"The horses are right," said Rington; "it would be madness to proceed; the path gets narrower as we go on, and there is a precipice of 500 feet within a yard of us. Jump off, catch hold of their heads, and follow me."

We did as we were bid, but it was with great difficulty we could persuade the poor beasts to stir.

"Keep to the left round this angle," shouted Rington; "there! now back them in here—farther yet, farther yet; it is a pretty deep hole."

It was in fact a sort of cave beneath overhanging rocks; and we were completely sheltered from the storm of waters which raged without. I say "storm of waters" advisedly; for not a breath of wind accompanied the outpouring of that blinding torrent, which fell perpendicularly from the sky as the waters of Niagaran fall over their rocky ledge.

"Ha!" said Rington, as a distant rumbling was heard, "it's coming back; I thought we were not going to be let off so easily as that."

True enough, it was coming back, and rapidly too. The distant rumbling soon increased to a roar; nearer and nearer came the dark clouds, quicker and louder were the startling explosions; again the vivid lightning flashed along the mountain ridge and far into the deep glens, and the deluge still descended, crushing the broad leaves, breaking the stout branches, and dissolving heavy masses of rock by the weight and violence of its fall.

For more than an hour we stood beneath the hanging rock, looking forth upon the terrific grandeur of that awful storm. The roar of the thunder, as it rolled far, far away, reverberating from mountain top to mountain top, was the first sign of a decreasing violence; hitherto the explosions had been so incessant and loud as to overwhelm all other sounds. It suddenly became lighter; the clouds were breaking; we looked up into the sky; positively, a piece of blue the size of a man's hand was visible.

"Scaldings!" cried Rington (he was a Wykmist); "stand by your 'clue-garnets'" (and a bit of a sailor); "that fellow will give us a parting salute yet, and a regular stunner too, I expect."

Bright above our heads hung a long, black, lurid cloud; even to my inexperienced eyes it had a strange and ominous look; though externally black as night, it glowed within with a fierce and livid light: stationary and threatening it retained its isolated position.

But as we gazed, dark pyramids of condensed vapour rise up to meet its closer and closer, quicker and quicker, as though attracted by some magnetic influence, they are drawn towards the floating volcano. And now their spiral tops pierce its side, and at the touch the highly charged gigantic battery pours forth stream after stream of the electric fluid, whilst the very ground beneath us trembled with the fierce concussion and appalling crash of the explosion.

I drew a long breath, and felt like a man who has escaped a great danger, as the flashes of lightning receded from our immediate vicinity, and the thunder once more rolled and rumbled away into the distance.

"That paring volley was worthy the salute with which we were received," said Rington. "You have had your wish of witnessing a thunder-storm in the mountains: how did you like it?" he added, turning to me.

"I would not have missed it for a thousand pounds," I answered.

"Nor I," said Harry: "it surpassed anything I could conceive of grandeur and sublimity."

"Well, it was grand," said Rington; "but we must push on now, with the chance of being able to cross the ford, though the chance is a bad one."

It still rained heavily, but we could see our way, and the fear of a wetting was not added to our anxieties, as we were already drenched to the skin: the first flash from above had gone through our white jean jackets as though they had been made of blotting-paper. Before we gained the bottom of the pass, the rain had ceased, the clouds had disappeared, and the sun shone brightly in the clear blue sky.

"I thought so," said Rington, as we stood by the margin of the stream; "we are too late."

A volume of water, the colour of porter, was surging past at a fearful rate; large trees were whirled along in the rapid current, as it foamed and boiled over the opposing rocks—now an upturned root, now a broken top, appearing above the surface in its headlong course.

"To cross that is simply impossible," observed Rington; "and now, which will you do?—return to Fernside, or go six miles round to Golden Grove?"

We both instantly declared in favour of the latter—anything better than turning back.

