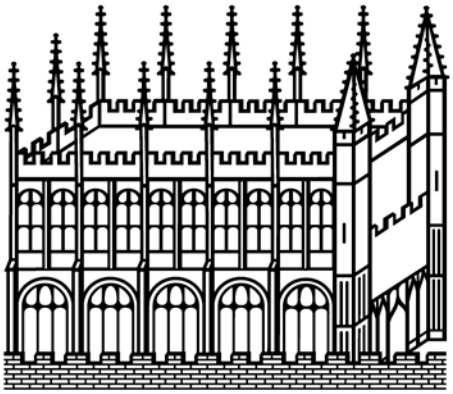

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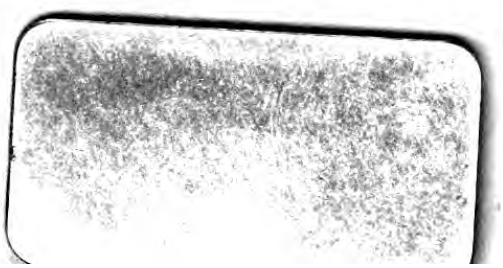

RURAL PICKINGS.

Country


RURAL
Pickings.

RURAL PICKINGS;

OR,

ATTRACTIVE POINTS IN COUNTRY LIFE AND SCENERY.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "POINTS AND PICKINGS OF INFORMATION ABOUT CHINA;"
"EPHRAIM HOLDING'S DOMESTIC ADDRESSES," &c.

For the Use of Young Persons.

Some science love—some home and ease—
Some love to sail the stormy seas,
While others seek the martial strife,
But *all* respond to rural life:—
Woods, waters, sunny skies, and fields and flowers,
Inspire the happiest hearts, and yield the happiest hours.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THERE is something to be blamed or pitied in that heart, which feels not a warmer glow, and beats not with a bolder throb when under the influence of rural scenes. Youth and manhood delight in the country, while childhood absolutely revels there. Even Old Age himself, almost forgetting the wrinkles on his brow, and the rheumatism in his limbs, is ready to skip in the gaiety of his heart, while he breathes the fresh air, gazes on the green fields, and calls to his remembrance the exploits of his boyhood.

> Again his childish days afford him joy,
> And pleasant thoughts—again he is a boy!

As my book will appeal rather to the heart than to the head, so sentimentality must give place to the healthy freshness of natural feeling. I cannot promise you much of a treat in the way of sighing over "faded flowers," and apostrophising "babbling streams;" but I will do my best to set your pulse throbbing among the bright breezy hills

and the sweet, secluded, bird-singing, heart-expanding valleys of rural scenery.

I will set before you, in such language as I may, rustic occupations, the rich garniture of fields, the goodly foliage of trees, the beauty of buds and blossoms, the sparkling of running brooks, the warbling of the feathery world, the fair forms of hills and valleys, the bright gleams of sun-sets, and the brighter glories of sun-risings. I will take you to scenes of rural seclusion, of dark and shadowy nooks, of wild boughs hanging over gurgling streams, of woods of giant trees, and hazel copses rich with clustering nuts; of mossy banks sprinkled with primroses; of old stone quarries and grey cliffs hung with creepers, ivy, and lichens; of thorn bushes garlanded with wild convolvulus and red and yellow poison-berries; of tangled wildernesses of gorse, fern, and fox-glove. You shall see Nature in her glory and her gloom; hear her in the silent eloquence of her solitude, and feel her influence in every hour.

Many have gone before me in describing rural scenery, and others will follow me in the same alluring enterprise; but Nature is a wide field in which all may wander, and each find something novel to admire. He that roams in the rich luxuriance of country scenes, with a love of what is sweet and simple, as well as what is arresting and sublime; and is content to express faithfully the joyous emotions of his mind, the gushing gladness of his spirit, in natural language, can hardly fail in affording pleasure.

