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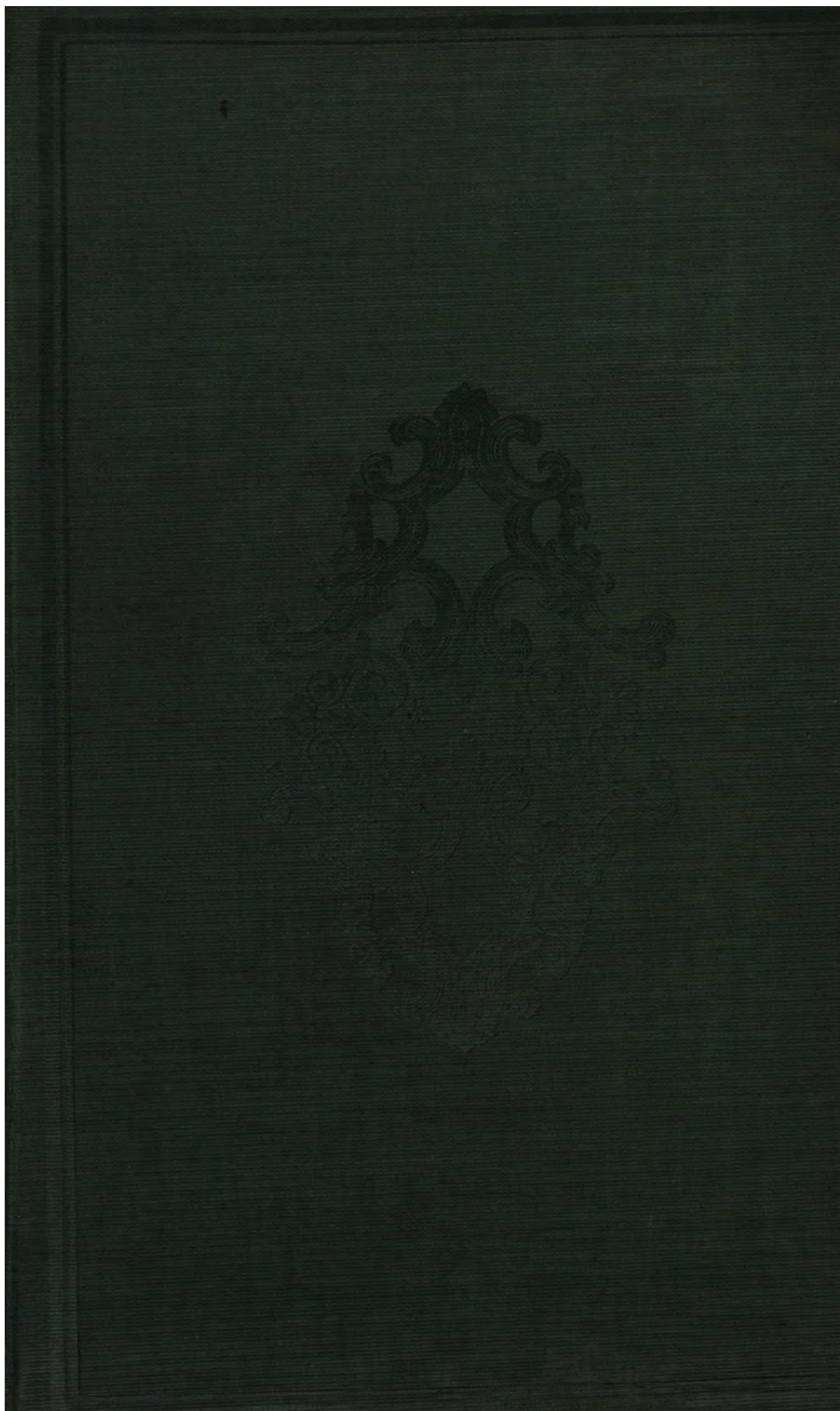
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RURAL RECORDS;

OR,

GLIMPSES OF VILLAGE LIFE.

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RURAL RECORDS;

OR,

GLIMPSES OF VILLAGE LIFE.

BY

JAMES SMITH.



LONDON:

LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, & LONGMANS,
PATERNOSTER ROW.

1845.

To the Memory

OF A

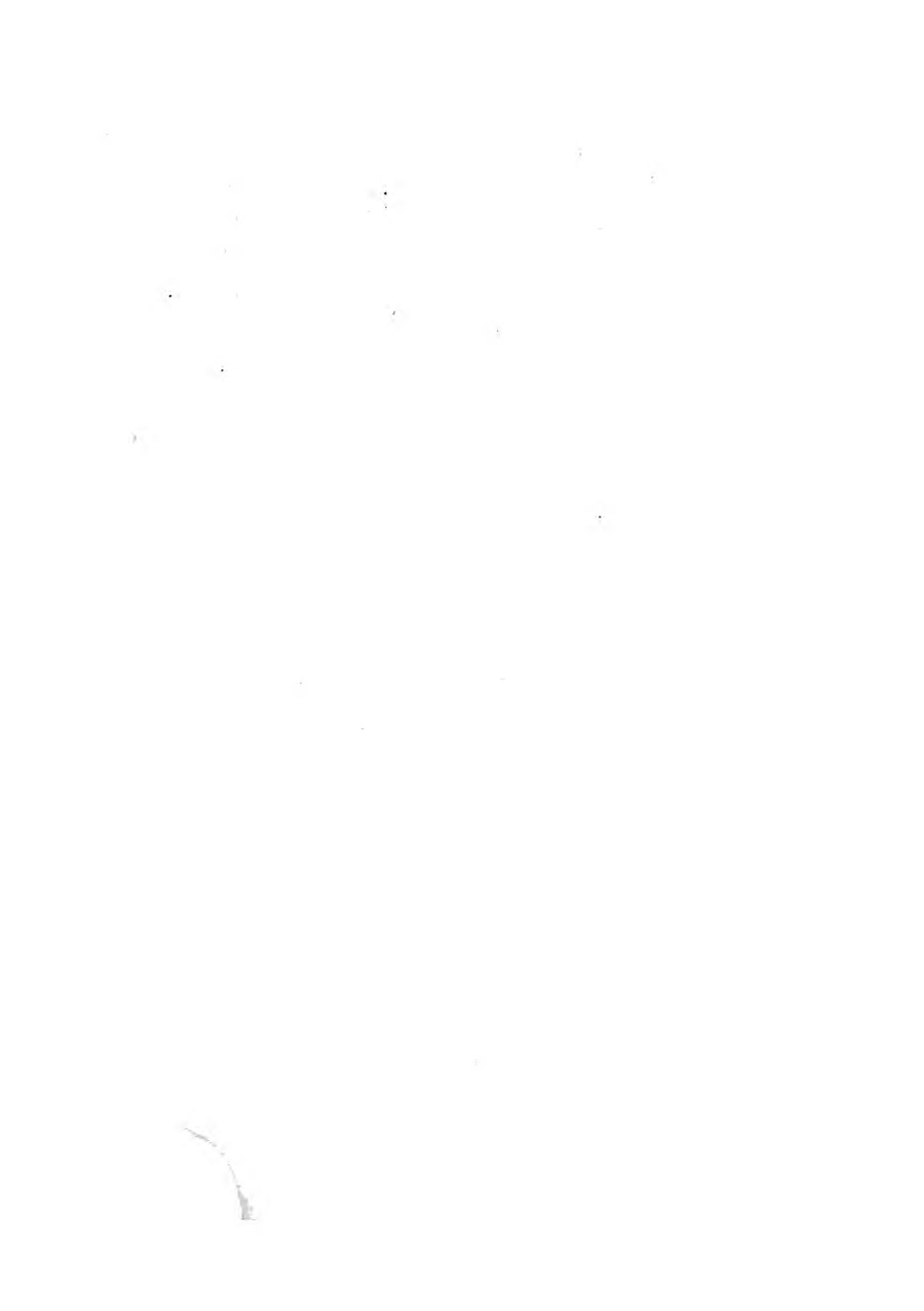
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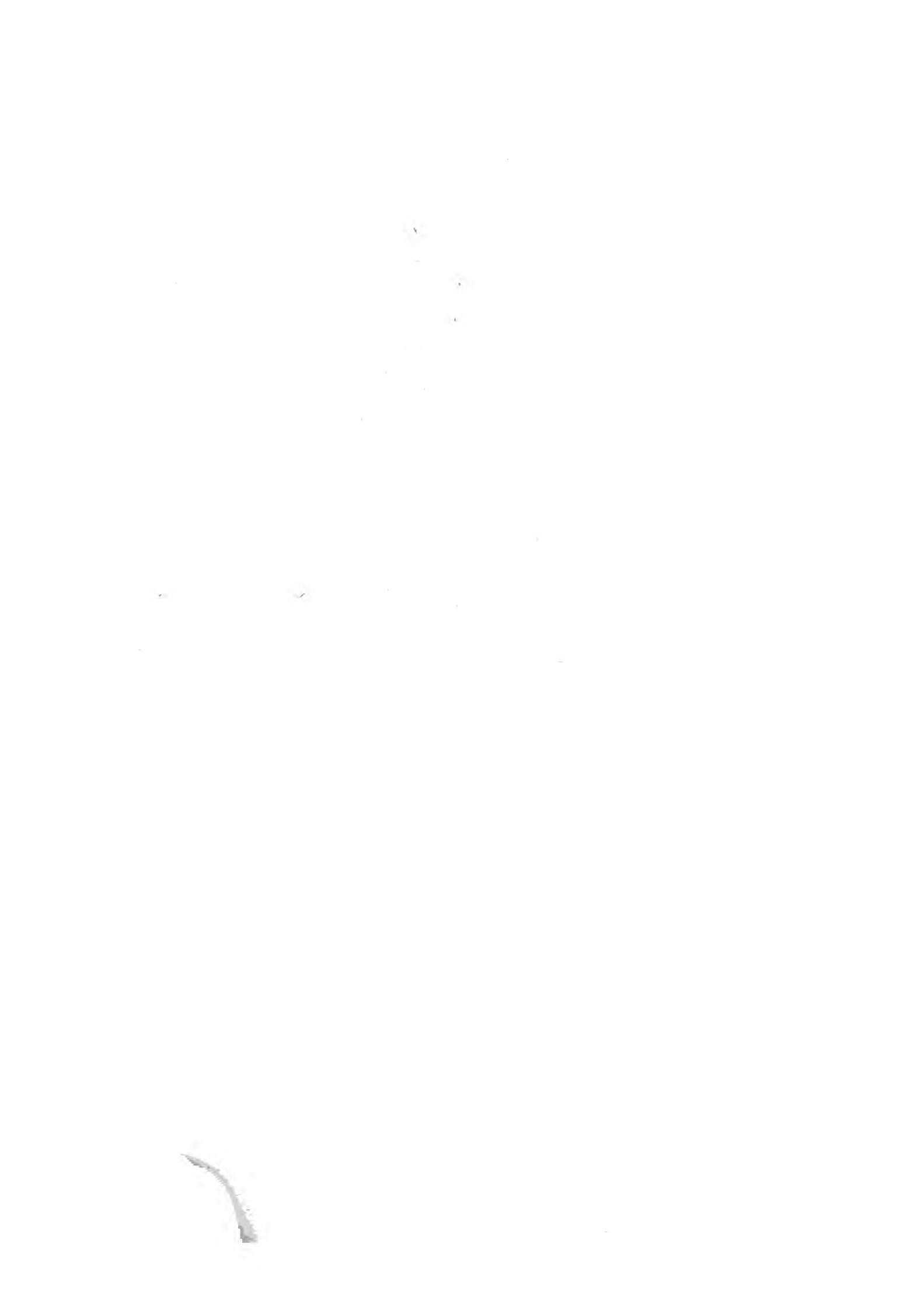
BY

THE AUTHOR.



PREFACE.

MOST of the papers, of which the present volume is composed, appeared originally in the pages of a popular periodical, and were written in the brief intervals of leisure permitted to the author by the pressure of his multifarious duties as editor of a provincial newspaper. Issued in a collective shape, with no higher object than that of amusing the leisure moments of the reader, further preface is presumed to be superfluous.



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RURAL RECORDS.

Mr. Evelyn.

Just upon the verge of a green lane, that juts abruptly out almost from the very centre of our village, stands an isolated tenement, ancient in date, quaint, curious, and strange, as ever plodding brain of olden architect devised ; sufficiently withdrawn to win for its indwellers the grateful peacefulness of retirement and repose ; but not remote enough to weaken that sense of security which the immediate vicinity of the habitations, and the daily paths of fellow men implies. From the old grey market-cross, the village's heart's core, the fretted mossy stone, that still serves to indicate the former station of a weekly mart, long since fallen into desuetude, and unto which still clings some fearful legend of a bloody martyrdom perpetrated upon its site ; from

this you may discern the heavy roof and tortuous chimneys of that antique house, with here and there a sombre gable or a sunken window, dimly and partially revealed through the bowery zone of chestnut trees, gorgeous with their exuberant and snowy blossom, that gird it in. Long lines of elms, majestic and old, and, at their feet, patches of green elastic turf, skirt this lane for many a mile. In the warm summer evenings, young children, in mirthful companies, resort to gambol there, and nowhere is the foliage richer, or the shadows deeper; nowhere does the sunshine look more gaily or more brightly in, through the green and shining leaves, speckling the ground with drops of golden light, that glow the brighter from their contrast with the heavy shade that sleeps or flickers on the sward beneath, just as the changeful wind stirs the dense rustling branches overhead, or leaves them to their motionless repose, than in that shady lane. And then the old house, what a pleasant home it is! How suggestive of bachelor delights; of an oaken library all solemnity and tranquillity; of a warm and cosy winter-room, with heavy draperies, and picture-hidden walls, and one large Gothic window, gorgeously bedight with saintly or heraldic emblazonments, admitting a "dim, religious light;" of a vaulted cellar teeming with ample store of choice and generous wines; of a summer

room, opening upon a wilderness of flowers and shrubs, and of a spacious porch, fit sanctuary for our post-prandial naps, or idle reveries at sundown.

Now, gay lilacs are shadowing that spacious porch, and caged canaries are carolling and fluttering at the open windows, and stands of flowering geraniums are blossoming hard by; and flowers, almost as numberless as stars upon a winter's night, and quite as bright, are loading the soft, rich, sunny air with their sweet breath, and luring to their honeyed urns the bee and butterfly that flit there restlessly from early dawn till rosy sunset; and you may hear the gleeful laugh of childhood, or the still more gleeful song of youthful maiden as you saunter by. Hist! that song, "Why don't the men propose?" How utterly destructive of all our bachelor visions of undisturbed serenity within its walls!

It is not, however, of the present inmates of this antique structure that we would speak, but of one who dwelt there years ago, and in whose life there seemed a colouring of romance, a Rembrandt tone of shadow mingling with the simpler outlines of the picture, worthy of passing note. His portrait still depends from the wall of the dining-room, an amiable yet melancholy mien, a thought sadder, perhaps, than he had looked in life, yet truthful and

very like withal. Poor old Mr. Evelyn ! Nothing ascetical, nor aught of misanthropy, ever mingled in *his* philosophy. Simple in manner and unobtrusive in habit, he was one among, but not *of*, the little circle in which he moved ; a portion of the constellation, but with an orbit peculiarly and only his. Our remembrance of his person and attire is fresh, vivid, and distinct as though he lived but yesterday, as though he still paced, day by day, slowly and musingly through our long straggling village, with downcast eyes, and tasselled cane trailed negligently behind him. His face was furrowed, not with the rough, irregular graining of the labourer's or artisan's, but clearly, delicately lined,—such characters as a silver *stylus* swayed by a gentle hand might produce upon a waxen tablet. His keen grey eyes were shaded by long lashes, that still retained their youthful silkiness and hue. His thin white hair was gathered in a queue behind, and scattered a shower of aromatic dust upon the collar of his coat. His habiliments were worn and faded, but there was nothing in them that could lead you to suppose their wearer had been either a spendthrift or a reprobate ; they were neat, and scrupulously clean, sober in colour, and well preserved, harmonizing with all your preconceived notions of what a decayed gentleman's attire *should be*. The ample frill protruding from the

vest was hardly fairer than the small and well-shaped hand that rested in its folds ; nor did they need the jewelled ring, or glittering shoe-buckles, to tell you their owner had once been other than he was. The stately figure, the patrician profile of his features, his lofty bearing, and the peculiarity of his gait, all seemed to

“ Plead haughtily for glories gone.”

It may be gathered, perhaps, from what is written, that Evelyn had been, in younger days, a handsome man ; and so assuredly he had been, and flourishing and prosperous to boot. That he should early have wooed and won, and passionately loved, one younger than himself, and fairer even than the fairest of those we meet among the crowds accounted beautiful, may seem a happy consequence of his flourishing condition and personal accomplishments. *That* chapter of his history were well alone. One month a bridegroom, and the next a widower,—pity trod hard upon the heels of envy, and misery shivered the cup which joy had filled brimful, while he seemed to have it most firmly in his grasp.

We need not check the current of our tale, to note the weight of agony which bore him down, or tell how soon delirium ensued, how fierce a struggle life held with death, how long they battled, how life

eventually became the victor, and how the tenour of its aftercourse was changed. But for this it would have been aimless and undistinguished. Too careless of self to seek for further personal aggrandizement, too philosophically (or indolently) content ever to be stirred by ambitious impulses, the lamp of life would have eventually become extinct, without a solitary excitement of its flame, by any of the wild currents which ordinarily augment its intensity and diminish its duration.

Solitude is no antidote to sorrow, and that commerce with the busy world, which before had seemed an evil to be shunned, became an oblivious opiate to be sought. Yet, even here, one shadow unceasingly pursued him, one cloud for ever dwelt upon his path; and though wealth, influence, and the homage and respect which they conciliate, flowed in, yet *one* was not who should have shared them all, and the gift seemed valueless, inasmuch as the void which death had made, still yawned openly as ever. All else went well for years. Then one of those periodical monsoons, which sometimes sweep across the world of commerce, a panic, razed to the ground the fabric of his fortunes. He gathered up the wreck, not to commence his pilgrimage afresh, but, hoarding it with thrifty care, "to live upon a little with content" in privacy.

Perhaps the well-remembered music of a rill,

welling with tremulous gush from some old woodland haunt, born in the shadow of forest trees, keeping its happy flow through dingle, brake, and glade, with young and laughing wild flowers clustering on its marge; perhaps the unforgotten tones and features of the playmates of his merry childhood, or, it may be, memories of a later time, and of a dearer being, then haunted the old man's mind; or, perchance, as the phantom (whether gold or reputation) that lately lured him on, had faded from his grasp, he thought no traces of the vain pursuit should vex his mind with the disturbing thoughts they would engender, and so the din and turmoil of the great metropolis was abandoned. Howbeit, as the glare and glitter of the world had shone upon the midday of his life, he sought to spend its brief remaining twilight in the quiet and seclusion of this inland village. And it was well and wisely chosen. The wish to close your eyes upon the self-same spot on which their earliest gaze was bent, the clinging desire that what is mortal should be laid to rest where others of our blood and name are sleeping, mingling our dust with the decaying relics of our race, may be a vain and foolish fancy, but it at least is natural; and, swayed by one or both of these, the old man came amongst us. Two rooms in the old house we have imperfectly described (they were the chosen sitting and sleeping apart-

ments of one dead) were dedicated to his use, and with a melancholy pleasure he there abode. Old gossips, and a sexton still more old, but all decayed, and all belonging to a bygone generation like himself, were chosen exclusively to share his confidence, for they, some forty years ago, had known the old man's buried bride. It seemed to solace him to hear them talk of her as one so young and beautiful, and they so old and withered. It was a simple and strange delusion. Had she lived, time would have dulled the keen edge, and chilled the early fervour of affection. It would have robbed the eye of its light, and the lip of its bloom; it would have stolen from the cheek its softness, and from the hair its sunny gloss and flow. They never thought of this, but spoke of her as she had been in past times, as if, could she be still living at that very hour, she would still wear the freshness and the hues of youth, and not be old and faded like as they. So sped the time, until—the date we have forgotten—we only know some years flew past, and then we missed the old man from his accustomed churchyard walk, and from the garden wickets, over which he used to lean to converse with these old and confidential gossips; and then we found he, too, was dead. Although he was of gentle birth, yet as he was a childless man, and such of his kindred as might survive were scattered far and

wide, and did not care to own the old man in his humble circumstances, no hatchment or marble to his memory was ranged beside the long array decking the chancel where the Evelyns lie buried for centuries past. A simple green grass mound, under the waving shadow of a leafy tree, is all that indicates the last resting-place of old Arthur Evelyn.

Ellen Booth.

EARLY and late, before the first grey glimmering of daylight in the east, and long after the hush of evening had fallen on the village and its busy inmates, we could perceive a ray of light gleaming from the window of the cottage opposite our own, and sometimes hear, when all was still without, a woman's voice singing a low and melancholy strain of song. It brought to mind poor Maddalene and her pathetic murmur,

“ Chi rende alla meschina
La sua felicità ?”

and, like the poet prisoner, we learnt to take an interest in the singer, simply because her song was sad.

This was three winters since : nor could we then divine what urgent cause induced the inmates of that cottage (a widow and her daughter, Spring-time and Autumn met together) to keep such long

protracted vigils, what sorrow or calamity provoked that melancholy strain of song. In the general aspect of their dwelling, and in their own mien and carriage, there were evident traces of gentility, straitened and limited, perhaps, yet still unquestionable gentility. That the younger had been tenderly and delicately reared, we could not doubt ; as little could we doubt the gentle birth and nurture of the elder. Both were alike ; with such agreement as may subsist between a bud and blossom. Time had softened, but not effaced, the beauty of the mother ; the daughter was in the brilliant flush of youth, just verging into womanhood.

We observed that many ladies called upon them ; but that to each, at parting, the younger lady evinced a striking submissiveness of manner we could not reconcile with our preconceived notions of the respect due, were it only from a sentiment of delicacy, to two unfriended females, who had evidently "fallen on evil days." In course of time we came to know them, and almost insensibly, and by degrees, as 'twere, became familiarized with the leading incidents of their past, and the arduous struggles of their present life.

In her early youth, such was the tenour of the widow's history, she had been married to a gay and polished spendthrift, who first dissipated her dowry, then neglected, and finally deserted her. A career

of profligacy was appropriately terminated by a violent death, and the corpse of the suicide found its last resting-place within the limits of the Père la Chaise, at Paris. A scanty pittance, all that her affection for her worthless husband, and her forgetfulness of self, had originally led her to reserve for her exclusive use, was now the widow's sole dependence; and to render it sufficient for their maintenance, the daughter was compelled to ply her needle unremittingly, and bear with all the coldness, the vain caprice, the studied insolence, of proud, fastidious patronesses. It would have humbled or broken a higher spirit than Ellen Booth's, thus to wear out her youth, and waste her energies in thankless toil, submitting with a show of placid meekness, and often with a heavy heart, God wot! to the undeserved rebukes, the captious questions and thoughtless petulance of the ignorantly arrogant. Yet the poor sempstress yielded to her untoward lot with a patient resignation that would have done honour to a far stronger mind and to an infinitely stouter heart. A smile from the mother she so affectionately revered, a few kind words of encouragement, a recurrence to some cheering passages from a favourite author, a "little talk of better days"—trifles, truly, yet all-sufficient were they, in many a gloomy hour, to dissipate the melancholy engendered in the mind of Ellen by continuous appli-

cation to her needle, and by the relaxation of the nervous system consequent upon a deprivation of her wonted exercise.

Thus weeks and months wore on, until the autumn of 1841, and then

“A change came o’er the spirit of her dream.”

She was no longer a melancholy, dreaming, listless girl. The touching Scotch ballads we had so often heard her sing with a pathos that moved one almost to tears, we heard no more. The merry *chansons* of Beranger, or the lively melodies of Italian lyrists, supplanted our ancient favourites. Instead of Pascal’s “*Pensées*,” we found a volume of Petrarch in the window, while Lalla Rookh usurped the place of “*Le Mie Prigioni*” on her little work-table. There was a heightened flush upon her cheek, a brighter sparkle in her tell-tale eyes, a bounding lightness in her step, and a jocund music in her laugh, that did your very heart good to listen to it. Nell was in love ! The fact was palpable, the evidence irresistibly conclusive, and the symptoms abundantly demonstrative of the nature of the malady.

Thereafter, we visited the cottage at more unfrequent intervals, until one sunny day, last April twelvemonth, startled to hear some verses of one of the old, half-forgotten, melancholy songs, we en-

tered the little sitting-room to seek solution of the mystery, and found poor Nell so marvellously transformed, that she, who had but lately seemed fit model for a sculptor's Hebe, did now appear a very Niobe. There was an "unquiet drooping of the eye," a pallor of the cheek, a compression of the lips, and a checked, imperfect respiration, that indicated all was not well, and that something had occurred to disenchant the gay, mercurial Ellen, and uncreate the ideal world in which she had so recently abode.

On the preceding evening, Nell and her lover had been castle-building,—weaving gay fancies and pleasant visions of the future, and the light-hearted girl had dwelt with sanguine earnestness upon the happiness she should enjoy when *her* dear mother would be his, and when they should gather round one hearth, and dwell beneath one roof—an affectionate and united family. But the mention of the mother's name seemed irksome to the lover, and listened to with somewhat of indifference. He hesitated, demurred, and vaguely intimated, rather than openly expressed, aversion to the triple union which Nell conceived essential to her happiness. She saw the fairy fabric which her buoyant hopes had raised, crumbling to dust with magical rapidity, but would not interpose an effort to avert its fall. She could not, thus did she reason, so lightly forget

the heavy debt of love and gratitude she owed her mother. She could not leave the only parent she had ever known, to wage a most unequal conflict with narrow means, and, it might be, perhaps, in latter days, with infirmities of ailing health, companionless. Her spirit rebelled at the idea; and, though it cost her many a pang, her lover was dismissed, and peremptorily forbidden all further access to the cottage. Even the unoffending "Petrarch" suffered banishment, and "Lalla Rookh" was thenceforth flung aside. It must have been a hard struggle; yet Nell bore up against it wonderfully well, and firmly and inflexibly adhered to her resolve.

So passed the summer and the autumn, serenely, if not cheerfully; and we, over whose mind the ballads of Burns and the exquisite Irish melodies of Moore have ever exercised that witchery so peculiarly their own, were once more gratified by hearing them sung and resung, fully to our heart's content.

In September last, the living of devolved upon a new incumbent, and a handsome bachelor to boot, who (as handsome bachelors are somehow very apt to do) soon won golden opinions from both rich and poor. Among the earliest of the intimacies he formed, was one between our neighbours and himself, and really it has thriven and

ripened with astonishing celerity. We know that Holy Writ enjoins the ministers of religion to visit "the widow and the fatherless;" still, we do not think the text requires such visitations should be diurnal, nathless we observe a daily regularity in the appearance of our vicar at the cottage opposite. "There must be something in it,"—the whole village conspires in saying so, nor would we, for the world, dispute the truth of its collective *dictum*. "There must be something in it"—every gossip is positively and not-to-be-contradicted-ly certain of it, and so we take it for granted there actually *is*. Besides, there is the old sparkle in the eyes of Ellen Booth, the old "celestial, rosy red, love's proper hue," upon her cheek, the old merry music in her laugh, and the old bounding freedom in her step. Then, too, we think we saw the exiled "Petrarch" on her table some few days since; and can with confidence aver we have heard her gaily carolling—

"There's nothing half so sweet in life
As love's young dream."

