqueror of Cruiser, who whispered it to his followers for a consideration, as Miss Bilksuffit whispers our character through the post after we have forwarded her a specimen of our fine Roman hand, along with a few queen's heads as a refreshment? Some say it is oil of rhodium, others that it is the tincture of tidlywink, while our north-country farmers' wives say "It is shinn-sham, such as their great-grandmothers gave geese when they saddled and bridled them."

JULY AND AUGUST.

Now is the time to wander into the country and lie idly on some green hill-side, or under overhanging boughs whose leaves make a dreamy rustling overhead, not unlike the sounding of the sea. Many of the birds are gone, but the fields are filled with waving corn; many of the summer flowers have faded, but the orchard trees are hung with ripening fruit and the land is filled with plenty. Instead of the singing of birds we shall soon hear the joyous shouts of "Harvest Home!" and see the golden grain safely garnered.

Who has not been awakened in the grey dawn of dewy morning, while staying at some pleasant farmhouse or roadside inn, by the rough "rasp, rasp," of the mower as he sharpened his scythe, and, withdrawing the blinds to look out, seen him, divested of coat and waistcoat, hard at work in the field where he will have cut down half an acre by the time we are summoned to breakfast? There lie the summer flowers in a heap to be dried by the sun, the globed clover in which the bee was murmuring, and all those beautiful grasses which to a common observer appear the same, though, when closely examined, they will be found to vary as much in form as one flower does from another. It is from these grasses that man has obtained by cultivation wheat, barley, and rye; and, though the quantity would be small, we can still get grain that makes good bread from the grasses that grow wild in our fields. The scented vernal-grass, which gives such a sweet smell to new-mown hay, only grows about a foot high, has short leaves and a close-packed panicle of flowers, and is of such a rich, pale golden hue when ripe that it is called the yellow-grass flower. The pleasant scent it throws out lies in the yellow spots which mark the flower-valves, which are as compact as an ear of wheat, instead of hanging in drops like the oak-grass. All the vernal grasses are fragrant, and where they are not grown there is none of that rich aroma in the hay which it is so pleasant to inhale. The grass which nothing will kill, which we try to destroy with quicklime, salt, and even boiling water, is the common annual meadow-grass that sheds its seed eight months during the year. It grows everywhere, even in the backyards of crowded London, if there is but a pinch of dirt between the stones for it to lay hold of and drag its head through. Cattle are very partial to it, and it is reckoned one of the sweetest and healthiest grasses they can eat, and is the most abundant of all grasses. Our best grazing-lands are covered with it; for, as it is too short to make hay, it forms a rich, dry turf, for its numerous fibres draw all the nourishment out of the earth within reach, and all on the surface also, in which it finds support. Another grass which sheep are very fond of is the fescue-grass, generally found on poor lands that have a hungry look, especially when it is in flower, as the stems grow rather wide apart. But, poor as it looks, sheep get fat on it, as there is good eating below, and it forms such a strong, thick turf as at times to destroy all other grasses that grow beside it. As it only grows a few inches high, it is much used for lawns, where, through being mown and rolled, it has a green, cheerful look, very different from what is seen on the high, dry grounds where it is left to flower. The meadow fescue, which grows as high again as the sheep fescue-grass, is generally sown for grazing lands.