The lover of nature has an inexhaustible treasure in the common things of creation. His enjoyments flow not from one part of rural influences, but from all. To him the air is health, the wind is music, the flowers are pearls, the fruits a banquet, and the burst of glowing sights and

harmonious sounds that appeal at once to his eye, his ear, and his heart, create in him a jubilee of joy.

> "God has not given
> This passion to the heart of man in vain,
> This love of earth's green face, and air of heaven,
> And all the bliss of Nature's rustic reign."

For it is a source of wealth; not the wealth of the coffer, but of the heart. It makes man rich in the love of beauty; rich in the quiet delights of solitude; rich in sweet and kindly thoughts; rich in yearnings and aspirations after purity and knowledge; and rich in desires for the happiness of all creatures. It breaks up the deep fountain of his affections, binding him in closer brotherhood to his kind, and awakening in his soul a warmer, a purer, and a holier thanksgiving to God.

CHAPTER II.

SOLITARY RAMBLING IN COUNTRY PLACES.

Companionship in trees.—Communings with the earth and skies.—Grateful influence of a country walk.—Solitary paths.—Green lanes.—The park.—The antique manor-house.—The high hill.—The sylvan scene.—Rural influences.—Country and city pleasures contrasted.—The country girl.

HE who has increased the joy of those around him, has done some service to his kind. To be happy and to make others happy; to point out what is fair and beautiful in the world, and to call forth the strong sympathy of kindred spirits, is a blissful privilege that a friendly and nature-loving heart will highly prize. There are those who know not the value of their possessions in the natural creation, and who have never heard of

> "Poets making earth aware
> Of all its wealth in good and fair."

Such should be reminded that for them the sun shines, the dew falls, the flowers spring, and the rural world is arrayed with beauty.

Who, having a mind capable of observation and reflection, has ever indulged in a country walk without adding to his peace and joy! To be alone amongst Nature's works, is not to be lonely. There is a companionship in the trees and hedge-rows; there are communings of thought

with the heavens and the earth, with the birds, insects, and flowers, which beguile the mind of its cares, and add to its happiness. Do you doubt this? Set your foot in the shadowy lane; climb the stile into the fields; get among the buttercups and the daffodils, and you will doubt it no longer.

Is your heart but ill at ease? Are you sad? Then get into the green fields. As you leave behind you the habitations of men, the oppression on your spirits will gradually lighten. You will have liberty to indulge your woe, for no one will be the witness of your anxiety; but this very liberty to be sad will make you more cheerful. As the air comes wildly around you, you will breathe more freely, and your restraint and your moodiness will take wing together. The chirping of birds will invite, nay, persuade you to be happy. The trees, beautiful in form, and varied in leaf and colour, some magnificently grand in height, some heavily hung with verdure, and some of delicate spray and foliage of feathery lightness, casting their shadows on the green turf, will allure you from the sunny glare, so that you may revel in the shade and look upwards with thankfulness, and without being blinded by the mid-day blaze.

As you proceed, refreshed by the temporary shade, the clear, blue sky, and the vegetable world, reflected in the water, will arrest your admiring eye, and wake you with wonder and delight. Nor will the soft grass beneath your feet be without its influence on your heart, nor the insect world on the wing, buzzing, fluttering, or dancing in the air, fail to excite gladdening emotions; the eye, the ear, and the heart will all share the general jubilee, till unconsciously you will find yourself humming a lively tune, or singing a hymn of thanksgiving.

> Hope her sweetest flowers shall bring,
> And Joy shall sport with sunny wing.

It may be, too, that at the close of your delightful wanderings, you may meet with one of kindred spirit, who will love to listen to your glowing descriptions of all that you have heard, and seen, and felt, and who, moved by the eloquence of your heart and tongue, will agree with you that of all walks, a walk in the country, whether solitary or social, is the least lonely, and the most delightful.

But why do I speak as though you were a stranger to rurality, when I ought rather to take it for granted that you are a lover of Nature, and have wandered, freely as myself, her loneliest and loveliest scenes!