Well, well, if Ellen Booth and her widowed mother do not change their residence from the cottage to the vicarage before the coming autumn, we will renounce all pretensions to play the prophet at once and sempiternally.

Emma's Well.

A RING of trees, lifting their mossy stems at frequent intervals from a soft green bank of thymy grass, and, in the midst, a bubbling spring welling up for ever with the same low murmur, and thence issuing into the broad and open marsh, through which it leads its slender current till it mingles with the river which wanders through the adjacent vale. Above this spring, the tangled branches of the encircling trees weave, in the summer time, a roof of subtle foliage, through which the sun drops here and there some scattered flakes of vari-coloured light, purple, and gold, and amethyst, and on the cold and swelling surface of the waters sheds, prodigally, a shower of starry, quivering, sparkles. A flight of steps, mossy and damp withal, gives access to the spring ; and thither, morning and evening, tend the village children for supplies ; but when the

westering sun no longer tips its branchy dome with slant and crimson beams, and a green twilight broods above that gurgling spring, the loiterer may list in vain to hear the plash of jug or pitcher in its bubbling depths, and strain his eyes in vain to catch the fleeting outline of a village child emerging from the copse that girds it in.

Tradition, the sponsor of many a way-side nook that else were nameless, has conferred upon the spring the title of "Emma's Well;" and the same tradition, the chronicler of unimportant histories, which else had been forgotten, has preserved for it the reputation of a haunted spot.

A few disjointed fragments, garnered within the memory of garrulous old age, accepted with a pliant faith by credulous and wonder-loving youth, and so transmitted from the grandsire to the grandchild, aided in part by written testimony, have thus preserved and still continue to preserve the outline (for it is little more) of the occurrence which gave to Emma's Well its name and ghostly reputation.

Ages since (tradition is a negligent chronologist) there stood upon a gentle slope, whose summit overlooks the village, a structure that in its outward features partook of the prominent characteristics of the age, and had a half-warlike, half-monastic look. Not a vestige of the edifice, however, now remains. The broken surface of the

ground, swelling and sinking, and defining where a moat and mound had been, alone points out its site. It had devolved by heritage upon two orphans, brother and sister, on whom but little wealth devolved beside.

During their nonage, the guardianship of the maiden and the youth had been confided by the father's will to Gwillim Bengenhoo, an ancient comrade, who, relinquishing the corslet for the cowl, had abandoned the profession of arms, and sunk the product of the spoils he had acquired in purchasing a permanent asylum in the monastery of a neighbouring town. Whether old habits were relinquished with the same facility as he had flung aside his military vestments, we will not tarry to inquire. We may be pardoned if we doubt it; for certainly his demeanour was still more soldier-like than monkish—his aspect more hilarious than austere—his voice more fitting to rebuke marauding *lanz-knects* than to patter aves—and his eyes more apt to sparkle and dilate at the sight of maiden coming to confession, than in the contemplation of emblazoned missal, rood, or relic. Scoffers there were, who did not scruple to affirm that in his spiritual colloquies with the daughter of his departed comrade, he sometimes mingled lighter matter than beseemed the priestly gravity of his character or the maiden purity of hers. With the brother, on

the contrary, his converse was exclusively of former days—the camp, the battle-field, the siege, the sortie, the joust, the tournament, the pageantry of peace, the stirring scenes, the “pomp and glorious circumstance of war.” Such recitals, clothed in the vivid diction of one who had been himself an actor in the scenes described, did not fall dead upon the ears of Ernest Bertweolf, but wrought within the youth a fierce desire to emulate the deeds he heard so mightily extolled. The wily Benedictine failed not to feed the flame he had excited with all the incentives which a subtle fancy could devise ; albeit there was little need to stimulate an imagination that from childhood had been filled with images suggested by the presence of memorials connected with the tilt-yard and the battle-field. As soon as the attainment of his majority had left young Bertweolf free to carve out his own career, and independent of control, he naturally chose a military calling. That there were usurers in those days we may infer from the circumstance of the future soldier somewhere finding funds to purchase horse and arms, and join a company of free-lances just on the eve of setting out for Burgundy. To follow out his history, we may add that sickness or the sword—it is uncertain which—arrested him in his career, and that his ashes found their latest resting-place within a foreign grave.

Thus far contemporary records travel with tradition, and then a hazy indistinctness gathers upon, and partially obscures, the narrative. It seems that with the absence of the brother, and more especially with his premature decease, the sole impediment that hindered Gwillim Bengahoo in the prosecution of a cherished and a deeply laid design, was effectually removed. An antiquated gentlewoman, half familiar, half dependent, grown grey in household duties, and fast relapsing into second childhood, by whom the maiden had been educated, and to whom she looked with somewhat of a daughter's fondness, offered but little hindrance to the crafty churchman's plot. Indeed, by matron and by maiden, he was regarded with a reverence that beseeemed the sanctity he simulated with most consummate skill. His visits to the latter increased in frequency and were prolonged in their duration. Anon he affected to expound the philosophy of Plato to her inquiring mind; broaching, with cautious reserve, doctrines that were gleaned from a widely different source; withdrawing, with ready tact, his countenance from such unguarded expressions as called up terror or suspicion in the maiden's mind. In fact, at once to tear aside the flimsy veil which masked his purpose, the soldier-monk, forgetful of his vows, had conceived a strong and uncontrollable passion for his ward, and day by

day was weaving complicated toils around her; slender and imperceptible at first as spiders' webs, but strengthening and thickening with a steady, slow progression; making his approaches with a cat-like stealth, and awaiting with keen watchfulness an opportunity for hazarding the final spring.

Hard by the spot from which the spring, elsewhere described, now issues, at that time stood a statue of the Virgin, with a narrow oratory beside it. Thither it was the custom of Gwillim Bengenhoo and Emma Bertweolf to repair; devotion, the actual object of the one, and the ostensible purpose of the other. The privacy and isolation of the spot—hemmed in by trees, withdrawn a little space from human ken, and quiet as the grave, rendered it a fitting theatre for cunning villany to play its part in.

Late in a summer evening (that crime could ever choose an hour so full of Sabbath calm!) both entered that small oratory and tarried there a weary space. What chanced, nor record, nor tradition have preserved. A woman's wail, breaking the solemn stillness of the soft and odour-laden air, heard by but one belated peasant as he crossed the marsh, and by him mistaken for a heron's scream, was all that indicated the dark and fearful nature of the event. We err: a villager recalled to

mind, that in the self-same night a spade, left carelessly beside his door, had vanished by the morning; by whom abstracted he was afterwards to learn.

It were a waste of words to lengthen out the narrative. Wrong issued in murder, violent but unpremeditated murder, and punishment must follow bloodshed, if no concealment intervened. The grave would tell no tales, but hide and hush up all; stoutly and strenuously toiled the monk, delving with might and main, flinging aside the soil with bare and sinewy arms,—no labourer in the trench could well put forth such might and energy. Each foot of earth removed, removed a corresponding load from off his heart. It should be deep—broad and very deep. The stiffening corpse lay prone upon the dewy earth, the lips that had upbraided and threatened him with just exposure to the world, were still compressed as though with mortal agony, the glassy half-shut eyes seemed still to glare upon him with impotent menace; and so he delved and delved, and ever and anon would pause and hush his breath if sound or murmur smote upon his ear. At times the booming of a bell, striking the hours, would wander up the valley; at times the wind would make a melancholy music in the trees; sometimes a burst of song from nightingales in Easney Wood, at others a

sudden rustling in the grass, a bird stirring within its nest, nay, the very flitting of an insect's wing, would startle and involuntarily cause him to suspend his task ; but promptly was it renewed again, and thus he toiled and dug with feverish head and reeking limbs, until his shoulders came almost upon a level with the surface of the earth. A little deeper and then—ho ! what seething, roaring sound was that?—what tremulous heaving of the ground beneath his feet ? Water ! the soil crumbles into fragments, sinks, and bears him sinking with it. The cold and icy spring rushes impetuously up, foaming and frothing, whirling and eddying, and roaring like a peal of thunder in his ears. It is as though a whirlpool spun around him. He clutches at the sides, but gains no hold. There seems no sky above, no footing underneath. He is stunned, blinded, overwhelmed ; and as he sinks, life seems ebbing from the extremities, and concentrating its fast-failing functions in the heart. Anon a freer, fuller gush of volumed water, and the enfranchised spring, with one strong effort, vomits from its depths a swollen livid corpse.

By dawn of day the spring had worked a little channel in the soil, and flowing southward, found an outlet in a gully terminating in the sea. Upon the margin lay the rigid corpses of the murderer and the murdered,—the victim and the man of

blood—in close companionship. You may imagine what a mighty stir ensued when these things came to light. There were a few who had the hardihood to avouch that foul wrong and cruel murder had been done—and certainly there was an ominous black ring around the neck of Emma Bertweolf; but the Superior of the Benedictines, and indeed the brethren, one and all, proved to demonstration, that a wondrous miracle had been effected, and that the spirits of the maiden and the monk had both been rapt from earth while kneeling at the feet of Mary Mother. Nay, they defined with marvellous minuteness the motive and the method of the miracle; and registered the circumstance with infinite verbosity and marginal illuminations in the records of the Priory, whither we would refer the curious for a more detailed and ample explanation.

From that time until now, as superstition testifies, that spring-side has been haunted through the watches of the night, by the unquiet spirits of Gwillim Bengenhoo and Emma Bertweolf. Sometimes is heard a stifled wail—sometimes the flutter of a garment seen; and though the oratory has long since crumbled to the earth, and the Virgin's statue has been utterly destroyed, tradition still

preserves the memory of the event ; and the very village which has since sprung up around the spring, derives its title from the spirit-haunted " Emma's Well."

Widow Allen.

BUT for the thin blue wreath of wavering smoke winding upwards from between the broad branches of the stately sycamores which shade it from the summer sunshine, and screen it from the winter winds, you never would discern the whereabouts of Mrs. Allen's cottage. Scarcely, indeed, can you distinguish it, when threading the flowery path which leads you to its very porch, from the mass of vari-coloured vegetation which surrounds it; so overrun, masked, nay, completely hidden is it by the rank abundance of a monstrous vine, which thrusts its delicate tendrils into every chink and cranny of the casements, festoons the porch with its green tracery, wanders erratically from the eaves to the very ridge of the reed-thatched roof, and clambers almost to the summit of the massive chimney, which it embraces with a loving clasp,

as though that swallow-haunted chimney were endeared to it by the mere force of old companionship.

It is of a most rare antiquity, that cottage; and tradition does affirm that when the abbey of St. Bene't's was dismantled, and its idle denizens thrust violently on the world, a shrewd and thrifty manciple abjured his creed, wedded the willing widow of a pursy purveyor, and, transporting to his new abode all the culinary appurtenances of the abbey kitchen, even to the sculptured stonework of the ample fire-place, which he could either buy or beg, here set up his rest, and prematurely waddled into his grave from absolute plethora. And to confirm the tale, tradition points to the unseemly hugeness of the fire-place just alluded to, and to the heraldic shields by which it is enriched, and to the elaborate and conventual character of the carvings in the porch, as constituting proofs irrefragable of the legend's authenticity.

Behind the cottage rises an uneven and precipitous acclivity, indented with a thousand hollows, and carpeted with moss of velvet softness, and flowering heaths in all their multitudinous varieties. A frowning cluster of gigantic firs fringes the summit, and breaks the force and tempers the severity of the breezes from the

east. From May till August wood-doves keep up a perpetual cooing in a neighbouring copse, and restless bees, hovering among the honey-teeming garden flowers, fill its precincts with a happy languid murmur.

Before it, a devious path winds downward to the village through a green pasture field, dappled with here and there the graceful shadow of a silvery larch. Almost from the first peep of day until the last glimpse of sunshine, if curiosity had led you thither in the summer months, you would have seen a matron far advanced in years, seated within that cottage porch, plying her needle with such industrious rapidity as was scarcely compatible with her apparent age, and almost realized your idea of perpetual motion. Upon a closer view, you would have discerned that trouble had wrought worse havoc on her face than age,—that the mild light of eyes which once shone with the placid expression of a Madonna's, had been dimmed far more by tears than by the slow alternations of successively revolving days and nights, and that care had forestalled age in furrowing her shrunken features and in silvering her once glossy hair. Yet, to confess the truth, abating these few evidences of an unwilling alliance with the grim goblin—man's yoke-fellow from before the flood—there is as little to suggest romantic fancies in the

person, habiliments, and abode of Mistress Allen, as the most stolid lover of matter-of-fact could willingly desire.

But every cottage has its history, simple, often, as the uncultured minds of those who, generation after generation, are born, nurtured, and die within its walls; and sometimes touching as the melody of a remembered ballad, haunting the mind with dim suggestions of a period far remote, voices now silent, and happy faces long mingled with the dust. And has not every inmate, too, his or her separate chronicle,—an unwritten but enduring record, matter—full and teeming often with strangely coloured incidents,—a narrative of mingled cheerfulness and pathos, of cheerfulness and pathos mingled indivisibly,—a motley tale replete with such incongruous diversities as almost simultaneously move to laughter and to tears? In the humble annals of our widowed neighbour, there is a sad preponderance of evil and untoward accident, yet borne with such serene and passive magnanimity as adds no trifling testimony to the comfortable belief that

“There’s a divinity doth shape our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.”

At the very hour of birth, Janet Randall (such was her maiden name) became a dowerless orphan;

“Her mother dying of the gift she gave.”

Her father,—but let the failings of the dead rest with them. Suffice it that the orphan child was tenderly and delicately reared by a maiden relative, whose affection she exclusively engrossed, and whose moderate fortune it was commonly reputed she would ultimately inherit. When ripening into womanhood, the fascination of a handsome face and fluent tongue effected an easy conquest of her simple heart: the offer of a stolen match was too romantic to be rejected, and so Janet became a wife. The indiscretion of an unsanctioned bridal was soon forgiven and as soon forgotten. Wife and mother, for two years Janet was happy. At the expiration of that period, the aunt died, and with the possession of the property of the deceased, came the revelation of the husband's true character—profligacy, cold neglect, reckless brutality, and finally abandonment, followed each other in rapid succession. The placid nature and forgiving spirit of the woman had borne up against all except the latter; but when beggared, deserted, and even deprived of the infant son, over whom she had kept so many and many a sleepless vigil, pillowing the child upon her aching heart with a feeling of deep thankfulness that *he*, at least, was spared the agony which she suffered;—when, by this unfeeling act, the mother's misery was consummated, health and intellect alike gave way, and for weeks

she suffered all the paroxysms of violent insanity. Recovery, gradual and wavering, often despaired of, but finally assured, restored her only to the consciousness of her worse than widowed and childless lot.

In the interim, a career of dissipation, followed by the commission of some unlawful act, had rendered a precipitate flight from England imperative on the part of her husband. A wretched paramour, and his young child (strange companionship of vice and innocence!), were the sharers of his flight. For years little or no tidings could be gained of the fugitive: his destination, nay, his very existence, was problematical, and poor Janet, whose small inheritance had been utterly expended, with the alternative of destitution before her eyes, was compelled to a life of daily toil, sometimes seeking employment in the humble capacity of a nurse, and at others engaging in the occupation of a sempstress, in order to furnish herself with the bare means of a scanty subsistence.

The sympathy of her wealthier neighbours, however, fittingly expressed by acts of liberal and delicate benevolence, tended eventually to the removal of many asperities from her otherwise rugged path; so that, in course of time, the villagers would sagaciously aver that Mistress Allen was "well to do!"—"a comfortable body,"—with

many other remarks, indicating a similar profundity of observation.

Thus years went by, unmarked by the occurrence of any stirring incidents to vary their tedious uniformity. Occasionally, by some chance channel, she would learn that her husband was still in existence, and that a second family was growing up around him. Repeatedly she sought to commence a correspondence with her son, but the letters were either intercepted by the father, or, if received, his influence was exercised in interdicting a reply. Notwithstanding these rebuffs, our poor neighbour's vehement desire to open up some intercourse with her expatriated offspring sustained no check; nay, rather seemed to gather force from the impediments besetting her. Her waking thoughts, her very dreams, were coloured by one absorbing hope. It solaced her in many a solitary hour to sit and conjure up the lineaments of the child,—to image forth the change which each succeeding year had probably worked upon his features,—to trace by such imaginative aids as active fancy lent, his gradual growth and slow development, to compare her recollections of the father with her suppositious picture of the son, hoping against, yet fearful of, a more than personal similitude between the two, and shaping endlessly a host of varying conjectures—conjectures that were alternately hopeful

or desponding, as gloom or cheerfulness prevailed, but referring always to the hoped-for restoration of her child.

At length some vague, uncertain rumours reached her of her husband's death, and these were presently confirmed by information of a positive and circumstantial character. His turbulent passions had plunged him in a conflict with the bushmen of the colony, which terminated in a tragedy fatal to himself, and to the other aggressors in the fray.

To assume that she was unmoved by the intelligence of the event, would be to imply on her part, the possession of a degree of stoicism foreign to the widow's character—

“Some natural tears she dropp'd, but wiped them soon.”

Their separation had been of too old a date, and his villany had been of too deep a dye, to render his decease productive of a more than transient feeling of regret. One circumstance, moreover, was coupled with the tragical intelligence, calculated to modify even this fugitive sentiment of sorrow. Occupying, as the narrative of the occurrence did, a prominent place in the public papers of the day, the details given of the residences and colonial connexion of the victims, put her in possession of the actual address of her son. Up to

this time, acting upon the indefinite information afforded by the underlings of a commercial house in London, having Australian agencies, the letters she had forwarded had been directed to the port to which the vessels chartered by the house in question chiefly traded. Now, however, there was a clear and unimpeded channel of communication open to her wish, and the widow hastened to assure her son that he had a mother in existence, and to possess him with such details of his own and of his father's early history, as (presuming upon his ignorance of the fact) might suffice to establish her claims to his maternity.

Eighteen months wore by, and never did eighteen months appear so long, so tedious, so interminable as these. Sometimes buoyed up with sanguine hopes, sometimes dejected by a multitude of dark perplexities and melancholy misgivings, the widow's feelings were as variable as an April sky. Still time went past, and still no answer came; and when, at length, expectation began to fail, and the widow's heart was heavy with the fear of going down into the grave without the gratification of the wish which had been dearest to her heart, her son himself appeared.

It must have been strange to have witnessed the meeting of two so widely severed, and so long

apart ; to whose minds memory could present no salient points on which the imaginations of both might dwell, nothing capable of eliciting a train of similar and simultaneous sympathies ; for one of whom, indeed, there was *no* past ; no distinctly remembered and tangible links of union between his mother and himself ; no rallying place for scattered and dispersed affections ; no cherished associations, surviving lapse of time and changing circumstances ; while in the bosom of the other, a mother's love was yearning inextinguishably. And though the features of the infant were no longer to be recognized in the settled aspect of the man, yet the father's face seemed looking on her once again in the countenance of the son ; and in his voice she heard the well-remembered accents of another voice, which, years before, had been her blessing first and then her bane ;—accents heard

“ With a memory-mingled joy
Which made his father live before her sight.”

With her son's return the widow appeared to have regained some portion of her youth and active spirits. Her whole care and her exclusive happiness seemed thenceforth to centre in ministering to the comforts of her son, who, on his part, pleased with the novelty of the scene, ena-

moured of the idle life he led, and gratified to find himself the object of attentions as unremitting as they were affectionate, luxuriated, for a time, in a *dolce far niente*. But this was not to last for ever. Habits of lawless and wild indulgence, fostered in early years by those whose influence should have been directed to censure and repress them, might be temporarily concealed, but were not therefore permanently forgotten. When the novelty wore off, and idleness became monotonous, and kind attentions, from their consistent uniformity, begat a weariness and absolute distaste, the hereditary and ineradicable taint of evil gradually peeped out. Its earliest manifestations were confined to trifling lapses and inconsiderable aberrations, which the doting fondness of a mother easily excuses and willingly palliates.

Then followed dissolute revels, nightly recurring orgies, midnight excess, and morning penitence. Counsel and exhortation availed nothing. If the means were withheld, threats and imprecations speedily extorted them. The widow might remonstrate, but her remonstrances were ridiculed; she might entreat, but her entreaties were responded to by scoffs. It was a wild life, but its lax depravity was perfectly in accordance, if not with paternal precept, yet at least with paternal practice :

and the poison-plant which had germinated in the colonies, lost nothing of its pestiferous qualities by transplantation.

Meantime the widow's funds were wasting rapidly away: the slow and thriftily-hoarded accumulations of many a laborious year were rigorously exacted, and recklessly expended. Her moderate earnings were totally inadequate to cope with his incessant and unreasonable demands upon them, and beggary must, as an inevitable consequence, presently ensue. Again and again she urgently implored the prodigal to renounce his desperate courses, and embark in some career of honest industry. Her words might just as effectively have been spent upon the idle wind. If the accustomed source of his pecuniary supplies began to fail, another must be found.

Woods and preserves, teeming with game, lay thickly scattered round the village: associates were not wanting: the hazardous and illegal nature of the pursuit harmonized in all respects with his daring and adventurous character, and, to the reputation of a debauchee, John Allen presently added the unenviable notoriety of a fearless poacher. Success begat blind confidence, and this blind confidence eventuated in his own destruction.

One scowling night, towards the close of Au-

tumn, 18—, the dusky outlines of two figures were discernible, ascending the meadow-path which terminated at the widow's gate. Between them, stretched upon a hurdle, and muffled in the voluminous folds of a thread-bare cloak, they bore a dark recumbent burden—as thus disguised, a motionless and shapeless bulk. A light was still gleaming from the crevices of the cottage shutters, and at the sound of approaching footsteps, there was a slight movement audible within. The door opened, and the flickering fire-light streamed full upon the faces of the bearers.

“In God's name, what have ye here?” exclaimed the widow, as she met the intruders on the threshold.

They muttered an inaudible reply, and, entering the cottage, laid their burden on the floor. When the covering was withdrawn, the dabbled and distorted features of a yet warm corpse glared upon her aching sight.

“A bloody deed!” grimly observed the companions of the slaughtered man, “a foul and bloody deed!”

“My boy—my wilful, erring boy!” was all the mother could articulate, and she fell upon the corpse with the sharp and thrilling cry of delirious agony. How long this sudden swoon endured, she could

not tell. When she arose, she was alone—alone, save that the stiffening corpse lay prone beside her.

That night she spent in prayer, and when the morning dawned, it found her with the cold, calm, passionless, and settled aspect of one, who had been taught by suffering to believe that, come what might, evils so huge as those already passed could never chance again. The wish she had so perseveringly and blindly cherished had been gratified, and what was now the sequel? Alas!

“We, ignorant of ourselves,
Beg, often, our own harms.”

Evidence, upon the inquest, was adduced to prove, that after a mortal struggle, the poacher had been shot by a gamekeeper in self-defence. The two associates of the victim had absconded from the moment of their quitting Mistress Allen's cottage; and, with the funeral of the corpse, the excitement occasioned by the event died gradually away. But, from that dark history, the widow has deduced a stern but valuable moral. A more implicit trust in Providence, a keener perception and heartier appreciation of the futile vanity of human will and forecast, and of the wisdom manifested by that “Divinity which shapes our ends,” have resulted from

her experience of the past. In fine, the widow is, in all respects, a better and happier woman than of old ; and in the serene and even flow of her declining years, we recognize another illustration of that beautiful apophthegm,

“ There is a soul of goodness in things evil
Did men observingly distil it out.”

A Ramble in the Country.

SUN and song, soaring both ; dew on the earth, and light in the sky, glowing here and sparkling there ; in the glancing waters, a glassy rich transparency ; in the rustling of the forest leaves, low melody ; in the murmur of the awakening insects, a soft and dreamy music ; in the matin-song of quivering birds, a voice of audible and unmitigated gladness ; and in the slight, wreathed, and delicately-hued cloud-fragments that float along the braided heaven, a world of grace and beauty ; and thus accompanied,

“ Morn, on the mountain, like a summer bird,
Lifts up her purple wing.”

From cottage chimneys, buried in neighbouring trees, blue wreaths of smoke go eddying up ; from cottage casements, draperies homely, but white as

driven snow, are hastily flung back to offer free admittance to the morning air. Glancing within, you note the ruddy blaze of a newly-kindled fire, the busy housewife setting forth the morning meal, and cherub-cheeked children sunning themselves upon the threshold, and lavishing caresses on the shaggy dog which lies supine upon the step, or starting up in chase of vagrant butterflies temptingly flitting before their kindling eyes.

Wandering from the village into lanes made lovely by an overarching roof of greenery, and past farm-houses bulwarked round about by swelling stacks, thatched barns, sheds, stables, pens and piggeries, you gain the upland meadows that are all alive with men and horses, ploughs, harrows, drills and rollers in the active operations of a tardy seed-time. Occasionally a covey of plump partridges rise whirring in the air; occasionally a timid hare springs up and dashes to the nearest covert with all the speed that trembling fear can urge; and now a green and gentle slope conducts you to a slight and sparkling runnel, spanned by a rustic bridge, mossy, and seamed, and creaking to the tread. You cannot pass it by without a momentary pause, there is such witchery in its melodious flow, and the eye lingers so long and lovingly upon its cool transparent waters; and thus, halting awhile upon the narrow bridge, you call to mind many a

well remembered passage in the writings of your most treasured authors; and probably there will recur to memory, among the rest, a passage in its kind so exquisite, that we are confident of pardon for its repetition here :—

“ *Like the still,
Unbroken beating of the sleeper’s pulse,
The reeds bend down the stream : the willow leaves,
With a soft cheek upon the lulling tide,
Forget the lifting winds ; and the long stems,
Whose flowers the water, like a gentle nurse,
Bears on its bosom, quietly give way,
And lean in graceful attitudes to rest.*”

Threading a plashy path, skirted by stunted willows and venerable pollard-trees, you reach a bosky dingle, in whose wandering paths the cottage children joy to congregate; and where the wild flowers pave the moist elastic sward with nature’s rich mosaic, there loiter they, and bear from thence a fragrant spoil of purple violets, and pale anemones, pencilled geraniums, and soft-eyed primroses. And if intruding foot-falls startle the childish spoilers at their sport, it would rejoice a painter’s heart to see them clustering in groups so picturesque, shading their glistening eyes with round and ruddy arms, and putting on a look as full of mingled archness as bewilderment. Above you floats a very at-

mosphere of song, and through the green and matted roof the light looks in, but rarely, and then with broken, tempered rays. The ground beneath is tapestried with flowers, and with the tendrils of a multitude of parasites, wandering from tree to tree, and weaving a fairy net-work round the knotted trunks and sinuous branches. But ere we quit this branchy fastness, and ere the full tide of song dies gradually away upon the ear, rest for a moment on the twisted root of yonder stalwart tree, and hear what sweet music a living poetess hath discoursed anent these winged choristers :—

“ How pleasant the life of a bird must be,
Flitting about in each leafy tree ;
In the leafy trees so broad and tall,
Like a green and beautiful palace-hall,
With its airy chambers, light and boon,
That open to sun, and stars, and moon,—
That open unto the bright blue sky,
And the frolicsome winds, as they wander by !

“ They have left their nests in the forest bough,
Those homes of delight they need not now ;
And the young and old they wander out,
And traverse their green world round about ;
And, hark ! at the top of this leafy hall,
How, one to the other, they lovingly call :—
‘ Come up, come up !’ they seem to say,
‘ Where the topmost twigs in the breezes play !

