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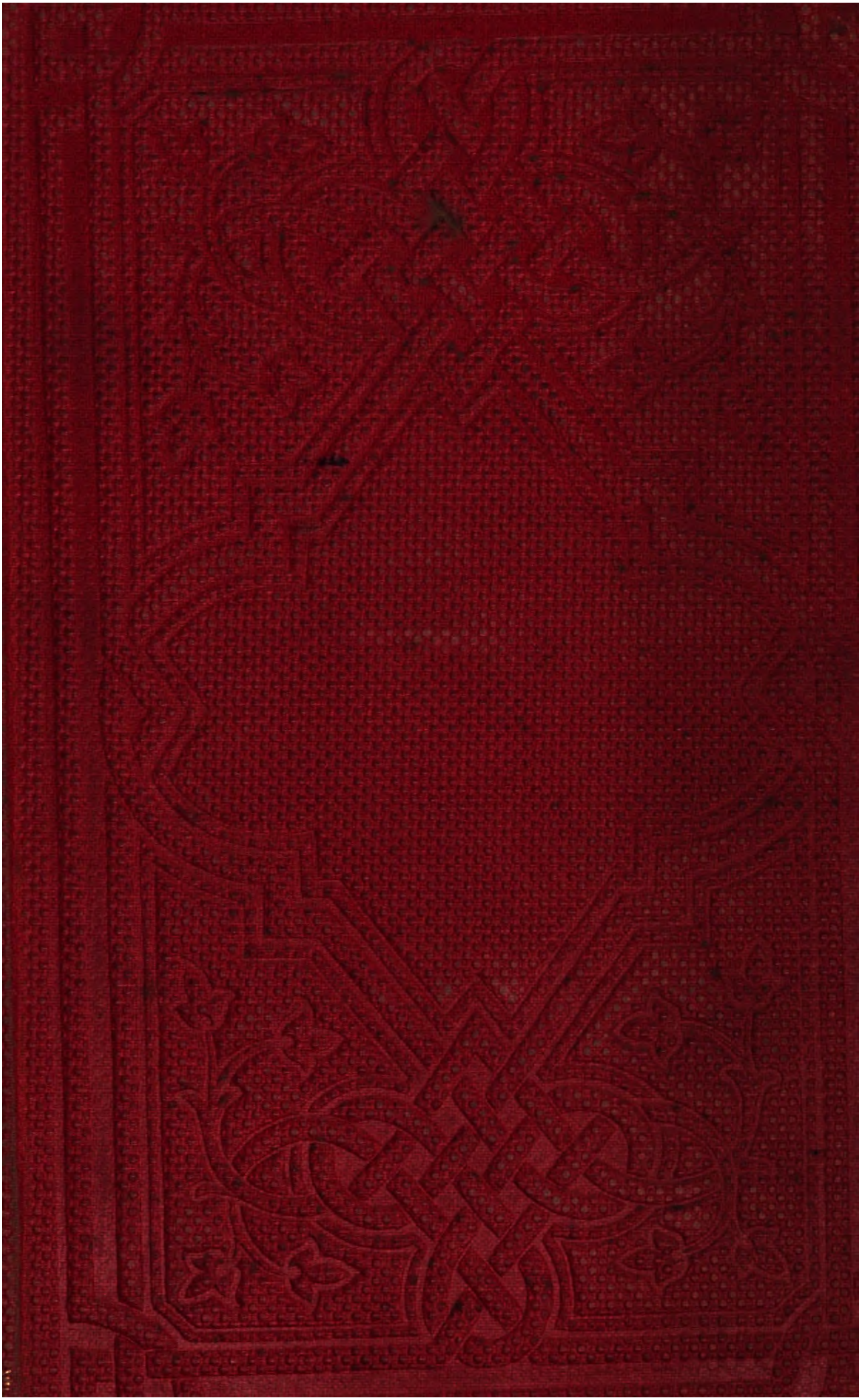

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THE POACHER,

AND OTHER

PICTURES OF COUNTRY LIFE.

By THOMAS MILLER,

AUTHOR OF "BEAUTIES OF THE COUNTRY," "RURAL SKETCHES," ETC. ETC.

WITH THIRTY ILLUSTRATIONS BY SAMUEL WILLIAMS.

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PREFACE.

WHETHER or not this book will be remembered a quarter of a century hence, will be a matter of no moment to the Author; if it has so long an existence, it will serve to point out the many great changes England has undergone since the work was written.

Surely that man has lived in an age worth recording, who, from travelling three miles an hour in the old ponderous stage-waggon, or snail-paced market boat, has been whirled fifty miles in the same space of time by a railway engine; who has sent a letter hundreds of miles for a penny, and seen her Majesty "black-balled" by her own paid postmaster, after she had been kind enough to countenance the transmission; and when

there are grave men who believe with Wilkes, that hanging a man is the very worst use you can make of him; and others who think that it would be no sin to erect a statue to Oliver Cromwell—that the stern Protector did not govern England so badly after all, and that had not King Charles been a knave, he would never have been a martyr. These are bold thoughts to utter, yet we hear them every day, and no one now seems to make them a matter of wonderment.

Many of the scenes in the present work are laid amongst a simple and old-fashioned race of people, who, half a century ago, bowed down at the name of King, and believed that to respect his "divine right" was next to, if not before, their duty to Heaven; when to honour God and the King was supposed to be one and the same thing. Since those days, a new rank has arisen, and intellect claims a right to be heard, although its owner may not possess a rood of land. Punch has, since that period, been transformed from the old street blackguard on the green-baize forum, into a wise, staid gentleman, respectable to his very hump, and wielding a truncheon more dreaded by evil-doers than the baton of

our bravest field-marshal ever was by the enemy. The sun himself has turned portrait-painter, and our likenesses are now drawn by the light of Heaven; while a man, having a week's holiday, sets out to have a peep at the Pyramids, and just makes as much preparation for leaving Cornhill for Grand Cairo, as our forefathers did when they journeyed from Cheapside to Clapham. If these are not changes enough, let us glance at the days when Dryden was paid sixpence a line for his poetry, to our own, when five hundred pounds have been offered for the best play, and no first-rate author thought it worth while to compete for the prize.

Surely, amid such daring changes as these, the Writer is "doing the state some service," by drawing the thoughts of his Readers into the green solitudes of the country, that they may have a brief breathing space, before they proceed further; and although he has ventured to give an opinion on a few matters, they will be better able to weigh them more calmly while traversing in fancy the yet unenclosed footpaths of Old England; that if, at times, he has expressed his sentiments in strong language, he would have them remember that he has also felt deeply,

and that the subject so handled was then the one in which his whole soul felt most interested; and that he has ever borne in mind the holy text which says,—"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

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THE POACHER.

"If gentlemen cannot breathe fresh air without injustice, let them putrefy in Cranbourne Alley. Make just laws, and let squires live and die where they please. The prisons are filled with peasants, shut up for the irregular slaughter of rabbits and birds, a sufficient reason for killing a weasel, but not for imprisoning a man."—Rev. Sydney Smith's Works, pp. 57, 63, vol. ii.

It was in the afternoon of a busy winter's day, when a tall, healthy-looking young man, wearing a smock-frock and heavy ankle-boots, was seen crossing a footpath, which ran through a newly ploughed field and led to a small thatched cottage, the last which marked the long line of the village street. The peasant had gone a long way out of his road

to reach the cottage by this footpath; for although it was a pleasant summer's walk to a neighbouring hamlet, yet to gain it, and avoid passing through the open street, he had made a circuit of at least two miles; for he was ashamed of being seen, as he had but just returned from prison, where he had been confined three months for poaching. He opened the door, and as his wife arose with the child in her arms to kiss him, said, "Well, Mary, here I am again; I've come back like a bad penny."

A tear started into the woman's eye, as she said, "Never mind, John! it will come home to the gamekeeper, in some shape before he dies, for taking the false oath he did about you."

"And how have you gone on since I've been away?" inquired the husband, as he took up a child on each knee, and kissed them by turns.

"But very badly," answered she, sighing; "the overseers tried all they could to persuade me to break up my home and go into the workhouse, but I refused, so they allowed me nothing. One poor neighbour and another helped me a little when they could, and the dear children have never wanted much." The tears chased each other down her cheeks as she spoke, and a glance at her careworn, though handsome features, told plainly that she had deprived herself of many a morsel for the sake of her children. "I have got nothing in the house but a little bread," added she; "would you like a crust after your walk?"

"No, I will wait a while," answered the husband. "They allowed me a halfpenny a day for working on the treadmill, so I had three shillings to receive this morning when I left the prison. Go out and get a little bacon and potatoes; I have tasted neither for three months."

He held the child-in-arms whilst the mother went out to the chandler's shop; and no sooner was her back turned

than he examined the cupboard, the shelves of which were empty, saving of a little oatmeal in a jar, a small portion of salt, the remains of a coarse brown loaf, and a few pieces of crockery. The wife returned with a frying-pan, which she had borrowed, having sold her own during her husband's imprisonment, together with the saucepan; so the potatoes were put on in the tin kettle. The husband watched every movement, and soon discovered the utter "nakedness of the land."

Their frugal meal over, and the children in bed, the young couple sat down to talk over their prospects. John's place in the farm had been filled up by another man, and several of the villagers were at work on the roads, their wages one shilling per day—a sorry prospect with a wife and three children; so John sighed and shook his head, whilst his partner remarked, "that half a loaf was better than no bread, and matters would mend with the spring."

The husband applied next day to the overseers, and was placed to break stones on the highroad. He was much respected by his fellow-labourers; and to welcome his return, they in the evening went into the village alehouse to treat him to a pint and a pipe. Whilst seated on the long settle before a comfortable fire, talking over old times, the gamekeeper entered with his dog and gun, and took his seat on the opposite bench. The first words exchanged between the two were, "Well, informer!" and, "Well, jail-bird!" The landlord chanced to enter, or the altercation would soon have risen high; as it was, they each confined themselves to a little savage recrimination.

"Remember, you'll have six months the next time I catch you," said the gamekeeper.

"Shall I indeed?" answered John Burrows, knitting his brows as he spoke; "and what will you have, think you?"

"Perhaps a broken head, if you can give me one," replied the gamekeeper, with a forced and savage laugh.

"I don't think we should part on such terms as we did before," replied Burrows; "I hope we shall not meet to try."

They still continued to "rip up the old grievance;" the gamekeeper contending that he found him with the hare in his hand, and Burrows still persisting, as before, that he picked it up out of the ditch in the field by the wood-side as he was returning from his work in the evening.

"You well know, Parks," said a stout, athletic young man, addressing the gamekeeper, "that I had thrown it there; I have told you so fifty times, and bid you do your worst; I saw you coming, and threw it there, and what more do you want? I don't believe John Burrows ever set a snare in his life; I have hundreds, and everybody knows it—take your change out of that."

"I never did," answered Burrows; "nor was I ever a poacher in my life, and yet I have had three months of it, and lost a good place of work into the bargain. Parks," added he, looking fixedly at the gamekeeper, "you're a d——d rascal, and, weak as I am through prison diet, I should like you to stand up before me for half an hour now, just to try which is the best man."

"He'll none fight," said the young man who had so openly declared himself a poacher, and his lip curled with scorn as he spoke, "unless it be when he meets a man alone in the woods —he armed with his gun, and the other only with his walking-stick—as he did when he shot the poor shoemaker dead; they brought it in 'manslaughter,'" added he, with a sneer, "when it was a cowardly, cold-blooded murder. Parks, I wouldn't have your conscience for ten times your salary!"

The landlord again interposed, and as one or two under-

keepers had by this time entered, the conversation became more general. From that night John Burrows and the poacher became sworn friends; and the latter often vowed that if he ever met with Parks whilst he was out at night, he would pay him off for "old scores." Dick Heron, the poacher, was seldom without money, and he often enticed Burrows to drink with him; for he well knew that his companion had suffered imprisonment unjustly, and although sorry for what he could never remedy, yet he tried to make up for it in the best way he could. How he got rid of the game was a secret between him and the village butcher, who was on intimate terms with a licensed game-seller in an adjacent market-town. The keepers might watch, Heron still poached; and it was whispered that Parks had more than once avoided coming in contact with him on a moonlight night, and had turned off purposely into another path in the wood. Heron even boasted that he had often seen the keeper's back; and as for his dog, he had patted it so often in the alehouse, that it knew him as well as it did Parks—came up, smelt him, wagged its tail, and then followed the keeper. There was no doubt much truth in Heron's boast; for Parks had, as we before stated, been tried for murder, and he might have some dread at meeting with the poacher alone, for he was the "hero of a hundred fights."

Many a shilling did the poacher give to Burrows, and many a hare and rabbit were snugly covered under a crust, and made into a pie and baked in the oven of that cottage, though not without alarm on the part of the wife at first, until Heron reasoned and argued, and showed that the farmers were compelled to feed the hares which the squire sold, and that more than one of them had accepted of hares from his own hand. These arguments, together with a hard winter, only six shillings a week, and three small

children, did much towards reconciling Mrs. Burrows to what she still considered to be wrong. She also did the poacher's washing and mending, and he paid her like a prince, though he regularly worked on the roads. The overseer once caught him eating his dinner by the road-side; it was a small cold hare-pie. He asked Dick where he got the hare, and his answer was, "I found it ready cooked under the crust." "They will have thee one of these days," said the farmer, smiling. "I shall be more deserving of three months than Burrows was," replied Dick: "I saw a fine hare this morning somebody had thrust into a hole in the north end of your hay-stack, and I left it there."

"It is a cold day," said the farmer, "and a pint of ale will do you no harm to-night;" and he thrust a shilling into Heron's hand, and on the following Sunday sat down to dinner with a beautiful hare on the table. Everybody could trust Dick Heron; he never betrayed a friend in his life, and the worst word they could ever say of him was, "He's a poacher!" The overseer of the highway did no more than Mrs. Burrows had done, nor did he enjoy the dish a bit the less through knowing that he came by it illegally; he had but little doubt that he had fed it himself, for he was a severe sufferer through game, as his wheat fields skirted the wood-side, yet he dare not kill one; the squire allowed none of his tenants to take out a license.

A few evenings after, the principal farmers in the hundred met to talk over a little parish business in the village hostel, when one of them said, he should be compelled to give up the lease he had taken of the squire; alleging, as a reason, the havoc made by game amongst his crops. "I have this winter," said he, "lost one-third of my turnips through the hares and rabbits; what we turn up over-night,

are half eaten up by them before the morning. I have seen fifty of them in the wood-end field; and three hares eat as much as any sheep."

"Nor is that all," answered another farmer, who was also a great sufferer through game-preserving; "they nibble the heart out of the young clover, and leave the under-grass worth but little for summer hay; the same with the spring wheat, they devour the early shoots, and others that bud out in their place are weakly and worthless, and unripe when harvest-time comes. True, we can throw up the land, which is but poor recompense, after all that we laid out in manuring, and draining, and improvements."

"I had to sow barley twice this season," continued a third, "for the pheasants came out and ate up the grain before it had struck into the soil. Game sweeps off everything both above and below ground. This year hundreds of rabbits choose my potato-field to burrow in. I spoke to the steward about the destruction they had caused; he told me I knew how to remedy it: the word was as usual—leave."

"But the worst of all is the allotments," said an old man; "I am sorry for the poor labourers; early and late do they toil at their spot of ground, up with the sun, and off by five or six to their regular day's work, after having worked like slaves in their bit of garden ground. Their beans and peas appear, early cabbages and other vegetables, and in one night are all eaten up bare. Poor Burrows told me his seed last year cost him altogether a pound, and he had nothing left worth gathering, for the hares had eaten up all."

"I am afraid sending him to prison will prove his ruin," said the first speaker; "not that I think it's any disgrace to him, for he neither robbed nor injured anybody;

and after all, I should have picked up the hare myself, as he did, had I seen a chance. But, poor fellow, he does not seem to be the man he was; he is conscious we all know he has been to prison, and the thoughts of it somehow seem to 'bash' him. I never heard of his attending the alehouse until he came out of jail, and got acquainted with Dick Heron. I'm very sorry for him, for he was a most worthy young man before this affair happened."

"He's a lost man, sir, depend upon it," added another; "I saw him and Heron out together very late one night, as I was returning home from market. As for Dick, game he will have; and it is his boast that he can undersell any game-preserver in England, because he neither pays for keepers nor feed. His hat covers his family, and if he goes to prison we should all feel more sorry than he would. I think Parks does not like to 'tackle' Dick somehow; especially since he confessed to having thrown the hare in the ditch for which poor Burrows was taken up and committed. I have heard the poacher tell the gamekeeper to his face, that if they ever do meet, he will find his work ready cut out for him; Dick hates him, and Parks is afraid."

"I have often thought it unfair," said the elder farmer, "that a poor fellow who is either taken up for trespass or poaching should not have some chance to defend himself. A gamekeeper, who generally wishes to stand as well as he can in the estimation of his master, comes forward and makes his statement, true or false; there is seldom anyone by to contradict or cross-question him. The culprit is not believed even if he is innocent; for the magistrate is too often a game-preserver himself, and looks on all poachers and trespassers as rogues and vagabonds,—so he commits him. Appeal is out of the question, as the peasant is too poor to employ a counsel, or even find bail for his appearance in another court. Had I known what I do now of

poor Burrows's affair, I would have seen him through a fair trial, cost what it might, for I hate injustice as I do the devil. A jury of honest farmers would have acquitted Burrows, and a just judge would have made Parks ashamed to show his face in the court again."

"I have known more than one poacher who has been made a gamekeeper," said another, "which proves to me how lightly the gentleman who took him into service must have thought of his former offences: for no man would be so mad as to put an acknowledged thief into a situation of trust. Which of us would again employ a man who had been found guilty of stealing a sheep, a pig, or robbing a hen-roost? I would not; yet if I wanted a hand, I would engagé Heron to-morrow, although I know him to be one of the greatest poachers in the county. Poverty and hunger compel many a poor man to take a hare or a rabbit, who would sooner perish through want than steal from any one. You may preach to him about guilt till you are hoarse; he believes he has as much right to a hare or a wild rabbit as the lord of a thousand acres. No law can ever alter this opinion; what he captures may have been running over the wild heath or the unclosed common; from boyhood he has looked upon these spots as a freehold, and the game that he sees there he believes belongs to anyone who catches it, and feels no more regret about seizing it than he does in thrusting the young linnet into his hat which he has hunted from bush to bush. In other property, the man who prosecutes must, in some measure, identify it; in game this is not called for: a man might escape for stealing a pig through lack of proof, but with a hare he has not a chance left."

So argued these "sons of the soil," over their evening ale; and they but uttered what thousands of English farmers believe to be the truth, though no one has yet proposed

a remedy for this crying evil. If gentlemen will preserve game, let them be at the expense of it, and not make the farmer pay; for he is not always allowed to take out a license, there is too often a clause in his lease to prevent this; true, he is not compelled to take the farm, no more than the mechanic is to take starvation wages, while there is the union-workhouse open. Let the game on open commons, and heaths, and highways be free to all who can capture it; this would of itself lessen the evil: and if a man wilfully trespasses on preserved ground, imprison him; give him, however, a chance to capture a hare or a rabbit on these old open spaces, and he will seldom enter your parks or woods. We should not then meet with accounts of so many murders amongst keepers and poachers; the village vagabond would go out with his dog and snares, and if he caught nothing, he could but blame his own ill-luck. The farmer might permit him to range over the fields he rented, and if he took a hare or two, he would not find so many runs through his standing corn. Let the peasant have cheaper bread and more employment, give him a little allotment, and let him kill the game that enters it; or, wherever he can obtain permission, let him hunt when he can afford a holiday; a gun he would not need, he would manage without that, and soon be tired of the sport, for game would then by instinct seek the preserves for shelter. This is a simple but sure remedy; make but a thing common, and the novelty is lost: it would amuse a few idle fellows; and they would be much better so employed, than spending three months out of the twelve in prison, and leaving their wives and families chargeable to the parish.

Even as the farmers had prophesied, so it turned out. John Burrows, through his connexion with Heron, became a confirmed poacher. They still continued to break stones on the road, but they now worked by measure, so could

begin when they chose, and leave off at whatever hour they pleased, for they were only paid for what they did. Night after night were they out together: and Burrows, after his three months' imprisonment, seemed to have lost all respect for his character. He felt that the farmers looked on him differently to what they were wont to do; but his many visits to the alehouse had called forth this change: their cold looks were the consequence of his own misconduct, although circumstances unforseen by himself had their weight in leading him into such a course of life; and when in liquor, he laid all his sins at the gamekeeper's door. Heron was a professed poacher; from the time that he was a shepherd boy he had set snares; he was tolerated the more because he had never been caught. Burrows, up to the time of his imprisonment, had ever borne the name of a most respectable man; nor had he, when he left the jail, stood a bit worse in the eyes of the farmers, until it became whispered that he had turned poaching into a trade, that he made money by it, and spent it in drink. Dick, somehow, had obtained a right to continue poacher; every one knew it, and not a farmer could be found to inform against him; but two were too many for one village: beside, Dick was single, and Burrows a married man with a family; his wife also was a respectable farmer's daughter, whose father's ruin, it was said, was caused through game eating up his crops, for the old man struggled on, and died just when they were about to make him bankrupt, declaring that for many seasons his losses had amounted to fifty pounds a year, through the destruction of game only. The little allotment which Burrows held had, during the first year or two, been the talk of the whole village; his radishes, lettuces, and onions were finer than any in the neighbourhood. He produced a dish of peas at the village club-feast, when few besides had even got theirs to flower; his gar-

den was his pride, and his wife spent hours over it: game entered at last, and made in one night a desert, while the day before all was blossoming into beauty. Autumn saw him committed to prison for picking up a dead hare, which he had not snared: game had wrought his ruin; he had fallen, and lacked the energy to raise himself; he felt that he had been the companion of felons in a common jail; more than one had halted at the alehouse he too often frequented, and had claimed him as a prison acquaintance.

No marvel that there ran bitter blood between him and Parks, the gamekeeper; each waited his own time, believing that the hour of revenge would come; words and blows had been exchanged over their ale, and Heron had separated them. Their utter hatred for each other deepened daily. Both Burrows and the gamekeeper were courageous men; but as the latter had been tried for murder, and was the chief cause of the poacher's unjust imprisonment, his conscience sometimes smote him for what he had done, producing that peculiar feeling which causes such a sinking of the heart, and (however naturally brave a man may be) tells him that his is not the righteous side of a quarrel. Burrows, on the other hand, considered himself an ill-used man, and looked upon the gamekeeper only in the light of a bitter enemy, believing from his heart that his motives sprung from envy at the respectable station he had attained in the village, and the high terms in which the farmers were wont to speak of him. Nor was this all; they had been rivals in love; had both aspired to the hand of the farmer's daughter, who was now Burrows's wife, and for this, he believed, the gamekeeper had never forgiven him. Once or twice Parks had crossed the path of Mrs. Burrows during her husband's imprisonment, and had not dared to look up into her face; as the villagers said, there was "a hang-dog down-look about him," whenever he met her.

Nor did it at all improve his temper to be told, when in the alehouse, how thin his old sweetheart looked while her husband was in prison. Thus, if neither malice nor revenge lurked underneath their mutual dislike, these were reasons strong enough to prove that they had no cause to respect each other.

In ordinary cases, where gamekeepers and poachers attack each other, the latter have generally a wish only to escape clear with their game; if called upon to surrender, they refuse; they are seldom the first to commence the quarrel, conscious that, in the eye of the law, they are considered the aggressors; and when a man has gone thus far, who would not, if he could, repel force by force, when he knows that if captured his doom is a prison? Years ago the punishment for night poaching was transportation: and we marvel that so little blood was shed during that tyrannical period. Keepers, we believe, at that time, were more cautious in their attacks, and "Liberty or Death," we well know, were watchwords amongst the poachers. A man had a more powerful motive for defending himself and making his escape then than now; and we doubt not but that between both parties there was a silent understanding that they went out to kill or be killed if discovered, and that this cruel law, which gave no quarter, caused both gamekeepers and poachers mutually to shun each other. Game preserves were in those days guarded by man-traps and spring-guns; the innocent trespasser, who might by chance lose his way in the night, was as liable to be shot dead, as the poacher who wilfully ventured on those forbidden grounds in quest of game; not that we think the man who caused the spring-gun to be placed there, and planted the hidden wire along the ground, one jot less guilty of murder than if he had held the muzzle of a pistol close to the trespasser's heart, and pulled the

deadly trigger with his own hand. One was a cold-blooded, cowardly mode of attack, leaving a man no means of defending himself; the other might admit of a moment's parley, and a chance of striking aside the arm before the shot was fired. Nor is the system much better now; for whilst gamekeepers go out in the night with loaded fire-arms, poachers will, whenever they can, also arm themselves with the same deadly weapons. There must be wild places open and free, in which the poacher may set his snares, and ramble with his dog, before game preserves will be considered strictly as private property. Once let the poacher know, that on certain waste lands, open heaths and commons, fields through which foot-paths run, that there, and there only, he may capture game without molestation, and the general voice will soon be uplifted against him if he ventures upon private and forbidden grounds; let this be tried until a better remedy can be discovered for this great evil. Depend upon it we shall meet with fewer of those midnight attacks and savage murders which so often meet our eyes in the columns of the newspapers; that a poacher will then be looked upon in no other light than a robber; and that even the feeling of the honest amongst his own class of society will not then, as now, run in his favour. Let him carry his gun, if he can afford one, openly, and in the daytime; but on no account to go abroad with it at night. Let the cur run barking at his heels, and the wire snares hang dangling over his shoulders; let there be no more mystery or secret about his profession than there is in that of the angler, who sallies forth with his rod and basket in the open eye of day; and when he begins to find, in the limited range which is allowed him, that but little gain can be obtained from such a mode of life, necessity will compel him to become industrious, and he will soon glide into laborious habits like other men: he

will seek game only for amusement, instead of profit; and when he perceives how little he can capture, he will soon be ashamed of his profession.

This, in our humble opinion, would do more towards the preservation of game than all the laws which have been hitherto enacted. Few would then be found to pity the professed poacher. What game he could fairly kill would be his own; and if we err not, such a plan would go a great way towards exterminating the battue system of murder which too often takes place, for few gentlemen would then drive the game out of their preserves by this wholesale destruction.

The gamekeeper and Burrows had both made up their minds that, meet whenever they might, on forbidden ground, no quarter would either be asked for or given; and Heron, who had no malice in his nature, did all that lay in his power to prevent hostilities between them, nor would he, if he could hinder it, let his companion go out alone in the night. "I like to fight a man, and have done with it," said the open-hearted poacher; "if he beat me, I would shake hands with him the next minute. Never let a grudge grow after you have stood up man to man; it's a bad plan, Burrows, and nobody knows where it will end."

"I cannot forget it, if I would," replied Burrows; "one thing I have made up my mind to, and that is, never purposely to put myself in his way; if we meet, and he takes no notice of me, I shall take none of him. If he threatens to inform against me, I shall not complain. But if he lays a hand upon me, or even raises his arm, then," added he, after a moment's pause, "why the best man wins."

"But what," said Heron, "if he only warns you off the ground, and tells you, if you will promise not to come there again, he will take no notice of it,— surely you would go?—I know I should."

"That will never be the case," answered Burrows; "meet when we may, we part not on such peaceable terms. He knows it, and so do I. A wild cat and a terrier are as likely to lie down side by side as we are. They tell me Parks has given up carrying a gun in the night; it is a fair challenge now! Our two cudgels were reared up in the same corner one day in the ale-house, and we both looked at them, then at each other, but neither of us spoke. This," said he, lifting up a knotted crab-tree bludgeon as he spoke, "will decide either his fate or mine."

"I do not like this, Burrows," said Heron, in a solemn tone of voice, unlike his general manner of speaking; "promise me that you will never go out again in the night. I will run all risks, and go share and share alike, the same as if you were with me. If Parks meets me, we shall not fight, depend upon it; and if we do, and I come off with the worst, I have neither wife nor child to leave behind in trouble, and I would not forget to give him one or two in, if we should ever come to blows, for what he has done for you; but God forbid I should ever kill him. I would rather be imprisoned a thousand times than do this. A few blows one may get the better of, but——" he left the sentence unfinished, so much was he startled at the sudden change which had passed over the countenance of his companion, as he stood with his teeth clenched, his brows knitted together, and the crab-tree cudgel clutched in his hand, as if it had been screwed up in the jaws of a vice.

"You would say murder," replied Burrows; "but I seek not to shed his blood. I tell you, Heron, it is not that, nor do I well know what it is. But when I recall the naked shelves and empty cupboard, which I found on my return from prison, the thin hungry features of my

children, and the careworn, sorrowful countenance of their mother, I ask you if you think I can either forgive or forget that fellow's villany? Look at what I was before that time, and then at what I am now! No, the day of reckoning will come, and no one can prevent it."

Heron argued with him in vain, and it was noticed by many that the two poachers were less together than they usually were, and that, whenever he could, Burrows seemed to shun the society of his old companion.

The gamekeeper went his nightly rounds, as he was wont to do, but it was remarked by many that he did no more; that he left the thickets and underwoods unexplored, contenting himself by seeing that all was right along the pathways by which he passed. The peasants at the alehouse began to jeer him on the subject, to tell him that he was afraid of meeting with the ghost of the man he had shot, or that they had met Burrows in one place laden with game, and passed Heron in another smoking his pipe, and watching his snares, as if he were lord of the manor. All these twittings were not without their effect on Parks's temper, and he began to conclude within himself that they thought him a coward; but in this they were wrong, for saving in matters where his conscience smote him, he was a man of stout courage, and possessed great strength.

A few nights afterwards he captured two poachers; they had come from a village four or five miles distant; and although both parties were without fire-arms, they fought bravely, and by his own personal prowess Parks succeeded in taking them prisoners to the lodge. Even in this affair they managed to raise the laugh against him at the alehouse, as one of the poachers turned out to be a little knock-kneed tailor. The gamekeeper had drank pretty freely during the early part of the evening, and so far lost his temper, that he rose up and challenged the best man in

the room. Burrows, who was present, got up in an instant, and accepted the challenge.

"No, not you!" said the gamekeeper; "I have had no words with you to-night; as for the rest of the company, they have insulted me." Heron was not there, and after Burrows had sat down, there was silence for several moments, none other choosing to take up the challenge.

But during the brief silence, it was remarked that, as the gamekeeper and Burrows sat opposite each other, their eyes frequently met, and were instantly withdrawn. Yet, when again raised, the fixed scowling expression was resumed, as if each was taking the measure of his man; it was afterwards said, that the gamekeeper regretted not that he had stood up before Burrows, and that he seemed to wait for him to dare him to fight. But Burrows did not; for a few minutes after he drank up his ale and went out, saying to Parks as he passed, "Any other time will do." The keeper turned round to reply, but he was gone.

That night firing was heard in the woods; and it was afterwards proved, that a large party of poachers had congregated from two distant villages, to have their revenge on the game, for the sake of the tailor and his companion, who had a few days before been committed to prison; nor would they have spared the gamekeepers had they chanced to come in contact. Parks had not long been in bed when he was awoke by the firing.

Meantime, the under-keepers had been out reconnoitring, and returned with the tidings that the poachers numbered near twenty men. Parks readily agreed, that it would be useless to attack them with such odds in their favour; but still bade his party keep a sharp look-out, as they might pounce upon some straggler, or perhaps be able to identify their figures and dog them when they retreated. To accomplish this the better, he ordered each to take a

different route, selecting that for himself which led in the direction from whence the firing proceeded.

It was a beautiful moonlight, frosty night. So clear was the sky, that the stars seemed to twinkle as they burnt in brightness; the dark-leaved holly, and the boles of trees, threw a strong outline on the wood-paths, while here and there, in many an open space, fell the fine tracery of the leafless boughs like open net-work in the moonshine. Between the intervals of shots fired in the distance, the silence seemed more profound, until even the footsteps of the gamekeeper, as he trampled down the dead leaves, became so audible, that he looked round more than once, as if he expected to see some one behind him. At length, a little to his left, he heard the death-scream of a hare, and moving cautiously along, he came up just in time to see the figure of a man in the shade, kneeling down to unloose the game from the wire. A smart blow on the back, and his hand on the collar of the poacher's coat, was but the work of a moment with the gamekeeper; and when the man arose with the cudgel in his hand, he also seized the collar of the keeper, and said, "You took me unawares, and without warning, but it is just like you; blow for blow is but fair," and he struck Parks with such force upon the arm, as caused him to unloose his hold.

Both men now stood upon the defensive in the open moonlight, for the gamekeeper had sprung back several paces to avoid a second blow, and ere the attack was renewed, they had a full view of each other. "I would rather have met a better man," said Parks, resting his heavy cudgel on the ground as he spoke.

"One you have injured more, you could not have met," answered Burrows; and there was something more awful than passion in the deep calm tone of voice in which he spoke, as he added, "In this world you have ruined my prospects for ever."

"I but did my duty," answered the gamekeeper, his face showing, in the moonlight, wan, and white, and spiritless.

"Was it your duty to be a villain," replied Burrows; "to forswear yourself, that you might curry favour with your employer—to get me thrust into prison, and leave my wife and children to starve, and when I came out again, to see every honest man shun me, as if I were a felon;—was this your duty, you false-hearted rascal?"

"It is not the first time you have called me rascal, and scoundrel, and liar," retorted the gamekeeper, his blood now mounting his cheek, "and I have borne it, but beware! there are limits to my temper, as well as any other man's. Nor is this quarrel of my seeking now; had I known it had been you, I should not have raised my arm, but have given you fair warning, not to have entered my beat a second time."

"And yet I should have come, all the same for that," replied Burrows; "for I discovered long since that you were a coward, as well as a villain; you gave proof of that no longer ago than to-night at the ale-house—you dare not tackle a man who is a fair match for you, and that everybody knows."

"Coward and villain," muttered the gamekeeper, uplifting his cudgel as he spoke, and half-choked with passion as he recalled the scene, which we have described as having taken place but a few hours before; and he aimed a blow at Burrows, which the latter parried by holding the crab-tree bludgeon over his head. Both, as we have before stated, were young and powerful men, and well did each handle his formidable weapon; blows were exchanged on both sides, heavy enough, as a beholder would have thought, to have felled an ox. Yet not an arm relaxed, nor was any unfair advantage taken; for when Parks chanced to drop his

cudgel, Burrows stepped back until he had recovered it, although the blood was then streaming down his face. The ground all around was torn up with their footsteps, and their deep breathing sounded louder, and came quicker every moment. Yet, still they continued the combat, now shortening the hold of their weapons as they closed, then raining down blows with giant strength, when they stood at arm's length. There was no sign of either giving in, no cry for quarter, no shrinking from the contest; but this could not last long, and each seemed now anxious to decide the battle by one overwhelming stroke. Twice had Parks raised his heavy bludgeon with both hands, and each time his opponent had escaped the unmerciful blow; he made a third attempt, but Burrows sprang aside, and for the first time made a two-handed stroke, which alighted on the gamekeeper's head, and with a deep groan he fell motionless on the earth. Burrows rested a moment against the stem of a tree to recover his breath, then sunk gradually upon the ground through loss of blood, his head resting unconsciously on the body of the gamekeeper. In that position they were found about an hour afterwards by the underkeepers, senseless and bleeding, and removed to the lodge. Medical aid was obtained without loss of time, though the doctor gave no hopes of their recovery. It was a melancholy sight to see these two powerful men in that double-bedded room, and to hear them answering each other in deep low moans. It would have made a man hate the very name of the Game Laws for ever.

How awful and solemn is that rallying-point, which many attain just before the hour of death—that fearful isthmus, which stretches its narrow neck between the two worlds; when the old familiar earth becomes dim and indistinct, and the great undiscovered future draws nearer and nearer, like a huge misty globe rising higher and

darker, until it fills up the mysterious space, which a few moments before seemed to lay low, and wide, and far beyond. Some such world seemed to heave up before the gamekeeper as his last hour drew nigh; he muttered something about the darkness of the wood, and the height of the tall trees, which seemed to shut out heaven. What glimpses he could catch of the sky between, he said, was red with blood. The doctor bade him be calm, and the kind old clergyman, who had attended through his own love of smoothing the rugged passage of death, breathed words of hope and pious comfort into his ear. For a few moments the memory of the dying man rallied, and again his thoughts took the tinge of earth, as he faintly breathed, and said, "But his blood is upon my head, heavy! heavy! heavy! I cannot raise it to look up to heaven."

Again the benevolent clergyman consoled him; bidding him be strong in hope, and telling him that there was but little doubt that, with care, Burrows would recover; but as for himself, another brief hour, at most, would see him removed for ever from all the heart-aches and anxieties of this short life.

"Recover—live! not dead!" murmured he, raising himself by a sudden and powerful effort on his side and elbow, while the bandages which encircled his head, and had long been soaked through, added to his ghastly appearance; as his eye alighted upon the figure of Burrows, who, still undressed, slept senseless on the coverlet of the opposite bed, for there was little more than space for a chair between the two, he exclaimed, "See! he has come to embitter my last moments!" And having sunk down, he in vain made another effort to raise himself, as if he doubted what he had seen; feared, yet could not resist the impulse which urged him to gaze again on the body. So great was his excitement, that several minutes elapsed before either

the clergyman or doctor could succeed in making him comprehend the truth of the matter; and when, by degrees, he fully understood what they said, his first words were, "I could die happier, if I knew that we parted friends. God forgive me for the wrong I have done him!"

The clergyman and doctor consulted together for a few moments, when the latter went to the bedside of the poacher, and, after numbering the pulsations, ventured to awake him gently; and by the aid of powerful smelling salts, soon restored him to a state of perfect consciousness.

"It is I who must seek his forgiveness," said Burrows, who clearly comprehended all the good clergyman said; "and oh! believe me, if ending my days in prison would prolong his life but a few weeks, weak and low as I am, I would cheerfully endure confinement and slavery to the end of my days!"

"All the riches of the earth would not purchase him another hour's existence," replied the clergyman; "he is already fast sinking, he hears you not. My dear brother," added he, addressing the dying man, "your wounded friend wishes to hear his pardon from your lips, and prays that as you yourself trust to be forgiven, so will you, from your inmost heart, extend your forgiveness to him."

"Forgive him—I have nothing to forgive—it is him whom I have injured," said the dying man, speaking with great difficulty. "Let me see him, for God's sake—let me but grasp his hand. They were cruel laws that first made us enemies. Heaven pardon me for ever putting them into force; and may their hearts be changed who framed such unjust laws. I must soon meet him face to face, whom a few years since I shot dead! Dear friends, pray for me."

The chair was then taken away, and the bed on which Burrows lay was trundled upon its castors, close beside that on which the gamekeeper was now breathing his last.

The clergyman placed the hand of Burrows in the feeble grasp of the dying man, and while their deep sobs proclaimed the sincerity of their forgiveness, he knelt down and offered up a heart-rending prayer to Heaven.

After many a solemn expression of mutual forgiveness, the dying gamekeeper said, "As I shall soon have to appear before a just God, from whom no secrets are hidden, so would I, in this my last hour, do justice to all I leave behind, and who must ere long follow me. But, above all, would I have justice done to him whom I have so deeply injured, and have it known that I came by my death in a quarrel of my own seeking—that I struck the first blow, and twice, when disarmed and in his power, he forbore to strike, which was more than I should have done towards him, had I then had such an advantage. Thank God that it was not so. You, friends, will bear witness to the last words uttered by a dying sinner. I feel my end is drawing near—and here confess, that I justly merited the death I am enduring. Lord, forgive me!"

"God forbid that I should hold myself guiltless," answered the poacher, his utterance broken by deep convulsive sobs; "had I but listened to the pleadings of my better nature, I should, long ere this, have held out the hand of forgiveness to my erring friend, nor refused the friendly cup, which he, more than once, has offered me to drink from; I believed he had injured me, though I might have done as he did had I been in his place. True, I was innocent of the crime (if it was such) for which they imprisoned me. Those whose good opinions I valued, I lost; I felt that I was no longer what I had been, the stain of the prison clung to me; had I been guilty it might have been different, and by my future conduct I might have endeavoured to redeem my character; but as it was, pride was ever whispering in my ear, that I was an injured man, that

I merited not the cold looks which were cast upon me. I found anger, not comfort, in the thought that I was innocent; and I looked upon him as the cause of my ruin, forgetting that he was but an instrument in the hands of others—that he but did his duty; and to cherish hatred against him was as foolish as the revenge of the child who seeks to destroy the rod. Yet I did so. Had it not been for the Game Laws I should now have been an honest and industrious man, and these guilty hands would have remained clear of human blood, nor would my children have had cause to be ashamed, when they saw my grave pointed out in the quiet churchyard, where my honest forefathers sleep; for should even a jury acquit me, I must ever feel that I am a murderer."

But we will close the curtain over this painful scene, leaving the dead man for ever at rest, in that mournful chamber, where the wounded poacher prayed and groaned at intervals, and would have torn the bandages from his wounds, and soon bled to death, had he not have been narrowly watched by his wife and the doctor, the latter of whom would on no account permit him to be removed.

A coroner's inquest was held on the body of the gamekeeper, and the jurymen entered the chamber to look at the corpse, previous to retiring to the public-house to return a verdict. Burrows was still in the same room in which the dead man was laid; his own face turned towards the wall, and his ears open to every whisper, and quite conscious of the business on hand, which to him was a matter of life or death.

"I should say he'll have to spoil a new rope for this affair," remarked one of the jurymen, nodding in the direction of the bed, on which the wounded poacher was laid.

"As sure as God made little apples," replied another of the jurymen. "Wilful murder, clear enough. He'll have

to lie in jail about three months, before the assizes come off. Let me see, they hang on the Friday, the week after." Burrows gave a convulsive shudder as the last sentence was uttered.

"I think I shall take our Nance, and have her touched for the king's-evil, when they hang him," said a third; "I have heard it's a sure cure." He had heard what half-a-century ago (when hanging was almost an every-day occurrence) was believed by hundreds of ignorant people; for to be touched by the quivering hand of the expiring victim was said to be a sure cure for a number of diseases.

"I don't think there's much in it, unless it's a relation that's murdered," answered another; "I remember my uncle saying he was once touched at Lincoln, and that my grandfather paid Jack Ketch a guinea, to allow him to stand under the gallows when the cart was drawn away, but I don't think it did him any good."

"Well, gentlemen, I hope you've decided," said the foreman of the jury; "there's twelve shillings to spend, and I think we had better put a shilling or two a-piece to it, and knock up a bit of dinner, as there will be no more work done to-day amongst us."

"Agreed, agreed," answered half-a-dozen voices; while one or two added, "I vote for beef-steaks and onions;" and another said, "Can't have anything better;" so they departed one after another, treading heavily as they passed down stairs, to return a verdict of "wilful murder," and order dinner.

It is beyond the power of our pen to picture the anguish of the poacher, after the jury had retired. He called death "gentle names," but death came not to end his misery; amid his ravings his fancy pictured the grim gallows heaving up before him, and he felt the biting cord cutting deep into his neck, and he muttered to himself as if

addressing the gaping crowd, who had come out to see him die, and enjoy a holiday. He regarded not the words of comfort when spoken, he saw only a busy stage of wretched existence, which led onwards to death, and he was impatient to reach the dark end of his journey. He bade them not mock him with delusive hope, for he had shed human blood, and was doomed to die for it. It would have made a heart of stone bleed to have heard the ravings of that wounded man.

Before midnight the coffin was brought home, and placed in the lower room; and the feelings of the poacher had to undergo another shock, when the joiner and his assistants came into the chamber to carry the dead body down stairs. He sprang up, and sat gazing on them with fixed eyes and clasped hands, his lips quivering with emotion, although he remained speechless. Heavy, and slow, and speechless, did they move down the narrow staircase, like men who had long been in the service of Death, and were accustomed to his terrible trade. An hour of bustle, and the tread of busy feet, and the lodge was again silent; nothing was heard, saving the groans of the wounded man within, and the howling of a dog from without, sounds which ceased not until long past midnight.

A few days after, Burrows was taken before the magistrate, and then committed to the county jail, there to await his trial at the next assizes. The awful day at length arrived, when the judge entered the town, ushered in by sound of trumpet, and a long line of carriages; instead of a train of solemn mutes, and sable hearse-plumes, so befitting a procession which comes to decide between life and death, that ushers in the frail child of clay, and empowers him to say, "Thou shalt hang by the neck until thou art dead." Awful responsibility! to sit enthroned like the Omnipotent God, and tell an erring brother, that on such a day

"he shall surely die,"—shall be cut off from the "land of the living," with all his crimes upon his head; his hope in this world at an end, and his trust to be placed in that dreadful tribunal, before which he is hurled in an instant, by the hands of the "MURDERING HANGMAN." For if "thou shalt do no murder," who authorises thee to take away the life of a fellow-creature? The solemn ceremony alters not the deed, whether the poor victim expires amid curses or creeds; prayers and a rope are of no matter to him, for legal murder is still murder, after all. If it must be done, let the sheriff do his own bloody work; damn not the soul of the hired caitiff, who for money is base enough to do such a revolting deed. What judge would be found to act the part of executioner? True, death is a dreadful punishment; but does it either prevent or check murder? Does it not rather brutalise a brutal mind? Are there no proofs on record of murderers showing how bravely they dare die? Have not such examples found followers? There is the worst before their eyes: the bolt is withdrawn; a struggle or two and all is over; if the victim is strong in faith, the words of prayer are the last he hears,—"and we are sinners all." Blessed ending! What man would covet life after his hands are guilty of shedding blood? What brute in human form can begrudge life for life, when he is prayed over and pardoned by the authorities who murder him "as if they loved him?" We will not call such a religion a mockery before our Maker's face; for the worshippers of Juggernaut are, after all, but the victims of ignorance and folly, and deserve to be pitied. Hanging is, we fear, a poor check upon crime, and an evil which, we believe, has but little effects in preventing greater evils. It ought either to be abolished altogether, or rendered a thousand times more impressive and solemn than it is now. A few policemen, and a crowd of thieves

and prostitutes make but a "sorry sight" at an execution.

Whether the verdict returned by the coroner was the cause or not, we cannot say, but Burrows, instead of being charged with manslaughter, was tried for the wilful murder of the gamekeeper. The very charge at the outset was unjust; and who can tell the influence it might have on the minds of some of the jury? Several witnesses were examined, and amongst the foremost, Dick Heron, the poacher; but his honest evidence rather militated against the prisoner's cause; and the inference drawn from it was, that Burrows' attack was premeditated; and their frequent altercations at the alehouse were made to appear as cherished motives, all tending towards a future revenge. Even the evidence which both the clergymen and the doctor gave was turned by the opposing counsel against the prisoner and made to give a deeper colouring to the crime which had led to the death of one "so gentle and forgiving in his nature as the deceased." And when the venerable clergyman, in his cross-examination, refused to swear to the exact words uttered by the gamekeeper, although he adhered to the purport and true meaning, the counsellor endeavoured to set aside his evidence altogether, in spite of the deep murmur of disapprobation which echoed through the court. The judge was an old man, who heard with difficulty; and when he summed up the evidence, it was clear to all that he had omitted two or three of the most material points which told in favour of the prisoner, and the consequence was, the jury returned a verdict of Wilful Murder, though not without recommending the prisoner to mercy. The judge in passing sentence held out next to no hope, and Burrows was removed to the condemned cell, there to await the day appointed for his execution.

It was some comfort to the poor poacher to know that

he was innocent, and that he had never once meditated murder; that the furthest limits to which his irritated feelings had carried him, was a wish to punish Parks until he confessed the injury he had done him; beyond this boundary his anger extended not. Sorry enough he was for what he had done, and many a night and day he had already spent in tears and prayers, seeking for forgiveness where it alone can be found; in the solitude of the prison he had examined his heart, and no inward voice reproached him with murder.

It was a strange change; but when he knew the worst, and had even sat down and counted the hours which divided him from death, he became calm, resigned, and cheerful. "It is some comfort," said he to the chaplain of the jail, "to know I am not a murderer; that thought will never break my rest. The first time I was sent to jail, I was innocent; nor should I, had I been found guilty, have considered that it was a crime. If a hare is of more value than the ruin of a man's family, and of his own character, I would sooner be guilty of breaking such laws than of making them. I am sorry for what I have done, and deeply regret that I returned the blow. But *he* has forgiven me—as to poaching, that stands not between me and my hope of heaven. I will do all you wish me; but on that point seek not to alter my fixed opinion. I must first be convinced that it is wrong before I can be taught to repent of it." The chaplain endeavoured to convince him that to destroy game was wrong, because it was breaking the laws. "Friend," said Burrows, looking intently on his countenance, "I have not long to live; let not a hare dangle between us and the light of heaven. Your arguments are but wasted, and deprive me of the solace which I should find in the Bible. Had it not been for the laws you advocate, I should neither have been here, nor have felt remorse for

what is beyond my power to recall. I seek not to defend myself; leave me to make my own peace with God."

He sat down, opened his Bible, and soon felt that calm quietude, which resignation and religion gives, and which the truly guilty can never know.

The sufferings of his wife it is beyond our power to paint, for whatever faults her husband might possess, to her he had ever been kind, and to his children a fond and indulgent father. Sorrow is sometimes a kind messenger; it threw her upon a sick bed, and promised to prevent her from having that parting interview with her husband which would have broken her heart.

A petition was forwarded to the Secretary of State, who had before received a letter from the judge, stating that he saw nothing which could induce him to deviate from the sentence already passed upon the unfortunate prisoner. The Secretary had a summons to attend the Privy Council, and really, through a multiplicity of business, had no time to enter further into the matter, so ordered the usual form to be adhered to on such occasions, "regretting that he could not recommend it to our Gracious Sovereign," &c., &c. So all hope, on the part of Burrows's friends, was at an end. As for himself, he had entertained none; for what mercy could he hope for from the laws which imprisoned a man for catching a hare? Surely, if the man who guarded the game was killed, no matter how, Justice, not to make itself altogether ridiculous, could not be appeased with less than hanging.

He had, however, two days and two nights longer to live; and the chaplain of the jail, who had never heard him crave forgiveness for the hares he had caught, began to think that a poacher might possibly be admitted into heaven, without praying for pardon for offending against the Game Laws. This assuredly was a great stride for a divine

to make, especially one who every year shot over a neighbouring squire's preserves; and few men, we imagine, can better appreciate the benefits of fresh air and field exercise than those who are compelled to give spiritual aid towards the great labour which is so admirably finished by that hempen morality, Jack Ketch. And, after all, what are the lives of a few common people, compared to the many advantages which the poor gain, through the rich landed proprietors coming down for a month or two in the year to shoot over their estates? Gamekeepers must guard preserves; they are paid either to kill or be killed. True, it may lead to a little hanging, but that is of no inconvenience to any gentleman; and better hang than have the battue system banished. The Rev. Sydney Smith has "done the state some service." Hear him:—"We really cannot believe that all our rural mansions would be deserted, although no game was to be found in their neighbourhood. Some come into the country for health, some for quiet, for agriculture, for economy, from attachment to family estates, from love of retirement, from the necessity of keeping up provincial interests, and from a vast variety of causes. Partridges and pheasants, though they form nine-tenths of human motives, still leave a small residue, which may be classed under some other head. Neither are a great proportion of those whom the love of shooting brings into the country of the smallest value or importance to the country. A colonel of the Guards, the second son, just entered at Oxford, three diners-out from Piccadilly, Major Rook, Lord John, Lord Charles, the colonel of the regiment quartered at the neighbouring town, two Irish peers, and a German baron:—if all this honourable company proceed, with fustian-jackets, dog-whistles, and chemical inventions, to a solemn destruction of pheasants, how is the country benefited by their presence? or how

would earth, air, or sea be injured by their annihilation? There are certainly many valuable men brought into the country by a love of shooting, who, coming there for that purpose, are useful for many better purposes; but a vast multitude of shooters are of no more service to the country than the ramrod which condenses the charge, or the barrel which contains it. We do not deny that the annihilation of the Game Laws would thin the aristocratical population of the country, but it would not thin that population so much as is contended; and the loss of many of the persons so banished would be a good rather than a misfortune. At any rate, we cannot at all comprehend the policy of alluring the better classes of society into the country by the temptation of petty tyranny and injustice, or of a monopoly in sports. How absurd it would be to offer to the higher orders the exclusive use of peaches, nectarines, and apricots, as the premium of rustication; to put vast quantities of men into prison as apricot eaters, apricot buyers, and apricot sellers; to appoint a regular day for beginning to eat, and another for leaving off; to have a lord of the manor for greengages, and to rage with a penalty of five pounds against the unqualified eater of the gage! And yet the privilege of shooting a set of wild poultry is stated to be the bonus for the residence of country gentlemen. As far as the immense advantage can be obtained without the sacrifice of justice and reason, well and good; but we would not oppress any order of society, or violate right or do wrong, to obtain any population of squires, however dense. It is the grossest of all absurdities to say, that the present state of the law is absurd and unjust, but it must not be altered, because the alteration would drive gentlemen out of the country! "*If gentlemen cannot breathe fresh air without injustice, let them putrefy*

in Cranbourne Alley. Make just laws, and let squires live and die where they please."*

Meantime the truly good and pious clergyman, who had attended the death-bed of the gamekeeper, and done all that he could for Burrows on the day that his trial took place, had at his own expense journeyed up to London for the sole purpose of preventing the execution of the poacher. "Hanging is murder at the best," said the old parson; "but to hang an innocent man is to commit murder, without even a motive for vengeance!" The venerable old man alighted from the coach in Lad Lane, clothed in a grey old weather-beaten top-coat, which covered his iron-grey black suit underneath, and without pausing to take any refreshment, he plodded onward to the west-end, in his old-fashioned buckled shoes, and with his stout walking-stick in his hand. "Perhaps the bishop may have forgotten me," muttered the old man to himself, after having inquired his way from Charing Cross. "Oh God! on what a slender thread hangs the life of an innocent man!"

With a heavy heart the worthy old man reached St. James's Square; it was evening, about the hour when the great bishop sat down to dinner. The clergyman gave a

* From "Works of the Rev. Sydney Smith," vol. ii., pp. 56 and 57, edition 1840. The Game Laws have undergone a great alteration since the above passage was first written, which is nearly a quarter of a century ago; what they may be twenty-five years hence we know not, though we believe the day will come when men will marvel how such laws could ever have existed at all; that to future generations the Game Laws will be as great a matter of wonderment as the old Norman Forest Laws are to us in the present day; and that some future author may raise upon their foundation an historical romance, as the writer of the present volume formed his "Royston Gower" through reading old Manwood's "Forest Laws."

modest knock at the door; it was a knock somewhat between the impudence of a postman and the modesty of a beggar. A servant in goodly livery answered it—"The bishop had just sat down to dinner"

"Dear me!" said the pious parson, "I was afraid of that, and yet I lost not a moment. It is a matter of life and death I come upon," added the good old man, venturing a step further into the hall; "my eyes are somewhat dazened now; do, friend, hold me a light whilst I scrawl a line or two upon my card; he may remember me; we were at Cambridge together; and I have come above two hundred miles to save a poor fellow-creature from being hung; he will be glad to see me, although it is forty years ago since we last met. There, friend, take that to him, and tell him I am waiting here: a man's life is of more consequence than many dinners."

"I cannot enter the dining-room myself," answered the servant, struck by the earnestness of the old man's manner; but I will endeavour to persuade my fellow-servant in waiting to forward it to his lordship, although it is against our orders. Above two hundred miles is a long way to come, and on such an errand. Pray take a seat."

The card was presented to the bishop at the very moment he was discussing the origin of some Hebrew root, and attempting to prove that his version of the passage in question was right, and all others wrong. The deaf judge, who had passed sentence of death on Burrows, was on that very evening one of the bishop's guests, and sipped his wine as unconcerned as if hanging was the every-day business of life, as if he was a foreman, who left the finishing of the work he had cut out to the care of his underlings.

The bishop was so engrossed with his Hebrew root, that

he had placed the card upon the table, and forgotten all about it, when the old country clergyman, in his grey great coat, stalked into the room: tired of waiting, he had taken advantage of the absence of the servants, and found his way upstairs. "My name," said he, unabashed by the presence of the great company, dressed as they were to the very point of fashion, "my name is George Goodman, rector of Rushlea, and I come to speak with the bishop on a matter of life and death; nor is there a moment to be wasted. We were fellows at the same college. The man condemned to die is innocent, and God above is witness that I speak the truth!" and the old man sat down, uninvited, in the nearest vacant seat.

"A glass of claret, if you please," said the deaf old judge, who scarcely heard a word which the worthy clergyman had uttered; "the port I was speaking of has been but seven years in bottle; after my next circuit we will try it: eight years old was my father's maxim—it allows one time to put in what we lawyers call a demurrer."

"Goodman! Goodman!" exclaimed the bishop, springing up and shaking hands with the intruder, "what, my old friend George? God bless you! God bless you! no man in the world I would sooner have seen. Gentlemen, an old and very dear friend, the Reverend George Goodman —a better man I never wish to know."

The deaf old judge nodded to the new comer, and emptied his glass, as if to say, "Glad to see you."