There are several grasses which to look at when growing appear all alike, but when cut off and laid side by side the difference between each is easily seen. Such are the foxtail-grasses, all of which have round heads, and which are so common that no field hardly is without them. On examining them minutely, we find the slender foxtail has a purple tint, and is much longer in the spike than the meadow foxtail; while the latter is also of a golden-green hue, and is covered with silvery-looking hairs; and the floating foxtail is bent at the joints, as if pinched here and there to prevent it from growing straight. Thus it will be seen that each has a distinct feature of its own; and, when we add that there are already above two thousand varieties of grass known and named, it will not be wondered at that out of so great a number there should be some resemblances. The crested dogtail is a pretty grass, and grows well on poor, dry ground. It is not round like the foxtail, but when in bloom is more like flat-sided barley. Rough cocksfoot-grass, which cattle will not eat, if they can get any other, while it is green, makes excellent hay, and grows everywhere where there is room enough to thrust up its rough-tufted panicle. It is the same with the meadow soft-grass: cattle will not eat it unless they are forced, though few grasses are more beautiful when in flower, there is such a rich mingling of pink and pale green, with a bloom like an apricot on the panicle. It has also a fibrous root, and will grow anywhere, though it flourishes best on a light, peaty soil. Another grass which cattle do not like, and which spreads like couch, sending out underground shoots four or five feet in length, is the creeping soft-grass, which pigs are very fond of rooting up. The turfy hair-grass, though beautiful to look at, with its rich purple panicle in bloom, cattle always avoid, unless starving, as it is very coarse and tough. As it makes itself a hillock, mowers almost dread it as much as a stone, it makes such havoc with the scythe. But our commonest and most useful grasses are the rough and smooth stalked meadow-grasses; for the rough will stand the smoky air of cities, and to it we are indebted for the many bits of green which give such a refreshing look to our dusty squares and streets; while the smooth is the first that gives a green look to spring, and comes "before the swallow dares." But even these grasses can only be found in their full beauty in moist meadow lands or beside our pleasant English rivers. There are many varieties of these meadow-grasses, some of which grow on our mountains, in woods, and even along the seacoast. One (the reed meadow-grass) shows grandly among the reeds and flags that form the sedge by our watercourses, often growing to the height of six feet, and a famous cover it forms for our wildfowl-shooters in the fens and marshy meres, where it overtops the tall bullrush, and, like it, often grows in the water. Another grass which grows equally tall is often seen in our hedgerows, where its drooping panicles of beautiful flowers, nearly two feet in length, shine like silver. This is the oat-like grass, so like the cultivated oat that many do not know the difference. As for its leaf, nobody in the land ever wore a ribbon that equalled it in beauty. It catches the hue of every shifting light, and is gold and green, silver and purple, seeming to change every time it waves to and fro. There are also the smooth, hairy, soft, and barren oat-like grasses, nearly all of which grow tall, and give great variety and beauty to the wild flowers and foliage of our hedges, amid which most of them grow. The wild oat-grass often grows among cultivated oats, and they are so much alike as to require close examination to discover the difference.

And from these grasses, though we know not which, have sprung up the ripe harvest that now whitens the land, through a system of cultivation which in its earliest stages is lost to us. Only the other day a crop of oats was found on the site of an old Roman cavalry encampment in Lincolnshire, through which a ploughshare had not before been driven for centuries, which, instead of growing in long drooping panicles like our common oats, were globular, like onions in flower and seed, though the grain was larger than what we now grow. The spot on which this strange-looking crop sprang up has always been known as the Roman Encampment. Curious wheats have also been found in ancient tombs and other places which bear but little

resemblance to the crops now grown—all proving a progressive cultivation. And this corn-bearing grass will soon cause a busy stir throughout the length and breadth of our wave-washed island, where sun-tanned reapers will be at work late and early in the fields; the comely maiden throwing aside her russet gown as, with sickle in hand, she takes her place beside the strongest and sturdiest son of the soil. The poorest villagers feel as great an interest in the state of the harvest as the wealthy landlord, for, though but gleaners, they have, like the birds, a small share of the crop, and a fine full ear is no more trouble to stoop for and pick up than one that is blighted; and, like Boaz of old, many of our noble-hearted British farmers allow their poor neighbours to glean behind the sheavers.

What prettier sight is there to be found in the whole wide world than the corn-growing fields of England engirded with hedgerows that are trailed over with the last summer flowers, and blackened and reddened with no end of beautiful berries, while great green pastures and wooded uplands go spreading out between? It makes the heart of an Englishman leap with delight to behold those wide, sea-like patches of wheat all whitening and waving their billowy heads in the breeze, while clouds sweep over them like shadows of ships on the ocean, or like the wings of some great angel that has come to crown the land with plenty. We hope the day will never come that will see England convert her rich fields into grazing-grounds, and have to depend on foreign nations for her whole supply of corn. It would be ungrateful to the Giver of all good things not to be glad and thankful for a plentiful harvest; for all know, and none better than our farmers, that the success or failure of the crops rests with a higher power than that of man. The produce of the mine, the loom, the quarry, may be depended upon while labour can be found, but it is not so with corn and cattle, for a blight may come suddenly, and, in spite of all that man can do, spoil all that he trusted to for feeding himself and his cattle. There are also wide seas and terrible storms to encounter before the food he requires can be brought from other shores; and no living soul can say when the ship is laden that she will reach her destined port in safety. Man can neither protect his growing crops nor his ships from the fury of the elements. Pleasant is the shout of "Harvest Home!" and may our island be submerged when it ceases to be heard, and its farms and homesteads and pleasant pastures be sunk "deeper than ever plummet sounded." We like to hear the rustling of the laden harvest-waggon along our green lanes—that sweeping sound which no words can convey to the ear, which is like the rushing of water or the fall of rain among the summer leaves, and is caused by the overhanging sheaves grazing the high trees and hedges, a sound to which the creaking of the wain harmonises, and the tramping of the horses seem to beat time.

In Herrick's time, he tells us, the reapers crowned themselves with ears of corn when they carried home the last load from the harvest-field; that the horses were covered with clean white linen, and the sheaves decorated with branches of the oak; that at the harvest feast, after they had toasted the maids who wore "wheaten hats," they drank success

To the rough sickle and crook'd scythe.