“ ‘ Come up, come up, for the world is fair,
Where the merry leaves dance in the summer air !’
And the birds below give back the cry,
‘ We come, we come, to the branches high !’
How pleasant the life of the birds must be,
Living in love on a leafy tree ;
And away through the air what joy to go,
And to look on the green, bright earth below !

“ What a joy it must be, like a living breeze,
To flutter about ’mong the flowering trees,—
Lightly to soar, and to see beneath
The wastes of the blossoming purple heath,
And the yellow furze like fields of gold,
That gladden some fairy region old !
On mountain tops, on the billowy sea,
On the leafy stems of the forest tree,
How pleasant the life of a bird must be !”

Emerging into open sunshine, a patch of common-land receives you, overspread with golden gorse, and covered with grazing oxen, ragged donkeys, more ragged ponies, and a swarm of gabbling geese. Traversing its arid expanse, you gain the farthest edge, whence, in a rapid and continuous descent, the ground slopes southerly. Will not this stile, with the contiguous tree casting a dense and grateful shade upon its bars, detain you for a while, until the eye has feasted to satiety upon the fair broad prospect which lies outspread beneath ? How wooingly the welcome wind dallies with the

glowing cheek that freshens and rejoices in its soft embrace!—and as it swells and quickens in its play, you catch the chime of distant bells, rising and falling with the uncertain ebb and flow of the wavering breeze, upon whose fickle wings the subdued and mellow sound is borne. Far down, within the valley's warmest hollow, bosomed in neighbouring trees, a grey church tower lifts up its reverend front, part buried in the deepest shadow, part luminous with the sunshine's glorious sheen. Here a farm, and there a nest of cottages, a knoll of trees, an humble wayside inn, with its conspicuous sign swinging aloft, a silver gleaming pool, orchards and gardens, snowy with trees just blossoming, a water-mill bridging a shimmering stream, a villa environed by firs and evergreens, a village-green bestudded with a busy company of cricketers,—lie scattered round; and there, rooted by the banks of a refulgent stream, roofless and open to the eddy winds of heaven, the noble gable and tottering walls of an old monastic ruin loom out magnificently against a back ground of the brightest green. One fair oriel, with its mullions, transoms, and tracery yet entire, attests the ruin's ancient majesty; while a small campanile, niched and besprent with corbels droll and grim, is all that spoilers and the storm have spared of five goodly

towers and campaniles that once rose proudly up to heaven. Ever and anon, islands of dusk cloud-shadow float languidly athwart the valley's green expanse, and the truant eye, following their noiseless flight, flits as they flit, from field to wood, from swelling eminence to sunken lane, from meandering stream to placid pool, from tower to tower, from roof to roof, until the shadow dwindles in the distance to a mere undistinguishable speck.

Pending the hot and heavy hours of noon, you resort for rest and for refreshment to the nearest hostelry ; but go not unaccompanied by some choice pocket-volume, lest weariness intrude unwelcomely upon you. Then, having dined, fling up the sash, and there shall steal upon the sense the faint but grateful odour of the velvet-lipped and honeyed flowers that star the trim-kept pleasure-ground without. At such a time, let not old Herrick and his dainty quaint conceits be overlooked, for he shall recreate your ear with verses "musical as Apollo's lyre." In such wise, rambling on from poet to poet, and bringing from the mind's rich garner-house the accumulations of a thrifty memory, gem after gem flashes to light, and one burst of poetry, among the rest, so apposite to this sweet season, that it were a treason to the time to pass it by neglectfully :—

“The spring is here—the delicate-footed May,
With its slight fingers full of leaves and flowers,
And with it comes a thirst to be away,
Wasting in wood-paths its voluptuous hours—
A feeling that is like a sense of wings,
Restless to soar above these perishing things.

We pass out from the city’s feverish hum,
To find refreshment in the silent woods;
And nature, that is beautiful and dumb,
Like a cool sleep upon the pulses broods.
Yet even there a restless thought will steal,
To teach the indolent heart it still must *feel*.

Strange, that the audible stillness of the noon,
The waters tripping with their silver feet,
The turning to the light of leaves in June,
And the light whisper as their edges meet—
Strange—that they fill not, with their tranquil tone,
The spirit walking in their midst alone.

There’s no contentment in a world like this,
Save in forgetting the immortal dream;
We may not gaze upon the stars of bliss,
That through the cloud-rifts radiantly stream;
Bird like, the prisoned soul *will* lift its eye,
And sing—till it is hooded from the sky.”

So, wearing out the afternoon, you wait the coming on of eventide. At length, the westering sun, beginning to decline, gives note of its approach, and gathering round him a dazzling host of rainbow-coloured clouds, sinks in a blaze of glory to repose. Twilight steals on, hushing and curtain-

ing the sun-deserted earth ; but from every brake still issues forth a flow of song, diminishing in volume as the winged choristers one by one nestle within their tiny homes, and drooping, yield to slumber. Anon, it dwindles to a solitary twitter, ceasing at times, then languidly renewed, then wavering, then almost inaudible, and presently heard no more. Woods with their unmoving branches, and unfathomable gloom ; winding waters glancing luridly in the sunset's lingering glow ; church towers, frowning and massier in the waning light ; hills, purple and indistinct in the faint far distance, hamlets, with here and there a red light shining through the casements of the scattered cottages,—all put on a novel aspect,—an aspect solemn, weird and unfamiliar. You hear no more the whoop and halloo of the children at their evening sport, nor catch the slow and weary foot-falls of the horses, heavily pacing homewards from the darkening fields. A perfect Sabbath calm is slowly settling down. Twilight itself begins to wane, and—

“ Night, sable goddess ! from her ebon throne,
In rayless majesty now stretches forth
Her leaden sceptre o'er a slumbering world.”

Pole's Lane.

OUR neighbourhood literally abounds with green lanes. In point of fact our best roads ("highways" *par excellence*) are little better than green lanes,—erratic in their course, turf-bordered and tree-shadowed, not over-burdened with traffic, and happily uncontaminated by the presence of a toll-gate. The most shadowy and picturesque, if not the most devious and unfrequented, of all these rural roads is Pole's Lane.

You enter it by a triumphal arch of Nature's own erection—its pillars, the ivied trunks of two gigantic elms; its capitals and architrave, the interlacing boughs and tangled foliage of those twin guardians of the avenue. Look what a glorious canopy this green cathedral hath! how mysterious a gloom, pierced here and there by drops of golden light, broods over all the long perspective of its

stately aisle,—how the sunshine flashes at uncertain intervals, and slantingly, upon its rugged mossy pillars, changing the ivy-leaves to glittering patines of shining silver,—how others frown in all the grimness of their cheerless shadow, because unvisited by those bright rays, and how, when you have reached the end of this arcade—this lofty pile of Nature's masonry,—how does the broad and steady flood of sunshine bewilder and oppress your dazzled eyes, and drive you back, almost perforce, again to revel in the green and mellow atmosphere which dwells unceasingly beneath that densely-woven roof of trees.

Hard by the northern outlet of this lane stands an isolated mansion of venerable aspect, familiarly designated as "THE FRIARY." The ancient monastic character of the edifice is still evident from its high-stepped roofs, its multitude of gables, buttresses, and foliated pinnacles, the massive mullions, and rich tracery of the windows, and the grotesque and hooded figures that here and there peer forth at various angles of the copings. Sharing the general fate at the dissolution of the monasteries, its territorial appendages were alienated, itself dismantled, neglected, and gradually falling to decay. A subsequent possessor, in the reign of Elizabeth, averted its impending fall, re-edified its ruined walls, and soon rendered its desolate cham-

bers—silent for many a long year—vocal with the cheerful echoes of childhood's merry laugh, and the sweet music of woman's gentle voice.

Pleasant is it in the glowing evenings of the gorgeous summer, to saunter down Pole's Lane, and, leaning idly on the weather-stained fence which severs the Friary garden from the road, to watch the shadows of the trees as they creep, with a rippling motion, noiselessly and steadily, from roof to roof, and pinnacle to pinnacle of that grey pile. Crimsoned by the setting sun, its fretted windows glistening and sparkling in the fading light, flowers shedding upon its walls, in their hoary age, the glory and the grace of youth,—it must be a dull or a dim eye that will not kindle into admiration while reposing on the sweet picture formed by that old Friary, in its frame of foliage, with a little flowery wilderness spread out in bright and fragrant beauty just before it.

Another and a nobler mansion detains the present owner from the Friary, and an old domestic, grown grey in the service of the family, keeps "watch and ward" within its precincts. Let us enter, if only for the luxury of pacing up and down its lofty and superb old hall.

Hath not the world gone back with us? Live we not in the heroic times of old? Were not those hacked and ponderous suits of mail at

Cressy? Did not those torn and faded pennons stream proudly in the wind at Naseby's bloody fight? Could not the Roundheads bear unwilling witness to the temper of those goodly brands, and to the might of the loyal arms that wielded them? In this dusk solitude, where the hollow echoes of your very footsteps sound strange and startling, doth not the presence of that long array of faces—limned, some of them, by men of high repute—induce a sense of mute companionship you care not to disown, and would not willingly relinquish? And is there not one which stays your step and fascinates your gaze—one which compels and rivets your attention? It is a face of eminent and surpassing beauty, resembling in the general outline of its features that of the merry monarch, yet characterised by an expression of touching melancholy, resulting from the total blindness of the cavalier portrayed. Like the portrait of Ginevra :—

“ He who observes it—ere he passes on
Gazes his fill, and comes and comes again,
That he may call it up, when far away.”

You turn to your aged cicerone to inquire if she is familiar with the history of one stricken with so mournful a calamity, and she will respond, perhaps, in some such terms as these :—

In the chapel of the Fancourts—that dim and

quiet nook, wherein the westering sun peeps fitfully before it sets, and then withdraws again, as though its cheerful light could find no tarrying place amidst the tombs that sepulchre, and the effigies that would perpetuate the memory of mouldering mortality—in this, repose the ashes of Sir Herbert Fancourt. Dying, he left two sons—the one inheriting the Friary and its broad domains; the other, his father's blessing and—his sword. More, too, the good old knight bequeathed—a portion of his own high, haughty spirit to the landless boy; while the softer and more plastic nature of the mother descended, with her beauty, to the elder born. A sister, younger than each, fell likewise with the heritage to young Sir Herbert's charge. Both loved fair Alice—how could they less? but between themselves the bond of brotherhood was slender and frail indeed; and years that should have strengthened, served only to relax and weaken it. As the younger grew to manhood, the bitterness and the abasement of dependence became more irksome and intolerant, in proportion as the sphere of his desires enlarged, and the painful humility of his position became more prominently manifest. The writings of Harrington and his contemporaries had imparted a peculiar colouring to his character; and with the sanguine earnestness of a political enthusiast, he hailed the

outbreak of the Parliamentary War with delight, as the first step towards the regeneration of his country, and hence was readily induced to join the standard of the sturdy, iron-armed Republicans. Sir Herbert, with the hereditary loyalty of his race, embarked his sword and fortune in the cause of Charles. Through all those troubled times, the brothers clung with desperate fidelity to the rival parties whose interests they had respectively espoused. Reverses had not weakened the loyalty of the one, nor success cloyed the ardent and adventurous spirit of the other; and strange was it to observe how most unequally fortune had dealt with these two brothers. Sacrifice of home and patrimony, alienation of kindred, and, worse than all, the loss of vision, in a chance encounter with the Roundheads, had been the guerdon of the elder's loyalty; military rank, emolument, and the gift, from Cromwell, of his brother's confiscated property, were the rewards showered freely down upon the young Republican. Equally strange it was to note how, with the altered complexions of their fortunes, the character of each had undergone a striking change; how, gloomily brooding on his blindness, penury, defeat, the triumph of the Roundheads, and the murder of the monarch, there sprung up in Sir Herbert's mind something of his brother's fierceness and bitterness of feeling; and how, upon the

part of Edgar Fancourt (so was the younger named), there had arisen a compunctious sorrow for the past; a welling-up of dormant, hidden springs of love; a yearning, as it were, towards the playmate of his boyhood, and the neglected counsellor of his impetuous youth.

An outlaw and a fugitive, Sir Herbert and his sister (the constant companion of his wanderings), shifting his abode with every fleeting rumour of portending danger, succeeded in baffling the friendly search his brother instituted for him, as skilfully as he eluded the pursuit of those, whose motives in endeavouring to penetrate his lair were far more questionable and obnoxious. The autumn following the execution of his royal master, found him the temporary tenant of a humble habitation upon the estate of Bengo Temple, scarcely a bow-shot from the borders of the Friary lands. One warm sunny evening Sir Herbert and his sister sat, as was their wont at such a time, at an open window of this cottage, which then, as now, looked out upon a gently undulating tract of meadow land, dotted with trees, and sloping downwards to a little watercourse, which, from the dark centre of a copse hard by, issued, as by some rejoicing impulse, into life and sunshine, gurgling above the shining pebbles that paved its bed; then laving the bare roots of a venerable willow with a murmur like the

wavering laughter of a child, and anon breaking into a thousand sparkling ripples and rainbow foam-bells, as it wandered onward, ever making such gentle music in its course as might have soothed the slumbers even of a Sybarite ; children, on whom the "heavy honey-dew of sleep" had fallen, were nestling upon its banks, and pillowing their glowing cheeks upon the moss which gathered round the snake-like roots of trees upon its margin — reapers' children, who, when they woke, would look abroad with free and happy gaze upon the fields and sky, upon the flowing waters and the waving trees. How Alice wished within her heart her brother's eyes could be unsealed, and shine as clear and luminous as theirs ! Yet it seemed as though the stir of the freshening air ; the sleepy murmur of that watercourse ; the low rustling of green boughs ; and the faint odour of closing flowers, soothed and consoled him in his darkness ; for a quiet smile—rare visitant !—played momentarily upon his channelled face.

Relapsing into his habitual reverie, he was startled by the sound of approaching footsteps, and, in another moment, by the unexpected entrance of his brother to the chamber. Bending down to kiss the flushed and startled girl, who knelt beside the blind man's chair, the intruder paused, as if to read upon his brother's countenance

what might be passing in his mind ; and then, as though discerning in the close shut lips and lowering brow no tokens of a friendly greeting, he said in tones of earnest but subdued expostulation :—

“Have you no welcome, Herbert, for your father's son?”

“Say rather for a traitor, who has brought dishonour on that father's name, and ruin and contumely on his children,” was the rejoinder.

“You judge me harshly, brother, as God shall witness ; I am guiltless of an evil motive in the warfare I embarked in.”

“Tush ! your presence wearies me ; why thrust yourself upon me ? Was it to witness the beggary and degradation you and the rebellious regicides, your fellows, have brought upon me ?”

“Herbert, I have sought you long and unsuccessfully ; and now that Providence has led me hither, nothing shall sunder us until I render you the act of justice which I owe you,—nothing divert me hence until you once more call me ‘brother,’ and until I win from Alice the assurance of a sister's love.”

“Whither does all this mockery tend ?”

“Mockery ! Herbert ; if ever in the thoughtlessness of youth your brother mocked you, I pray you pardon him ; and pardoning, believe he would not mock you now.” And drawing from his breast

a scroll of parchment, he unrolled it, and proceeded. "Brother, look here," then hastily checking himself, he added, "I—I had forgotten. Alice, observe, our brother's sentence of attainder is reversed — his forfeited estates restored. See, among others, here is Cromwell's signature; and Herbert will now enjoy his own again."

The sister's face grew radiant, as her eyes ran hurriedly over the extended document; but the brother's countenance underwent no change, and when he spoke it was with apathetic coldness.

"The boon has little value, coming from regicides, and through a traitor's hand."

The Republican advanced still nearer to his brother's chair, leant his arm upon his shoulder, and, sinking his voice to an impressive whisper, said:—

"Herbert, for our father's sake—for the reverence you bear towards his memory, as well as for our gentle mother's sake, whom, looking on our sister here, I seem to see revived again,—do not reject the proffer of a brother's love, or spurn the restitution which he offers you. Remember how we two grew up together; how often, side by side, we knelt together by our mother's knees, and stood together by our father's bed, when, blessing us before he died, he bade us cling to each other stedfastly, and cherish the motherless girl, whom he bequeathed especially to you——."

He would have urged his suit more earnestly, but his utterance was checked. Hot tears were welling from his brother's sightless eyes, and a trembling hand outstretched to meet his eager grasp. What need of further words, when in the cordial pressure of that hand, so long withheld, and in those tears which then fell thick and fast, the younger son of old Sir Herbert Fancourt could perceive the mute assurance of perfect reconciliation and unconditional assent? The errors and estrangement of the past were forgotten and forgiven, and there was hope, and union, and the re-assembling of the old household deities to bless the future.

"So," ends the aged cicerone, "after that, they lived together for many a year in the old Friary; both brothers remaining single throughout their lives; but Alice married, and a troop of fairy children soon sprung up to gladden the ancient mansion, and point their tiny fingers at the portrait of their uncle, blind Sir Herbert."

Woodside Wake.

OUR memory is a picture-gallery of prized and precious cabinet pieces, dear as the apple of our eye, on which, indeed, they first were traced, and thence transferred by swift and facile process to the chambers of

“ The old, old man halfe blind,
To whom the rolles, laid up in heaven above,
And records of antiquitie appear.”

In the long, long winter evenings, we set them forth in meet array, deterge the dimness and the dust which gather on, and partially obscure, their vivid hues, restore the fading touches, soften down the harsh, and dwelling now on this delicious bit of woodland scenery, and now on that soft twilight sketch, enjoy perpetually “a sunshine in a shady place.” Just now a rustic festival gleamed on us

from this visionary canvass; a simple, primitive, and withal most hearty festival, one of the few yet lingering in various of the wayside nooks and little known localities of our beloved land.

Fancy a bright and breezy day; the first of summer, or the latest of the spring,—you could not well determine which, for the leaves wore all the fresh green beauty of the one, and the skies shone with the brilliant richness of the other. Imagine, on such a day, a four-miles walk, through woodland paths, green lanes, and meadows fragrant with a starry multitude of flowers; sometimes bewildered by concurring routes; as often venturing on the wrong one as the right, and always in a flutter of pleasurable excitement, occasioned by the novelty and strangeness of a ramble,—say rather a journey of discovery,—through a tract of country as primitive as it was picturesque.

First we struck into the fine old park of L—, sweeping across a lawny glade, past troops of deer, and scattered clumps of lordly trees, and through a stately avenue of beech and elm, and past a limpid pool, on which the timid, speckled water-hens were shattering the glassy surface in their restless play, and then our devious path conducted to a sunken lane, rugged and stony, much like the channel of a dried-up water-course. A flight of steps, rudely indented in the shelving bank, op-

posing that by which we had descended, admitted to a little sylvan realm, some seventy acres, the intact relique of an ancient chase, timbered with leafy veterans, and carpeted with soft elastic sward, and ferns, and flowering heaths, and here and there a fallen giant, leafless and lopped,—the *torso* of a tree; and everywhere green alleys, filled with soft shadows, deepening into distant gloom,—alleys from which you would not feel surprised to see a troop of Spenser's knights advance in glittering panoplies, Sir Satyrane, or Scudamour, or peerless Britomart, or love-lorn Marinel. Touchstone and Audrey might flit across your path, and "sweet sir Oliver" go wandering by; even the image of the melancholy Jacques' thoughtful countenance, glassed in the tranquil waters of a sedgy pool, might gleam upon your sight, and yet beget no wonder, but simply win the kindly recognition due to dear old friends.

Upon the outskirts of this fairy land, we presently arrived,—a grassy slope, with only here and there a tree,—a grave, abstracted, solitary tree, standing at distant intervals, each like a sentinel at watch upon the borders of a slumbering camp. A rustic foot-bridge next, spanning a narrow runnel that stole along with stealthy flow, tinkling as it ran,—an idle, languid tinkling, as though intended for its own especial solace,—a mere melodious hum,

such as a child might murmur, lapsing into sleep. Across two fields, bright with the vivid verdure of the springing wheat, and then a stile, arched by the meeting boughs of two young ash trees, admitted to another sunken lane,—a warm and sheltered hollow, with high protecting banks, draped with soft moss, ground-ivy, wild strawberries, and myriads of white and purple violets, filling its shady precincts with a delicious fragrance, the very place to saunter up and down in, during the twilight of a summer evening, repeating, as you saunter, the choicest stanzas of the “Castle of Indolence.” Following the windings of the lane, we issued on a four-went way ; the confluence of as many country roads, and then—Ho ! ho ! what jocund sound was that ? A peal of distant bells ? or was it simply fancy ? A momentary pause, another gush of sound, and then the fact was placed beyond dispute. Woodside bells, unquestionably, for Woodside bells, and Woodside ringers, were famous all the country through. They rose and fell, swelled out, and died away, grêw bold and clear, distinct and strong, and ever and anon subsided to a scarce heard tremor of the air, just as the wayward wind freshened or failed. Led by the sound, we took the upland road, ascended to the summit of the breezy hill, and saw the village at our feet, bathed in the sunshine, and girdled by the woods. There

it lay; church-tower, and cottage-roofs; white booths upon the green, flags flaunting from the little inn, and throngs of moving figures in their holiday costumes; a glorious mass of foliage in the park hard by, shadowed, in part, by flitting clouds, with here and there a flash of sunshine from the glancing waters of a wandering stream,—a vagrant freshet, that lost itself at times among dim brakes, and thickets dear to the ring-dove and the squirrel, and then again recovering its track, ran riot, like a giddy schoolboy, through slopes of mossy sward, and stole along the margin of green corn-fields, and wound around the roots of aged trees, and bubbled, and danced, and surged, and foamed at every trifling hindrance in its course, and dashed gaily down a miniature cascade, and boomed like mimic thunder wherever narrow bridges arched its darkling flow, and led its silver thread of waters through a more erratic and meandering track than any stream in any hundred of our good county of ———.

Step by step, as we advanced, the lusty peal grew lustier, and then the music of a village-band grew audible, and then the hum of all those happy holiday-makers blended with the sound of band and bells.

But the wake! How would a Wilkie or a Wouverman have delighted to vivify his canvass by

faithful transcripts of those animated groups ! How happily would Watteau's pencil have depicted all the accessories of the scene ; the broad green, dotted with scattered cottages, each in its plot of garden-ground, the stately zone of trees by which the park is severed from the green, receding here, and jutting there, like outlines on a map, forming a promontory now, and now a bay. The church, the primitive old church, with its low walls and heavy roof, its short square tower, and stunted spire, its sunken windows, with the ivy tapping at the panes, and creeping through the crevices, and thrusting its long thin fingers into every nook and cranny obvious to its touch, and weaving a green and glossy gaberdine for the else bare porch ; and hugging the rounded pillars and the Norman archway, with a cordiality resulting from an old and intimate association,—the silently compacted friendship of a century or two. The village inn, with its contiguous bowling-green, its orchard in the back-ground, resplendent with the snowy blossoms of the fruit-trees, and its huge old walnut-tree, spreading its wilderness of leaves immediately in front, and through the trees which fringed the eastern margin of the green, glimpses of "Cross-brook farm," and its surrounding sheds, and barns, and fields, and coppices, and devious lanes, and leafy hedge-rows, spreading away, until

the eye grew weary of its wide excursive range, and reverted with complacency to Woodside Wake.

It was a festival which had derived its origin from catholic times,—an anniversary of the dedication of the church, coupled whilom with solemn ceremonials, processions, and religious services, disused, decried, forbidden, and forgotten ; all but the merry-making (on which, in course of time, were grafted all the accompaniments of a fair), and the old time-honoured gathering of friends and kindred, too wholesome, and, withal, too wise a custom to be suffered to fall into utter desuetude.

The scattered fragments of many a household band are re-constructed at the wake. From distant towns, outlying villages, or hamlets more immediately at hand, flocked in the acquaintances and kindred of the villagers, upon the day of which we treat, pranked in their holiday attire, pleased with the weather, with the scene, themselves, with every thing and every body,—all eye, or ear, or tongue, according as their various dispositions prompted them to gaze, or gossip, or greedily drink in the busy babble of the day. Wrestlers, too, were in the crowd, proud to exhibit their sinewy strength before a circle of admiring loons ; and here and there, arch-eyed and subtle-fingered sybils poured in the credulous ears of country lasses an affluent tide of promises and prophecies,

hued with the colour of the hearers' hopes. Impetuous children, dragging their grandames to the glittering stalls, and clamorously beseeching for a fairing; hoydens, looking with longing eyes at tempting dolls (babies in point of size), yet timorous of purchasing, lest they should compromise their nascent claims to womanhood (the womanhood of twelve!); rustic couples, upon the eve of matrimony, stealing away to unfrequented walks, to gossip unobserved by prying eyes; venders of fruit and fish, toymen, and piemen,—these were among the throng. Then there was a caravan, a yellow house on wheels, which must have lost its way, and, wandering throughout labyrinthine lanes, stumbled by accident upon the Wake. Inside were a giantess and a dwarf, two boa-constrictors, and a learned pig, to say nothing of the little hump-backed showman, who was a wonder in himself. How he sustained his "amorous descant" upon the marvels of his show, and blew a blast upon that sonorous trumpet, and beat that doleful gong, and ground that ill-used organ, and rung that wretched bell, and tapped the painted canvass with his cane, and played "God save the Queen" upon his chin, with variations on the pan-pipes; how he got through all this, and never seemed a-weary, was, to say the least of it, astonishing. And how the urchins in the crowd below were wrought upon by

his too potent eloquence, and plunged their hands into the innermost recesses of their trouser-pockets, and fished up penny-pieces, and thrust them into the showman's hand, and rushed inside the caravan, and gazed and gazed, and still came out unsatisfied, and wished for other pence, and other exhibitions to ensue, was not a whit less wonderful.

But the chief attraction of the day was, unquestionably, the dancing. With the young especially, all others were as nothing in comparison. An old stone cross, an unpretending piece of sculpture, coeval with the church—as grey, as weather-stained, as reverend in look as its contemporary, a morsel of antiquity, preserved with greater zeal, perhaps, because an ancient jingle, still extant, connected its stability with the prosperity or decay of Woodside, stood near the centre of the green. On every anniversary of the Wake, this old grey cross was masked in flowers, and when the sun was somewhat on the wane, the village fiddler perched himself upon its summit, shouldered his violin, flourished his bow, and marshalling his rural *ballet corps*, set twenty couples capering round the cross. There was not overmuch of either grace or elegance in their performances, we must admit; but there was a compensating superfluity of zeal and energy, and what was better still, an infinite amount of hearty, almost boisterous,

enjoyment. Pleasant was it, moreover, to catch a fitful glance of so many bright eyes, and flushed cheeks, and tossing ringlets, as the dancers glided past you ; and with the free air of heaven about them, the blue sky overhead, and the soft elastic sward beneath their feet, we have been present at balls of higher pretensions that have pleased us considerably less.

Well, all things have an end, and so, of course, had Woodside Wake. The dancers danced the sun down, and saw the twilight fade, and even then dispersed reluctantly. The fiddler, poor weary wight, descended from his perch, and spent a merry evening with his brethren of the band in the "long room" at the Chequers. The Chequers teemed with talkative and thirsty guests, who kept the host and hostess, ostler and the maid, continually astir. The long black shadows of the trees behind, buried the little church in deepest gloom. The cross, with all its drooping garlands, became a dim and dubious object in the gathering shade. Lights twinkled in the cottage windows, and the smoke of fires, kindled afresh in order to the preparation of the evening meal, streamed upward in faint pale columns from the tunnelled chimneys. The yellow caravan disgorged its last scant company, and the hump-backed showman rolled up his canvass, and put his speckled snakes

to bed. The night-wind freshened apace, and waned with the rustling leaves, and curled the surface of the gliding waters, and uttered ghostly whispers in the apprehensive ears of boys, belated in their lonely walk to distant villages. A solitary star, and then another, and another, and, finally, a glittering multitude of "golden bees," looked out upon the night, and bore us silent company throughout the solitary road, and dewy meadow-paths, by which we wended homeward from the Woodside Wake.