We had a long and a weary ride, for the country was in many places under water; and twice we had to swim our horses across gulleys, which Rington affirmed were dry when he passed that way the day before. We arrived at last safe and sound at Golden Grove; Rington placed his wardrobe at our disposal, as Cupid had not yet made his appearance, and a still glass of hot rum-and-water speedily took the chill out of our bones. A good dinner added still more to our comfortable feelings. It was past twelve o'clock before we separated for the night, and as I laid my head on the pillow, the roar of the mountain storm was still ringing in my ears.

ON A SAND-BANK.

What a volume of never-ending wonder is that of Nature, as in many another respect, so in this, that there is not a single blank page nor even a dull page in its whole compass. There are, it is true, many which are printed in characters so minute that the mere "run and read" passer-by pronounces them blank, and many more which to the mere worldling are dull, because seen through an eye dimmed by unnatural glare and glitter; yet even those contain a little world of interesting matter for him who will bend his back to pore upon them with a loving eye.

I have been led into this train of thought by the results of a half-hour passed this afternoon upon a sand-bank. No spot could have seemed more unprofitable and uninteresting—more utterly a blank;
and yet I left it with regret, and took with me thence sweet food for meditation, which lasted me five long miles home. The bank rose on the shady side of a hollow lane, and its clean sand offered a tempting couch to one overheated, as I was, with the fervour of the past noon-day. There, stretched at full length, I fell to admiring and re-admiring the spoils I had walked so far to win—a large tin case laden with orchids. The bee and the fly (Ophrys epigaeæ and aconitae) were there, those strange and beautiful freaks of Thor’s imaginative powers. The butterfly (Habenaria bifolia), and the pyramidal (Orchis pyramidalis), and the sweet-scented per excellence (Cypripedium concolor), blended their powerful colours. The dingy bird’s-nest (Listera viidua-vi) displayed its queer coil of many-knotted roots, and the great white heliophorine (Cephalanthera grandiflora) its few but showy blossoms; while our own Kentish orchis (O. fusca) might have furnished a toy-shop with those miniature dolls, almost lost in their great tawny polonkets, which were hung so thickly about their stem.

When my eye was well nigh satiated with their varied beauties, I replaced them in their cool depository, and began to look around me very listlessly; for, in truth, my mind sympathised much with the drooping drowsiness of Nature, and a sense of oppression in that sultry atmosphere seemed to weigh my spirits down, as it had long since brushed the merry voices of the birds. Yet all around me was swarming active life, exulting in the full glare; minute life; it is true, but fraught with such deep interest as soon thoroughly aroused and absorbed my flagging powers of observation.

A ragged row of thistles across the way first attracted my notice. The tallest of them, queenly to (the peacock butterfly, in vulgar parlance) had chosen for her throne; while grouped about her in lower degree were half a score of her humber congener, the tortoiseshells (Vanessa urticae), each on his thistle cushion. A right royal presence hers, and right worshipfulcouriers they! The wings of all were wide outspread to my gaze, as if in grateful consciousness that God’s own glorious blazonry which they bore was a silent hymn of praise to Him who made the great sun shine out so fiercely for their sake; a hymn, too, that might laugh to scorn every attempt of human art to rival, or even to imitate it.

Nearer at hand, yet still beyond the shade of the overhanging bank and its canopy of ferns, a gigantic umbrellifer stood boldly cut from the bramble-buried dry ditch. This, too, was studded with brilliant gems of insect life; the scarlet cardinal-beetle (Pyrochroa coccineum) and the yellow-striped wasp-beetle (Olytus arietis) were revelling in the strong odours its blossoms exhaled.