We are glad to see that there is a revival of these old English merrymakings, for they draw the rich and poor closer together, and, as Irving says, "blend all ranks in one warm, generous flow of joy and kindness. . . . for one of the least pleasing effects of modern refinement is the havoc it has made among the hearty old holiday customs. It has completely taken off the sharp touchings and spirited reliefs of these embellishments of life, and has worn down society into a more smooth and polished but less characteristic surface." Washington Irving might have gone a step further, and have added that, when these good old festivals ceased, that warm, friendly, and almost affectionate feeling which existed among the poor tenants and labourers for their landlords died away, and there was then a deep gulf between them.

And now we are about to plead in favour of the poor, despised ass. Do those, we wonder, who ill-use this patient and useful animal ever think of Him who "sat thereon" when He entered Jerusalem? He was the companion of the patriarchs of old, shared in their journeys, and bore their burdens, and is frequently mentioned in the Bible. Look at him! What endurance there is in his meek face; what intelligence in his mild eyes! We have seen scores of brutish-headed fellows in our day who had not half the intellectual expression in their countenances which we have noticed in a beautiful ass. How faithful, too, he is to his master; and how he pricks up his long ears when a kind, encouraging word is spoken to him! Many good people in the world are called asses because they leave the dainties to others, and fare hard, suffer, and are patient; labour and never murmur; studying the good of others instead of wishing to gratify themselves; and from such asses, it is our faith, rise many of the saints that will sit in the high places of a future world. In our "inward eye" we have often pictured him grazing about the tents of the grey forefathers of the early world, while their daughters—with such faces as tempted the angels to fall—rode on them through the flowery fields of Palestine in the golden mornings that have for ever departed. He carried figs and grapes and olives between the mountain passes, and pretty he must have looked when covered with such luscious burdens. His iron-grey colour harmonises beautifully with the green of our lanes and the crimson of our fern and heather in autumn. As for a gipsy encampment, neither the tents, the red cloaks, nor the swarthy countenances would look anything if the picture was not made Oriental by putting in the ass. That the ass came from the East is certain; but that the original from which our meek, patient sufferer descended was the wild, untamed zebra is not so clear, though some naturalists have laboured hard to prove that it was.

"There was a lover and his lass" once strolling with an old friend in the neighbourhood of London when they came to a common on which was an ass and her little month-old foal. The friend took up the tiny colt in his arms, and, as the young lady had just returned from the seaside, placed it at her feet, as he said, "A present from Margate, miss." With a quiet smile the lady patted the pretty foal, and said, "Yes, I see; and also with the usual motto—

When this you see,
Remember me."

The presenter evaporated, and was never known to offer such another gift.

The merriest scene at a country race is when the donkeys run. Who does not remember seeing the winner forced along by the crowd of boys behind, who sometimes fairly carried him off his legs to the winning-post; while the one that ought to have won, after having tossed his jockey over his head, had bolted out of the course, and was shying his heels in the faces of those who were attempting to capture him? All children are partial to asses, and many a pretty picture have we seen in our day where two or three rosy darlings were mounted on the gentle animal's back, the ass nibbling at the grass by the hedgeride, while the children were wholly buried in the wild roses they were pulling down over his head.

SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER.

SUMMER now sits with her head resting on her hand under the fast-fading leaves that embower her, and as she watches them fade at her feet one by one feels that her time has come, and that she must soon die. She sees the dark green curtains that she hung up to shelter the birds while they built and sung rent and falling, letting in patches of light, where all before was cool and shaded, and revealing the empty nests—deserted tenements—from which the sweet singers have fled. She no longer hears the lark in the sky, and knows that it sits *grieving* somewhere, hiding itself; no cuckoo calls from the tree, and, as for the silver-voiced nightingale, he has deserted her, and gone away in search of some other Summer over the sea. The robin and wren sit looking at her with little eyes rounded with wonder, marvelling why she does not depart when the hawthorn berries are beginning to redden and the sloes and bullaces to blacken in the

Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.

When Summer looked up and saw the tall hayricks rising like altars on which her feathered grasses and fragrant flowers had been sacrificed, and beheld the bulky stacks where the golden harvest was garnered, and thought of the provisions she had made for all that would be left behind, she became more reconciled to her departure, as she felt that she had not left a duty unfulfilled. She knew that her sweet sister Spring would do all she could for her to make her return pleasant when she again woke from her long sleep, and wished that she could do the same for Spring, instead of leaving her to come all alone through the cold and naked domains of Winter. So Summer laid down and died, and Autumn, sighing as he stood over her grave, covered it with leaves whose colours were as beautiful as her own choicest flowers. But there is an immortality in everything that Summer has once touched: even the seeds that blow off her faded flowers only arise to look round for a new bed to lie in, and wheresoever they fall there will spring up a new generation of blossoms. Time may mow them down, and bury them for ages in the earth, and they will spring up in the same place in other years and look as fresh and beautiful as when they first shook their bells in the morning light.

