

JANUARY AND FEBRUARY.*

NOW Nature's great Gallery of the Seasons is hung everywhere with grand and solemn-looking Pictures of Winter. We see Winter on the bare, treeless, windy Wolds, whence the flocks and herds have long since been driven, and where even in Summer they but picked up a scanty sustenance;—Winter sleeps in the low-lying Valleys, where the watercourses are frozen and the small icebound craft lie idle by the silent wharves, while not a sail is seen between the rime-whitened embankments that wind their way to the little riverside towns;—Winter on our dreary Commons and wide, open Moorlands, where the fallen snow has obliterated every trace of roadway, and there is neither hedge nor shed to shelter the belated traveller who moves slowly along with head bent, while the keen cutting wind makes his teeth chatter again;—Winter lying white and cold on spots which Murder once reddened; under ghostlike guide-posts where, without burial rites, Suficides are interred; and where strange nocturnal sounds are often heard, such as never break upon the listening ear of Day;—we see Winter overhanging with a leaden weight the high hilltops, where the dull grey clouds lie at rest until loosened by the rushing blast—when they sweep along like escaped maniacs with tattered garments streaming in the wind. There is now a roar like a whole wilderness of hungry lions by the sea where the maddened waves spring upon the bald-faced cliffs, and ships are as helpless before the storm as withered leaves in an Autumn gale. That roar is echoed back inland from the dark woods, where the great trees wave to and fro all night long, and gnash their knotted branches together as if in agony. The New Year is cradled in cold and darkness, and rocked by the loud-blowing winds of Winter.

Many have argued that there would be more harmony in the divisions of the Seasons if the year commenced with Spring, and was marked by the budding leaves and putting forth of flowers. Had they watched the movements of Nature narrowly they would have seen that there is a stir of life in the out-of-door world as soon as the shortest day has passed unless checked by a keen frost, which would retard the growth of everything were the year even a month or two advanced. The lengthening of the days is a natural beginning of the New Year, as it was in that undated epoch when time first began by dividing the light from the darkness and "calling it day." So may time be said to begin again with a new dawning in the lengthening of days. How naturally the year seems to grow out of the short, dark days as it brightens out into the green of Spring, and expands into the full, flowery Summer, until the golden sunsets of Autumn redden the misty and shortening days, while far beyond the steel-blue ridges of Winter show dim and cold, behind which the Year will wane and die, to reappear once more brighter and brighter as it springs from its December grave and slowly expands into a new Summer! Those who want to see Winter wearing its wildest aspect should traverse the grey wolds, lonesome cliffs, and solitary marshes of Lincolnshire when they are buried under a vast winding-sheet of snow, for then the long, level space at the foot of the hills lies white and silent as a frozen ocean whose shores are uninhabited. The ridgy heights look like a city of the dead long ago built of the purest marble, but seeming as if they had stood for ages still and deserted, and that those white, unlettered monuments were all the dead had left behind for us to wonder at—the cry of a wild bird or the moan of the houseless wind being all the sounds that break in upon the silence of the solitude. It was not safe to venture across the wild unenclosed marshes, when the frozen streams were covered with snow and all lay smooth and level with the land, without bestriding a long rail, so that if the ice broke beneath you the rail was a support, and there you might sit up to the hips in the fast-freezing water for hours together without a human soul appearing within call, while the tufted plover went wailing and sailing round your head, and you saw the wildfowl screaming between you and the setting sun. If you escaped and night came down, there were only the frosted reeds and sharp sedge to shelter in, and there you might lie down and be frozen to death, and remain many a long day without any living soul discovering you; for such things have often happened.

Many of the animals we occasionally catch glimpses of in our Summer walks are now asleep. Some have stored up food in their little granaries to be in readiness against they awaken, or to last until they are provided with a new harvest. Sudden changes from cold to heat often cause our hibernating quadrupeds to awaken in mid-winter, and but for the food they have stored up they would be sure to perish, while this foresight enables them to recruit their strength, then sleep on until the warm days of Spring tempt them again to search for food in their former haunts. The dormouse and harvest-mouse lie coiled up in a ball, and when found in this state of deathlike sleep may be rolled across a table without being awakened. Nor is it easy to get a stir of life in the hedgehog while hibernating, unless it is placed close to the fire. But the long-tailed field-mouse keeps the best-stored Winter larder, and as much food has been found in its nest as would fill a peck measure, consisting of corn, acorns, various seeds, and even potatoes. Hogs sometimes root out its storehouse, and make but a few mouthfuls of the whole provision. The pretty squirrel also lays up food, often in several places, for it passes a great portion of the cold season in a torpid state. Bats, too, seek out dark places, where they cling to whatever they can get hold of with their claws, and sleep with their heads downwards, one overlapping and clinging to the other, like a swarm of bees when alighting, and a score or more have been found thus hanging together. Other animals, which are rarely seen on account of the many hiding-places the thick clothing of green Summer affords them, are now visible; and we often see the stealthy fox, the long-bodied ferrets and weasels, out hunting for prey, while the beautifully-shaped marten seeks for birds among the naked trees, availing himself like a skirmisher of every hole, knot, tangle of moss or ivy that affords shelter, until he can securely mark out his victim. Birds, also, which at other times seldom venture near human habitations, may now be seen hovering near our homesteads in search of food when the weather is severe. We see them flying in and out the sheds, pecking about the stables, searching the thatch, and thrusting their little beaks into the crannies of old walls, examining decayed posts and fences, peeping into the hollows of trees, searching for food where cattle are foddered, and for insects near springheads, which are the last watering-places that freeze, however cold the weather may be; and in these places, especially under dead leaves, they find numbers of insects to feed upon which we rarely see flying abroad in the chill Winter air. As for the robin, he is our Winter nightingale, and cheers the solitude with his song, even when the wind is strong enough to blow him off his perch and turn his feathers over his little head. His warm red breast is the richest bit of colour we see in all the wide landscape, except the crimson hollyberries. Many of his low notes are unsurpassed by birds which have won greater fame as singers, and are the most delicious out-of-door music we hear at this season.

Who while walking out in Winter among farms and villages has not noticed the strange expression in the faces of young cattle when they stoop to drink at the usual watering-place, and for the first time find it frozen over? We have often fancied the eyes of a wild Indian that had never looked on ice would wear the same strange wondering expression if in stooping to quench his thirst he met with an obstacle as cold and hard as marble, instead of the soft-yielding fluid he had been accustomed to. The older cattle, that have experienced one or two winters, only low and turn their heads in the direction of the farm, as if they knew some one would soon come and break in the ice, as usual, to enable them to drink, while the young ones keep putting their mouths to the chilling ice, which they dim with their warm breath, and howling pitifully, not understanding at all why they cannot drink as usual. Numbers of fish perish in the ponds for want of air, which they would obtain were holes broken in the ice. Frost does not prevent the mole from digging underground, for the harder it freezes the harder he works, for he must follow the worms however deep they may go if he wishes to live, and they will make their way lower down than the frost penetrates. Besides being a great eater the mole is a very hard drinker, and how he manages to get his usual load under his smooth, velvet-like coat when all the water is frozen has puzzled many a wise naturalist, for if he tapped the stream low down under the ice he would be drowned in his own tittle. The mole is always fat, no matter what the weather may be.