Peddam Grobe.

It is within a bow-shot of the village. A lusty forester—a forester of old Ardennes—might wing an arrow to its nearest marge. When the summer twilight deepens, and the heavy air is hushed, you may hear the everchanging music of the nightingales' delicious song ringing through every aisle of that green wood ; and if they pause, then, in that pause, an ear familiar with its murmur cannot fail to catch the silvery chiming of a waterfall—a music mellower than the birds'—as though it were a liquid echo to the songs just ceased.

Zoned by that stately wood, a broad and shining sheet of water—blue as a turquoise, yet flecked with here and there a moving image of the white and wandering clouds above—freshens the shelving sward, and laves the twisted roots that ever and

anon peep out upon the clear cold stream that sleeps below.

Upon the southern margin of this tiny lake, just where a devious lane impinges on its borders, the surplus waters find a hasty outlet and form a picturesque cascade. A skilful hand—bridging the fall with a flinty arch, breaking its else tumultuous leap by stones fantastically piled, paving its bed and banks with fossils, spars, fragments of shattered sculpture, and curious minerals, and training the luxuriant tendrils of the dark ground ivy, so that they tapestry its rugged sides—has made that waterfall a perfect picture in its kind.

But the wood—the shadowy, flowery, vocal wood! Of a surety, Chaucer must have had its fellow in his eye, when he described that “pleasaunt grove”

“ In which were okès great, streight as a line,
Under the which the grasse, so fresh of hew,
Was newly sprong, and an eight foot or nine
Every tree well fro’ his fellow grew,
With branches brode, laden with levès new,
That sprongen out ayen the sunnè-shene,
Some very red, and some a glad light grene.”

For this, like his,

“ With turfès new
Is freshly turved, whereof the grenè grass,
So small, so thicke, so short, so fresh of hew,
That most like unto grene wool, I wot it is.”

Pierced, too, by

“ Paths of little brede
That greatly had not used be,
For they foregrowen were with grasse and weede,
That well unneth a wightè might it se.”

Wild flowers in multitudes carpet the sward, and by the water's brim, drooping and delicate lilies of the valley shed a white gleam.

Some sixty paces from the waterfall, there is an open space—a grassy knoll, a natural dais, as it were—the throne of one magnificent old oak, a kingly tree without a rival in its green domain. Beneath its branchy dome, a low irregular cottage has been reared; a rustic habitation, in perfect keeping with its site. But for the beauty of the porch with its rare carvings, the fair bay-windows with their antique panes of lozenge-shaped and many-coloured glass, and but for some slight evidences of taste and even luxury, discernible within, you might mistake that humble homestead, with its roof of thatch and high-peaked dormers, for a labourer's, or at best a bailiff's, cottage.

You have scarcely time to comment on the dazzling richness of the choice geraniums ranged on the benches in the porch, before a spare, attenuated, silvery-headed gentleman, stricken in years, and somewhat bowed withal, dressed in a fashion somewhat obsolete, yet in his costume faultlessly

neat and point-device, emerges from the low-arched doorway, and with a bland and courteous smile, and a peculiarly benign and soft expression beaming from his clear blue eyes, invites you to a closer view of his rare blossoming treasures. Warmed by your praises of those cherished flowers, the old man welcomes you within his "keeping room;" and, with a pardonable garrulity, points out, and dwells at length upon the history of every relique garnered there:—vases and urns from Roman camps, weapons from Danish tumuli, and coins of the heptarchy; a dinted bill, not innocent of blood at Hastings' fatal fight; and swords that had been hacked and gashed in Border frays and Northern raids. Missals, too, and venerable MSS.; and books so numerous and rare, your fingers absolutely yearn to loose their primitive clasps, and dally with the discoloured leaves, your eyes to pore upon the bold black type, and scan the quaint affected title-pages. Rome and Greece, France, Spain, and Italy,—the master-minds of all these realms meet in mute congress on his shelves: "mute," did we say? oh, what a grievous libel on the mighty dead! Not "mute," but fervid preachers, of surpassing eloquence; sage expounders of most beneficent truths; silver-tongued necromancers, with sorcery mightier than Prospero's; skilful to quicken or to calm, excite, subdue, all pas-

sions, feelings, impulses of the human heart, all thoughts and operations of the human mind, so long as human hearts shall beat and sentient faculties endure. How the sight of those beloved books has sent us wandering from the subject matter of our sketch !

Glossy and dark with age, massive, and grotesque to boot, the oaken furniture asserts a claim to reverend antiquity. Pictures—sweet cabinet pieces—a Canaletti here, and there a Cuyp ; a scripture piece by Francia ; and a glorious woodland sketch, redolent of dewy leaves, and soft, moist, odorous turf, by Gainsborough ; a foaming sea, from Vandervelde's creative pencil ; and a vivid transcript of a southern landscape by Gaspar Poussin, grace (we could almost add) and glorify his walls. Within a niche, canopied by an elaborately-sculptured fragment of a cathedral stall, an exquisite Etruscan vase—a perfect gem—rests on a slender slab of delicately-veined Sienna marble, crowned with a diadem of summer flowers, perpetually renewed, that seem to shine with a peculiar and unaccustomed light amidst the sombre furniture and rusty reliques, by which those flowers, so full of life, and grace, and youth, and fragrant freshness, are gloomily surrounded. Over all is shed a stream of many-hued and fluctuating light, tempered and tinted by the motley-coloured medium through

which it pours. Charmed with the place, you turn to your benign, kind-hearted guide, and with a candid eulogy confess that he has made that room a perfect realm of Faëry ; and wending homewards, ponder much upon the teeming brain, and pure large heart which seemed to prompt the eloquent discourse of your delightful and delighted cicerone.

We had often wondered what could have been the tenor of the old man's early life. We had divined that something more than a mere ordinary love of nature and of books had called him into studious retirement. We believed that those inanimate objects—those dumb mementos of departed centuries on which his heart appeared to be so much set, were but the imperfect substitutes for something worthier, — something that had been better loved, and prized, and prematurely lost. Nor did we greatly err in these conjectures, as the recital of one solitary but strange occurrence, in itself developing a little history of the past, will perhaps exemplify.

Late in the evening of an autumn day, in 18—, the tract of country bordering on Peddam Grove was visited by a tempest more terrific than any that had been witnessed for many previous years. Peal upon peal of brattling thunder, echoed along the murky vault of heaven, lit only by the livid glare of lightning-flashes riving the awful

blackness of the storm. When the deafening thunder-crashes rolled away, the wild winds, roaring through the groaning trees, gave terrible responses to the elemental music. No moon, no stars, no glimpses of the ordinary light of heaven, were visible through all the pitchy concave of that terrible and angry sky.

Within his antiquated chamber sat our studious friend, buried in a not ungrateful reverie, his eyes fixed on the ruddy flickering of the cheerful fire, his mind wandering unconsciously through the "dark backward and abysm of time," and his ear but partially attentive to the hoarse wailing of the blasts without, the creaking of the branchy trees, as they were swayed by the controlling wind, the blind dashing of the rain and withered leaves against the casements, and the solemn diapasons of the thunder fearfully audible over all. Once or twice, indeed, he started up, awakened from his reverie by what he thought to be a shout and shriek; but it was so improbable that human beings should venture out on such a night that he dismissed the fancy from his mind, and fell once more into his former reverie.

Again the shouting and the shrieking seemed to rise more shrilly wild and desperate, as the deafening tumult of the storm sustained a momentary pause. That some one was abroad seemed

now beyond dispute or doubt ; and, fortifying himself against the pitiless pelting of the tempest, and bidding a domestic lead the way with staff and lanthorn, the old man sallied forth. Guided by the sound, he reached a spot where a black and bulky mass lay stretched by the roadside. By the wavering light of the lanthorn, he discerned a figure lying in the road, with his battered and bleeding head dashed evidently on a pointed stone ; his lower limbs encumbered by an over-thrown post-chaise, from whose incumbent pressure a lady was engaged in vain endeavours to release him ; while the postillion strove with similar hopelessness to extricate the horses from the shelving bank, down which they had madly rushed. Aided by the efforts of the two new comers, the poor mutilated sufferer was released from his position, and carefully conveyed to the habitation of our friend. Returning to the spot, he learnt from the postillion that the strangers were on their transit from the sea-coast to an inland residence ; that, confounded by the darkness of the night, and the terrors of the tempest, he had mistaken his road ; and that the horses, dazzled and startled by the vivid lightning-flashes, had become so perfectly unmanageable and independent of control as to cause the deplorable catastrophe which had just occurred. As soon as the latter could be extricated from the road-side

gully, the postillion was despatched for medical assistance, and the old man once more sought the welcome shelter of his roof.

Making some brief inquiries touching the sufferer's condition, he left him to the lady's and his servant Mabel's charge; and descending to the room below, piled up fresh logs upon the hearth, and busied himself in preparing such emollients and restoratives as were immediately at hand, haunted the while—most strangely haunted and disquieted—by the accents of the lady's voice. He chid the fancy, and still the fancy would not be effaced. Accents like those had rung within the chambers of his memory for many years; and now—oh! 'twas improbable; nay, almost impossible. Yet the idea clung to him—clung to him the more tenaciously, the more he strove to shake it off.

In the meantime, the lady had unveiled; and the dying man (for such indeed he was) had had his countenance divested of its gory mask, and with a feeble voice intimated a wish to testify his gratitude for the timely help afforded by his host: accordingly, the domestic was despatched upon the errand, and in a few seconds the old man's gentle footfalls were again upon the threshold.

Had Medusa's snaky head glared on the group? Why stood the old man thus aghast? Why did

the others, simultaneously convulsed and conscience-stricken, strain their hands upon their aching eyes, as though they would exclude some horrid vision, and shut up the sense from impressions hideous as the phantasies which nightly crowd upon a murderer's brain?

It were a tale as tedious as true if all its details were divulged. Suffice it that the old man recognized there—*there*, under his own roof, in the chamber of which he had so long been the sole and solitary inmate—the adulterous wife, whose broken faith had driven him into privacy, and coloured all his after-life with its peculiar hues, and the paramour, for whose uncertain passion, years before, she had renounced home, honour, and all that halloed and adorned the pure sphere in which the wife and mother moved—brought, by the retributive workings of a mysterious Providence, the latter to breathe out his last beneath the roof of him he had so foully wronged, the former to become the witness of her husband's wordless scorn, her paramour's miserable and remorseful death.

We have but little inclination to dwell at length upon a subject involving details as painful as humiliating. The paramour died of the contusions he had received, forgiven (let us not forget to add) by his injured host, and was interred with plain and simple circumstance in H—— church-yard.

The lady presently removed a little distance from the scene of the calamity, and from the immediate presence of one, whose very aspect — pure and benevolent as it was — seemed a tacit and continual reproach to her. Twice in each year, at Christmas and at Easter, they join the communicants at —— Church, midway between their respective places of abode ; and to those who are acquainted with their relationship, but unacquainted with their previous history, these venerable individuals (for they are now considerably advanced in years) are the constant occasion of conjectures at once ingenious and innumerable.

Our Parish Clerk.

HE was an old man twenty years ago ; and twenty added years have left but slight and scanty traces of their progress upon his face or frame. At times, indeed, we almost doubt if he were ever young ; or if we conjure up some misty wavering picture of his youth, every accessory of the picture inevitably assumes the distinctive characteristics of an epoch impossibly remote. We link him, by inexplicable association, with the antiquities among which he lives, and moves, and has his being. We discern analogies—curious similitudes—between his colourless and placid countenance, and the grey stony faces of the corbels peering from the inner walls of our rural sanctuary. We detect affinities, absurd and fanciful enough, we must admit, between the living and the lifeless relics of the past ; and recognize a brotherhood, a tacitly-com-

pacted fraternity, existing between the statuary of our parish church and the attenuated person of our Parish Clerk. Solemn services, and the abiding presence of objects in unison with their solemnity, seem to have tinged his character with a kindred sanctity and seriousness: a sanctity, at least, of outward aspect; and a thoughtful seriousness, peculiar to a mind of a naturally grave and meditative cast.

We never were familiar with the old man's early history, further than that by a politic match he came into the possession of a decent competence, that his wife died in the very prime of life, and left one daughter to his charge, who in her turn became a wife, a mother, and a widow, and with her child took up her residence beneath her father's roof, sharing its shelter to the present day. With this competence, and his parochial stipend, old Joshua Cleghorn maintains his little household and himself in comfort and respectability.

His cottage is, beyond all question, one of the prettiest in the village. A strip of garden ground, a narrow, flowery strip, yet odorous of mignonette, divides it from the road; but the jutting porch, a really noble affair, pillared and ceiled, and sufficiently ample to have sheltered the festive group who, day after day,

“ When all was still, and nothing to be heard
But the cicada’s voice among the olives,
Related in a ring, to banish care,
Their hundred tales,

—this jutting porch, with its incumbent room, and the heavy gable overhanging that, advances to the very margin of the public path, and frowns most royally upon the passers by. The timber framework, both of this and of the other portions of the structure, looks from the walls in massive undisguised solidity ; and quaint devices—rustic attempts at bas-reliefs—profound and unintelligible efforts of provincial ingenuity, deck the surface of the intervening plaster. Huge casements, lightsome cheerful-looking casements, with three substantial mullions, and a broad beam-like transom to each, and a perfect multitude of clear and twinkling panes in all, admit a liberal light to the sitting-room and kitchen of the cottage. Above them jut the rough-hewn solid joists on which the overhanging upper story rests,—another row of broad bright casements—more massive joists, and the heavy pent-house roof, with its irregular ridge and clustering chimneys, each like a little tower, completes the picture. “ Completes ” it, quotha ? To limn the cottage, and forget the clambering honeysuckle, and those so lately exuberant monthly roses, and that delicious jessamine, and the delicate ver-

binia, and the other parasites which tapestry its walls, would be to leave the picture incomplete, indeed. With the tiny fingers of such sweet friends, tapping perpetually at his casement panes, with such a leafy, fragrant, cincture girdling his cottage, old Joshua appears to have realized the poet's wish :—

“ Bind me, ye woodbines, in your twines,
Curl me about, ye gadding vines ;
And oh ! so close your circles lace,
That I may never leave this place.”

Within, all is methodical and orderly ; homely, but bright and cleanly to a fault. The walls and ceilings white as his own thin snowy hair, and the furniture black with age, and lustrous with incessant polish. Draperies as pure as truth, and flowers that have not yet put off their summer beauty, curtain the windows, and not a shrivelled petal or decaying leaf is left to moulder on the sill, for the flowers are little Amy's exclusive charge, and the dimpled hands of the old man's cherished grandchild are sedulously active in their grateful task. There is, besides, another evidence of their industry (and of their skill, to boot) in Joshua's chimney-corner chair, a curious fragment of the past, anciently a portion of the altar furniture, then superseded by a less worm-eaten substitute, trans-

ferred anon to Joshua's kitchen, and now gay with the flowery cover, which Amy's busy fingers have embroidered for its lofty back, and broad capacious seat.

We have said that Joshua is very far advanced in years, an octogenarian, we take it, but we never had the curiosity to search the parish register. Age and an independency have secured for him a certain standing in the village, distant but one remove—if even one—from that of Mr. H——, the curate. In fact, among the village worthies nightly congregated at the *Royal Oak*, we rather think our venerable clerk is held to be a greater man than even his superior. And Joshua, who, to speak sooth, is keenly sensitive in matters which affect his personal dignity, contrives, with admirable tact, by the infrequency of his visits thither, his gravity when present, the punctuality of his entrance and his exit, the exclusive appropriation of one particular seat, in one particular corner, and the unvarying abstemiousness of his habits, to maintain the *quasi*-dignified position he has long enjoyed. His gravity and taciturnity, moreover, have earned for him the reputation of wisdom, and hence in all disputes arising from discussions of a political, legal, historical, ecclesiastical, agricultural, or miscellaneous character, Joshua is uniformly constituted referee; and if his decisions

cannot claim to be profound, they very frequently have, at least, the merit of being amusing and original. How he acquired this species of presidential influence, this parlour speakership, this privilege of a casting vote, is a perfect mystery, an archæological curiosity: certain it is, however, that his "pooh, pooh!" is listened to with marked attention; the elevation of his eyebrows, and the puckering of his lips, regarded as ominously important, and the shake of his head accepted as a conclusive verdict which admits of no appeal. Sometimes a junior, a beardless youth, a very tyro, but recently admitted upon sufferance to the society and fellowship of the village elders, mooting a complex question, ventures to sound our venerable Solon on the subject. Rare temerity! Joshua's dignity is at stake, and on such occasions Joshua's dignity asserts itself most unequivocally. Slowly withdrawing his pipe from his mouth, and as slowly pouring forth the long, white, fragrant wreath of smoke, he gravely bends his eyes upon the questioner, with a look so keen and searching, so expressive of excessive wonder and of wounded dignity, that the youngster straightway feels compelled to bury his blushing face in a volume of concealing smoke, and by subsequent silence atones for past presumption, while the company exchange looks of mute ap-

proval, and tacitly acknowledge the force and efficacy of such peculiar punishment.

Once only, we believe, did Joshua meet with a rival on this secular arena of his greatness, in the person of a pert, pretentious land-surveyor, a mere intruder, an alien, as it were, who occupied his seat, disputed his *dicta*, criticized his theology, quarrelled with his politics, depreciated his antiquarian knowledge, laughed at his decisions, and absolutely quizzed his pig-tail! This was more than flesh and blood could bear; it was personally offensive, obnoxious to his reputation, destructive of his supremacy: his admirers were aghast; the frequenters of the *Royal Oak* put *hors de combat*, and the whole village ran the risk of being fairly revolutionized. But the triumph and the usurpation of the daring land-surveyor were merely temporary. After a three-weeks' residence in the village, existing without apparent means, mystifying and imposing upon the butcher, baker, and grocer, by his grandiloquence and plausibility, he decamped one moonlight night — in debt, of course; and Joshua, with a smile of grim complacency hovering about his lips, entered once more upon the occupation of his favourite chair in his favourite corner, and claimed and keeps his old supremacy without abatement.

Perhaps no small portion of the deference accorded to our Parish Clerk may be referable to the exalted notion which the villagers entertain of Joshua's scholarship. Nor has the acquisition of sundry scraps of Latin, encountered in his desultory readings, laboriously impressed upon his memory by frequent repetition, and liberally made use of in his colloquies with more unlearned neighbours, been wholly inoperative in building up the goodly structure of his fair renown. To hear him gravely batter down the argument of some less classic disputant, and wind up all with a sonorous Latin peroration—a curious chain of irrelevant quotations, piled one upon another, like pebbles upon a Highland cairn, and to note his lofty mien, contrasted with the posed and baffled manner of his adversary, is a treat unique and perfect in its kind. If the argument be not so weighty and demonstrative as to carry conviction with it, the Latin is, at least, unanswerable, and the silence of the disputant proclaims the triumph of the clerk.

History is, decidedly, old Joshua's favourite study; but the notions of the times of old which float through his mind, are dim and hazy in the extreme,—misty outlines of terrible events, and imperfect guesses as to detail; disturbers of the imagination, rather than quiet occupants of the

memory. Upon the dark and glossy chest of drawers which graces the sitting-room—the *sanctum sanctorum* of his cottage—there lies an old black-letter copy of the “Martyrology;” and when the long, long winter evenings are deepening into night, the huge folio is reverently taken down, opened with a degree of solemnity that rarely varies, and its harrowing records read, *aperto ore*, to a silent and a sometimes trembling audience. Most of the old man’s notions of the past are gleaned from hence, with a sprinkling of historic lore, gathered at various intervals from a ragged volume of old Echard’s History, and from that curious tome “The Survey of Popery:” “Printed,” as the title-page informs us, “by Valentine Sims, dwelling on Adling-hill, at the signe of the White Swanne, 1596.”

Joshua, we whisper it in confidence, is not without pretensions to the reputation of a local *littérateur*. Mortuary and elegiac compositions are his forte, anonymously given to the world, yet boasting a celebrity co-terminal alone with the duration of the monumental memorials which stud the green churchyard of ———. More perishable depositaries of his mental treasures, Joshua occasionally has found in the columns of the county paper; and though the pathos of the veteran’s poetry verges at times upon the limits of bathos,

and his prose lacks clarity and point, Joshua is happily unconscious of a solitary blemish in the construction either of his rugged rhymes or prolix prose: nor would we have it otherwise; for the gratification which our Parish Clerk derives from the publicity thus given to his cherished compositions—be they mournful elegies, or simply letters upon local topics—seems literally to keep his old heart warm: true, these voluntary contributions are sometimes shelved, mislaid, forgotten; true, they are often mercilessly curtailed; true, there at intervals appear among the “Notices to Correspondents” a pithy and cruel intimation to the effect that “the verses forwarded by our old correspondent J. C n, fall very far below the usual average;” true, they are not unfrequently “set up in nonpareil,” and jammed unceremoniously in an obscure corner of the paper; yet these cannot repress the *cacoethes* of the scribe, who bows good humouredly to the sentence of his editorial judge, and presently renews his literary efforts with persevering pertinacity.

We have mentioned a certain staid gravity and sober seriousness as being prominent among the peculiarities of Joshua’s character. But further than this, there is a vein of deep melancholy pervading it, which we never could account for until a simple observation solved the difficulty.

"*I have outlived,*" said he, "*all my contemporaries.* My old boon companions have, one by one, died off. My associates for a half a century—and some of them had been my schoolfellows—year after year, were thinned by death. The lessening chain snapped, link by link, until I myself became the latest relic of its former length, and now I seem to stand alone amidst another generation. I have found fresh friends, but they are not like the old. Grey-headed though they be, *I* can remember them as striplings. *They* never were partakers in the pranks and frolics of *my* young days, while the events and individuals with which *my* past life has been identified, with *them* are matters of history and tradition, as it were. Alack ! sir, it is melancholy, but profoundly true, that 'though men be so strong, that they come to fourscore years, yet is their strength then but labour and sorrow.'"

A grateful transition does it now appear to pass from such a sombrous theme to a little gossipry anent our childish friend, Amy, the pet and grandchild of old Joshua, and the life and sunshine of his home. Home, indeed, it could be scarcely called, if Amy's zeal and Amy's industry were once withdrawn from their peculiar sphere. She is a model housewife (if that be not a misnomer), a pattern and exemplar of notability and thrift, whom

village dames refer to, when they would reprove their own less notable and thrifty offspring ; and of whose enviable superiority in these particulars, the more industrious of the female portion of the village juveniles are not a little emulous. Yet, withal, Amy, though “in wit a woman,” is “in years a child,” and fairly puzzles you whenever you attempt to guess her age. Eyes, brimful of sparkling merriment ; a mouth perpetually prompt to smiles ; a tongue as voluble as ever wagged, and limbs small, plastic, and rounded as an infant’s ; yet gifted with a shrewdness, vivacity, and intelligence, quite womanish—Amy is a perfect riddle. To her honour be it spoken, she is an universal favourite. The old love her from motives of gratitude—for acts of trifling benevolence, slight, but gracefully performed, as childhood’s benevolence always is—for words of sympathy, and kindly offices, felt, and at all times gratefully appreciated, even by the lowest in the social scale ; while the young love her because her mirth and cheerfulness are kindred to their own.

Innocence hath privilege in her
To dignify arch looks and laughing eyes ;
And, as a faggot sparkles on the hearth,
Not less if unattended and alone
Than when both young and old sit gathered round,
And take delight in its activity,

Even so this happy creature of herself
Is all sufficient ; solitude to her
Is blithe society, who fills the air
With gladness and involuntary songs.
Light are her sallies as the tripping fawn's
Forth startled from the fern where she lay couch'd ;
Unthought of, unexpected as the stir
Of the soft breeze ruffling the meadow flowers.

Her vocal capabilities—for Amy has a voice remarkable both for its power and sweetness—form a source of no small pride to Joshua. Once every week, the village choir (bassoon, two violins, and clarionet) meet for rehearsal at the old man's house ; and then and there, solace each other's ears with anthem-songs, and many a solemn strain bequeathed by Purcell, Arne, and Boyce, while Amy's voice rises above the instrumental bray, like dainty Ariel's soaring high and clear above the elemental strife. And if the old man's eyes glisten with pleasant tears, and he suspends his own, to listen to his grandchild's liquid voice, and lavishes applause when silence would be more discreet,—we must acknowledge that Joshua's is an honest and a pardonable pride.

So do these voyagers upon the stream of life beguile their steady course,—the one borne onward by a full and swelling current to the dark and surging gulf of death, and the other floating, with pleasant ripples murmuring in her ear, towards the

broad, smooth, smiling ocean of the world. Yet a few years, and they must part companionship; old Joshua's place shall know him no more;—Amy, perhaps, will merge the maiden in the wife, and remove, it may be, to a distant place, and the village will sustain a double loss; our humble choir will lose its sweetest chorister, and young and old will grieve to miss that living land-mark—OUR PARISH CLERK.

The Wayfaring Tree.

“ Wayfaring tree ! what ancient claim
Hast thou to that right pleasant name ?

* * * *

A name, methinks, that surely fell
From poet in some evening dell
Wandering with fancies sweet.”

MORNING and evening—in the hour of prime, and at that uncertain time when twilight’s banner still floats flauntingly along the sunless west, and night pushes a slender cohort of dim and distant stars above the purpling uplands in the east—have we not greeted thee, O many-centuried and reverend friend, with this continually-recurring verse ? And through years of change (years that have wrought so little change in thee) have we not come to love thee as a dear companion ; to reckon thee among the “ old familiar faces ” we should grieve to miss ; to invest thee with a life and sentiment appertinent

rather to the moral and the inward, than the physical and outward world; and to note thy varying aspect as minutely as lovers watch the changeful countenance of those they dote upon?

Spring weaves for thy aged limbs a subtle drapery of vivid green; summer deepens its hues; and autumn dyes the woof with russet, gold, and crimson,—“motley your only wear,” until the tattered garb falls piecemeal to the ground, and the cold, keen skies of winter glitter above a mighty maze of leafless limbs and branches bare. But in all seasons we must claim for thee the attributes of majesty and beauty, suffering no change with changing vesture, and knowing no abatement with the diminution of thy commingling leaves.

Wert thou not a sapling, a slender shoot from some chance-scattered acorn, when England's sod first felt the pressure of a Norman's foot? Did outlawed bowmen as they rustled past thee (thou wert a youngling even then) mingle with their discourse of *venerie* approving mention of king Rufus' death? Did ever palmer from the land of Palestine couch him awhile beneath thy spreading arms, and bless the greener garb of England's soil, the softer gleam of England's sky? Wert ever flouted by the glistening pennons of the partisans of York and Lancaster, while ruddy watch-fires shed a lurid light upon thy outstretched boughs? Didst ever

witness that brave retinue sweep by, which made the progresses of Virgin Bess such showy glittering spectacles? Were thy green branches riven from thee, what time the "king enjoyed his own again," to garnish burly burghers' doorways, and stir the spleen of silent sour republicans? For all of these were thy contemporaries, and thou survivor of them all!