The venerable clergyman soon made the reverend dignitary acquainted with the particulars of his important mission; nor did he omit the conversation which our readers are already familiar with, as having taken place in the chamber of the lodge where the gamekeeper expired. An appeal under such circumstances was not made in vain; and, late as it was, the bishop instantly ordered his car-

riage, and bade the coachman at once drive to the House of Commons, having no doubt that he should there meet with the Secretary of State. Such, however, was not the case; it was what is called a "no-night house," with just that thin sprinkling of members through which a wily politician sometimes manages to move a measure a step, when he would scarcely dare to make the motion before a full house; —and, of course, no Secretary of State was there. That evening a great literary lord gave a grand *conversazione,* and thitherward the clergyman and the right reverend prelate hastened, but found no Secretary there. He had been, and was gone, they believed, to the Opera; for the thought that a fellow-creature was about to be executed in a few more hours had vanished amid the multifarious mass of pleasure and business which every new day produced. At the Opera they were fortunate enough to meet with the great man, on whose word life or death depended. A right reverend bishop and his carriage were things not to be resisted, although the very dress of the old clergyman himself, such is the wisdom of etiquette, would have prevented him from obtaining admission in that fashionable theatre. As it was, however, the trio were soon seated in the splendid drawing-room in St. James's Square; and the deaf judge, with reluctance, left his claret to enter into the important discussion which transpired.

Nothing could be clearer or more conclusive than the simple facts narrated with such force and eloquence by the honest pastor; and the deaf judge did think, under such circumstances, that the man ought not to be hung. The worthy parson went further, and endeavoured to prove that even transportation was too great a punishment for the offence, as, at the worst, it was but manslaughter. But this was a matter to be reserved for the consideration of a future day. As it was, no time was lost in making out the

warrant to prevent the execution: and the good parson again prepared to set out on his long and weary journey homeward, having, through the intercession of the bishop, procured the sealed packet which contained the pardon of the poacher.

Light as a bird's was the heart of that happy old man, when, seated in the stage-coach, he heard the clatter of the horses' hoofs as they hurried him along with his glad tidings; and so wrapped up was he in the thoughts of his good cause, of the pleasure it would diffuse through the heart of the sorrowing wife, and the smile that it would call back to the lips of the eldest child, that he never thought it possible he could be upset, or a wheel might come off, while he was journeying in so holy a cause. Fortune did not forsake him; and never did lover long more anxiously for the countenance of her he loved, than the worthy clergyman did for the cold rugged front and iron-studded doors of that forbidding-looking jail.

When the old parson entered the condemned cell, in which Burrows awaited the fulfilment of his sentence, he was struck with the calm and dignified appearance of the prisoner. It recalled to his mind what he had read of the Romans of old. "I wished to see you once more," said the poacher, as he returned the friendly grasp of his hand. "This waiting is but tedious work after a man has made up his mind a hundred times how he will die. I saw my wife for the last time this morning, and she said her hours, like mine, were numbered; and her wan looks told that Death had already knocked at the door of the frail tenement. Thank God! the worst is over; yet I should have nothing I cared to live for if she were to die; and never did a weary child covet sleep more than I do the death which these unjust laws doom me to suffer; for you know not, my friend, how great a comfort it is to

me to feel that my conscience acquits me from ever entertaining, even for a moment, the thought of murder. How a man guilty of such a deed might meet death, I know not; but were I before the bar of that Holy God, in whose awful presence I shall in a few more hours stand, I could, without fear, plead 'Not Guilty' to the charge for which I am about to suffer!"

"I know it—I know it!" answered the worthy clergyman, his countenance betraying the deep workings of his benevolent heart while he spoke; "and there are others, thanks be to His Holy Name! who also believe as I do. Let us kneel down together, and thank God for all His mercies." A child learning to lisp the prayers which a fond mother has taught it, is a scene which hovering and unseen angels may love to look upon; but the prayers of a venerable old man—one whose hairs Time has silvered over with the hoary winters of many years, whose whole blameless life has been spent in endeavouring to benefit his fellow-men, and who believes that his reward will only be found in heaven—presents to our minds a grander and holier picture. His language was the awed and holy utterance of the heart: had you but have heard him, you would have felt that he addressed God, and not man; even the iron-hearted jailors wept, although they were paid for keeping watch and ward over misery; and when the pious clergyman ceased, they knew that the law had revoked its stern sentence, and that its majesty was satisfied for once, without dooming its victim to die. What the feelings of the poacher were we know not; though the pale quivering lip, and the tear-dimmed eyes, proclaimed the deep emotions which his strong and brave heart laboured under.

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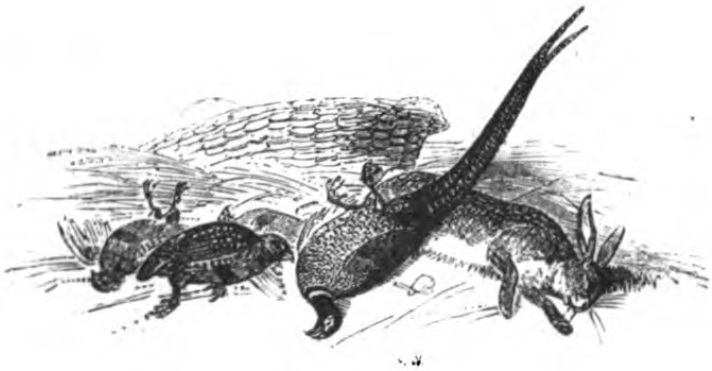
After a few months' imprisonment, Burrows returned to his wife and family, "a sadder and a wiser man;" and

though still on friendly terms with his old acquaintance, Heron, he is no longer a poacher. Not that his sufferings have altered his opinion of the Game Laws one jot or tittle; for he looks upon them as he ever did, and as thousands at this very hour still do, who, like ourselves, openly denounce them, as cruel, tyrannous, and unjust!



THE COUNTRY.

"Then to a lawn I came, all white and green,
I in so fair a one had never been:
The ground was green, with daisy powdered over;
Tall were the flowers, the grove a lofty cover,
All green and white; and nothing else was seen."

CHAUCER.

THE country! What images are called up to an in-dweller in cities at the mention of the word country! especially if he has passed his earlier years among "Nature's green seclusions." It is summer time; "the leaves are green and long;" and you meet with a friend who is going into the country. Fain would you accompany him, but business

prevents you, and all you can do is to send the fancy thitherward, while you recal the old familiar scenes. The smell of the hawthorn, the waving of the tall grass, and the cool shadows of the high hedges, are with him—their remembrance alone lingers with you, and even in that there is some comfort. Many writers have wished that more of the country was left open in our large cities. We do not. Give us a few more squares, wider streets, not so many courts and alleys, and let the country be where it is. A city park is a pleasant place; but oh! how unlike the true green, open country! The very flowers in Finsbury Square have, to our eyes, an unnatural and waxy look: they smell of smoke, and in place of real bloom, we find them covered with "blacks," which seem ironed in, like the washed linen sent home from the airy drying grounds of a laundress in Fetter Lane. Not but what such places are highly beneficial to the health, and pleasing to the eye, and we wish London abounded in hundreds of similar squares, but they never can be the country. We would prefer picking our way through acres of pathless furze, as we did a few days ago at the foot of the Addington Hills, in Surrey; a prickly land, all golden with blossom, yet dearer to us than ten thousand of the "smoothly shaven greens" of cities.

The Great Builder of the country is God! you see His handiwork in every step you take, from the ground you tread upon, to the trees that rise tall and green above your head. Look whichever way you will, He is the grand Provider,—man but works up the material furnished by His mighty hand. But a country, that probably was never cultivated by the hand of man since the first morning dawned upon the world, is of all places the most beautiful for a real lover of nature to wander in—a world of old oaks and hoary hawthorns, with ragged gorse bushes overtopped by ancient crab-trees, where the sloe and the bullace run riot

with each other, where the fern overhangs the wild bluebell, and lilies of the valley peer out wan and white beside their sweet companion the violet. Such a place was Corringham Scroggs, and the open ranges beyond Somerby; and there are still hundreds of such spots in hawthorn-hedged England.

How few know, unless they are read in ancient lore, that many of the wild flowers which are familiar to our children in the present day, retain the very names which they bore in the times of the Saxons; that a thousand years ago, with but few exceptions, they were named as they are now, and will ever be, whilst England rears her green head above the sea; that Alfred the Great, when pointing them out to his children, used the same words which our children do at this hour; and when the fair Rowena gathered her wild nosegays, ere a Norman hoof had trampled down a daisy, she called them just such names as we were taught to distinguish them by in our childhood. An old-fashioned paper will we write, ere long, on this very subject, and call it "Saxon Flowers," unless some better writer should steal a march upon us. What would we not give to see the masterly hand of Sharon Turner dallying with such a subject?

When were the fields of England not "powdered," as Chaucer happily calls it, with white daisies; her woods without wild-roses and woodbine; her groves without hawthorns; her sunny banks without primroses and violets; or at what period was she without her "tall pensioners," the cowslips? Her earliest ruins were haunted by the wall-flower; her loneliest moors redolent with wild thyme; her old Druid-haunted woods, "ankle-deep" in lilies of the valley; crocuses and snow-drops were ever her own. The first Spring that visited our island scattered them plentifully from her green lap. The armed gorse and golden

broom had always the blue-bells in their company, and the meadow-sweet threw out its fragrance when the naked Britons rose to oppose the landing of the ancient Romans. A good book on flowers has yet to be written; and, to do it well, a hundred old volumes must be ransacked of their treasures, to find out their ancient meanings. Old histories, monkish legends, ancient ballads and dramas, which few read now,—all these must be laid under contribution, and made to give up their sweets, before we have a true history of English flowers, to carry with us into the country,—

"Minting the garden into gold."

The country! how we long to throw down our pen, and leap into the first train, and be off; and yet this cannot be. A weary bee, returning to its hive, deposits its honey; and, in its dreams, goes murmuring again over the flowers, even as we do now, half envying—

"Nature's sweet confectioner."

The quotation is Cleveland's, the first line in his volume of poems. He was a true poet, although he fought against the clear-headed Protector Oliver Cromwell.

Dreamers we have ever been; and, although the stern realities of everyday life have thrown their forbidding shadows athwart the sunshine in which we basked, yet they have never wholly blotted out the brighter visions. Glimpses of far-off places are ever opening before us, "green nestling spots," which we have loved even from our boyish days. Nature hath never wearied us, and the more we have looked upon her face, the greater has been our pleasure; even as a child whose eye tracks the sunset across the sea, and believes that the trailing pathway of gold ends only on the threshold of heaven.

The solemn woods have, to us, seemed like the great

cathedrals which God himself had erected—as if a holier religion reigned there than was ever found beneath the towering fabrics erected by the hand of man. The deep roaring of the winds had a sound to us unlike aught earthly; the rustling of the leaves, in gentler gales, awoke the heart unaware to prayer; we felt not the same, while in the midst of such shadowy scenery. The pillars hewn, and carved, and upreared by mortal hands, look not so grand and reverential as an aisle of ancient oaks, tossing their gnarled boughs above our heads, and admitting, through the massy roof, partial openings of the sky. The organ never fell upon our ears with the same solemnity as the roar of the ocean, beating upon a solitary shore. Between the walls of high and lonely mountains, we have felt an inward awe, which the vaulted abbey could never awaken; for over the one hung the great image of the Creator—above the other, the builder, man.

Ruins only approach the sublime when they are grey, and vast, and time has erased their history. To us the Pyramids would not convey such images of mysterious and melancholy grandeur as the naked and rugged pile of Stonehenge. The untraceable Past is sublime, through obliterating Time having long since claimed it for his own, and handed it over to Eternity; it seems tinged with the first sunshine which broke upon the world, and may catch the last ray which shall settle down upon the earth, ere the night of silence and eternal darkness descends upon it for ever. What would we not give if Shakspere had trod the streets of Pompeii, and laid the scene of another immortal drama in the midst of its ruins? Desolate places, which have no written history, look like the old mourning worn by another world—relics that tell of burial and past existence—and we know no more; uninscribed tombs and mysterious monuments, which make us feel that we are but a

portion of the "clod of the valley," and the immortality of earth a mere mockery.

Look at the country everywhere; those hills are thousands of years old; deep down you may discover the remains of animals, which man has left no record that he ever met with in this corner of the globe. How came they there? In that fertile valley, waving with corn, are found bones of the mastodon; what was the spot, where that homestead now stands, then, when the living monster shook the soil with his heavy tramp? Ocean, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, mountains of ice, torrents of lava, settlings down of old seas, layer upon layer, and the great eye of God only looking on! What a world! yet men talk as familiarly about it as if they had seen each separate formation,—can tell me (as they think) how this hill, up which I walk breathless, was formed,—and how this valley, which I grow dizzy while gazing into, was sunk. Further on are unopened burrows, in which the dead sleep; a few blue beads, a bone or two, a piece of misshapen flint,—and the rest will be for ever unknown. The prow of Cæsar's galley grazes upon a mysterious coast, in I know not what corner of my country for certain, and this is the earliest record I possess of ancient England. I read of war-chariots, and bearded Druids, and brave men; and all that heaves above the earth, which I can believe they ever gazed upon, is the ruins of Stonehenge. I have looked upon the Roman wall, and Roman arch, at Lincoln, in wonderment,—hard grit, and slow-decaying stone; and all beside is Egyptian darkness.

Man seemed not to walk abroad until the twilight of Time, when the evening shadows of uncounted years had gathered over the earth, and grey Eternity stepped out over the furrowed fallows, to sow seed for a new generation, and endow them with wisdom enough to make them

doubt. The reality of Homer is tossed like a pebble, amongst many others, upon the great sea-shore; and I misbelieve the marble which is made up into all I ever see of the mighty bard. Troy becomes a fable, whilst I read; and the great Iliad a drama played by the heathen gods.

Backward the mind goes into the valley below my feet, the ruined abbey, the winding river, the ancient town where the Danes once dwelt. I read the Saxon Homily, and turn to Augustine,—think of the slaves in the market-place, fair as angels, and picture this country then. Weeping mothers, as now—no change! The armed Roman and the tyrant capitalist, the same chains; groans in the victor's galley as he sails away, are echoed from the mines in which my brother men now labour, the fields they at this hour till, the factories in which they work, and work—then die. And might still towers above right; the old picture is but in a new frame; man poor, and man powerful; man rich, and man wronged. Briton, Roman, Saxon, Dane, Norman, Slave, Thane, and Theof, serf, villein, peers, paupers,—and the history of my country is written. Layer above layer, the old formation in which every unaccountable struggle is called a slip—such is the geology of our race.

What beautiful pictures do we everywhere see if we but walk a few miles through the country! turn the eye whichever way you will, some object is sure to present itself worth noticing. How graceful is the motion of the weeds which here trail into the water, and ride like things of life upon every ripple, while the half-bared roots of the old willow, around which grows fungi of varied hues, are mirrored in the deep stream; and far down you see the tall, tapering branches, waving to and fro in alternate shades of green and white, just as the leaves flicker in the playful wind, which every moment comes and goes, in and

out, over and through, the tall, tapery, and leafy rods, which shoot out from the summit of the hollow stem. Up darts the gaudy kingfisher from the bank, and as it flies over the top of the old elder tree, on which the full sunshine streams, you might fancy it a winged treasure, gems "of all hues," green, and blue, and orange, and yellow, glittering, and bright, and varied, and rich enough to grace the tiara of a sultana. In the dark pool below swims the water-rat, his bright, black eyes riveted on the pendent branch round which he is floating, his motion so gentle that he scarcely ripples the smooth current of the water—that fallen leaf has frightened him from his play, and he has gone to his nest, somewhere amongst the water-flags. What a lapping and a babbling the stream here makes, as it raises its low, liquid voice, as if chiding the smooth pebbles which check its course; and lower down it goes murmuring along, seeming angry that it has been stopped by the way; and now it resumes its old, cheerful song, which it will carry for miles, between the narrow banks, until it mingles with the deeper music of the distant river. What more picturesque object would an artist select than this water-mill in ruins? Stagnant has this wheel stood for years; and bit by bit have the lower portions rotted and passed away; what remains is beautiful through its very decay; there is an ancient look about the moss and the weeds that have sown themselves in the moist crevices —they hang, and droop, and wave in a hundred beautiful forms. There is a desolateness about what remains of the old broken bridge, that ever seems stretching itself as if to regain its former position on the opposite bank; in the hanging planks which dip into the water-course, as if wearied of waiting their time, and anxious to be swept away; in the roofless walls which still show where a human habitation once stood; in the traces which point out

where a garden was once cultivated, where the wild bramble has long ago twined round the cherished rose-tree, while the wallflower and the hemlock grow side by side amid the untrodden ruins.

Year after year, long after the old water-mill had ceased its work, might a solitary woman be seen seated in the evening sunset beside the doorway. There she lived alone, bent with age, unvisited and neglected; how she obtained her livelihood no one knew, though rumours were afloat of the hoard of wealth which had been the accumulated savings of the owners of the water-mill for many generations. For a length of years the strong ancient iron fastenings of the doors and windows had formed her only safeguard, until Time, under whose hand all things decay, rotted the massy woodwork, and ate into the very heart of the stubborn iron; and when those silent sentinels of bolt and bar became weak and useless, the wicked hands of ruthless men commenced their work under the dark shelter of as black and tempestuous a winter's night as ever rocked the earth, or blotted out the stars of heaven. Days passed away before the murder was discovered, so seldom did a passenger tread the solitary lane beside the brook. What wealth she might have possessed, the undiscovered murderers must have carried away; and when the old furniture was sold to defray the expenses of her funeral, the house was for ever closed, and never did human foot again cross its threshold until ruin had completed its silent work, and roof and rafter were by degrees carried away during many hard winters, when the needy cottagers required fire-wood.

What a cheerful look there is about the little cottage of the bee-hive maker! what swarms of healthy children are ever going out of the doorway! He calls his hut, The Hive; and from the bustle, and stir, and industry, and

cleanliness, which are ever found there, his dwelling is not misnamed. What piles of fresh yellow straw lay upon the sloping bank, which have been steeped in the brook to render them more pliable to the hand; those long trailing heaps of briar, clear from knot or branch, he will split with his three-pointed cleaver, and draw through his sharp-edged shave, until they become thin and almost as elastic as tape; and with these he will twine together those "golden roofs," as Shakspere has happily termed them, in which the belted freebooters, who carry "war among the velvet buds," will pile up their cells of honey, drawn from the dewy lips of summer's sweetest blossoms. Who knows but that the immortal bard of Avon may, in his day, have gazed upon such a scene as we do now!

Strange tales are told of the large pike which have been caught in this stream, and many a monster have we ourselves seen occasionally basking in the sunshine near the surface of the water. In former years it was the great haunt of old-fashioned anglers, who prided themselves in fishing according to the rules of honest Izaak Walton. Early in the morning you might have seen them wending their way towards this renowned stream; and even after the shades of evening had grown from grey into dusky black, still some one or another would be found at his post. To us, who had less patience, "snaring" was our favourite mode of catching these immense jacks—when we could: a stout rod, a strong line, and a good spring wire set wide open upon a clear running noose, and this we were wont to drop gently into the stream, with a slow and steady hand; above and below, it must be clear of the pike; another gentle move, and the fish seems as if sleeping securely in the very centre of the ring, for the motion has not disturbed him—Quick! he is secure; it bites and closes around him every way, seeming to eat into his very bones;

and on the green sward he lies, caught without either bait, or hook, or net.

Which way shall we turn now? Down this lane, and up the steep road of red clay that winds between those two plantations. We will clear the fence at a bound, and trespass in spite of the board which threatens to prosecute all invaders; for formerly there was a pleasant walk right through the centre of this fir-wood, but the consent of two magistrates was obtained, and the old thoroughfare was closed according to law. What a shame it is that these rich robbers should possess such power! Would it not be doing the public a greater good than was ever yet done by hanging any man, however bad he might be, to hang up one or two of these selfish and narrow-souled fellows (who, because they are owners of the property, cut off the ancient privileges which the poor have for centuries enjoyed), and thus make them a warning to all other like invaders? What would one of these purse-proud 'squires think, to see (instead of his own unjust warning, threatening all trespassers who ventured upon a pathway, which their forefathers had trodden without molestation for ages)—to see written up, "*Whoever dares to close this ancient thoroughfare shall be bound hand and foot to the largest tree, and kept upon bread and water until he again throws it open to the public;*" or, as it is a matter important to the health of many, why not (if hanging is beneficial and prevents evils) tie him up at once on the highest tree in the wood? In a case like this, taking away life might act as a warning to others; and, in the end, prevent all further encroachments upon old, acknowledged public rights. Does not this system of closing public thoroughfares arise, in a great measure, from the Game Laws? We know a few instances in which footpaths have been closed only for "THE BETTER PRESERVATION OF GAME."

How still and solemn the old plantation seems; moss and weeds and withered grass have already grown over the once familiar pathway. The rustic seat that overlooked the distant country from this beautiful opening is removed; there is nothing now to tell that this was the great Sunday and holiday resort of the public. And the will of one man alone has done this—a fellow whom nobody ever heard of, until one or two unexpected deaths turned him up from his obscurity, and made him heir. May he be doomed in the other world to some shady and solitary forest, to a wooded and lonely walk, walled high at each end, and where the trees are planted so thick that he cannot get his body between them, but there ramble up and down, a lonely ghost, for the same number of years that he has caused this once beautiful footway to be closed; then may his spirit return, for a brief space, to earth, to warn his successor, and tell him all he has suffered for what he did with the plantation-path; and when it is opened again, may they both enter Paradise!

What a beautiful burst have we here! A village, half embowered in forest scenery; the thatched roofs peering here and there among the trees, and recalling those primitive towns inhabited by the ancient Britons, which the Roman invaders found situate in the inmost heart of England's undated forests. The very chimneys are overgrown with moss and liverwort, until they become scarcely distinguishable from the boles of the overhanging trees; and the tasteful hand of Nature has tinted the thatched roofs with every hue of the surrounding scenery. It is only by the glinting of a white wall, seen through the picturesque opening of the branches, or where a straggling sunbeam throws a golden glow upon the little lattice, or a slow moving column of pale blue smoke curls upwards, and is lost amid the deep greenery of the foliage, that at this dis-

tance tell us we are drawing near the habitation of man. Yet as we draw closer, the scene changes as if touched by the wand of some mighty magician; and what appeared in the distance like a village in the centre of a forest, opens out into a well-wooded and picturesque hamlet, with green crofts, and ancient orchards, and sweet garden grounds, walled in with the golden gorse. The very fences have a forest look, as if the moss had assumed every varied tint of sunlight and shade, with all those rich and ever-changing hues which heaven pours down from its painted dome of cloud,—a minglement of purple and gold, and blue and silver, alternating with twilight glooms and starry spaces, which dot the dark with silver. The very road, that goes winding beneath the ancient trees, has a peculiar character of its own. Here it is brown, and broken, and bare; there its course is disputed by giant roots, which twist like coiled serpents everywhere. Further on, there stretches a rich expanse of grass, whose growth neither the tramp of hoof nor print of wheel can long impede,—so dense are the matted and massed shadows of the boughs above, so damp, and level, and green, the expanse below. Saw ye ever a church that looked more holy, with its silent burial-ground, than this? The very gravestones seem to partake of the character of the trees as you draw nearer, for they are old, and few, and far apart. How solemn sound the tones of the old church clock! It seems as if Time was in no hurry here; that the huge trees had grown up without impeding his march; and that the old tower had become grey in its unbroken sleep: and even the Tongue of Time scarcely caused aught to open its eyes in this shadowy, green, and secluded world. The dead here seem as if they had lived to do all that there was to do, and had then laid down to take their rest; for you cannot conceive that the bustle and tumult, and wear and tear of life, were ever heard in

a place so tranquil as this appears; but that everything grows of its own accord, and that man has but to gather enough for his common wants, then stretch himself upon the velvet sward, and sleep.

As we draw nearer and nearer the dream is broken—We see the ponderous wagon beneath the shed, which is roofed with withered furze, and pillared with the unbarked stems of trees. The red plough and the fanged harrow are piled amid other implements of agriculture, which tell that even here man liveth by the sweat of his brow; and you see that the nymphs of this Arcadia are red-armed and industrious maidens, who brew, and bake, and milk, and churn, and, beside administering to every household comfort at home, pour forth their produce into a neighbouring market; while their swains are huge, healthy, stalwart fellows, who, instead of piping all day long to their silly sheep, turn up the stubborn soil, which stretches for miles away beyond the outskirts of the forest-like looking village, where fields spread like an ocean, whose waves are golden corn, whose surf breaks in ridges of woolly sheep upon the green shore, and the roar of whose waters is the lowing of herds, scattered over many a level lawn and heaving upland. A poet might fancy, while standing here, that he looked upon England in its rude, sylvan, and barbarous age; and further out, in its present state, rich in improvement, and flourishing in industry, and bearing the marks which the intelligence of man has stamped upon the earth. So primitive look these thatched homes among the trees, so wealthy that wide expanse of cultivated land, here and there alive with lowing herds, and further on, white over with bleating flocks. Behind, we might picture the hardy Briton hunting the savage wolf or chasing the wild deer. Before, where the sunlight streams, instead of the howling wolf and the belling of the deer, we look for the bird-boy's whistle or

the milk-maid's song, or listen for the carol of the sun-tanned reaper. Here we have, mapped out before us, what our artists so seldom paint,—the bold back-ground of a primitive old world, hilly, and woody, and wild, softening down into smiling corn-fields and rich pasture lands, dipping into dales, and ascending in sweet, green summits.

Oh, how delightful it is to watch the opening of morning here! to see the first pale glimpse of dawn broaden, and brighten out into day; to stand upon this commanding summit, and look over miles of beautiful scenery, such as, if broken up, would supply an artist with subjects for a thousand pictures: but it is our task to paint in words, and bring before the "mind's eye" of the reader, bit by bit, what would burst upon him at once from the canvas. The only advantage the poet possesses is the power of describing the sounds which make musical his landscape, and which we heard everywhere around on a sweet

SUMMER MORNING.

Morning again breaks through the gates of Heaven,
  And shakes her jewelled kirtle on the sky,
Heavy with rosy gold. Aside are driven
  The vassal clouds, which bow as she draws nigh,
  And catch her scattered gems of orient dye,
The pearlèd-ruby which her pathway strews;
  Argent and amber, now thrown useless by:
The uncoloured clouds wear what she doth refuse,
For only once does Morn her sun-dyed garments use.

No print of sheep-track yet hath crushed a flower;
  The spider's woof with silvery dew is hung
As it was beaded ere the daylight hour;
  The hookèd bramble just as it was strung,
  When on each leaf the Night her crystals flung,

Then hurried off, the dawning to elude;
  Before the golden-beakèd blackbird sung,
Or ere the yellow-brooms, or gorses rude,
Had bared their armèd heads in lowly gratitude.

From Nature's old cathedral sweetly ring
  The wild-bird choirs—burst of the woodland band,
Green-hooded nuns, who 'mid the blossoms sing;
  Their leafy temple, gloomy, tall, and grand,
  Pillared with oaks, and roofed with Heaven's own hand.
Hark! how the anthem rolls through arches dun:—
  "Morning again is come to light the land;
The great world's Comforter, the mighty Sun,
Has yoked his golden steeds, the glorious race to run."

The dusky foragers, the noisy rooks,
  Have from their green high city-gates rushed out,
To rummage furrowy fields and flowery nooks;
  On yonder branch now stands their glossy scout.
  As yet no busy insects buzz about,
No fairy thunder o'er the air is rolled:
  The drooping buds their crimson lips still pout;
Those stars of earth, the daisies white, unfold,
And soon the buttercups will give back "gold for gold."

"Hark! hark! the lark" sings 'mid the silvery blue;
  Behold her flight, proud man! and lowly bow.
She seems the first that does for pardon sue,
  As though the guilty stain which lurks below
  Had touched the flowers that droop above her brow,
When she all night slept by the daisies' side;
  And now she soars where purity doth flow,
Where new-born light is with no sin allied,
And pointing with her wings heavenward our thoughts
    would guide.

In belted gold the bees with "merry march"
Through flowery towns go sounding on their way:
They pass the streakèd woodbine's sun-stained arch,
And onward glide through streets of sheeted May,
Nor, till they reach the summer-roses, stay,
Where maiden-buds are wrapt in dewy dreams,
Drowsy through breathing back the new-mown hay,
That rolls its fragrance o'er the fringèd streams,—
Mirrors in which the Sun now decks his quivering beams.

Up rise the lambs, fresh from their flowery slumber,
(The daisies they pressed down rise from the sod;)
He guardeth them who every star doth number,
Who called His Son a lamb,—"the Lamb of God"
And for His sake withdrew the uplifted rod,
Bidding each cloud turn to a silvery fleece,
The imaged flock for which our Shepherd trod
The paths of sorrow, that we might find peace:—
Those emblems of His love will wave till time shall cease.

On the far sky leans the old ruined mill,
Through its rent sails the broken sunbeams glow,
Gilding the trees that belt the lower hill,
And the old thorns which on its summit grow.
Only the reedy marsh that sleeps below,
With its dwarf bushes, is concealed from view;
And now a struggling thorn its head doth show,
Another half shakes off the smoky blue,
Just where the dusty gold streams through the heavy dew:

And there the hidden river lingering dreams,
You scarce can see the banks which round it lie;
That withered trunk, a tree or shepherd seems,
Just as the light or fancy strikes the eye.
Even the very sheep, which graze hard by,

So blend their fleeces with the misty haze,
  They look like clouds shook from the unsunned sky,
Ere morning o'er the eastern hills did blaze :—
The vision fades as they move further on to graze.

A chequered light streams in between the leaves,
  Which on the greensward twinkle in the sun;
The deep-voiced thrush his speckled bosom heaves,
  And like a silver stream his song doth run,
  Down the low vale, edgèd with fir-trees dun.
A little bird now hops beside the brook,
  "Peaking" about like an affrighted nun;
And ever as she drinks doth upward look,
Twitters and drinks again, then seeks her cloistered nook.

What varied colours o'er the landscape play!
  The very clouds seem at their ease to lean,
And the whole earth to keep glad holiday.
  The lowliest bush that by the waste is seen,
  Hath changed its dusky for a golden green,
In honour of this lovely Summer Morn ;
  The rutted roads did never seem so clean,
There is no dust upon the wayside thorn,
For every bud looks out as if but newly born.

A cottage girl trips by with side-long look,
  Steadying the little basket on her head ;
And where a plank bridges the narrow brook
  She stops, to see her fair form shadowèd.
  The stream reflects her cloak of russet red;
Below she sees the trees and deep-blue sky,
  The flowers which downward look in that clear bed,
The very birds which o'er its brightness fly :—
She parts her loose-blown hair, then wondering passes by.

Now other forms move o'er the footpaths brown,
  In twos and threes; for it is market-day.
Beyond those hills stretches a little town,
  And thitherward the rustics bend their way,
  Crossing the scene in blue, and red, and grey;
Now by green hedge-rows, now by oak-trees old,
  As they by stile or thatchèd cottage stray.
Peep through the rounded hand, and you'll behold
Such gems as Morland drew, in frames of sunny gold.

A laden ass, a maid with wicker maun',
  A shepherd lad driving his lambs to sell,
Gaudy-dressed girls move in the rosy dawn,
  Women whose cloaks become the landscape well,
  Farmers whose thoughts on crops and prizes dwell
An old man with his cow and calf draws near.
  Anon you hear the village carrier's bell;
Then does his grey old tilted cart appear,
Moving so slow, you think he never will get there.

They come from still green nooks, woods old and hoary—
  The silent work of many a summer night,
Ere those tall trees attained their giant glory,
  Or their dark tops did tower that cloudy height—
  They come from spots which the grey hawthorns light,
Where stream-kissed willows make a silvery shiver.
  For years their steps have worn those footpaths bright
Which wind along the fields and by the river,
That makes a murmuring sound, a "ribble bibble" ever.

A troop of soldiers pass with stately pace,—
  Their early music wakes the village street:
Through yon white blinds peeps many a lovely face,
  Smiling—perchance unconsciously how sweet!
  One does the carpet press with blue-veined feet,

Not thinking how her fair neck she exposes,
  But with white foot timing the drum's deep beat;
And, when again she on her pillow dozes,
Dreams how she'll dance that tune 'mong Summer's
    richest roses.

So let her dream, even as beauty should!
  Let the white plumes athwart her slumbers sway!
Why should I steep their swaling snow in blood,
  Or bid her think of battle's grim array?
  Truth will too soon her blinding star display,
And like a fearful comet meet her eyes.
  And yet how peaceful they pass on their way!
How grand the sight as up the hill they rise!
I will not think of cities reddening in the skies.

How sweet those rural sounds float by the hill!
  The grasshopper's shrill chirp rings o'er the ground,
The jingling sheep-bells are but seldom still,
  The clapping gate closes with hollow bound,
  There's music in the church-clock's measured sound.
The ring-dove's song, how breeze-like comes and goes,
  Now here, now there, it seems to wander round:
The red cow's voice along the upland flows;
His bass the brindled bull from the far meadow lows.

"Cuckoo! cuckoo!" ah! well I know thy note,
  Those summer-sounds the backward years do bring,
Like Memory's locked-up barque once more afloat:
  They carry me away to life's glad spring,
  To home, with all its old boughs rustleing.
'Tis a sweet sound! but now I feel not glad;
  I miss the voices which were wont to sing,
When on the hills I roamed, a happy lad.
"Cuckoo!" it is the grave—not thee—that makes me sad.

Tell me, ye sages, whence these feelings rise,—
  Sorrowful mornings on the darkened soul;
Glimpses of broken, bright, and stormy skies,
  O'er which this earth—the heart—has no control?
  Why does the sea of thought thus backward roll?
Memory's the breeze that through the cordage raves,
  And ever drives us on some homeward shoal,
As if she loved the melancholy waves
That, murmuring shoreward, break o'er a reef of graves.

Hark! how the merry bells ring o'er the vale,
  Now near, remote, or lost, just as it blows.
The red cock sends his voice upon the gale,
  From the thatched grange his answering rival crows,
  The milkmaid o'er the dew-bathed meadow goes,
Her tucked-up kirtle ever holding tight;
  And now her song rings through the green hedge-rows,
Her milk-kit hoops glitter like silver bright:—
I hear her lover singing somewhere out of sight.

Where soars that spire, our rude forefathers prayed:
  Thither they came, from many a thick-leaved dell,
Year after year, and o'er those footpaths strayed,
  When summoned by the sounding Sabbath bell,—
  For in those walls they deemed that God did dwell.
And still they sleep within that bell's deep sound.
  Yon spire doth here of no distinction tell:
O'er rich and poor, marble and earthly mound,
The monument of all,—it marks one common ground.

See yonder smoke, before it curls to heaven,
  Mingles its blue amid the elm-trees tall;
Shrinking like one who fears to be forgiven,
  So on the earth again doth prostrate fall,
  And 'mid the bending green each sin recal.

Now from their beds the cottage-children rise,
  Roused by some early playmate's noisy bawl;
And, on the door-step standing, rub their eyes,
Stretching their little arms, and gaping at the skies.

The leaves "drop, drop," and dot the crispèd stream
  So quick, each circle wears the first away;
Far out the tufted bulrush seems to dream,
  And to the ripple nods its head alway;
  The water-flags with one another play,
Bowing to every breeze that blows between,
  While purple dragon-flies their wings display:
The restless swallow's arrowy flight is seen,
Dimpling the sunny wave, then lost amid the green.

The boy who last night passed that darksome lane,
  Trembling at every sound, and pale with fear;
Who shook when the long leaves talked to the rain,
  And tried to sing, his sinking heart to cheer,—
  Hears now no brook wail ghost-like on his ear,
No dead-man's groan in the black-beetle's wing:
  But where the deep-dyed butterflies appear,
And on the flowers like folded pea-blooms swing,
With napless hat in hand he after them doth spring.

In the far sky the distant landscape melts,
  Like pilèd clouds tinged with a darker hue;
Even the wood which yon high upland belts
  Looks like a range of clouds of deeper blue.
  One withered tree bursts only on the view,—
A bald bare oak, which on the summit grows,
  (And looks as if from out the sky it grew;)
That tree has borne a thousand wintry snows,
And seen unnumbered mornings gild its gnarlèd boughs.

Yon weather-beaten grey old finger-post
  Stands like Time's land-mark pointing to decay;
The very roads it once marked out are lost:
  The common was encroached on every day]
  By grasping men who bore an unjust sway
And rent the gift from Charity's dead hands.
  The post does still one broken arm display,
Which now points out where the new workhouse stands,
As if it said, "Poor man! those walls are all thy lands."

Where o'er yon woodland-stream dark branches bow,
  Patches of blue are let in from the sky,
Throwing a chequered underlight below,
  Where the deep waters steeped in gloom roll by;
  Looking like Hope, who ever watcheth nigh,
And throws her cheering ray o'er life's long night,
  When wearied man would fain lie down and die.
Past the broad meadow now it rolleth bright,
Which like a mantle green seems edged with silver light.

All things, save man, this summer morn rejoice:
  Sweet smiles the sky, so fair a world to view;
Unto the earth below the flowers give voice;
  Even the wayside-weed of homeliest hue
  Looks up erect amid the golden blue,
And thus it speaketh to the thinking mind:—
  "O'erlook me not! I for a purpose grew,
Though long mayest thou that purpose try to find:
On us one sunshine falls! God only is not blind!"

England, my country!—land that gave me birth!
  Where those I love, living or dead, still dwell,
Most sacred spot—to me—of all the earth;
  England! "with all thy faults I love thee well."
  With what delight I hear thy Sabbath bell

Fling to the sky its ancient English sound,
As if to the wide world it dared to tell
We own a God, who guards this envied ground,
Bulwarked with martyrs' bones—where Fear was never found.

Here might a sinner humbly kneel and pray,
With this bright sky, this lovely scene in view,
And worship Him who guardeth us alway!—
Who hung these lands with green, this sky with blue,
Who spake, and from these plains huge cities grew;
Who made thee, mighty England! what thou art,
And asked but gratitude for all His due.
The Giver, God! claims but the beggar's part,
And only doth require "a humble, contrite heart."

Alas! many a picturesque and thatched roof shelters discontent and poverty. There sits the poor man, amid all this apparent plenty, scarcely a step removed from the ever-open jaws of want, which daily and hourly threaten to devour him; the dreaded wolf, which in former times the forest sheltered, is now stretched across his threshold, —its gaunt and hungry form is ever at his door: he endeavours in vain to scare it. Glance for a moment at the night scene at Goatacre, on which the moon looked down at intervals, as she straggled from cloud to cloud,—now revealing some forlorn and furrowed countenance, which the next moment was thrown into shadow, as the shifting light passed on over the wan, and pale, and hunger-bitten, yet determined peasantry. Picture the naked hedge, through which whistled the cold, bleak winter wind; the rude hurdle, on which the denouncer of wrong was mounted, the candle flickering in the horn lantern, and bowing its faint flame beneath every blast that blew; while the ragged sons of the soil, who were congregated around, were clamor-

ous for cheaper bread:—how one proclaimed that he had but six shillings a-week to keep himself, a wife, and two children; while another made it known to his neighbours that his hard earnings amounted but to eight shillings a-week, out of which seven were expended in providing his family with bread alone. What suffering must have been encountered, what privations must have been endured, by those men before they came forward and made known their wants to the world! Almost every new day sees published some new history of privation and suffering; for the time has arrived when facts are looked more into than they formerly were,—when men, writhing under oppression and wrong, are no longer afraid to speak out. The day of dissimulation is drawing towards a close; the long night of error is fast departing, and a new morning about to break forth upon the world, whose dawning shall be truth, and whose mid-day light shall shine upon right and justice among men; when millions shall no longer labour to keep a few hundreds in idleness and luxury, while they, the common producers, lack even the bare necessaries of life; for the hewers of wood and the drawers of water are already straightening their backs, and, amid their aches and pains and privations, asking each other how they came to be what they are. They have already discovered that "something in this world goes wrong;" nor can all the power of their tax-masters check the great spirit of inquiry which already floats unfettered over the earth, and which having, like the dove, once brought back the olive-branch to the ark, will, when set free again, return no more, but erect its nest in the green boughs that wave over a new world, high above the rotting ruins of oppression and unjust power.

It is the severe tax-master, the stern oppressor, the usurper of our common rights, and the labour-fed roller in

idleness, whom this new deluge threatens—on them will the waters of knowledge descend like a destructive avalanche,—while the industrious, the virtuous, and the good will rise securely in the ark which their own hands have formed, scarcely feeling the rush of the torrent which, in its headlong course, will sweep away all wrong, then settle down into deep and gentle rivers, whose banks these liberated children shall crown with cities, and cover the rivers with commerce, and in whose streets the cry of oppression shall never more be heard; where they who sowed shall reap, and not another; and the tyrant shall dare no longer to trample upon his fellow-man; where he only shall be called master who excelleth in kindness; where love shall predominate over fear; an man shall again walk upright, as in the morning of his creation, nor longer cringe, like a slave or superstitious victim, beneath the crushing wheels of the chariot in which rolls the unwieldy Juggernaut of wealth.

What a firm front did our forefathers show before they snapped asunder the iron fetters with which Charles the First foolishly thought to bind them! What stores of hidden knowledge did they bring to light! what buried charters they disinterred, discovering in their excavations the very foundations on which English liberty was based! Shoulder to shoulder did they work; here placing a fallen pillar upright, then crowning it with a capital, and anon, throwing across the bold architrave, until at length there sprung up from under their persevering hands a magnificent temple raised from a thousand ruins. For a long time they defended the fabric by the power of reason alone,—driving back the destroyers by the holy awe which flashed from the intellectual light, that streamed like a halo of glory around; and when the assailants drew nigher, and

the voice of right and reason were drowned amid the approaching tumult, those hands, which had so long laboured peacefully, reluctantly grasped the dreaded thunderbolts of war, and spread desolation and death among the armed throng who sought to drag down Liberty from her sacred shrine.

What unrecorded skirmishes and unnumbered battles were then fought! What hundreds of brave men moistened the soil with their blood, that they might leave the land of their forefathers free! Brave must have been the hearts and strong the arms of those unproclaimed champions, who fell fighting for their own ancient homesteads, and left a lesson, written in letters of blood, for their children to read, teaching them that it was better to die in the cause of freedom, than live a pampered menial in the corrupt court of a crowned king. Hampden, bleeding for liberty in the field of Chalgrave, towers like a god above the prostrate form of King Charles kneeling on the scaffold to be beheaded. The plain man overtops the crowned martyr, and seems to look down upon him in the great sunset of time, like a grand and solitary pillar reared high against the evening sky, and throwing its gigantic shadow far away beyond the prostrate capital which lies at its base. How grand and god-like are many of the characters which rise up before us whilst reading the history of our country! Neither Greece nor Rome can number amongst its heroes greater names than are registered in the archives of England.

Beside this wood, on a lonely summer's day, we first read Shakspere's forest play; here saw the melancholy Jacques, and the hunted deer,

> ——— "As he lay along
> Under an oak, whose antique root peeps out
> Upon the brook that brawls along this wood."

Our Rosalind was then an honest farmer's daughter, who dwelt

> ——— "In the frontiers of this forest, by
> A sheep-cote, fenced about with 'fir' trees."

Never can we forget that day which first made us acquainted with the faithful Adam, whose age, like a healthy winter, had settled upon him "frosty but kindly," which brought before our eyes the brave Orlando and the noble-hearted Duke, with the loves of Audrey and Touchstone: "A poor virgin, sir,—an ill-favoured thing, sir, but mine own." The very scenery gave a richer relish while we read "As You Like It;" and every now and then, as we raised our face from the book and looked out upon the landscape, we seemed to see the living actors pass before our eyes, and, in the low music of the branches, heard their voices uttering line for line as we turned over page after page. And now, were a lover of Shakspere to retire here, and sit down to such an intellectual banquet as we then enjoyed—unquestioned, unmolested, and free—he would be liable to be committed to prison, unless he chose to pay a heavy penalty, although he neither injured "bough, nor leaf, nor flower." When will free-trade-loving Englishmen arise like one man, and do battle for the restoration of these old pathways—these birthrights which the landed knaves have wrested from us? But the axe is laid at the root, and we shall yet win back our old privileges. It angers us to the very heart when we think of what has been, and contemplate what we do now. Merle and mavis, warble on! your songs seem to have a different sound to what they had in days of yore, when this holy old forest path was free and open to all. What a wild scene here opens before us—the remains of a real old English forest; what majestic oaks, relics that have outseen the reigns of the Plantagenets and the Tudors;

how grey and majestic they look, even in ruin!—grim giants of the old world—weather-beaten warriors, who have fought with the winds of a thousand forgotten winters! What a rattling of storm, and rain, and sleet has beaten upon their knotted boles, and what sweet summer suns have shone upon them! Further on we come to an old-fashioned cottage, whose owners have for ages been foresters. Many a wild tale is told of their daring deeds in other days, and we will narrate a love adventure which befel one of them in our own.

Several of the old names which we meet with in ancient ballads have descended to families who are living in the present day on the borders of Sherwood Forest; and amongst these the Scarletts boast of their ancestry from the Saxons, and still recount many a deed done by their forefathers in the days of Robin Hood.

The cottage in which their descendants still live, as you may see even from this distance, bears traces of great antiquity; and the hooks which are driven into the massy oaken rafters have, no doubt, borne the weight of many a well-fed deer. The raised hearth and the old andirons belong to another age; and an antiquary would be tempted to go on his knees to examine the iron fastenings of the door. Look on those quaint, twisted chimneys, which arrest every stranger's gaze as he threads his way through the gorse, and fern, and heather, that grow knee-deep on the edge of the forest, and over which we might wander for many long miles.

In this cottage, forty years ago, was Hubert Scarlett born; for the eldest son had ever been called Hubert through many generations. Like his forefathers, he was brought up a forester; for, from the time of Charles, the lords of the soil had judged wisely in selecting their Verdurers and Agistors from a family who had been nursed

amid herds of deer, and by some kind of instinct seemed created only to become either their guardians or destroyers. Hubert, when a boy, accompanied his father in his wild forest-walks, until, like him, he knew every wild avenue of the forest, and no marvel that a bow and arrow were his delight; and although he was prohibited from feathering his shafts at bucks and does, he was allowed to "deal death" amongst the wild rabbits, and many a white tail did he lay low.

The blood of the ancient outlaws ran strong in his veins; he loved the forest better than he did his home, and he would sit for hours by the wood-side listening to the "belling" of the harts. He knew every gipsy that encamped in the neighbourhood; and many a night, when his parents thought he was safe in bed, had he lowered himself from his cottage window and returned to the gipsy camp, joined in their songs, and shared their supper—the last of which he often provided. Singing and smoking he became perfect in in no time, nor was he long in learning their peculiar dialect. Had they a vicious donkey to break in, Hubert was the first to mount him. He was the very idol of the gipsies, and through exposure to the sun and air, he soon became as brown as the darkest descendant of Boswell's tribe. Right proud was old Hubert of his son, while his mother, in secret, heaved for him many a sigh. Sometimes he was missing for a fortnight together, but then he was with Boswell, or Israel, or Jael, or Dedemiah, and he would return with the next tribe who came to encamp in the forest. His father was sure to find him either swinging asleep in a pannier, or astride of the donkey most celebrated for his kicking propensities. Then he had chased badgers, and hunted otters, and climbed such trees after squirrels, that you marvelled, after hearing of his exploits, he was still there to recount them: the

lad seemed to bear a charmed life. As he grew up, he became tinker, and chair-bottomer, and basket-maker. He could play the fiddle at a country feast, climb the pole for a new hat, run a race in a sack, or ride a donkey round the course, and wrestle and fight with any one, although a stone heavier than himself. A finer built young fellow than Hubert Scarlett never stood in a pair of shoes. Neither was he by nature quarrelsome; when he fought, it was always to take part with the weakest side: if he could not make peace, he made war, and wherever his tall head was seen, there victory was sure to alight—men fell before him like ninepins before a practised player. But if carried away by drink, or quarrelling in a wrong cause, or even in the midst of the *mêlée*, an olive-coloured hand was placed upon his shoulder, or one voice, sweet as a nightingale's, but whispered "Hubert," his arms fell, and he was at her side—that one was Jael, the gipsy's daughter.

Strange power had that beautiful girl over the swarthy son of the old forester; her dark, piercing eyes acted upon him like a spell; he became like Samson, bound and asleep in the lap of Dalilah, until her own voice aroused him. He knew not love by name; he felt that her gentle spirit held a sway over him, that he could do nothing which gave her pain; that when he had forgotten himself, he could not look into her face without the colour deepening the tint of his bronzed cheek. Like the tiger at the feet of his tamer, he quailed beneath her glance when he had done wrong. Wherein lay her power?—she who had never slept under any other covering saving her own tent; who had clutched the drawn knife in a brawl, and sat unmoved amid the discord; who had visited her companions in grated prisons, and foretold future events until she half believed in her own predictions, so clearly had she learned to read the human countenance—where lay the spell by

which she conquered Hubert? Was it her noble nature, mysteriously blended with his when they were but children? when she checked his arm as he aimed at the only chanticleer which some poor cottager possessed, or made him leave behind the apples he had stolen from some orchard; dismount the pony he found in a lonely lane; and leave alive the lamb, at whose innocent throat his knife was pointed; when she stepped in and received the blow he aimed at another, nor wept at the pain inflicted until they were alone, while he sat beside her, hanging his head in guilty silence, though the forgiving pressure of her hand burned through his brain, until he leaned upon her shoulder, and wept like a child; and they went again hand-in-hand through the green lanes, while she, with the voice of a Siren, sang her sweetest songs, and he gathered her the ripest berries from the hedges, cut weeds that she might kneel down and drink at the clearest spring, and vowed from his heart that he would never again cause a tear to dim her dark and beautiful eyes? She seemed like another Miranda in the "Tempest."

And Jael moved through the stormy elements of that wild life like the moon along a cloudy sky—her brightness sometimes hidden, but never totally obscured. She glided over the patches of darkness in mournful silence, burying her brilliancy with regret, and smiling all the sweeter when her silvery face again appeared. Her love for Hubert diminished not, even when a stain had settled down upon his name; when he fled and believed himself a murderer, although it was an upright struggle between man and man, and he left the gamekeeper, who had endeavoured to make him prisoner, bleeding and senseless in the forest. She hovered about the spot until she was satisfied that the wounded man would recover; then left her tribe alone, and in the night, and went in search of Hubert. Many a weary

league did she wander, through wild woods and over pathless moors, inquiring at every hamlet, hostel, and thorp by which she passed; until at last she found him among a recruiting party, on the eve of being marched off to his regiment. The massive gold ear-rings which had been worn by her grandmother purchased his freedom, in spite of the prediction which threatened destruction to her tribe whenever those antique trinkets were sold or lost. Though she trembled as she recalled the prophecy, still love prevailed; his happiness was to her beyond the value of gold.

They hid themselves among the discarded gangs of her own race; known horse-stealers, who had broken out of jail; men who would as soon have slaughtered the shepherd (had he interfered) as the sheep they stole and consumed at a meal: and they were not betrayed. And many a time did the tear steal unconsciously down Jael's cheek, when, by the crackle of the midnight fire, which blazed in the untrodden and innermost depths of the forest, she beheld the drinking-horn which Hubert held, waving high above the cups of his companions, and heard his rich mellow voice swelling the chorus, as "under the greenwood tree" they chaunted some downright gipsy song.

After a time the affray with the gamekeeper was forgotten, although rumour whispered that the little hoard which old Hubert had saved by the servitude of many years was seriously diminished in silencing Justice, who, though blind, is still sculptured with an open hand. Jael became the wife of Hubert, and never did the moon look down in her earlier age upon wilder pranks than were that night played in the solitudes of old Sherwood, when every echo seemed to lend its voice to celebrate their marriage. But Jael shared not the mad carnival; the nightingale sang her to rest, and the wild rose shed its blossoms above her tent as she slept; while the mother of Hubert watched over her

as she closed her eyes in sorrow. Would he still obey her, who had now become a sworn subject to his sway? were thoughts which lay cold upon her heart; and she prayed, unaware, until she sank asleep, her spirit hovering between Heaven and Hubert.

Vain were the offers of old Hubert Scarlett to give up his cottage and his rangership to his son; though married, a gipsy life was still his choice, and his beautiful wife was a true daughter of the forest: still there were moments when the gentle heart of Jael, like that of Ruth of old, sometimes yearned for the home of her mother-in-law, for she was ever kind to her gipsy daughter. But they had youth, and health, and love on their side, and every green forest in merry England was to them a home.

Many a moon had waxed and waned. Spring trod upon the heels of winter, and the violet threw out its perfume, where the deep snow-drift had gathered. The rich garment of summer lost its velvet greenness, and wore itself down into the faded yellow of autumn, and then the winds came and blew the threadbare remnants away. The earth had many a time arrayed herself in her gayest robes, and put on her choicest chaplet of flowers, and gone to play for days in the sunshine; then, wearied, slept out her winter's sleep, until the twitter of the swallow again awoke her. And during all these changes Hubert and Jael lived happily together. Braced by the forest air, their children were light on foot as fallow-deer, and hardy as the mountain heather. They ran out in the rain to wet themselves, then chased the wind across the moor until they were dry. Cold but made them hardier; the summer sun only deepened the bronze on their olive cheeks. The bough that sheltered the bird was roof enough for them until the storm passed over; they nestled in the fox's den, and hid themselves in the wide burrows of the rabbit warren.

But the young gipsy mother bore not the brunt of the warring elements like her husband and children; though the wild thyme and heather still threw the same sweet odour around her tent, yet she now felt the cold night-dew with which they were impearled. The barking of the fox in the wood, and the crowing of the red cock from the distant grange, as he counted the watches of the night, too often startled her from her fitful slumber. The wind, which before played with her dark tresses and she felt it not, as she sat by the camp fire in the twilight, now caused her to draw the hood of her red cloak more closely around her head; and she who would before walk over twenty miles of ground in a short day, with a child at her back, was now compelled to ride short stages on the donkey which it was once her pride to drive.

This change escaped not the fond eye of Hubert, and many a deep sigh did he heave when alone. He selected the sunniest and breeziest spot for his encampment, and proposed giving up the wandering life to return to the home of his fathers. But when Jael's eyes alighted on her children at their gambols on the open heath, and thought how happy she herself had been at their age—when, free and unfettered, she went singing through the green lanes like a bird, when the nightingale hymned her lullaby, and the lark carolled beneath the opening eyelids of the morn—her heart pleaded for their freedom, and she looked up to the blue vault beneath which her forefathers had walked erect for so many generations, and felt how greatly its grandeur exceeded the low-roofed habitation of man.

Another autumn came and sowed the forest paths with fallen leaves. The cold east-wind blew like the forerunner of winter; the low, leaden sky rained heavily; the earth was fetid and damp; and for three days Jael had never arisen from her heather-bed beneath the tent, nor had

Hubert once quitted her side. The children sat mute and sorrowful before the rain-extinguished fire of the camp, saving the eldest daughter, who rose every now and then to administer to her mother's wants. Hubert had begged of his wife to allow him to hasten to the nearest town and call in the aid of a physician.

"You were always kind," answered Jael, uttering the words with difficulty, "but Nature has ever been the restorer of our race. The Leech cannot stay the approach of the Dark Angel. I have tried every healing herb in which my forefathers had faith. My race is nearly run." And she clasped his hand, as if she sought forgiveness for opposing his kind wishes.

"Your will shall be mine, dear Jael," answered the husband, while a tear stole down his brown, manly cheek, pausing in its course, as if lost amongst those strange tearless furrows. "Would to God that I might die with you! Your gentle voice, which has so many times pleaded for me on earth, would win me an entrance into heaven. The Avenging Angel would not separate us, if you knelt and pleaded for me on that holy threshold." And his big heart heaved as if it would burst.

The lips of Jael moved, although she spoke not; but with clasped hands and closed eyes, she seemed holding communion with Heaven, and no sound was heard but the rain and the measured roar of the forest trees, as the wind blew and paused at intervals, and mingled with the stifled sobbings of Hubert. The children sat muffled together without the tent, in the cold and blinding rain. At length Jael said,—

"We shall all meet again in heaven! I have never felt well since little Japhet died, Hubert, and now he lies asleep with his sister!"

"A sleep which the roaring of the old oaks will never

awaken him from," answered her husband. "I sometimes dream that he still lies in my arms, and forget that he is dead, and try to take his little hand in mine. But thou sayest he is an angel now, and thou art wiser and better than I am."

"I have felt the cold night-wind blow upon the spot nearest my heart, where his little head was wont to lie," replied Jael, breathing heavily between each syllable; "and I miss that soothing murmur in his sleep, which sounded like a swarm of summer bees. But let us not envy Heaven! God beckoned him back to the home from whence he came. Last night he appeared unto me a white-winged messenger; I saw him smiling, through my tears, and I knew that my hours were numbered. He held out his little arms to embrace me!"

Again she clasped her hands, and her lips moved in silence; and she sank into a deep sleep, from which the morning light never awoke her more!—

> "She will not hear the tempest rave,
> Nor, moaning, household shelter crave
> From autumn winds that beat her grave."

Reader, shouldst thou ever wander on the border of Sherwood Forest, on the southern side of Oakdale, thou wilt see three hillocks at the foot of a majestic oak; the larger one is marked with a plain headstone, on which thou mayst read the following simple inscription:—"To the Memory of Jael the Gipsy."