Though Nature makes but little show of life in the beginning of January, yet, if the weather is fine, we see signs of her stirring by the end of the month. Foremost among all her flowers is the snowdrop, the herald of Spring, scarcely distinguishable, but for its straight-veined, long green leaves, from the snow on which its white bell-shaped blossoms often rest. It is found wild in many places in England, and in warm, sheltered situations flowers as early as it does in a greenhouse. There are said to be but three or four places known in England where the crocus grows wild, not but what a few may be found scattered here and there, where chance has thrown them, in many spots, but nowhere saving in these few limited localities can they be found covering whole acres of ground. The meadows at Nottingham are, perhaps, the largest grounds covered with wild crocuses in England, or rather were, before the railway cut across this ancient land of flowers; yet in all that space we never once found a yellow crocus, for, excepting a few nearly white, all were lilac-coloured; and a pleasing sight it was to look over all these wide acres of meadow land soon after the snows of Winter had departed and see it purpled over with countless myriads of flowers. But it is the golden-coloured crocus that gives such warmth to the snowy borders of Winter, making a sunshine on the ground in February, when a large bed of them are growing together, and seeming to give back gold for gold when the sun streams down upon them. Another golden-coloured flower, which is sometimes found in bloom in February, is the celandine, often mistaken by country children for the buttercup, although the latter seldom flowers until May. The large bright green leaves of the celandine are among the first to arrest the eye under sheltered hedgerows in Winter even before the flowers appear, so prominent does the dark green stand out amid the surrounding nakedness. Then the flower itself is very beautiful, often displaying nine golden-coloured petals, and, excepting the crocus, making one of the gayest shows in the wreath of Winter. It is often the only green thing we see peeping out through the piles of dead leaves that the wind has drifted under the hedges. The blue periwinkle is also during warm seasons found in flower in February, and, though growing wild, is not very abundant. Very pretty does it look with its blue bud twisted up like an unopened convolvulus; and to come upon a patch of ground lighted by its early flowers cheers the heart like a blue opening in a dull, leaden-coloured sky when it is the only bit of blue that is seen; and country people say that while there is as much blue seen in the sky as is big enough to make a pair of breeches there is hope of it turning out a fine day, no matter how rainy it may have set in. Another flower that blooms on the edge of Winter is the common red or dead nettle, nothing to look at among the showier flowers of Spring, but beautiful when examined closely as a lip-shaped flower. How airy its red hood seems propped up by the stamens! Then its cleft, bell-shaped calyx, which can only be seen by holding it up, is as graceful as the leaf of the plant itself, which can hardly be surpassed for beauty of form. Look at this common weed, as it is called, through a glass that magnifies moderately, and you will ever after place the dead-nettle among the choicest of flowers for beauty, small as it is. There you will see rubies imbedded in the richest velvet, as such jewels ought to be, and never pass this common wayside wild flower again without thinking what a rich floral treasure you have had pointed out to you. The common coltsfoot is another Winter flower which blooms before it puts forth its leaves, and is out of flower by the time they make their appearance. Like several other compound flowers, the coltsfoot is composed of many florets, each perfect in itself and furnishing its own separate seed, just as the dandelion does, the down of which we disperse at a breath, and send abroad what will produce scores of flowers. This flower covers miles of our railway embankments, along places where it was rarely seen until the new road was made. The ground ivy, which is not unlike the form of the flowers of the dead-nettle, may be seen in bloom very early. The leaves of this pretty plant shoot out in pairs at the base of the blue-eyed flowers, as if forming a green cushion with scalloped edges for the delicate bloom to rest upon. Rosemary, which figured so largely in the festivals and funerals of our forefathers, flowers in Winter. The winecup was stirred with it before drinking to the bride and bridegroom at a wedding feast. It was also borne before the bridal party to church, and used for decorating the marriage-bed. Nor was it omitted from funerals, though in spite of the many allusions to its having been used both at weddings and funerals in the works of our old poets, we are at a loss to discover the reason, for Herrick only tells us that it "grows for two ends"—marriage and death; but gives no further explanation. It was grown extensively in English gardens in the olden time, and used for many purposes. Chickweed, which belongs to the order of stitchworts—those grand-looking, star-shaped, clear, white flowers that throw such a light around the green shades of Summer—is often found in flower in February, in sheltered places that catch the warmth of the sun. But the chickweed that blooms so early soon disappears, and is replaced by the broad-leaved mouse-ear, another variety that sheds its seed some six or seven times within the year, during which all these new crops flower, amounting to myriads if they have room enough to spread and grow. The stems of this chickweed may often be found half a yard long, and it takes some time to count all the flowers one single stem contains. There is also a pink-coloured chickweed, almost as beautiful to look upon as the pimpernel, and another kind that bears bluish-purple flowers.

By the end of February we see signs of Spring on every hand. Where there was only a show of brown buds a week or two ago there is now a pale flush of yellowish green, such as we see in a primrose, so faint that at a distance it looks as if a sunbeam had gilded the branches. Draw nearer and you see these tiny brown buds now dotted with green. Spring has touched them with her delicate pencil, and will come round again soon and form them into perfect leaves, so that they may shelter her opening flowers, which will be seen everywhere.

* Descriptions of the Twelve Months. By THOMAS MILLER.

MARCH AND APRIL.

PLEASANT is it now during a country walk to hear the sharp, bright, plough-share whistle through the moist soil with a sound that seems in keeping with the loud March wind; to see the bright, clean-cut earth lying furrow above furrow, like the clean ridges which the receding sea leaves on a brown, level beach; and to inhale the smell of the new upturned earth which is as healthy as sniffing the ocean. Pleasant is it also to watch the sower as, with his corn-hopper before him, he scatters the grain with a regular swing of the arm, to which his measured footstep keeps time as true as the beating of a clock, while the daring rooks follow high upon his heels, or sweep down close above his head, as if meditating a descent on the corn he carries. May we be forgiven—for the sake of the birds—for wishing that the farmer had to eat just enough of his own grain to know what the anguish is if he has steeped it in poison to kill the rooks, for, of all Spring sounds, except the childlike bleating of pretty lambs, none rings more cheerily upon our ears than the cawing of a rookery. I like to see them sailing about the high, windy elms that overtop and surround some old gable-ended manorhouse; the very noise they make has ever seemed to me to enhance the tranquillity of the scene, telling how they have built their nests and reared their young without ever having been disturbed by the proprietors of the estate through many generations. You hear them almost before the morning has dawned talking to one another in the branching streets of their airy city, for as soon as it is light they descend into the neighbouring fields to breakfast on dew-worms, which they are very fond of. If they pull up plants it is only to get at the larvae of insects which feed on the roots, and the millions of insects they destroy—that but for the rooks would feed on the crops—is beyond number. No farmer who has an eye to his own interest will ever destroy birds; but for them we should be infested with such a plague of flies and caterpillars as laid bare the land of Egypt. I like to see their stately walk along the furrows of a newly-ploughed field, the dainty way in which they lift up one foot after the other, and that peculiar side-to-side motion which gives such a swing to their tails. Who that has stopped under an oak has not seen hundreds of caterpillars which, having fed on the beautiful foliage, hang suspended by the threads they have spun under the boughs. These the rooks make short work of when they alight on the tree by flapping their great black wings and beating down the insects in myriads; and, having done this, they alight on the ground and feed so heartily at times that they seem to have a difficulty in flying back to the rookery.

We now hear the throistle and blackbird singing in the early morning as soon as it is light, which is often above an hour before sunrise, and the very ring of their voices tell us that Winter has departed. The thrush may now be seen perched on some rail or gatepost, his bright, round eye looking out on the surrounding landscape, while his spotted breast heaves up and down as he throws out rich gushes of music. Once heard, you can ever after distinguish his song from that of any other bird as soon as you have caught a few notes; not that he always sings alike, but there is something so regular and measured in his music, never seeming in a hurry, but conscious of his own strength, and a perfect master of his instrument, he seems to take his time about it, now and then shutting his eyes, as if to show you he could go to sleep over it if he pleased, and even then sing much better than many other birds when they are wide awake. The blackbird is a softer singer than the thrush, and you must be very near to catch all his low, sweet notes if listening while the March wind is blowing. Then he is a bird that loves solitude, seeming to find delight enough in his own singing without caring for any other listeners; fond, too, of dark, shady places, much more so than the nightingale. These, and the skylark, are our earliest English minstrels, for they never leave us, but brave our severest winters, and cheer us with their glad songs while most of our Summer songsters are still far away across the seas. And those far-away birds that will soon return, which our old poets call God's messengers, ever going to and fro on the earth, how wonderful are their ways! Little frail things as they are, what journeys they undertake without making any more preparation than spreading out their wings and cleaving the yielding air! Over wide seas they pass, resting we know not when nor where, only knowing that they are again heard singing in far-distant countries where it is still summer, but how they get there is only known to Him who seeth not a sparrow fall to the ground unheeded, for to man they are neither beholden for food nor shelter. Now the bark-peelers are at work in the woods, and the osier-peeler busy in the holts by the rivers. What an aroma fills the air where the bark-peelers are employed stripping the trees as soon as the sap has begun to ascend! It is neither like the smell of flowers nor new-mown hay, but most like that of mixed hawthorn buds and lilacs, supposing their perfume to be ten times stronger than it is. Many reckon the smell of new bark to be the healthiest that we can inhale, and it is worth journeying to the woods for, as this real forest smell can only be enjoyed among the bark-peelers. And now the daisies are out, for April has greened the ground and powdered it with their silvery flowers, and made the meadows a soft carpet to walk upon, richly diapered. We see the leaves growing larger every day, and know that Spring is making green bowers for the returning birds to build and sing in, underneath which she will hide their young ones. We hear the bee murmuring in the grass among the opening flowers, and catch the faint hum of insects high up amid the trees. The hedges no longer look bare, and rent, and deserted, like houses from which the inhabitants have fled, for April is putting them in good repair, and colouring them once more with her refreshing green, that delicate Spring green which the dyer's art has not yet imitated. How we strive to bring this green into our walled cities, so as to preserve some remembrance of the open country where all is now so fresh and beautiful! We never see a grass-plot before a door in our smoky streets without thinking of the altars of the old Pagans, for it seems an offering to Nature as if placed there to acknowledge her presence. How the little plot of grass is patted, and watered, and out to keep it green and level, and with what delight the citizen brings out his chair in the evening to sit by it and look at it as he tries to fancy hard that he is in the country! He points with pride to the solitary alder that overhangs the stagnant ditch at the end of his little garden, for in it he sees signs of the progress Spring is making, and, as he takes his ten or twelve strides over his tiny lawn, for so he calls it, he dreams of green meadow sweeps and breezy downs to which he will soon be borne by the rapid railway when the time to enjoy his Summer holiday arrives. We also like to place our beloved dead where the grass grows and the trees wave, and the birds sing, far away from the jarring sound and noisy traffic of cities.