As century after century, in solemn sequence, marshalled by memory, glides shadow-like before the eye, we seem to recognize a thousand stirring episodes and "auld warld tales" linked with the history of this myriad-leaved and antique oak—this green and living temple now jubilant with song; and there are "modern instances" recalled to mind by the *Wayfaring* Tree, which we would fain record before they, too, become inurned among the partially-remembered or totally-forgotten things of yesterday. We could wish to show there is a literal and obvious, as well as occult and poetic meaning in the often-quoted verse of Wordsworth;—

" Our impulse from a vernal wood
May teach us more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can."

* * * *

" Good-bye, Kate, dear Kate; let us part at the

old Wayfaring Tree. We both have cause to love it well ; nor will this parting make us love it less. Nay, Kate, no tears. Think of my prospects ; think of the aid which I shall now be in a position to render to our mother : think too—there, there ! I thought my bonny Kate would smile again.” And the young man thrust back a cloud of jetty ringlets from his sister’s forehead, and pressed his lips upon its smooth expanse, with an earnestness and warmth which served to indicate the fervour and the fulness of his love.

“ I know these tears are childish, Harry ; but I know, too, or at least have read, that commerce with the world soon deadens a young man’s heart—effaces the images impressed upon it in his earlier years, and fills the mind with evil fantasies and feverish desires. Not that I distrust you, my brother,” she continued, laying her hand upon his shoulder, and lifting up her quivering eyes to his, “ but I do fear, I do distrust the weakness of our common nature.”

“ A grandame’s tale, Kate ; a grandame’s tale, and nothing better—fit only for a schoolboy, and not,” he added, drawing himself up to his full stature, “ not worthy to be told to *men*.”

“ That very gesture—that impressive emphasis—adds some confirmation to its truth and value, Harry,” rejoined the maiden in tones of mingled

archness and reproach. "It is a spark struck out from smouldering pride, that only waits the accession of a little fuel to kindle it into a consuming blaze. Devoutly do I hope, however, that the event may prove your sister Kate no true prophetess."

"Amen; my moralizing Kate. Let us not cloud our parting with any more such sombre sermons. Harry Salter shall be a great man yet, and you, my pretty one, and our mother—heaven keep her!—ladies both. And so, another kiss, Kate, and then good-bye."

And straining his sister in his arms, not without mingling a tear or two with hers, the young man bade her an affectionate adieu. He loitered awhile upon the summit of the hill until the receding figure of the maiden disappeared behind an angle of the sloping lane; then glancing hurriedly at the grey church-tower, the clustering chimneys and fantastic gables of the hall, and the row of poplar-trees which grew hard by his mother's cottage, he struck into the fields, gained the main road, and in another hour had taken his seat upon the coach which bore him towards ———.

If, at that moment, when the pang of parting was mingled with a host of good resolves, both tempering his sanguine expectations, the youthful traveller could have analyzed his feelings, it is pro-

bable that he would complacently have pronounced them unselfish and disinterested in the extreme. And, for the nonce, the estimate would not have been erroneous. Yet, it must not be concealed, that in general there was a strong tincture of selfishness, and a strong desire for self-aggrandizement, interwoven with the better principles of his nature; nor was the new sphere of life into which he was about to be inducted, one precisely calculated either to conceal or to obliterate these blemishes upon his character.

His father had been master of the village-school, and, dying, bequeathed two children to the care, and a very slender pittance for the maintenance, of his widow. Of these two children, Henry was the elder, having just attained to his majority; while his sister was his junior by four years. The interest of a family connexion had procured for him a situation in the only banking-house in ———, and thither we have already seen him on the road.

Of his subsequent career, brief mention may suffice. Habits of unwearied application and industry, combined with much self-taught and practical knowledge of the minutiae of his business, contributed materially to aid the advancement of his prospects, and to push his fortune to a height which even he, sanguine and ambitious as he was, had never dreamed of reaching half so rapidly.

His letters home were brief and business-like. Distance and increasing duties prevented him, he said, from paying them a visit, and moderate remittances were inclosed as substitutes, occasionally accompanied by the gratuitous tender of much sound worldly advice. Of the latter, more especially, there was a liberal donation when Kate intimated her intended marriage to a fellow-villager, the bailiff of an absentee esquire. Something like dissidence, too, was hinted on the brother's part, which failed, however, in shaking the already-settled purpose of his sister, who became the wife of Edmund Sible in the very week in which Henry Salter became the son-in-law and partner of the wealthy banker, his old employer.

* * * *

Twelve years had elapsed since the date of the parting previously described, when, towards the close of an autumnal day, a carriage halted at the foot of the Wayfaring Tree, and a man of gentlemanly exterior and prepossessing mien alighting from it, directed the postillion to proceed leisurely towards the "Royal Oak," at the same time indicating with his cane its position in the village, which lay bosomed in the trees below. As the carriage disappeared, the stranger, folding his arms, stood with the immobility of a statue upon the green ring of turf which environed the aged tree; while

his eyes wandered excursively and with an interest that was evidently heightened by mental associations, over the valley which lay in gathering shade and deep tranquillity beneath. The sun, dipping behind a clump of trees upon a western eminence, yet glowed in fiery-broken fragments between their black and interlacing stems. A pile of glittering clouds, some purple and massive, shaped like islands floating on a pearly sea; others crimson and plumed like the pinions of an oriental bird; and others lambent and wreathing as a wind-fed flame, embossed the heavens above. Here and there a misty exhalation wound upwards from between dark masses of luxuriant foliage, and seemed to indicate the presence of a rivulet in the sward below. White gables gleamed spectrally through leafy orchard-trees, and where the grey church-tower rose up, the hovering smoke from neighbouring cottages hung like a vapoury crown around the antique pile. There was that, both in the hour and prospect, which might almost have "created a soul under the ribs of death;" and the absorbed and motionless aspect of the stranger acknowledged to the full the influences of the season and the scene.

"Another half-hour so consumed," at length exclaimed the stranger, "would absolutely transform me to a boy again. I suppose all men have their weak moments, and this is mine. But who

have we here ? Kate ! as I live, and that respectable clod-hop is my brother-in-law, and her husband, I presume. Umph !” And the banker (since it will be readily surmised that it was he) slowly advanced towards the individuals, whose approaching footsteps had so abruptly put an end to his soliloquy. Though unexpected, their interview elicited but a moderate display of cordiality. Upon the part of Katharine Sible, there was a continual struggle between her old affection for her brother, and a certain sense of deference extorted by the consciousness of his superior wealth and elevated station. The deportment of her husband was respectful, but self-possessed, while his greeting was acknowledged by the banker with a stiff and ceremonious condescension.

When the inquiries of the latter, with reference to his mother’s health and welfare, had been answered, and minor questions satisfied, he claimed his sister’s private ear upon a matter of particular importance, on which, indeed, his present visit hinged ; and taking her aside engaged with her in close and earnest conversation.

As their colloquy continued, there was a degree of warmth and even of asperity infused into it, which plainly intimated that the turn it had assumed was as distasteful as unexpected to the sister.

During the preceding week, Kate had written to her brother, soliciting a somewhat heavy loan, in order to enable her husband to enter upon the occupancy of a farm then vacant. Unwilling, from a variety of motives, to concede to the request, and equally unwilling to decidedly refuse it, the banker had resolved upon a personal interview as the most fitting medium through which to communicate his disinclination to grant the favour sought.

Accordingly, with much prolixity and needless verbiage, he urged upon his sister, as his reasons for refusal, the scarcity of money, his inability to withdraw any portion of his floating capital from the channels in which it was employed, and last, though certainly not least, the disinclination which he felt to advance so considerable a sum upon mere personal security. It is scarcely necessary to observe that the two former were mere fictitious obstacles, the whole pith of his objections being concentrated in the latter. Kate remonstrated, mildly at first, then angrily, then grew indignant, reproached him bitterly, and the conversation eventuated in a serious rupture.

The following morning Mr. Salter took his departure from the village, poorer in self-respect, poorer in the affection of his kindred. Before the advent of another year, Katharine Sible and her husband had settled in the Red-hill farm, not, how-

ever, through the instrumentality of the banker, but by the friendly and munificent assistance of the bailiff's late employer.

* * * *

Twelve more eventful years have flown, and a man still in the prime of life, clad in a plain and unobtrusive garb, accompanied by a graceful girl of seventeen, with a countenance remarkable for its mirthful sweet expression, pause in their ramble, and seat themselves upon a bench erected round the trunk of the Old Wayfaring Tree. The relationship which subsists between them cannot be that of parent and child, for he himself is childless, but their affinity is evidently close. Some minutes they spend in silent admiration of the scene, and then the elder thus addresses his companion :—

“ While we tarry for a space beneath the shadow of our sheltering friend, you shall hear the narrative, Kate, which I have often promised you.”

“ A kind thought, uncle, and I will promise you in return, that you shall find ‘ fit audience, though few,’ ” archly rejoined the maiden.

“ Your mother may have told you how, at this tree, we parted first, and how at this tree we met again. You must have heard, too, how my avarice and selfishness laid a temporary ban upon the prospects of your parents, and—as my conscience whispers me—a heavier ban upon my

own. Not avarice alone, but pride impelled me to refuse. I had become the associate of men of wealth and title, and I felt a species of contempt (you may well frown, Kate) for the alliance which your mother had, contrary to my suggestions, formed; I was unwilling, therefore, to give my new relation further prominence in the world. Often and often, in after years, has that refusal to perform an act of kindness—nay, of positive duty—sat heavily upon my heart, retributively followed, as it was, by the death of her through whom the wealth so prized originally became my own. Three years alone elapsed between my second parting from your mother, and my wife's decease. As yet, Kate, there are trials which you have never known, and this is one of them. Another and another followed it. My patron and benefactor, and indeed my second-father drooped, from the moment of his daughter's death, and followed her within a year or something less. He was a man of large and liberal heart,—his mind more comprehensive and expanded than that of most mere money-changers; and gratitude, affection, reverence—all these I owed and freely rendered him. In his last hours I was unceasingly beside his bed, and closed his dying eyes. And when from that dim room I issued out once more into the glare of day, and noisy haunts of

men, I found I had emerged from it an altered, and, I hope, a wiser man :—

“Hackney’d in business, wearied at the oar
Which thousands, once fast chain’d to, quit no more;
But which, when life at ebb runs weak and low,
All wish, or seem to wish, they could forego,—”

I relinquished those active occupations which my circumstances no longer rendered it imperative on my part to follow up, and with my mind’s eye filled with pictures of the green valley and secluded village in which my earlier years were spent, I determined once more to make my home where I had first drawn breath. Without equipage, without attendants, in humble garb and altered mien, I appeared upon the threshold of your father’s house. It was my whim to represent myself a beggared bankrupt, friendless and penniless. The artifice was perfectly successful, attended only by a far different result than what I had anticipated. Both your parents received the ostensible outcast with a welcome by him most unmerited. The evil he had done was recompensed by good, and thrifty competence was lavish of the liberality which niggardly wealth had avariciously withheld. You know the rest, Kate. It is a history preg-

nant with profitable reflection: do not forget it, dear."

"And what may be the moral which you would deduce from it, uncle? since I have heard you say that every history has its moral," inquired the niece.

"It is this," he rejoined, drawing a small volume from his pocket, and folding back a page that had been doubled down, "read it, Kate."

And the maiden, with a musical emphasis, read the following lines:—

"If thou be one whose heart the holy forms
Of young imagination have kept pure,
Stranger! henceforth be warn'd; and know that pride,
Howe'er disguised in its own majesty,
Is littleness! that he who feels contempt
For any living thing, hath faculties
Which he has never used; that thought with him
Is in its infancy. The man whose eye
Is ever on himself, doth look on one,
The least of nature's works, one who might move
The wise man to that scorn which wisdom holds
Unlawful ever. O be wiser, Thou!
Instructed that true knowledge leads to love;
True dignity abides with him alone
Who in the silent hour of inward thought
Can still suspect, and still revere himself,
In lowliness of heart."

The maiden closed the book, and both arose.

“A beautiful and simple truth,” she observed, as they retraced their steps, “I shall never fail to think of it,—to think of you, as often as I pass the old WAYFARING TREE.”

Woodside Chequers.

Not to know "Woodside Chequers,"—its comely landlord, and his pretty daughter, its magnificent old walnut-tree, and velvet bowling-green, its pleasant orchard, and its lawny cricket-ground, would imply a degree of ignorance perfectly unpardonable in any inhabitant of any village lying within a reasonable distance of our own. We, too, should be wanting in our duty as faithful chroniclers of village history, were we to neglect to introduce the reader to both host and hostelry.

It was a shrewd thought of the original founder of the "Chequers" to build it on its present site,—just at the confluence of the only lanes which can aspire to something like the dignity of roads; for, in the hot and arid summer-time, he must be a resolute and self-denying traveller, who can steadily pass it by, nor turn aside to rest himself and horse,

beneath the cool soft shadow of the branchy walnut-tree before the door; and in the cold and gusty evenings of the gloomy winter, there is a sore temptation to the numb and weary wayfarer, in the broad red glow of wavering light, which streams from every lower window of the inn, and sheds a ruddy glare upon the miry road. Other and manifold attractions are there for those who make the "Chequers" their habitual resort, the host himself, not certainly the least,—to village elders a boon companion, and to all a mirth-provoking humourist; while his daughter Lucy, an arch and winning Hebe, the "cynosure of neighbouring eyes," despotically sways the hearts of half the Woodside bachelors. No wonder they extol her father's "old October," and proclaim his home-grown cider to be a peerless beverage; and no wonder that she hath as many suitors as Penelope, who consume, like those at Ithaca, her father's substance, but, unlike those, perpetually enrich the exchequer of their host.

Stephen Mavis!—the very name seems most peculiarly befitting one whose ripe round voice can make the rafters ring again with echoes of old glees and catches, that have cheered the heart of many a generation gone. Stephen Mavis! that little oily obese man, whose grey eyes twinkle with the quiet humour which is perpetually working at

the corners of his mouth, and dropping in quaint, sententious speeches from his tongue; the warm, kind-hearted friend of every needy man, woman, and child in the whole parish; whose bountiful disposition is proverbial, whose very failing is, in fact, excessive credulity in cases of simulated distress; who, in a fit of forgetfulness, (such was *his* version of the story) deterged the whole array of scores from off the bar-door, one bitter winter, when work and money equally were scarce,—what a lengthened, and withal a truthful eulogy, could we not write upon the character of the blithe, child-hearted host of Woodside Chequers.

Deserted in his infancy,—one of the waifs and strays of humanity, left to the frigid charity and precarious benevolence of the world, the child Stephen was discovered by some school-boys during the progress of a birds'-nesting foray, wrapped in an old bag-wig, deposited on a thymy path, not many paces distant from a public path, and sleeping soundly beneath the broad blue cope of heaven. Transferred to the parish workhouse, the poor foundling in due time became the pauper scape-goat; but spare diet and rough usage, hard words and blows by day, and a miserable couch by night, neither impeded his growth, nor embittered his temper; and at the age of fourteen, the merry-hearted outcast made his first plunge into active

life, in the capacity of odd-boy at the Cross-Brook Farm. Thence, mounting the ladder of promotion, he was inducted to the hostlership of the Chequers; and some years later, thrift, and a concurrence of fortunate circumstances, were the means of elevating him to the dignity of landlord,—the *ultimatum* of his aspirations, the crowning glory of his difficult career. Nor, as we have intimated, has prosperity blunted the fine edge of those warm generous feelings, which nature gave him in requital, as it would seem, for man's neglect. He is the father, metaphorically speaking, of every orphan-child within the range of his acquaintance; and as to foundlings! discreet and learned men would most assuredly pronounce his overflowing tenderness for them, rank monomania. For our own part, we are prone to the belief, that Stephen's heart is, after all, worth half a dozen such discreet and learned heads.

For long after Stephen's assumption of the style and title of "mine host," common consent concurred in dooming him to an irrevocable celibate. The maiden portion of the village noblesse (for your patrician aristocracy hath its plebeian counterpart) turned up their noses (with some, it was a work of supererogation) at the man of doubtful parentage; and humbler folks, as humbler folks are very apt to do, submissively conformed to their

example. Hence was the landlord of the "Chequers" doomed to be an *enfant perdu*,—a bachelor thrust violently without the matrimonial pale,—a mateless Adam wandering in solitary sorrow round the confines of the marital Paradise. Bless you ! they were never more mistaken in their lives ; for Stephen suddenly astounded the prophets, and falsified their prophecies, by suddenly wooing, winning, and wedding, the most arrant shrew that ever trod in Katharine of Padua's footsteps. Swayed by the impulse of a most prevailing pity, moved by a sentiment of deep compassion, or perhaps half-conscious that his own benevolence of disposition, tending to excess, needed a counterpoise, a balance, and a check, Stephen Mavis wrote himself husband, and, in due time, father.

In the dramas of an old-fashioned play-wright (one Will Shakspeare by name), we find it recorded that Petruchio's mate was most effectually subdued and tamed ; but Mistress Mavis, be it remarked, was perfectly untameable. Nor was the violence of her temper modified in the least degree by matrimony. Yet Stephen bore it all, with the equanimity of a philosopher, and the resignation of a martyr. Invective only elicited some expression of his dry quaint humour, and when the domestic atmosphere was rife with storms, and resonant with feminine thunder, Stephen would coil himself

up like a tortoise within the impenetrable shell of a happy indifference, and, with an inward chuckle, frame mentally shrewd aphorisms upon the failings of his ungentle helpmate. Finally, the poor shrew grew weary of this idle expenditure of breath,—then hypochondriacal, then sickened, and then died ! And this was Stephen's first and last venture in the matrimonial lottery.

To do him justice, the landlord of the "Chequers" sorrowed earnestly for his loss ; though happily the childish prattle of his only child and daughter Lucy, mitigated his regret.

Will it not be asked, if this same Lucy, whom nineteen summers have ripened into all the grace and beauty of a fabled wood-nymph, has inherited aught of the maternal taint ? In truth, we must respond in the affirmative : but then it is the slightest tinge imaginable, and, heightening as it does the brilliancy of her sparkling eyes, lending vivacity to her movements, and imparting a sort of piquancy to her conversation, one could scarcely wish her spirit less, or her participation in the milder attributes of her father's character greater than it really is. Rivals and gossips add, that Lucy hath a potent and invincible self-will ; but so had Beatrice, and yet what cynic thinks of blaming Benedick's "dear lady Disdain ?" Like Beatrice, too, our village beauty is a very "Até in good

apparel" to her suitors, albeit there are two who claim an enviable pre-eminence in her affection, or, to say the least of it, esteem.—John Eleigh, the handsome bailiff at the Warren Farm, and Robert Hotham, a thriving village tradesman, with a snug freehold of his own, and a comfortable nest-egg in the —— Savings' Bank. But then her smiles and sarcasms, her gentle speeches and her biting jests, her sunny glances and her stormy frowns, are apportioned so equally between the two, that we profess we are utterly incompetent to pronounce which is, indeed, the favourite. Mere accident, or perhaps caprice, will, we suspect, eventually decide the choice.

* * * *

We laid our pen aside, and let a fortnight pass, nor do we now regret the pause, for on a bright June morning in the present year, when the sky was populous with soaring birds, and jubilant with happy song, and bright with cloudless sunshine, and the air was fragrant with the dewy scent of tardy orchard-blossoms, and the green earth still glistened with the beaded lustre of the last night's shower, and the luxuriant trees spread their broad leaves, as though they wooed the sunshine, and longed to dally with the breeze, and bees were humming round the garden-flowers, and insects weaving mazy dances in the sun, and martins

circling the old church-tower in rapid rings,—on such a morning, we repeat, traversing the green at an early hour, we saw that busy hands were fashioning an arch of evergreens round the “Chequers’” door,—that the old stone cross, elsewhere alluded to, was draped with flowers, and that a flag, a new and silken flag, was fluttering from its summit. What did it all import? The Wake, we knew, was past, and what could these gay decorations mean? We put the question to Tom Brenchley, the hostler of the inn, and his broad unmeaning features relaxed into a grin as he replied, “Young missus a-going to have a master, sir.” And then the man chuckled again, as though he had uttered something supremely droll.”

“And who may be the happy man?”

“Master Hotham,” laconically responded he of the ample mouth.

Food for conjecture this! a most provoking stimulant to curiosity. What did it all import? How had the match been brought about? What had determined Lucy in the choice? Happily our wonderment was not destined to have a wearisome duration. An old man—no other than the parish-clerk—bore down upon us with an evident determination to bring both himself and us to anchor. Bursting with the secret, the venerable functionary

scarcely waited to be questioned before the whole history came trickling from his tongue.

It seemed that both the suitors of our village belle had grown impatient of delay, and from besieging Lucy had diverted their assault to Stephen, bent upon baiting him into such an exercise of his paternal influence as should compel the coquette to a final and determined choice. Our host, pondering upon the matter, and secretly making his own election of a son-in-law, bent all "his corporeal agents to the feat." With an intuitive perception of the "idiosyncrasy" of his daughter's mind, he chose a favourable opportunity to enlarge upon the subject of her settlement in life, dwelt on the character and prospects of her suitors, and with bitterness and vehemence aspersed and ridiculed the pretensions of Robert Hotham. The artifice succeeded to a miracle. Lucy first palliated, then defended, then, battling for the libelled man, not merely championed his suit, but hurled a scornful negative at that of John Eleigh; and when, at the secret suggestion of our host, Thomas Hotham visited the wayward beauty, and stoutly urged his suit, he won from her the promise of her hand, and Stephen gained his wished-for son-in-law.

And they were married: and there was open-house at Woodside Chequers, music and merry dancing on the green, Momus holding high festival

without, and old Silenus—truth must be told—heading a band of tipsy revellers within ; and, in the fulness of his heart, Stephen trolled forth his choicest songs, and broached his choicest ales, and in the choicest language he could command toasted both bride and bridegroom in a choice old beaker of his choicest wine. Rare mirth ! rare festival ! rare revelry ! a day marked with a white stone in the village calendar by all but the rejected wooer of the bride, who purposes, it is affirmed, to seek, in change of residence, forgetfulness of the pretty bar-maid of WOODSIDE CHEQUERS.

A Legend of the Church.

DEAR to the antiquary and the artist is our old grey Parish-Church, with its encircling lime-trees, and the green ivy-garment duskily investing its aged walls, and the fair carved-work of tower and porch, buttress and niche, turret and niche, corbel and coigne. And if dear in its outward aspect to the antiquary's eye, be sure his love for "hoary eld" shall find substantial *pabulum* within; for there survive entire in rare and perfect preservation the architectural fittings and appointments which the munificence of its gentle founder originally lavished on its picturesque interior. The oaken altar-screen still retains its lace-like tracery, its shadowless and saintly effigies, its gilded and pictorial decorations. Ranges of open benches fill the central aisle, their standards carved in curious guise

crested by *fleur-de-lys*, with godly Latin mottoes graven in Church text underneath. A rudely-sculptured font, besprent with uncouth bas-reliefs, yet occupies its ancient standing at the entrance of the church. Within the worn and hollow-sounding pavement, the embedded monumental brasses with their Norman-French inscriptions rest undisturbed, partially defaced, but not illegible; while desk and pulpit, the table at the altar and the rails contiguous, appear the rude and primitive manipulations of an Anglo-Norman artificer.

Dedicated to St. Mary and St. Margaret, tradition has deduced the origin of our Parish-Church from the piety and wealth of two fair sisters, similarly named. Out of the scattered fragments referring to their history, thus orally preserved—the fireside gossip of aged grandames as they gather round the winter hearth—we have essayed to weave as clear and continuous a narrative as the imperfect and disconnected character of the materials will admit of.

In the early portion of those turbulent and stirring times when Stephen sat upon the English throne, the broad lands and swelling coffers of Sir Geoffrey Wyander, lord of the manor of —, (failing male issue) devolved upon two maiden sisters, Mary and Margaret. As both were young, and both of unimpeachable descent—the true Nor-

man blood mantling in every vein—the heiresses early became objects of absorbing interest in the eyes of such of the surrounding knights, thanes, and aldermen, as could advance pretensions to as clear a shield and pure a lineage as themselves.

Educated within a convent's walls, the sisters' limited experience and unripe notions of the world would have inadequately fitted them for the duties entailed upon them by their new position, were it not that nature had beneficently gifted the elder with a certain strength and self-reliance of character, imperfectly developed in the cloister, but daily expanding and maturing in a broader sphere, in proportion as circumstances seemed to call it into action, and demand its vigorous exercise.

The younger was a graceful, gentle girl, gifted with a rare beauty, and with a disposition as femininely soft and placid as the mild and dove-like eyes, through which her soul looked out upon a world but newly revealed to her enfranchised gaze. There was a loftiness and majesty in the beauty of the elder that exacted homage; while the countenance of the gentle Margaret, beaming with happy light, involuntarily won esteem.

How was it that thus differing—thus unlike in mind and feature—the high-souled Mary and the shrinking soft-eyed Margaret should, almost simultaneously, have set their hearts upon one object?

Was it that under the handsome exterior of her soldier-cousin, Erfurth Holditch, the elder sister recognized a spirit kindred to her own? And was it that the pliant mind of Margaret, putting forth a host of tendrils—impulses, affections, sympathies—craving some object for support—something to cling to and weave themselves around, encircling what they garlanded; was it that, in the hardier nature of the soldier, these budding tendrils found, as it were, a massive trunk, wooing their embrace and strengthening their growth? Was it that the elder loved him for the perils he had undergone, the exciting scenes in which he had conspicuously borne a brave man's part, and for the spirit of daring and adventure by which he had been influenced in his busy brief career? And was it that the accents of a voice naturally winning, and modulated with the nicest skill, trilling sweet lays acquired from Provençal *makers* and *minnesingers*, found, through the willing ear of Margaret Wyander, a facile entrance to her heart? We only know that so it was,—that continued intercourse confirmed and ripened love,—that Mary's ears were seldomer regaled with tales of war and chivalry, while the songs of Provence were carolled with a frequency and fervour most grateful, it would seem, to the happy hopeful Margaret; and that, in short, the soldier and his soft-eyed cousin plighted their troth, and then irre-

vocably sealed it by a secret union. By whom, or when, or where the ceremonial was performed it boots not to record, if even record could be had. Haste and secrecy could be purchased then as now; and Erfurth and his bride were on the wing, hours ere their lengthened absence had been noted by the elder sister as an unwonted circumstance.

How fierce and violent a storm of passion then swelled within the disappointed sister's breast, how from her heart she cursed them bitterly, bridegroom and bride—how vowed an immitigable hatred to them both—how every soft and womanly feeling seemed utterly extinct; how, in their stead, arose an intense, consuming thirst to be avenged; how, in fact, her whole nature seemed changed, and how she moodily immured herself within her chamber day after day, week after week, brooding upon the scornful slight which had been put upon her love, and upon the cunning (as she deemed it) of the sister who had supplanted her, it were a charity to the infirmities of our common nature to touch upon but lightly, and so pass on to after incidents.

A year had scarcely run its course before the civil war broke out between the unpopular possessor of the throne and his fair relative and competitor. Margaret's husband was among the first to fling himself within the ranks of those who upheld Stephen. Alas! he was among the first to

fall a victim to that sanguinary strife, slain in a mere chance skirmish which his own precipitate and desperate zeal had unhappily provoked.