Days are now shorter and nights longer, and, though there are times when the sky looks more blue and beautiful than ever it did while bending over the sweet violets of spring, yet the giant Wind is ever coming by fits and starts, as if to show that he is on the watch, and sending up whole hosts of leaves flying before him like a routed army; he makes the woods roar again with the blast of his loud bugle, as if to warn us that we are drawing nearer to those dark gates which will soon close upon the year. We see the leaves dashed with crimson like the hectic flush on the cheek of the declining maiden, too beautiful to last long, and we know that the branches will soon be bare and the foliage lie withering on the graves where the summer flowers are already buried. In the fields that echoed back the sound of human voices, and were filled with busy figures, silence now reigns. We no longer meet the milkmaid with the pail poised on her head and her skirt drawn through her pocket-hole to keep it from dragging in the dewy grass, nor hear her voice chanting some old ditty between the hedgerows. The flocks we meet in our evening walks go by beating reluctantly to the fold, for the nights are growing too cold and damp to leave them afield. The bees seem to fly along wearily, as if wondering how much further he will have to go before he reaches the next flower, for he no longer finds so many resting-places, where honey was plentiful, as he did a few weeks ago. The red-breasted robin, scarcely seen amid the flame-coloured leaves, alone pipes a low ditty to the bee as it passes, as if to say, "Never mind, I am still here." The swallows have become restless and uneasy, some of them appearing like anxious parents who are about to embark, yet cannot get all their family together, so are compelled to linger by the water-side, and scold the scouts who keep coming in without bringing with them the remainder of the passengers.

After a warm summer swallows leave earlier than when the season is cold, which is, no doubt, caused through insect food having been more plentiful, making their young ones stronger and sooner able to undertake the long journey, which lies before them than they could have done had it been a backward summer. No doubt the state of the weather operates in the same way on their return, and that they arrive here earlier or later as the season is backward or forward at the point whence they start, for they can know nothing at all of the state of the weather here until their arrival.

Now the thatcher is busy at work, if the farmer has been so fortunate as to save straw enough out of his last year's harvest; if not, thrashing must commence at once, for it will not do to leave cornstacks exposed to the weather without a covering. The sheaves had better be left in the fields than carted away and pressed together for the rain and damp to get at them, as they would dry in the shocks if they got wet in the field. No farmer leaves a stack unthatched a day longer than he can help after the sheaves have once settled down; and an unthatched stack has a slovenly look in a rickyard, and not a very tidy one when finished, if a slovenly thatcher has been employed, who often leaves the stack as if a thousand rats had been gnawing it. The good thatcher leaves his work as smooth and finished as a well-built house, shaving off every loose straw with an old scythe, and giving it such a pretty, neat look, with its yellow sloping roof, that, were it hollow and not so big, you would like to carry it off, and, having a doorway and window made to it, place it at the end of your garden for a summer-house. Farmers are more careful of their straw now than they were in former years, when it used to be pitched out of the barn into the strawyard by cartloads at a time, to the great delight of the pigs that buried themselves under it, and went to sleep after having eaten all they could. Pigs have no such times of it now, and it is a good thing they cannot be made to understand how sumptuously those pigs that saw "the light of other days" fared, or they might revolt, and strike against making bacon.

Their remote ancestors had many privileges which they can never enjoy; for Doomsday Book is filled with accounts of the large freeholds they were entitled to roam over, as all who lived on the borders of the forests had the privilege of turning in their hogs to eat the "mast," as the acorn and beech nuts were called, which fell from the trees in autumn. This custom still exists in a few remote places which have not yet been disforested. Hogs were not then kept only for bacon, for the boars were hunted even by kings, and preserved by "most biting laws," and many a noble horse has been ripped up by his terrible tusks; for he was the most dangerous animal that was hunted in our old English forests. A law was passed by William the Conqueror that any one, not having a Royal license to hunt, found guilty of killing a wild boar within forest boundaries should have his eyes torn out; and it was difficult to tell what were the forest boundaries in those days, as they were only marked by some hoary oak, pile of stones, a mill, gravel-pit, or such like objects, that often laid miles apart, while the distance between each landmark could either be claimed as forest land or not, for a mile in or out; and vindictive forest-keepers often persecuted those who lived on the borders of this disputed territory, even when they were innocent. There were wild boars in the New

Forest in the time of Charles I.; and, according to Manwood's "Forest Laws," these cruel enactments were in force up to the reign of Elizabeth.