An abrupt sand-cliff, which projected over towards my shady nook, gave forth a ceaseless hum from a cloud of flies (Chrysides) of every metallic hue imaginable, that buzzed about its face. Some of them were crimson, others blue, and others green; but all were shot (to use a silkier phrase) and illuminated with the same gold tint. Immediately below my feet, on a regular hot-bath of loose fallen sand, three or four of those most elegant of our British beetles, the tiger beetle (Ondardella competa), were running to and fro very swiftly, of course in search of prey, for the appetite of these pretty monsters seems quite insatiable. The proceedings of one of them soon riveted my attention. Over a hollow at the root of a furze bush, a large spider had woven its cunning web, and in its meshes at that moment was struggling a fly, a small tentredoo or saw-fly, I think. The spider himself stood at the top of his ladder, watching with grim satisfaction the helpless struggles of his victim below; for well he knew how stout was that thread of his own spinning. Just then, however, another longing eye fell upon the fly, and a fell purpose entered the mind of one of my emerald-coated friends, to rob the poor spider of his lawful prey.

Advancing with this intent, he seized one of the gauzy fluttering wings; but the net proving stronger than he had foreseen, a stout tug left him master of no more than the wing he had grasped. What was to be done? There was little hesitation on the part of the beetle; like a second Alexander, he would dispose the Gordian knot with his sword, or rather swords, for there are a pair of them which he ever carries unsheathed and ready for action. This, however, proved no easy task, for the clammy cords clung most embarrassingly about his weapons, and even round his neck. To get rid of them, he from time to time lifted a foot and brushed them off, as a dog does the flies that settle on his nose, and then went to work again. One by one the meshes were removed, and at last the captive, still bound hand and foot, rolled out at the feet of his persevering foe, and was carried off in triumph.

One more scene from real (insect) life, and we must quit our sandy seat for the road again. Where the slope of the bank was steepest, just above my head, I observed two nuts of differend clans, black and red, pulling with might and main in opposite directions. What was the nature of the bone of contention I am at a loss to conceive. It was a small round dark grain, looking more like a seed of the bush vetch (Vicia sepium) than anything else. The black, pulling down-hill, had of course all his own way; still, red refused to let go; and I thought of the wise man’s words, “Go to the ant, thou sluggard, and consider her ways;” for a more remarkable instance of perseverance under insurmountable difficulties I never witnessed. At length the treacherous sand slid from under his feet; he lost his hold; and the descending stream, with the weight of the now undisputed prize, carried his antagonist rapidly down, down, to the bottom. But no; ere he quite reached the terra firma below, he mysteriously disappeared, as if swallowed up by an earthquake. Gathering up my hat and trusty staff, and ease of orchids, I made the same descent in one bound, keeping my eye meanwhile upon the spot where he had vanished. When it was reached, the mystery was speedily solved; there, right in his downward track, yawned the fatal pit, which I could not discern from above; and from the bottom of it protruded the ugly jaws of the ant-lion, which had already
put him out of sight, and were now standing wide
open for another such mouthful.

"Said I not rightly, dear reader, that the un-
promising sandbank had proved neither a blank
nor a dull page to me?"

**LONDON IN THE GREENWOOD.**

It is a fine sunny breezy morning on one of the
Mondays of August—Saint Monday you may call
it if you will—when, in the character of "one of the
people," a character, by the way, which we have no
intention of repudiating, we start in one of the
people's vans, for the forest of Epping. This
forest, as many of our readers know, lies eastward
of London, and straggles over a vast extent of
ground, comprising in its embrace many neat little
villages and hamlets, associated in the memory of
Londoners, and especially of East Londoners, with
the classic name of the greenwood and the frolic
and fun of a forest holiday. For, to the dweller in
Bethnal Green, Spitalfields, Whitechapel, and a
wide district besides, Epping Forest is what the
Bois de Boulogne is to the Parisian—the Ultime
Thete of all his recreative rambles, and the place
where he abandons himself with the least restraint
and reserve to rural and innocent pursuits and
recreations.