March and April bring with them Spring flowers in abundance, and the pleasant sound of "Come, buy my pretty primroses!" is by this time a familiar cry in our city streets. There is no yellow so pure, and pale, and delicate as that of the primrose, nor any wild flower grown that has such a sweet, clean look, especially if we find it blowing on some sunny slope in the midst of green fields, for by the dusty wayside it soon loses its delicate complexion. Unlike the generality of starshaped, five-petalled flowers, the bloom of the primrose is united at the base, having no division saving what is seen on the

outer rim of the flower, and which cannot be divided without tearing the blossom to pieces, while with most flowers any single petal may be torn off and the rest remain as perfect on the calyx as they were before. Pull the primrose out of its sheath, and the beautiful golden neck will be seen that was before concealed; turn it upside down, and the funnel-shaped flower will lose none of its beauty; nor can art excel the graceful form of the corolla. A glass made with such a slender neck and exquisitely-shaped lip as that of the primrose would be a delightful acquisition to the many elegant ornaments manufactured to hold flowers. The primrose, like the cowslip and polyanthus, is many-flowered, and it is only through some strange freak of Nature that all the bloom does not stand up in a tuft on a single stalk, like the cowslip and other similar umbel-shaped flowers, to which family it belongs. This can be clearly seen by examining a primrose-root closely when the flower-buds lie clustered together and unopened in their little cradle of green leaves, which must be divided to see the tuft of buds that lie below. Why this tuft should not be uplifted, and a dozen or more primroses be seen when it is in flower, all growing on one single stalk, we are not able to divine. Were it to grow so it would be one of the most beautiful wild flowers that adorn the velvet valleys of England, and for grandeur eclipse almost any other plant. Some florists think it possible to grow the primrose in a tuft like the sweetwilliam; and it is believed that the polyanthus originally grew like the primrose, with only at first a single flower on a stalk, the same as a daisy. Cowslips we have gathered above a foot in length, with nearly thirty blooms on a single stalk, and sometimes we have found the flowers nearly as large as small primroses. Like daisies, cowslips love to be out in the sun in the open fields, while the modest primrose—happily called modest—delights in sheltered and shady places, seeming to seek retirement as if wishing to veil its beauty. That the cowslip is a sun-loving flower is shown by the crimson spots at the bottom of its cup; and pleasant it is to walk through field beyond field with cowslips growing on each side the old winding footpath, and in spots where they, no doubt, grew centuries ago. We know places in England that are called cowslip pastures in old leases that date as far back as the Reformation, and are covered with cowslips in Spring at the present time. They are old pastures, with a turf that yields to the foot like a thick carpet, never bearing grass enough to pay for mowing, but feeding such sheep as we seldom see anywhere else beside, for they pass more time in sleeping than they do in feeding, so fattening are those rich old pasture-grounds. Then there are great woods close at hand abounding in bluebells and lilies-of-the-valley—for they would not know what flower you meant if you called the bluebell a wild hyacinth in that out-of-the-world part of the country. And in little nooks, half hidden in the sunny woodbanks, nestle the sweet wood violets, betraying themselves by their fragrance even before they were found. Heaven be praised, no railroad has yet desecrated these sweet green woods, nor defiled by its smoke those cowslip-covered pastures which, in my boyish days, I fancied were like the golden fields of Eanna, and that when the squire's pretty daughter came there to gather cowslips she was later than Proserpine. Even beside the picturesque highways there are raised footways, only divided from the fields by hedges, with stilts at the entrances of almost every field, which you might climb over and go anywhere into the green country beyond. Some of these stilts led to plantations that went winding away up the hills as if to tempt you into the plantation and woods that crowned their summits, where the early-building birds made their nests and reared their young, and were rarely disturbed. Or you come to sequestered cottages, inhabited by woodmen and gamekeepers, standing in places where you would never have thought of looking for a human habitation; and sometimes you caught sight of such a sweet face at one of the lattices, that you thought of it for days, and dreamed of it for nights after, and sighed to think of the beauty buried in those solitudes. We always mixed violets and primroses together in our wild-flower posies, and bluebells and cowslips, as town children, when they get out in the suburbs, still mix buttercups and daisies together. I often fancy now that all those pretty names chime together like sweet music; that there is a rustic rhythm in primroses and violets, in cowslips and bluebells, and buttercups and daisies; and that, if a single word is transposed, the melody is lost. They seem almost like the first words we were taught to utter, so little were we when led by the hand into the pleasant fields that stretch every way around the home of our childhood, to gather these dear old English flowers, that still retain their ancient Saxon names unaltered. Except in colour, there is but little resemblance between the bluebell of Spring and the blue harebell that flowers at the close of Summer, as the latter grows singly, while the wild hyacinth grows in such a close cluster that the flowers touch one another, and some of these heads may be found nearly a foot long when all the bells have opened, for then they are wider apart. The buds are darker when folded than they are when fully blown, and it is only in the open flower we see that graceful curve which the lip of the bell makes bent backward. We have often thought, from the frequent mention of it in his works, that the violet must have been one of Shakspeare's favourite flowers. He makes it "sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes;" and when he selects a delightful spot for the gentle south wind to blow upon it is "a bank of violets," and many are his beautiful allusions to this little fairy of the flowers. We hold that the violet of Spring is nearly a perfect purple; and that the violet which flowers at the end of Summer and has no perfume is alone blue. Milton calls it "the glowing violet"—a warmer epithet than could be given to blue, or to the small golden-eyed centre of this little flower. Like the rose, the violet retains its fragrance long after it has withered, and leaves its sweet odour on whatever is placed near it. What a beautiful sight is a large bed of wild wood anemones all nodding their heads together in the April breeze! Then they have a colour of their own, unlike that of any other Spring flower, which seems to change before every breeze that blows, showing at one moment flashes of pale purple as their heads bend down, then moving back in lines of light as they display the inside of the flowers, and so ever changing their pleasing hues of lilac and white at every stir of air that sets them in motion. Then they hang their heads aside so prettily, as if they were ashamed of the wind disarranging their neatness, as it does, and letting in the sun to look at them. How beautifully the petals spring from the little tripod with upturned feet, for such is the involucre which forms the calyx of the anemone! Let botanists call it what they please. The leaves of this flower are elegantly cut, and might be used as a pattern for snipping out pretty paper borders. There are parts of England where, in Spring, we may walk along for the hour together over ground covered with bluebells, primroses, and anemones. No garden was ever spread out with such beds as these, for they almost seem never-ending—a pathway extending for miles with a broad border on each hand of blue and gold. We believe that no mortal was ever wholly vicious that liked to look at flowers, but that there must be something good in everybody who admires them. Who can tell what good they have done for mankind—what virtues they have awakened—what vices destroyed? He only who made them so fair.

MAY AND JUNE.

MAY is the month of merry music and sweet smells, for in no single month throughout the whole year are so many birds heard in full song, nor is the air every way so laden with perfume, for now unnumbered leagues of hawthorn hedges are red and white over with Maybuds. Many of our sweet singing birds that come back to us in April are silent before the end of June, though they make our sea-circled island ring again with their melody during the whole of the intervening month; and the hawthorn-blossoms, which scarcely showed a single bud in April, have a rusted and withered look by the time June hangs out her roses, only retaining their beauty while the month lasts after which they are named. Our forefathers kept their great out-of-door holiday in the month of May, and the incidents named in many of our old ballads took place "in the merry month of May." They put a gay dress on some pretty rustic maiden and called her May, and brought green branches and may blossoms from the woods and fields, with music and shouting, to make an arbour for her on the village green, where the tall maypole stood hung with flowery garlands. They danced around her to the sounding of pipe and tabor until the day died, and made their hearts merry with May. It was a season of rejoicing throughout the whole land, and every town and village sent out its young men and maidens to do "observance to the may." No month in the whole year works such a change in the appearance of Nature as that of May. The interval between April and June seems like voyaging between two climates, where we start from and often leave behind a cold rainy Spring and in the course of a few brief weeks land on a shore where sunny Summer reigns in all her beauty. The very buttercups and daisies, which made no show from where we set out, are, by the time we have journeyed through May, overtopped by the tall grasses; and trees through which we could then look and see the ramification of every branch are darkened with a thick covering in the "leafy month of June." The corn-fields, which then made no more show than grass meadows, are now tall and green, and begin to display their eary heads, and anxiously does the farmer watch the nights and days about the middle of June, for then his corn is in flower, and the weight of his future harvest depends upon the setting of the corn-bloom, for until that takes place it is more liable to be blighted than at any other time during its growth.

Nowhere in the world beside are there such long miles of hawthorn-hedges as in our green Old England, and pleasant is it to walk between them when all the land is perfumed and lighted with may. They stretch up hill and down hill; they run across our flowery valleys, hem in our rich meadows, and make shady borders to our quiet winding lanes. There are hundreds of towns and villages where may comes up to the very houses and throws its perfume in through the doors and windows, while daisies nod their pretty heads within a stride of the well-cleaned doorsteps. Watercourses reflect and throw back the light of the drooping maybuds, where the blossoms lie like the shadows of silver clouds that have fallen on the sheeted hawthorn. We have hedges so old, and high, and thick, still covered every year with may, that they would form a barrier against the approach of an army, and could only be destroyed by fire, or after long heaving with the axe and billhook. When covered with leaves, you might as well try to see the dawn through the blackest Winter midnight as look through them. They grow beside ancient footpaths, that lead to woods and parks, and old manor-houses and solitary granges, which the noise of traffic never reached; where the ringdove has built and cooed undisturbed through the quietude of long centuries, and the moonlight-coloured may blooms as freshly and smells as sweetly as when it first opened its fragrant blossoms in the golden mornings of the early world.