The plan pursued in the present day of feeding swine in the forests is—as many as can be collected from the neighbouring farmers are placed under the care of a swineherd, who drives them into the forest and looks after them while there, taking care, at least once a day, that they have plenty of water; and when this is found he tries to keep them near to it all night, so that they may drink their fill again before setting out in search of the mast, which makes them hot and thirsty, but is very fattening. A shilling a head was the price formerly paid for swine turned into the forest, and attended upon during the season of autumn. The Rev. J. G. Wood, in his "Illustrated Natural History," says:—"I have seen pigs sucking cows while lying down in a farmyard, nor did the cows attempt to hinder the pigs from sucking." Farmers will do well to keep a sharp look out after these new milkers. As pigs will eat almost everything that is given them, we need only say that the best method of fattening them is to give them plenty of food and keep them clean. Good food is produced from meal, mangold, and swedes. The roots should be boiled or steamed, and when boiled the meal stirred well in before emptied into the troughs. If the roots are steamed they should be reduced to a pulp, and well mixed with the meal as they are emptied into the cooling-trough. If bran is added it should be well mashed first in boiling water. In our younger days barley-meat, boiled potatoes, and a few beans to create thirst, was considered the finest food for fattening pigs; and there is no improvement in the bacon since artificial food has been used. There was a sweet, wholesome, country smell about the troughs in those days.

Though Autumn has but few flowers to wreath around his brow, and his violets, which flower late, are scentless, yet he is crowned with berries as beautiful to look at as the costliest stones that were ever set in gold or silver. The woody nightshade, with its deep purple petals and rich golden anthers, bears berries of the deepest scarlet, not unlike the red garden currants; while those of the woodbine are of the same rich hue. Both the leaves and berries of the guelder-rose shine like a fire in autumn, while those of the wayfaring tree are also red before fully ripe, when they turn black. The spindle-tree, though attracting but little attention in summer, makes a splendid show in autumn, when the seedvessels are as beautiful in colour as our choicest roses, causing the tree to appear as if covered with bloom, when the capsules separate like the petals of a flower. The bird-cherry, with its rich bunches of fruit, is another beautiful shrub, but the clusters, which are first green, change to red, then to the dark purple (almost black) of the grape, and are nearly as luscious to look at; nor is there any harm in the tempting fruit if eaten moderately. The dogwood, or wild cornel, bears a dark purple berry, while the branches are of a deep red colour, which, together with the foliage before it wholly decays, makes a rich picture of mingled gold, green, crimson, and purple, unlike almost any other shrub that grows. It is called in some places the fairy-tree, though it is but a shrub. The privet, with its great bunches of black berries, make a grand show at this season of the year, and retain their rounded fullness long after the hips and haws are withered, thus affording food for birds when there is little else on the hedges. But the most curious of all berry-bearing plants is the butcher's broom, as both the flower and berries grow out of the very middle of the leaves. The fruit, too, is almost the size of cherries, and make a beautiful show in winter, and we wonder, as the plant is an evergreen, that it is not more used in our shrubberies. For a Christmas decoration it is more beautiful than holly, and remains longer green.