No doubt you have walked abroad in the country in solitary paths, when your foot has shaken the dew from the spangled fern, and when the bright sun has flashed through the crooked branches and dark-green leaves above your head. You have scared the solitary owl from the hollow oak, and the timid hare from her form beneath the furze-bush, pausing a moment to watch the heavy flight of the one to the wood, and the nimble escape of the other to the coppice.

You have wandered down the green lane, narrow, and overhung with branches, when the piebald magpie has winnowed his way chattering, to the upper boughs of the tall ash, and the blackbird with rapid wing has buried himself in the brake, taking your course to the green-mantled pond in the hollow at the bottom of the broken ridge.

You have walked among the sere rustling leaves, and seated yourself on the ivyed trunk of the fallen tree, gazing on the water, while the fish have leaped up to catch the gnats and flies on its surface. A moor-hen has suddenly appeared from the hollow of the bank, a water-rat has plunged to the bottom of the pond, and a widgeon has paddled along between the bulrushes and the broad flat leaves of the water-lily.

You have rambled in the park among the dry fern, and under the hollow oaks, when the timid fawn has started off to the distant herd, and the antlered stag has turned towards you his proud head and branched horns, as if questioning your right to trespass on his territory. You have gazed on the antique pile, the stately manor-house with its wide-spread wings, ivy-clustered walls, and spacious courts, quiet and partly grass-grown, as though they had been left much to themselves. The ancient hall, though not tenantless, has appeared deserted; though not a ruin, it has had a ruinous aspect, as if it had outlived its day, and belonged to a period of time long passed by.

You have mounted the high hill and gazed on the boundless prospect of fields and farms, woods and running waters, church spires, villages, and distant mountains. You have seen the beauty of sylvan scenes, felt the luxury of repose, and drunk in the soothing influence of solitude, silence, and meditation. Little have you recked the haunts of busy life, little have you desired the hubbub of the distant city. Escaped from noise and turmoil and care, you have gradually given way to the delightful, calm, and quiet enjoyment, that by degrees has sunk into your very soul.

How lowly, in such seasons, have you estimated riches, and luxury, and renown; how hateful appeared to you injustice, oppression, and cruelty, and how much in unison with your affections were pity, and charity, and kindness, and love, and thankfulness, and praise.

In such a scene, in such a time, and in such a mood of mind, you have had crowding upon you a lovely cluster of rural influences in sweet confusion, in which different seasons were mingled; green grass and verdant foliage; cottages with vine-clad walls; oaks and elms casting their shadows over half an acre. Cowslip meadows, violet banks,

and broken ground, rich with the yellow furze and purple foxglove; hill and common decked with the crimson heath-bell; birch trees with silvery bark; soft moss, dried fern, the warbling of birds, the breathing of the scented gale, the odour of the burning peat, the blue heavens bright and beautiful, and the golden glory of the setting sun.

One half the things we prize in the crowded city are willingly resigned in the country for the unbroken quietude and undisturbed peace which are there enjoyed. In the city we seek our pleasure, and provoke our delight, but in rural scenes our enjoyments come uncalled around us, and gently take possession of our hearts. City pleasures enervate us by their excitement—country pleasures strengthen us by their sweetness and repose.

In rural scenes we wander without restraint; we have no need to pay particular attention to our dress, we have no fine speeches to make, and no etiquette to observe. We go on, or we stop as we list; converse with those we meet, or pass them by at our pleasure; muse, moralise, and sketch with our pencil or pen just as we feel inclined.

> Leisure and Ease lead on the tranquil hours,
> And Pleasure guides us to his fairy bowers.

But now let me sketch you a country girl from the life; little did she think, when first she caught my attention at the brook, that any eye was fixed upon her, still less that she should ever figure away in print. When people sit for their pictures, no wonder that they set themselves in stiff and unnatural attitudes; give me a sketch from unconscious nature. I saw my country girl through a hawthorn hedge, when she dreamed not that any one was near.

See you the cottage on the rising slope at the corner of the coppice, where the thin, blue smoke is losing itself

THE SPRING

among the topmost branches of the trees? Picturesque as it is, it is much more to be admired as the subject for a sketch, than as a place of abode, for the thatched roof is old and uneven, the rooms are small and dark, and the whole tenement would be better for repair; the very rabbit-pens are in crazy keeping with the cottage, and the bee-hives in the garden look as if a blast would blow them down. But the country girl! the country girl!