Poor Margaret—the plaything of that fickle ingrate, Fortune, might well be overwhelmed by such a fearful and unlooked-for casualty. Reason itself gave way awhile ; and during the time that strong delirium held her faculties enthralled, her husband's kinsmen mercifully consigned the gashed and ghastly corpse to its last home, that the widow's eye might never look with agony upon the livid and distorted features of the slaughtered soldier.

When the elder sister heard of this sudden sharp calamity, her heart melted within her. In the presence of death, anger, and hate, and jealousy, and wounded love, and baffled hope stood solemnly rebuked. The cause of their disunion no longer found a place within her memory ; but a more unclouded past—childhood and girlhood—the recollections of an era teeming with thoughts and images of love and tenderness—of a time when they two nestled their soft cheeks upon the same pillow, wove the same woof, shared the same rambles, loved the same pet fawn, cherished the same dear rose-tree, wept and laughed, grew pale or crimson, sad or merry, as the same feelings swayed the hearts of both—came thronging on her mind. And as the past brought with it such gentle

humanizing influences, why should they not renew it in the future? They had too long been widely and unwisely severed; henceforth, they would have, as they had had of yore, but one home and one heart.

Borne down,—indeed, still almost distraught with grief, the younger yet could find a solace and a mitigation of her sorrow in her re-union with her elder sister. And when the latter fell upon the widow's bosom, and brokenly sobbed out her sorrow for the past, her grief for this last heavy stroke of evil fortune, and spoke of hope of better days, when suffering should be softened down by time, and submission soothe regret, her dark eyes kindled through her tears, and a faint smile, like a ray of fleeting sunshine gilding the blackness of the storm, played momentarily upon her compressed and pallid lips.

So the old house received them once again, linked together by a closer tie, wiser and sadder both; the joyousness of youth displaced by thoughts of a graver, if not gloomier, texture, as though a few short months had done the work of years, and prematurely stamped the feelings of a later epoch upon their youthful minds. Perhaps the solitude in which they lived, disposing them to ponder on the pre-existence and the after-destination of the soul, or perhaps the subtle converse of a priestly

adviser, anxious to aggrandize the church of which he was a member; or perhaps that natural revulsion of the mind from matters of momentary to matters of imperishable importance, which results from worldly disappointment and domestic calamities, influenced them in coming to the determination which they did. Tradition does, indeed, hint vaguely at visionary influences, but it is too apocryphal to be relied on; and this alone is certain, that the sisters mutually resolved to found a church, and dedicate it to the service of the Almighty, in token of their reconciliation; purposing, likewise, to endow it at their decease with the wealth of which they were possessed.

At that time, the whole surrounding country, or, at least, the upland portion of it, was little better than a leafy wilderness, intersected by numerous bridle-ways, with here and there a broader track, offering a passage for the slow and cumbrous wains of those rude days. At scattered intervals, large clearances had been made; and out of the old primeval trees, and with the aid of clay extracted from the soil, and rushes gathered from the margin of the river, groups of cottages were framed, windowless, and chimneyless—a miserable shelter for the miserable serfs who tenanted them. A franklin's more commodious abode, a smithy, and perhaps a huckster's store, were the only tene-

ments that varied the otherwise uniform aspect of these primitive hamlets. Wherever the ground swelled into anything like a reasonable eminence, the stronghold of a thane might be observed perched on its summit, while the circumjacent hollow would exhibit its irregularly-clustered hovels, overlooked by the more massive and enduring residence of the rural magnate. Such churches, too, as then existed, were mostly built upon a rising ground, and seemed to serve as landmarks in that wild, untravelled breadth of marsh and forest-land. It may be readily conceived, therefore, that at such a time, and in such a region, the rumour of the meditated erection in the first instance, and afterwards the commencement, continued progress, and completion of the sacred structure, were regarded as the gradual devolution of an event peculiarly, nay, almost marvellously, important.

It was an event, moreover, that was regarded with the utmost satisfaction by the Romish Church, upon whose dignitaries in due time devolved the task of formally consecrating the edifice to the sacred object for which it was intended, and who determined to lavish on the ceremonial all those adventitious aids by which the Church of Rome imparted a character of such imposing grandeur to every rite and ceremonial to which she lent her countenance, or in which she bore a part. And

hence the consecration of this edifice, followed, or rather accompanied, (as the churchmen suggested it should be,) by a solemn presentation of the sisters at the altar, in token of compunction for dissensions past, and thankfulness for love restored, was marked by features of such rare magnificence, by such impressive pomp and such processional display, and witnessed by such a multitude of wondering spectators, gathered from far and near, that both the solemnity itself, and its strange issue, lived in the memories of succeeding generations for centuries afterwards.

On that solemnity we need not tarry to comment—our legend has reference to its issue only. As the sisters knelt before the altar, thus, by a formal act, to ratify their reconciliation in the sight of God and man, and the venerable bishop bent down to give his benediction on them both, a burst of dazzling sunshine on a sudden filled the edifice with golden light ; a rosy cloud, fragrant and warm, unseen before, floated along the vaulted roof, and from its invisible heart swelled out a gush of music, faint and low, as though it were the distant echo of some dulcet sound, rather than the melodious sound itself ; pinions rustled and fluttered, and angel voices (they could have been no other) seemed presently to mingle with the music's swell ; and then, again, sunk gradually away as the flutter

of the wings subsided, and the sunshine waned, and the rosy cloud waxed dim, and the soft music died upon the ear.

There was a hush—a silence that was almost audible, a deep, dead calm, reigning for a space in every portion of the holy pile. Most of the congregation lay prostrate on the pavement, the sisters knelt upon the altar-steps, with bowed heads and clasped hands, the old ecclesiastic stood alone erect, and folding his hands upon his breast, with eyes uplifted and serene, at length emphatically said, “*THY* will be done!” A thousand voices, as by one impulse, blending into one deep chorus, made response, “*Amen, Amen!*”

And then the old man, gently touching the kneeling sisters, bade them rise; but neither speech nor motion answered him, for still they knelt, with heads bowed low, and fingers intertwined, with mute lips, and eyelids drooping heavily. Again, and yet again, he would have raised them from their kneeling posture; but there was neither word nor sign; and then awe fell upon the hearts of all present, for they knew that *DEATH* was there! The spirits of the sisters, forgiving and forgiven, had passed away unseen, and angel-voices, and solemn symphonies, had heralded them to Heaven!

A Seasonable Gossip.

“Whate’er the wanton Spring,
When she doth diaper the ground with beauties,
Toils for, comes home to Autumn ; Summer sweats,
Either in pasturing her furlongs, reaping
The crop, or ripening the fruits for food,
While Autumn’s garners house them, Autumn’s jollities
Feed on them ; I alone in every land,
Traffic my useful merchandise ; gold and jewels,
Lordly possessions, are for my commodities
Mortgaged and lost. I sit chief moderator
Between the cheek-parched summer, and th’ extremes
Of winter’s tedious post ; nay, in myself
I do contain another teeming spring.
Surety of health, prosperity of life
Belongs to Autumn.”

FORD.

For a perfect insight into the rural life, the humbler rural life of England, in its best, busiest, and happiest phase, commend us to the beneficent and glorious autumn. While the year was yet

young, and the soft winds of spring went whispering abroad tidings of green leaves and budding flowers, when the blue canopy of heaven shone with a serene and happy light, and hidden runnels began to chime a cheerful music, and the primrose glimmered in the hedge-row, and the violet peered forth timidly from mossy banks and southern slopes, when trees were bursting into leaf, and birds rehearsed what seemed a half-forgotten strain, and insect-life began to stir and waken from its wintry sleep, what season so hilarious as the sunny showery spring?

It melted into summer; and what a well-spring of enjoyment was there then, in dim woods, and by the margin of abounding rivers, when the fierce heat of day was yet prevailing unabated; and when the more grateful twilight stealthily succeeded, go where you would, how deep, how most divine a calm, descending hour by hour, and deepening as it fell, invested all the purpling earth! At such a time, did not the question often struggle to your lips, "What season shall presume to vie with affluent and flowery summer?"

But that, too, merged by gradations, delicate and imperceptible as rainbow tints, into the fruitful and foison-teeming autumn—a gladsome and a blessed season. And each hath its peculiar, unique, and individual grace; each its distinct and

separate attributes and associations, a charm exclusive and incommunicable. How admirably Spenser has personified these lapsing seasons, no genuine admirer of that nature-loving poet need be told. Yet must we give the old man audience here, enriching by his threads of gold the humbler web with which we purpose interweaving them :

“First, lusty Spring, all dight in leaves of flowres,
That freshly budded, and new blossmes did beare,
In which a thousand birds had built their bowres,
That sweetly sung to call forth paramours ;
And in his hand a iavelin he did beare,
And on his head (as fit for warlike stoures)
A guilt engraven morion he did weare ;
That as some did him love, so others did him feare.

Then came the iolly Sommer, being dight
In a thin silken cassock coloured greene,
That was unlyned all, to be more light :
And on his head a girlond well beseene
He wore, from which as he had chauffed been
The sweat did drop : and in his hand he bore
A bowe and shaftes, as he in forrest greene
Had hunted late the libbard or the bore,
And now would bathe his limbs, with labour heated sore.

Then came the Autumne, all in yellow clad,
As though he ioyed in his plentious store,
Laden with fruits that made him laugh, full glad
That he had banisht hunger, which, to-fore,
Had by the belly oft him pinched sore :

Upon his head a wreath, that was enrold
With ears of corn, of every sort, he bore ;
And in his hand a sickle he did holde,
To reap the ripened fruits the which the earth had yold."

And thus brought once more to the very threshold of our topic, we take reluctant leave of Spenser's vivid verse, and resume our rural gossipry.

Before the vapoury haze of early morning has been touched with gold by the ascending sun, voices come floating up from every lane and outlet of the village ; and the frequent rustle of intruding footsteps in the bearded corn startles the wakeful lark from his dewy, and thenceforth-to-be-forsaken, lair. Up—up—to the very precincts of a cloud, which a sun-glint has converted into fire, the startled bird soars, carolling, while his moist plumage, kissed by a slant beam, quivers radiantly in the dawning light. Far and near, let the eye wander where it will, from the bold swelling uplands, that exhibit one bold tract of yellowing corn, to the golden patches in the valley, that shine the brighter from their contrast with the dark trees and verdant pasture-land by which they are surrounded—all is life and movement. No idlers now hang listlessly over the old stone bridge, at the bottom of the village, and sound the rivulet's bubbling depths with pebbly plummets. None

gather now around the deserted smithy, and out-roar the roaring bellows, with the babble of their blended voices; but fields and lanes, stack-yards and barns, absorb all idle hands; and when the "leazing bell" rings out its long-expected chime, and troops of gleaners pour from every cottage door, and throng the meadow paths, and darken the garnered fields, you would suppose the village had been visited by pestilence, so little to betoken life is there, throughout its quiet, sleepy, straggling street.

Perhaps no modern writer, not even Howitt excepted, has given so true, and (its brevity considered) so complete a picture of a harvest scene as Professor Wilson, in the following passage of his "Soliloquy on the Seasons :"—

"Now, too, is England, 'merry England' indeed; and outside passengers, on a thousand coaches, see stooks rising like stacks, and far and wide, over the tree-speckled champaign, rejoice in the sun-given promise of a glorious harvest-home. Intervenes the rest of two sunny Sabbaths, sent to dry the brows of labour, and give the last ripeness to the over-laden stalks, that, top-heavy with aliment, fall over in their yellowy whiteness into the fast reaper's hands. Few fields now—but here and there one thin and greenish, of cold, unclean, or stony soil—are waving in the shadowy

winds ; for all are cleared, but some stooked stubbles from which the stooks are fast disappearing, as the huge wains seem to halt for a moment, impeded by the gates they hide, and then, crested perhaps with laughing boys and girls,

‘Down the rough slope the ponderous waggon rings.’

No, not rings, for Beattie, in that admirable line, lets us hear a cart going out empty in the morning, but with a *cheerful dull* sound, ploughing along the black soil, the *clean dirt* almost up to the axle-tree, and then, as the wheels, rimmed, you might almost think, with silver, reach the road, macadamized, till it acts like a railway, now glides along downhill the moving mountain ! And see, now, the growing stack, glittering with a charge of pitchforks ! The trams fly up from Dobbin’s back, and a shoal of sheaves overflows the mire. Up they go, tossed from sinewy arms, like feathers, and the stack grows before your eyes, fairly proportioned, as a beehive, without line or measure, but shaped by the look and the feel, true almost as the spring instinct of the nest-building bird.”

This is as true to nature, as it is perfect in point of finish—a truly English picture, by a Scottish artist.

Let us now glance for a moment at the farmer, the genuine unsophisticated yeoman of the old school

—the broad-backed, strong-limbed, and brawny-handed scion of the ancient stock—what a transformation the autumn works in him! Much as we respect the many traits of excellence peculiar to his character, we must confess, that he is, in general, a dull and ponderous animal, a slow-spoken, heavy-witted saunterer, patiently watchful of the progress of his crops, and punctually attentive to the periodical satisfaction of his appetites; but at haysell and at harvest, how marvellous the change! It is a strife betwixt the laverock and himself, which shall be first abroad; and as with him, so with his household. The earliest glance shot by the rising sun, through the sparkling casement of his ample kitchen, shines upon every member of the family, old and young, circling a breakfast-table laden with abundance most profuse. Brief space, not idly spent, is thus consumed. Without, a sleek and silken-coated cob, saddled and bridled, awaits the burden of his master's bulk, and, mounting this, the anxious yeoman hastens to the fields. The swarthy reapers own the influence of their master's eye, and sickles glance like lightning-flashes through the yielding corn. Sometimes, alighting from his nag, he wields that implement himself, and with a lower, broader sweep, enjoins a greater thrift of straw, dwelling exultingly the while (how mournful is the yearly retrocession

of the world !) upon the superior mode of reaping and of binding sheaves, which generally obtained when *he* was young ; while elder men, who were *his* rustic tutors in the labours of the field, bury their brown faces in the wheat, and with difficulty suppress a smothered laugh. Presently he is among the busiest of the carters in a neighbouring field, pitching the sheaves, or driving team, or portioning out supplies of beer, or ruminating on the quality and prospective value of his well-housed oats. And so he flits from field to field, busy as the busiest, and manifesting a volubility of speech and suppleness of limbs peculiar to the occasion, rather than the individual. Dinner supplies him with a timely respite, but the customary nap which used to follow like an epilogue, is now foregone, and afternoon, and even night (if the sky be threatening), find him lingering in the fields with the adhesive pertinacity of the worthy in the old ballad, who

“ Oft fitted the halter, oft traversed the cart,
And often took leave, but seemed loath to depart.”

Nor is it merely in the harvest-field and in the homestead that the most delightful characteristics of the season are observable. Orchards and garden-grounds are rich with their abundant fruitage ; and creaking branches, heavy with luscious burdens, droop to the very ground, which they so richly

chequer with their restless shadows. Loitering
through these green alleys, you almost hope

“To catch a glimpse of Fauns and Dryades
Coming with softest rustle through the trees ;
And garlands woven with flowers, wild and sweet,
Upheld on ivory wrists or sporting feet.”

And with a kindred appreciation of the luxuries of such a haunt, you learn to think approvingly of the thoughtful wisdom, not unmingled with a shrewd and worldly policy, which induced the reverend dwellers in monastic houses, to zone their grey abodes with bowery gardens and with fruitful orchard-trees, planting a natural cloister wherever they had reared their less enduring avenues of stone ; each, like the other, meet for fostering solemn meditation, or for recreation of the “o’er informed” and weary mind.

What exquisite and varied scenes has Shakespeare laid in such localities ! Think of the carousal in Justice Shallow’s orchard, when the “sweet of the night” came in ; of the ominous gathering of banded conspirators in that of Brutus ; of Malvolio “practising behaviour” in Olivia’s ; of the strife betwixt Sir Rowland’s fiery-blooded sons in that of Oliver ; and of the delicious moonlight interview among the whispering trees at Belmont. Nor fail to call to mind, as relevant to the spot,

the touching allusion made by Felicia Hemans (in the sonnet entitled "Orchard Blossoms") to the

"Old nook,
Haunted by visions of the first-loved book."

That nook, the branches of an apple-tree—that first-loved book, the volume penned by the magician who created Ariel and Prospero, Hamlet and Lear. With such associations, do not the leafy orchards become the "*campi santi*" of a rural realm?

Thus gossiping, have we consumed those heavy hours of heat and languor, when the strongest sinews were unstrung, and the hand trembled, and the head drooped beneath the influence of the intense and steadfast blaze of the careering sun; when no slow-sailing cloud stretched its vapoury screen athwart the dazzling orb, but a quivering mirage danced restlessly above the arid fields; and trees were motionless, and even streams seemed dumb, and lost the liquid murmurs which were music to the thirsty and dust-begrimed wayfarer's ears. And now, with how sincere a welcome do we greet the gradual approach of eventide!

Lo! where the sun goes down. That sky, and all that lies beneath its cope, is garmented with such rare beauty, as in another season you might seek in vain. The heavens above are one vast

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pearly concave, brightening into a silvery effulgence around the sinking sun. All objects and all forms beneath are flushed with gold and crimson. It sleeps upon the branchy trees, and throws their massive shadows into deeper gloom. It glistens upon cottage casements, and pours a richer glow upon the rose-trees garlanding the porch. Sinuous streams and glassy pools, it touches with a lustrous light. Old towers, and the crumbling walls of tottering ruins, forget their age and desolation, and wear a look of renovated youth. Winding valleys are filled with the hazy radiance, and it lingers upon the loftier uplands, until the young moon fills her horns, and "eve's one star" hangs sparkling in the cloudless ether.

And now wend homewards all the sun-browned throng, with which the fields have teemed from earliest dawn.

" The day is past and gone,
The woodman's axe lies free,
And the reaper's work is done.

The twilight star to heaven,
And the summer dew to flowers,
And rest to all is given,
By the cool soft evening hours.

Sweet is the hour of rest,
Pleasant the wind's low sigh,
And the gleaming of the west.

When the burden and the heat
Of labour's task are o'er,
And kindly voices greet
The tired one at his door."

Home they troop, pouring in through every avenue, in companies of eight or ten. Feeble age, and even feeble infancy, each with its slender freight of "leazings;" the mother with her band of ruddy children round her; the reaper with his youngest born toddling on tip-toe, that he may still retain his father's horny finger within his tiny grasp; and the arch-eyed maiden loitering behind to listen to the whispers of a rustic lover.

All that the pen has written, or the graphic pencil traced of scenes peculiar to the hour—

"Che volge 'l desio,
A naviganti, e 'ntenerisce il cuore,
Lo di ch' han detto a dolci amici adio—"

now comes fresh upon the mind, enhances your enjoyment of the time and scene, and blends confusedly with the dreams by which the heavy slumbers of the night are visited.

Let us now conclude as we began,—with the sweet music of a poet's song,—an ode (or call it what you will), worthy of the season, and worthy, too—despite of here and there a strained conceit

—of lasting preservation among the accumulated,
and still accumulating treasures of our land's
language :—

“ Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness !
Close bosom friend of the maturing sun ;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run ;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core ;
To swell the gourd and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel ; to set budding more
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For Summer has o'erbrimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store ?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee, sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind ;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spare the next swarth and all its twinèd flowers ;
And sometimes, like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook ;
Or by a cider press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozyings, hours by hours.

Where are the songs of Spring ? Ay, where are they ?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,
While barrèd clouds bedeck the dying day,
And touch the stubble plains with rosy hue ; .

and many a well-remembered merry-making, "long, long ago." Yet there are the tower-like stacks of chimneys, and there the little turret with its bell-less cupola, and there the uneven outline of the rugged roof, and there the jutting profile of a dormer-window, the circular and massive pigeon-house, the clustering stacks, the orchard trees, and every stable, barn, and shed,—standing out in bold, black, clear relief against that fiery and tumultuous sky, and forming, in their combination, as sweet a picture, reader, as you or we could wish to look upon. We have a hearty liking for this odd, old, rambling, overgrown farm-house—a partiality that has grown and thriven with our strengthening intimacy with its inmates. "Bachelors' Hall!" we used to call it. Marry, it must change its appellation now. To think that ever such a fine, frank, free-hearted bachelor, as this our ancient comrade was, should forsake his boon companions, renounce old habits, and become—a married man. We scarcely can forgive so serious a secession from the little knot of which he was the head and front, wherein he was supreme, a deipnosophist of the first and finest water. He, too, that railed with such exceeding mirthfulness against "those tame, life-lacking animals, called husbands;" and now this valorous bachelor, this village Alcides, hath found an Omphale to bring him to her feet. Well-

a-day, ere long we shall mistrust the permanency and firmness of our own most settled prejudices and prepossessions.

Yet must we own, if ever bachelor had cause to point with pride to her who won him from his celibate, Frank Harper had. Nor marvel we that he is now a happier as well as prouder man than in those boisterous times, which latterly have merged in calmer, wiser days. Lizzy Field (we cannot for the life of us forget her maiden name), when first we knew her, was mistress of a village school—her cottage nestling within a little elbow of the valley, that following the sinuous wanderings of the *Rib*, winds eastward from the church at Thundridge to the Angler's Haunt at Latchford. It was a leafy corner, a sort of lonely hollow in the world's huge hedge-row, just meet for such a violet to blossom in.

An orphan, and a poor one—those with whom community of poverty had placed her on a level, pitied, while the wealthier of her neighbours befriended her. They raised a fund to educate the daughters of their needy tenants—the labourers whose cottages peep out from trim and well-kept gardens, bordering the hollow lanes, or crown the more obtrusive knolls which skirt the valley, and at intervals appear to break its winding course—and gave to Lizzy the control of these young sun-

browned damsels. And, by the way, it was amazing to observe how great an interest the brothers of the patronesses forthwith took in all that related to the management of this said school, how perseveringly they would persist in escorting their sisters to the cottage, and how repeatedly it happened that these fair relatives felt called upon to chide them for the earnestness with which, when there, they bent their eyes upon its pretty mistress; so that the colour came and went, mantling and melting away beneath her pure transparent skin, as rapidly as a young bird's heart would beat beneath the boyish grasp of its delighted captor. Yet Lizzy never dreamt that there was aught of such marked note and excellency in those small features, that petite oval face, and those soft hazel eyes, as made the village schoolmistress a standing toast with many a farmer's son; nor nourished in her mind a solitary fancy that the most uncharitable could torture into an imputation of vanity. Had it been so, perhaps, she would have taught her tongue reserve, imposed restraint upon a manner naturally joyous-hearted, unsuspecting, and ingenuous—become a miser of her smiles, and tempered the winning sparkle of her eyes with a less vivacious fire. Unconsciously the pretty mistress of the Thundridge School made woful havoc with more hearts, and turned more heads than we have patience to enumerate. Daz-

zled with a face which he had seen less frequently than heard of, our bachelor himself felt the icy envelope of unconcern, wherewith his heart had previously been crusted, melt gradually away beneath the sunshine which came beaming from the face of Lizzy Field. Then, too, his bachelor acquaintance, from time to time, were marrying around him. His bachelor parties were proportionably falling off. He saw likenesses in little of those whilome single gentlemen springing up to make their whilome solitary hearthstones glad. Moreover, winter was at hand. Its long evenings would be sometimes lonely ones. His housekeeper was growing old and deaf, and inactive withal. The roomy house appeared *so* void, and even the snuggerly which he had fitted up with such especial care and nicety *might*, nay, surely *would*, be far more lightsome, ay, and pleasanter withal, if a young and pretty mistress were received within its walls. Was Frank Harper in love with our rustic beauty? Undoubtedly; he was received, accepted, and by consent of village rumour, unanimously acknowledged to be the chosen suitor. Would the owner of broad acres confer his name upon the poor schoolmistress? This latter was a question, rumour would not take upon itself to answer, but met it ever with a look of wondrous gravity, shrugging its shoulders with a solemn "*hem!*" as though it owned

a secret which it did not care to publish. Whether this ambiguity was justifiable will presently be learnt.

One evening, flushed with wine, and fresh from the raillery of some who simply ridiculed, and some who really envied him, Frank paid a promised visit to the cottage, and—we marvel at him. It must have been the wine, and not the man that spake. We will not wrong him by the hint of a belief that sober manhood could have so forgotten itself. Had he not sisters? Were *they* not likewise orphans? Could hot and heady passion overwhelm totally in oblivion a brother's feelings? In charity we let his words pass by, and find no record. Suffice it, that the quick and apprehensive spirit of the woman caught at the hidden meaning which he lacked the daring, the effrontery explicitly to avow. Her eyes were lightning—her mind a crowd of startled and indignant feelings, finding imperfect vent in a torrent of impetuous reproach—her heart the hot arena of a fierce and bitter strife 'twixt love and hate, contempt and pity, sorrow and surprise. To find that such a leprous spot could taint *his* fair-seeming purpose—to learn that confidence, the strong love, the unfaltering faith of woman, had been so misplaced, and could meet with such return—chilled, grieved, and, for a

moment, terrified her. Far worse was it with him. Before the majesty of injured innocence, Frank Harper stood rebuked, humbled, repulsed. He crossed the threshold of her cottage, strode hastily towards home, and when he could collect his scattered thoughts, call into play the better feelings of his nature, and dispassionately exercise his sobered senses, would fain have shut the occurrence out, as some unreal, distasteful dream, in which he had been playing a reluctant part.

And now we overleap an interval of months, each with its little item of events to swell the general sum. Long, melancholy months—monotonous and wearisome were they to Lizzy Field. The bitter experience of so much perfidy and contemplated wrong saddened and depressed her. Duties became a matter of listless, automaton performance; pleasures assumed the form of irksome tasks, shunned eagerly, and participated in with evident repugnance. All intercourse between the cottage and the farm was, of course, peremptorily cut off. The retrospect to Frank was full of shame and unmitigated regret. It humbled—it enlightened him. His notions of the female character, sooth to say, had, up to that time, been strangely tinged with error. He had admired its polished surface, but never pierced its depths; jested upon

its apparent weakness, but knew nothing of its actual strength; amused himself with its frivolity, but was ignorant—profoundly ignorant—of the calm and settled seriousness of purpose, the self-sustained, intrepid resolution of which it could be capable, when exigence required. Homage, however, now supplanted admiration, passion succumbed to principle, and the acknowledgment of injury eventuated naturally in a desire for its atonement.

To compass this, (a delicate and difficult embassy to venture on,) a skilful mediator—the penitent's pet sister—volunteered her services. And even then, with "all appliances and means to boot," we doubt if this apt mediator, urged though she was by affection for her brother and high esteem for Lizzy's worth, would have gained her point, had it not been for certain sentiments of pity which were beginning insensibly to mingle with the angry and contemptuous feelings that had at first possessed the latter's mind,—certain faint hopes struggling against confirmed belief,—charitable wishes that were disposed to catch at any extenuating plea; wine, delirious passion,—ought to lessen the offence, and transform seeming forethought into unconsidered impulse. But whatsoever were the causes, the result was happy, the mediation eminently successful.

“ His loving words her seem'd due recompence
Of all her passed paines : one loving houre
For many yeares of sorrow can dispence,
A dram of sweete is worth a pound of soure.
She has forgott how many a woeful stoure
For him she late endur'd : she speakes no more
Of past : true is, that true love hath no powre
To looken back : his eies be fixt before.”