But chief of all is that old English fruit, the wild blackberry, which the cottage children gather to make pies and puddings, eating all the time they are out, and smearing their pretty faces with the juice. There must have been a time when these and a few other wild berries, with sloes, bullaces, and crabs, were about the only fruit that grew in our island; for we never can fancy England was without its trailing wilds of brambles. What pretty, out-of-door pictures have we seen of children blackberrying, with their torn frocks, battered bonnets and hats, and healthy, rosy cheeks—sturdy little things, with their long hair hanging over their faces, through which their bright eyes peeped out as if from under a veil! The bramble-rose is also a beautiful flower, nearly the last that blows, for we find fruit and bloom hanging together. The petals are like satin, nor do we know anything beside that bears such a large quantity of fruit. We have seen whole hedges covered with blackberries, both green, red, and ripe, so close together that scarcely a leaf anywhere was visible. Blackberries also bring to mind the good and godly old ballad of "The Dabbs in the Wood." The dewberry bramble is difficult to distinguish from the blackberry when ripe, but when in flower the difference is easily perceived, as the bloom has the same rich blush as the wild rose which makes our lanes and hedges so very beautiful at the close of spring. If the berry is held in a favourable light, it will be seen to have a rich bloom on it like a plum. The dimples or divisions of the berry are also larger and not so numerous as those of the common brambleberry. On heaths and moors in the lake districts is found the mountain bramble or cloudberry, seldom more than a foot high. The fruit is a beautiful orange colour when ripe, and is considered a most agreeable acid. Like the wild raspberry, the stone brambleberry is red, and as acid as the mountain brambleberry. As for the wild raspberry, it grows almost everywhere; and our old country wives say the cultivated fruit, which is derived from the wild stock, is not to be compared with it as a preserve. From the wild strawberry the one in our gardens has also been obtained, though now grown ten times the size of the original. The bilberry is a beautiful little shrub when covered with its rosy, waxlike flowers. On the berries there is also a rich purple bloom, like that on grapes; and they do say that those who have eaten them with cream are never again heard to extol strawberries. Birds are fond of this berry, and epicures say that game fed on it has a richness that nothing else resembles, so exquisite is the flavour. Who that has been where it grows does not remember the little cranberry, the very fairy of shrubs, bearing fruit though it only stood three or four inches high, as if purposely grown for Titania and Oberon to reach without climbing? We cannot fancy that those now sold at the shops have either the same appearance or flavour as the cranberries we ate in our boyish days. Is the art of preserving lost? or, in this money-loving age, is the cranberry sacrificed for the sake of cheapness, putting anything with it that will make it keep? Shop jams, pickles, and preserves we carefully avoid. They have neither a wholesome look nor taste, unless purchased at some little shop in the country, where the old woman will tell you all about how she prepared them and how little profit she gets. But such as is made by the great wholesale manufacturers, where they shoot into the copper fruit by the cartload, and boil down the hoghead that contains the treacle—hoops, dirt, and all—we carefully eschew by passing the tart and waiting for the cheese. The whortleberry is the last on our autumn list, and beautiful it is to look upon before fully ripe. It has on the sunny side a bloom like the peach: this goes off when the berries are thoroughly ripe, for then they are scarlet. They are eaten with game that is "very high." Pigs also are fond of them.

NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER.

AUTUMN has now shaken down all the faded leaves that have so long hung trembling and withering on the branches, and November, with puffed cheeks, is busy blowing them before him into ditches and under hedges, and damp, low-lying places, to rot under the frost and snow, rain and darkness, of the fast-coming winter. Though sky and earth look saddening, there are myriads of unseen fingers at work placing the fallen leaves over the sleeping flowers to shelter them from the bitter blast and the black frost, until they again feel the warm breathing of spring, when they will throw off their light covering, and once more open their beautiful eyes to look at the sun. Sometimes, after the late autumn rains the meadows lose their withered and arid look, and for a few days assume the refreshing green of spring, though not a flower can be tempted out to show itself through that treacherous covering which one night's frost may blacken and destroy and leave not a vernal trace behind. The cattle stretch their necks over the fence of the foldyard and seem to wonder why they are kept there, eating dry hay and out straw, while such pleasant pasturage lies before them; and sometimes the farmer will let them out to eat their fill of the short eddish; but when night comes they seem glad to go back to the foldyard, with its warm, dry straw, for the wind blows not there so cold and cutting as it did through those open and naked hedges. Either the sound of the thrasher's fall or the clank of the machine is heard from morning till night, and we almost wonder that a fowl is left alive, so close do they venture to the impending danger while pecking about the thrashing floor. The flower-garden is a waste; for, if there has been a frosty night or two, and after that rain and fog, the chrysanthemums look as if they had been boiled and thrown away, and only the rosemary shows some sign of life that promises soon to be in flower. In the kitchen-garden the high banks of earthed-up celery and the parsley borders show long trails of green, while the kale, brocoli, and savoy are valued more now than all the tender green of summer. While the wind blows without the thrifty housewife consoles herself within doors with the knowledge that she has neglected nothing; that all the delicate fruits which would not otherwise keep are preserved, that the more hardy are stored up in dry places. She looks up with a smile at her great hams and fitches, sees the onions hanging in nets beside brown, dry bundles of sage; knows that the stubble-fod geese are safe in the strawyard; that she has but to give orders for one of the fattest to be killed; to uncover some of those potatoes which when boiled are like flour; to go into the storeroom for an apronful of apples for the sauce, and soon there will be a savoury dinner on the table that will scent the whole house.

The storm without may roar and rustle,
She does not mind the storm a whistle.—*BURNS.*