Another summer came, and although Hubert had passed the dark winter with his son and daughters in the home of his fathers, and wandered many a lonely hour alone in the wild forest, and in the deep midnight wept beside the grave of her he loved, still the smiling face of Nature seemed again to beckon him abroad; and he obeyed the summons,

for grief weighed heavily upon his heart. His daughter was now verging into womanhood, and those who could remember the features of her mother at her age, saw again her living likeness in the forest. But the comforts of a cottage-life had tamed down the wild spirits of the children; they missed their mother — she who could ever "make sunshine in a shady place." Their camp was no longer the happy home that it had been when she was alive. Hubert felt the change more keenly than they did; his father's cottage recalled not the painful thoughts which now hovered around the desolate-looking gipsy encampment. It was the last of three melancholy evenings which they had passed in the forest, when Hubert sat at the foot of an old familiar oak, where, in happier days, Jael had many a time been his companion; his little son, a half-stolen image of his deceased mother, stood fondly between his father's knees, while his hand rested on his daughter's shoulder. The tambourine, which had never been struck since her mother's death, was laid amongst the wild flowers of the forest; and his glance was rivetted on his daughter, who sat on the green sward, gazing intently on her father, her eyes still moist with the tears which she had but that moment before dashed away; for they had come unaware from her swelling heart, as she recalled the memory of her whose grave was visible behind the foldings of the tent. She read in her father's countenance all that was then beating, like a "measured funeral march," in his heart; and in a voice softened by the melancholy which reigned within, said,—

"Let us go to grandfather's—we shall be happier there. love to hear the organ in the old church; it recals my mother's voice when she sang to us, making such music as we can never hear again."

"We will, my daughter," replied the father; "happi-

ness will come no more to me in this old forest: the sun that lighted its shadows is set. Let us tarry no longer."

Hubert looked fondly on his beautiful daughter; rose from the stem of the tree on which he was seated, and, throwing his arm around her, while his eyes filled with tears, added,—

"This wild life but ill becomes thee, my daughter; and these, thy brother and sister, have long since found the couch beneath my mother's roof softer than the hardy heather. They are ever pining to be with her. I will become a forest-ranger, like my forefathers, and kneel in the grey old church, in which they have prayed for many generations."

He kissed her, and broke up the encampment, and in answer to his mother's voice, as she threw open the lattice, said, "We have come home at last, never to leave it until I am borne to my grave in the forest!"

His heart was too full to utter more, for his father's step was on the threshold, and, with the grasp of a giant, he welcomed him home.

Such is the last story told of the inhabitants of the ancient cottage, which we now see standing, conspicuous, amid the pathless forest land; even at this distance you may see the roses which Hubert's daughter has planted, and which engird it every way. Old Hubert sleeps with his fathers in the neighbouring churchyard, while his son is still ranger, and never lacks the corner of a venison pasty whenever a friend is at hand. The gipsies have made choice of the glen nearest his home for their summer encampment, and the children of Hubert are often seen there, the noisiest among the group. But the forest-ranger has become a grave and solemn man. Maid and widow have visited him in vain. Like a stricken deer, he shuns the shaft. His wounded heart's sole solace lies within the

grave, and he calmly awaits the day that will at last see him sleep side by side with Jael the gipsy. We may, perchance, yet pass him before we have traversed this wild scene. How graceful does that doe and fawn appear crossing the sunlit glade! Oh! for the genius of Landseer, to transfer them at once into our sketch-book! But, alas! we are only artists in thought; the glowing canvas is beyond our power!

COUNTRY STATUTES.

"For John can reap, and Dick he can plough,
And Dorothy she can milk the cow,
Look after the dairy, and churn the cream;
While William can whistle, and drive the team:
Then drink, my brave boys, and drain the tin-can,
For many a master will need a new man."

OLD COUNTRY SONG.

A COUNTRY Statute (or "Stattice," as it is always pronounced by the villagers) is a rural feast or wake, where farmers hire their assistants, and is held both in villages and small market-towns. Servant men and women who are out of place come for miles to attend the stattice; and, if

they can, "get hired." It is a kind of English slave-market, in which the hireling has a voice in the bargain, and can either hire himself or not. If the "hireling" agrees with the farmer, he accepts his "fasten-penny," which is generally a shilling now; and this binds him down to serve for twelve months. Hiring and fasten-penny are genuine old Saxon words, and we here see an ancient custom still in existence; for, so far back as the time of Alfred, the serfs or villeins who had, by their merit or by purchase, procured their freedom, were thus hired by the farmers, and received their fasten-money at some wake, mart, or market-cross, generally on a saint's-day. Such as were not free, in those days, belonged to the soil; if the estate was sold, they were sold with it; and the land-owner or thane, or whatever he was called, had as much right to the serfs, as he had to the swine, trees, sheep, or oxen; for such was then the law of England, in the "good old times," which we so much deplore in romances; for, thank God! in reality, they have long since passed away.

Let it be understood, that, in regard to a country "stattice," we use the words "slave-market" in no other sense than that the servants stand there, waiting for a bidder; and that the farmers walk round, examine their bulk, bone, and sinew, and hire such as they think likeliest to do the most work, the servants selling or letting themselves out to hire of their own free will. Nor does the scene vary much from a registry office in London, where you see announced outside, that servants of all kinds are in daily attendance, waiting to be hired.

The farmer rarely inquires about character; he asks the man what he's been used to, and, if he is satisfied with his answers, and they agree about wages, the bargain is soon concluded, and the day appointed when John is to arrive at his new place.

The scene of a country stattice is so peculiarly English, that we regret no great artist has ever attempted to paint it; for it is rich in character, and such as can never be met with, at any other time, in all that mixed variety which is there assembled: men and women, who have lived at lonely farm-houses, far away from any busy high road, as ignorant of the ways of the great world as children—many of whom can neither read nor write, and have scarcely an idea beyond what enables them to cultivate the soil, and look after the cattle; who, the moment they are seated by the kitchen fire, fall asleep, as if, when their hunger is appeased, and their day's work ended, they had no other duty to perform, but to slumber soundly until the morrow. And yet many of these are fine-looking men and women; stamped with the ruddy, round, old English face; ready to weep at a tale of sorrow, or laugh at a merry jest; harmless, kind, simple, and tender-hearted; yet, beyond the routine of their daily life, buried in heathen ignorance. True, there has been a change during the last few years; though the nooks and corners, which we have before us now, are still as dark as they were a century ago, for the light of knowledge has not yet extended to these places. They believe in dreams and omens, wise men and witches, and practise such superstitions as were common at the time of the early Saxons. Argument is wasted upon such as these; their forefathers were believers in the same follies; and, if a dog howl, or a raven croak, they know it denotes something; and they have a score of old traditions, to them as clear as gospel truth. They never had the chance of obtaining knowledge: when children, they had to mind other children, two or three years younger than themselves, while their mothers and fathers were out at work in the fields. At six or seven they could tent the corn, or herd the cows in the lanes, or run errands. In another year or two, some

farmer took them into the house, to feed pigs and poultry, fetch up the cows, ride to the mill, and bring home a sack of flour, take a horse two or three miles to be shod, and, by so doing, "earn their keep." Years creep on, they get hired, find a sweetheart, are married, and rear up another race, just in the same footsteps as their fathers reared them; and this is the true history of many a farmer's servant.

But this is the morning of stattice, and Johnny is dressed out in his best; his clean blue or white smock-frock is drawn up through the openings that lead to his pockets. You see a portion of his substantial corduroys, with pearl buttons at the knees, and a length of strong, drab riband; his worsted stockings, which are generally ribbed, fit as if they were glued to his legs; while his high-ankle, heavy-nailed boots glitter again with grease—you feel that you could not walk a hundred yards in them, so heavily are they shod with iron. His neckerchief is generally red, or blue, or yellow, flowered or spotted; his sleeved waistcoat a warm plush, the richest pattern he can find; his hat has the nap rubbed the wrong way down, to let you see it is "real beaver." He carries a stick, which he cut himself; and when he is in serious conversation, he every now and then thrusts the knob of it into his mouth. Molly mostly has a pair of pattens in the left hand, and an umbrella in the right, rarely either wearing the one or putting up the other, unless she is going home. Her gown, if in summer, is the gaudiest print that can be purchased, covered with enormous somethings between a cabbage and a dahlia. Her shawl is also of a glaring colour; and she is very fond of wearing either red or blue ribands in her bonnet, shaped into tremendous bows. Her hands are rough as rasps, and almost as hard, through scouring kits, and other household drudgery. If she wears gloves, they make her feel uncomfortable; so much has she exposed her hands to water and

weather, that they fairly burn again, and the gloves are soon thrust into her pocket. She wears a large gilt brooch, with a piece of yellow cut glass in the centre as big as the eye of an ox; but, above all, she prides herself on a smart shoe and stocking; and will sometimes, when the roads are dirty, bring a clean pair of the latter in her pocket, which she puts on in some retired corner of the fields or woods, just before entering the market-town or village. She has at times a colour like the rose, and here and there you will see a neck, that has escaped the sun, almost as white as the milk in her own dairy, while her eyes are generally of that bright, cheerful, shifting colour, called hazel, looking dark at a distance, yet as if you can see through them when near. Her lips are full, round, and open; and when her mouth is in repose, you can see the white teeth between. She is the image of embodied health, and can eat fat bacon like a ploughman; and as to work, from morning until night she does nothing but sing over it.

She meets John, with whom she had, perhaps, lived in service a year or two before, and of whom she had only heard from a fellow-servant once or twice since that time; or she had seen him at a feast, and he regretted that he did not still live in the same place with her, and we know not what beside, though the following dialogue takes place:—John, stopping short as he sees her approach, and lifting up his stick high above his head in astonishment, exclaims, "Lauks, Molly! sewerly it cau n't be thee, neither. And how is 't, my wench?—and how's all at hoam?—our old measter and missus, and all on 'em, at Grinley-on-the-Hill?"

"Why, John, this is a sirprize, for cartain," says Molly, without answering a single question; "an' how beest thee? an' Betty? I heard it waur to be a match. And

hez to gotten hired, or hed a bidding, or only cum out for a holiday like?"

"Noah!" replies John, sucking the knob of his stick. "I hed a bidding, but he nobert bid twelve pound, and I axed fourteen. But I'm to call on him at the Black's Head, waur he puts up, afore I goe hoam"—and here the conversation is interrupted by a farmer, whose eye having alighted upon John, he steps up, and begins as follows:—"Are you hired, my young man?"

"Noah, zur; I wishes to be, if we can come to terms."

"What have you been used to?" inquires the farmer.

"All sorts of labouring work," says John; "ploughing, sowing, manuring, and helping at harvest, seeing after the cattle, and sike like."

"Who did you live with last?" is the next question.

"Measter Duckles, of Thonock Hill Farm," says John; "a good measter, but rather short-handed; for, beside having to do moast all the work at lambing season, I had to go to town with the team, and that was more than we bargained for;" and into his mouth went the stick, for this was a long speech for John.

"These hard times make us clip close," says the farmer, tapping his boot with the butt-end of his whip, and musing for a moment; then adding, "I should, at times, require you to do the same. What wages are you asking?"

John replies; then selects a choice bit in his stick which he gnaws whilst awaiting the answer.

The farmer finds no fault with the wages, giving John to understand that there will be no abatement in the work from what he had at the last place. Then looking at Molly, he asks John if they have lived in service together; is told when, where, and how long ago; inquires her working qualities, and receives satisfactory answers; tells John that

the two servants who have lived with him for four or five years are about to marry; and, knowing that love makes labour light, jokes John about his doing the same some day if he hires Molly; whereat John grins, and has recourse to his stick; whilst the farmer agrees with Molly; taking them both, perhaps, into the public-house, and, after fixing the day when they are to come, giving them a crown piece (if he is generous) for their fasten-penny.

You pass another, and can tell at a glance that he has long been out of place; that he has wandered from stattice to stattice, and sought in vain to get hired. His thin sunken cheeks show that it is long since he had his full run at the thick fat bacon-flitches. The bundle he carries under his arm tells, that if he can but obtain a situation, he is ready to go at once—to set out that very night—for he has lost too much time already. He has had thoughts of enlisting—but no: ignorant as he is, and low as wages are, farming is still better than soldiering; for he has read in the papers that they strip the poor fellows, and flog them when they do wrong, while a master could but discharge him. The little that remains of the last wages he received is but very little now; and he has visited every relation he can think of, for twenty miles round, and stayed with them until they all but told him to go, and he could not "sheam" to stay any longer. He does not know what he must do—until he meets with an old acquaintance, who, like himself, has long been out of place, and they agree to start off together the next day, to some distance, where a new railroad is about to commence, and where they are sure to obtain employment—and lose much that is good and moral in their characters.

But who is the handsome girl that apes the lady in her dress, and scarcely deigns to recognise the companions of her childhood? and whose pretty face will, we fear, be her

ruin; for it has already been the means of her leaving two situations. She loiters about the large village inn, which is a posting-house; she *feels* that her unbecoming dress is observed by every servant-girl in the stattice, and turns away ashamed, and wonders whether or not HE has come. She looks in the large open doorway, at which she sees none but gentlemanly farmers enter—men booted and spurred; she looks up at the sign, "Dealer in Wines;" she sees beside the huge bow-window written up, "Post horses let out to hire." No, she dare not enter to inquire if "he" has come, for she feels that house is far too grand for her; it is so different to the Brown Cow, where two years before she used to go with John, and sit beside him, while he drank his ale, eating gingerbread and cracking nuts. But John was not the son of a wealthy farmer, neither did he ride on a spirited horse, nor put up at the head inn, like him whom she now waited for, and who had promised to meet her at the Statutes. A gentleman alights, and the landlord of the inn, on the large stone step beneath the pillared portico, stands smiling, and receives his guest with a polite bow,—nay, even deigns to hold his horse until the ostler arrives! Oh! the courage of love! She approaches, and, without raising her eyes from the ground, blushes, while she inquires, in a voice just raised above a whisper, whether young Farmer Elliston has arrived? "Not yet, young lady," is the polite answer. Up, heart! poor heart! he—the landlord of a posting-house, an inn where "real" quality stop—called her a lady! There must be something in her appearance to call forth such a compliment as this! and if aught were wanting to confirm it, it was the host's answer to another young woman, who, inquiring after her master, received for answer, "No, Molly, he has not come yet."

Poor girl! she will wait no longer; she will go and

meet him; how happy he will be to see her! Some day he may drive her to that very inn-door in his gig, and the same polite landlord will bow to her, and be ready to hand her out, as he did one young lady whom she saw arrive that morning; but this will not be until she is young Mrs. Elliston. She passes along the village street, she sees her old sweetheart John, and turns her eyes another way. How can she, who has just been called a lady, stoop to one who wears a smock-frock? True, John loves her, and she liked him well enough, but that was before the young farmer had told her she was "far too handsome to be a servant."

She passes the last cottage in the village, walks along the embanked footpath beside the high-road. He will meet her soon, and alighting, throw the bridle over his arm, and then walk along beside her, perhaps take her with him into the head inn; then they will see that she has not come there to be hired like a common servant. There is a bend in the road, then it is straight as an arrow for more than a mile; she turns the corner, and sees two gentlemen and a lady approaching at an easy canter on horseback. The first horseman is a little way ahead, the second rides abreast with the fair equestrian, whose green veil streams out in the wind, and whose riding-habit was never made by a village tailor. Poor girl! her heart sinks within her! her head reels as the little cavalcade rushes by!—It was Henry Elliston, who rode beside the rich farmer's sister, who smiled so kindly upon the wealthy Miss Hazleshaw, who saw "her," but neither smiled, paused, nor bestowed upon her a nod of recognition. She looked after them, and saw the head of the rich heiress turned back; even she had observed her!—how could she miss doing so? how could any one have passed without looking, who had seen the roses in her cheek fade into a deadly pale?—but, above all,

Miss Hazleshaw—on whom she had waited at table scores of times, when visiting at Woodhouse Grange? She leant against one of the white posts beside the footpath, and wept bitter tears.

Then came Hope, "with eyes so fair," whispering that he would yet come; he would but put up his horse, then return. How foolish she was to doubt him! He loved her too well to deceive her! What if his mother had given her warning to leave, still he had been kind to her: witness the silk dress he had bought her, the costly shawl, the golden ear-rings! Oh no! he could never prove false! Had he not told her that when his father died all would be his, and then—and then——Hour after hour she waited, faint, weary, and hungry; group after group passed her, turned to look; some of them tittered; some, who were tipsy, and knew her, bade her pull off her finery; others told her to sell her shawl, and buy a decent gown for her poor mother at home;—even John passed her; for when he approached to speak, she turned away, and all he said was, "Good night, Mary, and God bless you!" She gained the village where the Statutes had been held; it was growing dark; she ventured into the grand inn, and inquired boldly for young Farmer Elliston. He had not been; he had ridden on to the market-town: there was to be an Agricultural Protection Meeting, at which a real duke was to preside; all the country gentlemen, who were advocates for a dear loaf, had gone to attend it. She leant against the inn-yard gate, to weep, and the merry laughter of the plain-clad country girls, who passed by with their swains, on their way home, fell with a kind of reproach upon her heart. She felt that she had been deceived, and recalled, alas! when it was too late, the many warnings she had received to be aware of flattery, and never to forget what were her station and circumstances in life. She might have said with

the old poet, William Lodge, whose "Golden Legacy" first appeared in 1590,—

"Now I see, and seeing sorrow,
That the day consumed returns not;
Who dare trust upon to-morrow,
When nor time nor life sojourn not?"

Poor Mary! she set out to walk alone, three miles in the dark, yet felt so faint and hungry, that she was compelled to call at the little ale-house, near the end of the village, to purchase a loaf and butter, to keep her from "sinking." A good-natured old butcher chanced to be halting at the door with his light cart, and as he lived in the same village as "Pretty Mary," he insisted upon her riding home with him; she consented, and her tears fell unnoticed in the dark.

As she rode along, she heard a village girl, from a foot-path behind the hedge, chanting the following song to her companions. Henry Elliston had purchased a printed copy of the very same song of a ballad-singer, and presented it to her. Poor girl! she remembered the time when he first read it over, too well! It was entitled,—

TO MARY, SLEEPING.

The lark has left the heath-flower bells,
And gone to meet the sun, Mary!
The yellow bees their honey-cells,
To hum where sweet streams run, Mary!
Look how the vine-leaves glitter, dear!
Around your lattice creeping;
The early sun is beaming there,
And through the casement peeping.

The throstle to its callow brood,
'Mid hawthorn blooms is singing,
The ringdove from the tall elms cooed,
Round which the woodbine's clinging.

On the musk-rose there hangs a tear,
The flowers their sweets are holding;
They wait, my love, till thou art there,
To see their buds unfolding.

But still the landscape wants a charm,
As Eden did its Eve, Mary!
And till thou leanest on my arm,
The flowers will droop and grieve, Mary!
Then wake, my love! arise, my dear!
Nor let us longer dally;
For sunshine's dancing everywhere,
On hill, and stream, and valley!

Months had passed away, and it was drawing towards the close of a brief, cheerless, wintry day, when the same butcher was returning from his rural rounds, where he had been collecting sheep-skins, with which his light cart was now heavily loaded. The snow had fallen all night long, and continued throughout the day without ceasing; and as the wind blew full in his face, both himself and horse hung down their heads, and fronted with reluctance the sharp fleecy blast. Over the wide, bleak, unsheltered common, the snow lay deep and untrodden, blown here and there into wild fanciful ridges, just as the ground rose and fell, or where the wind had whirled it; and it was only by some white-covered hillock of stones, a furze bush of taller growth, the remains of an aged hawthorn, and the relics of an old finger-post, that a practised eye was enabled to trace the winding of the road. All around hung the low, dull, leaden-coloured sky, so low that, as far as the eye could stretch, it seemed to rest everywhere upon the snow, save where, on the furthest rim of the horizon, the level monotony of the line was broken by a steep slate roof, now covered with snow; and that was all that stood visible of the Union Workhouse, for the rest of the building was lost

in the distance. It was so cold and cheerless a day, that not even a donkey, the hardiest defier of wind and weather, was to be seen in the whole wide range of the sky-bounded common, for even he had sought a shelter in some unseen hollow. Nothing but the hardy butcher and his sleet-blinded horse stirred amid the wild solitude of that wintry scene. Slowly and heavily did the horse move, until it came to a stand-still near the guide-post, towards which the road slightly ascended. "Thou hast had a hard day, poor beast!" said the gallant butcher, leaping out of his cart into the snow, which was full knee-deep; "and hast load enough without carrying me. Come, another mile further, and we shall be within sight of home." The poor animal pricked up its ears as if it understood every word; and, encouraged with a kind, cheering pat, struggled along, straining every nerve, the deep ruts filling up and falling in as fast as they were made by the bright wheels; and on it went until stopped by sheer exhaustion beside the old crumbling guide-post. "Well done, Brown Bess!" said the jolly butcher, again patting his horse; thou hast weathered the worst of it, and shalt have the best feed the stable affords when we reach home; there is no hurry, old girl!" and he again patted the faithful animal, examined the girth, saw that the harness sat easy, and was about to proceed, when he saw something lying at the foot of the guide-post. He stepped aside to examine it, and beheld—the dead body of a child! which was naked, except a thin covering of flannel. "They had hard hearts who left thee here," said the butcher, taking out his handkerchief, and gently wiping away the snow from its little head and face; then selecting the largest and cleanest sheep-skin, he wrapped the body gently up in the woollen covering, and placing it carefully in the cart, slowly and thoughtfully resumed his journey through the wind an snow.

When the butcher reached the neighbouring village, his first act was to deliver the body of the child into the constable's hands. "Lose no time," said the butcher to this legal functionary, "for as the snow had hardly covered it, it cannot have lain there long, nor can those who left it there be far off. When I have put up my horse, and taken a mouthful of refreshment myself, I will assist you in the search: lose no time, but set out at once with such force as you can muster." The constable spoke about a magistrate, a warrant, a summons, a coroner's inquest; but these the butcher showed could at any time be got, and that while he was busied in obtaining them the guilty party might escape; but if a pursuit was at once set on foot, owing to the depth of snow, the heaviness of the roads, and the slow progress any one would make, there was no fear, either through the trace of their footmarks or so few people being out on such a day, but what some tidings of their whereabout might be picked up; for it was his opinion that they must be somewhere within two or three miles of the neighbourhood. It was at last decided that the butcher, when ready, should set out with his man, retrace their steps, and first give warning of what had happened at the Union Workhouse. Meantime the constable and his two deputies were to commence their search at once, by carefully examining every hovel, haystack, and rickyard on that side of the common which lay nearest the guide-post.

The night was moonlight, although not a silver ray was visible through that thick woolly haze which intervened like a cloudy curtain between heaven and earth. It was a kind of dim, grey, ominous light, nowhere darkened by those deep masses of shadow, which, when the sky is clear, give such rich variety to a moonlit landscape. It seemed neither like day nor night, but one wearisome, monotonous, undeveloped dawning; as if the day stood still, and waited

for the night to awake, that still slept grey, and cloudy, and silent, upon the cold snowy confines of the unawakened world. The wide hedgeless common was unbroken by a single shadow; nor was the beautiful tracery of a naked branch reflected upon the snow, which still fell, flake by flake, deeper and deeper over the untrodden solitude. Full two hours had now passed away since the short-lived day died, when a loud, deep, thundering knock rang through every wretched room in the Union Workhouse, causing the miserable inmates to pause as they held the uplifted spoon between the cup and lip, and left off sipping the sumptuous potation of oatmeal, hot water, and salt. The first summons was not answered speedily enough for the somewhat hasty and choleric butcher; and when the little grating (not a foot wide) was opened in the forbidding-looking door, and a thin, starved, skeleton-skinned face was seen between the bars, the butcher called down a deep imprecation on his eyes and limbs, and added, "If I'd been a poor devil of a pauper, starving for want of relief, a pretty time you'd have kept me here this cold snowy night; why, they would have to half knock the door down before you'd let 'em in."

"Poor paupers don't knock that way, sir," answered the thin, half-starved inmate; "they are over frightened when they come to ask for relief;" and he opened the door.

"Where's your master—Pinchgut, or what do they call him?" continued the butcher. "Tell him, Bull, the butcher from Rampton, wants to see him directly."

The man disappeared through one of the cold, uncharitable doors to do the butcher's bidding.

"I picked up a dead child to-night on the common, at dark hour," commenced the straight-forward butcher, when the master of the Union-house made his appearance. "The

poor little thing had nothing on it but a slight strip of flannel, and looked as if it was scarcely a month old, and I've come to inquire if you've seen anybody about to-day with a child. Our constable and his men are on the look-out about the outskirts of the common, and they thought it best that I should come as far as here."

"Why—you see, sir—that is—there was," stammered forth the master of the Union-house, changing colour as he spoke, and looking deeply confused; "a young woman did leave the Union to-day with her child; we have no right to keep them, you see, when they insist upon going; and I cannot say but it may have been her, for she has long been very flighty."

"Good God!" exclaimed the butcher, stamping his stout oaken walking-stick upon the floor; "flighty as the poor creature might be, she could never have the heart to strip the little thing all but naked, and leave it there to die on such a day as this—it cannot be her!"

"Why, as to that, you see," replied the master of the Workhouse, "she had very little to cover herself with; for the Poor-law compels us to take the clothes from them which the Union provided, and we must obey the law, or answer for it before the commissioners."

"Then you are a d—d cold-hearted rascal," continued the butcher, uplifting his heavy stick, and with one blow felling him to the ground, as he would have done a bullock; adding, "I would serve the cursed commissioners the same if they were here, and let a poor woman go out almost naked on such a day as this!" And, consigning them to Sathanus, he quitted the Workhouse, no one daring to detain him.

On the bleak north side of the common, and scarce half a mile from the down-falling weather-beaten finger-post, stretched several fields (if such a name may be given to the

enclosed spaces which, but a few years before, had formed a part of the vast common, but were now parted off with a stoop-and-railed fence, which every few yards was broken down and open); the boundary line hardly distinguishable, saving here and there by a row of perishing and sickly quicksets, which seemed as if they refused to grow and form a hedge on what had so long been a broad, windy, unenclosed, unclaimed range, for the cattle of the neighbouring poor. Chartered, perhaps, and granted to them at first by some good old forgotten Anglo-Saxon king, and inclosed by the chicanery of some selfish all-grasping hole-in-a-corner clique, who will no doubt one day be rewarded according to their deserts. Here and there a thatched hovel had been erected; further on stood the remains of a haystack or two, now covered with the thick fallen flakes, and scarcely discernible in the dull, hazy moonlight from the snow-covered hillocks which on every hand heaved up amidst this ridgy and broken portion of the ground.

In one of these miserable hovels which the very cattle had forsaken—for the roof was open to every wind of heaven, having long since been carried away to kindle the fires of some wandering gipsy tribe,—while the naked and dilapidated beams which stretched over head were deeply encrusted with snow, and you could not look upwards towards the cold, cheerless, leaden-coloured sky, without a shudder—so desolate and comfortless was the spot,—into this wretched down-coming, miserable building, the constable had entered, attracted by a low, stifled, and scarce audible sobbing, and led thither by the trace of partially obliterated footmarks in the field. In one corner sat the figure as of a woman; her naked elbows resting on her knees, her face buried in her hands, over which fell her long, dishevelled hair, partially covered with snow, while she herself was half-buried

amid the feathery flakes, which had fallen and settled unmelted on her shoulders—so bleak and bitter was that night!

Inured as the constable was to scenes of wretchedness and misery, and often as he had been the hard and unfeeling lever which the iron arm of the law forces into cruel action—the man stood now motionless, speechless, and appalled! An under garment of cotton, which left bare her bosom, neck, and arms, and a thin, light skirt of the same material, were all that she had to shelter her from the deep-fallen snow and sharp-cutting wind of that dreary and pitiless wintry night; for she had been stripped of her upper garments by the cold, charitable hand of the matron of the Union-house. Less feeling than she, who, in the cruelty of her heart, drove forth her handmaid into the wilderness, they had sent forth this second Hagar and her child, all but naked, and without even a loaf of bread or a cruse of water, to struggle as she could through the blinding sleet, or lie down and die by the road-side. And God, whose merciful eye is ever watchful, had sent out His angel, as in the days of old, to bring back again the little life He had given into His own hands, and leave the innocent mould in which He had enshrined it to perish; a dark blot upon the fair face of nature—a stain on that merciless law which man maketh for his brother man, while he blasphemously mocketh his Maker to his face, praying "that His will may be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Awful will that day of reckoning be, when the unfeeling framers of these murderous laws shall be summoned before the dreadful tribunal of that stern, but just Judge, to account for the millions they have, by slow, but sure starvation, slain. In vain will "they call upon the rocks and mountains to cover them;" their deeds shall be written, as if in red letters of

fire, upon the unclouded front of the sky, and read in every frowning eye of the assembled world.

Thrice did the constable accost the wretched creature who sat before him; but received no answer, neither by word nor sign; and, saving by the unconscious, unrepressed and deep internal sobbing, as if all sorrows had rushed together into the heart, and were dying there as it died, cold, motionless, and deep within, she shewed not one external symptom of life—as if she had long since ceased to breathe; for where the snow-flake fell, there did it rest. There was something so new and strange in this silent misery, that the man was half afraid to approach her; and when he went outside the hovel to call for assistance, his voice seemed to sound to him as if it was not his own, for he felt low, sad, and dejected: strange feelings to him "who had no tears." By this time the butcher had returned from his mission at the Union-house, and, attracted by the sound of the constable's voice, had plodded his way, knee-deep, towards the hovel, which he reached about the same time as the assistants whom the voice had summoned.

"Good God!" exclaimed the butcher, gently raising her head, and looking into her face, "why, it is pretty Mary! and the sweetest face that the sun ever shined upon, has come to this! For heaven's sake, let us lose not a moment; she may yet be saved!" And stripping off his rough, heavy top-coat—an example followed, at the same moment, by the constable himself—they wrapped her up as carefully as a tender nurse would swathe an infant, and bore her by gentle stages through the deep and heavy snow, to the kind-hearted butcher's residence in the adjacent village—the village in which, twenty years before, the dawning first broke upon her innocent eyes.

Under the rough and homely exterior of the butcher's wife there beat as true and tender an English heart as ever swelled in a Saxon breast; and all that the kind and ministering hand of woman could do was done for poor Mary. The bright fire flickered and gilded the walls of the clean chamber in which she was placed, throwing its changing light upon the gaudy curtains, and upon the snow-white counterpane, and causing you to think of that cheerless roofless, miserable hovel, with a shivering feeling of dread. And no sound was heard there but the muffled footsteps of the kind woman in attendance, moving noiselessly to and fro over the thick carpets, as she every minute applied some new restorative, or gave utterance to some comforting and endearing expression, which was only answered by the half-smothered sob of the sufferer, or the unconscious ejaculation of "Hush, baby, hush!" breathed forth in such a pitiable tone as seemed to make the heart of the hearer bleed. Nor could the deep feelings of the kind woman any longer be controlled, for, sitting down on the side of the bed, she raised the checked apron to her eyes, and wept like a child.

On the following day a coroner's inquest sat upon the body of the child, and instead of finding guilty the party who had put into execution so merciless and unfeeling a law as that which was chiefly instrumental in its death, they returned a verdict of murder against the unfortunate mother: not even qualifying it by an allusion to the state of mind which she had been in for several days before quitting the Union-house. One or two of the villagers carefully examined the spot where the child was found, and although a considerable depth of snow had fallen, there was no doubt on their minds, from the traces which they were enabled to make out, that the poor woman had sat down at the

foot of the guide-post, and probably,—numbed as she must have been with the cold, and weighed down with anguish, and misery, and wretchedness, together with the unsettled, excited, and insane state of mind,—that her own intense agony made her, for a time, forget even her child. There were proofs, though faint and half obliterated, that she had returned to search for the infant; that after wandering for some distance, she had turned again, crossed at several angles, and at each turning still gone wider and further from the spot, until she had reached the miserable hovel in which she was found. Even when she partially recovered, though only to the consciousness that she still lived, her first words were such as a mother utters to lull and soothe her child, and such as left no doubt on the mind of the butcher's wife that poor Mary believed her infant was still beside her. Not a syllable of remorse had escaped her lips; not a sentence was uttered to shew that the memory groaned under the remembrance of guilt, for although it was but the senseless pillow which she pressed, she wasted over it a hundred motherly endearments. Any one who had witnessed that painful scene would have felt convinced that she was no murderer.

Nor was there a mark of violence discovered on the body of the child, to justify the sapient jury in returning such a verdict; and as the medical assistant was the paid parish doctor, he—good forbearing man!—had too much sympathy for his employers to state, that any infant who was exposed naked at such a severe season, and in so bleak a situation, must perish through the cold, unless possessed of the strength of a young Hercules. Nor was it until night—when, armed with a warrant from a neighbouring magistrate, they came to carry off the poor suffering mother to a county gaol, and there, in a cold, comfortless cell, to

wait her trial at the coming assizes—that she seemed conscious of what had happened. In vain did both the kind-hearted butcher and his wife plead the necessity of a sufficient delay to allow for her recovery, stating—and that truly—she was not in a fit state to be removed. All was useless; living or dead, the law must be made secure of its victim, and that without delay; its majesty must be vindicated; the law must have its victim ready in its den to prey upon when it pleaseth. Even had she died by the way, justice must have rested gratified without the satisfaction of killing her.

The many hours through which she had been exposed to the elements on that desolate common, and within the roofless and snow-filled hovel, in addition to the long distance she was removed in the cart at such a season, acted mercifully upon her; and she who would no doubt have been "butchered to make an *English* holiday," died, and disappointed the gaping crowd, who would have come forth from miles around to have glutted their gaze on the handiwork of the moral hangman. She was spared the lingering misery of those moments, every tick of which marches in slow anguish over the heart, counting the consuming hours that elapse between condemnation and death, and which—oh, cruel mercy!—is too often embittered by the long-expected pardon being withheld, even after it is granted; as if the law loved to experimentalise upon the life it cannot in justice take away, so contents itself by administering a few thousands more of its heart-breaking sobs and deep prolonged agonies, compared to the enduring of which death is, indeed, mercy.

Who can tell the sentence that will at last be pronounced from the great Tribunal, before which she was summoned, when Justice shall strip all human motives of

the blinded trappings which may conceal them from mortal sight, and the naked roots, from which a thousand evils have sprung, are laid bare, and open, and undisguised—when the lips of the paid pleader are mute, and the hired defender of wrong stands silent—when right shall need no advocate, and wrong shall not lack an accuser—when the balance of justice is held even by an Omnipotent arm, and not a human being dares to tamper with it, or sully its star-like brightness with a breath?—then may the form of Mary, holding up her child, stand high, and with pointed finger mark out those whose cruel laws drove her to seek, through the dark alleys of death, that repose which they denied her here. And if the realms of eternal misery, like those fabled by the old poets, are divided into regions where the bleak winter rages, and the summer burns with a volcanic heat, the avenging spirit need not to inflict on them a sterner doom, nor deal forth a juster punishment, than to turn them abroad, without either food or raiment, on some unbounded and frozen desert, and leave them to the same elements and the same mercy to which they left poor Mary and her child,—the icy torments to which Dante consigned Ugolino and Ruggiéri, in his "Inferno." *

And what thought young farmer Elliston to all this? He cared not; for the law which should have protected

* The fact upon which the story of "Pretty Mary" is founded will be familiar to every reader of the newspapers. So recently as about the time of the opening of Parliament, in 1846, a similar scene was repeated:—A poor woman and her infant were sent out of the Union Workhouse at Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire, all but naked; the child was picked up dead, and the woman committed to take her trial for murder. It almost seems, on again reading over this portion of the sketch, that I had been adding a chapter to a Romance, instead of merely painting the scenery amid which this terrible tragedy was enacted.

Mary and her child was so framed that it could not touch him—was so worded that a woman who had still a remnant of modesty left, shrunk back in disgust from its aid. The fate of the beautiful and broken-hearted girl seemed to concern him not. Beauty seldom exists without vanity; and, in the higher circles of society, women are hemmed in with binding forms and becoming ceremonies; and when this barrier is overleaped, there comes the law, thundering with indignation, and heavy with damages; while the poorer daughter of Eve is compensated with a broken heart, and an early death!

Many a simple country youth and maiden who envied Mary on the day of the statutes, and thought or spoke harshly of her as she passed, were sorry at heart for what they had done; and numberless are the visits which they have since paid to her suffering mother, and many the trifling presents they have made her.

As for the noble-hearted butcher of Rampton, he came to some arrangement with the master of the Union Workhouse, which stopped the mouth of the law: "For," as he said, "the thief who would lend himself to turn out a woman and child on such a day as he did, almost naked, and in the midst of a wild common, and all to keep his hateful situation, would, at any time, submit to having his head broken, if he could but get a pound or two by it, and the doctor's bill paid; which he was sure to charge over again to the parish."

Both he and his wife, however, bestirred themselves, and through their interference, and the assistance of other friends, the remains of poor Mary were brought back from the gaol in which she expired (almost as soon as it was entered); and she and her child were buried in the same grave, in the churchyard of the village in which she was

born. The grave opened its hungry jaws but once to receive them both, then closed upon the blighted flower and the opening blossom for ever!

——"She died in youth—and bowed
'Neath woes far heavier than the ponderous tomb
That weighed upon her gentle dust;—a cloud
Did gather o'er her beauty, and a gloom
In her dark eye, prophetic of the doom
Heaven gives its favourites—early death!"

BYRON.

A SUMMER RAMBLE.

"Crowned with her pail, the tripping milkmaid sings;
The whistling ploughman stalks afield: and hark!
Down the rough slope the ponderous waggon rings:
Slow tolls the village clock the drowsy hour;
The partridge bursts away on whirring wings;
Deep mourns the turtle in sequestered bower."

BEATTIE'S MINSTREL.

HERE we are at Gracechurch Street (why did they alter the fine old name of Gracious Street?—but we will not

quarrel about that now). What a lovely summer's morning! Let us jump up on the outside of this Camberwell omnibus; we can ride all the way from the city of London to the Fox-under-the-Hill for sixpence, and that is a good step beyond Camberwell Green. Be careful how you get down; the omnibus goes no further this way, so there is no occasion to hurry—there are other conveyances to Dulwich and Norwood, but we are going to walk across the fields. The first turning to the left is Champion Hill, and in that direction we will bend our course. Yes, it is very beautiful here—we are in the country at once. What a scene opens upon us, and we have not yet walked half-a-mile! Woods, green fields, beautiful hills, sloping down into rich pasture-lands, houses nestling in sweet shady spots—and all burst upon the view in an instant! We never yet brought a stranger here who was not startled by the sudden opening of this delicious scene. This is called Five-field Lane; across those fields, at the bottom of it, over rude stiles and pleasant foot-paths, which will bend out a little to the right, is the old rural pathway to the ancient village of Dulwich. Here we might fancy ourselves a hundred miles from London. What rude, primitive stiles! Look at the young couple before us—nay, let us turn our heads, or the young lady will never get over. How cheering is the ring of her silvery laugh! I'll be sworn she never leant so heavily upon her lover before; and she fell with her face upon his, as if by accident, and then said, "Adone, William, do."

All these hedges were white over, a month ago, with the blossoms of the hawthorn; the very air was redolent of their perfume. We turn off here. You see that clump of trees at the bottom of the field beyond us, to the left? They overhang a pond, around which grows hundreds of blue-bells. We know no spot so near London as this

where they are to be found wild. They love moist and shady places. The lower part of the woods, which we see in the distance, are, in spring-time, covered with bluebells. This is Dulwich; yonder stands the college, founded by Alleyn, the player; he who had, no doubt, seen Shakspere many a time: and who knows but what the great poet himself may have walked over these very fields, with Ben Jonson, and Burbage, and the founder of Dulwich College? There is a choice picture-gallery at the back of the building, containing a few first-rate pictures by the old masters. Look behind. What a noble avenue of elms! We never in any part of England beheld finer trees; it makes your neck ache to look up at them. Beautiful do their shadows appear thrown into that smooth sheet of water. It is the prettiest village in the neighbourhood of London, and endeared to us the more, because there are so many pleasant foot-paths all around it, stretching in every direction across the fields. The road to the left would take us to the foot of Forest Hill; to the right, up Beggar's Hill, to Norwood; but we will keep on in a direct line until we reach a little swing-gate, that leads into the wood, for there is a beautiful steep hilly path through that "silent land of trees." Here we are among oaks and birches, ash, maple, hazel, and entangling underwood; with gorse-bushes, yellow as gold; and patches of land, purpled over with heather; while the hiccory ever comes between, with its bunches of scarlet berries. True, we miss such gigantic trees as toss their knotted and weather-beaten arms over the moss-covered forest-paths of Sherwood; yet who would wish for a greener or more tranquil scene than we now stand in? Let us climb this little hill to the left; it stands in the very centre of the wood: a few years ago a rustic seat stood here: some Goth has removed it. I wish the fellow was tied to that oak, and kept there

fasting until he agreed to replace it. Many a time have we sat on that bench, looking at London in the distance; but the dry grass is no bad seat; and at the foot of this tree we can behold the bold outline of the greatest city in the world: can see from far below Westminster Abbey, to where spire and pillar stretch away beyond the dome of St. Paul's, while the long range of Hampstead hills fills up the dark-purple background, as they seem to stand bearing on their heads the piled-up sky. What miles of distance does the eye here range over at a glance! How beautiful is the prospect! How still and tranquil is all around us here! No sounds but the songs of birds, the bleating of sheep, or the lowing of cows in the valley! What a contrast to yonder crowded streets; to that hum of voices, and thunder of a thousand wheels, which are at this moment shaking the heart of the city! What a relief to sit here amid the silence which reigns around us, and think of the bustle and tumult amid which, little more than an hour ago, we mingled. But our path is still onward. Look down this hilly road, that goes winding through the wood; what a glorious picture! Now turn round here; we are on the Hog's-back, on the Surrey hills. That is Sydenham at our feet; the white spire beyond is Beckenham Church; that dark building to the left, miles away, is Eltham Palace; yonder summit, Shooter's Hill; the clump of trees in the far distance is near Sevenoaks. Here we have Kent and Surrey at one view; and this beautiful scene is but little more than five miles from London, to come the nearest way, which we have not done. We will turn to the right; a mile or so will bring us to Norwood, and after having had a glass of ale and a crust of bread and cheese at the Woodman, we will then strike down the hill to the left, and peep at the Annerley station. Who would wish for a more beautiful road? On our right

stretch woods all the way, green and sloping, and ringing with the songs of birds; on our left, as sweet a pastoral landscape as eye need wish to dwell upon. The view from the upper windows of the Woodman is "beautiful exceedingly." London again, but with the country, for miles beyond Westminster Abbey, stretching on both sides of the Thames.

☞ "To the Annerley Station"—is down this steep, hilly road; and when we have reached the base, we shall have woods on each side, over some portion of which we may wander, without committing trespass. Let us just peep into this sylvan solitude: there runs a rabbit! that was a pheasant which sprung up before us! what clusters of young nuts! so soft that you can crush them between the fingers. There's woodbine for you! you might gather an armful in a little time. What a variety of beautiful flowers are spread at our feet! That is the cup-moss, how delicate and chaste in form! real fairy goblets!—what large bees!—listen to that thrush!—here, I have found a blackbird's nest, with eggs in it; what a hard, round, solid house has the bird built! Let us leave it; should it escape the prying eyes of the little bird-nester, the woods will be enriched with two or three more songsters, by the time that another summer has thrown its green garment over the trees. Look at that board; why, this very woodland is to be let on building leases! Heaven only knows where unborn generations will have to go, in the course of time, to get out of London into the country! And yet—strange interposition of Providence!—what we lose by distance, we make up for by the increased speed of travelling; for even here the railroad would land us, within half an hour's time from leaving London. But the very poor—those who cannot afford to pay for riding—hundreds of such, we fear, will be doomed to live and die, in

years to come, without ever seeing the pure and open country!

We almost shudder to think what England will be a century hence, with its rapidly increasing population, should the sweeping and unjust law of enclosure, which has been brought before Parliament, be put into operation! We consider it an iniquitous, unjust, and tyrannous measure; and would like to see the framers of it tried for treason against the rights and liberties of the English nation: it is the grossest insult that was ever offered to England; and in the days of the Commonwealth, the proposers of such an un-English scheme would have been committed to the Tower, by the unanimous voice of the nation. It is a downright, bare-faced, fourfold robbery. The dead are robbed of all they left behind, to benefit the unneedy portion of the living! Gifts, charters, wills, the wide, ancient freeholds of the poor, are at once swept away, and there will be no shade of territorial possession left for them, but the grave. The living-poor are robbed of the only little land which they felt they had a common share in; they will not have a spot of earth left that they can call their own; nowhere to turn a cow or a horse loose, to graze;—the rich will have all. Children unborn will be robbed of the common freehold, which, for centuries, had been handed down from sire to sire; the land which their forefathers had for ages held, and which had smoothed the bitter pangs of their parting hour, to think that they left it free and unfettered to their children's children. And are the gifts of kings, and great, good-hearted men, who now moulder in their tombs, to be thus swept away at "one fell swoop?" What better claim have our nobility to their estates, than the poor men have to their commons and waste lands? Let them pause before the dreadful day of reckoning is called! Last, and not least, it is robbing a

whole nation of its health; a sapping and a mining of the whole constitution: for in years hence, the living will have nowhere to go for breathing room; two thousand now, will be ten thousand then; and in progress of time, twenty thousand!—and they are to have FOUR ACRES of land set apart for their health and recreation!

Was there ever before, in the whole annals of English history, such a daring, bare-faced, and downright attempt of robbery made upon the English nation? Ten acres is the maximum, for millions of inhabitants!—no more is to be allowed! that is to be all the breathing space given to the largest cities!—hardly room enough for them to walk clear of each other! In every three years the population increases above a million;—a pretty crowded country will ours be a century hence!—and those which are small towns now will be large ones then, and have only the four acres of unbricked space! It is dreadful to contemplate such a change as this measure proposes! There will be nothing but the dusty high-roads for the poor to walk upon; nay, perhaps few of those, for the railways are branching everywhere. May the island in which I was born be submerged a thousand fathoms beneath the ocean, before its wild wastes, and breezy commons, and free forest glades are all enclosed, and its poor population imprisoned in a few limited acres! Rise, freemen of England! rise! and let not these robbers wrest the last freeholds from your hands!

Was Magna Charta passed for this? Why, it is worse than the old Forest Laws of the Normans! The conquered Saxon serf, if he left alone "vert and venison," might ramble through the "royal chases," providing he had neither "bow, bolt, nor dog." We defy any living legislator to find in English history an act so unjust, so dishonest, and so injurious to the commonweal, as this

contemplated and sweeping enclosure act. Set the health it must destroy in the end beside the "dirty acres" it will bring into cultivation, then allow for the increase of population, and sum up the account a few years hence! From whom did this measure emanate? What is the name of this wholesale plunderer? Once known, it will become a hated by-word amongst us. Certain we are, that our good Queen is kept in ignorance of the consequences that must arise from an act so unjust and so un-English!

Here we have arrived at a garden in the wood—the Annerley Station. This is a place where the inhabitants of London come in hundreds on a Sunday, to breathe the fresh air; for when once in the Croydon railway-carriages, they are wafted here in a few minutes. Let us wander about the grounds. There are, you see, a few goodly trees still standing; and the very form in which the seats are arranged show considerable taste. Here we can sit under the shadow of an oak: for there are several left, that throw their green arms over thatched sheds and rustic seats; and higher up we find traces of the primitive wood itself—bramble, and woodbine, and hazel, matted and entangled together, with fox-gloves, and gorse, and fern, that have never yet been reclaimed from the wild. The very summer-houses are formed out of the old wood itself; even the front of the house is decorated with its spoils, and looks rural and rude with its rustic workmanship. Ten years ago this was a wild woodland. We have wandered in the midst of it for hours without meeting a single person, or hearing the sound of a human voice: now (saving where "Trespassers will be prosecuted" stares you in the face), ramble where you may, you are startled with the shrill laughter of merry maidens and light-hearted youths; or meet with groups of all ages, in various coloured costumes, which have a pleasing effect, when seen from a distance

between the openings of the underwood. It was a beautiful spot in those days—where the Croydon and Brighton railway now bares its brown iron back, there then stood the old canal. You could walk along the banks between the woods, and see the shadows of the trees and the deep blue sky reflected in the water; and behold hundreds of beautiful flowers, bending over, and looking into the bright mirror, which threw back their images. But the landscape seems now to have lost its eye, saving behind the Annerley Gardens, where a small arm of the canal still remains. Sometimes you might in those days see a solitary pleasure-boat, oared gently along, making ripples, which caused a thousand water-flags and reeds to bend and bow to and fro, nor once stand still until the red and blue shawls were lost in the green turning behind the trees. Beautiful the scene is now; for nature, in spite of the inroads of man, struggles hard to retain vestiges of her former beauty: even the flowers venture as low down the steep embankments of the railway as they safely dare, without being run over.

Well, we will not find fault here, though the smooth bright canal—which reflected the trees and flowers, and gave back "look for look," showing the blue sky and the green branches in its silver mirror—is blotted out for ever! still the rapid railway has brought down its thousands, who, had there been no such time-defying conveyance, would never have seen the beauty that remains. Still we think the railway might have been brought a little lower down, and the wood and water spared; but the mischief is done, and we are amongst the very few who either care for the scene because of its beauty, or regret its desolation!

Here, however, are still seen on a Sunday, in the lanes, and between every outlet of the woods, groups of gipsies, with their olive countenances, black hair, dark, piercing

eyes, and picturesque dresses, seeking to unlock fate and the future to all who are willing to cross their hands with the smallest piece of silver, and have faith in these ancient Fatalists of Norwood. The groups of donkeys, attitudes of huge, swarthy fellows, who lay stretched out beside them, smoking, with the fine, free play of limbs and attitude displayed in the half-naked gipsy children, would well repay the visit of some of our London artists, who stay at home and paint country pictures. We have seen many a "little bit" about this neighbourhood which has made us regret that we could only paint with our pen:—the sidelong look of the half-timid maiden—the reluctant consent of her lover, almost fearing the gipsy might tell something he would fain keep concealed—and the keen, searching look of the sybil, with her brown brat wrapped in the remnant of a dirty blanket; then retreating with her fair victim into some elbow in the wood, her old, weather-worn, dusky red cloak just seen between the branches—have often made us wish that we were good artists.

It is pleasant, too, to see the happy faces that congregate in such scenes as these; they leave the dry, hard, money-getting city-look at home, and appear here like another race of people. The man who would scarcely deign to direct you the way to the next street in the city becomes pleasant and communicative; his heart seems to expand with human kindness; the beauty of nature softens him, and he looks over the rich landscape for once without thinking of his ledgers. Indeed, for real rural scenery, for walks through fields and woods and green lanes, we consider that Sydenham and Annerley (both of which are within a few minutes' ride from London Bridge, and may be reached for a shilling fare) are the most perfect specimens of the pure unadulterated country, which may be the soonest reached from London.

But our ramble has not yet half ended. We will strike further down the road, which lies straight before us, crossing the arch which spans over the railway—and here again we have woods on either hand! Now we must bear to the left, past those old cottages, and we again find woods on both sides of the road! That little church, at the bottom of the highway, has not long been built. It is very small; but quite large enough for the few inhabitants who are scattered over the neighbourhood of Penge Common. A few yards to the left, and we reach the Crooked Billet. The road round by the end of the house would lead us across the fields to Sydenham. Those are the new almshouses. The scene has undergone a great change within the last few years.

The old Crooked Billet was just such a house as one looks for in the country: low, long, with no end of angles; and a large bay-window, within which a dozen people might sit, without being crowded for room. Oh! how unlike the great, staring, hotel-looking building, which now stands in its stead! In the old house, you went up a flight of steps into the parlour, and down steps into the kitchen, and out into the garden, where stood an ancient font, which came there nobody knows how; for the house was very old, and the font (which is there still) may, for aught we know, have been borne away from some neighbouring church by the Puritans, and cast aside as useless plunder. The picturesque, low door-way; the old-fashioned, straggling bar; the quaint, open-fronted sheds, into which all kinds of vehicles were thrust, while the travellers baited; the tree, with its surrounding seats—are all swept away, and not a vestige of what the Crooked Billet was, ten years ago, is left behind. The ancient bay-window was a favourite seat of ours; for it looked up the hilly road, and down towards Beckenham, and broad out, from its

ample centre, over woods and forest-like uncleared lands, where the few remaining oaks still stood knee-deep in fern and gorse. The house was then in keeping with the scenery amid which it stood: the one newly erected looks out of place, as if it had been removed from some city-street, and, if the narrow lane was wide enough, would return back again.

Straight down the road will lead us to Beckenham. The scenery on either hand is very beautiful. At the end of these cottages is a real green lane. It leads nowhere, saving into the fields. Excepting in the hay-season, or to carry in a load of manure, not a wheel crushes down the grass with which this almost untrodden lane is carpeted. It is full of elbows, and goes winding here and there, like the brook, whose course it follows. This toll-gate is of modern erection. The old one was far more picturesque; and the ancient-looking woman, in her red cloak, followed by the cat (who, every time she went to open the gate, accompanied her), together with some horsemen pulling-up to pay the toll—with the trees, which seemed to meet overhead, and the sunshine sleeping upon the brown road —all seen from a moderate distance, formed a beautiful country-picture. Those cottages, to the left, are very old; that, with the large half-moon-shaped beam spanning its centre, is a fine specimen of the "timber and plaster" building of a former age. Just read the inscription on the board—"Bacon Smoked Here."

This is the entrance to Beckenham. What a splendid old manor-house! with its high crumbling wall, overgrown with moss and lichen. And here is a summer-house erected high up amongst the topmost boughs of a noble tree! Look, how the rustic staircase goes winding up from branch to branch! More ancient cottages: the very style of their rude architecture tells that they have stood at

least two or three centuries. What changes have taken place since they were first reared beside this ancient road! The stormy days of Queen Mary have passed, and darkened over them. Who can tell what struggles may have taken place before these very doors, in the age of the Commonwealth! Read the monuments in Beckenham Church, and you will find that many a distinguished man ended his days in this ancient village.

Let us pause a few moments before we enter the churchyard. Our engraving, at the head of this article, is a view of the church itself. There are few such gateways as this remaining in England. What massy beams! true British oak. Look at the quaint, steep roof, with its small, square, antique tiles. Beneath this ancient gateway they halted with the dead; and at that avenue, still graced with a few decaying yews, the clergyman came to meet the funeral procession. We remember, a few years ago, seeing monuments in this churchyard, that dated as far back as the time of Queen Elizabeth. Into one of those ruined tombs we descended—for the side was torn away, and lay neglected amongst the grass—an unpardonable desecration! A cleaner-looking church we never entered—the interior is simple, impressive, and very beautiful, but much disfigured by modern innovation. What bad taste to half-bury that noble archway! There are a few monumental brasses, rich in ancient costume, let into the walls; as old, if we remember rightly, as the time of Chaucer. The church would well repay the visit of an antiquary; and if our readers have never felt the beauty and solemn poetry of Gray's Elegy, let them, in the gathering twilight of a calm summer evening, pause, and read it there; for it is all that the imagination can picture of an old English country churchyard, and awakens many a serious thought by its still beauty and

undisturbed antiquity—for there sleep the dead of grey and forgotten ages.

Now past the churchyard, along this rounding road, overshadowed with aged elms, and over this style on the left, will lead us across the fields to Sydenham. These are genuine country fields, in which we may gather a score or two varieties of wild flowers: splendid specimens of the meadow-sweet have we found there. The footpaths lead through corn-fields, where the red poppies wave, and along hedgerows, where wild rose and woodbine blow, and immense foxgloves shoot up to the height of four or five feet. Bright, clear streams run murmuring along; and the only house you pass is a large white farm-house, unequalled in appearance for beauty for miles around the neighbourhood. Out—by the corner of a little chapel; and here we are in the village of Sydenham, which is more than a mile in length. The old Golden Lion (formerly kept by Mrs. Ross, a worthy hostess), like the old Crooked Billet, is pulled down. It was one of the oldest houses in the village; full of "ins-and-outs," with a fine, large bow-window, that projected several feet from the building. Sydenham will in time become one of the largest villages in the neighbourhood of London: it is beautifully wooded, and would, but for its trees, have too much of a town-like look. They have commenced building everywhere since the Croydon Railway was completed, and land is already letting for double the sum that it brought in ten years ago: what it will realise twenty years hence is a grave question! All the way along the long, long street, even reaching to the right to the Dartmouth Arms station, and away to Forest Hill, there are houses, extending between two and three miles; and some of them are noble structures: servants in livery meet you at every half-dozen of doors—here a mansion, there a cottage;

with perhaps a notice over the latter, announcing it "To let, on a building lease." Well, railways have at least accomplished one good thing—they have been the means of drawing hundreds to dwell in the country, who otherwise (or until they retired from business) would have remained in town. We have not time to visit the Crystal Palace now, nor dwell on the alterations which have been, and are now being made in the neighbourhood of Sydenham, a village which Campbell, the poet, loved.