The country girl, in coarse clothing, filling her pitcher, there, at the brook, suits the scene better than if she were gaily attired. Like the rest of the world, she lightly values the blessings she enjoys. What is within our reach is too common-place to be estimated highly; she thinks not of the pure and healthy air she breathes, nor knows she the worth of the clear, fresh, tasteless water in which she is dipping her pitcher. Those who are pent up in the smoky city know the worth of these things. Mankind are unlike the fox in the fable, who called the grapes sour which he could not reach. Had a man been in Reynard's situation, he would have ranked the unattainable clusters as among the choicest fruit of the vintage. After all, however, the undervaluing of the grapes on the part of Reynard was only assumed, so that men and foxes are more alike than I at first imagined.

But again I am wandering from the country girl, who is well worthy our best regard, for Sarah Cummins is a praiseworthy character, and young and small in stature as she is, think not that she is a cipher in her father's cottage. Even now its comforts depend much on her care, for her parents are away at work in the fields, and she is left in charge of the younger children.

What mischief might not ensue in that humble abode, were it not for Sarah's superintendence! She has left the

baby asleep in the cradle, and invested a younger sister with brief authority over the household, whilst she is gone forth to fill the water-pitcher, but she will resume her rank the instant she returns to the dwelling, for she is somewhat proud of power, though she does not abuse it, and assumes her mother's manners when the cottage is left to her care.

Her parents feel little anxiety about their children while away, for they know that Sarah will see to everything, and prevent accidents from falls or fire. She began to practise so early, that she is likely to become an adept in domestic duties; as it is, she can cook coarse dishes, and already is she promised a place at the squire's when old enough to take it. This will give a wide field for fresh acquirements. But the cottage roof does not cover her skill, for, now and then she toils with her mother in the fields, and twice has she attended market at the neighbouring town. Besides all this, Sarah learns at the Sunday school what her parents cannot teach her. Though her father sings rude songs, she carols sweet hymns; though he spells old newspapers borrowed from the public-house, she reads her Testament and little books lent by her teachers. Her mother listens when she reads, and her father does not oppose it, having sense enough to see that such exercises are good for his child. Even in his cups has he been heard to boast that "Sally is a sober lass, and given to goodly ways."

There are three or four pictures against the cottage walls, but Sarah's sampler is worth them all put together. It hangs opposite the window, and is, like other cottage samplers, profusely adorned with green fir-trees, parrots with twin cherries in their beaks, and a scroll border. Nor is Sarah without her jewels, though that name will rather apply to the store she sets by them, than to the value of the simple articles themselves. Among these is a small

enamelled box an inch and a half long, with the well-known distich thereon,

> " The gift is small,
> But friendship 's all."

This box contains a very shabby pair of gilt ear-rings, and Sarah thinks it not altogether impossible that she may one day wear them. There is also a green smelling-bottle, sundry bits of lace, ribbon, and black satin, a shilling of very doubtful character, a new penny, and a crooked sixpence, besides a pincushion, needle-case, and silver thimble.

Sarah is certainly notable as a workwoman, but yet, after all, she is fond of a little trifling. Three times, while I have been peeping at her, has she held up her full pitcher on high, to empty it playfully into the brook, watching the sil very descending stream, and enjoying the light below in the agitated waters; and twice has she set down her jug to throw a pebble-stone at a water-rat under the roots on the bank of the stream. At length the cares of the cottage call her away. She has once more filled her pitcher, and is now hastening back to her domestic duties, with one arm stretched out towards the horizon, by way of counterpoise, while the other is borne down by the weight of her heavy jug.

CHAPTER III.

COUNTRY RIDES AND DRIVES.