A great authority says that red may derives its colour from the red clay in which it was originally grown, and that there is no more difference between it and the white than there is in two wild daisies which grow side by side, the one with pure white petals and the other dashed with red. We never find red may mentioned in the works of any of our old poets, though most of them have written something in praise of may. Chaucer, who lived just upon 500 years ago, has left us many a sweet line in praise of hawthorn-buds, but nowhere does he allude to red may. Spenser, whose works abound in beautiful descriptions of natural scenery, has no notice of this rich deep-coloured blossom, though he has written the best description of "Maying" we possess, with one exception, and that is Herrick's "Corinna Going a Maying," which is too long to quote here, and too beautiful to omit a single verse, so tastefully do the golden links of the song fit into one another. Spenser tells us that the young of both sexes in his day went out to gather "maybushes and sweetbriar," with which they decorated their houses, and which they fastened round the pillars of the churches. This was in the time of Elizabeth; nor have we in any other writer met with a description of the churches being decorated with may, except in Spenser, that we remember. He also tells us how many a lusty labourer went playing before the merry mayers, and how each youth danced with his maid. He is also the only writer we are acquainted with who makes mention of a "King of May," though he gives us, beyond the name, no account of this monarch of the month of flowers. May must have been a favourite decoration to have caused people in those days to rise so early in the morning and gather it to adorn their houses. We have in the present day often seen a large bunch of may standing in a jug of water inside the fender as a stove ornament, which looked very pretty, and perfumed the summer parlour; and this was replaced by fresh blossoms every other day while may remained in bloom. The fragrance of the hawthorn is a small country people delight in inhaling, and we know nothing more pleasant than a walk along a green lane after a shower, when the hedges on each hand are covered with maybuds; it overpowers every other perfume, and is one of the healthiest smells that floats in the air. We wonder that our enterprising perfumers have never introduced may-flowers among their refreshing scents; what a pretty ornament to a lady's table would a handsome bottle be, labelled "Maydew," with a graceful design of maybuds upon it! Gossiping old Peppys tells us in his "Diary" how his wife went to sleep at Greenwich so that she might go into the park early in the morning to bathe her face in maydew to make her fair. It is frequently mentioned in the works of our old writers as being used by ladies to give them a clear complexion, and to obtain it pure they had to shake the dewdrops from off the maybuds on their pretty upturned faces, and fine fun there must have been among these merry romps of a May morning, as they shook the heavy dew off the hawthorn blossoms over one another, scattering it over the hair and neck, then running away screaming with delight. Were we artists, we would paint the picture that now floats before our "inward eye." Maydew was believed to give to the complexion the white of the lily and the blush of the rose, and we believe nothing is more likely to do this than rising early and walking afield in the pleasant morning of May. Maybuds have caused the poets to say more beautiful things "about the leaves and flowers, about the playing

Of nymphs in woods and fountains, and the shade
Keeping a silence round the sleeping maid,

than any other blossom that ever blowed, nor could Burns find a sweeter shade to place his lovers under than

The milk-white thorn that scents the evening gale.

We have always fancied that the sweetest wallflowers we ever gathered are those that grow wild, and are generally found upon or in the neighbourhood of old ruins. They are of a lighter colour than those double ones that are such favourites in our gardens, nor do the wild ones ever come double. But for perfume the cultivated wallflowers bear no comparison beside them, for four or five heads of flowers will scent a large room. Nodding high up in the wind, on the mouldering battlements, they seem to beautify decay; and, as they are old English flowers, we can look back through the "mind's eye," when they bloomed on the sill of the bow window, where Beauty adorned herself, and which is now covered with the ivy of centuries, from out of which the owl hoots to the night. Pansy or heart's-ease is another old Saxon flower, and is known in our country by more pretty names than any other flower. It is called Cuddle-me-to-you, Kiss-me-at-the-garden-gate, Three-faces-under-a-hood, Love-in-idleness (a name Shakspeare uses), Ease-my-heart, and several other names which we hesitate to mention, though the brazen beauties who romped about the Court of care-killing Charles II. were familiar with them all. Milton calls it "the pansy freaked with jet;" and Shakspeare's Ophelia says, "There's pansies that's for thoughts," a sentence containing some allusion that to us is lost. The gorse or furze which figures on our coloured plate, with its bloom of bellied gold, is found on most of our heaths, commons, and moorlands; but is a very difficult plant to keep alive if moved into a garden, as we have experienced, though brought away with the root firmly imbedded in its native soil. It is in flower nearly all the year round; for in the depth of the Winter the pale green blooms may be found imbedded among those sharp thorns which ever wear such a touch-me-not look. It is an old country saying, "that when the gorse is out of flower, kissing's out of fashion." When the great Linneus first saw the gorse in our country, it is said, he fell down on his knees to look close into its beautiful flowers, and envied England for possessing such a gorgeous shrub, he never before having seen anything he so much admired. We have seen a gorsebush bearing double flowers, that stood ten or twelve feet high, and was broad in proportion: it looked like a tree hung all over with little golden baskets, for such is the shape of the flowers. It is believed that bees make richer and better-coloured honey where the gorse and broom are in abundance than they extract from any other flowers. The gorse is much frequented by linnets; nor do we know a better place in which to shelter and watch the habits of birds than some little opening in a wild common that is covered with gorse, or "fuzz," as country people call it. We have seen places in England where narrow bridle-paths run through miles of country covered with this gorgeous shrub which were so tall in some spots as to conceal the head of a man on horseback as he wound his way along—places which the bees were ever humming about, and were never silent, except at night, through the singing of birds; where the sun shone all day long; for it was all a wide open land, with scarcely a tree upon it to throw down a shadow; and far away as the eye could reach all these upheaving and down-sinking waves of land were "golden'd" over with gorse-flowers, looking with its ups and downs like a widespread sea of gold. And on the far edge of this wild gorse-land—for by that name it had been called time out of mind—stood several ancient cottages, the inhabitants of which were all bee-keepers, and had amongst them scores of hives, for the bees were no trouble to keep where there were miles of gorse that remained in flower nearly all the year round. Old as these cottages were, they were not all alike; neither had they all been built at the same time, and we often think now that, for rich and varied colouring, they were the most picturesque tenements eye ever looked upon, much as their beauty was enhanced by the surrounding scenery. One was coloured with whitewash, and almost dazzled the eyes through the bright light that fell upon it; another wore a rich umbery brown hue, as if the bricks had been sunburnt for years and time had deepened the tawny tints. Then one was roofed with thatch and another with little flat tiles, which had been made of such rich red clay as red may loves to grow in; and on these quaint old roofs grew no end of creeping plants, moss, and fungi of every description—green, golden, and grey. And every little attic had a roof of its own; for these ancient cottages were many-roofed, as if each separate room had been covered in at different times. Then all the sloping sides came down to the same level channels, from which they sprung up-ones, like a spray of chestnut-blossoms. Then there were strange-looking little out-houses that went in and out at every angle of the building, full of light and shade, with sharp corners and grey old porches, and steps leading up to them as white as bleached bones and as strange in shape as the fossil bones of extinct monsters. Some of the chambers were ascended by outer staircases that were roofed over, and went sloping upward like steep brown narrow banks, looking as if the builder had forgotten to make a staircase inside and had broken through one of the end walls after the attics were finished. Then there was a large sheet of water, called a "mere," a short way from these ancient tenements which in Spring were visited by hundreds of swallows, scores of which built their nests at the corners of the windows and in every nook and gable of these old cottages. A pleasant spot it was to spend a summer in, and one to be remembered long after the roar of a seaside town had faded from the memory.

Now Summer reigns everywhere, for by the end of June the trees wear their richest covering—a green, that will be dashed as soon as the scorching suns of July dart down upon the leaves. Pleasant is it now to enter some dreamy old wood where the branches are so closely interwoven overhead that you can scarcely see the flowers that lie half buried at your feet, [to listen to the coo of the wood-pigeon, the murmur of the brook, and the low whispering of the long leaves, that sound at times like "airy tongues which syllable men's names." It is good for our natures to spend a few hours now and then in these peaceful solitudes among the works of God. There is nothing to remind us of man in such places. The trees rise up like great pillars which support the sky, and we feel that we are "in a temple not made with hands." You come away from such spots like a giant refreshed, and mingle with your fellow-man in a kinder spirit after communing with your own heart in these beautiful and retired places. It may often be noticed that those who have descended from high mountains seem to have brought down with them a different spirit to that which they possessed before they ascended. It is a pleasant fancy to believe that they speak more kindly and act more tenderly because they have been nearer heaven than they ever were before. The great railroads are doing wonders, and we do believe the readier the access man has to Nature's work the more eagerly he will avail himself of it, and become all the better through so doing. The look of plenty that is scattered over the landscape in the form of flocks and herds, streams, gardens, orchards, and corn-fields, with the open sky—that great blue eye of heaven overlooking all—makes him feel grateful and glad, and purifies his grosser nature, without those feelings of bitter repentance which are too often preached from the pulpit as being as necessary to make mankind better. The very sight of the flowers carpeting the fields without the culture of man even sets a child wondering how they grow.