Straight along, over the railway, and leaving Sydenham Church to the left, will lead us to the summit of the steep hill. Here we behold London again, and can see for miles, across the line of the Greenwich railway, beyond Deptford, and far down the river. Now we will bear a little to the left, on the brow of the "Hog's-back;" and on the right-hand side of the road a swing-gate opens, and, through the wood, our road is direct into Lordship's Lane. This is the same wood we passed through when we left Dulwich in the morning, nor are we more than a mile beyond the spot where we then halted to look over London. Pass we the Plough, in Lordship's Lane, the only old road-side public-house remaining in the neighbourhood; and Daddy Gibbs, who is ninety-seven, says there is no better beer drawn in all Surrey than at this old house. Across the fields, at the end of it, will bring us out at Goose Green, and, if we continued our course, across to Peckham Rye. All these walks, over fields and through lanes, are beautiful and pleasant; for they have still, with but few exceptions, the good old country look. Here cattle graze; and you catch the sweet smell of new-mown hay, in the season; see green hedges, and little farm-houses, scattered far apart, over the fields; and, worst of all, at almost every turning, you see, "To let, on building leases." Over the hill, and we are in Grove Lane—dusty, steep, but rather

pretty—and now Camberwell Green (what a brown, grassless green!) opens before us; and, hark! the old London cry, "City—West-end—Off in a minute, sir!" Well, we mount the omnibus; and the noise and tumult of the crowded streets tell us that we are (for one day at least) at the end of our SUMMER RAMBLE.

OLD ENGLISH FERRIES.

Now moves the ferry-boat across the river,
Bearing the wealth produced by many a farm,
Oxen, and sheep, and fruit, and mid them all
The sun-browned cultivators of the soil.

We have often wished, when visiting the various exhibition rooms in London, that there were (in place of the many portraits, which too often occupy the best places and the largest space) a few more pictures of English scenery. Railroads are rapidly cutting up the face of the

country, and in the course of a few more years, many a picturesque spot, that now ornaments the landscape, will be swept away, the manners and customs of the old-fashioned villages will be changed, and objects which have, time-out-of-mind, stood out like the bold bluff headlands that dot our coast, will disappear for ever. Nor do such scenes transferred to canvas stand out alone like "green spots in the desert waste," delighting only ourselves; but if well done, they multiply in engravings, and bring pleasant memories to a thousand hearths, carrying future generations back to the days of their "rude forefathers," and awakening many a dear remembrance, which but for them would have slumbered until the day of death in the dark chambers of forgetfulness. Such pictures call up images of repose, and beauty, and love; some of us were familiar with them in the earlier years of childhood.—What poetical touches time hath given! How rich and mellow are the tints that memory throws over the whole landscape!—the winding road is filled with portraits, and we look calmly on that great gallery of the dead! This is but the imagination aroused while looking upon the sketch of a well-known scene. A portrait alone could not awaken such recollections!

Many of our fine old English rivers abound in beautiful pictures, not of landscape alone, but of scenes that come and go, like the shifting effects of sunshine, cloud-coloured: where but a minute before we saw every object as if cut out in gold, the next changes to a dim bronze, and then shuts all in under a cover of dusky green. Under such a sky as this (when sun and shade come down to play with one another on the earth), what can look more picturesque than a large flat-bottomed old ferry-boat, creeping, as if half-afraid, from the further shore of the river, and throwing into the water, clear-shadowed, images of sheep and

oxen, the red cloak of an old market-woman, the blue smock-frock of some shepherd, and the white dress of the farmer's handsome daughter? Near and more near draws the huge square-headed boat, the splashing sound of the water broken by the bleating of the lambs, the lowing of oxen, and the voices of the passengers; heard for a moment, then lost again, just as the breeze rises and falls at intervals. How clear is the figure of the ferryman reflected, with his weather-stained jacket, as he leans over with the long boat-hook, rearing it at first, like a mast, above his head, then lessening it as the lumbering craft advances, now reaching but a yard above him, then coming to a level with his brawny shoulders, against which it rests, while with all his strength he walks the whole length of the boat, and red in the face as a lion, pushes her across the river. Up comes the long boat-hook once more, from out the clear water under which it was buried, high up in the sky it rears, making a hundred pretty dimples with the drops that fall from it; the same Herculean arm again plants it in the river-bed: if it slips, overboard he goes, as he has done many a time; on, onward another length he walks; he has given her plenty of head-way now, and she will soon come grinding upon the gravelly shore.

Dost thou love beautiful pictures which bring before the eye the still green rural scenes of pastoral England? If so, look on this. That white-washed old-fashioned building (partly covered with ivy), with its bay windows reflected in the river, is as ancient as the tall elm-trees that overtop it. It has been a public-house ever since it was built, and never was known by any other name than the Old Ferry House. It stood as it does now, with its twisted chimneys and gable-ends, when one summer morning four of Cromwell's iron-sided soldiers, who bore on their hel-

mets the marks of Marston Moor, came across, "fiery red with speed," to hunt out an old royalist, who resided in the Elizabethan manor-house, which is still standing in the village. One may almost picture the old Puritans, with their pistols in their belts, and the bridles thrown over their arms, as they stand ready to leap out on the opposite shore. It would look well on canvas: one might tell by a glance at the countenance of the sturdy ferryman, that they would obtain but little information from him about the hiding-place of the brave cavalier. Look at the brown high road, which comes bending down the brow of the hill from the centre of the wood that shadows its summit, until it dips into the very edge of the river. That road is almost as old as the hill over which it stretches; over there and across the river has been the highway to the neighbouring market-town behind us ever since the time of the Saxons, for there was a ferry here when William the Norman compiled that gloomy catalogue, called "Doomsday Book." There was once a wooden bridge a mile or two lower down the river, but it was swept away ages ago by a winter-flood, and was never again rebuilt. Tradition says that the ferryman who then lived went down in his boat in the night, and sawed the middle piles of the wooden bridge asunder; but this is an old-world story, and all such ancient places abound in traditions. What groups descend the hilly road! How slowly that boy comes creeping down with his lambs: if he does not move quicker, the farmer on his chestnut horse will be at the ferry before him. How steadily the old woman comes trudging along in her scarlet cloak, with her black gipsy bonnet tied over her arm, and the basket steadied on her head; she has outstripped the old man in the blue frock, driving the donkey with its huge pair of panniers, which are filled with peas and new potatoes. That young lady in

the riding-habit, who comes cantering along on her long-tailed white pony, is the daughter of one of the richest farmers in the village; she is off a-shopping, and the young drapers will put on their best bows when she arrives. You should see with what grace she will enter the shop of the head milliner in the market-place, carrying her riding-whip in her hand, and holding up her habit as a duchess does her train on a drawing-room day: she has pulled up to gossip with the old woman in the scarlet cloak, who is one of her father's tenants; she will listen until they reach the ferry, and hear all about old John's rheumatics, and the goose the fox carried off the other night; the storm that blew down so many young apples; the fence the pigs broke through, and the cabbages and lettuces they consumed; and how near the old woman's daughter Deborah was of being married, when James "come to his harm" by a kick from the horse. And the young lady will persuade her father to mend the fence and replace the goose, and old John's rheumatics will be attended to—for the lady's grandmother is still alive, and grows no end of herbs in one corner of the garden, and has bottles filled with decoctions and lotions, which, with her presents of chicken broth and jellies, are found very strengthening.

Another ferry stands where the river rolls between two wild marshes, far removed from either town or village, the roads, which are said to have been thrown up by the Romans, run straight as a line within view of each other, stretching away for miles. Here the ferryman truly passes his life in solitude, for, saving at fair times or on market days, but few pass along that lonely road. His hut is the only human habitation which catches the eye in that vast extent of landscape. On both sides of the river the wide marshes are laid out for grass, and when the hay is harvested, hundreds of heads of cattle are turned loose, and may be heard lowing in

the wide solitude. No hedge rises up to break the monotony of the scene; the boundary lines are long water-sluices, where the bulrush bows and the water-flag waves, and acres of rushes grew up and wither year after year, uncut or unclaimed by living man. If "Boat-a-hoy!" is hailed by some stray traveller, up starts hundreds of tufted plovers, wheeling and shrieking above the wild sedge, and flying farther away, to allure the intruder from their concealed nests, which are often trampled into the sinking soil by the heavy bullock. When the marshes are cleared of cattle and silent, and the eye sees only for miles thousands of acres covered with long grass, catching every reflection from the sky, sunshine, and cloud, and the breeze that sweeps across, the scene looks not unlike a vast ocean, whose eddying waves are without a sound. There is a silent grandeur in its loneliness.

Beside the river stands the ferryman's hut, a low, lonely-looking building, its roof rising but little higher than the old Roman road, and his long, straggling garden, saving for its few trees, scarcely distinguishable from the green wilderness that spreads behind. An old ferry-boat, years ago sunk at the front of his house, and now filled with river mud, stands just as it was thrown, leaning upon the bank, by the flood, and is his chief defence against the ravages of the current; but for this wreck his hut might have been carried away long ago, like the summer-house he had built at the end of his garden, which, together with his large potato-bed, were all washed away in one night, after the breaking up of the ice on the river. In winter, when the waters are high, and roar and foam between the banks, his life is often in danger; more than once he has lost his boat-hook, and been carried away by the current, and cast upon a rugged wear, over which the water foams, and boils, and whitens, with a deafening

noise, which must have rung terribly in his ears, when we remember that he never looked on the sea in his life. Talk to him about the perils of the ocean, and he will shake his head, bid you consider the large ships which he has been told sail upon it, then, pointing to his own ferry-boat, show, as plain as can be, that if you compare the size of the two vessels, the danger is equal. He is well read in Robinson Crusoe, and, beside his cat and dog, keeps several tame "pewets," and a lame raven, which is almost as old as himself.

Thirty years ago, he was near getting married; but as the moments of his courtship extended not beyond the time he ferried the fair damsel across the river, and this only for a fortnight, during the summer months, the match somehow or other was broken off. Rumour says, that love commenced one market-day, by the maiden remarking that he must be very lonely; to which he made no reply, until the fortnight following, when he acknowledged he was; but in that time the fair one had forgot all about it, and he never made any further advances saving once, when he inquired if she was fond of fish, and gave her two he had caught. So he continues to live alone; wind, and rain, and darkness, find him ever at his post; a day's illness, he says, he never knew; his brown, hard, weather-beaten features are a living picture of health. Few would like to live in that lonely spot which is inhabited by the old ferryman.

Let us pass further north, to the Humber, to that arm of the sea which stretches into the German ocean; and from Barton to Hull we must cross a ferry nearly five miles in width. We know not what the ferry-boats are now, but, twenty years ago, we were bundled into an open boat, amongst Yorkshire horse-dealers and Lincolnshire graziers, men, women, children, and cattle; now shipping

a sea, then answering the wind with a scream; a wave roaring here, and a woman there; horses plunging one way, and the boat another; up this way, and down that; and ten to one against our reaching within two or three miles of the point we steered for. Many lives have been lost in crossing this ferry; and one who would run his eye over the old country papers, as far as fifty years back, would be startled to read the losses they record. In foggy and windy weather, and during the dark winter nights, have the ferry-boats been run down by ships, drifted from their course, thrown upon sands, or grounded on banks, miles away from the spot where they ought to have landed. But steam-boats have, we believe, long been substituted for those open and dangerous crafts; where, for twopence, any one who ventured had as good a chance of being drowned, as if afloat on the broad bosom of the great Atlantic.

At more than one ferry have we been oared across by a "Lady of the Lake;" her father had, perhaps, gone to market: and she, who had all her life been nursed like a water-lily on the rim of the river, took to the element as if she had been born in it. Once we remember running aground in the middle of the Trent, sole passenger with a fairer captain than even old Charon bore across Styx. There was no help for it; the tide was fast receding; and we, in the large, bulky ferry-boat, likely enough to remain there until it was again high water. To make matters worse, we lost the boat-hook between us; and it may be somewhere on the "monstrous deep" at this hour, for we never recovered it. Her mother holloed from the opposite shore, but that moved us not an inch. Passengers continued to assemble, but ours was the only boat; and the longer we remained, the "harder" we were aground. "Perhaps we might launch it by getting out," said the lady." "But then we have no boat-hook," was the reply;

"and we might drift as far as the Humber." The lady sat down, and from a huge pocket took out her knitting. Her passenger, to shew himself equally at home, lit a cigar, and pulled out a book. "It is very provoking," said she, after having taken a few stitches, "but it cannot be helped; and you will be too late for the coach. And you really are not angry?" Angry, no! no man could ever look into such a face, and feel angry a moment after! There was a simple innocence in its beauty which we have seldom seen: it was a face that would have haunted a man on his death-bed, if he had caused but a tear to trickle down that peach-like, damask cheek.

In about an hour a boat from Nottingham passed, hauled by two horses; the captain hove to, and threw us a rope, which we made secure, and our little bark soon reached the shore from which we first started. Other passengers had better luck: and as the coach was lost for that day, we had only to receive the landlady's apology, order tea and dinner together, and take up our abode for the night. During the evening the ferryman and landlord (for he was both) had returned from market, and laughed heartily at our adventure with his daughter. He recounted many "a moving accident by flood and field" while over his pipe and glass.

Few have visited Nottingham without crossing Wilford Ferry, which is divided from the town by a wide range of pleasant meadows, acres of which are purpled over in spring with crocuses. This is really a primitive old ferry: a massy iron chain stretches across the river, and acting upon a moveable pillar, or short mast, which stands at the head of the ferry-boat, requires but the brawny arms of the boatman to keep shifting his hold of the chain; and with a score or two of pulls he brings his passengers safe to the sloping and gravelly shore. The village of Wilford is very

picturesque, with its thatched cottages and little gardens dipping down to the very edge of the river; its neat looking church, surrounded with elm trees, every branch alive with the building rooks, which, with never-ceasing caw, are ever crossing the river, and hovering round the old grey church tower, half buried in the greenery of the surrounding trees. Along the banks rise a beautiful avenue of trees, high, and old, and shadowy; and stretching their antique boughs far out over the river, and making cool and sunless (saving the chequering gold that shines through the network of the leaves) as delightful a walk as may be found along the many miles of embanked and winding paths that girdle in the hundred-armed Trent. Beyond this beautiful and shaded avenue spread smooth verdant meadows, looking in the summer sunshine, and from a far distance, like acres of green velvet, hemmed with a wide and winding belt of silver; for so glitters the silver-skirted river on the border of these sloping fields of green, pastoral England, beautiful as those where Proserpine frighted let fall her flowers, when Pluto's wheels crushed the ungathered blossoms. Across these meadows, whose banks are washed with a thousand murmuring ripples, rises a bold round hill, dark with trees from base to brow, and with a steep, embowered wood dipping from the very forehead of the summit, and arching down to the level where you stand, before swinging open the ponderous gate. This is Clifton Grove, celebrated three centuries ago in old ballad lore, and well remembered by every reader of poor Kirke White; for this was his old and favourite walk. Down the ragged precipice which yawns and hangs headlong over the river, they yet point out the steep path down which the foul fiend dragged the fair maid of Clifton, on that dreadful night when a deep sleep fell upon her attendants; and there no grass grows. You might fancy that it had been ploughed up by thunder,

could you forget that it had been torn up by many a torrent of rain, which comes down like a cataract, and empties itself into the river. But we will not seek to stir a leaf of its old superstition: many a young lover has wandered in the twilight of those solitudes, and shuddered at the vengeance which follows broken vows and plighted hearts. Spirits of the Past, pardon us if we recall some rural scene, and see your forms again bending in maiden white, as ye break the deep green of the scenery while stooping down to gather those sweet violets which by their perfume babble of their "whereabout," and lay nestled in little beds all over that beautiful grave. May the whole multitude of Marys forgive us, if in that haunted grove, and in the shade of those melancholy boughs—

> ——— "In such a night,
> Swearing we loved you well,
> We stole your souls with many vows of faith,
> And ne'er a true one."—SHAKSPERE.

Forgive us, if we slighted the old legend of love, and doubted the deeds of the foul fiend, while our soul was carried away by a fair one: and many such, we hope, will long haunt that romantic spot, and carry their victims to Saint Mary's shrine, as thou, dear Polly, didst, nearly a score of years ago, carry off in triumph thy unbeliever. What hand now uplifts the latch of the door of thy dear old grandmother's thatched cottage? What elegant form stoops to gather the flowers in that little garden, hemmed in with its moss-covered railings? Old Time draws back the untwining of honeysuckle, Memory adds the murmuring of her bees, Fancy fills up the silence of the gravel walk, brings back the flowing of the river, the dreamy cawing of the rooks, that bell sounding over "the wide watery shore"—and his arm is again around thy waist, and they sit down within the porch which is now another's.

A boy calls his giddy sweetheart wife, and a thoughtless girl her boyish lover husband. Time thickens his troubles, Care comes, and Sorrow steps nearer, Grief wears a grave look, and Pity appears as if she had not seen Pleasure for many a long day; but still Memory and Love, linked arm-in-arm, laugh and stroll together, for they have tossed their craped hat and bonnet amongst the flowers, and wait the first toll of the bell ere they join the sad procession. Where are the famous cherry eatings of Wilford now? The poetry around the neighbourhood is fast fading. The flower-sellers, who used to stand under the sunny rocks of Sneinton, have vanished. The green foot-path that led along the river bank to Colwick is closed, and the celebrated cheese seems to live but in name. Even the pathway that leads to the old ballad-haunted grove has been altered, and all "old things seem to be passing away." Beautiful was that old ferry on a Sunday in former years, when trade was good, and "all went merry as a marriage bell." A change has come over the scene.

In another ferry, at low water, the channel of the river is narrow, and you would despair of ever reaching the opposite bank, through such a width and depth of mud; and just as you are about to give the ferryman "a word or two of a sort," up strides a huge broad-shouldered, powerful fellow, half buried in boots, and with a "Now, sir," walks you off on his back, and sees nothing in it, on his part, but a daily and common occurrence. Should a lady remonstrate, he has but one answer, and that he is polite enough to give, sometimes in the shape of a question, as he says, "Why, Mam, you would not surely like to walk?" For our part, we laughed heartily, and thought of Robin Hood and the ducking he got, in the old ballad; and we felt thankful that Big Boots had not fallen, and buried us in the mud. We were told that he won his wife by such

an accident. It was a feast time, and he had taken too much drink, but he apologised in so handsome a manner, that Betty in a few weeks consented to become Mrs. Boots; for by that name is he called by the ferrymen and passengers. His father was boots to the boat before him.

Next to the ferries, in beauty, is the ford; only passable in the summer and fine dry months of autumn. To those who are strangers to such a sight, it has a startling effect, to see a laden waggon, axle deep in the water, and drawn by oxen or horses, moving slowly across a wide river. In harvest time it forms a beautiful picture: the yellow and hanging corn, thrown and shadowed upon the water, with the varied colours of the oxen, "moving double"—is a scene scarcely to be surpassed, as a painting in English scenery. Many accidents have occurred in passing these fords: when the current has set in too strong, men and cattle have been washed away and drowned; and we well remember putting off in a boat to rescue a milkman, who, with his cans and horse, was swimming down the stream at a rapid and dangerous rate. The wicked said, he had gone in to water his milk; for it had a strange blue look when skimmed in the morning.

Primitive and quaint are those little old-fashioned draw-bridges: such a one, especially, do we remember across the ancient Roman fossdyke near Lincoln, which was opened and shut by two old women, each of whom turned round a large handle, while the bridge moved with a heavy, cumbrous and groaning sound. A great treat was it, for us boys, to stand and ride on that old drawbridge. We fancied ourselves knights, crossing the moat to some enchanted castle: and well could one of those worthy old dames play the part of the dragon, especially on a washing-day.

And where art thou now, Dedemiah? (strange name for a farmer's pretty daughter!) Twenty years ago did

we cross Hazelford Ferry with thee, on a beautiful morning in summer; we were the only passengers, and our path lay the same way for a long and pleasant distance. Forty-five miles was not then a day's walk to be frightened at. Many a time have we done it, and been laughed at by older men for our boast—men who have cleared fifty miles of ground within fourteen hours—but that day, Dedemiah, we fell far short of our task; thy father's cottage stood in our path, it was the village-feast, and we entered together. How our cheek burnt, when in thy brother's face we recognised an old companion; and thou lookedst not up, but drooped thy long eyelids to the ground—the roses that stood peeping in at the old diamond-paned window, looked not more lovely than thou didst at that moment look! And thy mother, with her searching eyes, when she found how brief had been the term of our acquaintanceship, stood serious for a moment, then smiled, and forgave us both. A few months were to elapse, and then thou wert to have "been mine own," and for thee then he would

"Have herded cattle on the hills:"

very poetical with thee beside us; but thy father thought "the lad would never make a good farmer, who was so fond of books." We thought him but an industrious clod, and marvelled how such a sweet flower as thyself could spring from it; and so "we parted."

What glimpses of beautiful scenery has her name recalled!—Moonlight on the road and on the river! The still village, with its white-washed cottages, sleeping in the silvery moonshine, and looking, with their ivied porches, and thatched roofs, and overhanging trees, as if they formed a part of a great picture!—a night scene, in which nothing ever moved!—where all things ever seemed the same! And that old ferryman, who grumbled when we aroused him from his bed, was he ever young, or ever

in love? We thought not, Dedemiah. And thy aunt's cottage, on the opposite side of the river, how lovely it looked in the moonlight, every window-pane flashing back the dazzling beams! Then the murmuring sound that the rippling water made, all night long, as it rolled its surging silver to the shore, dreamy, calm, peaceful, beautiful,—a land which fancy had lighted up with sweet poetry!

How oft memory withdraws the curtain to reveal the past! What a blank would life seem were it not for such scenes as are again revealed! Who covets the solace of forgetfulness, or would wish to blot out all, and again begin anew? To obliterate the beauty of that great landscape, because there hangs over it a few dark clouds? Jenny and the apple-tree, and the two old men, who have ceased to become friends, and whose reminiscences are, we think, so finely depicted by Mackenzie, in one of our old periodicals, is a beautiful illustration of this feeling. Old age, but for memory, would indeed be solitary. It is the everlasting lamp of the ancients, lighting up what would otherwise be the dark tomb of the mind. They who love not old home feelings, and delight not in calling up images of the past, live in a land unvisited by poetry; each day is but to them a "great fact," and they are unhappy if the next produces not a greater. We love to sit and dream in the "green old world," and shall be sorry to witness the destruction even of our OLD ENGLISH FERRIES.

SHAKSPERE AND SHEEP-SHEARING.

"When my old wife lived, upon
This day she was both pantler, butler, cook;
Both dame and servant: welcomed all, served all:
Would sing her song, and dance her turn: now here
At the upper end o' the table; now i' the middle;
On his shoulder, and his: her face o' fire
With labour; and the thing she took to quench it,
She would to each one sip."

SHAKSPERE'S "WINTER'S TALE."

THE most beautiful description that we can recall of a sheep-shearing feast is in the "Winter's Tale:" it may be somewhat too poetical for the generality of readers; but, amid all the flow and inspiration of its delicious

poetry, there is the stamp of living and homely truth. It shows that the great Shakspere was once a Warwickshire lad, that he mingled amid the rural merry-makings of his hobnailed neighbours, that he was fond of warden-pies, and knew the best ingredients for making custards and cheese-cakes. Look at the motto at the head of our chapter—was there ever a painting to equal its simple truthfulness? What busy, bustling, good-natured farmer's wife stood before him for this picture? What life, what stir, what happiness, what a hearty welcome does she give her guests! We see her moving about, "now here at the upper end of the table, now in the middle; on his shoulder, then on his." We hear her talking,—"Why, neighbour, you eat nothing; do try this ham: that beef lay in corn for a fortnight; I cured it myself. And how does my god-daughter, Margery; why did you not bring her? And so poor neighbour Hathaway is no better? Well-a-day! last sheep-shearing feast we danced 'Green Sleeves' together. That pie is overmuch baked; try the cheesecake: neighbour, I drink to thee. But I must go peep at the fowls I left roasting. Just a small glass to cool me; a welcome to you all." Then she is lost for a few moments, for she was cook, butler, dame, servant. No doubt she was well known about Stratford, and that, on a future day, when the Warwickshire lad's works were printed, some old man, as he stumbled upon the passage would exclaim,—"Why that was old Dame So-and-so; I knew her well: her daughter was Billy's sweeting when he was a boy. Hey, he's right.

> 'She was the prettiest lowborn lass
> That ever ran on the green sward.'

I've seen her dance with Master William, as we used to call him, many a time." For we can scarcely think other-

wise, than that Perdita was some beautiful rustic maiden; or, it might be, one of the proud daughters from the hall, who had for once descended from her dignity to play the "queen of the feast:" for we have seen such condescension in our day at a pastoral May-day game. It might be that her image became clothed in after years with the matured richness and immortal poetry which he has thrown around her; and from her he shadowed forth a form too pure, and too ethereal, to belong to earth, and threw around the memory of his youth a divinity that belongs to heaven.

He might have heard the busy housewife give her orders to some country lout; and, listening behind a shading hedge, overheard the Clown talking to himself, and saying,—"Let me see, what I am to buy for our sheep-shearing feast? Three pound of sugar, five pound of currants—rice. What will this sister of. mine do with rice? But my father hath made her mistress of the feast, and she lays it on. She hath made me four-and-twenty nosegays for the shearers; three men, song-men all, and very good ones. * * * I must have saffron to colour the warden-pies; mace, dates, none; that's out of my note; nutmegs, seven; a race or two of ginger, but that I may beg; four pounds of prunes, and as many of raisins o' the sun." This also must have been a copy from the life. Then the Clown "cannot reckon without counters." How often have we seen an illiterate countryman sitting by the roadside, with the contents of his basket emptied upon the ground, and a number of pebbles for "counters" placed beside each article, with the change in his hand trying to make the balance right, and puzzled with the figures the hasty shopman had scribbled upon each of the packets. Sometimes he would undo a parcel, to make sure of what it contained; and then, for the life of him, he could not fold it up again—no, not if the paper had been twice the

size; so he would be compelled to tie it up in his neckerchief, knot it well, and make it into a bundle. What a minuteness is there about the whole of this description! What visions of furmity and cheesecakes, and all those good old country dainties, which are found at the rustic feasts of the present day.

Another character, that of the pedlar, shows how true the picture of sheep-shearing feast is to nature. Although, in the play, Shakspere lays the scene in Bohemia, yet almost every line tells us that it was beside the Avon, near his father's homestead, amongst the cottagers, with whom he had many a time mingled when a boy. Whenever was there a feast without pedlars, gipsies, fortune-tellers, or beggars being present? We never remember one in our day, although we have visited some scores, such as May-games, harvest-homes, statutes, sheep-shearings, village-wakes, feasts, tuttings, potations, and merry-makings, with such names as are not to be found in "Hone's Every-day Book."

They never could have done without Autolychus: he who hath "songs for man or woman of all sizes; no milliner can so fit his customers with gloves: he has the prettiest love-songs for maids; he hath ribands of all the colours i' the rainbow; cambric, lawns; and he sings them over as if they were gods and goddesses."

How rich, in point of improbability, are the ballads the pedlar disposes of: "The old usurer's wife brought to bed of twenty money-bags, and longing to eat adders' heads and toads carbonadoed; the fish that appeared upon the coast, and sung a ballad against the hard hearts of maids." And Mopsa's simple confession, that she loves a ballad in print, "for then we are sure they are true:" and when the subject soars beyond all probability, and staggers her capricious belief, how easily does she become reconciled

by the pedlar asserting that it is signed by "five justices, and witnesses more than his pack will hold."

How a merry youth like young Shakspere must have enjoyed such a scene! what a good understanding would there soon be between him and the pedlar, who no doubt would apply to him, with a knowing look, to give countenance to any subject which was too outrageous for even their belief. We can almost fancy we see him. What a quiet humour lurks in his eye, whilst he gravely quotes Holinshed, or some old chronicler, to show that wonderful fish have often appeared on our coast—that Mrs. Taleporter, the midwife, was too particular a woman to sign her name to anything that was not true: and one or two of the old men, with whom the immortal boy was a favourite (for who would not love him?) would nudge each other, and laugh at his wit; and perhaps call Shakspere and the pedlar aside, and oh! who would not wish to have heard the jokes cracked at that merry sheep-shearing?

Then the old men would perhaps banter the youth, because he had not bought something for his shepherd-queen of the pedlar. There may be more than we know of in his reply, when he says, "I know

> "She prizes not such trifles as these are;
> The gifts she looks from me are packed and locked
> Up in my heart, which I have given already,
> But not delivered."

It might be that the poet had not the wherewithal to treat his "queen of curds and cream," and that the remembrance of his poverty struck upon some old scene, while shadowing out, in future years, his "Winter's Tale." Who can tell but what his father, or some meddling relative, stepped in and marred his love for "the prettiest low-born lass that ever ran on the greensward?" or that she, far wealthier,

had mercenary friends, who looked upon her union with him as beneath "her pride of place:" or that, whichever way it might chance to be, it called forth, in after years, that splendid burst, wherein he says,

> "I was not much afeard; for once or twice
> I was about to speak, and tell him plainly,
> The self-same sun, that shines upon his court,
> Hides not his visage from our cottage, but
> Looks on all alike."

Who ever saw a rural feast without flowers? What gay nosegays do the villagers wear on such occasions!—yet whenever were they before presented in such language as is uttered by Perdita? What would we not give to have preserved a true old English picture of a sheep-shearing feast by England's greatest poet,—if, instead of a princess, the shepherd queen had really been a peasant?—that the sheep-shearing scene had been a portion of the "Merry Wives of Windsor:" "sweet Anne Page," the "mistress of the feast;" Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page, the purveyors; Slender there, the butt of Falstaff; and neither king nor prince guests on the occasion: that the scene had been England instead of Bohemia? What a picture should we have had of the manners of our forefathers! It might have lacked the matchless poetry in which the "Winter's Tale" is steeped; but, oh! what a light it would have thrown upon the characters amongst whom Shakspere mingled? We should have had a few more such sketches, as the living, bustling housewife, whose portrait stands painted at the head of our chapter! What he has done is unequalled; what he could have done can never be known. How flat, dead, and colourless, will appear any painting of our own, after the few masterly touches Shakspere has thrown upon the canvas, and still left unfinished the great picture!

All who have wandered into the country, about the beginning of summer, must have heard the unusual bleating amongst sheep, in the neighbourhood of rivers, or beside water-courses; and if they have never beheld such a scene before, must, when they have reached the spot, have looked both with interest and pleasure at a sheep washing. There stand three powerful sun-burnt fellows, up to the middle in water; a sheep is forced in by a man on the bank; it is seized by the first washer, who, laying fast hold of the fleece, souses the poor creature about as if he would shake it to pieces; he then looses his hold, and the bleating animal, as he begins swimming towards the shore, is seized by the second washer, in whose hands he fares no better than he did whilst an unwilling prisoner to the first. He bleats more pitifully; and just as he is within a few feet of the shore, souse he goes over and over for the third time—and then he is at liberty. He reaches the bank, and there stands bleating, while the water flows from his heavy fleece. Others, who have undergone the same fate, bleat in reply; while the unwashed ones are not a bit behind-hand in their complainings, for a hundred sheep "baa" like one.

Then what a roar of laughter comes ringing upon the air at the sturdy shepherd boy, who, while thrusting and forcing along some obstinate sheep to the edge of the water, is carried in headlong with his woolly companion; and, by an unexpected plunge, both are sent head over ears together, and land alike with a kindred and sheepish look, for Jock is passed from hand to hand, amid loud "guffaws," which are heard half-a-mile off! Sometimes the village girls will come down to the sheep-washing, and then there flies round many a rough random shot of country wit: the girls trace strange likenesses amongst the sheep to some envied rival; and, in allusion to the number of lambs,

"more is meant than meets the ear"—the frailties of some fair Phyllis are shadowed forth, while Damon, although midway in water, burns up to his very ears. You find that Dianas are not the only nymphs who haunt the neighbourhood of these pastoral Arcadias.

We have seen pictures, in which sheep-washing and sheep-shearing (or clipping, as the farmers call it) are represented together, as if it was only out of the water, and then under the shears. The following is the criticism of an old practical farmer, one who still keeps up the old customs—has his sheep-shearing feast and harvest-home: breakfasts at six, lunches at ten, dines at one, takes tea at four, sups at seven, and is very rarely out of bed after nine, and in winter generally retires at eight; is nearly ninety years of age, and never in his life was laid up with a day's illness; his hair is as white as lamb's wool, his cheeks red as a rose; his grandfather lived until his hundred and fourth year, and his father had turned ninety-nine when he died. He says, "The picture you sent me is very good, but very wrong; sheep are never clipped as soon as they are washed: it is very different to shaving a man. If the sheep are dry in three or four days, they clip hard and 'husky,' and far from easy; but if they stay ten or twelve days after the washing, the oil returns into the fleece, and then the sheers move quite free. Four or five fleeces yield a tod of wool, which is worth about a shilling a pound." The old farmer is no bad representative of the "weather-bitten" shepherd in the "Winter's Tale."

We know not how many hundreds of sheep the old man has had shorn in a summer; but we well remember having seen a dozen of clippers at work for him at one time, and a right merry scene it was. Off went the ponderous barn-door—a door through which a piled-up waggon of corn could enter without ruffling a sheaf. This was taken off

the hinges, and several large logs of wood placed under it; and here the sheep-shearers began their work, not fearing a want of "elbow-room." And now was heard challenge upon challenge, and bet upon bet—five or six "clipping like one;" and the wager—perhaps half a gallon of ale—won by him who had clipped his sheep in the shortest time. Sometimes the last snip of the shears was heard so close together, that it was difficult to tell which had done first; then the race commenced again. Pile upon pile the fleeces rose, forming a little mountain of wool, which almost made one long for a cold, bleak winter night, that we might throw ourselves into it, and nestle there until the dawn. Then the old wool-merchant would call, as he went his round through the country; handle the fleeces, to see how the sheep had turned out; and if he was in the "giving mood," perhaps leave the men "a crown to drink."

After the sheep were shorn and turned loose, a scene of confusion ensued—such a running to and fro—five or six lambs laying claim to one dam—and she, poor thing! bleating and smelling, and repelling the invaders, while her own lambs, still "doting and doubting," went round and round her, until they at length showed signs of satisfaction in the motion of their tails. Then they would bound off, and return again, happy as children who had found a lost mother.

Sheep-shearing feasts are of great antiquity: they are mentioned in the early books of the Bible, especially in that fine dramatic chapter which describes the loves of the ill-starred Ammon and the "fair Tamar"—he whom his brothers slew when "his heart was merry with wine." Who is there that does not regret that we have no minute description of these ancient festivities; of what they ate and drank, and the merry songs they sung? Perchance

either David or Solomon had strung together a few sweet verses, which the daughters of Canaan chanted at these pastoral feasts; and some lovely maiden would blush when "her teeth were compared to a flock of sheep coming up from the washing."* That there was no lack of plenty at these ancient festivals is proved from what Abigail took from the sheep-shearing feast to present unto David: which was "two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs."† These she took unknown to her churlish husband, Nabal, who refused to relieve the wants of David, although he sent at a "good time," when Nabal "feasted like a king." The churl died, and David married his noble-hearted widow.

Beautiful must these scenes have appeared, as seen through the openings of the tents, or under the shadow of some wide-spreading tree; the flocks and herds grazing in the distance, and such figures as Saul or David, or the beautiful Bathsheba, standing in the foreground of the picture. But the long night of ages has closed over the scenes; the very spots on which they were celebrated can no longer be pointed out: and it is only the great eye of poetry, which gazes with unshaken faith, that sees, or cares to see, the fine painting in these primitive pictures.

Now comes the sheep-shearing feast of modern times. The great copper is filled with furmity, made of boiled wheat, which, when cold, cuts like jelly; currants, raisins, spices of every kind; sugar shot in, in pounds, which, when boiled enough, is emptied out into basins and pans, and cooled with new milk. Round this delicious mess assemble the young; three or four, with their huge wooden spoons,

* Solomon's Song, vi. 6. † 1 Samuel, xxv. 18.

eating out of one pansion or large earthenware vessel, about two feet wide. Sometimes they quarrel like pigs around a trough—one has thrown a spoonful of furmity into the other's face; others have left off, and gone into the orchard to swing; the great kitchen is a very Babel of sounds. Sometimes the feast is in the barn; the immense door is turned into a table, and almost bends beneath its load of provisions. We talk of roast beef: taste what is set before them! Smell of that chine! what a nosegay! it is stuffed with all kinds of savoury herbs: it tastes like duck, goose, pork, veal; as if all good things were rolled into it, and made one. It would make a sick man well only to smell of it! What slices! what appetites! what horns of brown ale they empty! A waiter in a London eating-house would run away horror-stricken, and proclaim a coming famine throughout the land. They eat their peas by spoonfuls; a new potato vanishes at every mouthful; dishes are full and emptied ere you can turn your head. That was a whole ham ten minutes ago: now you behold only the bone. Who ever before saw such enormous plum-puddings? Surely they have eaten enough! Why, that broad-shouldered, sun-burnt fellow has clapped a solid pound upon his plate: it is burning hot! look how he holds that large lump, and blows it between his teeth; the tears fairly start into his eyes. Where are those legs of mutton? the chines, and sirloins, and edge-bones of beef? Gone! for ever gone! And now come the custards, and cheese-cakes, and tarts. The men will assuredly burst: see, they unloosen their neckerchiefs, their waistcoats, as if they were going to begin again in downright earnest! Every man seems as if he had brought the appetite of three.

"It is a poor heart that never rejoices." And when we think of the many bleak, bitter nights, at the close of

February and the beginning of March, which the shepherds have passed in the open fields and on the windy hills in the "lambing season," it gives one pleasure to see them still so happy. Many a lamb would have been lost but for the care they took of them: for there they waited night after night, amid sleet and storm, in their little temporary huts, ready to rush out in a moment, and pick up and shelter the young lambs, which would otherwise perchance have perished in the cold. Proud were they when finer days came, and they looked on and saw their new-born flocks, as Bloomfield has described them in his beautiful poem of the "Farmer's Boy," racing in the meadows:—

> "A few begin a short but vigorous race,
> And indolence abashed soon flies the place;
> Thus challenged forth, see thither, one by one,
> From every side assembling playmates run;
> A thousand wily antics mark their stay—
> A starting crowd, impatient of delay.
> Like the fond dove, from fearful prison freed,
> Each seems to say. 'Come, let us try our speed:'
> Away they scour: impetuous, ardent, strong,
> The green turf trembling as they bound along.
> Adown the slope, then up the hillock climb,
> Where every mole-hill is a bed of thyme,
> Then panting stop; yet scarcely can refrain—
> A bird, a leaf, will set them off again."

Now let us peep into that pretty parlour. There sit the farmer's daughters at tea. What piles of cakes, honey, butter, eggs, ham, cold fowl! What smiling faces; and some of them are really beautiful,—pictures of rosy health. Now they are singing in the kitchen; now the fiddle is heard in the barn; there is giggling and laughter in the orchard; whisperings somewhere in the garden; children playing at hide-and-seek in the stack-yard. See where

those dark-eyed seducers, the gipsies, have congregated outside the farm-yard—somehow or another they have come in for their share of the feast: by-and-by they will become bolder; one bearing a child will venture into the barn, another will follow, and as the ale-horn circulates, it will, long before midnight, be "hail-fellow, well met."

Then come the morris-dancers, Robin Hood and Maid Marian, with such poetry as is not to be found in the old ballads. Well, there is plenty for all: the ale for sheep-shearing feast was brewed many a long month ago, and there are still half-a-dozen barrels untapped in the cellar.

But where is the old farmer?—he bade his men fall-to, and welcome, and we have not seen him since. No; he is in the large, old-fashioned summer-house at the bottom of his garden, with the butcher, and the miller, and the maltster, and the doctor, and the landlord from the Black Bull; and they have drawn the corks of a few bottles of choice port, and are enjoying themselves in their own way.

The young lawyer has brought his fiddle, for he is a gentleman-fiddler, and the young ladies in the parlour will come soon, and dance on the lawn, for even there the line of distinction is drawn. The wealthy farmer's daughter may condescend just to dance a turn or two in the barn; and when they have gone, the old one-eyed hired common fiddler will strike up "Bob and Joan," just to show his contempt for such "proud, stuck-up, thingumterrys," as he will call them; with "their waltzes, and quadrilles, and such-like outlandish fal-the-rals, as their grandmothers would have been ashamed to have been seen in."

But a few old-fashioned farmers, with their wives,

soon drop in, and all is forgotten. The world has undergone a great change since Shakspeare's time: even in our own day we have seen many an alteration; and, saving the county in which we were born, we know not another spot in England that would read SHAKSPERE AND SHEEP-SHEARING.

GREENWICH PARK.

"When the merry bells ring round,
And the jocund rebecks sound
To many a youth, and many a maid,
Dancing in the chequered shade;
And young and old come forth to play
On a sunshine holiday."

MILTON'S "L'ALLEGRO."

HERE we are at liberty to walk over hill and valley, under the shadows of tall elm trees, and along avenues of broad-branching chesnuts, where the antlered deer are ever

crossing your path with stately tread, or some old Greenwich pensioner, leaning on his staff, peeps out from the most picturesque corner of the landscape. Here children from stifling parish-schools, in the close streets of London, are brought once a year to breathe the pure air, and look enviously on the joyous games of others of their own age, who have no keen-eyed governor over them, to keep their mirth within bounds. Here lovers bring their lasses, husbands their wives and children, while grey old grandams are seen seated on the hill side, recounting the changes which have taken place since they first ran down that steep green hill, many a long, long Whitsuntide ago.

And those old pensioners who sit in the sunshine for hours apart, or conversing with each other, who look upon this regal domain as their own—what must their feelings be when they contrast this green quietude to the stormy seas and thunder of battles through which they have passed? Many a time have we watched them, as they stood on some breezy summit, calmly gazing over the Thames, while ship after ship glided by, on their way to some far distant shore—and we have wondered whether memory carried them back to their own early years, when the love of home was yet warm in their hearts, and their hands were unstained with blood? And those men are the ruins which war has spared!—some have lost both legs, others their arms! Look what they are now, and turn to what they were then! That meek, pale, venerable countenance was then brown and weather-beaten; that trembling voice was the first to cry "Forward," while, with pistol and cutlass in hand, he boarded the vessel, and shot a fellow-creature dead, and at a blow brought another down, pale and bleeding, upon the slippery deck. And Nelson, who knew not "what fear was," the man whom "kings delighted to honour," who basked in the sunshine of beauty, and moved "sole star"

amid circled queens and princesses—with working lip and glaring eye, was the first reaper in this great harvest of death! Glory was gathered from the groans of dying men, and the outspread wings of Victory were dabbled in human blood! And for this cities were illuminated, and bells rang, and guns fired, and thanks given to God in old holy cathedrals, and prayers offered up to Him who has said, "Thou shalt do no murder"—as if sorrow and repentance were not more befitting the stern solemnity of necessary warfare than the shouts of triumph thus raised over the unfortunate dead.

And here these pillars of battle repose; columns, which shot have struck and fire blackened, here lie "vast and edgeways," as if they had never sustained a shock, while the mighty fabric on which they fought has, perhaps, long since perished. Here they walk and meditate. One that is blind is searching for his companion. They fought together, and are now "wardsmen." He gropes his way, and calls aloud for "Johnny;" and is directed by one or another of his brother pensioners as they pass, for Johnny is at the top of the hill with his telescope, picking up a penny or two from those who are good-natured enough to have "a peep"—and when he distinguishes his old companion he calls to him, nay, comes part of the way; and they light their pipes, and "fight their battles o'er again." Some of these fine weather-beaten fellows are wags, and nothing delights them more than to "cram a landsman." They will kill a score men with one cannon-ball, and tell you how a ship, "fully manned," was boarded and taken by half a dozen hands. Others are grave and thoughtful. They have already contemplated "the sea-mark of their utmost sail," and look calmly on the untrodden shore which lies beyond.

One we observed scanning narrowly the children from

the Greenwich charity-school; amongst which were several orphans, whose fathers had been pensioners in the Hospital. At length he pitched upon two interesting-looking girls, to whom he gave a penny each, and a few cakes. He said they were the children of an old shipmate—one who died in his own ward; that he had married a woman much younger than himself, and that she died first; that whilst their father lived, he kept them respectably, as he was wardsman, and had a few extra privileges; but after his death they were placed in the charity-school—and the old man added, in tones full of feeling, "I always look out for them when they come into the park. Bless their hearts! their father was as good a man as ever broke bread." And he turned away, and walked up the hill, pausing every now and then to look upon the children in the valley; and, an hour after, we saw him sitting at the foot of an antique chesnut, with spectacles on, and a bible in his hand; nor did we venture to disturb his reverie. It might rise from some unaccountable feeling, predominant at the moment, from seeing those dear children gathering the fir-cones, and taking them home (not their *own* home) for playthings—as if they had no toys now—that endeared this old man more to us than if he had recounted all "his hair-breadth 'scapes." Then to think, "that he always looked for them," and that he recalled their kind father—but, perhaps, that thought might make him sad.

How unlike their former life, to see these men rummaging here and there for a few sticks, to carry home! One passes you with a bundle of withered branches, which would not do more than build a common crow's nest; while another has a piece or two thrust under his arm, and ever keeps his eyes upon the ground, looking for more. Famous smokers are many of them; and we have noticed a few who, sailor-like to the last, pay great attention to

children when they are accompanied by a good-looking nursery-maid. But our greatest delight has been to hear one of them, when he thought himself alone, break out into some stormy old sea-song, which gave the very year and day when the action commenced, with the name of the admiral, and a catalogue of the ships. It was an act indeed, worthy of royalty to give those fine old veterans such a palace-like residence, and such a princely park to wander in. Such a noble act almost dulls the sharp and biting edge of war.

Greenwich Park, at Whitsuntide, is well worth visiting. The fine old hawthorns are still in blossom; and the noble avenues of trees are robed in their summer garments. The beautiful scene is filled with busy life: there are groups of holyday-makers in every corner; turn your eye whichever way you will, you see happy faces, for they have come out solely to enjoy themselves, and left all their cares and troubles at home. This is the great harvest of the old pensioners,—their glasses are bespoke three deep; and at every telescope, eyes are looking on the river, and the shipping, and busy London, in the distance, whilst the younger ones marvel how it is that the dome of St. Paul's has approached so near. Fruit is bowled down the hill-side, and a score of young urchins are mixed in the scramble. "Poor Jacks," from the river-side, who speak the rough nautical language perfect, and are well skilled in rich seafaring metaphors—there you will see them playing at "kiss-in-the-ring;" and it is astonishing to mark the airs of some little miss, who is a shade more beautiful than her fair companions, and to see the tricks she plays her boyish lover. Others are running down the hill, and many a slip takes place before they reach the bottom; and then there is one universal titter amongst the bystanders, for it rarely or ever happens that any of the fallen are hurt. Even the

elder people sometime venture on a race; and although they are more careful than they were forty years before, still it reminds them of by-gone times. Others come to look on and laugh; and there is no lack of matter for merriment. One poor fellow has invested all his capital in tartaric acid and carbonated soda; and, with a pail of water at hand, he manufactures soda water on the spot for his customers. Another comes up groggy, and, thinking a glass will cool him, gives a lee-lurch as he is about to pull out his penny—staggers, falls, and upsets the whole establishment. The pail of water licks up every grain of the ingredients, and runs fizzing and effervescing amongst the grass; whilst the drunken delinquent lies sprawling amongst the foam. The manufacturer is ruined, and the destroyer has got but a shilling. The loss is summed up, amid much laughter, and a penny subscription is set on foot, to reimburse the unfortunate proprietor.

Away we go further on to some new disaster. Whether by accident or design, an old woman's basket of gingerbread has gone cantering down the hill; and fifty ragged rascals have devoured its contents in the same number of seconds. No one did it!—and another penny is drawn from the pockets of the good-natured to repair the loss. A pail, with lemonade "iced," as the salesman says, comes rolling along, water and bottles making a whirl like a mill-wheel. A laughing crowd collects, and the man's loss is made profitable; while the good-hearted cockneys are again gulled! Here an Italian boy grinds, and a merry group dances—there a youth throws aside the end of his penny cigar, and looks and feels very queer after the "manly" exploit of smoking it. Others come to eat and drink; and they buy every kind of thing that is offered them, having a great love for ginger beer, which the hot sun has "well got up." Further on, you see a little love-making amongst the trees.

It is the first beginning: they keep at a respectful distance now; but, ten to one, before sunset they will be seen arm-in-arm together, and return to London in the same steamboat. And, at the last moment of all, she will tell him where "she lives servant," when it is her "Sunday out," and at what corner he is to wait for her. "Will he come?" she goes home wondering. Every way you see little parties seated on the grass; hill and valley are dotted with them; their drapery breaks the brown boles of trees; it blends with the green branches. Each group forms a picture by itself; the little ones are tumbling about on the ground; a hat lies here, a bonnet there; three or four deer fill up the background. The sunlight falls in patches along the chequered avenues; spaces of light and shadow intervening between that long cathedral of trees.

A merry place is Greenwich Park at Whitsuntide,—it is London in the country! From Westminster to Whitechapel, from St. Giles's to St. George's in the Fields—each pours forth a specimen of its population; from the unwashed sweep, to the clean confectioner; the mealy baker, to the fan-tailed coalheaver, you will find of each class a few specimens; while dandies, newly decorated by Moses and Son, are as plentiful as the rushes amongst which the great Lawgiver was first found. The Jew and the Gentile are nose to nose, lovingly partaking and imparting a light to their cigars; and the man who but the day before called to see if you had any "old clo" to dispose of, makes you a bow (if you have dealt with him) that would not have disgraced Beau Brummel. But the ladies and their costumes, it would puzzle Planche to describe them! Bustles are at a premium; you might almost fancy that the hoops which our grandmothers wore, had been cut into half; that to imitate the camel's hump, was now the new "line of beauty;" that to be like a dromedary, was the

nearest approach to a duchess; and that the Venus de Medici was "all my eye," unless she had a basket buckled on her back, and a cloak thrown over it! Why do they hang up and ticket these "artificial" commodities in the windows? Were we women, we would star all such panes; it is really too bad!

Whichever way you turn the eye, you see a picture of something that you would like to have painted, and hung up in your room. Look at the attitude of that dear little girl, timid and cautious as the spotted doe that is approaching her. The child stretches out its hand, and the deer its neck; and now it begins to eat the fruit she has brought for it. See how her little eyes sparkle as she lays her hand on its side! She wants to kiss the deer; and just as her innocent lips are within touch, away trots the "forest-born" up the avenue.

What a merry group are those on the left! that sound is, indeed, "joyous laughter!" it comes from the heart without a care. What tale is the old man telling, that keeps up such a fire of merriment? That is his wife who struck him so playfully on the shoulder. Ten to one, it is some reminiscence of their younger days. And those are his daughters, with their sweethearts. God bless them! A few more years will see that ancient couple laid in the grave; and then the younger ones will think of them, as they come with their own children into the park on some future Whitsuntide.

But we must peep at Blackheath, with its donkeys and gipsies. What a prospect opens here! miles upon miles of beautiful landscape! Now, ladies, which of you have the courage to ride? Here are a score of donkeys to choose from, and we are hemmed into the midst of the circle. What a Babel of sounds! "Don't have his, my lady; it's lame!" "Mine's the little beauty to go!" "Here's

one that never stops when it's once started, mam!" "He'll cheat you if you have his!" A blow is struck, and we get a little more breathing space; and, after separating the combatants, establish something like order, though a great portion of the merit rests with the approaching policemen. What laughing and screaming among the girls! They would fain go faster, but are afraid to fall. Then the young lover, who is also mounted, must hold her on. Then the donkeys jostle each other; they will not keep pace. Their ride is one succession of stoppages.

Watch that dark-eyed gipsy, with the baby at her back. How closely she follows the young couple! Listen to her tempting promises:—"There is nothing but riches and good luck for you, my pretty lady; for that is written on your face; and you'll have the man of your choice, if you come aside with me, and let me tell you a few things that will come to pass before your marriage!" The sybil has succeeded; she draws the fair girl aside, into a hollow of the heath. Look at her brown hard hand clutching the trembling palm of her votaress; how she traces each mystic line! Poor girl! she will be sad and silent all the evening after; for promised happiness brings solemn thoughts; and it will be many a long day before she tells her lover all the gipsy prophesied. Few would believe that there are thousands of fortune-telling books and dreamers' guides sold every year; and that one half of the ignorant servant girls in the country believe in them!

What happy faces meet us everywhere in the park! The long avenue that leads to the Observatory, seems as if it held not a heart but what had left its cares at home. And yet many of these will soon become men and women, and rear up families in the stifling courts and ill-ventilated alleys of London. And their children——but Providence will watch over them: they will escape cabs, and carts, and

fires; and fall down huge staircases, as if they bore "charmed lives." The children which are assembled here, feel that for once in their lives they are far away from danger,—they seem lost amidst the vast space there is to range in; were it not for fear of losing their parents, straight a-head would they run, nor stop until compelled by their weariness. And to-morrow they will be impaled within a narrow court, the width of which a tall man might measure in three strides. In place of this fresh air and goodly prospect, they will inhale the unwholesome smell of poisonous sewers; and where now, above their heads, the green branches wave, half-washed garments will be hung to dry, and they will thread their way amongst clothes-props, instead of the boles of beautiful trees. Should they seek a wider range, it must be in the narrow, dangerous streets, where every cab-driver that is compelled to slacken his speed (or run over them) will thunder out a curse, which they will not forget, but, like the old Abbess, and Marguerite, in "Tristram Shandy," divide it into parts, and go on practising, until they become perfect in the pronunciation. And if so now, what will they do when the cursed Enclosure Act has passed? Why, the man, who, twenty years hence, has sat at the foot of an old oak, or wandered over a green field, will be looked upon as a wonder. Should this volume be remembered then, to be understood it will require notes by some unknown antiquary. "Wood-walk,—forest-path,—and field-road," will have to be more definitely described in distant dictionaries; and a country book of the present day will be as great a literary curiosity as "Manwood's Forest Laws" is in this "age of railways." Green will only be remembered as a colour; and as to flowers, the Bow-pots, which Hone, in his "Every-day Book," complains about being dear at a penny, will then be at a railroad premium, and realise half-a-crown.

The keeper's lodge is situate on the slope which leads to the foot of One-tree Hill, descending a few hundreds of yards from the right-hand side of the Observatory. Within the paled enclosure, or garden, which surrounds the park-keeper's residence, stands a huge, gigantic oak, measuring at its base upwards of fifty feet. This is, beyond doubt, the only remaining relic of the ancient forest, which, ages ago, stretched for miles around the neighbourhood, and must have been an old tree long before "good Duke Humphrey" erected the square tower called *Mirefleur*, on the foundation of which the Observatory now stands. This ancient tree looks like the mighty wreck of an age that has passed away: it stands like a solitary Titan, rooted to the earth, as if to show the bulk of the mighty giants who once waged war against heaven. Hollow in the middle as a cavern (for the teeth of time have been eating into its old English heart for long centuries), a door has been let into his iron side, and the earth above the unfathomed roots is paved with tiles, while a seat runs all round the interior of his weather-beaten ribs, on which a dozen men of these degenerate days may sit round the table (which stands in the centre) without being cramped for elbow-room. The thunder of a thousand years has trampled over the head of this grey forefather of the forest. Saving in the silent solitudes of Sherwood, we know not where to find, in England, so noble and venerable a relic of the old world of woods. Pity that it should be shut out from the public.

Nor must we omit to point out the splendid elms and chesnuts near Wilderness Pond. Many of these are really magnificent trees, lifting their leafy heads to the clouds, and looking down upon man as if he was no more than a blade of grass in comparison to their giant height. Several of them are almost perfect in form; and we wish that our artists would study such noble specimens as these,

in place of the shrub-like abortions which too often disfigure the foregrounds of their canvas. There are no finer trees within ten miles round London, than are to be found within the wall nearest Blackheath.

In the space paled off beside the Wilderness, we have seen many beautiful bits which would paint well. The fern, or brachen, grows there to a goodly height; and when autumn has given a brown and golden tint to the broad fan-like and bending stems, they form a fitting and forest-like ground for the deer; just revealing the head and antlers of those which are lying down, and contrasting richly with the forms of the spotted herd that are busy grazing; while here and there a doe, with its fawn, half break the foreground of an hawthorn, the head of which melts into the sky. Deficient as the scene might be, compared to the grandeur of Highland mountains, it would still be nature, and have a very different appearance to those lawn-like and pastoral prettinesses, in which some of our young artists place these "forest-born beauties."

But we are wandering away from the hill-top, at whose foot the past opens like a map, marked with mighty events, and chronicled with changes, which imagination only has the power to reveal.

Let us pause on the brow of this hill, and recall a few of the stirring scenes which these ancient hawthorns have overlooked; for they are the ancient foresters of the park, and several of them have stood hundreds of years, and were knarled, and knotted, and stricken with age, long before Evelyn planned and planted those noble avenues of chesnuts and elms. Below, between the plain at the foot of the hill and the river, stood the old palace of Greenwich, in which Henry the Eighth held his revels, and where Edward the Sixth, the boy-king, died. The early chroniclers say, that his death was hastened through smelling a bunch of flowers

which was purposely poisoned. Doubtless, that ancient palace was rich in the spoils of many a plundered abbey and demolished monastery,—in vessels of gold and silver, which had been dedicated to holy purposes, but were then red with the wine, shed at many a midnight revel, by the Defender of the Faith, and woman-murdering king. Perhaps the walls were hung with the portraits of the wives he had caused to be beheaded; while his own glared from the midst of them, like a tiger triumphing over his prey.