In the sheds and round about the farm there are oxen, sheep, and pigs, fat and ready for the Christmas market, and her husband is out looking after them, and seeing that nothing is neglected, for he hopes to obtain a prize with that pretty round heifer, and knows that that handsome steer is sure to be commended; for he has already won medals of gold and silver, and knows almost to a pound how much flesh he can put on the back of his prime shorthorns without destroying their symmetry. He will take a rule, and show you that the forelegs of that pretty heifer are sixteen inches apart; point out the beauty of her eye, her handsome head, light bone, and, while you feel the meat that is on her, you begin to think of red fires, girdirons, rump steaks and shalots, dishes of mealy potatoes, and a foaming jug of his own good, strong, homebrewed ale. But, perhaps, there is already a sparerib before the fire, for there were signs of pig-killing near the large outhouse, and that, sprinkled with sage, and those melting mashed apples, are a capital makeshift on a cold November day. And those prize pigs! what, we wonder, will the cooks do with all the fat? Cut them up, take the bones out, and put the fat into bladders; which we almost think would pass for lard without any other preparation. And yet they say every bit of a pig is good—from his bone to his chop, either as pickled pork or cured bacon: even his ears, his tail, and his chittlings are liked by some, eaten hot with mustard. For our part, we should prefer the sheep. Who has not heard of "a leg of mutton and trimmings" or sat down at this season of the year to a "leg-of-mutton supper" with a great dish of mashed turnips, as much as the strong-armed maiden could carry in, and another of potatoes, a third of greens, that made the table creak again when set upon it? Every here and there "boats" of caper sauce are sailing about the great white sea of tablecloth, steering in on this side between the turnips and on that between the Mont Blanc of snowlike potatoes. Not a man round but what can eat a pound and a half of solid meat, and drink a quart of ale with it. Were they weighed before and after supper the difference would be many pounds. One or two may burst now and then, but, as for bile or indigestion, they are never troubled with either, and the survivors think that is a great comfort.

Very often countrymen will come miles to one of these suppers, but few like to go back again by themselves when the night is dark, rainy, or windy. They know who lies buried under the post where three cross roads meet, and who is said to "come again at twelve o'clock at night," and chase late wayfarers as far as the gibbet-post. And those gibbet-irons do swing and creak, and seem to send out strange unearthly sounds over the darkness, causing a timid man, when he can hardly see an arm's length before him, to look "nine ways at once," and hardly to know which he is pursuing. Strange tales could the old village carrier tell, were he so minded, of what he has fancied he has seen and heard when journeying slowly along those lonely roads alone, sometimes in the dark, at others with the lantern hanging from the front of his tilted cart, which seemed, in snowy weather, to throw sheeted ghosts on the embankments with its shifting light, awful enough to have made him set off for home and leave his heavily-laden, slow-paced cart behind him. He has heard chains rattle as he passed old ruined stables, and seen trees take strange shapes as they appeared to walk on before him; knows who was sitting in the church porch he passed—though the person was in bed all the time—and was not the least surprised when they told him for whose death the passing-bell was sounding, as "he expected it before." He knows where murders have been committed, and has seen blue lights burning over the spots where the murdered are buried. Though the remains have never been discovered, yet he "could point the very places out if he liked, as them blue lights only burn there."

How anxiously his arrival is looked for at the village on Christmas Eve, when he has so many things to bring that are needed for the morrow—for many a Christmas pudding is depending on the safe return of the old village carrier; and he never disappoints his customers, for "slow, but sure," is his reply when they complain of his late arrival. Then he has such a dog! To hear the old man talk you would almost fancy that there never had been his equal before. He attributes his safety to his dog, and has left it in charge of his cart for hours together—"Keeper will let any stranger put anything he likes in the cart, but only

let him try to take it out again, that's all!" And he tells how a young grocer once put a basket in by mistake that ought to have gone by another carrier, and how Keeper pinned the grocer and held him fast until he came up and liberated him.