JULY AND AUGUST.

How strange it would appear to any one who knew nothing about the change of the Seasons in the two countries to leave England at the close of our Winter and, after a long, slow voyage, to land in Australia, expecting by the date of the year to find Summer in all its brightness and beauty instead of the beginning of Winter as it would then be! Then to sit down and think that in England we were making our hay, and should soon begin our harvest, while there they were laying up fuel for the Winter, and wearing their warmest clothing, and even then shivering through very cold, while we were sitting lightly clad at our doors of an evening, glad to feel the slightest breath of air stirring about us, to find them there taking everything hot, and clustering as close as they could round the crackling fire with doors and windows closed, and to know that had he remained in England he should at that very time have enjoyed his cold lamb and salad, and been glad of ice to cool his sherry, instead of sitting down to the smoking dishes then before him, the heat from which made the frosted windows steam again, and out of which, if he looked, were he in the country, he would see only a naked and desolate landscape, while the fields he had left behind were covered with flowers, and waving with corn, and the long green leaves were throwing a pleasant shadow over the land! Quitting our antipodes at the close of Winter in a slow-sailing vessel, he would once more leave Summer behind him, and arrive in England about the time we were preparing for our Christmas. And so he might voyage to and fro, without ever seeing Summer or setting foot on a land covered with flowers. But the change must be still greater to pass into those northern latitudes where for a time there is no night, and to remain there until there is no day, nothing but darkness for weeks together, saving those wild northern lights that keep flashing like sheeted spectres across the sky. In spite of our showers, and mists, and cloudy days, which remind those who dwell far inland that they are surrounded by the sea, still Old England is a lovely land to dwell in, with its mild Winters, gentle Springs, warm Summers, and pleasant, cool Autumns, all varying at times, yet never so much but we are blessed with seedtime and harvest, and gather the ripened fruit from our orchards. We have no long leagues of bleak, barren mountains whose shadows make the valleys gloomy and chilly at noonday, but gentle hills covered to their very summits with verdure and flowers; meadows through which long miles of sweet rivers flow, looking as if their channels had been ploughed only for a happy and freedom-loving nation to dwell beside. Nor are our inland lakes, and meres, and ponds less beautiful, on which the water-lilies sit like fair queens on thrones of emerald. A land covered with old grey churches, in which centuries of generations have worshipped, and where Peace dwells with humble Poverty in the lowliest cottages by which they are surrounded, seeming as if guarded by their dead. And over this blessed land Summer now reigns, crowned with roses in all her pride of beauty. She has thrown open her green gates, and hung up her richest scenery, and never did her hedges look more beautiful than they do now, tinted all over with flowers, for what a few weeks ago appeared unsightly weeds are waving streamers of bloom, and even the dull-flowered beardbind has grown "a thing of beauty." Summer never looked more lovely than she does in July, though she wears darker raiment than she did a month or so ago; she hangs her flowers with diamonds in the early morning, and fills the night air with their perfumes, for the day is too short for her to dispense all the sweet gifts she has come laden with. The garden fruits are now ripe, the red currants hang from the branches like pretty earrings of coral, while black shins like great heads of jet, and the huge gooseberries are bursting with mellowness; and next to strawberries a dish of real Warrington is as great a luxury as can be placed on the table for a dessert, though they are but gooseberries. Cherries, like roses, are losing their beauty, though a few of the later sorts may be preserved until July; and Plat in his "Garden of Eden" tells us how in August our great man-hearted Queen Elizabeth visited Beddington Park, and that Sir Francis Carew, knowing how fond she was of cherries, had a canvas strained over a choice tree, wetting the same now and then with a scoop or horn as the heat of the weather required, and so, by withholding the sunbeams from reflecting upon the berries, they grew both great and were very long before they had gotten their perfect cherry colour; and when he was assured of her Majesty's coming he removed the tent, and a few sunny days brought them to their full maturity." This was in the year 1599, and may be numbered among the last of brave old Elizabeth's cherry-eatings. "In several little English villages the feasts are still called cherry-eatings, as they fall about the time cherries are ripe."

Now the woodbine dangles its delicious trumpet-shaped flowers above the gaudy foxglove, which lights up the underwood like a pillar of crimson flame, while the fields are covered in places with scarlet poppies, which when waving in the wind look in the distance like a great army in motion. The foxglove is a noble-looking flower, and may rank next to the hollyhock for grandeur, standing as it does firmly anchored on its own roots and needing no support of any kind. We have often found it growing in solitary places, nearly six feet high, with a foot or more of bloom on its summit, and beautifully its bell spotted and freckled in the inside, often so fancifully that an imaginative mind may trace curious letters which spirits unseen by us are, perhaps, able to translate and read to one another this unknown language of flowers. No further from smoky London than in the woods which lie below the slopes of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham we have found foxgloves growing as beautiful as human eye ever fell upon. The foxglove is both a dangerous and a valuable plant, and takes a high place amongst medicines. There is something almost overpowering in the smell of the root when first pulled up, nor is it wise to inhale its odour for long together. We like the old English name of honeysuckle better than woodbine as applied to this beautiful climbing plant which not a flower that blows excels in fragrance, nor is there one that is a greater favourite with our villagers, as may be seen from the many cottages that are entwined with it, and pretty do its white-and-red-striped blossoms look, clinging to the lattice-work around a cottage-door. Then the bees come and murmur about it all day long, and gather rich store of honey from out its long bloom. But best of all do we like to see it growing wild in our sweet greenwoods, twining round the trees, which throw a cool shadow over it; or more graceful still does it appear overhanging some wild wood walk as it stretches across and forms a bower overhead, from which the sweet flowers peep out like the faces of fair ladies half hidden in greenery. The honeysuckle twines in a contrary direction from the briony, winding round from left to right like the convolvulus, and if turned a contrary way it will uncoil itself and droop down, but if left to itself one stem will wind around another, not that we believe, as some have said, that one reverses its spiral nature, but that the stem, which grows from left to right, is too strong to sid it other to escape from its coil. We think this can be seen by unwinding the plant. Though our beautiful wild roses have now shed their bloom, the lanes and hedgerows were richly garlanded with them only a few brief weeks ago, and a few late stragglers may sometimes be found even in July. May is not so beautiful to look upon as the pink-coloured wild rose only because the flowers

of the latter are larger, though we have seen at times a warm pink on may-buds like that on the maiden-blush rose. The sweetest of all our wild roses is that of the sweetbriar, the very foliage of which throws out a perfume too delicious for any one but a lovely-looking young lady to inhale. A fellow bearded like a goat ought never to be seen smelling sweetbriar. "Sweets to the sweet," were never intended for him who carries the reek of stables and the more manly smell of horses about him. The commonest of all our wild roses is the dogrose, which grows almost everywhere, and varies in colour according to the soil in which it is rooted, being generally white or touched with a warm pink, and very often red. The wild rose is a native of England, and no doubt British ladies decorated their hair with it as far back as we have any record of our island being inhabited. We have seen old hedges about our inland villages formed entirely of different varieties of the wild rose, which, from the thickness of some of the stems, the immense depth of the hedge through suckers having sprung up year after year, must have stood for centuries, and yet kept on blooming year after year, just as they did when the hoary churches near at hand were white and new and all alive with busy builders. Our oldest poets call the rose the Queen of Flowers, and it is believed that the choicest of our old garden roses were first brought over by the Crusaders. The rose retains its sweetness longer than any other flower after it is dead, reminding us pleasantly of the beautiful thought of Shirley that

Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet and blossom in the dust.