Where we now stand, Cardinal Wolsey may have meditated, with all his "blushing honours thick upon him." The broken-hearted Queen Katherine may have reined up her palfrey beside this ancient hawthorn, and snapped off a small stem, fragrant, and white over with blossoms, when she rode a-Maying with her crowned savage.

On yonder plain, where so many happy faces are now seen, the tournament was held. Galleries were erected there; and beauty leant over, waving rich embroidered scarfs; and the royal tiger smiled, before he closed the visor of his helmet, upon a face which was soon to fall, with its long tresses, on the scaffold, and be dabbled in the very blood which then ran so bright and joyous in the veins.

In this park the crafty Cecil mused many an hour, and plotted the return of Mary, while the ink was scarcely dry in which he had recorded his allegiance to the Lady Jane Grey. The whole scenery teems with the remembrance of stirring events and historical associations. Hal, the murderer, comes straddling and blowing up the hill; the pale and sickly boy-king rides gently by to inhale the sweet air. The titter and merry laugh of short-lived queens are heard in the bowers; and they are followed by the sobbings of fair attendants, who come to weep there when their royal mistresses are no more.

And that river, rolling along so smooth and evenly, that bears on its silvery bosom half the commerce of the world, and mirrors back the flags of a hundred nations, what scenes have been shadowed on its surface! There the ancient Briton, whose remains lie in the neighbouring burrow, has paddled his wicker boat. The gilded galley of the Roman, with its glittering poop and haughty eagle, has started the naked inhabitants of those marshes; while the misbelieving Dane and blue-eyed Saxon followed each other in their strange-looking ships, and fought between those very shores. Then come other scenes,—music, and banners, and barges blazing in gold, and rich in gaudy colours; rowers, with badges of silver, and dresses of crimson; and high-decked, unwieldy vessels, with awnings raised aloft, and on these were kings and queens seated, and deep-browed statesmen, and oily-tongued courtiers, who have ages ago glided into their graves.

And London,—the London which this hill then overlooked,—how little of it now remains! What would we not give to catch but a momentary glimpse of the old city—St. Paul's, with its huge tower; the quaint high gable-ended houses, ancient spires, and turrets, which the fire burnt down,—all, saving a few relics, now swept away: and even the sites of the gates and walls, which Stowe was so careful in enumerating, scarcely to be pointed out without a doubt; for these landmarks of the past are all but obliterated.

What great revolution of nature formed those steep hills and deep valleys? Was the whole neighbourhood one wild forest, the haunt of wild boars and wolves, as one of our earliest Saxon chroniclers has stated? When the foundation for the new pier (now destroyed) was dug, thousands of acorns, black as ink, were found in the soil, amid relics of plants and branches, which go far to prove that the

ancient forest stretched to the very edge of the river. Where are there finer and older thorns to be found than in the park? while a few of the oaks that remain are splendid relics of a distant age. On the hills, too, you tread on the stunted brachen, while the heather, in a few places, peeps up beside it, as if they struggled to regain possession of their ancient inheritance. No doubt those acorns had been buried in the earth for hundreds of years, when Greenwich formed a portion of that immense forest, which went stretching over the summit of Shooter's Hill, long before the antique walls of Eltham Palace were reared, and when only a few huts, and burrows, marked the dwellings and burial-places of the ancient Britons.

"The busy lark, the messenger of day,
Saluteth in his song the morrow grey;
And fiery Phœbus riseth up so bright,
That all the orient laugheth at the sight;
And with his streams [of sunshine] he drieth, in the groves,
The silver drops that hang within the leaves."

CHAUCER (450 *years ago.*)

COUNTRY TOLL-GATES.

"A laden ass, a maid with wicker maun,
A shepherd lad, driving his lambs to sell;
Russet-clad girls move in the early dawn;
Farmers, whose thoughts on crops and prizes dwell.
The broad-wheeled waggon doth the toll-gate near;
Anon you hear the village carrier's bell;
Then does his grey, old tilted cart appear,
Moving so slow, you think he never will get there."

"SUMMER MORNING."

BUT few have travelled far through England without being struck by the solitary situation of some of the toll-gates which they have passed through; and what must their loneliness be now, when such a number of coaches have been taken off the roads? For we fancy that the sound of

the horn, and the thundering of the guard at the gate in the deep midnight, were often, in those dreary places, welcome company. But in the silent, out-of-the-way country, where three or four long, houseless, weary, lane-like roads, come through woods and between hills, and meet at some murderous-looking angle, that is the spot for a romantic and lonely toll-gate. If you peep in at the open door, you see a loaded gun and a brace of pistols hanging over the mantel-piece, and a savage dog stands staring at you on the threshold; for there is a look of danger, both within and without the place. If a suspicious character calls in the day-time, to light his pipe or inquire the way, the light is brought to the door, and the answer given through as small an opening as can possibly be made; for the toll-keeper has a dislike to all reconnoitring. If you look at the windows, they are barred like a prison; the door is also covered with sheet-iron, and it would be a difficult matter to storm such a stronghold. You see nothing around for miles, but moors and commons, woods and fields; and you think of the long nights in the middle of winter, when sixteen hours of darkness out of the twenty-four, hang over that lonely and silent scene. You recall the winds which blow all night long, and the awful roaring of the tall trees, mingled with heavy showers of rain, that come blinding and beating upon the window-panes, and sounding like robbers that are breaking through; and you feel that you could never sleep amid such "a warring of the elements." Perhaps near at hand there stands a gibbet-post, on the very spot where a murder was committed; and the gibbet-irons swing, and creak, and rattle, as the wind goes whistling through them; and you feel as if you would not live near such a place for a thousand a-year. Or it may be that some one who destroyed himself is buried beneath the guide-post at the corner of the cross roads, as it was the

custom to inter suicides in such-like places a few years ago; and all the country people, for miles around, believe that the spot is haunted, for at twelve o'clock at night nobody knows what has not been seen. Drunken farmers, on horseback, have been chased, and timid ploughboys have had to run for it; and the old toll-man has had to come out to one fainting, and another speechless, and a third with his hair standing on end; and if you believe but half, there never was such a spot where "bogies" laid wait and "caught you unawares." One woman's "all in white," another without a head, a third carrying an infant in her arms. You could never see their faces, but you heard the rustle of their garments, and felt the cold air as they cut through it, for they walked not, but glided; and you never seemed to be nearer to them than when they at first appeared, and if you attempted to approach, why—they vanished. What a fine land of dreamy, old, supernatural lies to dwell in: nothing you can disprove, so you believe out of charity; and, in the open noon-day, are silly enough to stand and look at the place. True, they could see foot-prints which escaped you; and here and there blades of grass which the fire had blackened, and marks where "Christian and Apolyon sought each other to subdue."

Many might think our picture overdrawn; but we can assure them that in our younger years such was the common gossip round many a country hearth, and "so catching is cowardice," that, when alone, we have run past these haunted places after dark, as if the ghost of the suicide or murderer was in full chase at our heels.

It is a solitary life to keep watch at these dreary toll-gates day after day and night after night; places where the traffic is so small, that the tolls taken scarcely pay for keeping the roads in the neighbourhood in repair. True, there is a small patch of garden-ground to cultivate; but, then,

how few pause to admire it! A horseman pulls up, pays his penny, and the old man, merely because it is a change, watches him until he is out of sight; then for hours he hears not the sound of a human voice, for no one comes that way but what has to journey miles further, for there is nowhere to go to, no place to stop at, but the market-town, ten miles off. Sometimes this solitary confinement is relieved by the appearance of the village constable and his deputy. A robbery has been committed, and they have traced foot-marks to the end of the lane; in the night he must have passed through the wicket (for foot passengers) of the toll-gate. Did he hear it "slam to?—at what time? Was it one man only, or did he hear voices?" Comfortable inquiries these for a lonely man, who may be called upon to give evidence at the next assizes, and if the prisoner escapes, there he is still to be found "at home" on any future occasion. Or, perhaps, the night before the trial, some comrade of the thief's sends his voice through the key-hole, bidding him beware; and that if he appears in court on the morrow, and but attempts to identify the prisoner (whom he saw pass through the gate), death will, some dark night, be his doom. Yet such things were not uncommon less than fifty years ago. There is more than one instance on record, of highwaymen riding up to the gate at midnight, and paying the toll with a bullet; and we have heard of one old man who returned the fire, and shot the robber in the arm, bidding him remember, as he galloped off wounded, "that he had got his change."

But to drive up to one of these places in the night, as we have done, on some desolate country road, and knock for half an hour before we could awaken the toll-man; then, when he had answered you, to hear him "hack, hack," with his flint and steel,—to be told that the tinder was damp,—that he could not find a match,—and,

perhaps, the rain coming down all the while in torrents;—this is ruralising with a vengeance. Blow him up as hard as you like, he does not know how he came so "dead asleep;" he fancied he heard somebody, but, then, everybody knocks who passes; and there's no knowing who's who, or what's what. He has got up so often, and there's been nobody there; or they've run away, especially on a market night or at a feast time! "Poor old fellow! with you it is but once; you bid him keep the change, and are ashamed that you lost your temper, for you find he gets but about twenty pounds a-year, when he has "paid the trust."

He has got more; but how? "He was the last who spoke to the poor woman that was murdered by the side of the wood." He points to where the gibbet-post stands, and where the bones of the murderer still swing in irons. "They passed through the gate at 'dark hour'—she lingered behind, to beg a drink of water—she walked very heavily—he noticed the bundle she carried—she seemed well-nigh fainting—the shawl she had on had been patched—she carried a pair of pattens in her hand—the man bore a blue bonnet-box—she thanked him in a faint voice—came back again to inquire the time—he heard the man swear at her for staying so long behind—he was pock-marked—had a round head, and a savage look." The toll-keeper was the chief witness against him; he was kept at the assize town for three days; they allowed him a guinea a-day. That was the man, gibbeted a few hundred yards from his own door; the old gate-keeper could not step outside without seeing him. "It made him very unhappy for a time—the place was like a fair on the day he was gibbeted—they joked him about the ghost coming to him at night. But the wretch deserved it; he had but married the poor woman that very morning—she was with

child—it was a 'knob-stick' wedding—the parish gave him his choice, either to marry her or go to prison." Those who are acquainted with the trial of Tom Otter, and have passed Drinsey Nook, will recognise the gibbet-post, the toll-gate, and the truth, which we have almost given literally from the evidence on the trial.

The low, long sandy road; the dark fir plantations; the sleepy, deep, silent fossdyke, made by the Romans, and solemn through its very antiquity; the black, shadowy trees that grow round the lonely house, near to which the murder was committed; the gibbet-post, seen half way down the almost untrodden lane;—rise as fresh before us as if we had but visited the spot yesterday, although near forty years have passed away since that terrible deed was done. That awful Sunday was long remembered by the old gate-keeper; and he sometimes fancied that he heard the dying groans of the poor woman, but when he opened his door to listen, it was only the owls hooting in the neighbouring wood.

A toll-gate, beside a busy and lively road, is as cheerful a place as one can well wish for; the objects are constantly changing, like the forms and colours in a kaleidoscope. Up comes the huge broad-wheeled waggon with its six horses, and merry faces peeping out from the arch of the tilt. You wonder who the passengers are, and whither they are going; and the heavy vehicle keeps rumbling slowly along, as if it would reach the old city of York in about the same time that one of our Atlantic steamers would arrive at America. 'Tis gone! and you hear the tramp of horses, and the sound of the bugle; a troop of cavalry pass, two and two, the haughty steeds seeming to spurn the very earth on which they tread; you hear the measured jingle of their accoutrements all the way up the road. The immense train of caravans comes rocking along,—their high yellow sides seen far over the distant hedge-rows. You hear the

roaring of the lion and the growling of the tiger, and are thankful that such customers come not on foot. They are followed by the minnows of the fair,—peep-shows, and wax-works, and dwarfs, which you hope are very light indeed, for the sake of the poor jaded horse that has to draw them. The giant passes through on foot, and you pay nothing for a sight of him, while the wonderful fat boy stretches his legs for a mile or two; and you marvel what people can see so astonishing in either of them. Punch and Judy, and the Devil and the Doctor, ride lovingly together in the same wooden box; and the dog Toby runs barking here and there, as if he was no better than a common cur. Kings and queens and princes, the savage bandit and the pale ghost, the truncheoned emperor and manacled slave, sit together on the top of the rickety stage, looking like common mortals, and drinking out of the same pewter pot whenever they halt,—their regal dignity stowed away somewhere amid the lumber of the court, and their imposing grandeur bundled up ready for the next wash. Ventriloquists and conjurers, tumblers and balancers, singers and dancers, eaters of fire and swallowers of swords, men who turn bricks into guinea-pigs, and make you hear the chink of your own money in your throat,—all pass along the great highway, and swell the tide of plunderers who have come to prey upon the neighbouring town.

Then come the gipsies, with their children swinging and singing in the panniers, the youngest stowed away at its mother's back, and squalling lustily in the hood of her cloak. Inns and lodging-houses may be full to overflowing; what matter to them? the tents are ready to be erected at a moment's notice; the camp kettle plays a merry tune on the saucepan that swing beside it under the cart, and they go on jingling together from village to village. They cheat the toll-keeper, and laugh in his face;

for whilst some dark-eyed sibyl is driving a bargain with him, the whole tribe have passed through, and he is glad to take what she offers. Away they go, laughing and chanting the old chorus,—

> "Jog on, jog on, the footpath way,
> And merrily take the stile-a;
> A merry heart goes all the day,
> Your sad tires in a mile-a."
>
> SHAKSPERE.

And if there is a possibility of quitting the dusty high road, and breaking through the hedge, they will find a "footpath way" amongst the grass, and meet the cavalcade at some distant turning of the highway; for not to trespass, when half a mile of ground can be saved, is to throw away a risk, which a gipsy thinks well worth hazarding.

What a current of human life rushes through that toll-gate at a fair time! How it would laugh to nought all the wisdom of our statistics, could we arrive at the real ways and means by which those hundreds live! How many amongst them have no home! What would all they possess in the world fetch if sold! What numbers have not sufficient to pay for a lodging for the night! How many have journeyed thither, without object or aim, solely because it is a fair, and they have nowhere else in the world to go! They may, by chance, help to fix up a booth, run an errand, beg, steal, be trusted with sixpennyworth of articles (worth twopence) on commission, turn a swing, shout for a showman, carry a board about the town whilst the fair lasts, pick up a few broken victuals in a tavern, or cost the county the expense of a month's imprisonment, then be turned loose amongst other "rogues and vagabonds," who must either starve, or do something to merit transportation. What matter! the law has done its duty

for the present, and will not think of them again, unless they stir deeper into its memory. And yet, how difficult to legislate for such as these: imagine fifty such in an union workhouse,—it would be unroofed in one night;—still these restless elements have at last an abiding place; they settle down somewhere, and make room for new comers. How? Where? What a history would it be to read, if these questions could be answered! How many would be found amongst our soldiers! What numbers leave their "country for their country's good!" How many die through slow starvation, and a want of the common comforts of life! What return would be gathered from those who perish in prisons! If we could but take a list of all who pass through that toll-gate the day before the fair, and trace their "whereabout" twenty years after, with a brief diary of their "ups and downs" through life, we should have such a book as would throw all fiction into the shade, and drive romance into another world to search for new materials. But it cannot be; the grave holds more human secrets than will ever be known to the world!

Toll-gates, or bars, are very ancient. I remember mention is made of one somewhere in Doomsday Book—that gloomy record fraught with so much misery to the ancient Saxons. In the returns made by the Commissioners sent out by William the Norman, complaint is made of some gate-keeper who kept two great dogs, and used to set them on the passengers who refused to pay toll, although the road had been made free by a charter from King Harold, to all who cultivated lands within certain boundaries of the neighbourhood. Many a struggle was there, beyond doubt, between our Saxon ancestors and this burly gate-keeper. How many dogs he had killed, or how many battles he fought during the year, is not recorded; though,

if we recollect rightly, he was aided by two sons, while he himself wielded a tremendous cudgel. Rebecca and her daughters seem to have existed in those days; and we can imagine many a party riding by, too strong for this ancient gate-keeper, his dogs, his cudgel, and his two sons. Cedric of Rotherwood would, we fancy, have made a stand, and demurred at payment of the toll; and all the keeper would have got would have been a jest from Wamba, or a blow from Gurth the swineherd.

We have often been amused, while witnessing the "haggling" between some Scottish drover and an English gate-keeper. Sandy endeavours to drive his cattle through as quick as he can, so as to confuse the toll-man while keeping count; and, ere they have settled the dispute, the drove is half-a-mile ahead, and another drove are fast approaching the gate. Somehow or another these rovers of the highway, almost without exception, seem to think it no sin to cheat a toll-gate keeper, an exciseman, or a game-keeper. There is a kind of free-trade spirit amongst certain classes of society, which is ever struggling to find vent. Not a lady goes to France, who thinks it a crime to bring back a little lace, duty-free, although she might purchase it cheaper in England; and many a gentleman, who would not willingly wrong an individual of a penny piece, considers it a good joke to drive through a toll-gate without paying, although the next day he dines with his friend, a Trustee of the Trust. As to poaching—if killing a hare on a common, or any place open to the public, without trespassing on strictly private grounds, be a crime, we believe there are few young men in the country free from it. It is what we have done in our younger days, nor has it ever yet weighed a moment upon our conscience; and we still believe we have as much right to kill, cook, and eat the animals which run wild through the country, and are to be

met with on moors and commons, and roads by wood-sides, as the oldest peer of the realm. If any one complains, it ought to be the farmer, whose crops they destroy; nor would we take a blow quietly from any liveried gamekeeper, if we were not trespassing; for there is just enough of the old Saxon blood in us to break, if we could, the head of the menial who would break our own for such a deed. These murders between poachers and gamekeepers are the last relics of the old Forest Laws, and are a disgrace to England. Pity it is that the poor paid slaves only suffer. It is a damnable act! and has been the means of bringing many a worthy family to the poor-house, while the husband has been wasting his time in prison, not even committed for hard labour a few years ago.

Some of these toll-bars are primitive enough; and we remember once seeing one which consisted of two posts and a rope thrown across the road; a great loutish-looking country lad was placed there to take the toll, and the following conversation took place between us:—

"Why, this is a new toll; isn't it, Jack? How long has it been here?"

"Nobbert (only) a fortneat, zur."

"A fortnight, eh! Why, I was past a week ago, and there was a chain across the road then. What's got it?"

"Doant noah, zur; zomebody thieved it while I wur asleep, for when I wackened, it wur goan!"

"A pretty toll-taker you are, to let them run off with your chain. Have you many customers?"

"Noah, zur; they goa round abouten, and thruff yon farm-yard. I tuck but tuppence yesterday, an ged the mon fourpence, an it wur a bad sixpence. He ceam a-porpose to dew me: he wur a butcher thief."

The next time we passed, Jack and his rope had vanished; so that, what with the country people avoiding

the road, stealing his chain, and giving him bad money, we fancy that his employers were glad enough to leave the road free.

I remember, when very young, going with a butcher-boy, one Sunday in summer, to fetch a calf from a neighbouring village. There was a toll-gate on the road, at which we were to pay either a penny or three-halfpence, when we came back with our charge. To spend the money and avoid the gate were two objects we were resolved to accomplish; so the money went first, as a proof that we were in earnest. There was a footpath over the fields and marshes, a much nearer road to the village than through

the toll-gate and along the common highway, and we consoled ourselves that where there was a road wide enough for us, there would be room enough for the calf; but then there were stiles,—how was it to be got over these? Oh, we should find a gap somewhere in the hedge big enough to drive it through. Then there were those narrow planks across the dykes in the marshes; it would never walk over those without falling in. Oh, we could lead it down the banks, and it would jump across—calves were always good jumpers; besides, we had spent the money, so it must be made to jump.

We managed very well over the fields, and the calf trotted willingly enough along the soft, green grass; and, through breaking open a gate or two, and making a gap now and then in the hedges, which would cost the farmer two or three shillings to repair, we reached the first dyke without much difficulty. The calf went down the bank, looked at the water, and refused to move; we used all our strength to force it across, but in vain. My companion had a rope in his pocket, so he made a kind of halter, which we fastened round the calf's head. He jumped over the dyke—it was a good jump for a boy; if he pulled and I shoved, go across it must. It was Sunday in summer, and, in addition to a little blue jacket, I had on white trowsers and a white waistcoat, all clean that very morning. What matter? I shoved like a young Samson, the butcher-boy pulled, and over bounded the calf, when we least expected it, light as a bird. Into the dyke I went, head over ears, and, as the mud was about a foot deep at the bottom, I came out again with a good thick coat of it over me. Nor was this the worst of it; for as we were at no great distance from the toll-gate, the keeper had watched us behind the bank; and the first thing I saw, when the mud was rubbed out of my eyes, was the toll-man, with his hands on his

sides, laughing fit to kill himself, and exclaiming, when ever he could get a word out between each merry peal, "Hang it, lad, you cleared the gate better than the dyke." I returned home with "a very ancient and fish-like smell."

How beautifully situated are many of the toll-gates in the neighbourhood where this boyish adventure occurred,—overlooking, as they do, miles of meadow-land, amid which the snug farmhouses nestle, with their crofts, and orchards, and gardens, and rick-yards! And ever along the road are little bits of moving pastoral life,—a shepherd lad, driving his sheep to the next market to sell; a rosy-cheeked milk-maid, fetching up her cows, which every now and then pause to low through some gate, or bite off a tender shoot from the hedges; the farmer-man, sitting sideways on one of his horses, returning from his field-work, the whip resting upon his shoulder, and the measured music of the rattling harness joined with his own voice, as he trolls forth some rustic ditty about

> "Cherry-cheeked Patty, she lives in the vale,
> Whom I helped o'er the stile with her milking-pail;
> And she blushed, as I made her promise and vow,
> Next Sunday to meet at the Barley-mow."

Before some of these toll-houses roses are tastefully trained, and a tree or two is planted, whose boughs meet above the roof, forming a most picturesque approach from the road, and causing us to half envy the occupier of such a sweet rustic spot. Here, too, as with the old ferryman, almost everybody who passes is a neighbour, though they live four or five miles away. They greet each other by their Christian names: "It is a fine morning, John;" or "Good morning, William;"—for, saving the 'squire, the parson, the doctor, or the lawyer, "Sir" is but rarely used: should it be a very wealthy farmer, perhaps the compliment

may be returned with a "Good morning, Mr. Langley," or whatever the surname may be. They inquire after each other's health, and the welfare of one another's families, in a manner which shows that they take an interest in their neighbours; very different to the common every-day courtesy with which we see hurrying business men salute each other in a busy city.

We have often been amused by watching the efforts that stray cattle make to pass through a toll-gate; they will linger about the spot for hours, and attempt to rush by every time the gate is opened; and we have, in many instances, seen them break through the hedges, make a circle round the fields, and come out again a long way above the bar. When once they have strayed from their pastures, they seem to have a great wish to go on straight a-head, and will sometimes traverse the whole length of the county.

There are several toll-gates which stand in beautiful and picturesque situations in the neighbourhood of London, on the Surrey side; one a little beyond Dulwich, which we have alluded to in our "Summer Ramble," and another before we reach Beckenham, about a mile beyond the wild corner of Penge Common. Such places seem like company on a lonely road; we measure the distance by them, where there are no mile-stones. If thirsty, too, we can sometimes obtain a bottle of ginger-beer, an apple, or a biscuit,—the latter of which is often very trying to the teeth, as they only have them fresh once a-week, and, perhaps, even then have one or two left. In and around London we have often watched the huckster "do" the gate-keeper. One has passed through in his cart, paid, and obtained the number. "What's the figure to-day?" halloos out some well-known associate, who has no doubt often obliged the party inquired of in the same way. The answer is ob-

tained, and away he drives through the gate, repeats the number, and passes along without suspicion, and calls for a pint of porter at the first public-house, feeling no more remorse than we did about the calf.

You will often see a countryman come into the Borough with his hat surrounded with tickets, each fastened carefully between the band,—he would never keep them safe within his pockets; if he felt for his knife, to cut his bread and cheese, he would pull out half-a-dozen together, and never feel them with his hard, cold hands. We often wonder that more of those little bits of paper, given at the railway stations, are not lost than there are. We have seen a rush made at the last minute on the Croydon line, each one struggling to get a seat with the open ticket in their hand, for there was no time to put it away; and once our own went with a whiff out of the doorway, and we had to pay again at the London station. We saw an account, the other day, in the paper, of a gentleman in the Temple being locked up all night, who had lost his ticket, and was willing to pay his fare over again, but refused to pay for the whole distance from Croydon, as he had only rode from Sydenham. Threepence was the sum disputed between the parties, and for this he was made a prisoner for the night!! If Parliament gave the company such power over their passengers, the members ought to be ashamed of themselves. Why, it places the man who has a spirit to resist an imposition on a footing with a common felon! Hard lines, my masters, these, to imprison a gentleman, who will not allow himself to be imposed upon, and that, too, without summons, writ, or any of those tedious processes by which even a just debt is obtained. Surely it is time that John Bull aroused himself, shook his oaken staff, and broke a few heads somewhere or another, just to get his hand in. They know

how to behave themselves better at the old country toll-gates.

And many of these will, in time, be numbered amongst the things that once were. Fire, and smoke, and steep embankments, and dark tunnels, and miles of monotonous iron-bound road, will be all the traveller has to look upon, instead of the rustic road-side house, and quiet, dreamy villages, which he was wont to pass on the old-fashioned stage-coaches. The little toll-house with its white gate and solitary lamp, the only light seen for miles on a dark night on the lonely country road, will (save in a few places) be swept away, for the iron age has come. The long canals which our forefathers made, the beautiful high-roads on which for centuries they journeyed, the splendid rivers that flow like silver veins through the heart of England, will ere long be desolate and useless, or spanned with bridges and covered with railroads. While the works are in progress, employment is given to many hands; but what when they are finished? Shall we need as many ships as now sail from one corner of our coast to the other? as many carriers as now find a living by journeying thrice a-week to the neighbouring market-towns? Will our slow-paced canal-boats find employment at all? our catches, our keels, our river-sloops, our barges, cuckoos, long-boats, market-boats, and half a score others with old-fashioned names, which only a countryman knows the meaning of? Not they; the rail-roads will knock them all a-head, and the thousands which they now furnish with bread may go "cough" for employment. "Let the future look out for itself," seems to be the grand rule by which too many of our statesmen steer. We will enclose all the waste lands, and that will give employment to the poor for a time. And what then, gentlemen? Rail-roads finished, every acre of open land enclosed, and the

population doubling every three years, and the newly enclosed lands in the possession of the present landholders? —I see! Souse over head and ears we go, and get out of it as we best can, as the author did when he left the good old highway, and ventured over dangerous ground with the calf.

ENGLISH VILLAGERS.

"My country's happy cottages abound
No longer! Where they stood and smiled, uprear
The 'Bastile' and the Gaol upon the ground.
The Peasant-Father, sprung from sires robust,
Beholds such *Homes*, and wishes he were dust."

COOPER'S "PURGATORY OF SUICIDES."

IT is a very natural thought—and has occurred to thousands, as they have passed through some beautiful English village, and admired the thatched cottage, with its woodbine-covered porch, standing in the centre of its own little garden; or been struck with the long row of dilapi-

dated huts, that seemed to lean upon each other for support —it is a very natural thought, to wonder how the inhabitants obtain a livelihood. You see an old man working in his bit of garden-ground; that cannot support him: you behold an old woman, seated with her spinning-wheel in the open doorway; she cannot live by that. And, to draw a true picture of village life, as it really is in the present day, cannot be done without depicting much poverty, and many hardships.

Nature is ever lovely; and in no country has she been more bountiful in scattering her beauties than in our own; but the carol of the lark, the hum of the bee, and the fragrance of hawthorn hedges and flowery fields, mingled with the aroma of old woods in summer walks, along peaceful footpaths, are not found—

"Within the huts where poor men lie."

The country has not the same charm for these as it has for those who with plenty come to retire there, and to the accumulated savings, gathered by years of successful commerce in the city, bring that keen appetite for change, which is pleased with every thing that differs from what they have been accustomed to. To the peasant, the scene is just the same: he looks on the fields, and they recall years of ill-paid labour; he has toiled in them, early and late, and is not a shilling the richer than when, twenty years ago, he first became a tiller of the soil. The woods but remind him of short days and reduced wages, when he bound faggots or made hurdles, and the cold pierced to his very bones. The retired citizen is freed from such painful associations: he has been used to streets, close air, and high brick-walls; and now he feels like a liberated prisoner: he can stay within doors when the weather is unfavourable, and go ramble where he chooses when it is fine. If he

works in his garden, it is for amusement; if he walks, it is either for pleasure, or the benefit of his health; if he surveys his fields, and overlooks the poor labourers he employs, it is that he may hedge in comfort more closely, and bring all his wants within the circumference of his newly purchased domain. Bakers and butchers call at his door; the drayman delivers his barrels, the wine-merchant his cart-load of bottles; the cheesemonger and grocer are punctual in their calls: he has but to command, and all he requires is there. The labourer, in the opposite hut, shut out from his wealthy neighbour by the high iron palisade, and separated from him by the width of the road, finds it difficult to obtain "bread" for his family; and sometimes he wonders how it is. He has worked hard all his life; in the busy time of harvest he has laboured beyond his strength; his wife has done her utmost to assist him; and he has marvelled to find his home so clean, when she and the children have been out all day gleaning. Eight or nine shillings a-week in winter, and ten or twelve in summer, have been the very utmost of his earnings, saving in the few weeks of harvest, when he all but worked day and night; and he is one of those who has the very highest wages (as a labourer) in the village. His character is without a stain; his master would trust him with "unnamed treasure," if he had it; he never troubled the parish for a farthing; he could have credit any where—but he is an Englishman; he scorns to be beholden to any one, and he scorns to complain. He takes his piece of brown bread, and his bottle of milk-and-water, or small-beer, sold at fourpence the gallon, out with him in the morning in his basket; he hedges, ditches, and ploughs all day upon this, worse than felon fare; he comes home at night, and brings with him the little billet of wood, sufficient for the fire on the following day; he has his agrimony-tea, with his wife

and children, and, if in winter, it may be the luxury of a round of toast, with dripping on it, or a basin of milk, which the farmer has given them for fetching, and this is thickened with a little flour, and perhaps followed with a dessert of boiled potatoes, of which he possesses a few bushels of his own growing. His children lay their dear, innocent hands on the patched knees of his breeches; he closes his eyes, and hears them say their prayers, bids God bless them, kisses their innocent lips, and holds the youngest child while his good wife takes the others to bed. She returns, and they sit talking, whilst the wood-fire lasts, of what they shall do. Little George wants a pinafore, and Emma a frock; Nell's feet have been on the ground for days. He does not know what they are to do; they must not touch the money laid aside for rent; they cannot live on less,—agrimony-tea, milk (when his master can give it them), dripping, when they can afford it; bacon occasionally; bread they must have, and potatoes they will hardly make "last out." Can she get any weeding? no—he dare not ask, when so many are at work on the roads. She will go a bean-gleaning; though they are never ready until the frost comes, in the last bleak days of autumn. But George must have a pinafore, Emma a frock, and little Nell her old boots mended.

We pass on to another, employed by the parish to break stones on the road. He works by the piece, and in winter earns six or seven shillings a-week,—in summer, eight or nine. Out of this he has to find rent, clothes, coal, candle, and soap, and support himself, a wife, and four little children. If the farmer's labourer, with constant employment, can but just make ends "meet and tie," how does he manage, whose income is so much smaller? Look at him in winter, seated by the roadside: a little cushion, stuffed with hay, placed on the stones, is his seat; numbed and

cold, his legs are stretched out on the wet, snowy, or frozen ground, and remain in the same position for hours; his hands are blue, red, and purple, and covered with chilblains; still he works on; from morning to night you hear the click of his hammer; he has no time to feel ill, he must not "lay up" for a day, however severe his cold may be, until Sunday. Then he will endeavour to ease it, by onion porridge and water gruel. Let us examine his income, and article by article, see how far it will go, taking the average at seven and sixpence a-week. He has no garden.

	PER WEEK.			PER WEEK.	
	s.	*d.*		*s.*	*d.*
Rent	1	6	Requires for meat	2	0
Clothes for six	1	0	Tea and coffee	1	0
Bread for six	3	6	Sugar	1	0
Coal, candle, and soap	0	6	Butter and cheese	1	0
Small-beer and potatoes	0	6	More potatoes, beer, bread	1	0
Flour, lard, and milk	0	6	More clothes	1	0
Just to keep alive	7	6	Common necessaries extra	7	0

And, with an additional seven shillings, he would scarcely have the common necessaries of life; for, considering his hard labour, the meat would be barely enough for himself. Here is nothing to contribute towards a sick-club; not coal and candle sufficient to light and warm his cottage thoroughly for two days out of the seven in winter; not a penny appropriated for the casualties of illness. No wonder, poor fellow, that he is never well; that his poor, thin wife is pale as a ghost, and one or another of his children are constantly under the hands of the parish doctor, who supplies them with medicine, but nothing more. Would you feel astonished to find this man turn poacher? or to hear of his robbing a potatoe field, or stealing turnips, and bringing them home to his starving family? Could you, as a man, were you on the jury, and heard how he lived, and looked

over every item of his expenditure, find him guilty, with the same feeling as you would a common felon, who did these deeds to support himself in drunkenness and idleness? But what if he was tried only for poaching; for bringing home a hare or a rabbit to feed his hungry family!! But, alas! these crimes are not brought before juries; the magistrate, too often a friend of the game-preserver, is the only judge. Is it not a wonder, after looking at such facts as these, that we are not called upon to erect new jails, instead of new churches? And yet, what is this compared to Ireland and Scotland? We may alter the sentence, and say,—"One half of the world do not know how the other STARVE."

True, there is a dreadful remedy for this disease; witness the bone-breakers of the Andover Union. Cannibalism is but one degree beyond this; the imagination sickens over such scenes. There are moments when we can scarcely believe them true. That the new unions are prisons of the worst description no one will deny; that the men unfortunate enough to enter them are guilty of being poor, is too true: but that they should be set to hard labour, and kept in starvation, is too bad—it is, indeed, cruel. Somebody is guilty of this; who is he? or who are they? Surely there is still some justice left in England. If nobody did it, if no one is responsible, let the evil be remedied at once; let us wipe off the national stain. If the guilt rests with one or more men, let them be dragged into the light, that we may look upon their countenances, and see how unlike human creatures they are. Let us consign them to the tender mercies of all old women, turned threescore, and put a whip into their hands—

"To lash the rascals naked through the world."

Talk of the liberation of negroes from slavery, while such

scenes as these occur at our very doors! Why, it is a robbery to send a shilling out of a country in which so deadly a plague rages. And who but a hardened hypocrite would preach religion and resignation to a man ravenous with hunger, without first relieving the cravings of nature? Men famished and starving have no relish for the beauties of morality and virtue. Has it ever been put to the test? Read the retreat of the wreck of Napoleon's army from Moscow, and you will then have proof how even gentlemen by birth and title act,—who

"Feel all the vulture in their jaws."

That old woman who resides at the little cottage beside the pond, in winter gathers broken branches and decayed boughs, in the woods and lanes, and these she ties up in a bundle, of nearly a hundred-weight, which she carries on her head to the neighbouring market-town, a distance of nearly three miles, and sells for fourpence. Sometimes she makes two journeys a day, and gets a lift on the road in any waggon or cart that may chance to pass, for no one would refuse so small a favour to an old woman. You may meet her at the entrance of the wood on the bleakest day in winter, when the ground is ankle-deep in snow, and no footmark but her own has invaded that silent solitude: her heavy burden on the little roll which sits on the top of her close-fitting cap; her old-fashioned, faded, black, gipsy bonnet hanging by the strings from her arm; while her weather-stained red cloak adds to her picturesque appearance; and, with a heavy, broken branch for a walking-staff, she trudges along through all weathers—nor does she murmur at her hard lot. The ruddy tinge of health is on her rough, hard cheeks; and her face is marked with numbers of small wrinkles, invisible at a distance, and, when seen close, looking like the fine net-work of lace. Steadily does she bear her burden, swinging her body to and fro,

to keep it in even balance; for, when once placed on the roll on her head, she has no need to hold it with her hands. Habit has given her a safe motion; and her resting-places are the tallest gate-posts, where she can place the weighty billet, and mount it again on her head, without the pain of stooping. It would require the arms of a strong man to lift that bundle of wood from the ground, and place it on the round, stuffed roll, that, like a coronet, sits on the summit of her old mob-cap. Beautifully marked are some of the heavy branches she brings home, covered with various coloured mosses, and lichens of every hue; from the frosty-looking white to the deep orange and richly-hued red, which cling to the bark like icicles. Then the aroma she brings with her! that smell of wood and bark, the genuine old forest perfume, retained even while the faggots are burning; and throwing out that delicious fragrance which, on a cold morning, comes so refreshing from the chimneys of a clean English village: for next to a hay-field is the healthy smell of a real forest-wood fire.

And, oh! the brown bread, baked upon the hearth by the red embers of wood—sweetest and purest of all home-made things,—to see the dead, white-looking ashes cleared from the round tin or earthen vessel which covers the loaf; and to behold the crisp, umbered crust; and, above all, to have a good appetite, and a basin of milk, just warm from the cow, and a "hunch" of that warm loaf, is a meal never to be forgotten. You feel as if you were devouring health at every mouthful; as if you were swallowing the substance from all sweet country smells and tastes,—a mixture of dews from every sweet wild-flower—perfumes from neighbouring hay-fields—hawthorn blossoms, gathered, kneaded, and baked—honey with another flavour—cream before it had grown cold or thickened—and the smell of the cow's breath floating over all; and, when you have breakfasted,

you feel as if you should never again need a doctor, not if even you lived to reach your hundredth year.

Happy is that old woman, when, seated by her own hearth, she watches the blaze of the branches she has gathered; the red embers that fall below, the splutter and crackle of the burning boughs, as the sap comes frothing out; the fire seems to talk to her; it burns not in silence like coals; it becomes a companion; and the old woman half fancies that the faggots are glad that they have made her so warm and comfortable; they seem to expire cheerfully, as if they preferred such a glowing consumption to lying cold, and frozen, and damp, and covered with snow, and be left to rot in the cheerless, wintry woods. For years has that old woman been a "faggot gatherer." In summer she stores up a little stack of billets, at the end of her small garden, and these are purchased by her friend the baker; and, from the produce, she is enabled to pay her rent. The parish allow her one-and-sixpence a-week; her pay was taken off for a time, but they could not force her into the hated union workhouse; her spirit was not to be broken: she told the guardians, to their faces, that she would rather live on bread and water, and have freedom, than become a prisoner within their jail-like looking walls. The storms of sixty winters have not broken her spirit; she seems, like her native oaks, to have gathered strength with age: she feels not solitude, for the quiet of the woods, and the silence of the fields, have become endeared to her; and she loves to meditate on the many changes she has seen, since, thirty years ago, she followed the remains of her husband to the grave.

An old man, the very counter-part of the faggot-gatherer, lives at the north end of the village. He has numbered seventy years; yet never, during that long life, wandered further than the neighbouring market-town, saving amongst

the hills and woods, where he gathers herbs. For forty years, or more, out of the seventy, has he been a herb-gatherer. He is familiarly called the old herbalist; and, for miles round the village wives come to purchase his decoctions. He believes that the sun never shone on a more beneficial herb than wormwood; that camomile flowers will cure the severest cold; and that agrimony-tea is far before any other. The roof of his cottage is thatched over with herbs, placed in the sun to dry; while, from the ceiling of his low room, hang a hundred varieties of plants, which he believes, "by the blessing of Heaven," (a sentence he never omits) have power to cure every disease. But half their virtues, it must be borne in mind, consist in their having been gathered at fitting seasons,—under the influence of certain favourable planets, at twilight, midnight, before the sun rose, and even in the dry, burning noon of a summer's day. And at all such seasons is the old man out alone; for he knows their time of flowering, and is familiar with every nook in which they grow. His life has been passed in solitude, among silent moors and wild commons, steep windy hill-sides and pathless woods, where he but rarely sees the face of his fellow-man. On the wide heath you might sometimes see him standing motionless as a stone; or, when he stooped down to gather the plants at his feet, his old grey coat, seen from a distance, looked like some weather-beaten land-mark. Sometimes you might see him shivering in early spring, helping the osier-peelers.

His whole life is one unvaried record of poverty; he was nursed in it; and, from the cradle to the grave, he will know no change; yet he beareth the badge of endurance patiently, and looks calmly forward to the end. He has never eaten the bread of idleness, though many a time the hard crust has been moistened with tears, as they fell down his cheek upon his hand. Nature has been his only

comforter; the flowers of spring, the green leaves of the wood, and the sun and breeze of summer, have added more to his happiness than man. And what has man done for him, during the course of that long life? When he lost his wife and child, he was young, and he parted with all that was worth money, to pay their funeral expenses with, rather than trouble his brother man. When he was old and ill, man offered to remove him from his ancient home to the workhouse; to sell what few articles he had still left; and bury him, if he died. But his old age required quietness; he could not have lived amid the noise and murmurings of those walls: so man left him to die, or live, as he best could; for there was a law made, that if he could not endure the

complainings of the workhouse, he must die, for his brother man dare not help him. So women came, old, and poor, and inoffensive as himself, and stood between him and the Law, which would have killed him in a week; they broke through the Act of Parliament, which would have carried him so quickly to the grave,—and Nature soon cured him; for, with the spring, he was out again in the fields, and on the hill-sides; and, when he was wearied of wandering in the woods, he had his home to return to, his bed, his table, and chair, which would long ago have been sold to have paid for his funeral, had be been removed into the workhouse.

For what purpose was he born? what gap has he filled up in the world, during his long life? Reader! that old man is set up before us as an example of patience, endurance, and long-suffering,—one of those set up to show, that

"They also serve who wait."

All his life-long has he had to battle with poverty. What veteran ever endured such continued hardships, without murmuring? His very rags are venerable medals, won in a long warfare with privation and want. They tell of the hard campaigns he has weathered, while his placid countenance bespeaks that all is calm within. Is he forgotten by the rich? No! there are moments when his silver hairs, and his calm, resigned features rise up before them, and they feel as if they ought to touch their hats, and pay respect to him, instead of receiving such an act of undeserved honour when he passes. Behold him at church! in the centre of the free sittings,—seems he not as if pointing out the path to Heaven? Moralize, and dwell upon his life, his privation, suffering, and piety,—then go,—

"Dine with what appetite you may."

Teach him that he was doomed to endure; that want has prepared him for a better world; that happiness dwells not here below; that he will take his place amid saints and angels in heaven: lend him a tract; and, if you are bold enough, carry out the solemn mockery, and bid him still to "look above for comfort," and tell him that a few more brief years will end all his sufferings.—Then walk home, ring the bell, and order dinner; and, while sipping your choice old wine, and cutting through the well-fed capon, picture to yourself how happy that venerable man must be, enjoying his tract, brown bread, and mint tea!—Then look into your own heart, and see if you are worthy to take a place in heaven beside him? Inquire what you have done and suffered; what real sacrifice you have ever made to add to his happiness; what animal pleasure you ever deprived yourself of for his sake: how many times you visited him when ill; how often you looked into his lonely home, to see that he lacked neither fire, food, nor covering?—Alas! alas! your name was paraded in a long list; you had subscribed for the conversion of no end of "niggers;"—but the old herb-gatherer—the good old man—who stood on the very threshhold of heaven—Him, oh! to think that you should have neglected—"GO TO THE LEFT AMONGST THE GOATS."

Next comes the village postman, a character thoroughly English, and bearing no more resemblance to your London postman than the smoke-blackened tree in Cheapside does to the moss-covered oak of Sherwood forest. A "postman's knock," that *ruse* of bailiffs and writ-deliverers, and bearers of beggars' petitions and puffing circulars, is unknown to him; for, saving at gentlemen's houses, he uplifts the "sneck," or latch, and walks in, with his civil "Good day to thee! I've brought a letter, and I hope it contains good news." Nay, so accustomed is he to the

handwriting of the limited correspondence he carries, that he knows at a glance whether it is from John or Mary, or uncle William, or aunt Betsy; and feels almost as much interest in knowing how they are, as the party does to whom the letter is addressed. And what would the poor villagers do who cannot read, were it not for the postman? Oh! for the genius of Wilkie, to sketch one of those homely scenes!—to draw him seated with his spectacles on, first conning the letter to himself, whilst the cottager and his wife sit anxiously watching his countenance, as if they sought to learn the coveted tidings from the expressions it assumes. Add to the group a gossip or two in the doorway, the child snatched up from the midst of its playthings, and seated on the mother's knee, and there with difficulty kept still, and you have at once a pleasing picture of the interior of an English cottage. For thirty years has he been the bearer of sweet and sorrowful tidings: carrying to and fro records of marriage, birth, and burial, and all those changes which make up the shifting scenery of busy life. With what reluctance he delivers a letter, with a black seal and a mourning border. You may tell by his countenance when he has one of these in his "mail" —for so he calls his little leather letter-case. Nay, he has been known to bear such an ill-omened document to some near relation, rather than take it to the party to whom it was addressed. "They may break the tidings gently," the old man would say, "and bad news can never come too late." But let it be a love-letter to some farmer's handsome daughter, or buxom country lass, and see with what glee he carries it; inquires if the day is yet named, or the ring bought, and bids her remember the white riband he is to wear in his button-hole. Rumour does say that he has lost more than one lawyer's letter during his lifetime, and that "notices to quit," &c., have not always arrived in

due time at their intended destination; but the postman contends that the "poor bodies" have not always been at home when he has called: and somehow or another he never yet got into trouble through such neglect. Nor must we pass over his kindness, when, in former days, the postage of a letter, from any considerable distance, was a shilling; often has he lent the poor peasant the money to defray the postage, and sometimes taken twopence or threepence a week in repayment. "It might be of consequence, poor things," he would say, "and they have a very large family, and what is nine or ten shillings a week, when there are seven or eight mouths to fill, and at the price bread is now?" Then the puzzling addresses—the number of villages named "Burton" and "Sutton," and the Smiths and Johnsons that are scattered over England! Sometimes a letter has travelled through half-a-dozen counties, because it bore not the county's name, and has, no doubt, at last been consigned to the waste-paper bags in the Dead Letter Office. Nor must we forget the old familiar country commencement, which, for a century, has been the same in thousands of letters:—"Deer John, i sitt down toe rite these few Lions, wich hop to finde yu well, ass they leeve us Hall middeling At prezent," and so on.

So the old postman has journeyed through life, traversing over twenty miles of ground every day, rain, blow, or snow; in the cold, bleak, biting, dark days of winter, and the brown, burning noons of summer. You marvel how those thin legs have ever borne him so long, without once giving way; and yet he is one of the happiest of God's creatures, although his wages never exceeded twenty pence a day. He knows everybody around him, and is respected alike by rich and poor; from the 'Squire, at the Hall, to the poor pauper who breaks stones by the road-side, does he receive a kind nod and a friendly salute.

Nor must we pass over the village scamp—the never-do-good—who seldom stayed in his situation for a month together; has no regular means of obtaining his livelihood, but lingers about the alehouse door, and the blacksmith's shop; is ready to help the ostler, or strike the big hammer, or help anybody when he is in the humour; he is everybody's man, yet owns a master in no one; he will fetch up a bullock for the butcher, or do a few hours' gardening, or lie down and sleep in the sunshine, just as the fit takes him. He sleeps in the stable—that is, when he is not prowling about the woods at midnight; and yet no gamekeeper ever caught him poaching, nor was he ever known to steal. He has money but seldom. When he does anything, it is mostly for a pint of ale, or a piece of bacon, or a lump of bread and cheese; and yet, like a stray dog, whom no one owns, but is known to all, he manages to keep as fat and well as the heartiest cur in the village. Few sit down in the alehouse tap-room to eat or drink, without inviting him to a mouthful, and his large clasp-knife is out in a moment; and, with a "I don't mind if I do," he contrives to make himself quite at home. If the farmers roast him now and then about his idle habits, he contends that there is but sixpence a year between working and playing, and that there's a doubt in the end which gets it; yet when once enticed to it, few men can beat him at a day's work, for he has occasionally at harvest-time shown what he can do. Few excel him at training a dog, or finding a hare; and when any of the gentlemen farmers go out for a day's sport, he follows as a matter of course, although rarely invited. He has generally got a young hare or a rabbit alive somewhere in the stable, a hedgehog or a weazel, and will get a nest of young birds for any urchin who asks him; for to him half the village boys apply to know where to find the most

birds'-nests. In spring, he has got a dozen or two of young rooks to give to some old woman; and she, in return, finds a little dish that just makes a nice pie for himself. He wears the cast-off clothes of the ostler, and is content if he can get one boot and a shoe. Sometimes, in autumn, he will bestir himself to gather a few pecks of nuts in the woods, which he sells to the village carrier for half their value. If he meets the old faggot-gatherer, he helps her to make up her bundle, and thinks nothing about carrying it home for her, for he seems to take a pleasure in assisting any one but himself; and as for going a few miles for a doctor, he has done this often in the night, especially if the person taken ill was poor. Indeed, as many say, if he was in a regular situation, he "would be sadly missed." One man he never says "no" to, and that is the landlord of the village alehouse, and yet he never commands him; but says, "Jack, will you do so and so?" There is a quiet understanding between them, whether it regards a bone that is to be picked, a little malt to be ground, or weeding to be done in the garden; but Jack will take his own time over it, and that seems to be expected; although an additional "as soon as you can, my good fellow," rarely fails in having the work accomplished in less time than another would do it. And what is it Jack cannot do when his will is good? He can use saw, hammer, plane, and trowel, as if he had handled nothing else. "Ah!" say the farmers, sometimes, "there is a deal of good work lost in you." If a sheep is lost, or a horse or a cow has strayed, they may send men out everywhere; ten to one the lost cattle are driven home before night by Jack, although no one knew that he had set out in search of them. And there are many such good-natured ragamuffins in the world—no one's enemy but their own; who seem to have a dislike to calling any

man master, but love to enjoy a quiet, idle independence, troubling nobody with their wants; who never forget those who do them a good turn; and glide through life in a kind of silent fellowship, receiving all that is given them thankfully, not once murmuring at what is withheld. Such as these are sometimes found, at last, dead in a hayloft. A coroner's inquest sits on them, and brings in a verdict of "natural death"—whether through cold, starvation, or otherwise, concerns them not; the parish provides a coffin—the only expense they ever put it to—and that is, alas, too often their end!

Then comes the brawny blacksmith, with his sinewy arms and forge-grimed and swarthy features. Early in the morning you hear his ringing hammer, sounding like the measured tones of a bell; and in the deepening twilight the glow of his furnace flashes crimson across the road, and lights up the opposite hedge, while all around him flies a shower of burning stars. You hear the deep breathing of his asthmatic bellows, groaning and panting as if they gave up their breath with reluctance, or were half choked amid that fiery atmosphere. You see the light glancing on the dusky walls, on bunches of huge rusty keys and massy locks, while long rows of horse-shoes are suspended from every corner. You see the mighty hammer, which only a giant arm can lift, and beneath which the stubborn iron yields like clay; while two or three huge empty ale-pots tell how much liquor it takes to allay the thirst in his hot and hissing throat. He approaches the horse, from whose kicks and plunges the timid spectators retire, uplifts his dangerous and dreaded hoof, and plants it on his leathern apron, with no more fear than if it were the hand of a child; while his deep-throated "stand still!" to the restive steed, heaves up from his iron chest like the bass of an organ. He repairs the sword of

the yeoman and the double-barrelled gun of the sportsman; does his exercise with the one, and fires off the other as if arms were to him but playthings: and he takes off and trundles before him the wheel of the heavy waggon with as much apparent ease as a boy bowls his hoop—and what wheelwright can excel him in workmanship? By nature he is a man of peace; but woe unto the oppressor and tyrant in his presence; for he whose strong arm bendeth the stubborn iron to his will, careth but little for mortal grasp in the contest; and few are the men who can stand before the stout-hearted blacksmith. Behold him at his recreation—who like him can pitch the heavy quoit? He would laugh in your face if you proposed a less distance than twenty-one yards. No mere ell-wand measure would satisfy him, for he counts by his own huge, earth-shaking strides. Wouldst thou shake hands with him, first practice in the merciless grasp of a bear; for the clutch of his horny fist is firm as a vice, and unless thy joints are set securely in the sockets, his manly grasp will shake thee like a galvanic battery. Didst ever see him help a wayfarer up with his load, a pedlar with his pack, or a butcher with his basket? At one swing of his powerful arm, there the burthen is deposited, and he walks along whistling, and marvelling why people are so weak. Nor wouldst thou wonder at his strength, hadst thou but beheld him once at dinner; an ailing man would leap with delight if he could but devour at a meal what the blacksmith swallows at a mouthful. Potatoes go down whole, and you are afraid that the next lump of beef will choke him. No marvel that he is strong. His hard-hammering is scarcely louder than his voice when he sings; you can hear him half way up the village street. As for his workmanship, you behold it every way, for he is no sparer of iron; the very hinges to the gates look as if they

were the handiwork of a giant! He smokes his pipe and takes his "quart" every night at the public-house; for what would a glass of ale be before a man like him? He owes no man a shilling, and would tell his best customer to take his work somewhere else, if he were not satisfied; for he is one of John Bull's true children.

We have read somewhere how an English village commences. How the church brings the parson, clerk, and sexton; too many visits to the ale-house, the doctor and lawyer,—until, in time, the whole rural population lack nothing. But it often happens that the doctor finds a rich farmer who has got a daughter to dispose of, and that he can live both cheaper and better in the large farm-house than he could in the little market-town; and though his patients are few, he can fill up his time by killing partridges and pheasants, and joining the hunt in winter. As for the lawyer, whenever was a lease granted that did not admit of a dispute? If their forefathers went on smoothly for years, more fools they; they must have lost hundreds through it. If they got drunk now and then, and blacked one another's eyes, and made it up again, and were all the better friends after such a break out, as water is all the sweeter after a good shaking by the wind, it was because they knew not that a good round sum might be obtained for assault and battery. And if the law will give no redress—although farmer Jobson has for years carried his manure and brought home his harvest through farmer Giles's fields, he had no right to such a thoroughfare; and what if his hay rots, and his corn is spoiled, whilst the case is pending, the judge will decide at last, and that is some comfort. Beside, if there is nothing else to be obtained, there is the pleasure of carrying the cause from court to court. Again, the parson has been demanding too much in tithes—for it will not do to remain idle; or

he has overcharged in his fees; and what are a few pounds in law, if the shilling can be got back. The whole village is in arms; the dissenters triumph; the church is almost deserted; and all the blessings of litigation descend in showers upon the villagers. The clerk gets drunk at the wakes; the parson discharges him, but not without a trial; the clerk has friends, and they can prove that for years he has been allowed the same privilege. The parish is divided; and a few broken heads do the doctor no harm. Then comes trespass—poaching—carrying a gun—keeping a dog—rights of the common—privilege of a footpath; and out of these contentions spring the very health of our country; they are what exercise is to an over-fed man; nor would John Bull have that hale and hearty look and firm tread, which is his pride, without them. A downright Englishman cares not a straw for his right unless he has had to battle for it; but he loves a fair stand-up fight with his neighbour—a struggle for ascendancy without malice; and this feeling is carried into our great debating house, and, for aught we know, really is our great and glorious constitution, for our quarrels abroad are other matters.

The English peasantry are by nature a brave and happy race. Poverty, want of employment, low wages, and the high prices of food, have rendered them miserable and discontented; nor will they alter, until the system is altered which has thus changed them. Reduce your workhouse fare to a lower scale of starvation than it now is, and you will find it much dearer keeping a labourer and his family in the Union than if you found him employment at fair living wages, and left him to the comforts of his little cottage. If the commons and waste lands must be inclosed, let him come in for his share, by paying some trifling sum, as an acknowledgment for rent. Disgorge a few of the

many acres you have long robbed him of, lend him sufficient to bring them into cultivation, and give him time enough to pay back the loan, and three years hence there will not be half the number of paupers which are now to be found amongst our ENGLISH VILLAGERS.

SAINT SAXBY, OF SKELLINGTHORPE.

"But still his tongue ran on, the less
Of weight it bore, with greater ease;
And with its everlasting clack,
Set all men's ears upon the rack."

HUDIBRAS.

THERE was a queer, odd kind of a character, who lived in the village of Skellingthorpe; he had nothing in the world to do, except to attend to his garden, and provide for his wife, for he had neither "child nor chick," as they say in the country; so, either through a love of meddling, or a love of mischief, he busied himself with the affairs of other people. Now, a person may lend a hand in the

matters of other folks, and by doing so render them great assistance; but he was only clever in one way, and that, according to a very ancient saying, was in "helping a lame dog over a stile," which said wise adage may be rendered into plainer English by saying, that it means to "make bad worse;" and there is a great deal to be understood in this brief, three-worded sentence. A village is a fine field for a man to practise in, who loves to "set people together by the ears;" if he begins at one end, he is as safe to reach the other as a well-laid train of gunpowder is to explode the whole length of the line, when it is once fired; and abuse is sure to be conveyed safer than praise; for instead of losing, it gathers weight whilst it travels. Let slander, with its peculiar look, but whisper that such a one was seen at the bar, refreshing himself with a glass, and round the next turning it will be rumoured that he is a tippler; by the time that report reaches the middle of the street he will rarely be seen sober; and ere it has travelled the whole length, he is set down as a confirmed drunkard; and he may think himself well off, if only defrauder is thrown into the scale, without picking up some five or six other unenviable epithets, which seem to lie in wait at every corner.