Our van, which is furnished for the occasion, and
paid for by general subscription of its temporary
occupants, carries in all about forty of us, reckon-
ing the children; it is driven by its rather bulky
proprietor, grand in figured butcher, sprightly waist-
coat, and irresponsible top boots; and is drawn by
two stout sleek-coated horses, who trot merily
along the road, whisking their long tails and fling-
ing their manes about, as if our united weight were
just nothing at all, and they scorned to think any-
thing about it. We have not a single ounce of
crinoline on board, nor even a single silk gown;
but we have clean cotton dresses and well-brushed
Sunday coats, and faces, both male and female,
which, albeit they are some of them prematurely
furrowed with the cares, anxieties, and sufferings
of a struggling life, yet wear a genial smile, while
all eyes are sparkling with present or anticipated
enjoyment. We are prodigiously crowded at first
setting out; some of the husbands and fathers being
extremely broad in the shoulders, and given to
stooping, and squaring their stout limbs in a way
not at all convenient for close packing; but half an
hour's jumping and jolting over the stones has a
grand effect in shaking and settling us down and
filling up the chinks and interstices, so that by the
time we are well on to the meadows, we are packed
as fraternally as pickards in a barrel, and bowling
along, as Mr. Blinker, our vice-d-visé, observes to his
assenting wife, "as jolly as sand-boys"—though
what especial reason sand-boys have for being al-
ways so jolly as they proverbially are, passes our
comprehension.

Blinker, as soon as he can get his hand into
his breeches pocket, pulls out his tobacco-box and
begins filling his short pipe, and his bad ex-
ample is followed almost unanimously by the rest
of the adult males. The ladies do not dream of
objecting, but push aside the awning to let the
reek escape. Then, from some corner of the van,
there come the preluding notes of an accordion,
and the performer, a pale-faced lad of sixteen, strikes
up the air of "Cheer, Boys, Cheer," which he plays
with spirit and taste, and a very tolerable notion of
harmony. The ladies do not sit silent while the
music plays, nor indeed the gentlemen either; yet,
the moment it ceases, they demand a fresh tune, as
though determined to crowd as many pleasures as
possible into the holiday. Thus we trundle along,
smoking, singing, laughing, and chattering over
the hard smooth road; now we pass a van, and
now another, and now half a dozen more, all simi-
larly freighted to our own; and now we are passed
in our turn by vans less heavily laden or more
powerfully horseless than ours. Thirty vans at least
we have already seen on the road; nor are the vans
by any means the exclusive equipages of the forest
immigrants: the vans are all club or subscription
affairs; but in addition to these there are a goodly
number of independent "turn-outs" always in sight,
belonging to that portion of the population of
Whitechapel on wheels who can contrive to make
holiday on this glorious day. There is the butcher's
cart, the fishmonger's cart, the costermonger's ditten,
in which are strapped down four or five chairs for
seats; the semi-van of the furniture-broker, laden
with his young family; the trap of the town traveller,
who is driving out his young wife; the stableman's
dog-cart, and the holiday cab of the cabman, who,
for once in a way, will drive mother and the little
ones for a jaunt in the forest, instead of "putting
on" at the stand. All these vehicles, and many
others not so easily describable, make up a charioted
host, who are setting forth to invade the forest this
morning, and whom the forest will swallow up and
hide in its umbrous leafy recesses, covering them
up as effectually as did little Robin redbreast the
babes in the wood.

We have not long passed the interminable suburbs
of London, when we pull up to wet the horses' mouths
at a little village, where one of the vans which preceded us has halted at the public-house,
and discharged its occupants, who are all noisily
engaged in a game of cricket on the common, where
the grass, level as a table and smooth as a carpet,
prevented the capital field for the exercise. We trun-
dle on again, however, leaving them to their sport,
and we see that other parties have reached their
destination and settled down at their chosen spots
for the enjoyment of the day. Some stop at way-
side inns, where the landlords, accommodating their
charges to the means of their customers, will make
them comfortable on moderate terms. Others,
bringing their own provisions with them, keep clear
of the landlord altogether, and, leaving the main
road, will plunge into the forest towards some
favourite nook, and, isolating themselves from all
other parties, will enjoy a select pic-nic of their own.
And again, others, pursuing a medium course, will
put up the van and horses at the inn, and make
such use of it themselves as convenience prompts.

Our equipage stops at a small settlement, where
some cross-roads branch off into the forest, and