Delights of riding and driving in the country.—The wooded hill—the open common—the shady avenue.—High banks—hedges—and green pastures.—The blackbird, hare, and pheasant.—The windmill.—The miller.—The mishap.—The countryman.—The errand woman.—The group of children.—The shower.—The public-house.—The pot-house.—The setting sun.

HOW pleasant are country rides and drives, and what delightful country pickings they set before you! Freed from the dust and pebbles below you, and from all the fatigues and vexations of the turnpike-road pedestrian, you luxuriate in the prospects far and near. Standing up in your gig, or if on horseback in your stirrups, you peep over hedges and walls, and into farm-yards and interesting places, with which those who trudge it have no chance of becoming acquainted; now slowly ascending the wooded hill, or steep ascent to the open common, and now dashing along the level road under the shady avenue at full speed, doubting not that your horse, and almost including your gig also, is as happy as yourself. Who does not like country rides?

There is life, animation, and excitement in the spirited courage of your horse, and in the rapid whirling of your gig wheels. However far you have to go, you arrive at your destination pleased and delighted, the very pink of perfection and wall-flower of content, fresher than when you set

out, whereas the poor pedestrian may reach home, hours afterwards, foot-sore and discontented, having undergone vexation enough to sour his temper for the rest of the day.

How pleasant are country rides and drives! Now we stop the gig to pluck a beautiful wild flower growing on a high bank just within our reach, and now we drive up close to the side of a hedge to gaze on the sheep with their tinkling bells, and the cattle reposing in the green pasture-lands beyond. Here a blackbird, seen in the retired lane, suddenly disappears in the brake; there a timid hare starts from her form in the furze bush; and yonder, heavily and somewhat majestically, rises the fair-plumed pheasant in the air. Flowers, hedges, meadows, fields, cows, and sheep, blackbirds, hares, and pheasants, all have an interest in our eyes.

At one time we pass a windmill, and enter into friendly conversation with the miller, who is just coming out with his cart loaded with sacks of flour; whether we should do the same thing if we met him in Bond-street, I cannot say, however we are ready enough to converse with him now. He turns out to be a shrewd, companionable man, and we oblige our horse, a fine-built sleek-hided spirited animal, of course, good in his appearance, paces, and everything else, to accommodate himself to the pace of his rougher companion, whom our friend the miller praises to the skies.

Of course we gain much information respecting the mill, and the farm-houses in the neighbourhood, and the nearest market, and the lanes and woods, and then turn off upon the miller's recommendation, to the left, where soon the road branches out, as all country roads do, in different directions. We foolishly take the narrowest, for without some mistake, or some little disaster, even a country ride or drive would lose much of its interest. The road suddenly bends to the left, in a way sufficiently circular to admonish us not

to pursue it, unless we desire to return once more to the windmill. Cooped up more narrowly than we like, with a fine, luxuriant, dry, green ditch on either hand, we do our best to turn round our vehicle—we succeed in getting into one of the ditches, and almost in being overturned, though we do not succeed in turning round the gig. Our horse is ardent to go forwards, but instead of this he is compelled to go backwards to the branching off of the lane, which so chafes and exasperates him, that he plays us many a prank in return.

On we go again—now in a deep hollow way, and now on a hill. Now our horse's hoofs scatter the loose stones in places where the road has been mended, and now our wheels rumble over the wooden bridge. Nor do we fail to excite some attention; a countryman touches his hat as we whirl by him; an errand-woman laden with her full basket, mop and broom, drops us a courtesy; a group of children give over their play to admire us; a mother hastily snatches up her bairn by one arm, lest it should be Juggernauted, and the stone-breaker by the way-side suspends his clinking, honours us with his especial regard, and resumes his labour only when we are out of sight.

And now it begins to rain, why should it not! Many worse things in the world than a shower! and this is just such a shower as it should be; just enough to frighten us with the prospect of wet coats and saturated gig cushions; just enough to freshen up the trees and hedges with a deeper green; and just enough to make us enjoy, ten times more than we otherwise should, the sunshine that is about to follow. We pity the poor, half-drowned, draggled-tail pedestrians that we pass, and draw a comparison much in our own favour. The rain at last ceases, the sun breaks out, and we dash on merrily, forgetting our troubles, pulling up

after a delightful ride, at a way-side public-house, the Royal Oak, where all is cleanliness and comfort. The hostler, as if he expected us, stands ready to take our steed; we are won, at once, by the civility of our host and hostess. We cannot make it out why eggs and bacon are always so much better at a public-house than at home, and we wonder how the landlord can "make both ends meet," charging as he does so unreasonably reasonable.