Saint Saxby, of Skellingthorpe, was christened Saint, without any other addition to his surname; for his father, although he resolved that he should be called after Saint somebody or another, yet when he came to run his eye over the calendar, the great variety of names he had to pick and choose from caused him to waver in his decision; so one day, whilst he was out, his wife went to church with the godmother, and they made him Saint Saxby, at a venture, although the worthy woman would fain have added Smith, after a distant relation, had not the parson said that it would sound oddly after Saint. Whether or

not his name had anything to do with his prying propensities, we will not undertake to say; we simply record the fact, as it may be of use in some future biography.

Saint Saxby had built the house in which he dwelt; it was his own freehold: the spot of ground he selected was at the very entrance of the village, and at the point where three roads met, so that no one could either come or go without passing by his dwelling. Here, when he was not gossiping in the village, he sat watching the passengers; and we will bring him before our readers in the parlour of the Blue Lion, brimful of what he had seen after a long look-out. "Fine day, neighbour: saw Mrs. Hawksley pass to-day, with a large bundle—wonder what it was—she seemed to carry it very carefully. Bill Somers was waiting at the corner of the roads for above an hour, to-day; after no good, I dare say. Farmer Fletcher stood chatting to Nicholson's wife for above twelve minutes; it don't look well, you know. What's that down-looking fellow's name, who lives in the back lane there? saw him looking hard at Butcher Cave's sheep; hav n't forgot that he missed two or three last winter—thief! no, but he looks more like a thief than a thrasher—about work, nonsense! what, talk to a man's wife about work? not he; would have gone to Nicholson himself: I only name what I see—reports? hate reports! Wonder whose cart it was that went by in the night; good deal like Ashelin's, got up to look, fancied they were either lambs or calves; it seems very strange, and at night, too. Don't wish to alarm anybody, but saw marks on Snell's shutters as I passed; looked as if some housebreaker had been trying to get in—bolt? stuff! done with a lever; heard a noise, no doubt, and got off—mine? often; cased with iron, not a week passes but what they try mine. And who do you think Beckles is, after all? only heard the other day; why, his father was

a tinker, and his mother kept a mangle before she was married!—fact? had it from one who knew them both well—independent! hum! ask him how many years it is ago since he was fined for short weights—old ones he never used; indeed! had shoved them under the counter amongst the rubbish, to hide them, to be sure!—often mentions it? I dare say, because he knows it's the truth. Went away in his tailor's debt—overcharge was it?—imposition, eh? all very fine talking—why didn't he? because he didn't like going to law—only five shillings? well! it might have been five pounds!—stuff, about not ordering a velvet collar; no doubt he did!—have me before the magistrate again! what for?—know my authority! trust me for that! —dislike to him? not at all, only tell the truth!—report? no, very different when they know all about it—meddling? can't a man talk but what it must be called meddling?"

Now, our readers may imagine how the Saint's house would be besieged on the following day, by those who came to know if he had said so, and what he meant by it —bringing also with them, as a return, a good share of unmistakable abuse, culled, at random, from substantial, old-fashioned stores, and made so plain, that you could see it. The Saint either laid "perdu," or got out of the way; and Mrs. Saxby, although she admitted all to be true—for long custom had taught her that it was useless to doubt; so, like a wise woman, she "blessed their hearts," and consoled them with the assurance that "he had no harm in him—that he talked for talking's sake—had no meaning in what he said—that if they took notice of him, they might do nothing else—that, for her part, what he said went in at one ear and out at the other—it was a way he had, and words broke no bones—that nobody who knew him believed him, and, as to strangers, what did it matter? and this was the greatest comfort after all." So he went

on battering, defacing, and taking away character, which she endeavoured to repair and replace, by these and such-like comfortable assertions.

As to abusing him, that had been tried, and failed; threats succeeded no better, and he had thrice wriggled out of the hands of the law, uninjured either in person or purse. He was a man intended by Nature to be constantly disguised, and placed at the head of a sharp detective force —that is, if it is not unnatural to place one man over another as a constant spy, and to watch his every action, as is the case in an over-good government. But alas! he was not destined to head these hidden honours; for which he might have been canonised as the first Saint Sly on record.

What was there he did not know? If he was not certain as to what persons had been, he gave to them

"A local habitation and a name;"

if he knew not where they were going, he set down in his own mind where they would go; if he doubted what they were doing, he imagined what they would, ought, or might do; and, as to the future, why there could not be much harm in prophesying and guessing at that:—a man might either shoot somebody and die on the gallows, or obtain the star and garter; he might be imprisoned for picking a pocket, or be by chance promoted to the peerage. Saint Saxby only said what he thought; and all Skellingthorpe could not tell what the future might produce. If he had not "picked a hole in every man's coat" in the parish, he had tried; so it was no fault of his. He had followed a load of corn, in the night, for a mile or two—been horse-whipped by the waggoner, who was conveying it to the neighbouring market, and had slept amid the smartings he

merited:—followed some butcher, a night or two after, to see which road he went with his sheep—had been left to scramble out of the deep ditch as he best could:—and, nothing daunted, dodged some honest gardener with his load, for which he was rewarded with the loss of his coat-skirts, and had a narrow escape from being worried by the dog. And when his neighbours laughed at him for his pains, he consoled himself with the thought that they were ungrateful, and declared that he had no other motive than to prevent their being robbed.

As for his own garden, he could keep nothing in it—they even stole the fence, when there was no more to steal: they thought it but fair, that he who robbed so many of their characters, should be plundered in return; and as he had no character worth taking away, they seized whatever they could lay their hands upon, and often destroyed it merely for the love of the mischief. If they were found out, "they had no meaning in it;" and so they turned the tables upon Mrs. Saxby and the Saint, "blessing their hearts!" and doing the same again. But this was poor retaliation: if he set a man-trap, it was sure to be carried off; and when he sat up all night in his summer-house to watch his early peas, they contrived to steal his gun, which he reared ready charged beside him, although he swore, by all the saints his father had ever read about, that "he never slept a wink." They stole his cucumbers, and placed red-herrings under the frames; then gave it out that he had grown them. His gooseberry-trees they carried away whole; and if every one in the village was not a thief, he could find in each garden a bush that resembled his own, the next day; and, when disposed to be very ironical, he would say, "Of course they came there by themselves; had he been up, he no doubt should have seen them run away!" Oh! his sarcasms were very bitter! so much so,

that the whole village rung with laughter; for no one, saving the parson, was sorry for him. There were those who thought that the Saint, as he was always called, had no dislike to be plundered now and then, as it furnished him with a subject to complain about, giving him a right to suspect everybody; and if he was too hard upon names and persons, and they did sometimes threaten to punish him, why he never could be far wrong, when he declared, if it was not them, it must be somebody else. As sure as his garden was robbed over-night, so certain was he of meeting a large company in the parlour of the Blue Lion: joiner, blacksmith, wheelwright, butcher, tailor, and shoemaker, with a good sprinkling of farmers, were ever ready to sympathise with the Saint; for, like Falstaff, he was sure to make "eleven men in buckram" out of the two he started with. Nay, sometimes his imagination went so far as to recount how he struggled with them—which way they ran. And more than once have they before his face confessed themselves the robbers, and convinced him by pulling out the whole produce of the plunder from a single pocket; for they well knew that no magistrate in the county would grant him a summons. He lied and slandered, and they stole and destroyed, consoling him afterwards, by telling him, that there "was six in one, and half-a-dozen in the other."

The villagers soon found that they might as well try to seize upon a shadow as to get any substantial hold upon Saint Saxby for what he said; so they began by playing off tricks upon him. They persuaded him to buy a new patent spring man-trap, telling him that those he had tried before were of no use. He took their advice,—purchased one; had it paraded round the village, on the shoulders of two men, while the bellman went before them with a written paper, according to ancient custom; and after summoning

them, by ringing his bell, read aloud when and where it would be set, and cautioning all evil-doers to be aware of trespassing on Saint Saxby's garden. A formidable instrument was that man-trap, as it was borne about, ready set, with its wide, expanded jaws of jagged teeth, ten times longer, and in every way as sharp, as the teeth in a joiner's saw; and every now and then it was put on the ground, and on the floor of the trap was planted the end of a stout pole, so placed as a man might be supposed to tread upon it when it lay concealed; when off it went with a whiz and a click, as if a Titan was using a pair of proportionable snuffers; and there stood the pole, beaten deep in at the sides by these formidable steel tusks, making the beholders shudder, while they fancied for a moment that they had one leg locked up in the same secure and unenviable situation. That very night two or three of the Saint's old cronies came from the Blue Lion parlour, to assist him in setting it, and the old backbiter chuckled again with delight, as he thought that he should at last catch a real thief—and he did catch one long before the sun rose. He even made Mrs. Saxby get up in the night to have a look at the veritable thief which he had caught. There could be no mistake about the matter this time; there stood the man with his hat on, and his arm resting on the choice apple tree for support, beneath which the man-trap had been placed. And now arose the question, what should he do with him? Mrs. Saxby pleaded for his liberation at once; but this, he said, would be a dangerous experiment, as he fancied he saw something like a pistol in the captured man's hand. After a long consultation, it was at last decided that he should steal out gently, and call up the village constable to his assistance. Now, he had so often called up the constable to no purpose, that, like the boy with the wolf, in the fable, who, when he really did require help, called

aloud for it in vain; so did the worthy functionary slam down the window, bidding him, in no very measured tones, "go to the devil!" and telling him that if he had caught the man, he had already had punishment enough, and the best thing that he could do was to let him off, and make room for a new-comer, while, for his part, he should not budge a step, for everybody knew he was such a liar there was no believing him. The Saint soon found that he could obtain no help there; so he proceeded to knock up the joiner and the butcher, and they, nothing loth, accompanied him. "Be careful," said the Saint, when they had reached the garden gate, "It's old Dicky Lion, from Crowgarth. I know him well—a desperate fellow—never without fire-arms—he's paid me many a visit before to-night. You and I had better go up first gently, butcher, and each seize an arm apiece. You see his back is towards us, and there's no fear of his running away."

"Not a bit," answered the joiner, nudging the butcher with his elbow as he spoke. "I'll bet a guinea he hasn't a word to say for himself. We'll have him shown up and down the village street to-morrow. Shall we, Saint?"

"That we will," replied Saint Saxby, eagerly, "and the bellman shall go before him, if his leg is well enough to walk; they'll believe I'm robbed when they see the real thief:—won't they?"

"They will, indeed," rejoined the butcher; "we shall have a merry day to-morrow. Hist! let us move on gently."

And gently enough they did move; more like thieves than capturers; when the Saint, making a grab at the prisoner's arm, exclaimed, "We have you at last, and no mistake!"

"Why, how the dickens is this?" roared out the butcher, bursting with laughter; "its only Farmer Fletcher's scare-crow, after all! Well, this *is* something

to talk about—to think of a scare-crow, which is only made of straw and rags, with an old coat and hat on, leaving a corn-field, and coming to rob a garden! Hang it, neighbour Saxby! they'll set thee down for a greater liar than ever: and Farmer Fletcher, who has no love for thee, will be having thee taken up for a thief, for stealing his scare-crow."

The joiner could not speak for laughing; he placed his hand on his side; he was compelled to lean on the apple-tree for support; there was no boundary to his merriment; he fairly crowed again, and was only stopped by a violent fit of coughing. As for the Saint, he swore beautifully; there was scarcely a curse in the calendar that his canonised predecessors had invented, which he did not "rap out;" and such was the comfort administered to him by the butcher and the joiner, that he threatened to shoot them if they did not make off. He even went so far as to declare that he believed they and nobody else had placed the scare-crow in the man-trap, that they might make a fool of him. To which the butcher retorted, that he was one already made; and so they went on abusing one another until each party was out of hearing, the joiner and his friend, however, bearing off the scare-crow between them.

Hogarth might have sketched what is beyond the power of our pen to describe, for never was there a merrier day in the village of Skellingthorpe than that on which the Saint's prisoner was paraded about. Every rustic wag had his joke, and it would fill pages to record all the good things they said. As for the Saint, he was so enraged that he run up a high brick wall beside his garden, and surmounted it with a battlement of broken glass bottles; and in time he reaped a rich crop of dead cats and dogs, rags, old shoes, broken pots, stones, bricks, and every kind of rubbish which it was possible to throw over the wall into his garden. He would have emigrated to America, but he was afraid of

sea-sickness, so he contented himself by abusing people worse than ever.

Many a merry tale was told of the struggles for supremacy which took place between Saint Saxby and his wife, when they were first married, and how he at last contrived to carry the day. If, thought Mrs. Saxby—who, taking her altogether, was a good, worthy woman—if, thought she, "a soft answer turneth away wrath," not to reply at all will be sure to put a speedier end to his anger; so, like a peaceful person, she adopted the "silent system," and practice soon enabled her to keep it up occasionally for a day or two. This did not suit Saint Saxby, but what could he do? "You may drag a horse to the water," said he, "but all the abuse in the world will not make him drink unless he feels disposed. And so it is with my wife. I may argue from sunrise to sunset, and yet obtain no answer; not that she always keeps silent during these 'tantrums,' for sometimes when I am angry she begins to sing, then she talks to the bird or the cat; and I can tell you, neighbour, her songs have at times a good deal of point in them, and are very provoking; for instance, now, what can be more aggravating than such lines as these?—

'There was an old man in a rage,
Who went storming about the house,
Till you wished him shut up in a cage,
Or in a dark hole, like a mouse.
He storms and he swears,
Because nobody cares,
Nobody cares!'

And she will over with the last two lines for half-a-dozen times together," continued he. But for these two days she has never spoken a word to me, either good or bad."

"I'll tell thee how to cure her, if thou'lt stan' a pot o' yeal," said the landlord of the Blue Lion.

"I'll pay for half a gallon, if I succeed," answered Saint Saxby, eagerly,

He whispered something in the Saint's ear, which caused the old slanderer to chuckle again, as he exclaimed, "I'll set about it at once; there could not be a better day for it, —it's Saturday, and all will be as clean as a new pin."

In little more than half an hour Saint Saxby returned, shouting out, "Bring in the ale! I've found her tongue! I've found her tongue!"

"Where? where?" eagerly inquired half-a-dozen voices all together.

"In the coal cupboard," answered the Saint. "She had just finished cleaning the house, and was about to sit down to her needlework, when I went to the cupboard, as if to look for something, and pretending not to find it, I took up the shovel, and began to turn out the coals into the middle of the clean floor. "What are you looking for, Saint," said she. "I've found it," answered I; "I was looking for your tongue;—and I did find it to some purpose," continued Saint Saxby; "and glad enough was I to get out of the way, and lose the sound of it again, for it went like a water-mill."

After that day the Saint tried many a time to stop Mrs. Saxby's tongue, but he never succeeded; and when the landlord of the Blue Lion was consulted, he shook his head, and said, "Nay, nay, that's past my curing. I told thee how to set her a-going, but she's not so soon stopped as a clock, for she'll 'tick' on in spite of thee."

But the most important event in Saint Saxby's life was witnessing with his own eyes the perpetration of a dreadful murder. It was late on a starlight winter's night when he saw two men turn down a narrow, solitary lane, the end of which came out at some distance into the open high road. The Saint knew, by their very manner, that they medi-

tated some terrible deed; so, plucking up a heart, which, at the best of times was none of the bravest, he stole across the fields, and, skulking along under the shadow of the hedges, he was enabled to keep pace with them without being perceived, until they reached the end of the lane nearest the high road, when, to his great horror, the Saint heard one of the men say, "We had better dig his grave first, here in the ditch, it will be a long while before it is discovered. He will not be here yet this half hour." The Saint's knees trembled beneath him, and he sank down behind the hedge unable to move, covered from head to foot with a cold, damp perspiration.

"I think about six feet will do for him," said one of the men; and they proceeded to dig in turns; when one was weary, the other took up the spade. He heard it crunch through the gravel, and cut through the damp, heavy clay, and his heart sank within him at every stroke, as he thought how soon that cold bed would contain the remains of a murdered man! He recalled many of his own sins, regretted the number of lies he had told, the many fair names he had slandered; and the old rascal tried to pray, but could not; for he was afraid lest one of the intended murderers should jump over some gap in the hedge, and bury him deep in the grave they were then digging; so he resolved he would pray when he got home, and never for the remainder of his life speak ill of any one, if he could help it. Then his heart misgave him, and he attempted to get up and run away, but had not the power.

By this time the moon had arisen, and he was enabled to distinguish, through an opening in the leafless hedge, the countenances of the men who meditated murder. Horror of horrors! there could be no mistaking them; for they were his own neighbours,—the very butcher and joiner who had before figured in the scene of the man-trap! And as

he beheld them, all thoughts of prayer vanished, for he said to himself, "Ye villains! I shall see ye both hanged! I knew it would come home by ye, for the trick ye played me about the scare-crow. Thank heaven! you're going to commit murder at last! and a great blessing and a comfort it'll be to me to appear as a witness against ye! They will not laugh at me this time. Oh dear! I hear a step approaching—how very shocking! I should die if I were to see them do it!" and he threw himself flat, his whole length beneath the hedge, with his face to the ground, for the footsteps drew nearer and nearer. Then he heard heavy blows struck, as if upon a soft, dead substance—a groan or two, and all was over, for the spade was soon again at its busy work; and by such time as the grave was completed, he had reached his own home in safety. He had never run so fast but once in his life, and that was when the old women in the village of Skellingthorpe pelted him with rotten eggs. He jumped into bed without undressing, covered himself head and ears with the blankets; it was only by bits that Mrs. Saxby was enabled to draw from him an account of what he had witnessed. Towards morning he slept, and soon after daylight he arose, feeling himself the most important personage that had ever set foot in the village street of Skellingthorpe. He begun at the beginning, by causing the butcher and joiner to be first apprehended; and a willing guard was placed over them in the parlour of the Blue Lion. Sudden transition! They were prisoners in the very spot where they had held so many merry-makings; and even their own cronies stood sentry over them—one mounting guard with the tongs, another with the poker, a third with the fire-shovel, a fourth with the long broom. The culprits hung down their heads with a guilty look; they called for a quart of ale in a feeble voice, drank it up, and had another—filled

their pipes and smoked as if nothing had happened; and every now and then the hardened wretches burst out into a loud fit of laughter, which was re-echoed by their jailors, and which appeared very shocking to those who occasionally stopped to peep in at the window; and many an unbeliever jogged merrily along to see the grave opened; and when they told Saint Saxby, that they should n't wonder if it turned out to be another scare-crow, he drew himself to his full height, and said with dignity: "Remember, fools, that the lives of two of our fellow-creatures will speedily be forfeited to the laws of the country, which they have outraged, and that these two men have long been our neighbours!" and he strode proudly along, and led the way to the spot where the murder was committed.

There was scarcely a grave countenance seen in the group which had collected at the end of the lane, and even the magistrate, who had been summoned at the earnest request of the constable, was so uncharitable as to say, that "he didn't think the Saint had courage enough to commit a murder himself; but if some poor fellow had been found dead by the road-side, he shouldn't at all wonder if Saint Saxby had buried him there, that he might obtain some credit for the discovery;" whereat the Saint folded his arms, and said, "Sir, we shall soon see." Meantime two labourers were busily employed in uncovering the grave. Nor were they long before they discovered the body, it was tied up in a coarse sack, and instead of requiring the aid of the six men who had jumped into the ditch to render assistance, one of the labourers laid hold of the end of the sack, and with his single arm threw it on the bank. Through the various holes from which the contents protruded, it was clear to all as the sun at noon-day, that they had disinterred a Bag of Shavings! Fifty hands in an instant were

occupied in rifling the sack; and before the Saint had either time to speak or escape, he was first rolled in the mud, and then amongst the shavings, which stuck to him as if they were glued on, and as he run off they streamed out like ribbons. He looked as if a pile of shavings had been stripped of their covering, yet by some combined agency still kept together, and were running away. The children ran after him and hooted. Every cur in the village was out barking; and he was met by the horrid murderers themselves and their jailors, at the end of the lane, who joined in the loud whoop and halloo.

This was worse than the affair of the man-trap; he could not endure it; he tried to stop up his ears with his fingers, but all was in vain. The butcher was on one side of him, the joiner on the other, each with their interrogations:—"Were they to be gibbeted on the spot? Would he not come to see them executed?" Never before did saint swear like Saint Saxby; all the curses in "Tristram Shandy" were but jokes compared to what he launched out. He offered to fight, they laughed louder; he talked about the law, and they roared outright; he took up stones, and they retaliated with mud; they tantalised him with the great reward he would receive for his discovery, the promotion he would be sure to obtain. He showed his teeth, as if he fain would have bit his tormentors; and right thankful was he to reach home with sound bones.

Never before had such shouting and huzzaing, mingled with peals of loud laughter, rung through the ancient village of Skellingthorpe. It seemed, as the landlord of the Blue Lion said, "as if the devil hissen had brocken louse." Even Mrs. Saxby, who had been peace-maker a thousand times, was compelled to keep within doors; and, worst of all, papers were printed, and cried about the neighbourhood, containing the "Wonderful Discovery and Full Parti-

culars of the late Horrid Murder, Committed on the Body of a Sack of Shavings, with a Copy of Verses, written by Saint Saxby, of Skellingthorpe;" many a random shot of rustic wit was showered around on this occasion.

After that day Saint Saxby was never again seen in the village; his wife, who was much respected, stayed behind, and disposed of their little freehold to Farmer Fletcher; but in what quarter of the world they afterwards resided, we have not been able hitherto to collect any information that may be depended upon. Rumour does say that he assisted in the management of a small country paper; and that the publisher was served with three notices of trial for libels within a month, which is not at all unlikely if the Saint was once intrusted to pen a paragraph. Still there is not half the fun going on in Skellingthorpe, which there was in Saint Saxby's days; his very abuse served to amuse many, and the discoveries which he was ever making were generally fraught with matter of merriment; and though a few, who merited the abuse he was wont to shower upon them, were almost ready to dance with joy, yet there were others who sorely missed Saint Saxby in Skellingthorpe.

TWENTY-NINTH OF MAY.

"Wash, dress, be brief in praying,
Few beads are best, when once we go a-Maying.
Come, my Corinna! come; and coming, mark,
How each field turns a street,—each street a park,
Made green and trimmed with trees: see how
Devotion gives each a house a bough."

HERRICK.

WHEN the Puritans preached against long love-locks and May-poles as a sin, and the old-fashioned May games were, in a great measure, put down by law, and Oliver Cromwell had it all his own way, and the roystering Royalists were compelled to be as mute as mice, a great change was wrought in the ancient merry-makings and picturesque

festivals, which time-out-of-mind had been celebrated in rural England. Nor was it until after the Restoration that the country began to assume its old cheerful look; though, Heaven knows! it had not much occasion, for what good Charles the Second ever did for his subjects; a merry monarch he might be, but it was far from being a merry England over which he reigned. It was at this time no doubt that a new holiday commenced, when the Twenty-ninth of May, or "Oak-apple Day," was, in some measure, instituted for the ancient May-day: partly to commemorate the Restoration, and also to recall the king's escape from Noll's iron sides, when he hid himself in an oak: for which brave act he is still immortalised on many an ale-house sign, where sometimes he is made to peep out like an owl from an ivy-tod. In my own native town, in Lincolnshire, some years ago, the Twenty-ninth of May was a great holiday, at least amongst us boys; and it was a custom with us to go to the neighbouring woods—often before it was daylight—and fetch home large branches of oak and hawthorn, with which the streets were decorated. Many of the boughs we brought home were of an enormous size,—so large that it took the whole strength of five or six of us to drag one of them along with a rope, which process of removal gave any thing but an additional beauty to the foliage. Dreadful was the havoc we made amongst the oaks, for we were not particular about bringing away a young tree whole, provided it was plentifully covered with leaves. This was very wrong; for the woods were then free and open to us, and we wandered where we chose; and even if a keeper appeared, he rarely did more than warn us not to injure the young trees. Many a bow have we sawn off or chopped down, which we were afterwards unable to remove on account of its great weight, as the old faggot-gatherer said, it was always good "gleaning" after Oak-apple Day."

What a grave satire was our game of hiding in the oak when we reached the wood!—The representative of a king pelted with oak-apples and rotten sticks until he came down,—for such was the rule of the game, when once the monarch's hiding-place was discovered; and sometimes the modern Charles, if he were big enough, would punish the little Cromwell (who had been too fortunate in his aim) when he alighted, and with divers punches show that he could play well his kingly part. Nor did our court lack its accompaniment of beauties: romping, red-cheeked, mischief-loving girls, who cared no more about tearing their frocks than we did our jackets; for their mothers before them had gone out in the early morning a-Maying, and why should not they? We decorated their bonnets with oak-leaves, and wreathed our own hats with as much care as an ancient Druid would have done his own brows. We had our music, too—bullocks' horns, with the tips cut off, through which we blew until we were black in the face. A score of bulls could not have outroared us with their bellowing. Many a curse did we get, no doubt, from some crusty-tempered old fellow whom we awoke out of a sound sleep, as we passed along the streets; while the kinder-hearted would sigh, and recall the days when they also went a-Maying.

To me there seems, even now, something beautiful and poetical in this old custom—a last link left in the golden chain of sweet associations—the memory of age looking down the dim vista of years, and with a fond, though dim eye, attempting to pick out some half-distinguished object which revives the recollections of departed youth. The grey dawn of morning—the untrodden dew that hung heavy upon the grass—the silence of the fields—the old wood, with all its giant trees hushed in sleep—the first singing of the birds as they awoke—and the slow rising of the glorious sun—all seem to heave up like a grand picture

fresh from the hand of Nature, and presenting such features as we never again see. Was it a love of the beautiful which drew us forth so early, while scores of our companions remained behind asleep; or is there not something lovable about these old customs, breathing, as it were, sweet airs from the green still world, and tinged with a quiet pastoral look, recalling images of poetry—scenes which still live in Chaucer, and Spenser, and Herrick—telling us that the dim woods were the places chosen by our ancestors for their merry-makings; that the queen of beauty in those days had a flowery bank for her throne, the music of birds and the murmuring of waters for her concert, while liberty roamed everywhere unfettered? To bring back the green of old forests into the streets of a town; to toil, and moil, and chop, and saw, and then drag the heavy branches home, that we might place them over our doors and windows; to look at them with pride, and feel that it was no common day; to wander here and there in groups, and envy the possessor of the largest bough, was surely to evince a devotion becoming the spirit of ancient Britons, to say the least of it. And oh! poor Antiquity! how grotesque is thy appearance when placed side by side with Truth, to proclaim that our rude forefathers, who battled foot to foot with the refined Romans, were worshippers of oak-trees! Did a party of youthful Britons never invade the sanctity of the ancient groves, and meet with a grave rebuke from some bearded Druid? Great wielders of the golden pruning-hooks! (not one of which has ever yet been discovered) we know not what power your gloomy rites had over the youthful mind in those days; but in our own there was no grove too sacred for us to enter, no oak too holy for our axe, no branch too heavy to honour King Charles of merry memory.

A beautiful look did it give to the streets of that quiet

little country town, with its quaint, gable-ended, ancient houses. It was a pretty sight to look up and down, and watch the long line of oak-boughs as they projected from every building on each side of the way, until they seemed to touch, and close, in the diminishing perspective. Here and there, too, some flag was hung out from a neighbouring ale-house, the red folds forming a pleasing contrast amid the refreshing green of the branches which met the eye every way; and some old-fashioned lover of royalty would place a crowned doll in the middle of a bough, to represent King Charles in the Royal Oak, and there the band of boys was sure to assemble, and blow as lustily on their discordant cows' horns as ever a paid trumpeter did at the real Restoration. Whenever a few oak-apples were found on the branches, they were generally covered with yellow tinsel, to make them look like gold; and many a young urchin, as he blew his horn with puffed-out cheeks, looked up enviously, believing that they were indeed gold; and where a bough hung within reach, the coveted treasure would sometimes be purloined, and, like many another glittering deception, fall far short of gratifying the unlawful possessor. And yet many a courtier doubtless fared no better, who strained his neck with huzzaing on the Twenty-ninth of May nearly two hundred years ago, who found the golden prize he had so long coveted a gilded deceit, empty, and hollow, and valueless; for in those days there were high offices, which the possessor found only like "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal:" even great officers of state had to apologise to their butchers and bakers, that majesty had exhausted its treasury, either in a masque at Whitehall or promoting some pretty orange-girl to a title. Many a witty jest would Rochester have made, could he but have foreseen that the anniversary of the Restoration would at last be celebrated by the sounding of horns.

This year, 1846, the annual holiday kept by the House of Commons, in memory of the martyrdom of Charles the First, was not asked for as usual in Parliament; and the 30th of January was suffered to pass over without a sign or a sigh to mark that cruel butchery, which for just two hundred years has added a martyr to the calendar. Assuredly this is a huge slice out of the crust which hedges in "the divinity of kings." Well may old thrones totter, and ancient sceptres every day look more "shaky," if such neglect as this is to be tolerated; yet it has been done, and

——————— "though an evil sign—
No owl shrieked,
No night-crow cried, aboding luckless time;
Dogs howled not; no hideous tempest shook down trees;
No raven rooked her on the chimney's top;
No chattering pies in dismal discord sung."

SHAKSPERE.

This is a great and silent stride towards something—a tacit admission, that kings are but mortal, and, like many other mortals, who have nothing mighty to mark their memories, may be, without much harm, unworshipped and forgotten. No marvel if old customs fall to the ground, whilst such an example is set by an English legislature—one headed, too, by the last survivors of a stubborn, hard, Tory race. That dukes and rulers, who were in former days the makers and hurlers down of monarchs, should at last become the butt at which Wit empties his quiver, showing no more regard for a coronet than he would for a cabbage, are signs of awful times, neighbour—awful times! What would become of this country were the foolish part of its nobility to emigrate? Alas! alas! it would be left to a government of mind, an aristocracy of uncurried intellect only!

And we, who have worn oak-leaves in our hats, and

dragged home huge, heavy branches to commemorate the Restoration of Charles the Second—who have aided and abetted in the burning of many a "Guy," and the decapitation of many a stuffed "Pope,"—we have lived to see men bold enough to propose the erection of a statue of Cromwell in the new House of Parliament. To this have we come at last. After robbing woods in the night to show our loyalty, blowing till we were black in the face, shouting, and huzzaing, and throwing up our hats, to the great damagement of their crowns—after believing for years, without even a shadow of a doubt, that every castle we saw in ruins, and every church which stood unroofed, unhabitable, and drearisome, were all the handiwork of that arch traitor, Oliver Cromwell,—after all, it has come to this at last,—the memory of Charles the Martyr is "burked" by the very House of Commons who are about to erect a statue to the man who was chiefly instrumental in his being beheaded.

Oh, Memory! 'tis of but little use thou and I journeying back to these green, dreamy, secluded haunts; the light of truth, reflected from the pages of history, falls upon these dear old customs, and, in spite of all our love for them, shows that they are truly ridiculous! Sorry are we, grave old oaks! that ever we rent a leafy honour from your aged heads to commemorate so silly a ceremony! Ancient home of the grim old Druids! we were innocent invaders of your sanctity,—we knew not what we did!

What, then, were we guilty of? Let us look back through this night of years. Alas! the image of the Merry Monarch overshadows it not: traitors that we are! his memory is not even there. We but went out to do "observance to May;" to bring her home "with much green" and a sound of merriment: it was, after all, to the month of flowers we paid homage. The representative of majesty

we did not kneel down and worship, even when he sat enthroned in the royal oak; for it had been the custom of our forefathers "to pelt and hoot him;" unmannerly dogs that they were, they valued not his royalty a rush. And yet there is a poetry about his perils, a something to linger and sigh over, even in the cold, uncharitable pages of history; and while we censure the man, we seem to have a wish to love him. Poor historians should we make after all; our love of leaning towards human frailty would often cause us to show justice a cold shoulder.

What a doing and undoing does this short sketch present! Ten years ago it would have been a picture overhung with green and garlands, teeming with flowers and steeped in sunshine. Poetry without reflection, sentiment without thought, life such as we see on a stage, where the actors move, and cross, and smile, and bow to each other, but have no other share in the stirring events of the drama; they come and go, and so end a pretty scene. Neither Charles nor Cromwell would have appeared in our part had we written it then. Whence comes this change? Is the day at hand when the name of the Royal Martyr will be blotted out of our Litany, and that, too, by the consent of good and pious men? When Cromwell, instead of being considered a kingly scourge, will be hailed as the great benefactor of his country, and looked upon as one of the mightiest minds that ruled the age in which he lived? That day we believe is not far off, neither is that change very remote. The light which two centuries have clouded is about to break forth, and reveal all the progressions and improvements which science has made during this long night of silent labour; and the old mind, which during this long period has seemed to sleep, is up and looking out upon the new field which time has prepared for action. The fossil bones of freedom have become hard as iron during

their long slumber, and now clothed with a new body and a new life, they bid defiance to the old battering rams of bigotry, become stronger through the very blows which are rained down upon them, and shrink not, as of yore, at the touch of ancient superstition. What England has been we know; what it will be "hath not yet entered into the heart of man to conceive."

And at the foot of those very hills, more than two hundred years ago, the first bold blow was struck, which proclaimed that those who struggled for liberty were no respecters of persons. Those ancient woods had reverberated to the sound of Cromwell's musketry, and the thunder of a thousand hoofs had shaken their summits, as he drove before him the cavalry of the routed Royalists. The ringing of pistol-shots and the clanging of sabres had, two centuries ago, startled the echoes of those solitudes; and where the unwooded, bald brow of those ancient hills spread, there lay the traces of many a goodly ruin, old and almost forgotten, when the quietude was disturbed by Cromwell's cavalry,—for the devastating hand of Henry the Eighth had been there in advance of him, and the long grey grass had even then overgrown the crumbling foundations of the monastery. Cromwell had by this time obtained the rank of colonel; and it was here, where we dragged down our green offerings to celebrate May, that he met in arms General Cavendish, son of the haughty Earl of Devonshire, when, to quote from Cromwell's own unadorned description of the battle, "we came up horse to horse, where we disputed it with our swords and pistols a pretty time, all keeping close order, so that one could not break the other; at last they a little shrinking, our men perceived it, pressed in upon them, and immediately routed *this* whole body, some flying on one side and others on the other, of the enemy's reserve, and our men pursuing them"——

Cromwell did not join in this victorious pursuit, but hung back with three troops of horse of his own regiment, ready to attack the reserve, which was still unbroken, and headed by General Cavendish. Four troops of the Lincolners which had also kept aloof from the chase, were now drawn up in the front of the General's regiment; these Cavendish attacked and dispersed. He had no sooner done so, than Cromwell, whose three troops of horse were stationed deeper among the hills, charged the Royalists in the rear, which, says Cromwell, "did so astonish him, that he did give over the chase, and would fain have delivered himself from me, but I, pressing on, forced them down the hill, having *good execution* of them, and below the hill drove the General, with some of his soldiers, into a quagmire, where my captain-lieutenant slew him with a thrust under his short ribs. The rest of the body was wholly routed, not one man staying upon the place."

Here, then, fell one of England's old aristocracy; though not by Cromwell's own hand, yet under his very eye and by his own command. "If I met the king in battle," said Cromwell, "I would fire my pistol at him as at another." Proof here that he had lost all respect for the already doomed Charles, and with it the "divinity that hedges in kings" was scattered to the wind. The magic circle was overleaped. He had gained the mysterious centre of that halo, looked around, and instead of the blinding light which had so long been fabled to strike the beholder dead, he saw but the common haze of an old mortality. He had seen his lieutenant drive into a bog and thrust under his short rib the son of the Earl of Devonshire, and felt no more remorse than if he had been the son of a cheesemonger.

That spot where Cavendish's cavalry foundered, and

where the Royalist General was slain, is called Cavendish Bog "unto this day." It is at the end of Humble-Car Lane, beyond the wild spot haunted by the legend of "The Grey Old Ash Tree" and its unearthly raven, and abutting on the edge of those wild marshes, through the centre of which the river Trent flows, and forms the boundary line of the two counties. Here, mile upon mile, opens a vast space of hedgeless, treeless, and unenclosed country; much of it, doubtless, two or three centuries ago, one vast morass; its only passable road winding along at the foot of the hills, and stretching away to the ancient village of Torksey, to where its old baronial towers, now crumbling and in ruins, are still reflected in the beautiful river; though changed and altered, and grey and weather-beaten, sad, silent, and desolate, still the ruin throws its melancholy image into the mirror of the river, true as when its ripple reflected back the crimson and overhanging banner in the past days of haughty prosperity. And no one knows the date or origin of that ruin. History bears no record of the time when its foundations were first laid; it stands an undated ruin, an unrecorded relic, a grand remnant of old desolation!

Yet Torksey was one of the only three towns in Lincolnshire classed in "Domesday Book." It was celebrated as early as the time of the Romans, who formed the famous foss-dyke, which connects the river Trent with the Witham, at Lincoln. Every foot of ground about the neighbourhood is rich in historical lore, an unworked mine of rich legends, for in no county in England is there left so much for an historian to do as in Lincolnshire.

Little dreamed we, in our boyish days, that we were gathering our holiday trophies on the very battle-ground from which sprung the events that led to the dethroning and beheading of one king, the exile of another, and, when

death had ended the mighty struggle, the now all-but-forgotten Restoration, with its green boughs, and flowers, and garlands gathered to celebrate the Twenty-ninth of May. That on those very hills, with its few, distant hedge-rows, where the wild sloe, the black bullace, the hardy crab, and the aged hawthorn, all twined and massed together, and forming an impenetrable barrier,—that there Cromwell himself had given the command to charge, had shouted where we shouted, had perhaps alighted after the battle, wiped the blood from his sword-blade on the mane of his war-horse, and rested under the shadow of those very oaks, from which we had rent off branches to celebrate the Restoration of the king who fled before his power.

Old May-day, the old first of May, with its May-poles and rural merry-makings, had even then long been dead and gone. A stern race of men had arisen, and chased it from the land, for the day of great deeds had drawn nigh. Oppression had covered them with her dark cloud, from the centre of which they sent forth their determined voices, which, like threatening thunder, was heard far and wide around; for merry England had long before grown sad: her May-poles were hewn down, her May-garlands ungathered. Armed troopers halted beneath the old tree on the village green, where the merry dance had for ages been held; then musket shots and the clash of sabres frightened the Dryads of the old woods, whose solitudes had never before been broken by aught harsher than the sounds of the village maidens, as they called to each other while gathering flowers to twine into the garlands of May. Another race had sprung up in place of the holiday-loving cavaliers of Elizabeth and James's reigns. They were, as Cleveland describes them:*—

* Edition, 1687.

"With face and fashion to be known
For one of sure election,
With eyes all white, and many a groan,
With neck aside, a drawling tone,
With harp in 's nose * * *
See a new Teacher of the Town.

"With pate cut shorter than the brow,
With little ruff starched you know how,
With cloak like Paul, no cape I trow,
And not a bit of surplice now,
With hand to thump, not knees to bow,
See a new Teacher of the Town.

"With cozening cough, and hollow cheek,
To get new gatherings every week,
With paltry change of 'and' to 'eke,'
With some small Hebrew and no Greek,
To find out words when stuff's to seek,
See a new Teacher of the Town."

May-day was dead and gone; they tried to revive her again on a later day; at the end of her own flowering season they sought to bring her to life, to celebrate the Restoration of a King. Vain attempt! they dressed her cold corse with flowers; pale, and wan, and dead, did they drag her forth, but her soul had fled; her beauty had perished,—that bright sunshine of the heart, in which she alone existed, had left the land; and the Parliament made laws to restore her; they passed acts, and made a parade of her through the villages, but she breathed not, she stirred not; and the multitude soon ceased to move, when they saw that their beloved May was indeed dead!

The bones of many a man, and many a horse, were dug up, when sluices were made to drain the extensive marshes around Cavendish Bog; and even at this day, though richly cultivated, the place hath a strange, solemn, and saddening look! Along the winding banks of the river willows are

ever whispering. The unfrequented lanes in the neighbourhood are knee-deep in grass during summer time. You behold the fisherman following his solitary occupation by the river; enormous pikes are found in the water-courses, and troops of crows are always alighting upon this almost forgotten battle-field. It is a spot where a thoughtful man may walk and muse for hours; may picture the day (as he looks upon the neighbouring hills) when the son of the proud man looked down haughtily on the uncoroneted colonel, whose forces were drawn up before him, and, like Cleveland, may jest at Cromwell's "holding his neck awry when he maketh speeches, and cocking up his ear as if he expected Mahomet's pigeon to come and prompt him," comparing his nose to the "Dominical letter," and little dreaming that he whom they said "whistled to his Cambridge team" would so soon drive him into the bog, which, for hundreds of years afterwards, was to be immortalised by his own name. A colonel whom they said "beat up his drums clean through the Old Testament, in whose regiment you might learn the genealogy of our Saviour from their names, and whose muster-roll included the whole list in the first chapter of Matthew." Little did they deem that the man whom they thus sneered at held in his hand the future destinies of England, and was one day to look proudly down from the ancient throne of a long line of kings; and even the witty Cleveland, who thus jeered at both his personal appearance and the muster-roll of his soldiers, was compelled, on a future day, to commence his letter from prison with the proud title, which it must have half choked a royalist to have uttered, of—"May it please your Highness. I beseech your Highness to put some bounds to the overthrow, and do not pursue the chase to the other world. Can your thunder be levelled so low as our grovelling condition? Can your towering spirit, which

hath quarried upon kingdoms, make a stoop at us who are the rubbish of these ruins? Methinks I hear your former achievements interceding with you not to sully your glories with trampling upon the prostrate, nor clog the wheel of your chariot with so degenerate a triumph. The most renowned heroes have ever with such tenderness cherished their captives, that their swords did but cut out work for their courtesies. Those that fell by their prowess, sprung by their favour, as if they had struck them down only to make them rebound the higher." Strange times and strange changes were these, and such was the strain in which the Protector was addressed from the prison of Yarmouth by John Cleveland, the soldier, the wit, and the poet; a writer whose works abound with so many beauties, that they half counterbalance the numerous specks which blot the sunny literature of that period.

Although we may admire the old May games, the rough and boisterous buffoonery of the ancient Christmas revels, and all the light-hearted tomfoolery which contributed to make the "merry England" we read of, still we much question if the same amusements, which gave such gratification to our simple forefathers, would not, if now repeated, pall and dissatisfy the more refined taste of the present age. We fancy we should soon grow weary of watching the foolish curvetings of a stupid clown and hobby-horse; find but little pleasure in hearing some strong-voiced fellow halloing from out the throat of a pasteboard dragon; that the rude antics of Maid Marian, and the coarse jests of Friar Tuck would hardly be tolerated in a decent household; nor could we get up those uproarous bursts of laughter which these spectacles were greeted with by our ancestors. The holidays of England will never be again what they once were. They were adapted for a rude age and a rude race:—the barbarous

relics of the past, worn by a pastoral people, who unaware were progressing towards a more refined and poetical age. We look upon them as manners and customs now obsolete; as things pretty enough to gaze upon in a picture where the obstreperous uproar is silent, and we see but the quaint costume and odd antics of the actors; the eye pleased, and the ear unoffended. We retain, and improve upon the music, the singing, and the dancing of their merry-makings: the sunshine, the scenery, and the flowers we still worship; but their maskings and their mummerings we leave to sleep in oblivion. We are still worshippers at the same shrine, though we have hurled down the idols that disfigured the fair temple of Nature.

To a thinking man, the great change which has taken place in our holiday amusements are easily accounted for; place them side by side with the progress made in other matters, and there is nothing left for wonderment. The drama alone appears to have degenerated, as music lectures and literary associations have increased. Zoological and botanical gardens and museums, such as we have now, were unknown to our forefathers; yet amid so much light and knowledge, Tom Thumb has still his admirers, neither are the Giant or Fat Boy entirely neglected.

Nature will ever have her worshippers, while Spring putteth forth her flowers, and Summer clotheth the woods in her heart-cheering livery of green. Old manners and rude customs will only be remembered by the pages of the historian and the poet, to be pored over and pondered upon, as we now gaze upon those rare fossil remains, in which we trace the links of an old and forgotten age. The Twenty-ninth of May, the Restoration of King Charles the Second, his hiding in the oak, and the holidays that celebrated such events, are minor matters of history, when compared to the mighty convulsions which preceded them.

There are but few places where "Oak-apple Day" is kept as a holiday now, every few years will see the number less, and by-and-bye the very name of it will be forgotten. It might be, that, in such localities as we have described, where the weight of Cromwell's arm was long felt after the blow had been struck; where his men had been quartered, and he in person had been heard to command, while men trembled and obeyed him,—that a few of the old families who had fled the neighbourhood would, on their return at the Restoration, endeavour to keep alive the remembrance of an event which again replaced them in their old ancestral halls; and that only in places thus restored to their ancient occupants would be celebrated the Twenty-ninth of May:

MORTON MARSH MANOR-HOUSE.

"Ah! could we but know all,—
What aching hearts have bent within those walls,
What eyes have in those ancient chambers wept,
What death-bed scenes, and unrevealed confessions
Have died upon the air as soon as breathed:
'Twould make a gloomy volume!"

OLD PLAY.

THERE is an old moated manor-house still standing at the head of a long straggling village, which we shall call Morton, as we wish not the locality to be known. A wide marsh spreads for miles beside the hamlet; and, saving the wooden fence which runs along the low sandy highroad, this vast arena of rich grazing land is unmarked by any

enclosure, unless the wide rapid sluices, which empty themselves into the distant river (and are unseen from the highway), can be called boundaries; for these, and the low grey stones which the summer grass overtops, are the only landmarks.

The manor-house stands on "made land;" part of which was, no doubt, thrown out of the enormous moat, and the remainder brought from an ancient clay pit still seen on the side of a neighbouring hill. An old oak or two (the only trees near at hand) mark the site of an ancient rampart, which leads up from a high grassy mound, where the lodge, or outer tower, is supposed to have stood; these throw their leafless arms across the low embankment, which stretches to the very edge of the moat; an arch of brickwork, of modern date, spans over the moat before a mouldering gate, and in former times faced the drawbridge.

The manor-house is built in the ancient English style which marks the period of Richard the Third, though by some considered much older. It stood a stout siege during the civil wars, and the room is still pointed out in which the ill-fated Charles slept. It seems heavy with overhanging gables, one projecting above the other, and weighty stone windows, which look as if they would bear down the very walls! while old heads hang out, and grin on you from every angle; and these, the ignorant country people say, were once alive—were real wizards and witches (nailed up like birds and vermin on a barn-wall); placed there at the time of the Reformation, and sprinkled with some mysterious liquid which changed them into stone.

There are no written records to tell of the changes which that weather-beaten building has witnessed; for the church, nearly two centuries ago, was a heap of ruins, and all the monuments it contained perished when the edifice was razed to the ground. There is now no church nearer

than a mile—a small modern meeting-house is the only place of worship in this ancient village. All that can be gathered is from tradition: the villagers have heard their forefathers talk of old Sir Hubert, who pawned farm and field, and with fifty horsemen, equipped at his own expense, sallied out and fought under the banner of King Charles; that, leaving two-thirds of his followers dead on the field, he returned to his old manor-house with a sabre-cut on his cheek, and the loss of his left hand; that he kept open house, caroused with the remainder of his soldiers, drunk acre after acre, until neither meadow nor mansion were left —nothing saving the ancient manor-house, which he willed to his sister; that he was too poor to arouse the cupidity of Cromwell, or had some friend at the back of the stern Protector. The sister had lost her husband at Marston Moor, died at an old age, and left a daughter, whose husband, unlike his ancestors, joined the Pretender, and fell in battle. Then came the last of the race (whose father perished in the rebellion)—the old Lady Morton, whose name our grandmothers never uttered without looking pale. She turned the old manor-house into a school for young ladies; but whether she was a true descendant from the stout old royalist, Sir Hubert, is not known. There are rumours of the rightful heirs dying abroad in a nunnery; of the cruel old nurse installing her own child in the manor-house, and under the title of Lady Morton; and of the few ancient families who still survived in the neighbourhood entrusting the education of their daughters to her care. These, be it remembered, were the days when parents commanded, and children trembled and obeyed; when their manners were as stiff and formal as their dresses; and the cold crust of ceremony was thrown over the younger branches, with about as much care and feeling as our grandmothers would wrap up half a dozen pigeons in a pie.

When to disobey was to be disowned, and passionate old fathers were still entrusted with swords, which they drew and sheathed, and then swore like "true old English gentlemen."

And now a great change took place in that old manor-house; where ruin and silence had so long dwelt, youthful faces were seen, and merry voices were heard ringing in the ancient garden and neglected orchard. Those old, iron-studded doors grated harshly upon their hinges—as morning, noon, and night, the light-hearted scholars rushed out to play—and seemed to frown upon the sound of merriment, which echoed through that solemn-looking mansion. It was a relief to those thoughtless and beautiful girls to escape from the keen, cold, grey eyes and searching glance of Lady Morton, under which their little hearts trembled; and who, when she suddenly appeared amongst them in the garden, became hushed, and sad, and thoughtful, and alarmed, like birds trembling under the shadow of the kite that hovers above them. And the nurse (the old woman who had accompanied her into France) always was in her company; their voice, manner, and look were alike; one seemed the other's shadow; and they were ever meeting their pupils at unexpected turnings, when they fancied themselves alone, and squatting down in secret and shaded arbours, as Satan did beside Eve in Eden, when he first instilled his poison in her dreams.

And Lady Morton was so circumspect, and felt the responsibility of her situation so seriously, that she had persuaded the parents of the young ladies to allow them to receive no letters except from themselves, and these to be sent under cover to herself, stating from whom they came. That all others she should be permitted to open, and either present or destroy them, according to the nature of their contents: not failing to make the parents acquainted with

what they contained, if she thought the matter of sufficient importance.

Kind, moral, watchful Lady Morton! In the eyes of their fathers and mothers, thou stoodst without an equal; thy school increased, and gold came in from every way. And now governesses were engaged,—poor, tried, friendless creatures; discharged in a week, unless they consented to become blind to everything but her own will. In her own chamber she became perfect in taking copies of seals in plaster of Paris, until she could break open and re-seal without fear of detection every letter that came. A great acquisition would that woman have been to any mistrustful government; she took notes, and had numbers for every corresponding name, until not a pupil had a secret but what she was acquainted with.

Nor did she stop here: she had two creatures sworn to obey her will; and they, by her instructions, were to act as if unknown to her, and to reply to such letters as begged for interviews and clandestine meetings, making the lovers promise that they would never inquire how such secrets came into their possession. Even an elopement had its price, if it brought gold enough to Lady Morton's coffers.

So she went on, year after year, silencing suspicion by her cunning and hypocrisy, and making gold her god. But she moved not without leaving the glittering mark in her trail. Her every motion had gain for its object; every web she wove, and which stretched a hundred ways from her dark chamber, caught and brought in gold. And now she added farm to farm, and field to field, until the wide domains of the old royalist Hubert were all her own.

Many a night had this cruel woman and her accomplices sat up in that old manor-house, plotting new schemes to barter away the happiness of the unsuspecting victims who slept above their heads; for when a heiress eloped,

and the enraged parents came, her "God-a-mercy!" was ever ready. She would have every window barred, and every key in her own possession after nightfall. It should never happen again; she would keep bloodhounds and blunderbuses, for such deeds would soon bring her to her grave! So the devil and she stood sentry together for years, and laughed at one another whilst they kept watch.

And now she could have built herself a vault of gold; could have coffined up her body in the very dross for which she had bartered her soul!—but to ward off the evil one, who had so many just claims upon her, she became charitable to appearance, and began to give away bread and blankets to the poor. But the poor loved her not; for she had been the means of stopping up many of their footpaths and old familiar walks, which had been free and open for ages, even before the manor-house itself was erected. And the old mumpers, who came for their groat and loaf on St. Thomas's Day, crossed the money before her face, as if they feared it would fly out of their hands; for she bore an evil name. Then she had an old room in the manor-house fitted up for a chapel; the cobwebs were cleared from the carved roof, and the painted glass restored to its former brilliancy. She never attended worship herself; the place, she said, was too cold. The clergyman she employed was one the bishop could not license; for he had spent a fortune in gambling, and ruined a kind brother by contracting debts in his name. So Lady Morton had admitted him into her confidence. He loved wine, and cared not how he got it: and having bought a bundle of old sermons, he took the first that came to hand, read the prayers and lessons—then smoked and drank in the chamber which was allotted to him, until he either fell senseless on the floor, or groped his way into bed. Rumour

said that it would turn out a match between him and Lady Morton, as they were so often alone. But the world knew not that she had paid a heavy cheque, to which he had forged the signature; that but one person beside herself knew of it, and that she could produce it any moment when he refused to become her tool!

Strict watch enough she kept; not a young lady went in or out without her knowledge, though gold was the key that unlocked her door at every hour; until, at length, mischief came; for there was one who loved, though rumour said that she was privately married.

A child was born under Lady Morton's roof; none but her confidants were aware of the secret; and she, who lacked not the means for every purpose, entrusted it to the care of one of her tenants, a man whose helping hand had been called in to aid more than one elopement; and he, in time, sold the boy to a tribe of gipsies. As for the unfortunate young lady herself, she believed that it was dead—even the clergyman appeared, and swore that he officiated at its funeral.

Poor Ellen was ill for a long time; but Lady Morton was too kind to tell her guardians of their ward's illness; she was even so considerate, that it was unknown to them until the young lady's recovery; when she sent them a long bill, which they gladly paid, and were at a loss to express their gratitude for her kindness. The doctor was a creature of her own; and, by doing all that she wished, was enabled to keep his carriage.

There hung a mystery about the birth of the young Lady Ellen. She had guardians, trustees, and more money than she needed; nor could Lady Morton, with all her penetration, discover who she was, or to what wealthy family she stood allied. She received letters from her lover, vowing constancy and truth. He had been sum-

moned into France at an hour's warning; the rebellion that overthrew the Bourbons, and ended by placing Bonaparte on the throne of France, had commenced, and every man who held an estate in that distracted country was compelled to be present, or his property would be confiscated.

"If her husband comes," thought Lady Morton, "he will reward me for what I have done. If he stays away, she is my best pupil; and as I have orders to provide her with private apartments, and spare no expense to make her comfortable, why, I will set about it at once. I shall be well paid any way, and all has happened for the best. I wish I had not told her that the child was dead. What money I might make, if she knew it was still alive! It might turn out to be somebody, after all!" And she sat musing for a full hour, turning matters in her mind every way, and thinking how she could best bring the subject before her fair victim. She then resealed the letter, having before copied the crest,—and next day it was in the hands of the Lady Ellen.

Shortly after, she visited the unprincipled farmer, who was a drunkard, a thief, and a poacher. She came in with her gold-headed cane in her hand, and her fat poodle at her heels, leaving her ancient footman at the door. She talked first about rebuilding the church; then, raising her rents; and, at last, asked to see the little boy. "He ran away long ago," said the man, who sat unmoved smoking his pipe. She shook her cane over his head, became deadly pale with rage, and vowed she would have him tried for murder, unless the child was found. "Do your worst," said the man; "a good trial will open many people's eyes. If you want the boy, give me money, and I'll find him; he's safe enough among the gipsies. He was here last spring. Why did you wish me to sign a certificate of his death? He'll turn up, if you want him, never fear!"

The old lady went away satisfied, and, bit by bit, broke the tidings to her unhappy pupil. And so time rolled along; for the manor-house was at last deserted by all its pupils, and the Lady Ellen became her boarder. Suspicion was abroad; and although Lady Morton threw all the blame upon her servants, it availed her nothing, parents would not trust their daughters to her care. She was now old and deaf; her nurse was dead, and she was left alone to the mercy of servants who hated her; who would have poisoned her if it had not been for a fear of the law; so confined their practice to her favourite cats, poodles, and parrots. Even her old gardener never failed to leave a rake, hoe, or spade, in the midst of her favourite walk, over which he hoped she might some day tumble, and break her neck. Her coachman had long since had a sinecure, for the old carriage had not been out of the coach-house for years; so he just kept the horses in exercise, by riding now and then to a neighbouring tavern; ate, drank, and slept against them as if for a wager, to see which got the fullest. The footman became her master; did whatever he pleased; obeyed her when he had nothing better to do; and many a time stood grinning behind her carved and high-backed chair, whilst she was ringing the silver bell that was to summon him before her. Deserted, friendless, disliked, she had only the young Lady Ellen under her roof who was sincere to her: for she pitied and respected her grey hairs.