Joyously rung out the bells upon the sunny ninth of May, the day of Lizzy's bridal, that ceremonial which was solemnly to seal the reconciliation between her lover and herself. The church-tower heaved and swayed as though it were instinct with life ; yet with an even, steady pulsing, as a strong man's chest might heave at every respiration of his lusty lungs. The sound went floating up the valley far and wide ; it wandered into hollow lanes, and found a separate echo from each surrounding eminence—it filled the air with blithe, exhilarating music, and made the very sunshine seem more glad, the overarching heavens more blue, the earth more green, and kindled in the eyes of all who thronged the porch, lined the church-yard path, and clustered round the gates, to greet the egress of the wealthy farmer and his pretty bride—a cheerful sparkle that said, as plainly and distinctly, as a glistening eye could say, “ God bless them both !”

Then we believe Frank Harper to have been, as

at this moment we believe him still to be, as happy and as proud a husband as ever knelt beside a young and blushing bride, poor in the ordinary accéptation of the word, but rich in the wealth of an unsullied mind and virgin heart. The narrow education which outward circumstances had so materially restricted in early life, has been since repaired by the acquisition of accomplishments befitting the sphere in which her marriage has entitled her to move. But still the unassuming gentleness of manner—the innate nobleness—all that previously conferred upon her character its dignity, attractiveness, and strength—remain the same, unchanged and undiminished. Indeed, no one who, since the wedding of its master, has shared the shelter of its roof, can regret that this old rambling pile has ceased to be “BACHELORS’ HALL.”

An Autumnal Day in the Country.

“Brown Autumn cometh, with her liberal hand
Binding the harvest in a thousand sheaves :
A yellow glory brightens o’er the land,
Shines on the thatched corners and low cottage-eaves,
And gilds with cheerful light the fading leaves.”

HON. MRS. NORTON.

MORNING.—The sun’s broad disc peeping above an eastern hill,—the ecstatic voices of a multitudinous throng of larks, rushing heavenward, and pouring out, in their ascent, a flood of tremulous, and yet triumphant song,—the jocund voices of labourers in the farm-yard, of reapers in the harvest-field, and early gleaners in the bowery lanes,—the clinking of harness, and the creaking of ponderous wains, already astir, and tending towards the harvest-fields ;—what pleasanter sights and sounds than these, to usher in the glorious day ?

And as the blue mists roll away, veil after veil withdrawn, and distant hills shine clearly out, and winding waters leap and sparkle in the sunshine, and hill-side cottages send up their slender wreaths of white and vapoury smoke, into the pure, bright morning air, and the awakening breeze runs riot amidst the huge, gnarled arms, and waving boughs of every tree it meets with in its course,—what seemeth it but a renewal of the primal beauty of the earth, order and light evolving out of chaos, life, teeming, vigorous, and lusty life, up-springing from the heavy, death-like sleep of night? So morning, life, and sunshine dawn upon the world;—morning climbing the firmament's blue arch,—life in the vocal air, life in the dancing waters, life in the twinkling grass, life in the solemn woods, life in the thrilling song of the exulting birds, life in the red-veined vine-leaves clustering round the cottage porch, life in the haunts and homes of men, and sunshine brooding over, embracing, and informing all.

NOON.—Blazing noontide, the hot sun in his fierce, dazzling might, rides high and lonely in the heavens, without an attendant cloud to soften his excessive brightness, or mitigate the overpowering heat. The reaper's hand slackens, and the seemingly untiring energies of the morning succumb to the relaxing influences and prevailing lassitude of

the burning hour. Then, too, there is the luring shadow of an old oak tree, flinging its broad green boughs far and wide over the thirsty earth, and beneath it the often-replenished beer-bottles, with such coarse fare and homely cates as,

“Sauced with hunger, seem as sweet,
As greater dainties we are wont to taste.”

Who could resist tempters so mute and yet so eloquent as these? The glistening sickle is relinquished, the golden grain enjoys a respite for a space, and the little island of shadow,—green, grateful, welcome shadow, beneath the oak-tree’s canopy, receives a thirstier group than ever did Jack Falstaff’s favourite hostelry—thirstier than even Jack himself, or Pistol, Nym, or Bardolph.

Within the village, all is sleepy, torpid immobility. Windows are flung open, blinds drawn down, cats winking and nodding in the sun, old eleemosynaries dozing in older chairs, beneath the shade of porches more antique than all; the very leaves hang still and stirless on the trees; flowers droop upon their stems; birds seek the shadiest coverts; the white-washed walls of the many-gabled homesteads dazzle like Polar snows, and every cottage casement mirrors the flashing sunshine, until its multiplied reflexion blinds you with “excess of light.”

The brawny blacksmith's sturdy arms no longer wield the ponderous hammer, or wake the echoes of the ringing anvil. Our tailor (incorrigibly idle knave!) forsakes the shop-board for "the paper," and prates of politics until his customers and gossips shun him as though infected with the plague. The spare and sallow shoemaker (*cordwainer*, we think he styles himself,) leans lazily upon his hatch, watching, with his hollow eyes, half shut, the wreaths of smoke that issue from his blackened pipe—his inseparable and almost sole companion. Young urchins, enfranchised from the noisome, steaming school, look wistfully towards the freshet brook, and ponder on the purposed plunging of their panting limbs within its limpid depths. Fruit-pickers lie languidly beneath the orchard-trees, and wish—with what an earnest, unaffected heartiness they wish!—that life itself were one long dinner-hour. Only the rotund butcher, portly as a Christmas ox, and ruddier than a ripened peach, defies the somniferous hebetating influences of noon; and he, poor wight! intent upon his deadly work, his insect-slaughter, looks, breathes, and executes a fearful vengeance, at, against, and on a host of carnelious enemies. So, noontide wears away, and men again address themselves to toil, the reaper to his sickle, the blacksmith to his forge. Howbeit, the labour of the hours that, so to speak, are more

immediately post-meridian, hath little in it of a stirring character—little, indeed, beyond a certain show, a counterfeit and simulated sort of make-shift. The afternoon yields the *semblance*, but not the substance, of actual, active, earnest exertion.

EVENING.—In the cottage-gardens skirting the winding road, flowers are silently folding up their leaves; and bees, laden with the luscious spoils of many a far-off meadow, are wending homewards with a drowsy, droning hum. Above the tall old elms and stately linden trees, the towering patriarchs of the park, wheel flights of clamorous and dusky rooks, the feathered clergy of our childhood's fancy. Masses of shadow sleep upon the sward beneath, chequered at intervals with small fantastic patches of green and yellow light, nature's rich fresco, over which the deer glance to and fro with footfalls mute and echoless as snow. By road-side pools and sedgy ponds, stand lingering groups of cattle, whose lengthening shadows show strangely on the shattered surface of the glowing waters. Ever and anon you indistinctly catch some stave or fragment of a merry harvest-carol; and presently a waggon emerges from a neighbouring corn-field, with a rich freight of grain, and richer freight of sunburnt children on its summit, who wave aloft a goodly bough, that not long since was flourishing upon its parent tree; and as the cumbrous wain

sways to and fro, and rolls from side to side, rocking and jolting in the rutty lane, the laughter and the shouting of those ruddy urchins rings out more merrily and heartily than aye. It passes on, and gradually the echo of that childish mirth becomes more mellow, and, as distance intervenes, dies fitfully away.

Daylight is waning, and a pale, thin haze creeps stealthily along the valleys, covering each water-course, and rill, and gully with a delicate and filmy curtain; but a glowing light is still poured upon the uplands, and on the undulating range of hills towards the east, and on the tapering church-spire's tip. Look to the West. How gloriously the sun goes down, with all his pompous retinue of gorgeous clouds, purple and gold, ruby and amethyst, turquoise and pearl! Pooh! what idle talk is this! The dark, dank veins of mother earth can veil no colours half so radiant as those the face of heaven puts on at sunrise and at sunset. And now the full-orbed day-god dips behind that diadem of firs above the "Warren"—lower—lower—then, hovering like a glory above the crest of one dark tree, lingers a moment, and sinking, disappears. How deep a hush fell then upon the darkling woods,—solemn, intense, unbroken silence. The wind has sunk, not a leaf stirs, not a song-bird's note comes floating through the air. There

is a pause, a suspension, as it were, of nature's universal pulse, as though the loss of light had awed each woodland chorister, and made even inanimate things acknowledge, and obey its solemnizing power. Yet not for long ; for from the heart of one thick grove there issues a low preludious song, that grows and strengthens, augmenting in compass and in volume, until it mounts and swells into a full, rich, liquid strain, sinking and soaring, softening and quivering, until the air seems literally impregnated with melody, bird answering bird, nightingale uttering sweet discourse to nightingale, echo responding unto echo,—a perfect pæan, a choral evening song, sent up when heaven is dusk and earth is still.

Meanwhile, just where the sun went down, the sky still wears some reliquary glory—some traces of a scarcely departed grandeur. There are gleams of silent lightning—vivid and innocuous, and sudden openings in the rifted clouds, that a visionary might well believe were glimpses of the heaven beyond, caught momentarily, while its refulgent gates unclosed to welcome in some wandering intelligence. This, too, departs ; and one by one, dimly at first, trembling and uncertain, but glittering anon like diamonds, the sparkling stars come forth. The blue hills deepen into purple ; the misty haze expands, and thickens while it spreads. As the sky

pales, so pales its image mirrored in the sinuous river. Objects remote mingle and blend confusedly. The eye can scarcely note the line which severs the horizon from the purple uplands, or discriminate between the stedfast hills of *terra firma*, and those other piled-up heights, whose broken summits vary in form with every varying current of the wind. Lights twinkle in the cottage windows. Home draws within its cheerful circle the household band dispersed abroad throughout the day; and NIGHT, with its shining stars, its sleep, its solemn silence, and its shadows, settles down upon the darkened world.

Harvest Home.

“ Home came the jovial *Horkey* load,
Last of the whole year’s crop ;
And Grace amongst the green boughs rode,
Right plump upon the top.

This way and that the waggon reel’d,
And never queen rode higher ;
Her cheeks were coloured in the field,
And ours before the fire.

The laughing harvest-folks and John
Came in and look’d askew,
’Twas my red face that set them on,
And then they leer’d at Sue.

And Farmer Cheesum went, good man,
And broach’d the *Horkey beer*,
And *sitch a mort* of folks began
To eat up our good cheer !”

BLOOMFIELD.

ALAS ! for the rare old times—alas, for the festivities and revelries, the sports and customs, the

convivial hospitalities, the mirthful tide-times, and the oft-recurring festivals which gave to our sea-girt isle its peculiar title of "merrie England." One by one, have these observances and celebrations disappeared from the face of society. Gradually and almost insensibly have they receded before the full flood-tide of fashion and refinement, whose strong current hath swept over them with obliterating might. Many have been totally submerged, their memories existing only in the pages of romance or traditionary song. Of others there yet remain some traces, few and faint, and barely sufficient to interest the antiquary, and form the ground-work of his conjectural hypotheses. A few still linger on, shorn of their ancient state, but nathless reverent by reason of their venerable origin, and treasurable on account of their rarity and paucity.

There is one brief season of festivity, however, (and thankful are we that even *this* remains,) which still continues to maintain its ground, and display some portion of that genuine and right hearty spirit of hospitality and good feeling, by which our ancestors were actuated;—one period of the year, when the rich spoils of the golden autumn having been gathered in, the farmer opens his house and his heart, and welcomes to his table those sons of the soil, by whose labours the in-

gathering of the harvest has been perfected. To the society of these horny-handed, sun-browned wielders of the sickle and the flail, we now propose to introduce the reader.

The afternoon, already on the wane, is gradually mellowing into evening, and the sunlight that flickers upon the fretted casements is already beginning to tinge the broad green vine-leaves, clustering round their sparkling panes, with a glowing ruby light. The old farm-house, one half antique, massive and sombre as a minster tower, built to withstand the shock of centuries, the other half constructed at a recent date, blending the solid comforts of a bygone age with some portion of the conveniences and improvements of the present, has, in its every aspect, so radiant and so rubicund, a look of warmth, and kindliness, and welcome. Through the stack-yard gate—

—— “ the jovial *Horkey load*,
Last of the whole year’s crop,”

is now borne in, crowned with a coronal of leafy boughs, and by a noisy troop of riotous young urchins—

“ Right plump upon the top ;”

while lusty shouts, reverberated and prolonged by distant echoes, welcome its consignment as it is

gradually piled upon the swelling stack. These things you will observe while leisurely advancing towards the host, whose bidden guest you are. He, good soul, ruddy as the sun whose ample orb still lingers on the hill, as loath to look his last upon the cheerful earth, awaits your coming in the low-browed porch, and greets you, both hands in his, with such a cordial shake and pressure, as threatens total dislocation to your arms. From the windows in the rear, pours forth a cloud of savoury steam that, wafted onwards to the groups without, imparts some foretaste of the feast to come. Sometimes the curious visitor may espy, through all this vapoury veil, a red and glowing circle, innocently believed to be some burnished copper-lid; a closer gaze reveals a crimson countenance, a veritable human phiz, belonging to the kitchen-maid or cook; and, if familiar with the Florentine exile's works, he immediately bethinks him of the *Inferno* of "that old man eloquent."

We need not tarry to detail the sumptuous fare, the generous wines, the blushing fruit, prepared for those, the chosen few, the favoured guests, for whom the privacy of the host's own dining-room is reserved.

"Man is a carnivorous production,
And must have meals,"

And even we, to whom the task of carving is deputed, in the "lower house," must take the preliminary caution to quiet the cravings of our own appetites; and, fortified with wine, we sally out to meet a fuller company, at a homelier board, but covered with a prodigal profusion of substantial fare. And if, unlike King Arthur's Christmas bill of fare, our *horkey* could not boast—

"Hogsheads of honey, kilderkins of mustard,
Muttons, and fatted beeves, and bacon swine,
Heron and bitterns, peacock, swan and bustard,
Teal, mallards, pigeons, widgeons, and in fine,
Plum-puddings, pancakes, apple-pies and custard,
With mead, and ale, and cyder of our own;
For porter, punch, and negus were not known,"

there were not wanting good and meet apologies in monster-joints, barons and sirloins, rounds and ribs, and piled-up heaps of vegetables, for (to quote a couplet which appears most apposite)—

"Your labouring people think, beyond all question,
Beef, veal, and mutton, better for digestion."

There, too, were flowing tankards of nut-brown ale ranged at no distant intervals; and rows of bronzed and sun-burnt faces, whose eager appetites seemed peering from their glistening and expectant eyes. A brief grace, a clattering of plates, a

clutching of their knives, and then began the carnage. Oh, Apicius, Clodius, Heliogabalus, and every classic glutton of ravenous Rome or epicurean Greece, what treasure would ye not have promptly offered for an English labourer's appetite? With confidence we might aver it owns no equal in any other portion of any other quarter of the globe. The fabulous attributes of Guy of Warwick seem here to have their parallel, and Father Time himself is partially defrauded of his prescriptive title to be called "*omnium rerum edax*" (that is to say, of all things fairly edible). Beef and pudding in alternate layers are successively entombed within those apparently elastic ribs, and copious draughts of old October share a similar burial. Let not the carver hope for any respite from his labours; he, at least, must be prepared to wield his weapons with a dexterous and unwearying energy, until repletion comes, and even the appetites of the riotous urchins, heretofore alluded to, are successfully appeased.

Borne along by the recollection of the rapid operations of the guests, we have omitted to make all mention of the spacious kitchen in which they are assembled. Large, lofty, and well-proportioned, huge rafters, blackened by the smoke of centuries, support its dingy ceiling, whence descend sundry rude chandeliers, garnished with green

boughs, that ever and anon crackle in the candles' waving glare. At one end, a large bay window admits a refreshing current of the cool night air, mingled with the breath of closing flowers without; and beyond, the eye may trace the dark irregular outline of a serried wood, and the sharp clear figure of a tapering spire cutting the horizon's rim, with one star quivering like a distant beacon upon its arrowy point. At the other end, a few embers of the extinguished fire still glow within the chimney's wide recess. Along the intervening walls are ranged guns, flasks and polished spits, some old engravings—Scripture pieces of rude and simple execution—a portly clock, whose heavy, even throb is scarcely audible in all that din, and various bright utensils, familiar to those who have been duly initiated into the more occult of the profound Eleusinian mysteries of the kitchen. Around the tables, flit the busy maids, happy to catch a sheepish look, a whispered nothing, or a sly pressure of the brawny hand from some admired and admiring swain.

The cloth removed, and fresh supplies of foaming ale served round, with pipes, and that "pernicious leaf," whilome so much decried, the "syren-memory" is invoked for songs—songs that have made the walls of village hostelries ring many and many a winter night,—songs that have been ca-

rolled forth in the meadow, wood, and harvest-field, in the broad light of day, and by the blazing winter-log, at many a Christmas gathering ; songs that might boast almost as great antiquity as the very walls in which the vocalists are now assembled. Little of melody have they, albeit they abound in noise, and in prolonged interminable choruses ; moreover, they possess so marvellous and exquisite a flexibility, that every ballad may be, nay *is*, adapted to one unvarying tune. And then, as renewed potations quicken their energies and fire their rustic wit, how boisterous become their carols ! how hearty, how enthusiastic are their plaudits ! and when “ Master ” is toasted, with an eulogistic tribute to his many sterling qualities, his hospitality, his consideration for the poor, his charity in winter months, what a positive fever of enthusiasm pervades the whole assembled guests ! and when he cordially acknowledges his gratification, and expresses his thanks, what a tremendous uproar is raised by all the company ! and those who cannot reach to grasp his hand, seize on their nearest neighbour’s, and those who cannot gain their neighbour’s, are content to press the servant girl’s, and in the confusion which ensues, perhaps a kiss or two is stolen, and should the theft perchance be witnessed, still greater is the uproar, still heartier and more boisterous the laughter.

Thus the night wears on, diversified, perhaps, by an occasional "taylor's dance" upon the table, volunteered by some splayfooted dwarfish boy, the prototype of Wayland Smith's immortal imp, at whose grotesque and uncouth evolutions both young and old grin with immoderate delight.

But day is dawning. The stars have already "paled their ineffectual fires." The blue mist which all night long hung like a veil over the valley, and peopled the spring-side with a host of dim, spectral, and unsubstantial forms, rolls slowly away. Music is wakening from the leafy coverts of the wood, and

"Hark ! hark ! the lark at heaven's gate sings,
And Phœbus 'gins to rise."

The candles in the kitchen shed a faint and sickly glare upon the relics of the feast, and on the now sleeping groups who lay stretched on every bench and settle convenient for repose. The old shepherd, bent with the weight of fourscore years, starts from his fitful slumbers, and meets the patient watchful eyes of his faithful dog still bent on his, and sleeps and starts again ; the "odd boy," with the bloom of fourteen summers on his ruddy cheek, lies coiled upon the hearth-stone, in a deep calm sleep, dreaming of home perhaps. Others, dizzy and scarcely awake, stagger out into

the open air, and raise the "largesse" shout, not as of yore, to belted knights and gentle ladies, ranged round the tilt-yard or the field of tournament, but to sleeping stock, and all the four-legged tenants of the farm-yard. "Largesse, largesse," the shout is raised and multiplied by other voices; it is reverberated from most unthought-of nooks and corners, until the very air is all alive with that exciting cry, "Largesse, largesse;" you hear it ringing in your ears as you ride away, freshened and invigorated by the morning breeze. The sound grows fainter and fainter as you proceed, until you turn an angle of the road, pausing for a moment to direct a parting glance across the valley, to the hospitable homestead you have left, just brightening in the early sunshine, and for the last time indistinctly catch the old *refrain* of "Largesse largesse."

Broad Lea Farm.

AGE does not wither beauty more effectually than winter withers all the pleasantness of our old rural haunts. Paths that, in the flush and lusty prime of summer, were bowery cloisters, pillared and roofed with rustling boughs, vocal with bird-notes or the murmuring hum of insect-life, and filled with a green twilight that sunset used to kindle into gold, are bleak and bare, silent and desolate, open to the sky above, and carpeted with sodden leaves beneath. Rippling runnels have lost their silvery voices, and utter hoarse responses to the wailing wind. Silver-sheening ponds, that were such faithful mirrors of the changeful heavens, are now mere miry reservoirs, turbid and dank, black blots upon the blank and dreary landscape. Trees, that were lately garmented with lavish leafiness, wear now the spectral aspect of grim and grisly skele-

tons ; and through their rude and leafless branches we obtain a glimpse of cottage roofs and fair white walls, that have been hidden from our eyes since April's leaves were young and green.

Yet even now, a cold uncertain gleam of wintry sunshine steals through the rifted clouds, drops here and there a diamond sparkle on the surface of the water, glances on the bare Briarean trees, with all their manifold varieties of bark and branch, lichen and moss, glistens on twinkling casements and on snowy walls, and tempts us to expunge, *totidem verbis*, our precipitate disparagement of winter. Nay, under the influence of this cheerful glimpse of sunshine, working a marvellous metamorphosis upon the outward forms of nature, we are almost disposed to conceive that there are features in our local scenery which lose not one iota of their picturesqueness, whose picturesqueness is, indeed, enhanced by contrast with the ordinary concomitants of the season ; and to point, in illustration, to the ruddy walls and glittering window-panes of Broad Lea Farm, shining out from between the warm and compact belt of ever-greens, by which it is in part surrounded ; while those ample " wind-pipes of hospitality," as some old writer has quaintly designated them—those

" Quaint, fantastic chimneys, with their store
Of twisted, carved, and lozenge-shaped device,"

pour forth their dancing wreaths of whirling smoke as energetically as though they were the pipe-bowls of a pair of veteran and inveterate smokers.

The Broad Lea homestead is, perhaps, the finest specimen of the old manorial farm-house and its appurtenances that we possess in our immediate neighbourhood: the habitation massive, solid, and substantial; with wide bay windows, and a porch projecting from the centre, continued upwards to the roof, where a stepped gable, with a crocketed pinnacle at either angle, and a rudely-sculptured image on the summit, appropriately crown this most picturesque and characteristic feature of the edifice.

Within are chambers of a goodly altitude and area, with panelled walls, ceilings embossed with fanciful designs, and huge fire-places, set in as huge a framework of elaborate carving, not always strictly true to nature; long rambling passages, and winding staircases, with banisters and hand-rails, that consumed more timber in their fabrication, than would suffice to build a modern dwelling-house—a kitchen of the true monastic standard, stone entrance-hall, and vaulted cellars of unlimited capacity.

Before it, lies out-spread a green fore-court of smoothly-shaven sward, darkened by the shadow of a young and vigorous cedar, fenced in by richly-

berried holly-bushes, and opening on a winding lane, laved on its outward margin by the waters of a limpid spring. A hazel hedge severs this shallow runnel from a broad sweep of pasture-land, alive with sheep and oxen, and sloping with gentle declination to the river's edge, from which another tract of pasture-land again ascends, dotted with trees, and traversed by a sinuous lane, skirted with here and there a barn, a wayside cottage, or a prominent knoll of hardy firs, projected boldly from the lighter green of the receding uplands.

Behind the house, appears a little suburb of barns, sheds, stables, outhouses, and all the miscellaneous pens and piggeries, stacks and straw-yards, which make up the not incongruous picture of a well-appointed homestead; to say nothing of a populous dove-cot, and a pond as populous with feathered bipeds of another class; while right and left, and far behind, expands an undulating interchange of arable and pasture, woodland and lea: spires peeping up at intervals, and isolated farms begirt with yellow stacks; and, bounding all, a range of misty hills, blending, by imperceptible gradation of hue and shade, with the horizon's vapoury rim.

The master of the Broad Lea Farm is no mean sample of his order—the old substantial yeomanry of England; an upright, indefatigable, fair-sailing

and plain-spoken farmer ; well-principled and strong-willed, with a certain sturdy stubbornness of opinion, and a tendency to hasty prejudice, peculiar to an imperfectly-educated mind. Almost a Farnese Hercules in bulk and stature, with a bluff and ruddy countenance, expansive forehead, keen grey eyes, a voice that might be heard above the roaring of a tolerable tempest, and with a gait and carriage that befit the portly owner of we know not how many broad acres—Philip Langley, as he walks abroad with half a dozen greyhounds at his heels, or ambles through our winding lanes upon his favourite grey cob, appears to realize *in toto* one's ideal notions of an "English yeoman bold."

Philip's fair ally in the empire of his household, and in all respects the opposite of himself, is one of the pleasantest matrons of our acquaintance ; slight, and small in stature, with much of her early beauty lingering in her features ; a soft persuasive voice, a quiet unobtrusive meekness of manner, a wide and comprehensive range of sympathies, and a hand as open to "melting charity" as her heart. Then, too, she hath consummate skill in cookery, maketh delectable pastry, is deep in the mysteries of the dairy, manufactures delicious mead, and is without a rival in the preparation of jellies and preserves.

There is, besides, a reduced copy of our friend

the Farnese Hercules, in the person of Philip Langley the younger, a tall and handsome fellow, some four or five-and-twenty years of age, of a nature more plastic than his father's, and inheriting, in common with his sister Katharine—a bright-eyed, merry-hearted girl of seventeen summers, much of his mother's sweetness of disposition, and equability of temper.

Two years ago, this youthful bachelor, the very last whom rumour would have pitched upon as likely to hazard such a step, on whom, indeed, the most imaginative of gossips had never fastened the imputation of an attachment, irrevocably committed his heart and happiness to the keeping of pretty Mary Hazeldine, the eldest daughter of the keeper on the H—— estate, by an adroitly-planned and secret wedding. If there was little worldly policy in the match, so far as *he* was individually concerned, it proved, at least, that Philip's judgment of female beauty was perfectly unexceptionable. Mary Hazeldine, with her large glittering black eyes and oriental countenance (there was a gipsy cross in her humble pedigree), her small and delicately-chiselled features, and the thoroughly Grecian outline of her head, was, certainly, a pre-eminently lovely girl, whose chief, perhaps whose only, fault was—poverty.

At an event so startling, the whole village was,

of course, aghast with wonderment. Curious and amusing was it to observe how, straightway, every gossip, young and old, simultaneously recalled to mind with what incessancy young Philip Langley had been seen to while away whole summer days angling in the little trout-stream which flows hard by the keeper's cottage; or squirrel-hunting in the adjoining copse; or strolling down the bordering lane with gun and dog, yet shooting nothing, and returning always with a tasteful nosegay in his button-hole, the floral components of which bore a most suspicious similitude to the flowers which flourished so luxuriantly in the keeper's garden; but "to suppose that he would ever fling himself away upon an upstart minx like that!" and then the speaker's indignation and contempt grew very much too strong for utterance, and a superlatively disdainful toss of the head, pantomimically and expressively concluded the sentence. To Katharine Langley, the acquisition of a sister was a source of intense delight, while upon the placid matron, her mother, devolved the task of mollifying the anger of her husband, who stormed, and, like the army in Flanders, "swore terribly." The farmer's pride was wounded, his own private views and projects had been completely foiled, and hence, this stolen wedding was productive of a wide and serious breach between the father and the son. All the

efforts of the latter towards effecting a reconciliation, backed by the mediation of his mother and his sister, were utterly abortive, and, after a fortnight's residence in the keeper's cottage, the newly-married couple removed to a farm in an adjoining county, on which a relative had procured for Philip the situation of a bailiff; and our farmer, "still nursing his wrath to keep it warm," heard little more of his offending son.

On Christmas morning last, as the portly owner of the Broad Lea Farm sat basking by the warm fire-side, an enormous log crackling and seething in the grate, and a venerable pointer couched upon the rug—as he there sat pondering upon the sermon he had just heard, or perhaps ruminating upon a more secular subject, to wit, the price of wheat last market-day, his reveries were broken in upon by the entrance of his daughter Katharine, who solicited his attention to "the little angel of a fellow" she carried in her arms.