Some of the Eastern nations flavour their water with roses, and in Persia the flowers are gathered and piled up in a stack, like one of our large hayricks, before they are distilled for the attar of roses. There are several large gardens in our own country where acres of roses are grown which, when in bloom, are gathered and sold by the hundredweight at a time, and are then used for a variety of purposes. The scarlet hip, which looks so beautiful in our fading Autumn hedges, contains the seed of the rose, while the outer rind is prepared with sugar at times, and made into a conserve which has a pleasant acid flavour. The poppy is the richest scarlet flower that grows wild in England, and, by some strange freak of Nature, is most abundant in our rich corn-fields and waste roadside places which are never cultivated; nor have we any other wild flower of the same gaudy colour except the pretty pimpernel, which resembles the chickweed in appearance, and is now in bloom. Opium is obtained from the white poppy by making an incision in the poppy-head in the form of a cross, when it exudes in a gummy form and may be scraped off in a day or two after the cut is made, if the poppy-head is ripe. We used when boys to eat the ripe poppy-seeds by handfuls, and, though told since that they are dangerous food, we never remember an instance of their injuring any of us, though we often clubbed our pence at the door of the druggist's shop to purchase a poppy feast, and have devoured the seeds of a whole hatful of poppies amongst us. There is no opium in the seeds. We do not believe the poppies do much injury to corn, greatly as the farmers grumble, for they are not a widespread plant, and we can ill spare them, as we have but one other pure scarlet wild flower. One thing, however, is certain—the flowers of the poppy produce headache, and are even called "headaches" in many parts of the country. The flowers—pretty as they are—ought never to be kept in a room. Another beautiful flower that grows amongst corn is the bluebottle, the proper name of which is the cyanus. In gardens it shows a variety of colours, such as dark blue, light blue, white, purple, red, lilac, with no end of varied markings on the edges and in the centres, as if one colour played into the other until all the different hues were blended. The involucre is very beautiful, has a perfect bell shape, and, if looked at through a glass, shows some of the richest colours that can be found on the calyx of any flower. But, while dwelling on flowers that grow in corn-fields, we are forgetting that the harvest is by the end of August ripe for the sickle, and must now be shorn. Within the sound of our sea-washed shores, and far inland, where the deep wind-stirred woods murmur at times like one in his sleep, there is now busy preparation for the gathering in of the harvest; and soon our farmers will fill their great stackyards and high barns, on which the blue pigeons delight to rest, with rich stores of golden grain; but many a man and maiden must be sun-tanned by brown labour before the creaking wains can be laden with the harvest. Pleasant is it to see the reapers at work, to watch them stooping, and notice the tall clustering ears which a moment before stood upright as spears fall beneath their crooked sickles. Nor is there a prettier sight in all England than a broad field of ripe wheat browning in the sunshine and moving in the wind. We do not believe it possible to paint the shifting colours of a corn-field in motion: those browns, and yellows, and warm whites which ever seem as if changing places beneath every breeze that blows. We, who have gleaned the corn-fields in the days of our boyhood, can well remember how the sharp stubble out our little naked legs and hands, and how we sometimes laid hold of a sharp thistle when stooping down to gather an ear of corn. In our gleaming days we carried a little bag before us, called our corn-pocket, and, when we had gleaned a handful, cut off the straw with the pair of old scissors that dangled at our side, and thrust only the ears into our bag. Well can we remember the temptation offered that, if we gleaned another bagful, we should either have luncheon or dinner, for we were always wanting to eat while gleaming. Then there was the large sack under the shadow of some hedge or wide-spreading tree, beside the bottle and basket that contained our provision for the day. Brown dry bread has never tasted so sweet since as it did in those days of happy poverty. And into that large sack we emptied our little gleaming-bag many times during the day, until by night it was so full and heavy that our necks ached again as we carried it in turns on our heads through the pleasant fields and green lanes on our way home. Then, after gleaming-time was over, we had our little harvest to thrash out and carry in a sack to some breezy eminence, where, on a sheet, held down at each corner by a stone, we winnowed the heavy corn, that rattled again as it fell, while the chaff went floating far away; and so we gathered in harvest in our boyish days. What meals have we seen the farmer send into the field to his reapers, when every hour, as they say in the country, "was worth its weight in gold," and every breeze that blew shook the overripe grain by millions at a time out of the ears! Then it was necessary to put on every hand that could be obtained, and to keep on reaping from the earliest dawn until the day darkened, and every meal was eaten in the field; and we have heard of reapers drinking three gallons of home-brewed ale during the day while following this hard work. Could the severe labour have been done on water, we wonder? Tell a hard-working countryman that there is no support in good ale, and, if he is a plain truth-telling Englishman, and you are not far removed above him in your station in life, he will without hesitation say, "The best a grate leaver!" How beautiful a picture is harvest brought home across a ford, where the horses are never more than knee-deep in water, in which the waggon, with its high-piled golden load, is mirrored, and all the overhanging trees reflected! Many such pictures may be seen in our country at this season of the year when the rivers are low and the fords easy to pass over.

SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER.

THOUGH the change of the foliage now arrests every eye—for the commonest observer cannot walk out without noticing what a difference a few weeks, or days even, have made in the appearance of the trees—yet it is only in a few places, where trees are in large masses, that we can see all the rich contrasts of colour they now present. To see these autumnal tints to perfection we must visit the remains of some of our old English forests, where the trees have attained their full growth and the colours are massed together on a gigantic scale, such as we have seen in parts of Sherwood Forest and, in clumps even, around the neighbourhood of Newstead Abbey. Efforts have been made to produce this grand and gaudy minglement of autumnal colours by art, by planting trees in parks and ornamental grounds with an eye to imitating forest scenery, but, we believe, never successfully; for what Nature seems to do by accident man was never yet able to copy faithfully on a large scale, and our old English poet Spenser saw this when he described his bowers, "Not by art, but of the tree's own inclination made." Nor is it the trees alone that make Autumn so picturesque and rich in painting; there are patches of fern, grass, and heather lying about in the open spaces at the feet of these hoary giants of the forest, and these heathy places seem bounded with woods in every direction, which grow wilder and wilder as you proceed, without coming either to smitten fence, wall, hedge, or paling, or anything to remind you that man has insulted the majesty of the forest; by putting up a boundary to say, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther;" but all is wild, free, and open as the ocean, and the aged trees are its great ships. We are a forest and sea loving nation; and, if the dash of salt blood which runs in our veins was inherited from the old Sea Kings who were both our forefathers and conquerors, may not this love of woods be traced to a more remote origin, when the earliest peoplers of our island erected their huts in wooded fastnesses and reared their cities in the heart of shadowy forests? How fond our children are of a sail in a boat, of a little box that just holds them built out of doors, and, above all, of sitting under the shadow of a few green boughs! We believe that these are true signs of our origin.

Many of our celebrated artists have selected Autumn for their landscapes, in preference to any other season of the year, on account of the gorgeous variety of colours the foliage assumes, for then they have found in the

many-coloured woods
Shade deepening over shade,

while the oak alone is sometimes tinged with no end of tints, often with as many as will be found on half-a-dozen various trees. There the richest greens will be found blended with browns of every shade. But for gorgeousness the beautiful beech is the tree that seems to set the forest in a blaze, for nowhere else do you meet with that deep, fiery orange which is the "kindling" of Autumn. Gilbert White tells us that the walnut is the first tree that sheds its leaves and the next is the ash. But we have noticed the leaves falling as early from our chestnuts and limes as from the ash; while the elm retains the dark colour of its foliage in some situations longer than most of our trees. Nor does the beauty of the fir escape the eye amid all this change, as it stands out dark and tapering, and gives that mass of shadow to the scenery which we should miss were it absent. Then the ashkeys rattle again in the Autumn wind, and the golden acorns fall down in showers from their beautifully-carved cups, which country children call their "teathings," and set out as cups and saucers on their rustic tables while they give imaginary tea parties. Though Autumn soon strips the trees, and after a time robs the landscape of its beauty, it reveals many pleasant objects between the branches which the long leaves of Summer had shut out, and which we again recognise like old friends who have long been absent. We see again the pretty village in the valley through the network of the bare branches, which, while covered, shut out everything except the upper portion of the church spire, that showed its gilt vane above the trees. The whitewashed cottages once more give a light to the green slope of upland on which they stand, while the windows flame like rubies in the sunset, seeming at times as if the crimson blaze shot through them and we were looking through glass stained by the sunset of heaven. We again see the hillsides go dipping down into the dales, and the pleasant road that goes winding to the distant market-town, along which figures are ever moving in red and blue, and grey, giving life and colour to the landscape. The few sheep show white amid the far-off green of the turnip-field; the large hayrick and the thatched shed again rise up just where a painter would place them in his picture; and that sheet of water reflecting the sky gives a kind of eye to the scenery which lights up the whole expression of the landscape; for an imaginative mind traces features in such prospects and sees beauty and harmony in them as when looking at the human countenance.

But we are painting Autumn in advance instead of turning to the beginning of September, which at times wears such a look of Summer as to show but little signs of the changes we have depicted, for the sound of harvest still makes a ripe rustling throughout the land. Many of our late flowers are still in bloom, and here and there on the hedges may yet be found the trailing convolvulus. There are three varieties of this beautiful climbing plant growing wild, the prettiest of which is a great pest to the farmer, as it twines round the corn, and when ripe the seeds get thrashed out and mixed with the wheat and are either again sown or ground up at the mill. This little pale-pink, rose-streaked flower, which has a pleasant perfume, is as common as the daisy or buttercup, and very fond are children of wreathing it round their hats and bonnets, and nothing that grows makes a prettier wreath, for the leaves are very handsome, and the pointed, rose-hued buds that have not opened match like little bells between the full-blown vase-shaped flowers. We have, also, at rustic feasts held to welcome a Harvest Home, seen handsome country girls dress their hair with trails of this little convolvulus mingled with ears of ripe corn, and, being married, have turned our heads away and prayed to be delivered from temptation. The great bindweed—we wonder why the name of bindweed was ever given to such a pretty flower as the convolvulus?—is a gorgeous plant and often climbs to the very top of our highest hedges. But these beautiful flowers are shortlived, for that which blooms one day fades and folds on the morrow, so that the same bloom is never seen in perfection longer than one day. You may always tell which buds will open in the morning by examining them overnight, when they will be found screwed up, for we can use no better phrase to describe the pointed and coloured coil which is ready to open. The flower partially closes when there are signs of rain, but a rainy morning will not prevent the buds from opening which are ready, though the bloom will never be fully expanded. It is almost difficult to tell the beard from the convolvulus before flowering, so much are the leaves alike, both being arrow-headed in shape. But there is one sign which would even enable a blind man to distinguish the difference between the two plants, and that is, each one twines round a contrary way, one coiling, as gardeners say, "with the sun," the other turning from it. The seaside convolvulus, which is as often found inland on sandy soil as it is near the sea, is of a delicate rose colour, not unlike the smaller

bindweed, though readily distinguished through its kidney-shaped leaves. It is not, however, covered so thickly with flowers as the lesser wild convolvulus, nor is the form of the foliage so beautiful.