A silence and a shadow again settled over the old manor-house; for the young and buoyant scholars were gone, who gave such life and beauty to the landscape: you no longer saw them throwing aside their books, and bursting forth from the heavy studded doors, like a pent-up stream that runs and sparkles in every direction, giving a voice to the stillness, and throwing back on the sunshine

gold for gold. The race of romps were gone; the light-hearted couples that paraded that lonely avenue, arm-in-arm, seeking to shun the old grey eye of the stately governess, had vanished! Their shadows no longer broke the golden net-work of the velvet greensward; the voice of laughter had died away in the plashed walks of that antique garden. Many had found other homes, and other cares: husbands and children and household anxieties had stepped in between; and some had pillowed their aching heads in the grave: and now that cruel old woman might be seen crawling forth alone beside the old moat, or through the deserted pleasaunce; or sometimes she would sit basking on a sunny embankment, or, with bow-bent head, go muttering to herself through the grass-grown pathways of the shrubberies, and the secluded winding walks, which youth and beauty had once looked upon as their own, and there communicated to each other all those little guileless secrets which make such a bird-like flutter in a trembling heart; and many a time this cruel old woman would fancy that the grey stems of the trees were her pupils; and when the wind roared aloud, and the gnarled branches clashed together, she would call to them to talk less loud. She curtsied to the tall white grass as she passed, and imagined it was a visitor; for her memory and her intellect were now clouded.

And Ellen—the pale, the beautiful, the disconsolate Ellen—would climb the neighbouring hill, and wander onward to the distant wood, and, amid the sylvan solitude, sit hour by hour and weep; for there was something in the stillness which seemed to soothe her troubled spirit.

We see not the invisible hand which touches the leaves, neither do we behold the delicate fingers by which the flowers are blended. We know not but that the musk-rose of the dell—a pearl-flushed and perfumed home, hung up

in a silent world of green—may in summer time nourish some unseen spirit with its dewy fragrance. We cannot tell what the butterflies say to the flowers, when they shake the dusty silver from their folded wings, and settle down like pea-blooms among the hanging blossoms. The golden-belted bees may have a language of their own sweeter than the drowsy murmurings which we hear, with which they allure the buds and bells to give up their honey. The brook, babbling between the nodding bulrushes, may carry with it a language which we comprehend not, and whisper an eloquence so sweet as to draw down the tufted reeds to listen. The lettered flowers that strew the dale may form the pages of an open book, which only the hovering angels can read—and who can tell the mysteries therein recorded? The woodbine, twined around the neighbouring wild-rose of the thicket, may in that bending embrace give utterance to a love, sweet and pure, to the wild flowers themselves; for he, whose vision was not limited to the mere confines of external nature, hath told us that the bells of cowslips are peopled, and that many an invisible lip sips from the blossoms where the bee sucks, and are rocked asleep in the azure bosom of the harebell.

In vain did that beautiful girl seek to disentangle the veil of mystery which was woven around her. Who her parents were, she scarcely knew; her mother had long been dead; her father she never remembered, he having died while she was an infant. Her mother had again married, while she was but a child, to a man who accepted her hand because the little estate which she had in France had joined his own. Had the law allowed him any loophole through which he could have stepped in and claimed the property, he would have done so; but as this could not be, he married Ellen's mother, gambled away her whole estate, then broke her heart, and buried her—and all within the brief

space of five years. Then commenced the mystery which had ever since hung about Ellen: she was brought over from France—placed at school in the old Manor-house—secretly married by the connivance of her governess, her husband only requesting that their marriage might be concealed from Ellen's guardians.

Lady Morton soon discovered that it would militate against her own interests to divulge the secret, as the young lady's husband had given her to understand, before his departure to France, that the remittances forwarded by Ellen's unknown guardians would for a certain period be all her income, and that this might suddenly be stopped, if her altered situation was made known: and from this very fear sprung Lady Morton's anxiety to conceal the birth of the child; for the funds furnished by Ellen's guardians were most princely. Not a letter did Ellen receive from her husband, but what Lady Morton (now skilled to perfection in her long-practised art) was first apprised of its contents; and she had long foreseen that if she could obtain sole possession of the child, it would give her a power which she might one day wield to some purpose. After much difficulty, she had obtained tidings of the tribe among whom the boy was then wandering; and by the payment of a few gold pieces, and the promise of a larger sum, which was to be forthcoming when the child was delivered into her hands, she felt certain that in a few more days, when the tribe would be encamped in the neighbourhood, the boy would be again placed in her power.

Meantime, circumstances had long since occurred which had led to the trial and imprisonment of the parson, to whose care so many secrets had been entrusted, and who, as we have before stated, had signed a certificate of the child's death, according to the wish of Lady Morton: and now, when it was necessary for the full development of her

deep-laid plot that this man should, at the appointed time, be able to identify the boy as Ellen's son—oh! dreadful retribution!—he was in a few weeks removed from prison, where he had been kept in silent and solitary confinement, and sent home a drivelling and senseless idiot.

There was one respectable old tenant, who, with his grand-daughter, lived near the ruins of the ancient church; the spacious burying-ground of which was still used for interment. The cottage in which old Mark Middleton resided had been in the possession of his forefathers ever since the days of old Sir Hubert, the stout-hearted royalist. To this cottage we must now conduct our readers; for the old man's grand-daughter had some time since attracted the attention of the young lady of the Manor-house, and a firm friendship had sprung up between her and Ellen; to whom she had entrusted all her secrets, even to the birth of her child.

The young Lady Ellen was now frequently the subject of conversation between the amiable Amy and her venerable grandfather; and it was on a lovely summer evening, after many guesses and surmises as to what might have befallen Ellen's child, that the following dialogue took place:—

"I know not," said Amy, sighing as she spoke, "but there is something so kind and sincere and affectionate about the Lady Ellen, that I often wish she were my sister, though I could not then love her more than I do now. I trust that she will yet live to be happy; and yet I sometimes fear that the poor boy may be dead, and that would break her heart! for oh! it is cruel to revive hope, after it has become extinguished and dead, even as hers had done," and the beautiful girl sighed deeply as she finished speaking.

"Old Lady Morton can have no interest in deceiving her again," replied Mark Middleton; "poor little fellow! I fear he must have suffered much amongst those wild

people, and that the young lady will have to teach him to forget many things which he must have picked up amongst the gipsies. But saw you ever a more beautiful sky than this?" and they remained silent for several moments gazing upon the western horizon. It was, indeed, beautiful; for the sky was broken into a thousand masses of luminous gold, amidst which the sun seemed fast sinking; and as the venerable old man sat in silence contemplating its beauty, his thoughts wandered to Milton's description of the return of the Son of God, when he had driven Satan and his angels down the yawning precipice, and all the hosts of Heaven marched forth with bannered gold, and welcomed back the Holy Victor. Such seemed the sun; so stretched the clouds, like a mighty and armed host, rank above rank, along the western steep of Heaven—armour, and banner, and plume, and helmet, blazing in gold, broad and far along the whole skirt of the bending sky.

It was but for a few moments, and his thoughts trod painfully backward, as his eyes glanced upon the open Bible, to the beautiful history of Ruth, which he had been reading—and with a heart full, almost to breaking, he said, in a sorrowful tone of voice, "Thou hast been long with me, Amy; thou hast been unto me what Ruth was to the widowed Naomi—my home has been thy home—we are the last of a long race, and I have hoped and prayed that thou alone mayst be with me when I close mine aged eyes, and sink in silence into the arms of death. Yet, if thy society can make the Lady Ellen more happy, I will part with thee without a murmur."

"Speak not so sadly, dear grandfather," answered the beautiful maiden, who stood leaning over the garden chair, and now threw her arms round the old man's neck; "speak not so, or you will break my heart. I will never leave you—I never wished to leave you, strongly as you have

urged my living with Ellen. Much as we both love her, you pain me when you name it, and yet it is ever uppermost on your lips."

"True, true. Thou wert ever a good child," replied her grandfather, "and I am very old and foolish; it may be somewhat selfish too, now, Amy; yet thy happiness is dearer to me than mine own. I know not why I should wish to retain one blossom on the withered bough, when all the rest have fallen off, and are dead. I would, and I would not—I am fickle as a child—and yet I should like to see her happy. The old cottage will be large enough for us all, should not the lady's husband return. On that threshold I welcomed home thy father and mother from church; beneath this roof thou wert born; from out this door-way they were carried to their last home—and I—"

Tears choked his further utterance: memory rose up before him, with bowed head and drooping hair—her wan finger pointing to the outstretched and sleeping sea of graves—that silent sea, whose green waves heave but once into hillocks, then freeze down into the ridgy roofs of the dead, silent and motionless for ever. For every sigh we heave for the past is a nipping winter stealing upon the summer of the present, and blighting the very bloom on which the heart has set its choicest hope. Unseen, and too often unmarked by ourselves, we hang over the brink of the grave, wearing, footstep by footstep, away, pining for what, while living, we value not aright—for what, when dead, will, like ourselves, rest a clod of the valley—the soil from which other hopes and loves will spring, and pine, and die.

Mark Middleton had seen wife and child carried over his threshold, and consigned to their tranquil resting-place—to that solemn spot where he had heard the earth fall hollow and sepulchral on the coffin-lids of his own father

and mother, years, years agone, "each in their narrow cell for ever laid."

Still Amy hung about him like a thing of light, an angel, whose brightness might chase away all memory of the grave—the last link between him and eternity. Yet, through her face, death often peeped in upon the old man; it was like her mother's, she whom his own son loved, that only son his wife had worshipped, those lips his own aged father had often kissed. So "coil by coil unwound" whenever he looked steadfastly on Amy, when he gazed on the summer of her beauty, and thought of the winter "which had been."

The old man's attention was now drawn towards the garden-gate, at which an odd-looking visitor had entered—a man whose very look and bearing would have startled a stranger, while to Mark Middleton it was nothing unusual, for giving him a nod of recognition, he said, "Here comes our poor idiot. They were cruel jailors who drove him to this, Amy. Death would have been mercy, compared to such cruelty—a body without a mind. The Philistines used not Samson so savagely, when they put out his eyes. Poor fellow! great as his crimes were, he merited not such heavy punishment as this."

"I will leave you alone with him, grandfather," said Amy; "my spirits are already sadly depressed. Poor gentleman!" she added, looking at the visitor, "I often wonder what he could have done, that they should have used him so unmercifully:—I fear it was old Lady Morton who first tempted him with her gold—may God in His mercy forgive her!"

"There is some mystery connected with his misfortunes, which few know, saving the old lady at the manor-house," answered the old man. "The terrible and un-English plan of imprisonment has driven him to what he

is—the silent system and solitary confinement—which I cannot even name without feeling ashamed of my country, for adopting such a savage and unnatural punishment."

Amy heaved a deep sigh, cast a silent and pitiful glance on the poor idiot, and then retired.

Meantime the new comer had amused himself by plucking the choicest flowers in the garden, which he placed in every button-hole of his coat, and having filled these, he commenced planting them round his hat-band, until he completed the wreath; then came up to the old man laughing, unconscious of the havoc he had made.

Poor fellow! whatever his conduct might have been, it made the heart ache only to look at him. His face had once borne God's image, and been stamped with manly dignity. The high forehead was there, a waste pile, untenanted. The deep-sunk eyes, that had once marked the man of thought, now lacked lustre; their fire was quenched, or, in moments of anger, flamed with an unnatural light; the mild gaze was gone; they either blazed or were extinguished. The golden throne of reason had been overturned. The Goths and Vandals of our jails had been at work; they had killed the mind, and turned the living body loose into the world!

"Oh, God!" exclaimed the old man, rising from his garden-chair, and looking at the poor idiot, "Thou only knowest what this poor creature endured in his solitary cell, until his silence and his sufferings drove him mad. 'Repent and live' are written in letters of light on the pages of Thy holy book—characters worthy of being emblazoned on the gates of Heaven. 'Despair and die' stand cast in letters of iron over the prison-gates that darken our land, as if marking those damnable abodes where Hope enters not. Oh, dreadful thought! to know that there was no human voice to comfort him—no human footfall to

break that terrible silence—nothing but his own burning thoughts and aching heart—sickening and sinking day by day, and night after night! Horrible! horrible!—even the fiends find companionship. Poor fellow! death unto thee would, indeed, have been an angel of mercy!"

Mark Middleton then seized the arm of the idiot, and attempted to amuse him, just as he would have done a child, by gathering him flowers, and giving him fruit; putting the latter into his mouth, for he would have swallowed hemlock had it been offered to him.

He was now gentle, simple, and foolish as a new-born babe; and very few weeks had wrought this melancholy change. The powerful interest of Lady Morton had rescued him from solitary confinement and death; she just saved the living body, and no coroner's inquest was held over the dead mind. He had been refractory; had cursed his savage jailors; had yelled and shouted; had prayed aloud for death. So they gave him darkness. They thrust him into a deep, dark, and silent cell—alive, they buried him; then, cruel mercy! put food into his coffin, and made the dead-living man eat. A dead man suddenly awakening to life, in his dark grave, could not have listened more attentively for a sound than he did after his first struggles were over; motionless and silent did he listen in the deep darkness, hour after hour. No sound came; he held his breath—he could not hear for his own loud breathing; he held his breath—and then his heart knocked awfully and loudly against his bosom—his very soul seemed struggling to get free, as if it loathed the living body imprisoned in that vaulted coffin. But the mind was not yet dead; it aroused the body, and the man once more sprung up: like a newly-captured lion, he stalked to and fro in his horrible den. He paced madly his three limited strides, striking his hot head against the cold stones, unconscious of what he did. The

beaded drops stood thick upon his burning brow, his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth with parching thirst; yet his savage keepers gave him no drink. He might have been caged up in the centre of a desolate and sandy desert, where never was heard the voice of man, and looked for pity among the howling wolves that thirsted to lap his blood, as sought for it in that deep, cold, stony, and silent cell. Then he knelt down, and prayed for death—with clasped hands and streaming eyes did he pray to die. But even Death seemed to shun that horrible abode, and to pass on with a shudder, leaving the wretched living to die without a blow from his friendly dart—pitying and passing on, and giving the coffined living to his emissaries, the jailors: for Death knew that there was but a wall between them and his own dominions—the quiet realms of the grave.

So days of agony passed, until his thoughts became knotted, and he had no separate idea; all was massed in confusion; his very mind was numbed; one great overpowering agony had seized upon each lesser sense, and left no room for cessation. His thoughts had locked themselves up in one great pain; a mountain seemed to have settled upon his head, and crushed flat the mind beneath its pressure. Then they brought him forth into the light—silent, solitary, blinding light—and he smiled, played with his fingers, and thanked them; for light and darkness were now alike to him. The sun of his reason was fast setting, and gleamed sadly upon the ruins of a shattered intellect and broken heart. Then the white walls seemed to make faces at him; and he "mopped and mowed," and returned their mocking grimaces. He could not even see the cold, feeling eye gazing upon him through the eyehole in the door, while he was making armies of straw, and laughing as he blew his combatants together. Formerly, he felt low, sinking and hungry; and yet, when his food was

slided in, he could not eat it, for it was not hunger, but despair, that preyed upon him. But now this pang had passed; the slow poison springing from that horrible bite had crept through every vein, and poisoned every drop of healthful blood. He now devoured all that was given to him, and gnashed his teeth at his keepers. His body held the mastery over his mind. His hands had triumphed, and, by the aid of his brutal jailors, forced the food into his mouth which his soul loathed,—for there was no friend there kind enough to help him to die. They crammed food into his throat, and left it in his coffin: their only dread was lest he should die.

Lady Morton was then written to; and he was allowed once more to mingle with his fellow-men; for she feared that he might, during his derangement, babble out some of her secrets. This living body, without a mind, was turned out of its grave into the sunshine; and it looked round, as if it expected to find the earth desolate; clapped its hands to its ears, and ran from the sound of living voices; sought dark and silent corners, in which to hide itself; until, at last, it became reconciled to the face of man; licking, like a dog, the hand that fed it, yet lacking the sagacity which that faithful animal so often shows towards man.

And now he came fondling and caressing old Mark Middleton, for he knew by instinct that the old man was kind to him; and was now rubbing his face against his hands; then trying to catch him a bird, chasing a bee, or plucking a flower; or sometimes peeping into the cottage window to see if supper was forthcoming, for kind old Mark used to cut his food into small pieces, and feed him with it.

God waiteth His own good time; the day of reckoning is sure to come—that day when, if He stirreth not up the rage of man, the thunder-fires of Heaven will plough deep

the blackened graves for these dens of cruelty, tyranny, and savage oppression, and leave them, like the cities of the plain, marked only by the sullen and weltering waves to tell of the great iniquities buried beneath. The grim and weather-beaten gibbet-posts, on which the bleached bones and rusty irons hung and shook, and rattled in the wind, were not half so hideous to the imagination as these silent slaughter-houses are, to which thousands of our fellow-creatures are now yearly consigned. There stood the deed, marked by its dreadful doom, a hideous and shocking reality, beneath which the wicked shuddered, and the good man prayed. Death then claimed his victims in the open noon of day; but now he has to dive into deep cells and silent prisons, where the flapping of his wings spread no awe, where the voice of pity is never heard, "*where the wicked never cease from troubling, and the weary are never at rest,*" until hushed in the lap of our mother earth, where they sleep—the sleep that awakens not, till the last trumpet has sounded.

While Mark was busied with the idiot, old Lady Morton entered the garden, and seated herself in the rustic chair, without speaking; for she was now half crazy, and would talk to herself for hours, when she thought there was no one by to listen. Mark bade her "Good evening," but she was too deaf to hear him, and her attention seemed drawn towards the idiot, who was sitting on the ground, playing with the flowers, which he pulled up and offered to her.

"Fine morning, madam," said the idiot, unconscious that it was evening, while she was too deaf to hear a word that he uttered. "Won the prize at the flower-show—seven million paid down—this rose did it," added he, holding up a withered daisy; "grew it in the dark, madam—no air—no noise—no light—they all went mad when

they saw the colour; went mad, and ran away, and were followed by men with spades, who dug dark holes in the earth, and put 'em all in deep, dark holes, and left them there to grow." And he laughed aloud, such a laugh as sent back the blood of the hearer cold into the heart.

"She would be about the same age as Amy," said the old woman, muttering to herself as her memory looked back through the dim owl-light of the past, "but she died, and it was all for the best, for the doctor said so, and he knew better than I did, so I haven't that to answer for, anyhow. It was a rich piece of plate her mother gave me for my attendance on her when she was ill—she called it a tribute of affection—well! we buried her shame with her, and the world will be no wiser now. He said what he gave her would do her good, and he knew best; but he has long since settled his account, and I have nothing to fear from him. They behaved pretty well, after all—the legacy might have been larger—they were rich, and would never have missed it, but I have enough—enough to comfort me in my old age, and that's a blessing, after all"—and she drew her old cloak, heavy with rich lace, more closely around her, and said, "The summers are colder now than they were fifty years ago."

"I have travelled all over the world, madam," continued the idiot, who had never ceased talking during the old woman's long soliloquy; "I was a thousand years on an uninhabited island; very nice place, madam; no use for your tongue after the first year, so took it out, and hung it on a tree, and used to listen to it and the wind talking together; the country was sown with stones, and grew a rich crop of caves and prisons; nice places to lie in, madam; still as vaults, dark as death, and cold as old stone coffins;" and he again amused himself by pulling to pieces the flowers he had gathered.

"And he seems much happier now than he did," said the old woman, whose attention was at last attracted towards him by the sharp pull he gave her mantle; "he doesn't get drunk now as he used to do, so all's happened for the best, after all, for in some things he was even too sharp for me,—when he had his wits. I have n't much on my conscience about him, for he can harm nobody now; and he has n't sense enough to feel trouble like me, and that's a great blessing, after all; he does n't know the difference between a groat and a guinea, and it's a great comfort when it is so. He was fond of forgery, and might have got hung at last; so things always happen for the best, if we can but think so."

"Poor humanity!" exclaimed Mark Middleton, addressing Amy, who was leaning from the cottage window, and, like him, had listened in silence to the above conversation;—"poor humanity! I know not which to pity most,—the mind and memory decaying, or the intellect which is already dead."

"Dead—dead!"—echoed the old woman, catching the last word, and turning round sharply as she spoke, while her dim eyes were lighted up with a strange, unnatural flashing, as if the passionate fire of youth still burnt on, unconsumed, amid the grey and decaying ashes of age—"Who says he's dead?" continued she, turning quickly round as if moved by the power of some hidden spirit—"I tell you he was alive when I saw the old gipsy woman a week ago, and they will bring him here soon, and his father will come back a great king, and bring me a shipload of gold—bright, yellow, sparkling, heavenly gold—gold!" And with such fervency and deep feeling had the old woman uttered the latter sentence, that it brought on a dangerous fit of coughing, which, but for the timely interference of Amy, might have carried her to where "neither gold nor silver corrupts."

"Gold—gold!"—said the idiot, looking on the gravel-walk with a strange, puzzling, mad, serious look—"the devils fed me on it for days—hard, heavy food—makes the heart cold—bad digestion—heavy dreams—murder, fire, and bloodshed—cut-throats, poisoning, hanging, all night. They put me in a prison of gold—yellow figures came with brass teeth, and grinned at me; the sky, the air, the roof, the darkness, was all a dreariment of gold."

The conversation was here interrupted by an approaching sound as of a great multitude, and a few moments after a long caravan of gipsies approached, bearing with them all the equipage for a large summer encampment—for it was the great annual meeting of the tribe. Carts, waggons, horses, donkeys, dogs, children in panniers, infants on the backs of their swarthy and dark-haired mothers, with sun-tanned urchins clinging to the corners of their tattered cloaks; old crones, whose heads the snow of eighty winters had bleached; grim, hard-featured, forbidding-looking men, who appeared no older than they had done thirty years before; young, handsome, olive-hued women, moving along with a graceful and natural motion, such as no art could give, and such forms as an artist would have selected had he been called upon to model Egypt's voluptuous Cleopatra; fine, tall, sinewy, broad-chested, and manly-moulded fellows, casts of whom would have been the pride of an artist's studio. Nature's own forest-born sons; rangers of hill and wood, and heath and wold; the free, unfettered children of the sun, bound and united together by their own mysterious language, and their own ancient laws; and looking upon all the rest of mankind as aliens in blood, creed, and custom. Wild Arabs, who settle down in every corner of merry England, as if its green and ancient pastures belonged to such dusky children of the desert.

Onward they went, kettles and camp-poles rattling

against each other; snatches of song chiming in with deep oaths, and heavy blows dealt on the lagging and over-jaded animals; while many a wild woodland tune, whistled with considerable taste, blended sweetly with the softer voices of the children. Onward they went, women in men's coats, and boys half-buried in their fathers' cast-off garments, with the buttons of the huge velvet knee-breeches knocking against their brown and naked ankles: there trudged one, buried in a large ample waistcoat, the pockets of which extended below its knees, and wearing no other drapery: girls enveloped in the skirt of some old gown, hanging loosely around the neck and shoulders, while their arms were thrust naked through the former pocket-holes, as if to show their contempt for sleeves: some were bare-headed; others with their dark curly hair hidden in large old hats, with here and there a straggling lock peeping through the broken crown, while many a brim was pared off close to the body, as if they hated the shadow which intervened between their bronzed faces and the sunshine of heaven. Onward they went, as merry a group as ever prigged a prancer, clyed a lag of duds, binged in a bousing ken, maundered upon the pad, carried a kenching mort, or bilked a queer cuffin; for their heads were never troubled with the thoughts of paying either rent or taxes.

Old Lady Morton stood motionless as the long train passed, watching narrowly every face with her cold, grey, fixed eye, until the last cart rolled by, followed by a group of loiterers, amongst whom was an aged gipsy-woman. She halted for a moment, looked hard at the old lady of the Manor-house, exchanged a few cant terms with her tribe, then, drawing a circle with her forefinger around the palm of her hand, and pressing the centre with her nail, she said, "I am ready—he is here."

"Where? where?" exclaimed Lady Morton, her limbs

shaking with excitement as she spoke, while her voice sounded harsh, husky, and unnatural; "where? where?—let me see him first; I must know it is him! I have lived too long to be cheated now; let me see him, feel him, touch him, hear from his own lips that he has not been changed for another! I have the money here, ready, all in gold—good, heavenly gold!" and Lady Morton grasped the side of her heavy pocket as she spoke; while more than one gipsy darted his keen dark eye in the same direction, as if regretting that he could not rob her with a look; and their glances seemed to tighten the old lady's grasp on her pocket.

"Fool!" muttered the aged gipsy-woman to herself; then beckoning to a tall, athletic young man, whose hair was black as the plumes of a raven, and his countenance the colour of copper, she spoke to him in the language of her tribe, and, giving a nod of assent, he sprung forward with giant strides, and in a few moments returned, leading a shaggy pony, on which a beautiful boy was seated, dressed in neat attire, which had either been stolen or purchased for the occasion.

The Lady Ellen, who had just returned from her evening walk in the neighbouring wood, now stood by the side of Amy, and with a throbbing heart gazed in silence upon this strange scene.

"This is the child," said the old gipsy-woman, baring his neck as she spoke, and showing the whiteness of his shoulder, which formed a strong contrast to the sun-stained hue of his healthy cheek; "here is the mole upon his right shoulder, the locket that has never been removed from his neck, and there," added she, looking fixedly at the Lady Ellen, whose tears fell like the summer rain, drop by drop, "there stands his mother, whom I have not before seen, but never did the sun shine on two faces more alike."

The Lady Ellen looked at the boy for a moment, and during that brief interval she saw her own features reflected back—the same outline as her own then bore—the living image of what she herself was in childhood,—and rushing forward, she threw her arms around him, and would have fallen, had not Mark Middleton stepped forward to her support.

"Ah! there he sits!" exclaimed the gipsy-woman in triumph, "an honour to his old gipsy nurse—look at him! he walked forth in the early morning, when the healthy breeze and the stark-naked sunshine came down to play together upon the heath; with my own hands I washed him in the forest brook, then let him run to dry himself in the wind. Bless his sweet tongue! he used to swear at me the moment he opened his innocent eyes; and when I kissed him, he called me all the old thieves he could think of; there never was a child with such a tongue! And oh! it's delightful to hear him lie! for I never saw one of his age stick to a thing as he does; and as for thieving—bless him! there is not a child in the whole camp worthy to be named on the same day with him! My husband said, if he lived long enough, he would be king of the gipsies. He could drink like a man when he was three years old; and as to smoking—heaven love him! let me hide my tobacco-box wherever I would, he was sure to steal it! Let me kiss you once more, my dear darling," and the old woman approached him as she spoke.

"Go to ——, you ——!" What the hopeful youth said was full of awful alliteration and rounded periods—the very poetry of swearing; not like your common, hackneyed, every-day oaths, but such as sounded like the finish of a fine old Alexandrine by Spenser, if we can but imagine that beautiful poet once "rapping out" lustily, and imping his glorious wings into the ample heaven of Billingsgate. He

smacked the old woman's face when she had kissed him, and, pulling out a short, black pipe from his jacket pocket, bade her fetch him a light, and "be hanged to her."

Old Lady Morton paid the gipsy the final sum which they had bargained for, when the boy was to be restored, and between every gold piece she dropped into her hard, brown hand, she kept up a running commentary—"Quite sure it's the right child?—six—(a large sum)—seven—(I may never get it back)—eight—(if you have deceived me)—nine—(I'll have you transported)—ten—(and then hung)—that's all!"

The gipsy-woman had her attention drawn too much to the contents of the heavy leathern bag, which the old lady had returned into her large, strong pocket, to pay any regard to what she said. As for the rest, they were occupied in watching the actions of the wild boy. "Fear not, my lady," exclaimed old Mark Middleton, stooping down, and addressing the Lady Ellen; "many a wild flower has before now been transplanted, which has become the beauty and ornament of the garden; leave him to my care and Amy's for a few months, and you will soon see that evil habits have not yet reached his heart."

"God grant that it may be so," answered the Lady Ellen, sobbing bitterly as she spoke; "my heart pleads for him, and tells me that he is its own child—alas! that he is so—better were it a thousand times that he were dead, as I believed him to be, while he was yet young and innocent. Oh, God! forgive them who have made him what he now is! But her," added she, looking at old Lady Morton, "I can never forgive."

"Dear Ellen," said Amy, "though I am so young, I know all that you feel; leave him with me, and I will be a mother to him; my conduct shall make him forget the evil which he has been taught, and God in His goodness will

plant a virtue in every place where a vice is uprooted. Will you go with me?" said Amy, approaching the boy as she spoke, "I will love you; I will be kinder unto you than your gipsy-mother ever was."

"But will you love my pony, too?" said the boy; "I will not go without him; they tell me I am to have a new mother, but I will run away unless she loves my pony, for I can always find old smoky granny again, if I can but smell her pipe."

"Come, then," said Amy, "and I will love him for your sake; I will be kind to you both; and we will ramble where you choose, over hill and vale together."

The boy threw himself from the pony in an instant, and holding up his arms as she stooped down, twined them around her neck, and kissed her; then allowed himself to be placed on the garden chair, where he sat for several minutes between Amy and his mother, and would have sat longer, had not the old grey cat appeared amongst the gooseberry-bushes, when, jumping up with a loud whoop and halloo, in an instant he snatched old Lady Morton's walking-cane from her hand, almost knocking down the old woman as he brushed past, and clearing the hedge like a young greyhound, after the cat, he shot across the road, over a neighbouring field, where, after having leaped the hedge a second time, he alighted up to the neck unexpectedly in a deep pond. He was out again in an instant, and having lost the game he was in pursuit of, he returned to the cottage, sending his voice before him as he approached, chanting the following downright gipsy song:—

"Here's ruffpeck and capon, and all of the best,
And scraps of the dainties of gentry-cove's feast;
Here's grunter, and bleater, with tib of the buttery,
And margery prater, all dressed without fluttery.
For all this ben cribbing, and peck let us then,
Bowse a health to the gentry-cove of the ken."

He flourished the old lady's cane above his head, and wished the cat in a very warm, nameless place. When he reached the garden, he shook himself like a water-spaniel, to the great discomfiture of the ladies; then re-seated himself on the garden-chair as if nothing had happened, regretting, however, that he had not killed the wild cat, as he called it, as his gipsy-father had told him that it destroyed all the rabbits it came near. When Amy endeavoured to explain to him that the cat was not wild, that it would come when called, that it slept in the house, was fond of resting upon her knee, purred and was pleased when she patted it, he stared at her in astonishment; and then laughing aloud, exclaimed, "Oh, you're a greater liar than my old gipsy-mother." But great was his surprise, when, another cat approaching, Amy called to it, and in an instant it leaped upon her knee; the boy turned round, kissed Amy, and said, "Now I will love you, and marry you, for you do not tell lies, like my old gipsy-mother."

"There spoke his better nature," exclaimed Mark Middleton; "there perished a weed which encumbered the good soil, and in its fall revealed the better seed which had long been buried beneath its roots. Depend upon it, lady, nature will recover her own, ere long, and make a garden of this wilderness."

During all this time old Lady Morton had continued talking, either to herself or the gipsy-woman; but as to making any sense of what she said, you might as well have tried to form a connected link of reason from the detached sentences uttered by the idiot. She believed it might be the child, but still she doubted, although she was the only one who did so. She knew not when she should ever get the money back; and was sure that she could but ill spare it then. The gipsy said that she wished she had all that was left in Lady Morton's purse after she had paid her,

and she made some remark in the cant phrase of her tribe at the time. Still Lady Morton argued "all was for the best, after all. He has had good air, and good exercise; and such things are great blessings!" added she, looking-upward with that old hypocritical leer, which, if the floor of Heaven was stone-paved instead of "star-paved," might have tempted some avenging angel to have hurled on her head a heavy return for her solemn mockery. "It's all happened for the best, for he might have been kept in-doors, and nursed and spoilt until he was fit for nothing. Proud will the General be to see such a son; and I shall meet with my reward in gold—heaped-up gold."

"Think of thy reward in another world, old woman," said Mark Middleton, shouting in her ear as he spoke; "unless thou repentest, thy hoard of ill-gotten wealth will lay with a heavy weight upon thy heart at the last hour. Thy avarice was the cause of making this boy what he now is. Nor would *he* have been what I now behold him," continued he, pointing to the idiot, "but for the crimes your cursed gold tempted him to commit."

"You are a devil, Mark Middleton," shrieked the old savage; "you come to me at night, and say the same things, just the same; I knew I was bewitched, and have found you out at last: I'll have you tried, and burnt, and hung, I will—I will." And she shook her withered fist at him as she spoke; and cursed him between her teeth as she pursued her way alone, in the gathering twilight, to the old Manor-house. Two ill-looking gipsies had set off in the same direction only a few minutes before her.

An hour later and the whole neighbourhood was alarmed with the tidings, that old Lady Morton had not arrived at the manor-house. Search was made for her in vain; she was last seen at the end of a lane, where, a little way down, a footpath crossed a field, and cut off

three hundred yards, or more, from the distance to her residence, leading to a wooden bridge that spanned one side of the moat. Direct, the lane led into other lanes, beside which deep water-sluices flowed, draining the marshes, and emptying themselves into the neighbouring river. Right and left stretched acres of osier-beds, where the willows had already grown tall and high, and close together. In one of these osier-holts she was found dead on the following morning; a deep black mark around the throat left no doubt on the minds of the jury that she had been strangled. The large leathern purse, which was sworn to as having been in her possession when she paid the gipsy woman, was found empty a few yards from the body. Three of Boswell's gang were tried for having murdered her, but were acquitted; for the rest of the tribe swore that they had never quitted the encampment at the corner of Morton Marsh.

These events occurred before our time, although we still remember an old lady who was pointed out to us in our younger days as the Lady Ellen, and the rightful heiress to Morton Marsh Manor-house, which came into her possession a few years after the murder of the wealthy schoolmistress. We also have some slight recollection of her son, a fine, manly-looking gentleman, who, in his youth, our mothers told us, had lived amongst the gipsies. They are reported to have neither visited nor received any of the neighbouring gentry; and the "General," as he was called, was never seen without the limits of his own estate; and it was also rumoured, that in his old age he was a little "flighty." Mark Middleton and Amy were the only acquaintance they acknowledged. Amy, although many years older, and ere she reached her five-and-thirtieth year, was married to the Lady Ellen's son, and became, in her turn,

the mistress of the manor-house. As for the trials and proofs which were necessary to bring about all these changes, they were settled in the Court of Chancery, and few, saving the lawyers employed, knew anything of the matter.

There are still a few aged inhabitants in the neighbourhood, who can remember a beautiful young lady galloping about the hills and lanes with a handsome boy, many long years ago. That was Amy Middleton: and ten summers later saw her the wife of her once youthful companion.

Such is the old legend of Morton Marsh Manor-house, —full of ins and outs, like the building itself, and resembling, like it, so many styles of architecture, that as you can scarcely distinguish the Elizabethan from the ancient Gothic, so are you in the old tradition puzzled to separate truth from fiction. Not a servant has ever lived in the family without giving a new version of the story; and when they had retired, and we conversed with one or two of them, in the winter of their age, they so confounded one Lady Morton with another, that we found ourselves hovering between the reigns of George the First and Charles the Second, and so entangled in the events of both periods, so mixed up again with the Pretender and Cromwell, that for the life of us we could neither tell where the truth began, nor where the fiction ended. For many years past one wing of the old manor-house has been entirely closed; rumour, of course, reports it to have been haunted,—noises in the night, shrieks, lights, nay, even the footsteps of the cruel old Lady Morton, to the very "pit-pat" of her gold-headed cane, have been heard along the galleries and on the oaken floors; servants came and went without end, each

one retiring with a new tale of horror, and if half what they told could be credited, it would prove that

"Blood hath been shed ere now, in the olden time,
Ere human statute purged the gentle weal;
Ay, and since, too, murders have been performed
Too terrible for the ear: the times have been,
That when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end; but *now* they rise again,
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
And push us from our stools."

SHAKSPERE.

THE FARMER'S BOY.

"———Meek, fatherless, and poor;
Labour his portion, but he felt no more;
No stripes, no tyranny, his steps pursued;
His life was constant, cheerful servitude;
Strange to the world, he wore a bashful look,
The fields his study, Nature was his book."

ROBERT BLOOMFIELD.

To clearly appreciate the many beauties scattered over Bloomfield's "Farmer's Boy," the reader ought to possess some knowledge of country life; for it contains such natural and simple passages, the merit of which consists in their

faithfulness to nature, that without an acquaintance with rural objects, much of the truth and beauty of the description must be lost. A learned and profound critic, without this knowledge of "fields and farms," would never enter into the minute details which abound in this pure, pastoral poem; would not stoop to look at the little mole-hills covered with wild thyme, nor count the spots in the bottom of the cowslip: and yet this exquisite enamelling is the greatest charm of the poem. He could not see the hair, gathered from rubbing against the cow's hide, on the old hat in which he milked, without contrasting his peaceable cockade with that worn by the slaughtering soldier; an insect creeping up a plantain-leaf, conjured up the vast plain which must appear to the tiny traveller; nor could the started thrush hurry from the hedge without his noticing the shower of blossoms she shook from the blackthorn when springing from the branch. The quarrelsome gander with its broken wing, the horse switching its stumpy tail, the hunter's fetlock "sucking" the moistened ground, the hounds ranging through the covert "one by one," and the warm grateful breath of the cattle which surrounded him whilst breaking up the frozen turnips, show by what little morsels he managed to make up an exquisite picture. The greatest test of true descriptive poetry is, that you may break it into the smallest pieces, and yet find every bit a perfect part of the great whole; even as a botanist separates a flower, that he may the better understand its wonderful formation. Those who look for great and grand poetry in "The Farmer's Boy" will not find it there, no more than they will find the majesty, strength, and grandeur of the noble oak in the sprig of moss, whose form resembles the giant tree. To make ourselves better understood, few architects could excel Bloomfield in planning and putting together a simple rustic cottage, with its

thatched roof and trellised porch; a nobleman's mansion, a gothic church, and turreted castle he could admire; but the style, and order, and harmony would be beyond his comprehension. His work has been compared to "Thomson's Seasons:" saving in very few passages, where both poets had to describe the same objects, there is no resemblance between them; Thomson was a well-read author, he brought to his task a great knowledge of books, he took the range of the world within his subjeets. Bloomfield scarcely looked beyond his own neighbourhood, never ventured further than his own experience, his field was very limited, he only felt at home while depicting what was familiar to him; and his knowledge of books was, perhaps, the least of any author who has left a name that will be remembered. Strange as it may appear, this very deficiency in reading was not without its advantage; it compelled him to look closer into nature, to recall all he had ever seen which interested and pleased him; for he says in the four lines which follow the quotation at the head of this article,—

> "And as revolving Seasons changed the scene,
> From heat to cold, tempestuous to serene,
> Though every change still varied his employ,
> Yet each new duty brought its share of joy."

How very few authors have, like Bloomfield, commenced their career by describing what was familiar to them; imaginative genius has often begun its flight in a world of its own forming; fairies, witches, and enchanters have been the creations with which they have peopled their imaginary realms. This is a point which too many have overlooked, though certain we are in our own mind, that whilst Bloomfield was bending over his last and awl in a London garret, his memory was away in the pleasant fields, where he passed

the happy, though hard, days of his boyhood. Backward and backward would he go, amid London smoke and a limited landscape of chimney-pots, and bring forward, bit by bit, almost every incident in his pastoral life, and see them the more distinctly through the murky atmosphere he there breathed; as in a darkened theatre the spectator can better behold the magical illusions, which, for want of seeing other objects, rivet and fix his attention. Every field and footpath would rise up before him; the sunlight of morning, and the shadows which evening spread, would light up and darken a thousand spots which his memory had hallowed. Though he saw not, like Wordsworth, upon the lake "floating double swan and shadow," yet he looked through the same poetical mirror, and beheld where

> "A wide extended heath before him lay,
> Where on the grass the stagnant shower had run,
> And shone a mirror to the rising sun,
> *Thus doubly seen, lighting a distant wood.*"

Such little touches as these show the true poet; your mere rhymester never looks at them, and if he did he would see nothing but water: the image deep down meets not his eye, a flower is to him only something coloured, a star a little bright speck in the sky, the song of a bird and the whistling of a butcher-boy a mere variation of sound. The real legitimate stamp of sterling poetry will never be universally acknowledged, because all *cannot* comprehend it; a few may be able to test pure gold, but a spurious coin may pass through the hands of thousands, who are incapable of detecting the imposition. We have in our day heard passages of verse extolled by men who were clever in all worldly matters, but could not see that what they uttered lacked the breath and soul of poetry.

SPRING.

We will take the Seasons as he has arranged them, and begin with Ploughing; an employment that just hangs over the edge of Winter, and sends around that healthy smell which arises from the up-turned earth, proclaiming, even before the flowers appear, that Spring has come. In some counties a boy is engaged to walk beside the horses, and increase their lagging pace by using the whip; and Bloomfield boasts that this was not the case in the fields where he laboured—

> "But unassisted through each toilsome day,
> With smiling brow the ploughman cleaves his way,
> Draws his fresh parallels, and widening still,
> Treads slow the heavy dale, or climbs the hill;
> Strong on the wing his busy followers play,
> Where writhing earth-worms meet th' unwelcome day;
> Till all is changed, and hill and level down
> Assume a livery of sober brown."

The swart ploughman does not do his work so poetically, in the description, as the boy who follows with the iron-toothed "harrow," an implement whose name has been used by all our great poets. We want a description of the furrows made by the plough as they are turned over wave upon wave, smooth and bright if the land is moist, and regular as ocean-waves when the sea only just seems to move in its sleep, and all the winds are hushed. We miss the jingling of the harness, the whistle of the ploughman, the half-muffled tramp of the horses, the handles of the plough worn bright through use, the measured tread and stooping gait of the ploughman himself; but all these deficiencies are amply made up in the next picture, which is true and perfect nature—

——————"Giles with wearying strides
From ridge to ridge the ponderous harrow guides,
His heels deep sinking every step he goes,
Till dirt usurp the empire of his shoes."

Welcome, indeed, must that "green headland," with its patch of green earth, bank, and tree, have been after a few hours such labour as this, when at every step the clay accumulated, until his foot might in bulk and weight have matched with Goliath's, and he was compelled to halt and shake off the heavy clay shoes, which by this time weighed pounds. Nor was his work then done, though

"Hour after hour, and day to day succeeds,
Till every clod and deep-drawn furrow spreads
To crumbling mould."

The Sower must come next; and we marvel that we have no description of him, carrying his wicker-hopper, or bag, before him, his pace regular as the pendulum of a clock, his hands ever crossing each other, and scattering the corn-seed around, so true, and with such exactness, that you rarely ever see two grains, close together. But Bloomfield was neither the Plougher nor the Sower; he was only the farmer's boy; and when the corn was once sown, he went over it again with the harrow, to bury the seed with earth, a much easier task than before; for now all the large heavy clods were broken. Neither did his labour end here, that army of dusky invaders, the rooks and crows, came to gather the harvest which the Sower had spread over the field; at every bob of a head went an ear of corn, and there were hundreds of heads all "bobbing like one;" and conscious that they were undisguised robbers, they had their sentry placed on a neighbouring tree, and he had only to give a "caw" when the enemy appeared, then up, and off went every thief of the regiment, scout and all. Cautiously

from bush to hedge must the gunner steal; for if once observed, the black conclave are gone in a moment; but when once he has reached a fair hitting distance, "bang! bang!" go both barrels, and there are a dozen or more killed and wounded, and these must be placed about the field as a warning to evil-doers,—

> "Let, then, your birds lie prostrate on the earth,
> In dying postures, and with wings stretched forth;
> Shift them at eve and morn, from place to place,
> And death shall terrify the pilfering race.
>
> * * * * * *
>
> This task had Giles in fields remote from home."

And at night he had to collect the slain, and hang them out of the fox's reach on the branch of some tree, lest in the morning he should only find the feathers in place of the dead rooks; for a fowl was a fowl to Reynard, whether dead or alive, when he went prowling about supperless; and beautifully does Bloomfield describe those morning walks, when he went out early to take down the rooks, and again "strew the field with dead." Hear him, and observe how artistically all his objects are grouped; see what exquisite little touches there are about the picture; and above all, note the sweet bits we have put into italics,—

> "And when at day-break summoned from his bed,
> Light as the lark that carolled o'er his head,
> *His sandy way deep-worn by hasty showers,*
> O'erarched with oaks that formed fantastic bowers,
> Waving aloft their towering branches proud,
> *In borrowed tinges from the eastern cloud.*
>
> * * * * * *
>
> His own shrill matin joined the various notes
> Of Nature's music from a thousand throats;
> The blackbird strove with emulation sweet,
> And Echo answered from her close retreat;

The sporting white-throat, *on some twig's end borne,*
Poured hymns, to freedom and the rising morn,
Stopt in her song, perchance the starting thrush
Shook a white shower from the blackthorn bush,
Where dew-drops thick as early blossoms hung,
And trembled as the minstrel sweetly sung."

Then comes the "timid rabbit," the pheasant with its "gold and purple" plumage, and, last of all, the heath where the rain had collected besides the wood, and the trees and sky were "doubly seen," like Wordsworth's swan on the lake. The whole passage is perfect, a beautiful picture, with such touches as neither Gainsborough nor Morland ever put into a landscape; for the shaken blossoms and the trembling dews are Bloomfield's own peculiar handling. His task done in the fields, he hastens homeward, where there is sure to be something for him to do, even if every body else remains idle; for

"Giles must trudge, whoever gives command;
A Gibeonite, that serves them all by turns;
He drains the pump, from him the faggot burns,
From him the noisy hogs demand their food,
While at his heels run many a chirping brood."

Even the "chattering dairy-maid, immersed in steam," has her commands to give, and he must obey them, though he scarcely can hear her bawl out "Go fetch the cows," for the grunting and squealing of pigs, the gobbling of hungry turkeys, the unceasing "quack, quack!" of the ducks, and the interminable cluck of sitting hens "for constant war prepared," all thronging around him at once, and causing him to utter the natural exclamation of "What a strange concert is this to that which I lately heard!" Different, indeed, to the white-throat pouring forth its morning hymn "on some twig's end borne," and answered by the thrush, which shook down the white shower of blossoms, while the

blackbird strove to outsing them both "with emulation sweet." But he will soon be out of hearing, and far away from that "concert strange;" for

> "Straight to the meadow then he whistling goes,
> With well-known halloo calls his lazy cows;
> Down the rich pasture heedlessly they graze,
> *Or hear the summons with an idle gaze;*
> For well they know the cow-yard yieds no more
> Its tempting fragrance, nor its wintry store,
> Reluctance marks their steps—sedate and slow;
> The right of conquest all the law [illegible]
> Subordinate they one by one succeed;
> And one among them always takes the lead,
> Is ever foremost, wheresoe'er they stray,
> Allowed precedence, undisputed sway;
> With jealous pride her station is maintained,
> For many a broil that post of honour gained."

This description of fetching up the cows is admirable, and shows how closely he observed their habits; he wanted but another touch or two just to give variety to their attitudes—such would have been their halting a moment to browse upon the hedge, or pausing to "low" at other cattle as they passed by some gate, with a word or so describing their ungainly waddle, as they run along to regain their former station in the broken ranks. Although we have alluded to the milking scene before, yet it is so true a picture, and so unlike any other poet's painting, that we cannot resist quoting the whole of it:—

> "Forth comes the maid, and, like the morning, smiles,
> The mistress too, and, followed close by Giles,
> A friendly tripod forms their humble seat,
> With pails bright scoured, and delicately sweet;
> Where shadowing elms obstruct the morning ray,
> Begins their work, begins the simple lay;
> The full-charged udder yields its willing streams,
> While Mary sings some lover's amorous dreams;

And crouching Giles, beneath a neighbouring tree
Tugs o'er his pail and chants with equal glee,
Whose hat with tattered brim, of nap so bare,
From the cow's side purloins a coat of hair,
A mottled ensign of his harmless trade,
An unambitious, peaceable cockade."

Who would not like to have this pastoral subject painted and hung up in their rooms to look at? A spring sky overhead, sunny, and with an atmosphere almost of a primrose colour, especially where the sunlight was unbroken by the tall, shadowing elm-trees; the milk-kits of a clean creamy white, and the well-scoured bright hoops glittering like silver; the red cow, which Giles was milking, standing in the full stream of sunshine, and looking like rich red velvet, reflected in gold; Mary, simple, sweet, pretty, and singing, her head a little aside, and if you looked close you might fancy that you saw her white teeth, her russett gown drawn up through the pocket-hole, and beneath the neck cut a little low, while her hair hung down in graceful negligence; the mistress, a fine clean specimen of an English farmer's wife, in her deshabille, neat without study, as she ever is in the very thickest of her work, a little pride about her foot and ankle, for gay buckles were worn about that period; here a cart-wheel, there a shed; a shepherd dog, stretched out and basking in the warm beams of the morning, with chanticleer crowing on the moss-covered railings; a neighbouring pond partly seen beside the trees, just to give a lower light to the subject;—and who, if it were well done, would covet a picture more rural?

"On airy downs the shepherd idling lies,
And sees to-morrow in the marbled skies."

A very old thought, briefly and beautifully expressed; for no one can forget that allusion is made to the same subject in the pages of the New Testament; and that there

are numberless passages scattered over our earlier writers, which record similar prophecies of what the morrow will be from the appearance of the evening sky. Nor can we doubt but that the early Patriarchs, as they tended their flocks, were well-skilled in prognosticating the changes of the weather; and that their experience was gathered from close observation of the changes which they noted in their out-of-door life.

But after all the beautiful passages we have quoted from the first part of "The Farmer's Boy," there is not one in his Spring which excels in description that exquisite scene of "young lambs at play." How he appeals to the reader's feelings in the commencement, measuring them by his own, asking if their eyes have never brightened at beholding young lambs leap across their path, or run huddling in little clusters, and halting with looks of wonderment at the passer-by! We regret having quoted the lines in our description of "Sheep Shearing," and must beg the reader to refer back to page 148, for they will endure reading over again. A bird or a leaf startles them when they have stopped for a moment, and off they set again:—

> "Or, if a gale with strength unusual blow,
> *Scattering the wild-briar roses into snow,*
> Their little limbs increasing efforts try,
> Like the torn flower the fine assemblage fly."

And how tenderly he deplores their fate, comparing them to the "torn flower," that perishes in its bloom: and sincerely do we believe that he would have battened upon the cheese "too big to swallow, and too hard to bite," and the coarsest of brown bread, all the days of his life, ere he would have given up one of his little white flock to the

> "Murdering butcher with his cart!"

We can fancy Lamb himself reversing this portion of the

poem: what a shower of puns would he call down? how he would balance the knotty point, whether or not we should forego the luxury of lamb and salad, mint sauce and peas? what excuses he would find for conscience? and how, in the end, as in his "origin of roast pig," he would show cause why lambs come to be eaten, as well as sheep? The hillocks of thyme, and the wild-briar rose, would give a poetical zest to his appetite, and he would have shown how useless stuffing would be in a sweet, little white thing, flavoured so nicely by nature? It would have formed a rich companion to his Chinese tale.

SUMMER.

Bloomfield commences the second part of his "Farmer's Boy," by dwelling upon the moral lesson the farmer reads in the uncertainty of seasons, and how he is taught to rely upon an All-wise Providence, and how vain are all efforts and labour, if the weather is unfavourable. At one time he prays for rain, at another for sunshine. A shower descends, and he calls for the harrows to try the ground; but all beneath the surface is dry, hard, and white-baked clods, or crumbling dust; the turnips wither, and the bladed corn looks wan and weak; until, at last, the rain comes down, slow and sure and certain, penetrating to the very roots, and Giles is again out in the fields, and thus bursts forth in full song:—

"That up from broad rank blades which droop below,
The nodding wheat-ear forms a graceful bow,
With milky kernels, starting full, weighed down,
Ere yet the sun hath tinged its head with brown:
Whilst, thousands in a flock, for ever gay,
Loud chirping sparrows welcome in the day;
And from the mazes of the leafy thorn,
Drop one by one upon the waving corn:

Giles with a pole assails their close retreats,
And round the grass-grown dewy border beats;
On either side, completely overspread,
Here branches bend, there corn o'ertops his head."

And for some time he is lost to the sight—all you can see from a distance is his pole, beating about among the hawthorn branches; or perhaps you catch his voice chanting that ancient ditty of

"Away birds, away, take an ear, and leave an ear,
And come no more until next year."

Then all is still; for he has found a sweeter green spot—

"Just where the parting boughs light shadows play,
Scarce in the shade, nor in the scorching ray;"

and stretched out on the cool turf, all amongst what some young ladies who ruralise call "the nasty live things," he with pleasure watches the "swarming insects creep around his head;" and never did poet discourse more eloquent music than he has given utterance to, whilst noting how

"The small-dust-coloured beetle climbs with pain,
O'er the smooth plantain leaf, a spacious plain!
Thence higher still, by countless steps conveyed,
He gains the summit of a shivering blade,
And flirts his filmy wings, and looks around,
Exulting in his distance from the ground."

Every one who has read this poem remembers the following passage describing the skylark, and how by the aid of his hat he manages to shade the glare of sunshine from his eyes, watching her as she floats through light and shade: now concealed under some dark cloud; then again seen like a black speck on the floating silver of the sky—

until, lost to sight, though still heard singing, like a hidden angel that carols somewhere between the blue heaven and the green earth:

> "Just starting from the corn she cheerly sings,
> And trusts with conscious pride her downy wings;
> Still louder breathes, and in the face of day,
> Mounts up, and calls on Giles to mark her way;
> *Close to his eyes his hat he instant bends,*
> *And forms a friendly telescope that lends*
> *Just aid enough to dull the glaring light,*
> *And place the wandering bird before his sight:*
> Yet oft beneath a cloud she floats along,
> Lost for a while, yet pours her varied song;
> He views the spot, and as the cloud moves by,
> Again she stretches up the calm blue sky;
> Her form, her motion, undistinguished quite,
> Save when she wheels direct from shade to light."

And so he continues to watch her until sleep overpowers him; for there is a drowsy motion in the waving of the branches, and the nodding of the green corn beside him, strengthened by the far-off music of that little "fluttering songstress," wheeling and warbling through the blue and silver and purple, that seems drawn like a curtaining of gauze between heaven and earth, as if only to hide the stars from our view until the twilight shadows settle down. Next comes the harvest, and "the first sheaf its plumy top uprears;" the "keen sickle" is removed from its "twelve-month's rest;" the sweeping scythe now "rips along;" the sturdy mower bends over his work and strains every sinew; cottages are empty—half a dozen men might plunder the whole village, and meet with no opposition; even the little children are out gleaning; the "laughing dairy-maid" has gone into the harvest field; the farmer has quitted his elbow-chair, his pipe and brown jug of foaming ale, and exchanged his "cool brick floor" for the sultry and stubbly harvest

field; for all the field-gates are now thrown open, and everybody is at work

> "To turn the swarth, the quivering load to rear,
> Or ply the busy rake, the land to clear.
> Summer's light garb itself, now cumbrous grown,
> Each his thin doublet in the shade throws down,
> Where oft the mastiff skulks with half-shut eye,
> And rouses at the stranger passing by."

Love and labour go hand in hand together, and many a rival wit tries to engross the attention of the pretty dairy-maid, with her gown off, her hat awry, and who, every time she stops to speak, throws back, with a coquettish air, "the ringlets from her glowing cheek." Dinner hour approaches, and the "hooped keg" of home-brewed ale is drawn out from

> "Beneath some sheltering heap of yellow corn,"

and first presented, in the "cooling horn," to Mary; nor is Giles forgotten amid this "common cheer for all," and greatly does he enjoy these "wholesome viands" "amidst the fragrance of the open field"—for even rural occupations have their drawbacks—and he cannot help contrasting this field labour to that which he is

> "Oft doomed in suffocating heat to bear,
> The cobwebbed barn's impure and dusty air;
> To ride in murky state the panting steed;
> Destined aloft the unloaded grain to tread,
> Where in his path, as heaps on heaps are thrown,
> He rears and plunges the loose mountain down.
> Laborious task! with what delight when done,
> Both horse and rider greet the unclouded sun."

Most feelingly does he deplore the loss of poor Ball's tail, the only defensive weapon which Nature had provided him with to repel the attacks of swarming flies; nor are these his only enemies, for the pest and terror of the yard is—

"The gander, spiteful, insolent and bold,
At the colt's footlock takes his daring hold.
There, serpent-like, escapes a dreadful blow,
And straight attacks a poor defenceless cow;
Each booby goose the unworthy strife enjoys,
And hails his prowess with redoubled noise.
Then back he stalks, of self-importance full,
Seizes the shaggy foretop of the bull,
Till whirled aloft he falls, a timely check,
Enough to dislocate his worthless neck;
For, lo! of old, he boasts an honoured wound,
Behold that broken wing trails on the ground!"

A strange, quaint sort of unresisting endurance does Bloomfield attempt to draw from this attack of the insolent gander's, teaching us to gather from abuse and insult a kind of comfortable contentedness, like pigs who feel a great pleasure in having their bristly hides pecked at, and instead of either kicking or biting, stoop gently down and quite "enjoy the insults of the gabbling throng." None but a farmer's boy would ever have thought of drawing a moral from such a subject, and although we smile at the conclusion, we admire his ingenuity. Summer ends with a description of the harvest feast, and an appeal to the wealthy to

"Let labour have its due:"

then, in place of those murmurings which are heard amongst rural labourers, peace and contentment would be found, and our villages once more look as if they were a portion of merry England. We now arrive at

AUTUMN.

"'Mid storms and floods,
The thundering chase, and yellow fading woods."