"More little angels, Kate? Why you brought me four or five last week to look at, and each of those, according to your showing at the time, was, wings excepted, a miniature angel. Whose bantling may this be?"

"'Bantling,' Papa! It is a little cherub. I am sure I never saw a handsomer boy, and so large,

too, of his age ! and such a sweet temper ! And to call this little beauty a bantling ! Fie ! Fie !”

Luckily Kate's indignation found a harmless vent in lavishing a perfect hurricane of kisses upon the infant thus maligned ; and then, relenting somewhat, she laid her childish charge within her father's arms, confident that the loveliness of her helpless favourite was certain, in the end, to win upon the farmer's heart.

The child smiled, stretched forth its dimpled arms, and manifested the same degree of delight in gazing on the ruddy countenance of its stalwart nurse, as it would have evinced in the immediate contemplation of a ruddy fire.

“ But you have not told me whose it is, Kate.”

“ I will do so, by-and-by. They say it is so wonderfully like you, Papa !”

“ You are a chatter-box, Kate, and are always wandering from the point.” Once for all, whose is it ?”

Kate glided to her father's side, laid her soft hand upon his brawny shoulder, and, fixing her eyes on his, with a look of irresistible witchery, a look that might have “ won an angel down,” whispered :

“ You won't be angry with me, if I tell you ? You'll promise me you won't ?”

“ Oh, certainly ; and in return, Kate, you must

promise *me* to leave off talking riddles, and eschew romance and mystery."

"Well, then, Papa," said Kate, with the grave and measured accents of one whose mind is charged with some important secret, the profundity of which the speaker is desirous of impressing on the auditor, "It is *your* grandson, and *my* very dear nephew, Philip Langley."

"My 'grandson'—'Philip Langley.'"

"Yes, Papa, quite true: Philip and Mary are in the village; the baby and I are their ambassadors; and," she continued, in tones of mingled jest and seriousness, flinging herself upon her knees, "we humbly sue for their forgiveness, and crave"——

"A lasting treaty of peace," chimed in the farmer's gentle partner, as she entered the apartment, and opportunely joined her plea to Kate's.

Philip was staggered. He had been taken at a vantage, out-generalled, beaten by strategy, wounded in a vulnerable point: the child had stormed his heart, and Kate and Kate's mother dexterously combined to batter down the citadel of his supposed impregnable resolution. What could he do? Capitulate with a good grace? Make Christmas-day a day of festival, indeed, and welcome home again discarded kin? Some such suggestions conscience whispered to his heart, and Philip's

better angel "whipt the offending Adam out of him," and forced him to consent.

Kate (who petitioned for the post of messenger, as a special favour and peculiar privilege) hurried immediately to the keeper's cottage, for her brother and his bride, and the delighted trio reached the farm in almost breathless haste.

May we not pass over the meeting, and all its tearful, happy, varied, and embarrassing concomitants? You may be sure there was, at first, a perfect briny deluge—a copious overflow of pearly tears, shining like beads of dew upon the peachy cheeks of Kate, and glistening like diamonds in the lustrous eyes of pretty Mary Langley; even the elder Philip caught the infection, and brushed away two big round drops with as much vehemence as though they had been ugly blood-stains on his cheeks. Rainbow-smiles presently succeeded to the showers, and then there was an infinitude of happy gossipry; so much to be inquired, so much to be explained, so much had happened, so many little projects were presented for discussion, such an opening of the flood-gates of pent-up, suppressed affection; Kate's arm, the while, wound lovingly round Mary's waist, and Kate's untiring tongue pouring into Mary's ear a world of confidential chit-chat, with all the graceful sympathy and total unreserve of girlhood—our farmer fondling his

grandchild, while he held a never-ending colloquy with Phil ; and Mrs. Langley, good soul ! vibrating between the kitchen and the parlour in such a delightful flutter of excitement, that one almost feared she never would regain her old habitual equanimity.

Thus hours flew by like moments, and when the great hall-clock rung out the dinner hour, and the savoury steam of the roast turkey came floating in from the adjoining room, they one and all protested that the flight of time was really magical ; and then, with Mary on his arm, our farmer led the way to table, and never did the old oak dining-room at Broad Lea Farm gather within its walls a merrier, happier, or more united group than that which made its echoes ring with their exuberant glee last Christmas-day.

The Royal Oak.

You might travel many a league, and never meet with village inn so picturesque or so antique as ours. You might traverse many a broad acre of dingle, wood, and park, and yet not see so brave, so fair an oak, as that which covers with its mighty arms the time-worn sign that swings before our humble hostelry. It stands in solitary majesty, leafless and bare, a grim, gaunt skeleton, the huge anatomy of a strong-limbed giant, its summer bravery put off, its leafy gloriousness departed, its many-hued autumnal robe stript from it, and trodden down to mingle with the sodden soil beneath. Centuries have rolled over it, and generations passed it by, and still it towers in altitude, in beauty, and in bulk, the same. Lichens cling firmly to its rugged bark, and mosses drapery its hardy roots; but they become it, as hoary hairs become

the veteran ; they are gnomonic of a rare old age—old age without its concomitant decay. They must have been coeval—oak and house ; and he who reared the one must surely have committed to the earth the tiny acorn from whose grave sprung up the Titan vastness of the other.

But the inn ! didst ever see a crazier pile ?—an edifice so nodding, tottering, curious and uncouth ? Story overtopping story, and a row of heavy gables, sombrous and uniform, ornate with cunning carving, worm-eaten and somewhat defaced withal, lifting their peaked summits above the sunken windows, the redundant cornices, quaint corbels, vacant niches, brackets and bas-reliefs, which diversify and decorate the motley aspect of the “ Royal Oak.”

It hath had its mutations—that way-side ale-house ; and the rude effigies which rustic art hath traced upon its sign-board, have changed as often as the blazon of the royal shield. When its walls first rose, the hermit’s stirring call to arms was ringing through the realms of Christendom, and noble blood was shed like rain upon the thirsty soil of Palestine. Then, the “ Red Cross ” became the rendezvous for village gossips ; and if, perchance, some humble palmer sought the shelter of its roof, daylight would dawn before the throng dispersed whom curiosity had convened to hear

the wonder-teeming tales with which the wanderer regaled the greedy ears of that attentive company.

Anon, when many an eventful year had run its course, and the Crusades were numbered with the bygone things of an imperfectly remembered past, the "Harry Tudor" swung from before the village inn: and crippled veterans, who had been eye-witnesses of, and actors in, the sanguinary and merciless wars of the Roses, met in the summer evenings beneath the verdurous roof spread out by that all-sheltering oak, and spun interminable recitals (that varied with the occasion and the audience) of Hexham's total rout, of Stamford's fierce, disastrous fray, of Barnet's Sabbath fight, and Bosworth's bloody field.

Once more the sign was changed, and Harry Tudor's sharp and thoughtful face was hidden beneath a patch of sober, russet-coloured paint. True to the spirit of age, the shuffling close-cropped tapster (of the period of the Commonwealth) scrawled on his board the hackneyed watchword, which certain of the Republicans had adopted—"God encompasseth us!" *That*, we may be sure, was never destined to survive the Restoration; and in its stead, there was accordingly displayed as reasonable a resemblance of the oak of Boscobel as the limner's fancy could devise. And often renewed

as it has been, still does the sign revive, while under it we read the well-known name of its hearty, honest host, "John Summers."

Pondering upon the name, something of his past history occurs to mind,—scattered reminiscences that were silently fading out of memory. Five-and-twenty years ago, John Summers was a handsome stripling, light of heart and blithe of limb, and somewhat of a wag to boot; indeed, the very life and soul, mainspring, projector, promoter and part-perpetrator of every freak and frolic that from time to time enlivened and excited the less inventive, less mercurial, less enthusiastic minds of our good friends and old familiars, the villagers of ——. Supreme in ——— steeple, lord paramount of bells and bell-ringers, marshal of Christmas minstrels, comptroller of festivities at Easter and at Whitsuntide, grand caterer at harvest-homes, chief of the commissariat at the banquets of the club, joker in ordinary and extraordinary at weddings, umpire at cricket-matches, director of bonfires and fireworks on each recurring Guy Fawkes day,—what a perfect Proteus was honest John!

He had a brother, too, ("alas that *had*, how sad a passage 'tis!") of a temperament so opposite, and disposition so dissimilar, that at times one almost felt disposed to doubt their consanguinity. Abstracted, reserved, contemplative, and naturally

of a proud, unbending mind, the contrast which the character of Edward Summers presented to his elder brother's, was obvious to the most superficial, the most careless of observers. As they grew to manhood, this diversity of character, and the differing tendencies of their pursuits, went far to dissociate and divide them. The elder, as we have intimated, was somewhat of a free-hearted, jovial, roystering fellow, could troll a catch, and frame a reasonable after-dinner speech, pithy and pertinent withal; was unrivalled as a rifle-shooter, famous at fly-fishing, expert at quoits, and, as a cricketer, was justly noted for his scientific batting. Edward, on the other hand, almost effeminately delicate in person, found no enjoyment in the rough but manly pastimes of his brother, viewed his celebrity in those respects with something like contempt, acknowledged no community with his companions, and concentrated all his energies in the cultivation of his talents as a self-taught painter. Such profitless expenditure of time, it must not be concealed, was viewed with grave concern by one whose knowledge of cartoons was limited to certain scores chalked with scholastic regularity upon a cupboard door within the bar; and whose picture-gallery was limited to a series of brightly-coloured representations of a fox-chase, which, together with a pair of dingy caricatures, graced the club-room of

the "Royal Oak." In fact, paternal prudence augured but ominously of the future, from the experience of a costly, and (in so far as emolument was concerned) an unproductive past.

Meantime, the thoughts of both the brothers were simultaneously directed into one and the same channel—a channel easily surmised. Both fell suddenly in love! A childish playmate, a relative by some remote affinity, who, years before, had parted from the village as a merry, hoyden girl, chiefly remembered by reason of the exceeding and never-failing mirthfulness of a most sunshiny disposition, returned to it a matured and really dazzling beauty; a girl still in years, but in height, in figure, and in mind, a woman. She soon became the "cynosure of neighb'ring eyes," and was as much an object of admiration among the rising bachelors of ———, as (truth must be told) of envy, and (occasionally) of detraction, among the comparatively slighted maidens of the village. With both the Summers's, the intercourse of childhood was presently renewed; and with the younger, in all its early warmth. Perhaps the pride which woman naturally feels at seeing a proud man kneeling at her feet, valuing a conquest rather in proportion to the difficulty of its acquirement than its actual worth, or perhaps (so contradictory is the human heart) a sentiment of admiration for peculiarities of

character so diametrically opposed to those which marked her own, influenced Lucy Frazer in her choice. But be it as it may, Edward Summers was the accepted lover.

Well might the unsuccessful suitor, who had seen his junior brother's claims preferred to his, feel with some bitterness the slight thus put upon him; for if ever there was human being whose peculiar privilege it seemed to be to communicate to those within her sphere a happiness that was perfectly contagious, that being was Lucy Frazer. You could not tell from what precise source it sprung, nor how communicated. She *looked* a volume of unutterable kindness. The comprehensive benevolence of her soul appeared literally to find an utterance in every glance that emanated from her large and lustrous eyes; and when her lips broke into smiles, it came like some most welcome gush of sunshine, a pleasant prelude to the music of her voice.

John Summers, however, was a philosopher, and his philosophy was of an eminently practical order. Had it been otherwise, the placidity and equanimity of mind with which he bore his disappointment, after the first transient ebullition of chagrin had passed away, would have been infinitely less than that which he displayed upon the occasion. Other cares and other considerations shortly afterwards

occupied his mind. The old man, his father, fell suddenly a victim to an attack of apoplexy, and the "Royal Oak" devolved in consequence upon the elder, while a legacy of some three or four hundred pounds fell to the heritage of the younger Summers. This, to the latter, was a godsend he had scarcely ventured to anticipate; it seemed to offer him a footing from which he might in time attempt to scale the very topmost round of Fortune's ladder.

Full of high hopes and sanguine expectations, coloured with the glowing promise of a brilliant future,—a promise that was destined never to be realized,—he married, received his patrimony, and flung himself adventurously on the metropolis,—launched, with a flowing sail, upon the eddying sea in which so many a noble heart has been engulfed. But the skill which was the wonder of a village, was no meet rival for the excellence, schooled, disciplined, and matured within a city's teeming sphere. A self-humiliating truth like this was slow to force itself upon his mind, and reluctantly received, when it had gained admission there. Three years he lived upon the fruits of that economy which a thrifty parent had sedulously practised for the space of thirty: though subsidiary means were now and then derived from his professional labours, such subsidies were rare and scanty. The last remnant of the legacy vanished ere long. Then came the

bitterness of hope deferred, the incessant but inoperative struggles of a mind inadequately framed to wrestle with the difficulties which pressed upon his path, the gradual demolition of every anticipation most desperately clung to and most inveterately cherished, the slow approaches of inevitable penury, the progressive relinquishment of little luxuries at first, and then of comforts, and then of actual necessities. By all these gradations—step by step—the lowest deep of poverty was painfully attained. But even this, which bore down hope and health before it, the hideously palpable reality which rose up in place of all the pleasant visions shaped with such ease, and abandoned with such reluctance and regret,—even this was powerless to vanquish pride. And hence the brother he had rivalled, but in whose love he still maintained a place, was kept profoundly ignorant of the clouds which now were settling down so heavily upon the patronless artist's prospects.

What the wife felt, and never uttered, submitted to, and never murmured; how patiently she toiled, and never spoke of weariness, suffered in heart and mind, and yet could wear a smile, could still whisper encouragement, still caress, and never weep but when alone,—would be a painful speculation, and yet not profitless. If the heroism of the poor,—the noble, the enduring fortitude of woman, more

especially in her severest trials, her most intense distress, were chronicled—ay, simply noted down in all their naked truth,—those chronicles would glorify our common nature, and put to shame the glowing narratives in which historians too studiously have sought to embalm and perpetuate the madness, the folly, and the lust of many of the misnamed heroic, and many of the misnamed great.

We wander from the thread of our discourse, which now assumes a gloomier texture. Poor Summers declined apace, forbade all application to his brother, sickened, grew hopelessly delirious, waned with the waning season, and “perished in his pride!” At such a juncture, it became imperative upon the part of Lucy to inform the brother of her loss, and this she did, not without some trepidation and misgivings. When the intelligence was thus broken to him, he neither raved, nor tore his hair in agony, nor would permit the paroxysms of an ineffectual grief to have the mastery of his mind. Mourn for the dead he did, unquestionably, and laid his brother’s ashes in a grave beside his father’s, with such solemnity and undissimulated sorrow as testified the earnestness with which, at heart, he loved him. But the living had their claims upon his sympathy; and with a delicacy that was strangely blended with the naturally frank and warm-hearted manner in which his kind-

nesses were generally performed, he proceeded to provide a home for the widow and the orphan of his brother.

Hard by the narrow plot of ground which hides beneath the grassy ridges on its surface the mouldering dust of successive generations, the resting-place alike of wrinkled age and soft-cheeked infancy,—so near to it, indeed, that towards sun-down the shadow of the old church tower darkens the little porch, and when the Sabbath-day services commence, the organ's swell is audible in every chamber, stood (as still there stands) a cottage that then had been for some time tenantless,—a dwelling like that of the poet, *parva sed apta*. This did the thoughtful care of honest John select for those whose welfare now became his favourite concern. It was thenceforth a choice amusement to him, an employment into which he entered with an almost boyish zealousness, to make it habitable, to furnish it according to the fancied tastes of Lucy, to call to mind the predilections which he remembered her to have expressed, when but a laughter-loving maiden, whom it seemed impossible that calamity could ever touch, to carry there the high-backed, velvet-cushioned, oaken chair (a family heir-loom) in which she used sometimes to sit, and bid the brothers jestingly kneel down and pay their sovereign mistress fealty, to add, besides, some

favourite ornaments of antique rarity, that at the same time had attracted her regard, to till the garden, clear the walks, plant its neglected beds with flowers, prune the redundant branches of the vines and fruit trees ; and, in fine, to make it what was, and is,—an enviable haven for the shelter and security of one, upon whose gentle nature the tempests of the world had early and in rapid sequence spent their shocks.

It would have done your heart good to have seen John Summers thus employed, and afterwards to have witnessed the glow of honest pride which mantled on his comely visage when he led the widow and her orphan thither, and when he heard her falter forth her approbation and her gratitude. And if in very thankfulness she gave the feelings of her full heart vent in a copious flood of tears, and if John's eyes grew likewise moist, and if his voice wavered like a girl's, when he assured her he would ever be to her a brother, and if he felt uncomfortably awkward, he knew not how, in the contemplation of the happiness he had effected, and could only answer in reply to frequent thanks, " God bless you both !" and wondered how his eyes could be so dazzled by the sunshine, and pressed the little one until his tiny hand was almost flattened in his uncle's grasp,—surely on such an occasion it was only natural.

Why prolong the narrative? Is not John Summers still the landlord of the "Royal Oak," a substantial man in purse and person, still a bachelor, and, in redemption of his promise, a brother to the widow? Is not the artist's relict a tenant of that pretty cottage near the church? And is not her handsome son the very image of his ill-starred father, excepting that his mind is rather moulded in the fashion of his gentle mother's?

Fortune has prospered both; and a competence bequeathed to Lucy by a distant relative of her mother's, enables her now to mitigate with liberal hand the sorrows and distress of which she herself has felt the weight and known the bitterness.

Christmas Day in the Village.

ON Christmas Eve, the carol of a childish choir, chaunting the "stretched metre of an antique song," was with us at the very hour when sleep surprised us ; and through the watches of the tranquil moonlight night, that simple melody, lingering in the chambers of the memory, hovered about us in the spirit-land of dreams ; joy-bells were pealing when the morning's sun peeped through the misty curtains of the east, and greeted us with a "fair good morrow." And presently we heard the pattering of feet —light buoyant footsteps, cheerily ringing on the path, and ever and anon a hearty salutation "A merry Christmas !"—"I thank you, kindly ; and to you, and you ;" and there was such a fervid warmth and earnestness of utterance in those brief seasonable greetings, that it absolutely made our hearts leap as we listened. Up clomb

the sun above the vapoury barrier piled against the horizon in the east ; not with a dull and watery light, as we had seen him rise for many a morning past, but with a clear, a jocund, laughing light, as though his godship were intent to do especial honour to the day. Nor was he singular in this respect, as every house bore witness. Window-panes, lucid as crystal, flowing draperies of spotless white, rooms garnished and dight with super-zealous care, paths swept, and withered leaves removed, levies on cellars, and forays in the store-room, slaughter in the farm-yard, and a miscellaneous savour in the kitchen, evinced how universal was the wish to meet "Old Gregory Christmas" in a holiday and hospitable spirit.

Morning wore on : the old church-bells jingled again, and matin-chimes summoned the villagers to prayer. From far and near, from lonely crofts and wayside cottages, from huts that nestle in the sheltered hollows of the breezy common, and from lowly almshouses huddled together in neighbourly cohesion, from the venerable hall begirt about with solemn woods, and primitive farm-houses almost co-eval with the hall, they trooped in cheerful companies of three or four. Yeomen, with faces glowing like sunset ; labourers, with each a body-guard of ruddy children ; grey-headed men, the patriarchs of the poor, long since past toil, tottering along,

and propped on staves of choice and curious fabrication—the heir-looms of the family; even the spare and withered grandames—those ancient eleemosynaries who used to sit outside their cottage-doors, on summer evenings, winking and dozing in the sun—crawled forth from their warm chimney-corner nooks, and swelled the gathering throng. Under the church-yard yew they met, some were asleep beneath their feet, who bore them company on that same spot, at this same festival, last year, while garrulous talkers, whose memories yet retained the impressions stamped upon them in their youth, discoursed lamentingly of bygone times and festive celebrations, customs disused, and homely notions utterly exploded. This animated talk subsided into scattered whispers, as a stately lady, leading by the hand two graceful children, advanced towards the porch. Lining the path, they made a living avenue, through which that stately lady,—the mistress of the venerable hall, passed on with measured step and many a pause. There was a gracious word for each, kindly enquiries for absent invalids, and soothing speeches for the cripples and the blind, a smile of recognition for old pensioners, and delicate mention of substantial charities to follow; and then the “bidding-bell” tinkled its final summons, and the stately lady with her humble retinue swept through the porch.

How brave a look that rural temple wore, with its rich garniture of evergreens ! How rarely did the cold, grey, stony, sculpture, the quaint, fantastic masks, corbels grotesque and grim, and monumental effigies, contrast with the dark shining ivy-leaves, and the crimson clustering berries of the holly, which wreathed the pillars, garlanded the arches, wound around the font, and even decked the rusty helms and tattered surcoats depending from the chancel walls. Old familiar faces, some of them missed for many a weary month, shone on us once again ; children from school, maidens from service, “ smug ’prentices ” from neighbouring towns, and sturdy hinds from distant farms ; with here and there a melancholy gap, a void in some small circle, scarcely marked before, yet painfully obvious, when we recalled the muster-roll of those who shared with us the fire-side mirth of many a Christmas past. But memories of the dead “ come like shadows, so depart,” and regret for those whose places shall know them no more, wholesome and salutary as that regret may be in chastening and subduing the uproarious tendencies of our enjoyment, soon yielded to thankfulness for those who were yet spared, even though change was written on the features and the forms of all ; though rosy children were gradually losing their early grace and childish beauty, and expanding into

awkward hoydens ; though awkward hoydens were putting on the garb and gravity of men and women, and those who had lately seemed to be in the very flush and prime of life were waning sensibly, and hoary elders day by day drew visibly nearer to the tomb. But while we moralized, the high and solemn religious services of the day were proceeding in their devout and beautiful progression, and the repetition of the sublimely simple story of the Saviour's birth, the declaration of the stupendous object of His great mission, the exposition of the duties He enjoins, were delivered with an impressive earnestness, and received with a peculiar reverence appertinent to a glorious anniversary.

Anon, the old church-tower throbbed like a living creature with the rocking of the clamorous bells, and a motley multitude streamed from the vaulted porch,—all but the poor recipients of the Christmas dole, to whose necessities a sum, bequeathed originally for masses to be sung on this high festival, and twelve days after, ministers most seasonably. Emerging from the church, the “neighbour air smelled wooingly,” as, through the thin clear element, the grateful steam of hot and savoury dishes rose upon all sides, like fragrant incense. What saith the old ballad?

“All you that to feasting and mirth are inclined,
Come, here is good news for to pleasure your mind,

Old Christmas is come for to keep open house,
He scorns to be guilty of starving a mouse.
Then come, boys, and welcome for diet the chief,
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minc'd pies and roast beef.
Although the cold weather doth hunger provoke,
'Tis a comfort to see how the chimneys do smoke :
Provision is making for beer, ale, and wine,
For all that are willing or ready to dine ;
Then haste to the kitchen for diet the chief,
Plum-pudding, goose, capon, minc'd pies, and roast beef !"

And what that other seasonable ditty ?

" Lordings, Christmas loves good drinking,
Wines of Gascoigne, France, Anjou,
English ale, that drives out thinking,
Prince of liquors old or new.
Every neighbour shares the bowl,
Drinks of the spicy liquor deep,
Drinks his fill without control,
Till he drowns his care in sleep."

An easterly wind and a three hours' gallop on Salisbury Plain could not have stimulated our edacious and bibulous propensities more than these two quotations. The *refrain* of the former hung unctuously upon our lips, as we crossed the threshold of the fine old manorial farm-house, where dinner, and the sunshine of a crowd of happy faces awaited our coming. Happy moment ! our host and hostess were in the very act of marshalling their guests to table as we arrived. No need of

introduction : we knew them one and all, from the silvery-haired old gentlewoman, who talked familiarly of the Christmas parties she had met in '80, to the youngest, noisiest, merriest prattler of them all.

How the huge logs crackled and blazed, and seethed and hissed, and sent a roar like thunder bellowing up the vasty chimney ! How the quivering tongues of flame, reflected from the fire, danced on the dark and polished panels of the wall, portrayed strange fluctuating shadows on the ceiling, and shed a glow, a most superfluous glow, upon the faces of the company ! And what a picture-gallery might have been formed from truthful transcripts of those varied faces ! the deaf old gentleman's, whose round bald head shone like a ball of polished ivory, and who would persist in answering his neighbour's comments on the sermon with an eulogistic allusion to the turkey ; the blue-eyed girl's, whose peachy cheeks were one perpetual blush ; or his, the handsome stripling's opposite, whose eyes acknowledged a "divided duty," and wandered from the dinner to the blushing damsel with restless incessancy ; the little corpulent bachelor's, at once the wit and wonder of the village ; or the round-faced urchins' and arch vivacious hoydens' ; whose eyes sparkled ecstatically in the con-

templation of a marvellously rich and marvellously huge plum-pudding.

When all the edibles had been discussed, and even schoolboy appetites were satiated, wines, toasts, and speeches, "set the table in a roar." The little rotund bachelor rose "with great diffidence to propose the health of an old and honoured friend,—their estimable host, whose hospitality, domestic virtues, &c. &c." And then the "estimable host" "returned his heartfelt thanks," and begged to toast the bachelor, his "speedy marriage, and the blessing of a numerous progeny." And then there was an infinite deal of tittering, especially among the ladies, and not a little banter, and not a few sly sallies at the good-humoured bachelor's expense; and presently the ladies, and the junior bachelors, and the children stole from the table, and took possession of an ampler chamber, decorated with evergreens, (and misletoe among the rest, depend upon it,) and all the adults unanimously announced that they would have "some fun." And then the pranks and pastimes which ensued, the frolics so void of guile, so full of glee, the clear and ringing laughter of the children, so silvery, so ripe, so round, so evidently and entirely from the heart,—the tumultuous happiness of blind man's buff,—the trepidation of hunt-the-slipper,—

the puzzling riddles, and the forfeits that equally perplexed,—the project of a dance, a real old-fashioned country dance, so suddenly conceived, and carried out so zealously ; and, in the pauses of the dance, the liquid soaring voice of some half bashful maiden, trilling an old, old melody—a simple ballad, from the lips of simple beauty, but rapturously encored ;—all these were verily enough to make one's heart grow young again. Other pauses in the dance, too, now and then occurred,—wilful, premeditated pauses, invariably made beneath the silver-berried misletoe ; and kisses were stolen with a wonderful effrontery, to the scandal of the assembled company, until, in turn, the other members of the company were similarly attacked, and then it was remarkable that those who were the noisiest in their “ Oh ! oh ! ” submitted to similar mal-practices without a murmur ! The little obese bachelor himself contrived to leave his vinous friends, and, joining the merry-makers, made most desperate and indiscriminating captures beneath the mystic bough, without encountering a very violent opposition ; and then, chuckling with delight, led a seven years' beauty down the dance with all the elasticity and glee of an enfranchised school-boy.

So evening deepened into night, and midnight passed unobserved, and the “ wee short hours

ayont the twal" arrived before the festive company departed. Stars twinkled, and the setting moon blinked on dispersing revellers, and ever and anon we met some other fragments of a party just broken up, or passed a house yet ringing with the mirthful voices of its noisy inmates ; and with a heart warmed with good fellowship and wine, we sought the shelter of our own roof-tree, and in a deep, sound sleep, wound up the enjoyment of Christmas Day.

THE END.

