

"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 Niagara 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 dislodging 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 Wykamist); "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."

Right 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 gaze, dark pyramids of condensed vapour rise up to meet it: 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 parting 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 gush 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 stiff 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 these 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-adoring the spoils I had walked so far to win—a large tin case laden with orchids. The bee and the fly (*Ophrys apifera* and *aranifera*) were there, those strange and beautiful freaks of Flora's imitative powers. The butterfly (*Habenaria bifolia*), and the pyramidal (*Orchis pyramidalis*), and the sweet-scented *par excellence*, (*Gymnadenia conopsea*), blended their powerful odours. The dingy bird's-nest (*Listera nidus-avis*) displayed its queer coil of many-knotted roots, and the great white helleborine (*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 poke-bonnets, which were hung so thickly about its stem.

When my eye was well nigh sated 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 hushed 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 Io (the peacock butterfly, in vulgar parlance) had chosen for her throne; while grouped about her in lower degree were half a score of her humbler congeners, the tortoiseshells (*Vanessa urticae*), each on his thistle cushion. A right royal presence hers, and right worshipful courtiers 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 bade 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 out from the bramble-buried dry ditch. This, too, was studded with brilliant gems of insect life; the scarlet cardinal-beetle (*Pyrochroa coccinea*) and the yellow-striped wasp-beetle (*Clytus arictis*) 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 *silken* 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 (*Cicindela campestris*), 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 tentredo or saw-fly, I think. The spider himself stood at the top of his ladder, watching with grim satisfaction the hopeless 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 untie 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 opened, 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 ants of different 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 it 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 case 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 unpromising sandbank had proved neither a blank nor a dull page to me?

LONDON IN THE GREENWOOD.

It is a fine sunshiny 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 charms 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 *Ultima Thule* 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 farmed for the occasion, and paid for by general subscription of its temporary occupants, carries in all about forty of us, reckoning the children; it is driven by its rather bulky proprietor, grand in figured belcher, spriggy waist-coat, and irreproachable top boots; and is drawn by two stout sleek-coated horses, who trot merrily along the road, whisking their long tails and flinging their manes about, as if our united weight were just nothing at all, and they scorned to think anything 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 macadam, we are packed as fraternally as pilchards in a barrel, and bowling along, as Mr. Blinker, our *vis-à-vis*, observes to his assenting wife, “as jolly as sand-boys”—though what especial reason sand-boys have for being always 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 example 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 similarly freighted to our own; and now we are passed in our turn by vans less heavily laden or more powerfully horsed 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 ditto, 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 umbrageous 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, presents a capital field for the exercise. We trundle 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 wayside 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 picnic 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