And we have here one of the most graphic descriptions in

the whole poem; the subject is hogs in a wood, feeding on the mast or fallen acorns, which the strong autumnal gales that rock the giant oaks have shaken to the ground. The wild duck, starting from her lonely haunt, is happily introduced, and the whole picture, as a sweet bit of sylvan painting, has rarely been excelled,—indeed, it is so beautiful that, without further comment, we quote it entire:—

"The trudging sow leads forth her numerous young,
Playful and white and clean, the briars among,
Till briars and thorns, increasing, fence them round,
Where last year's mould'ring leaves bestrewed the ground;
And o'er their heads, loud lash'd by furious squalls,
Bright from their cups the rattling treasure falls—
Hot, thirsty food—whence doubly sweet and cool,
The welcome margin of some brush-grown pool,
The wild duck's lonely haunt, whose jealous eye
Guards every point—who sits prepared to fly,
On the calm bosom of her little lake,
Too closely screen'd for ruffian winds to shake;
And as the bold intruders press around,
At once she starts, and rises with a bound.
With bristles raised, the sudden noise they hear,
And ludicrously wild, and wing'd with fear,
The herd decamp with more than swinish speed,
And snorting dash through sedge and rush and reed;
Through tangling thickets headlong on they go,
Then stop, and listen for their fancied foe:
The hindmost still the growing panic spreads,
Repeated fright the first alarm succeeds."

They, however, halt at last; the gale subsides, and the night approaches; the short and frequent crow of the pheasant is heard from his roost on some neighbouring bough; the herd retire and huddle together in some warm slope covered with dry leaves and shagged moss, deaf to the call of Giles, and preferring the abode which they themselves have selected, to the spot he had marked out for their nightly covert. And he, poor fellow!—

"Knows no leisure till the distant chime
Of Sabbath-bells he hears at sermon time,
That down the brook sound sweetly in the gale,
Or strike the rising hill, or skim the dale."

The church itself must have been such an edifice as we rarely meet with now-a-days in England; he calls it "a mean structure,—the rude inelegance of poverty;" the roof, he says, was of straw, the windows broken, while the dock, the mallow, and the nettle grew everywhere, and the "grey capped daws" flew from the hollows of the high church tower;—that neighbours met here, and trod their departed friends beneath their feet, and children came

"To jump from hollow-sounding grave to grave."

Nor was this all; for although the neighbourhood, no doubt, abounded in pleasant woods and field-paths, yet, amongst these "new briared graves,"

"Hither at times with cheerfulness of soul
Sweet village-maids from neighbouring hamlets stroll,
And like the light-heel'd does o'er lawns that rove,
Look shyly curious, ripening into love."

Neither does it appear that there was a pin to choose between old and young, for "even Age looked sly" while gazing on these rustic beauties; grey, hoary fellows, with one foot in the grave, and one out, yet no doubt living illustrations of those whom the learned sage aimed at when he said, "There is no man so old, but that he thinks he may yet live a year longer." Guarding the corn of summer and the rising wheat of autumn, although the same employment, yet Giles found a great difference between the two. It was too cold now to throw himself upon the grass, and watch the insects climbing the plants, or, shading his eyes with his hat, mark the motions of the skylark, as she went

singing towards the gates of Heaven: he must now build himself a little hut of sods, plant boughs over it for a roof, and thatch it with the nodding weeds which grew beside the hedges. But we will not mar one of the most original descriptions of the solitariness of a farmer-boy's life that ever was penned in any language by our own prosaic remarks, but beg of our readers to read the passage over twice or thrice, until they can see every beautiful and natural touch it contains:—

"Keen blows the blast, or ceaseless rain descends,
The half-stripp'd hedge a sorry shelter lends;
Oh! for a hovel, e'er so small or low,
Whose roof, repelling winds and early snow,
Might bring home-comforts fresh before his eyes!
No sooner thought, than see the structure rise,
In some sequester'd nook, embank'd around,
Sods for its walls, and straw in bundles bound;
Dried fuel hoarded is his richest store,
And circling smoke obscures his little door,
Whence creeping forth, to duty's call he yields,
And strolls the Crusoe of the lonely fields
On whitethorns towering, and the leafless rose,
A frost-nipp'd feast in bright vermilion glows,
Where clustering sloes in glossy order rise,
He crops the loaded branch, a cumbrous prize,
And o'er the flame the sputtering fruit he rests,
Placing green sods to seat his coming guests;—
His guests by promise; playmates young and gay:—
But ah! fresh pastimes lure their steps away;
He sweeps his hearth and homeward looks in vain,
Till feeling disappointment's cruel pain,
His fairy revels are exchanged for rage,
His banquet marred, grown dull his heritage,
The field becomes his prison, till on high
Benighted birds to shades and coverts fly."

Such passages as these clearly point out the perfect originality of Bloomfield's poetry, and fully illustrate our

previous remarks respecting his remembrance of the most trifling incidents which affected his feelings when a boy, and out of which he culled the materials for his beautiful work. How simple, yet true, is the whole of this description! the homeliest language is selected; not a simple metaphor is introduced, but bit by bit the whole scene is worked out, charming us the more through its very want of ornament. Such extracts as these plainly tell of themselves that there is a great dissimilarity between the writings of Bloomfield and Thomson. We must now enrich our article with a few extracts from his

WINTER.

The dismantled groves through which the wind howls, the "storm-pinched" cattle, lowing in the frozen pastures for food, the twigs covered with hoar-frost, and the hardy bramble without a bud, usher in Giles with his "ponderous beetle," as he sallies forth in the black winter morning to break up the frozen turnips:—

> "On driving gales sharp hail indignant flies,
> And sleet, more irksome still, assails his eyes;
> Snow clogs his feet; or if no snow is seen,
> The field with all its juicy store to screen,
> Deep goes the frost, till every root is found
> A rolling mass of ice upon the ground.
> No tender ewe can break her nightly fast,
> Nor heifer strong begin the cold repast,
> Till Giles with ponderous beetle foremost go,
> And scattering splinters fly at every blow;
> When pressing round him eager for the prize,
> From their mixed breath warm exhalations rise."

Nor is the next picture less perfect, when at night he fodders the cattle, "moving unseen beneath his trailing load," while the hungry herd snatch sweet mouthfuls from

him as he passes. The description of the farmer's fireside is not quite so happily sketched as many of his out-of-door scenes; we have the rifted log, and the faggot blazing with "the frothing sap hissing out," the rack filled with cheese, the ample chimney where "many a savoury ham had been stored." Giles sitting on his stool, the butt of many a joke for the farmer's men, and the farmer himself seated in his arm-chair; and that is all. The fire-light plays not upon their features, the old "hob" is not mentioned, the shepherd-dog is left out of the picture, we have not the maiden's wheel, we see not the men red in the face as they stoop down to unlace their heavy boots; indeed, they are doing nothing, until one, awoke by his chilblains, starts up to look after his horses before he retires to rest,—

> "He starts, and ever thoughtful of his team,
> *Along the glittering snow a feeble gleam*
> *Shoots from his lantern as he yawning goes*
> To add fresh comfort to their night's repose;
> Diffusing fragrance as their food he moves,
> And pats the jolly sides of those he loves."

Here we have a painting which the most unpoetical of all beholders can see at a glance, requiring but little more than the comprehension of a child to bring it full before the "mind's eye." His description of the poor post-horse, in spite of our love for old stage-coach travelling, causes us after all to feel thankful for railways; we marvel no puffing company have inserted it in their prospectus; it would have proved as effective as some of those descriptions of the suffering slaves have done at the great negro meetings, causing ladies to wet their cambrics with weeping, and go home with severe colds in their heads, for the benefit of the blacks. But Giles must quit the comfortable fireside as well as the waggoner, who went out with his lantern to

fodder the horses; for dogs often sally forth in the night and worry the sheep, so he must set out alone to visit his little flock before he sleeps—

> "From the fireside with many a shrug he hies,
> Glad if the full-orb'd moon salute his eyes,
> And through the unbroken stillness of the night,
> Shed on his path her beams of cheering light.
> With sauntering steps he climbs the distant stile,
> Whilst all around him wears a placid smile.
> There views the white-robed clouds in clusters driven,
> And all the glorious pageantry of heaven.
> Low on the utmost boundary of the sight,
> The rising vapours catch the silver light;
> Thence fancy measures, as they parting fly,
> Which first will throw its shadow on the eye,
> Passing the source of light; and thence away,
> Succeeded quick by brighter still than they;
> For yet above these wafted clouds are seen
> (In a remoter sky still more serene,)
> Others detached in ranges through the air,
> Spotless as snow, and countless as they're fair;
> Scatter'd immensely wide from east to west,
> The beauteous semblance of a flock at rest."

Homer's celebrated night scene, as translated by Pope, is not more beautiful than the passage we have here quoted; nor do we know where to turn, amid all our great poets, to find, in the same number of lines, a more exquisite description of a calm winter sky, than the one here given by an uneducated Farmer's Boy. No one after reading it can, we think, doubt that genius is a gift; that poetry can never be taught in school or college; that education may refine and give a polish to a writer's style; but the great original well-spring of thought must first have an existence in the soul, and is as different from the meagre talent of mere verse writing, as the mock words of a parrot are from reason.

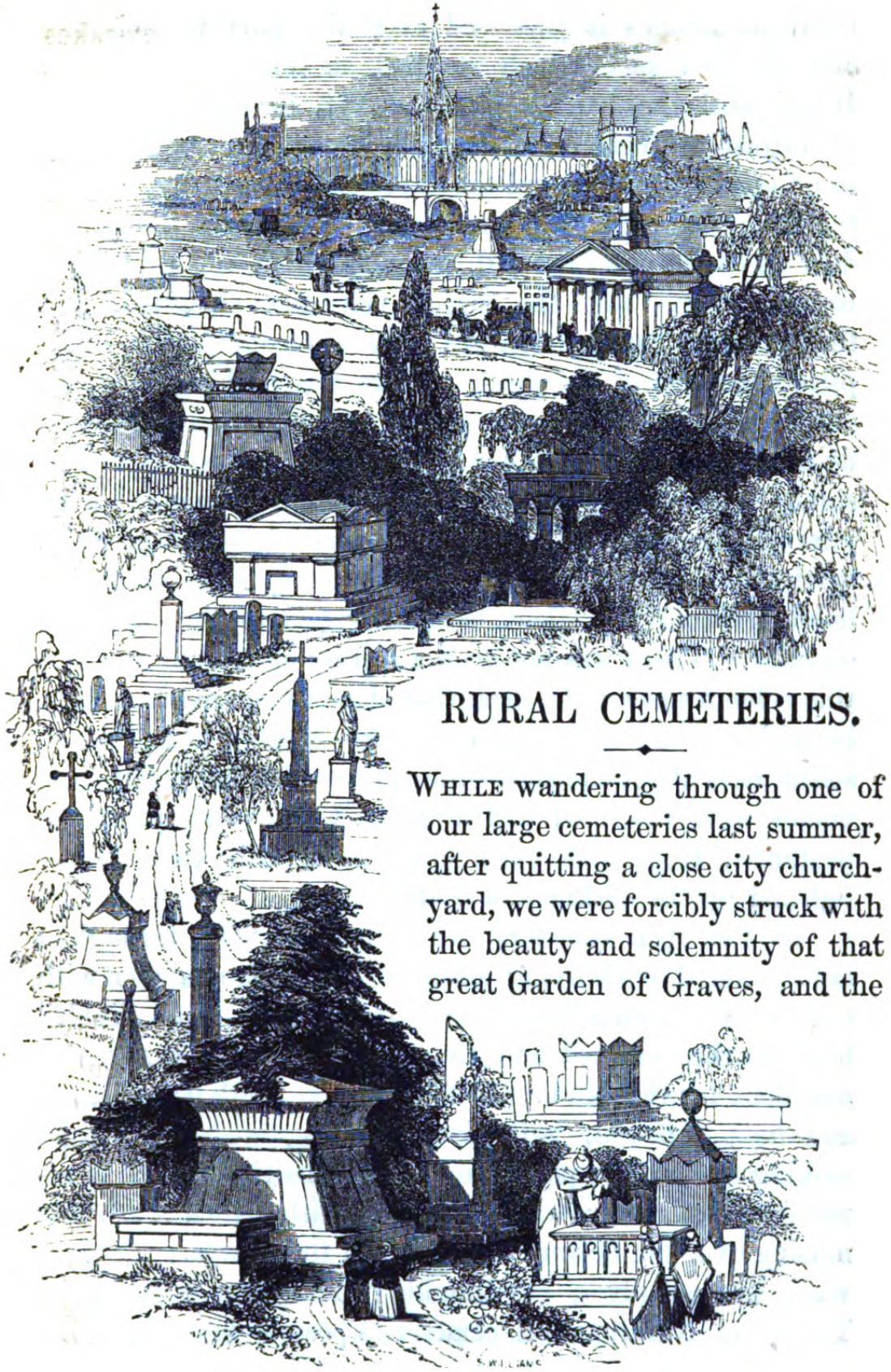
He next describes the aged ash-tree, which he mistakes for

"A grisly sceptre clothed in silver grey;"

familiar as the object was to him in the day-time, he forgot all about it as it stood singly before him in that narrow lane, its white bark fronting the pale moonlight, while many a strange shadow waved and played over his pathway, just as the night-wind rocked the topmost branches of the naked hawthorns. Admirably did he adopt these old superstitious feelings on a later day, when he told the tale of that ancient dame who was benighted in the vale of Fakenham, and went along muttering many a prayer, with the ghost trotting at her heels. Winter draws to a close —days lengthen—there are patches of blue here and there in the sky, and the sun once more

"Gives to the reeking mead a brighter hue,
And draws the modest primrose-bud to view.
Yet frosts succeed, and winds impetuous rush,
And hail-stones rattle through the budding bush;
And night-fallen lambs require the shepherd's care,
And teeming ewes, that still their burdens bear;
Beneath whose sides to-morrow's dawn may see
The milk-white strangers bow the trembling knee;
At whose first birth the powerful instinct's seen
That fills with champions the daisied green."

Amongst the richly illustrated books of the present day we must number an edition of Bloomfield's Poems, published by Mr. Van Voorst; the designs are excellent, faithfully representing the passages they illustrate, and will, we have no doubt, through their truth and beauty, cause many to purchase Bloomfield's Works, who have hitherto known only by report, or a few occasional extracts, what numberless passages of true, simple, and sterling poetry were written by the author of "The Farmer's Boy."



RURAL CEMETERIES.

WHILE wandering through one of our large cemeteries last summer, after quitting a close city churchyard, we were forcibly struck with the beauty and solemnity of that great Garden of Graves, and the

many advantages it possessed over the narrow, noisome, and crowded spot which we had an hour before visited. It was still the Land of Death; yet, forming as strong a contrast as there is between the broad burst of sunlight in an open landscape, and the imprisoned rays struggling on the damp floor of a deep dungeon. We entered the grated door on the brow of the hill, through which the refreshing breeze blew, and the sweet sunshine streamed, and threaded our way through the silent catacombs—the high-piled chambers of the dead. There was nothing to shock our feelings in this solemn scene. Imagination shadowed us for the moment with her huge wings, and we seemed to stand in the cabin of a vast ship that was manned with "ministering angels," all the passengers asleep in their quiet berths, and the Great Captain somewhere above, or at the helm, guiding the silent bark in safety to the shores of eternity. There was not even a feeling of loneliness about this solemn place; the dead that slept there seemed still to be with us—we were one company—there was no look of solitariness about the spot—the very marble on which their names were inscribed had a white, warm, and sunny appearance; Hope and Faith stood there, like twin sisters, lighting up the darkness of death.

In the open cemetery we seemed to walk through a land lettered with living affections, and strewn over with tokens of existing love. Our sympathies were divided between the mourned and the mourners. Our sorrow was not alone for the dead: Grief stood there, with bowed head, and hair unbound, with Pity kneeling at her feet, and looking up into her pale face, as if entreating of her to remember the living; while Memory, with folded arms, was musing over the flowers that adorned the graves. To those who, like ourselves, are humble worshippers in the great Temple of Nature, rural cemeteries possess many beauties,

which are lost upon such as care not for the lavish hand, that decks this green and flowery world. Such scenes to us are studded "thick as stars" with sweet and sorrowful associations; the very flowers that grow above the graves possess a language which we endeavour to translate; and we read in them many a fond memorial, and trace many a line of lingering affection, which, beneath a brown and barren mound of earth, would have been for ever buried. The imagination soars into another world where death becomes immortality, and the shapes it summons up are steeped in the golden shine of an unsetting sun. In a dimly-lighted, air-pent, city churchyard fancy is fettered: for there such images float not, or if they are seen there, they seem to sit with folded wings, weeping beneath the dark shadows of the mouldering walls.

Amid the dim and tumult of a populous city, the dead, to us, appear sadly misplaced: we never look upon those unhealthy corners, crowded with graves, without feeling that they have no right to be thrust there: we wish them far removed from those sunless spots, and would like to see something green and beautiful waving above their graves. Their business with this world is at an end, they have finished their long day's work: the roll of chariots, the trampling of horsemen, and the deep-throated utterance of busy life, are ever sending their harsh and grating sounds through the echoing chambers of the dead. Around a rural cemetery there hangs a silence more befitting the solemnity of death—the few sounds that fall upon the ear are neither jarring nor dissonant; there is a lulling murmur in the rustling leaves which adds to the repose that reigns around, and we exclaim to ourselves, "Here, indeed, the dead are at rest!"

Within a breathless, high-walled city church-yard, there is neither peace nor rest; the dead take up their abode

there for a brief space of time, and are then removed to make room for new comers: the grave is converted into a common Lodging-house, where guest succeeds guest, and how and where the last tenants were removed are truths too revolting for us to record. The grave old solemnity that long reigned over such places is destroyed, and we never see a spade thrust into the soil without feeling that some mute tongue, if it could but speak, would exclaim, "Forbear," and give utterance to Shakspere's immortal curse. Such places ever wear the same forbidding and monotonous look; the rank grey grass hangs white and withered; the very air seems dying for want of breathing room; the ground seems to have changed its nature; and there is an appearance of death in the piled-up houses, as if the inhabitants had only come there to die—to sit at their windows begrudging every inch of ground that was occupied by another. Around the cemetery stretches the wide unwalled country, where the eye traces many an old familiar scene, footpaths, and winding roads, which we have often traversed with those who now sleep at our feet; and they live again in our memory, as we call up the past, and cheat ourselves for the time into a forgetfulness of death. There we behold Nature at work; we see the seasons as they change; and many a varied image floats before the mind's eye, like the grey and golden clouds of evening. Summer deepens the delicate green of Spring; Winter treads coldly upon the heels of Autumn; and, whilst we read the lessons which an Invisible Hand has imprinted upon the landscape, we almost unconsciously prepare ourselves for a change, as we confess that "Nothing is immortal but immortality."

Old decayed monuments, which mark the graves of founders and benefactors, are in keeping with our ancient churchyards, as records of charitable bequests, beautifyings, and repairs, which Time has again dilapidated, and bared

once more the grey, hard, weather-bleached foundation, as if he scorned the touch of every workman save Ruin. Family vaults ought also to remain undisturbed (when they have received their last occupant), as sacred freeholds of the dead, until every vestige is swept away,—the monument crumbled, and the dust of the dead trampled into the common earth of oblivion by the unborn generations, who could never know that they trod upon human ashes.

We have the authority of Holy Writ for asserting that rural cemeteries date almost as far back as the deluge; for there it is on record that Abraham purchased of Ephron, the Hittite, the field of Machpelah, together with the cave that was therein, and the trees, even those which grew on "the borders round about," for a possession of a burying place.* Sacred history is silent respecting the spot where Adam and Eve were interred, nor is there any mention made of the burial-places of the elder patriarchs before the Flood; those ancient graves of the early world have been washed away from that great shore, on which, ages ago, every landmark had crumbled into dust. The sea of time has rolled over and blotted out every trace of the Garden of Eden, that garden in which God walked in "the cool of the day;" but whither our first parents were driven, or in what place their bones were laid, no one living will ever know. All we can gather is, that they returned unto the "ground from whence they came," and thitherward we are all fast hastening.

The field of Machpelah, with its solemn cave, must have been been a secluded and beautiful spot; for, beside the border of trees which hemmed it "round about," the field itself was interspersed with them; and it might be the more endeared to Abraham as it lay before Mamre, —on the very edge of that pastoral plain, and perhaps

* Genesis, chap. xxiii., verse 17.

even within sight of the hallowed tree under whose green branches he entertained the three angels, when Sarah stood concealed behind the hangings of the tent, and laughed at the conversation of her heavenly guests, as they partook of that primitive repast of bread, milk, and butter, and the choicest calf in the herd.* It is no improbable conjecture that, as the princely patriarch sat in the opening of his tent in the "heat of the day," as was his custom, his eye might alight upon the field of Machpelah; and, struck with its repose and beauty, as the shadows of the trees slept motionless on the edge of the sunshine, he selected it for a family grave, wishing to lay his bones within that land which he knew his "children's children," who would outnumber "the stars of heaven," should on a future day inherit.

Although Jacob died in the land of Egypt, with all his children around him, yet on his death-bed he made Joseph swear that he would bury him in the field of Machpelah; "for there," said the dying patriarch, "they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; *and there I buried Leah.*"† More than once does Jacob express a wish to be buried with his fathers; he seems to have a dread and a horror lest his body should be embalmed, or his bones left to moulder in Egypt. He entreats of Joseph to "*deal kindly and truly*" with him, and says, "*Bury me not, I pray thee,* in Egypt;" and when Joseph had answered, "*I will do as thou hast said,*" still Jacob demanded a more solemn pledge, and he said, "*Swear unto me. And he sware unto him.*"‡ Many a time, beyond doubt, had Jacob's thoughts wandered to that peaceful burial-place whilst he sojourned in Egypt;

* Genesis, chap. xviii.

† Genesis, chap. xlix., verse 31.

‡ Genesis, chap. xlvii., verses 29 and 30.

often had his fancy pictured that quiet cave, the field surrounded and covered with trees, where all day long their shadows waved to and fro, with a dreamy and sleepy motion, noiseless as if akin to death; and he dreaded lest the "building masons" of Egypt should pile a pyramid above his bones in that unbelieving land of idol-worshippers. Jacob was buried in the field of Machpelah; and although the twilight of ages has dropped down and deepened over that ancient cemetery, yet such a spirit of truthfulness breathes over the Holy Pages, that we can almost fancy ourselves the last lingerers in that solemn field, watching the departure of the "*great company of chariots and horsemen,*"* as they slowly wind away amongst the trees after the burial of Jacob, until all are lost in Egyptian darkness.

We know no pastoral poetry equal to what is scattered over the earlier chapters of the Bible; nothing that breathes such a primitive spirit of piety and peace. No sound of the city disturbs the quietude of those plains; the beautiful daughters of the patriarchs lead forth their flocks and herds to the wells of water; rich pasture lands, bordered with trees, stretch for miles away; green valleys everywhere open, filled with cattle quietly grazing; here and there a tent is visible in the landscape; Isaac walks forth to muse in the fields at eventide, while the figures of angels are ever crossing the scene, and showing how nearly, in those golden days, earth was allied to heaven. Even their funeral ceremonies are poetical. Poor old Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, was buried by Jacob under an oak, and it was called the "Oak of Weeping;" so great was their lamentation for her who had accompanied his mother from the home of her childhood, and shared all their privations in a strange land; and Jacob seems almost broken-hearted

* Genesis, chap. l., verse 9.

while telling Joseph how he buried Rachel by the road-side, "When yet there was but *a little way* to come unto Ephrath."*

Through what a land of poetry and peril was the dead body of Joseph brought out of Egypt! What painter is there bold enough to grapple with such a subject? Amid all the plagues of Egypt, there stood the coffin ready to be borne away,—in the deep darkness which overshadowed the land it was not forgotten; the pillar of fire flashed upon it by night, and by day it moved slowly behind the pillar of cloud; through the Red Sea was it carried, between that high and terrible wall of waters, which, when it had passed, rolled back, and became the grave of the haughty Egyptians. Through storm and battle, and the perils of the wilderness, and the thunder which shook Mount Sinai, was the body of that dead man borne. When Moses held up his wearied arm, and conquered Amalek, it was still there. On the waves of war it was washed to the Promised Land; it followed the Ark of God when Jordan was divided, and was at last buried in the field of Shechem, in the ground which Jacob had long before purchased of the sons of Hamor.† In the whole annals of time there is no funeral procession on record that comes near in sublimity and grandeur to his, who, when young, was sold as a slave to the Egyptians. That dead-march through the God-dried ocean and over the desert, led by Moses (whose grave the angels dug), the man who met his Maker face to face, and spoke to Him as a man does to his friend, was a mourner at that great funeral which eclipses all romance: the eye of imagination closes before its awful splendour. The dead and the living pass away amid the roar of the

* Genesis, xlviii., verse 7.

† Joshua, chap. xxiv., verse 32.

ocean, the thunder of the Mount, and the clashing of battle upon battle; and while we read, we feel as if in the presence of Him, "who doeth great things which we cannot comprehend."

In the beginning of Genesis, and from the utterance of the Almighty Himself, we find the first man that was created, doomed to return to the dust from whence he came —yet whether by burial in the earth, or otherwise, is not recorded; but, from the manner of interment followed by Abraham, there is but little doubt that the same custom was instituted by the elder patriarchs before the Deluge; and that Noah, who must have been well acquainted with the earlier modes of burial, imparted the same knowledge to his children. That the custom of burning the dead is also of ancient date we have authority as remote as that of the Theban war; whilst the glowing descriptions of the funeral pyres in Homer flash as brightly through the long night of ages, as if we ourselves were the spectators, and saw Achilles, with his "man-killing hands," stretched out on the blazing pile. Even in our own country we have strong grounds for supposing that the ancient Britons burnt their dead, from the number of rude urns which have at various periods been discovered, without any remains of the ustrinal vessels, incense-pots, coins, or lachrymatories accompanying them, as was the custom amongst the Romans. But whether such urns are anterior to the invasion of Britain by Julius Cæsar, and such was the form of burial amongst the ancient Druids—or, whether they merely contained the remains of some small and conquered tribe, who were half-Romanised through living near the neighbourhood of the encamped invaders, and, amongst other things, copied the Roman mode of interment,—are matters which we must leave to sleep in their ancient obscurity. One thing, however, is not improbable, as it was a custom of

remote antiquity to burn the dead, many a learned geologist may yet wander in error, and as he fails to discover that which was consumed by fire, wrongfully, perhaps, conclude that it had no existence at the imagined period he fixes upon for his "undated remains."

The embalming of the dead, as practised by the Egyptians, is known to all who have seen a mummy, or glanced at the history of that ancient and mysterious people. Sublime and impressive they may look in their own stupendous and solemn tombs; but, to our eye, they appear nipped up and miserable in their ornamented wrappings and gilded cases; and should we be compelled to have our remains handed down through three thousand years, we would prefer the noble urn and the funeral pyre a thousand-fold, and choose a moveable monument of marble and ashes.

Whatever were the customs of the ancients, their burials in imperishable tombs, in costly urns of gold or silver, beneath the domes of towering temples, by the roadside (solemn mementos of the traveller), or in lonely deserts and forsaken places, none were ever better adapted to the circumstances of the present day, considering the crowded state of our cities, and the increased value of the lands adjacent, than are our rural cemeteries. That such receptacles for the dead existed in past ages, we have ample proof in history, beside the existing ruins of many in the present day, which clearly show that the "silent cities of the dead" were remote from those of the living.

That rural cemeteries, like railroads, are at present looked upon with the calculating eye of cent. per cent., instead of the noble and enlarged view which looks forward to the benefit of mankind only, the enormous sums demanded for the ground too clearly demonstrate. It would form a most startling estimate, if the price for which a single acre of land is sold in one of our large metropolitan

cemeteries was put down in plain figures. But this is one of the evils that time will remedy; for it is not in a country like ours, seeking for free trade with all the living world, that any power can long monopolise these green freeholds of the dead. Men will be found ready to give their lands for burial-places at a fair remunerating price, such as the very poor will be willing to pay, for it is not the poor who can at present bury their dead in the cemeteries. Even the ground in parochial churchyards comes high, when we consider the "quick returns," and the many "entries" arising from one grave, so often changing its tenants in the course of a few years.

As regards the object of distance (a great consideration to the poor), let the cemeteries once open their graves at such prices as they can afford to pay, and conveyances will soon spring up, cheap enough and respectable enough, for such solemn occasions. We belong not to those who think it a waste of wealth to pay honour to the dead, nor would we wish to see the funeral processions of the rich shorn of a plume—they are in keeping with their lives—the last line of distinction the living can draw,—the proud homage which Pomp pays Death. Still, as we are all vassals to this great King, we think that something more of a grave and equal decorum ought to be observed towards the meanest subject that enters his silent dominions. Not in outward show alone, but something more of a sanctified respect towards their resting-places; not seeking to make such spots a ground of profit only (for surely that feeling ought to be buried with them), but to treat their remains as something that we may, in another form, meet again; for who can tell what amends may be made by treating the dead respectfully, or what power the Angel of Death possesses in that Great Court beyond the grave? They who believe not in a future state (and few are found who retain

that doctrine at the last hour) can entertain no respect for the dead; memory with them is but a mockery, and their sympathy for the broken-hearted sorrowers, who mourn over the departed, rings but with hollow comfort. They snap the golden chain of our faith, and break asunder the only link that extends from earth to heaven, and "binds us every way about the feet of God;" they would leave Hope no anchor to lean upon: to plant a grave with flowers, or to erect a monument, would be at once like renouncing their unenviable belief.

We know there are no lack of well-meaning persons, who will argue that it is sheer folly to bestow a thought upon the dead; and that many wise and great men have expressed themselves indifferent as to what became of their bodies after death; yet we rarely meet with any amongst these who have ever been found guilty of treating the dead with disrespect, and our love for them whilst living, though clinging now only to the barren branches, is hallowed by the remembrance of what they were, and not what they now are. "He is not dead, but sleepeth," ought to be a warning, solemn enough to guard the lowliest grave from desecration. Are the remains of mother and father, husband and wife, son and daughter, relation and friend, such common commodities that, when they have ceased to delight, and serve, and comfort, nay, even cross us, they are to be turned out and buried with no more ceremony, and no more feeling than ——? Nay, there is no comparison; we lose the bird that sang to us, and regret its loss; we miss the cat that sat and purred upon our knee; we talk affectionately of the dog that followed us faithfully so many years; the horse and ass live long in the memory of a kind-hearted master.

No; truly, there is no comparison: a ring, a chain, a book, a trifle, however small, according to the common

value of worldly calculation, becomes inestimable to those who love the memory of the giver. We descend with them, like Aladdin with his wonderful lamp, into the earth, and they flash upon "the unsummed treasures of the deep,"—upon heaps of wealth that can only enrich the beholder. If trifles like these can awaken such powerful emotions in a sensitive mind, what must the heart feel when standing beside the grave of an object so beloved? No, we will not think so meanly of poor human nature as to believe that any one living cares not for the dead, or sets no more store upon the two yards of common earth that covers the remains once dear to others, than he would upon the same space of ground in the wildest wold, or remotest moor. Although we know not where reigns that silence which was never broken by a human sob, nor can point out where the solitude dwells that has not echoed back a mortal sigh; though every yard of earth may, in former ages, have been a grave, and not a flower blows without bearing in its root the doomed drops of Eden; still we covet not a loneliness in death: and who living would not sooner share immortality with his greatest enemy, rather than enter it alone? Who would not rather be aroused by the sound of the last trumpet, and start up with the great army of the dead, than awake in the wilderness, where only the boom of the bittern could be heard? Who would wish to be the last man left upon a fast-sinking wreck, in the midst of a mastless sea, and not wish that he was one of the drowned? The great poets, in the midst of all their mighty imaginings, when they portrayed the punishments of a future state, either forgot, or wilfully omitted, solitude (as a state of existence too horrible to endure), and left modern times and model-prisons to work out and finish this refined cruelty, which even a dead man (if he could but feel) would dread.

Faith turns her bright eye to the sunny side of the

grave—to a future state of existence abounding in never-ending happiness—she sees but the eternal light in the distance, and bending all her energies thitherward, forgets her brief passage through the gloomy gateway of death. She knows that beyond those grim and forbidding barriers there stretches the delectable garden of heaven—that land of Paradise which far excels all we ever thought beautiful upon earth. Faith doubts not the written record of God, but trusting to that power which said—"Let there be light," and at whose bidding darkness was broken up, and rolled trembling away—believeth that when there she will never more be separated from those she loved; that in those nightless realms—"*There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.*"*

We well know, "that death, a necessary end, will come when it will come;" and without dwelling upon the "uncertain certainty," the preparation and continual expectation, which so many well-meaning people are continually dinning into the ears of the living, as if we were born for no other purpose than to die, we hold it necessary to look Death boldly in the face, and contemplate "this sea-mark of our utmost sail," not in fear and trembling only, but like brave men determined to "fight the good fight," and not ashamed to become captive to the Conqueror. Supposing that the space of life is limited from the very moment of our birth, and that the first minute which ushers us into existence commences the numbering of our days—are we to live only for death? to close our eyes upon all that exists in this green and beautiful world, and keep them fixed only on the grave? Better at once turn hermits, and betake us to lonely cells. What a life would this be if such were the case; why, we might as well live and sleep in our coffins, or for ever sit upon the ground,

* Revelation, chap. xxi.

"and tell sad tales about the death of kings." Was it for this that man was gifted with the mighty power of thought? that the grand unsculptured marble of the mind which could shape its imaginings into an immortality as endurable as the earth, was called up like a gigantic shadow—a mere mockery—to fade away again at the touch of death? Was the golden sun of Shakspere sunk "deeper than ever plummet sounded," that he might make circles only on the sea of Time, never to be traced again after they had ceased to wash this mortal shore? If so, farewell to man's divinity.

No; there is a great mustering ground somewhere in the undiscovered regions beyond the grave, where we shall behold those god-like spirits, whose departing tread still shakes the earth, and in them see the chosen senators of heaven. Those mighty minds, God-breathed and God-begot, if they do for ever perish—which we will not believe—must surely have mistaken their way, when they descended from heaven to inhabit their "fleshly tabernacles," or were sent as proofs that angels do sometimes visit us unaware. The very air is filled with their undying whispers, and if they spoke not "the great utterance of the Gods," they lisped an immortal language; they chartered the winds, and bade every breath that blew to proclaim to the listening ears of future ages, that they had gained a victory over death. They have left behind them lingerings of undying voices, stray notes which death could not silence; the golden gates of heaven could not close suddenly enough upon the sound of their "sweet harpings," without sending the gushing music back again to earth: what floats around us is all that is left of their immortality. Let us, then, not envy heaven, nor wish to thin those holy ranks of its "ministering angels;" they were but mighty messengers beckoned back in mercy by the Most High, lest

we should prostrate ourselves before His wondrous works, and in our idolatry forget the Maker.

But let us not blot out the traces of the foot-marks they have left behind. Who would not bow in homage to the dust of Homer? or wander weary leagues, if he could but discover where the forgotten ashes of those still illustrious in memory repose? It is a Popish deed to lock up the monuments in Westminster Abbey from public view, and to compel the poor to pay for a sight of those "holy relics;" they forget that there are "sermons in stones," which might benefit us. What right have they to demand money, and make a show of the graves of the mighty dead? Did the dead authorise them to do so? Did our warriors bleed, our statesmen rule, our poets write, and all our great spirits distinguish themselves, to be locked up, that we might pay to peep at them?

The illustrious dead are our own; they belong to the nation; before the time of Alfred they formed that nucleus which has grown up, and gathered, and spread, and become at last mighty England. Our glory is not to be found in riches and antiquities alone; its immortal part is lettered in the names of our dead, which Fame has trumpeted to the utmost ends of the earth. And now these great Great Freemen of England, which no earthly power could bind whilst living, are kept from us unjustly. Their jailers have turned our glory into grief, and mingled feelings of reproach with the hallowed thoughts that ought only to hover around the honoured dead. They recall to our mind the old couplet—

> "That was the mighty Cæsar—here you see
> All that makes—Sir, you have not paid the fee."

Better a thousand times would it be, if the departed great slept in some open cemetery, where we might have

access to their graves, rather than be kept in this selfish seclusion; for their ashes would hallow the remotest solitude, and their dust consecrate the commonest corner of the universe—their memories are imperishable.

Many a monumental effigy still exists, which has outlived the name it was sculptured to commemorate. Our knowledge just enables us to distinguish whether it was a warrior or a priest; as for the rest, time hath shuffled it into the dust of a million forgotten ambitions, which his unsparing breath has blown into oblivion. We have not so many renowned men that their tombs need to be hidden.

"Who knows," says a celebrated writer,* "whether the best of men be known, or whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot, than any that stand remembered in the known account of time?" What grand visions spring out of this hope to be realised in a future state of existence? What a narrow escape had "Abbot Samson" from oblivion? and who knows but that many a chronicle may be laid up in dark corners as instructive as "Joselyn of Brokland's?" We know not what records are kept in the archives of heaven, or what mighty memories are registered in the Book of Life. Names we never heard may have been uttered with loud acclaim, and all heaven rung with rejoicings as their entry was announced. To know such as these may be one of those lasting delights reserved for our future happiness—"to draw near the nature of the Gods." Let us have access to the tombs of those whom we know to be great, good, and worthy, that we may have a foretaste of this pleasure.

Returniug to our subject of rural cemeteries, we marvel to find so little that is new in monumental decorations. Old Heathen symbols meet the eye in almost every direc-

* Sir Thomas Browne's Urn-Burial.

tion. In the catacombs, the Egyptian style of sepulchral architecture may be considered in keeping, as it fills the imagination with solemn associations, and recalls those ancient and "silent cities of the dead;" carrying the mind back to the captivity of Israel, to the wondrous achievements of Moses, and all those stirring incidents which once shook the oldest kingdom of the world. Surely the path which Christianity has hewn through a thousand dangers, and which, though so full of peril, her martyrs fearlessly trod on their way to eternal life, is not so barren but that it might furnish something better than those emblems of the old idolaters. How few, saving the learned, understand the meaning of those mysterious hieroglyphics; even the tear vessels, quenched torches, winged hour-glasses, and circled serpents, are beyond the comprehension of thousands. They would better understand the descending dove, the full-cheeked angel sounding the last trumpet, the sacred cross, the arched rainbow, the ark, the stone rolled from the mouth of the sepulchre, and a hundred other old and holy emblems, which abound in our ancient churchyards. There seems to be a want of invention amongst our modern sculptors, not so much in the mere outline of monuments (their forms are numerous enough), but a want of something that would at once speak to the imagination. It is yet left for some man of mind to illustrate death, from the history of our holy religion; to sculpture that sleep after life's long storm, and call from the marble such forms as we believe we shall meet with in Heaven. The increase of rural cemeteries may yet be instrumental in bringing forth some hidden genius into light.

To such as us, who love flowers, and have some of every hue, culled from the choice gardens of the old poets, and preserved in the store-house of our memory, a grave overgrown with flowers is like a written book. We see

but little to sorrow over in an infant's grave, planted round with snow-drops, peeping through the "saintly veil of maiden white," and blowing in the very lap of Winter. To our eye that cold chaste flower calls up only images of hope and innocence; a pure emblem of the little sleeper below. Not a jarring note comes across the undisturbed harmony of our thoughts; there is not a youthful folly to mourn over, nor a single action to regret. If we sigh, it is for the fond mother left behind; for the face, a shade paler, since those little eyes, now closed below, looked into her own, and felt their unuttered love. We almost feel its little hand, grasping one single finger, and in fancy behold the fond mother kiss the arched crimson of its flower-sweet lips;—yes, we are sorry for her who no doubt in her sleep feels for it many a time in the darkness, and awakes to find a cold blank spot, where its warm velvet cheek was wont to be imbedded, while weeping she exclaims with Milton,

"Yet can I not persuade me thou art dead,
Or that thy corse corrupts in earth's dark womb,
Or that thy beauties lie in wormie bed
Hid from the world in a low delved tomb—
Could heaven for pity thee so strictly doom?
Oh no! for something in thy face did shine,
Above mortality—that showed thou wert divine."

Snowdrops and daisies are pretty companions to plant upon such an innocent grave.

The weeping willow, bearing sorrow in its very name, is a fit emblem to droop over the grave of a fond mother who has left her children in a strange land. It recalls the captivity of Israel; the silent harps, which before sounded with music, seem suspended from its downcast branches; and we wish the "songs of Zion" to remain for a time unsung. It also recalls the image of Barbara, of whom

Desdemona discourseth so eloquently, who went about the house "hanging her head aside, and died for love."

In one place we were drawn by a rich perfume to a remote grave, one that lay far back, as if to avoid the common gaze, and we found a monument erected to the memory of a young wife, like the marchioness immortalised by Milton,

> "Summers three times eight save one
> She had told, alas, too soon,
> And in her garland as she stood,
> You might discern a cypress bud;
> For the full blossom hung its head
> Sideways, as on a dying bed."

Her quiet resting place was overgrown with sweet-briar. It was a happy thought so to plant her grave: it told us that she was the sweetener of life, that she made her home a Paradise. Only twenty-three—Oh death! and her little infant too—her first child: the rose and the bud both shaken into the grave together; even their names were not recorded. We removed a branch of the sweet-briar, and read lower down, "Also the husband, and father, who died!" Oh God! within twelve months after he had wept over his wife and child; and we inwardly exclaimed, "Death, after all, is merciful;" like Corporal Trim, "we thanked God that he was dead."

The Primrose is one of our favourite flowers, it is an old emblem of childhood or youth; Shakspere calls it the flower "that's like thy face;" and Milton says, that "when forsaken it dies;" it tells us that spring is come, and settles down like a pale sunshine upon the dark Winter of the grave. From childhood it has, in our mind, become a golden link in the chain of Resurrection; the woods and banks around our native home were overgrown with this beautiful flower, and the first blowing root we dug up had

for years made us happy. We cannot even now account for these ideas. It might be that they came full of promise, that they told us summer would again add flower to flower; but above all, like the daisies, they grew wild in our village churchyard. Children know not what sentiment means; "they are pleased, they know not why, and care not wherefore;" it is in after years that we endeavour to trace in such trifling objects the secret that made us merry, or sad, and, when found, we regret the discovery. It is like bringing up our mature judgment to analyse a fairy-tale; laying down the "Essay on Man," and taking up critically the story of "Little Red Riding-Hood."

But chief amongst the spring-flowers, which ornament our metropolitan cemeteries, stands the Heart's-ease or Pansy, which, alike in life or death, still says, "Think of me." Shakspere calls it the flower "for thoughts;" and Milton has numbered it amongst those "which sad embroidery wear:" it is his "Pansy streaked with jet." No flower is richer in endearing names; it is the old "Forget-Me-Not;" and we could put down half a score fond, old-fashioned, and affectionate terms, by which it is still known in our remote English villages. On no grave can this beautiful flower be misplaced. Time has put no mark upon it; it belongs alike to young or old. "It is not for an age, but for all time."

Above all, to plant a grave with such flowers "as the poor inhabitant below" loved whilst living, would be a work of sad, but sacred pleasure. What would it not recall? It would be like a link extending to heaven—a chain which Death had no power to snap asunder. It would be keeping alive an affection which no earthly power could rob us of; an ideal happiness which, though poor, would "be our own;" a new and refined love, freed from all the "grossness of earth." We know not but that

such tokens of remembrance might be felt by the dead: they could do no harm; there would be nothing offensive in them; and whether the spirits of the departed are near to us or afar off, will, whilst we are mortal, be to us a mystery. In the dewy evening and all night long they would be there,

> "In the early dawn of morning, ere the summer's sun did shine,
> Before the red-cock crowed from the farm upon the hill,
> When we were warm asleep, and all the world was still."
>
> TENNYSON.

It is surely a more poetical thought, and attended with less inconvenience than that of the ancients, who kept lamps burning in their sepulchres, and liberated their slaves, on the conditions that they should watch, month for month, in those silent chambers of the dead, their sole occupation to feed the vessels with oil, and see that the flame was never extinguished. Ours would be a memorial, fed and kept alive by an invisible hand, rooted in affection, and watered with tears, which, when they fell not, would have the dew and showers for mourners, and a thousand ministering spirits, that are undreamed of in our philosophy.

How beautifully does Milton give utterance to his feelings, when he calls upon the vales, to cast

> "Their bells, and flowerets of a thousand hues,"

upon the tomb of his beloved Lycidas! It seems as if it would have comforted the poet, to have had the body of his friend in a grave, covered with flowers, so "to interpose a little ease." Alas! for him, not us, the body he mourned over,

> "The shores and sounding seas washed far away,
> Along the bottom of the monstrous world."

Milton lost his friend; and as he had not even the corse to weep over, he erected to his memory a monument in verse, one which will outlive all marble or brass, and which Time can never decay. How finely does he allude to the resurrection in the following lines!—

> "Weep no more;
> For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead,
> Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor;
> So sinks the day-star in the ocean-bed,
> And yet anon uprears his drooping head,
> And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore
> Flames in the forehead of the morning sky;
> So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high."

And Manoah says he will build Samson—

> "A monument, and plant it round the shade,
> Of laurel ever-green, and branching palm:—
> The virgins also shall on feastful days
> Visit his tomb with flowers."
>
> "SAMSON AGONISTES."

The old poets abound in beautiful passages, full to overbrimming of love for the flowers, and teeming with sweet and sorrowful allusions to death. Their gentle hearts clung to these lovely "daughters of the earth and sun;" they became messengers, bearing mysterious meanings, carrying images from the eye to the heart, and ever hinting of old undated affections, of a world which in the beginning was filled only with love. They traced in the flowers fanciful remembrances of fond passions—likenesses of what they loved, faint and spiritual, yet not the less beautiful, and cherished the more, since the originals were lost, investing them with every virtue that inhabits heaven. Nor ought these ancient emblems to be misinterpreted by us:

what the older poets did, they had good authority for doing; for our English flowers were christened at grey old Saxon fonts, and in them the early fathers of the church found many a holy meaning.

The graves of truly great men we would not care to see covered with flowers: it may be but fancy, but the solemn name, and the solid monument, with the remembrance of the mighty dead, who repose beneath, we would fain see plain, massy, and impressive; for such are "death's noblest ruins." But the tombs, within which are laid all that was once youthful, innocent, lovely, and beautiful, should grow green, "with sweet memories;" and though within "death kept his court," that faith, which has already unloosed his prisoners, should be expressed in the eyes of flowers, which look up from earth to heaven; for our hope lies in the land of light. If

> "The sleeping and the dead are but as pictures,"

why should they be placed only in black and hideous frames? One awakens again perchance to the "fever and the fret" of this world, the other to "life everlasting." Let us endeavour to divest Death of the terrors imagination has clothed him in, and instead of "a lean abhorred monster," look upon him as some friendly angel, sent to conduct us to a happier home in another world. To an intellectual mind, a grave planted with flowers kindles many an expiring thought; it is as if Grief, instead of bending motionless over the dull grey ashes she guards, rose up and fanned them for the moment into a feeble glow. Shadows numberless rise up around us, the land of death is peopled with dim forms, our mental vision sees through time and space, and we catch glimpses of old immortalities. We saw one grave "ankle deep" in flowers, which seemed to look cheerfully up to the tombstone inscribed "To the

memory of the once beautiful Juliet;" and we thought of Shakspere's Juliet, on whom death lies

> "like an untimely frost,
> Upon the sweetest flower of all the field;"

of him who yet lived to sorrow over her, and often came, exclaiming,

> "Sweet flower, with flowers I strew thy bridal bed."

We saw another grave which an affectionate daughter had planted with violets: it was to the memory of her father; the flowers were fading, for spring was fast verging into summer; but they recalled Ophelia, with her wild snatches of sweet song, as she once was—happy and light-hearted as a bird, before her violets had "withered all when her poor father died." We thought of Cordelia and Lear, and fancied somehow that her "voice was ever low and sweet."

Another pointed out where beauty slept, cut down like a rose in full bloom; and we thought of that exquisite passage, lamenting that the queen of flowers should so soon perish,

> "Alas! that it is so,
> To die, even when it to perfection grew;"

then the image of the gentle Viola came before us, she "who never told her love," calling up the whole of that matchless description, as if we had heard her own soft voice utter it, in tones surpassing the music of the sweetest silver bells. Thanks to the hand that planted that grave with roses, it brought back Shakspere and Viola. Nor could we forget the stately Katherine, "who, although unqueened," pale and broken-hearted, stalked before us in the likeness of Siddons, "every inch a queen," and said,

> "When I am dead, strew me over
> With maiden flowers, that all the world may know
> I was a chaste wife to my grave."

In the very sound of the surrounding trees, we seemed to catch whispers that came from a far-off land, notes sweetly mournful, that reach the ear unaware, making us doubt whether they linger in the air, or are freed from the prison-house of memory, by some unseen power; they recalled solemn dirges chanted in old cathedrals; voices which fancy hears in dreams, the ringing hymn, that called up Imogen, she, whose veins were like "the azured air-bell," whose breath "outsweetened the eglantine," and we again heard that cave-echoed chorus bidding the dead,

> "Fear no more the lightning flash,
> Nor the all-dreaded thunder-stone;
> Fear not slander, censure rash,
> Thou hast suffered joy and moan,
> All lovers young, all lovers must
> Consign to thee, and come to dust."

Flowers become sacred objects when planted upon a grave; in our minds they are allied in some mysterious manner to the dead, for death has hallowed the soil they grow upon. The woodbine no longer becomes the honeysuckle of the wild waste, when affection has planted it above the dead; were we even allowed to pluck it, and bear home its blossoms, they would in our mind call up images very different to those which arise from the same flowers gathered in the trailing paths of a wood. The wall-flower, that old inhabitant of solitary ruins, which we meet on abbeys and castles unroofed by time and war, is a sweet and fitting representative of death; while the heath which gives such life and beauty to the most lonely and out-of-the-way places, has a strange, solemn, and solitary look when grown upon a grave. The marigold is an old emblem of grief, it has furnished our poets with many beautiful images, from its turning to the sun morning and evening, and drooping its head and folding itself up during the hours of night. We could

point out a score of exquisite passages where the old writers "fondle and dally" over this ancient English flower as if "they loved it." Withers, after a very fanciful description of the marigold's love for the sun-light, says,

> "methinks the flowers
> Have spirits far more generous than ours."

Ivy is the ancient representative of friendship, the poppy of sleep and death; and the yew-tree is no doubt one of the first monuments which our forefathers reared above the dead. An interesting and very beautiful work might be compiled by one well versed in our old poetry, pointing out the "spiritual meanings," which our great writers gave to the flowers of death. Such a work ought not to be "pearls at random strung," for what they did was well done; they lived in an age when men walked hand-in-hand with Nature; and if from their closer communication with these "outward and visible signs," and wanting that light which time only throws upon the growth of its wonders, they wandered too far into the mazes of superstition, still their very errors plunged them into a world of poetry. They attributed to heaven and its "winged messengers," what we perhaps, too rashly, seek for in the simplest causes—they walked as if in the presence of God, where we dare even to doubt the existence of His shadow. They saw the work of a Mighty Hand, in what we too vainly attribute to man—in place of our clearer judgment, they had a stronger faith—a holiness of purpose, which covered a multitude of errors. Peace to their spirits!

We have seen one or two remarks on "Monuments to Let," which we do not altogether coincide with. Houses are built on speculation for the living, what harm is there in doing the same for the dead? Better this than a second funeral, as was the case with the late Duke of Sussex. We

do not like to see builders at work above the dead! And yet how is this to be prevented, unless the work is already erected? As for a second interment, we would fain be absent from the ceremony, although it was the funeral of an entire stranger. Family vaults must have a commencement in cemeteries; yet we think there are very few, even of the oldest heads of families, who would like to discuss such a subject beforehand. Such a scene in the hands of Hook or Hood, would have been a rich turning "of the silver lining to the light," of the vanity of poor human nature. And yet when we think of what they are, we are not sorry that the "merry tale" is left untold. We never read an account of death in our lives that made us smile beyond the moment. Pope's lady who wished for a little more paint, lest she should "die a fright;" Swift's card-player who exclaims in a breath, "The dean is dead!—pray what is trumps?" and Scott's inimitable creation of old Dumbedikes, "who could see to die with smaller candles," have ever read to us like satires, too solemn to be laughed at—matters too full of painful truth—the ruling passion strong in death, yet nevertheless death itself. Yorick's monument is more to our taste, and the melancholy pleasure Sterne supposed the spirit of the departed to have felt, in hearing the inscription read over with such a variety of plaintive tones, as denoted a general esteem and pity,—not a passenger went by without stopping to cast a look upon it, and sighing as he walked along,

"ALAS, POOR YORICK!"

In some of our cemeteries stand monuments, sacred to the memory of "Mary," "Maria," "Julia," and so on: all, excepting perhaps their age, is a mystery; we see the Christian name and nothing more; whether it be maid, wife, or widow, who sleep beneath, there is no record to tell!

It may be a hallowed feeling which suggested the erection of these nameless tombs, as if those who knew the dead wished for no sympathy in their sorrow, and craved not the passing stranger's sigh; that some living heart had shut in that image for ever, and wanted not the world to know how much that was lovely and beloved had borne that half-told name. We look on death with charitable eyes, and are loath to think that it was only a wish to be unlike others, that gave rise to the erection of these singular monuments: nor will we believe that they are copied only from the French; that the foreign fashions too many are fond of following while living, are kept up even in death. If the survivors affect only mystery for the dead, they have obtained it; and a few busy years will blot out the whole of the scanty record: for it is startling to see the inroads the elements make amongst inscriptions, several, that have scarcely stood ten years, are all but obliterated. We have thought sometimes that these are the graves of blighted hopes and broken hearts, of those "who loved not wisely but too well," for most of them are like

"A winter's day, that's dark before it's noon."

They tell where youth, and beauty, and loveliness in all its richest bloom, unnamed and unknown, repose. In the full flower of life were most of them cut down; from twenty to thirty (and but few have reached the latter age) are the periods that Death selected to carry off his prey:—

"They were not made
Through years or moons the inner weight to bear,
Which colder hearts endure till they are laid
By age in earth." BYRON.

On several tombs were hung garlands of everlasting flowers, which looked, at a distance in the sunshine, like coronets of

gold. Others were there brown and withered, the offerings of former years: sacred and untouched they remained as when placed there by the mourners; no sacrilegious hand had disturbed them. We pictured the home in which those wreaths were woven, to hang on "The Tomb of a beloved Mother;" and as the scene rose before us, we turned away with a sigh: it was an unconscious tribute Pity paid to the sorrows of the living, more than the memory of the dead; for we knew that she had gained that harbour where "the storm-beat vessel safely rides."

A few monuments had blank spaces, which merely left the age and year in which the survivor might die to be filled up; for the name of the living was already lettered below that of the dead. It seemed as if the Angel of Death held the pen in his cold hand, and was only waiting to make the entry—the few simple figures that balanced the account.

One worthy lady, after having recorded her name below that of her departed husband's as "Also of A. B., his affectionate Wife, who only lived to deplore his Loss until the —— year of her Age," so far recovered herself as to enter again into the holy banns of matrimony. There is no necessity for these rash resolutions: and we are told the only obstacle the new wooer had to surmount was "what would the people say when they saw her record on the monument?" The lady was a foreigner. Again, we think, unless with the very aged or very infirm indeed, these are rash and unnecessary resolves. Grief is a shy, retiring creature; every one respects her solitude, and all are glad when she again "makes sunshine in a shady place." True sorrow is too sacred to be trifled with; and if it will run into the very extreme, as in the above instance, it is not the less to be pitied. We are too fond of judging upon matters as they are, without properly weighing and looking

at what they once were; forgetting that human nature, in its most perfect state, is never without a portion of the old leaven of human weakness.

In one compartment of the catacombs we saw a small brass plate, fastened in the front of the bars; and on it was engraved the name of the inhabitant who slept within. The plate looked as if it had been removed from the door of the house where the dead had once dwelt. What a difference in those two houses! No postman, with inquiring eye, compares the address with the engraved name now. The busy maid-servant has long missed it "from its accustomed place;" it reflects her shining face no longer. The owner cares not what visitors may think now; dim, dull, and tarnished, it tells how altered is the inhabitant, though still always "at home."

A strange effect do those catacombs underground on the hill side produce on such as have never before visited them. At the end of the long, dark gateway, the sunshine streams down beyond the wide passage which you traverse, with its gloomy doorways—all occupied, or ready prepared for the dead. Your path lies between the houses of the dead, all up hill, shadowy, steep, and silent. It is like passing through the grave; and the sunshine that brightens beyond, looks as if it belonged to another world. The difference between these and the higher range on the utmost summit, is very striking; for there you can command a view of the wide, open country, and feel the free air blowing cheerfully upon your cheek. Here you might fancy yourself amongst those subterraneous tombs where the bandaged mummies of Egypt sleep. No one can now say that—

> "The rich, the poor, the base, the brave,
> In death without distinction lie."

The distinction between the base and the brave rests not

with man to decide; but between the rich and the poor there needs but a glance, and an inquiry as to fees, to satisfy any one that the poor will be some time before they are admitted into these "high places." Still we trust the day is near at hand, when Rural Cemeteries will be looked upon in a very different light to what they have been; that it will be thought necessary to take better care of the dead, in order to improve the health of the living; that however much opposition there may be to the allotment system amongst us now, we shall not begrudge that common allotment which will allow six feet of earth for each interred, so that they who never had a freehold whilst living, may at last inherit one undisturbed, nor be called upon to resign their claim until they have mingled "clay with clay."

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