The wild clematis is another climbing plant that gives great beauty to our hedgerows in Autumn, though its flowers, being of a dull green white, do not of themselves make much of a show. It is when in seed that this fragrant creeper appears in its beauty, covering the hedge like a large sheet with its white cotton down, and hanging from the dangling sprays and waving in the wind like the wings of a bird; for it has tendrils like a vine, and adheres firmly to whatever it clings. Another beautiful climber is the cross-leaved bed-straw, which bears yellow flowers, and is the handsomest of all the species, the rest of which are white. Nor is it the flower alone that gives it so much beauty, as its leaves grow in whorls and form rings round the stalk at regular distances, upon which opens the bloom. Our old herbalists tell us that in former times this beautiful plant was commonly used for strewing ladies' chambers, from which custom it derived its name of "lady's bed-straw." The wild hop gives great beauty to our hedgerows with its large leaves and pale golden catkins, which twine round one another for support in such fanciful forms as we seldom see in hop plantations, where they are trained and kept in order. We see them growing up in arches and stretching from one branch to another, with other climbers surrounding them to a certain height, which they at last leave behind, and, surmounting all, wave and play in triumph over all the wild undergrowth, while they catch the sun every way. What trees are to our woods and forests the trailing plants are to our hedges, with this addition, that when all their splendid array of foliage has faded the hedgerows are still enriched with their many-coloured berries, among which the nightshade stands conspicuous. This, like the monkshood and other poisonous plants, has purple petals, while the others, which are the colour of gold, project and unite in a point, having a really beautiful appearance. The rich scarlet berries of the wooded nightshade are not so poisonous as those of the deadly nightshade, though they are dangerous for children to eat, and both have often proved fatal. As we described blackberrying in last year's "Almanack," we have only to add that it is a most wholesome fruit, and that those who have never preserved it ought to give it a trial, and ever after we are sure they will care less about raspberries, which cost treble the price.

Nutting was the last of our out-of-door holidays, and there are many parts of England where it is still as common to devote one day in the year to nutting as it is to keep up Christmas, especially in country towns where there are woods in the neighbourhood. Little damage can be done, as the underwood is cut down every few years to give air to the trees, and amid the clearance the nut-bearing hazel is set no more store by than the hooked and trailing bramble. As for damaging the young trees that were newly planted, that could only happen through ignorance of the children and never, we believe, wilfully. One of the best poetical descriptions we have of nutting is in "Britannia's Pastorals," written by William Brown in the days of Elizabeth, showing that it was then so common a custom that we have no doubt Shakespeare himself often went a-nutting in his boyish days in the beautiful woods that skirt the Avon. To really enjoy a day's nutting all fuss and ceremony must be thrown aside and nothing but work-a-day clothes be worn. As for the young ladies of the present day, unless they made up their minds to leave their crinolines at home, they would never make their way through the green and thorny barriers where the finest nuts can only be gathered. Ladies in crinoline nutting in some of the entangled woods we know would be a merry scene. They would never see home again unless they were cut out of the dense underwood; and what would outsteel? Yet the ladies wore hoops nearly three centuries ago, when Brown was writing his Pastorals. To gather nuts is the smallest portion of the pleasure of nutting. It was the rural holiday that gave the real delight, the passing of a day in the wild green woods that was the great charm after all, for fine weather was always selected, and perhaps some of the finest days we have in the course of the whole year come like angel visits in September. Then it was a holiday which the happy children shared with us, and, poor little things, sometimes they strayed away, and were lost for an hour or two; and a pretty hunting there would be after these Babes in the Wood, for some of these woods covered hundreds of acres of ground, and were seldom visited except by the woodmen and gamekeepers. A public dinner has become a grave affair, but a dinner in a wood is one of the merriest meals good-natured men or women can enjoy. What an upsetting of plates have we seen at the false cry of "O, here's a snake!" and what fun some poor frog has made as it came out of the sedge by the wood-stream, as if to see how we were getting on. As for a large stag-beetle with its great horns, the dence itself could hardly have caused a greater upset among the girls. Then to sit down on the nest of the red wood-ant. May we be forgiven for laughing at the dandy tailor and the cure that witty and wicked surgeon recommended, for well did he know that the stinging of the nettles would be as bad as the bite of the ants. Poor Snip! it was a day or two before he could again sit on his shopboard in comfort, and everybody called to inquire after his health. We do not think our filberts and cobnuts excel in flavour the wild woodnuts, when the latter are so ripe as to shake down out of their cups, and the shells are hard and brown. It must be the end of September or the beginning of October before they are found in this ripe perfection, and if there has been much wind the nuts must be sought for in the herbage of the underwood. No garden-nuts were ever grown that possess the flavour of these woodnuts if gathered when the hazel leaves are few and thin, and of a golden hue. That great destroyer of nuts, the weevil, or maggot as it is commonly called, is almost as great a puzzle to us as the fly in amber. We have looked at hundreds of nuts, from when the bloom first began to set through every stage of its greenness to the time it was covered with its husk, and in no instance have we been able to trace any sign of the incision made by the fly, that is said to pierce the shell while it is in a soft state and deposit its eggs in it. That the weevil eats its way out of the nut and lets itself down by the thread it spins we can readily believe; but we never saw this thread suspended from the nut itself, though we have seen the weevils spinning their way to the ground suspended from the hazel, and once we were in a large nuttree where we were unable to find a single filbert but what was eaten by this insect. Nuts are often found black with age, in bogs and other places, that no doubt were formerly covered with forests, and no further off London than Greenwich scores of bushels were dug out in digging the foundations for the new pier. The acorn is a true nut, and its beautifully-carved cup is only another form of the husk. Beechnuts were formerly set great store by, but are thought nothing of now, except as mast to fatten swine when they are turned out to feed in the woods. Nor is our sweet chestnut greatly valued, though so many of the trees are grown while the walnut keeps its place, but we spoil the flavour of the nut in trying to grow it large. Small English walnuts left to grow naturally are far superior to any that are imported. We have in this country many valuable old walnuts that still bear, of the real age of which we know no more for a certainty than we know the age of many of our ancient oaks, which in Autumn are still covered with acorns. One walnut that still bears is known to have supplied the dessert prepared for Queen Elizabeth.

NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER.

WE much doubt the conclusion our scientific men have arrived at and their promises that when London is thoroughly drained and purified we shall no longer be troubled with November fogs, for we have walked miles through fogs many leagues from our great metropolis, over moorlands, and heaths, and commons, where there was neither drainage nor unpleasant smell, nor had the works of man ever defiled the sweet air of heaven. That a London fog may be reduced from its strong peanop colour to a tolerably thick grey when every fire consumes its own smoke we can believe, and that is all; for we shall as soon expect to have a cessation of Winter coughs in our churches, where one aisle answers another all through the service, as to be ever entirely free from our dense fogs, which are as difficult at times to see through as a blanket. Then we have our loud-roaring November winds, which toss the sea upon our shores and throw up the heavy shingle like sand, carrying with them the few last leaves that October left us in remembrance of Summer, and leaving our island in nakedness. The fog, and the rain, and the cold winds are the skirmishers that Winter sends out before him to clear the way—the pioneers that cut down every flower to make room for his army of snowflakes to encamp in, and his great frosts to harden, so that he may come rumbling up with his artillery of arrowy sleet. The trees moan and toss their huge branches about as if in agony, while the streams go along complaining between their banks, with a heavy grey sky above them, and the blinding rain muddying their brightness as it washes the earth into their channels. Yet, amid all this apparent desolation, Nature is carrying on her great work; for not a leaf falls without making room for its successor, and is pushed out of its place by the bursting bud, which even now begins to show itself. It is the swelling of this bud at the close of Autumn that forces off the old leaf, coming out above it and pushing down the old footstalk in its youthful strength, thereby causing it to break off and fall. In mild Autumns this bud often attains its full size, and though it makes no further progress during the Winter, yet a few mild days at the approach of Spring causes it to expand and show faint signs of the coming leaf. The leaf, therefore, does not die on the tree, but there is a stir of new life in the branch, and the family of young leaves coming out compel the old ones to take their departure. If a tree dies the leaves die too, but do not fall from the living tree that pushes off its leaves, the dead trunk retaining them, as may be proved by cutting off a bough and leaving it where it falls. For long months after it has been separated from the parent stem it will be found covered with dead leaves; while the living tree, though appearing naked, has sent out thousands of new buds, but the branches must be looked at closely to see them. The cause of evergreens retaining their leaves until the advance of Spring is through the new buds not making their appearance and pushing off the old foliage until that time. That is why the fallen leaves of the holly, and ivy, and evergreen shrubs lie brown and unsightly on the borders of Spring and amid the deep green of Summer. Some have argued that the change in the colour of the leaf has nothing to do with its fall, but that it would be thrust off by the bursting bud just the same without altering its hue at all. This may be true; but we think that whatever it may be that causes the leaf to change colour, whether the juices become acid or absorb more oxygen or whatever else it may be, we have no power to throw off in the daytime, or whatever else it may be, we have no doubt this change operates in such a way on the leaf as to make its fall easier when the new bud pushes out above it—that this losing of colour is a weakening of the leaf; for the time has come when it has no longer strength to contend and push its way any more among the young buds as it did in Spring. The new foliage we often see among the old late in Autumn is caused by the too forward buds opening out of season, and while older leaves are still too green and strong to be pushed from their places. Yet, knowing how necessary it is that these great changes of Nature should take place, we cannot help at times feeling sorry that so much beauty must be destroyed in order that it may be again restored in the coming Spring and Summer; and however little meditative a mind may be it must arrive at one conclusion, that there is nothing on earth but what must undergo a change—that the time will come when we also must yield our places to another generation, fall, and return to earth like the Autumn leaves, while another race is pushing itself out in places.