He can tell you all about the many rare and valuable dogs that for years have been intrusted to him to deliver at hall and manor house, rectory and grange. He still takes a great interest in them; and says, "I get many many a cup of ale when I have to leave parcels at them 'ere places, for asking after the good health of the dogs I have delivered." Then he will tell you of the trouble he had with the little white bull bitch; how she dragged at the rope he tied her to under the cart until she wellnigh hanged herself, and how he quite pitied the poor animal; and if there was a mile or two of road to go with only an odd horse here and there he let her at liberty and she trotted beside him like a little lamb; how at last they came to Farmer Strowson's bull-field, when she made one dash through the hedge and had his great black bull by the nose, "Hey! before you could say Jack Robinson; and if you'd seen her hanging on and the bull running round the close, roaring as if he were stark staring mad, and trying to throw her over his head, then stooping down to trample on her, then butting at the ground with his horns, then setting off again roaring, while he couldn't get rid on her a no how, 'yn' would never he forgotten it—no, not if you'd lived as long as Metheweyswulm." Next he tells you about that little terrier that was such a one for rats, and how the farmers used to come and borrow it when they were "overrun w' the nasty varment;" of the spaniel he was taking to the squire—that got away, and swam the river, and was home again at her old master's, twenty miles off, before the next morning; of the "little black 'un" that they were forced to send away again, as it flew at every cat it saw, and went bang through the Rector's study window after the cat he saw inside, killed the cat, and broke the globe of gold fishes, "beside smashing an owl jar that he'd had remains in of Romans, or someutt or another of that kind, and had cost a sight o' money;" how he took a real old English bloodhound to the lord of the manor because he had had no end of sheep stolen, and though he offered a great reward, could not discover the sheepstealers anywhere; when, after he got the bloodhound, and when more sheep were stolen, the dog scented the footsteps of the thieves, tracked them to where the carcasses of the sheep were hidden in a sawpit in the wood, then round and back again to the village, and up to a cottage where Black Ben the poacher lived, and where the marked sheepskins were found hidden under the thatch—and how "Ben an' another thief as lodged w' him was both transported for life, and the squire acted like a feyther to the thief's wife and bairns after he was sent away, an' made young Ben his head gamekeeper." As for the greyhounds he has delivered to gentlemen, according to his account, they almost outrun their own shadows, "and won every manner of thing at the coursing matches that they tried for." He has no end of stories about the wonderful sagacity of shepherd-dogs, which, he says, "can do owt but talk; though I think they do that at times—leastwise so that sheep can understand 'em;"—of how they have driven flocks of sheep from one place to another, while their masters have remained behind drinking, or kept them at the tollgate for an hour together without allowing one to pass through until the drover came up;—of how they made the flock turn either to the right hand or to the left, only through barking, also clearing the way for a vehicle to pass by running about on one side, and seeming to say, "Now, then, silly sheeps-heads, do you want to be run over?" and that they know what the dog says, and all scamper on the other side of the road, "like old boots." Then he has a story about another terrier, a real Skye, "that was sich a one for poultry, whether it was alive or dead, cooked or trussed ready. He would have them if they was comeatable anyhow." He tells how his old woman, as he calls his wife, went of an errand one evening for the squire's good lady, with a piled-up basket of delicacies for a young lady that was ailing—fruit, preserves, cream, eggs, butter, and at the top a couple of beautiful young fowls. That the Skye terrier was sitting at a window over the kitchen, "between lights"—that is, when it was neither light nor dark—and she, seeing him with his long white hair hanging over his face, took it for an old man, and asked him what time it was, when, instead of answering her, he poked out his head (no doubt the white cloth had partly come off), and took up the couple of fowls, which were trussed and tied together, in his mouth. That his old woman called him all the "thieves and rogues she could lay her tongue to, and said he would come to the gallows, in spite of his grey hairs." Then she knocked at the door, and when a young woman opened it, asked her if she had a grandfather with grey hair, and when she replied she had, his old woman up and told her that he had stolen a couple of fowls out of her basket, to which the young woman replied that was impossible, as he had been bedridden for years. That when she pointed to the window they looked up and saw the dog crunching one of the fowls; "and so it all ended through them paying for the poultry, and my old dame getting laughed at for being such a goose as to take a Skye terrier for an old, grey-haired grandfather."

So the old carrier jogs on merrily his way from year to year, moving like a clock, whatever may be the weather, and doing his best to amuse his passengers by telling them all about what he has seen and heard during the forty long years he has been the village carrier, "along all that line o' road." Not unmoved does he carry messages of comfort and tidings of sorrow, for many of his customers cannot write, so tell him what they have to say; and if it is good news he delivers it with a smile; if sad, with a sigh. Nor do the tears of the old man lie deep down; and many a time they have delivered a melancholy message when his tongue refused utterance. On the dry, barren highway, covered with summer dust, between the bare hedgerows in winter, when the roadside streams are frozen and the water-flings cut like swords if you touch them, he plods along his way, never increasing his speed, for he argues, "The old horse likes his own pace best, and it lasts longest." But they do say that at Christmas time, when he has so many parcels to deliver, at almost every house along the road, and has to drink the healths of such a number of his customers, to "wish them all a merry Christmas, and plenty of 'em!" he gets a little tol-of-ish, and keeps on "Gee-ing!" and "Woa-ing!" his horse from one side of the road to the other; that the wheels leave zigzag marks, and it is quite evident the old man cannot see straight;—that when they tell him of it he only laughs, and says, "Well, well, the road did seem a bit crooked now and then, I own; but Christmas only comes once a year." What tales he will tell you of the Christmases that were kept fifty years ago, in his father's time, when they were forced to have a pair of horses to the cart. "Such a cloud of currants, and raisins, and candied peel, and sugar, as we did bring in them 'ere old times of a Christmas! it was a sight, sure-ly!" There is one spot on the road at which, on his return, he always steps his cart, and takes off his hat, if it is light. It is there the spire of his native village first comes in sight. Does he mutter a prayer? Does he think of the dead that lie around it? No one can tell; for when asked why he does so, his answer is, "I suppose it's a way I've got."