Autumn has scattered countless millions of ripe seeds upon the earth, which the keen-eyed birds that remain with us all the year round will pick up from among the fallen leaves and withered grasses, and many an insect and small animal feed upon until Spring comes again and brings with her fresh and green provisions, and strews them plentifully before the myriads of eager mouths that have passed the long Winter without tasting food. What consternation does the removal of stacks cause in a great rickyard, where numbers of little animals have taken up their Winter quarters, and how bewildered they look as they run hither and thither, not knowing where to find a fresh hiding-place, when they rush out into the cold and houseless daylight, scarcely able to see at all at first, as they hurry from their dark warm nests! But if the season happens to be wet and warm there is still a show of green in the fields, resembling in colour that which we see at Spring; and this is caused by the grass springing up afresh where it would not have appeared again until March had the season been severe. We have even seen the primroses in flower in December in the warm woods of Surrey and Kent, and the young leaves of the violet making "some little show of green." Do our farmers gain or lose by sowing crops in Autumn? It would be a most useful table if correct returns could be obtained of the number of acres that have to be re-sown in Spring after an unfavourable Winter; for the seed makes no progress under ground during a severe frost, as much of it is lost for ever, though Spring-sown crops are by some considered lighter than those which are reaped from the grain that was sown in Autumn. One thing is certain—a field twice sown entails great loss.

Flocks of wild fowl now come over, and their loud screaming may be heard in the air in the night, that being the time they generally land. They seem very weary for a day or two after they have first alighted, and may be easily destroyed, though they are then in such poor condition as to hardly be worth the cost of sending them to market. When a good view can be obtained of their flight in the daytime it is worth while watching the changes made in the form of the flock. If they are flying against the wind, and it blows strong, though they move in the shape of the letter A without the bar across, yet there will generally be three leaders to form the point of the letter, and in calm weather only one, which has the hardest work to do of all the flock in opening a passage through the air. We have timed the changes of the leader in the wild fens and marshes of Lincolnshire, and have rarely seen him keep his place in the van more than a minute when flying against a head wind. He gives a peculiar cry when he wishes to change his place, which is answered by the one who succeeds him; then the former leader checks his speed for a moment and

falls in with the rear, who fly the easiest as a passage through the air is cut for them. Sometimes a few weak birds will lag far in the rear, but we hardly ever remember seeing them coming up singly, but mostly with a brace of birds in advance whose voices were seldom still, which we often thought were encouraging cries for the poor laggard not to give in.

The most cheerful objects that meet our eyes out of doors, when December has set in, are our evergreens, and, though many new ones have been introduced during the last few years, none excel in beauty our fine old English holly, about which there has been more good poetry written than on any other shrub, not even omitting the laurel, that "mede of conquerors;" for Christmas without the holly and mistletoe boughs might as well be deprived of its plumpudding. Who that has ever seen a large, bright-leaved holly-bush hung with its thousands of crimson berries, standing boldly out when the landscape was covered with snow, ever thought about the rose for a moment? It is the grandest Winter green ever grown, and endeared to us all the more through knowing that it is indigenous, and that the Roman cohorts had to hew their way through it before they could give battle to the old Britons in their wooded fortresses. Left free and open, the holly wears a most graceful form, and will grow to a considerable height. As for a hedge, there is nothing to be compared with it, for it cannot be penetrated by any but our very smallest quadrupeds, who may manage to get through the holes at the bottom of it. Then the little white grey flowers that appear about the end of May, or a little later, are really beautiful if looked into, rising, as they do, above the light-coloured young leaves, which, though formidable to look at and armed with thorns, like the alder leaves that grow on the very same branch, feel as soft in the hand as if you were clutching the foliage of a lilac. Let no one attempt to weed a flower-bed in Summer on which the leaves of the holly falls, unless with gloved hands, for it is as bad as trying to pick out a single pin that has fallen lengthwise in the midst of a hundred that all stand points upwards, or a grass seed from out the spines of the hedgehog. One variety of the holly is happily named hedgehog-holly, and the whole of the upper surface of the leaves is covered with sharp spines as well as the hedges. Other hollies, instead of bearing the rich, coral-coloured berries so much admired, are covered with yellow and white ones, which make a beautiful appearance. Then the wood of this handsome shrub is as white and smooth as ivory when polished, and so fine at times that the grain can hardly be seen at all. We little dreamed when boys that the birdlime we purchased was made from the young shoots of the holly, yet such was the fact; though in this age of improvement it is made of something that costs less trouble, and when used the birds escape and we are glad they do. No hedge is so free from the attack of insects as the holly, nor looks so beautiful all the year round.

The mistletoe is the only true parasitic plant we have in England, and is very seldom seen attached to the oak, but mostly to the crabtree. Any one who never saw it growing would be puzzled to tell what tree it was, partially naked and in some places covered with foliage of a golden green, until on a near approach he found it springing from the bark, and that it was not a tree; but how it came there is still a puzzle unless the seed was inserted in the bark by some bird, for there is no other way of growing mistletoe on a tree but by slitting open the bark, and putting in the seed of the berry; and we believe this may be done on almost any tree, for it is often found growing wild on the thorn, crab-apple, ash, lime, willow, and we hardly know on what tree it has not been found in one place or another, though it loves most to cling to an old crabtree, which is as true a native of England as the oak itself. Perhaps it grew plentifully on the oak in ancient times; or, as the Druids made the oak-groves their temples of worship, they might propagate the mistletoe so as to make these places green in Winter. In the olden time no maiden must be kissed under this bough until the youth had first gathered one of the pearlike berries, and as the branch was always suspended from the ceiling of the room we can imagine what merriment it must have made when some little short fellow endeavoured in vain to pluck a berry. Ivy is rarely used now in decorating houses, though it may still be seen in a few country churches at Christmas, and a church so decorated is well worth seeing, for it is an old custom without any harm in it, and one, we are sure, that is unlikely to awaken any but good thoughts, and be linked only to solemn associations; and it was a beautiful, old, almost holy superstition that caused our simple forefathers to believe good spirits entered the churches at Christmas and concealed themselves among the evergreens. Mankind was never made worse through having the productions of Nature before their eyes, whether in doors or out, at church or at home. A volume might be filled, and pleasant reading it would be, of the customs of different ages and nations, and how they varied these rural decorations, and the times and seasons they rejoiced, surrounded with green branches. Turning from the heathen, it might begin at the time Nehemiah ordered "the courts of the house of God" to be decorated with "branches of thick trees," carried on to the strewing of the streets of Jerusalem, at Our Saviour's entry, and so be brought down in many a picturesque record, through bygone Christmases and Easters, to our own time. Let us not do away with our Christmas decorations, for we have but few things left to bring back the memory of the green old poetical days when our forefathers found happiness under arbours of their own erecting, and watched their children dance beneath flowery garlands which their own hands had wreathed; when their pleasures were harmless and their hearts pure, and there was less empty and showy pride than there is at the present time. Who that has ever sat alone by a deserted hearth at Christmas, in a room where old festivals have been held, has not reflected on the changes that have there taken place, while the firelight has flashed on the portraits of the beloved dead and the dear loving ones that were then far away! What scenes Memory brings before us as we sit and watch the yule-log blaze and send its bright sparks up the dark-mouthed chimney—bright things vanishing in darkness! Love and Beauty, and Youth and Friendship, once congregated there, and friendly hands were clasped together, and warm hearts glowed, and friendly words were spoken, and now where are they gone? The ivy on the walls of the old house rustles in the December wind; like the house itself, it is so old that all remembrance of when the one was first built and the other first planted has passed away. Many a time have its leaves been gathered to decorate those dark wainscoted rooms at Christmas. The morning sun shines on it, and night falls darker where it grows than it does in other places, yet it never seems to change, though many generations have passed away since it first climbed those old walls and enwreathed those twisted chimneys, peeped in at those diamond-shaped lattices where beauty slept and manly vigour reposed; where childhood uttered its plaintive cries, and dead old age had to be shunted at. And from those windows we can see the still green churchyard in which so many of those who have passed away are buried, the side of the large room reflects back their graves through the older panes of the bay-window. We have sat and looked in it, then turned to the pictures of the dead still hanging on the walls who in the years that are gone kept many a merry Christmas in that apartment.