How different is the clean, comfortable public-house, on which we have happily lighted, to the pot-house we remember to have seen.

There sots and drunkards in their brawls,
Have pulled the plaster from the walls,
And ale and gin, and potent fume
Of vile tobacco, scent the room.
There orange-peel is freely spread,
And nut-shells crack beneath the tread;
And shattered furniture express
Debauch and riot and excess.
Torn all to tatters and unclean
The last week's news perchance is seen,
With benches in disorder laid,
A door be-chalked with debts unpaid,
A table flooded o'er with beer,
A broken jug and backless chair,
Unclean spittoons, a spill-can stored
With brimstone matches, and a board
For cribbage and back-gammon's game;
A ceiling smoked with candle flame;
A pack of cards dispersed around,
The knave of clubs upon the ground,
Where broken pipes together vie,
And songs and saw-dust mingled lie.
Filled with tobacco yonder stands,
Receptacle of filthy hands,

A box, whereon some son of rhyme
Has thus inscribed his verse sublime,
" A halfpenny pay before you fill,
Or forfeit sixpence, which you will."

We leave the public-house, the home-brewed ale has warmed our hearts, the corn has given courage to our horse. Again we are on the whirl! How pleasant are country rides and drives! All disagreeables turn to pleasures; the freshness of the air, the glowing west, the sounds that meet us at every turn, the farm-house, hay-field, meadow, dell and hollow, with the old hovel and crooked crabtree—all have separate charms as we hasten by them.

We have freely parted with a few sixpences, for a girl has opened for us a gate, a boy has picked up our whip, and sundry others have directed us in our course; we have hurried and loitered, and stopped and proceeded, as the whim prevailed, till the sun is setting in all his glory. On we go, crossing the long shadows of the trees; the night-breeze is beginning to rustle among the leaves, and distant objects seen against the red glare of the western sky look dark, and near, and present a distinct outline. On we go; in another hour the picture we gaze on will be illumined no longer; even now

" Heaven unbinding her star-braided hair
Sinks down to repose on the earth and the sea."

How pleasant are country rides and drives!

CHAPTER IV.

FARM-HOUSES AND FARMERS.

Contrast between a country farmer and a city tradesman.—Farm houses.—Stone walls.—Gables.—Pointed roofs.—High and heavy chimneys.—Oaken door studded with iron.—Porch fitted up with settles.—A farmer's homestead, fold-yard, and rick-yard.—Rural picture by Pratt.—The farmer and his visitor.—Howitt's description of farm-houses and farmers.—The dinner party.

THERE is this striking difference between a farmer, and a town or city tradesman, that while the latter makes present sacrifices for a future advantage, the former enjoys the best things of life as he goes along. The tradesman will put up from youth to age with small premises, bad air, scanty meals, and late hours, that he may hoard up wealth, all which time the farmer is living in a large house, and enjoying health, peace, plenty, fresh air, pure water, sunshine, green fields, singing birds and flowers. Parks and palaces, and large libraries, and learned men, and picture galleries, and squares and carriages, and gay equipages he wants not; and if he have not the follies, the finery, and the wonderful sights of the city, he reads about them in the newspaper and laughs at them. Give him his friend, his jug of brown ale, his pipe, and the "Farmer's Journal," and he is as happy—aye, and a great deal happier—than the Lord Mayor at the Mansion House. True, he is a

"country bumpkin," and a "clodhopper," and he knows that he is called so, and repays the joke with usury; for never do the walls of his kitchen, or of his snug smoking parlour, ring with a heartier roar, than when he is laughing at "those chaps, the kid-gloved, silk-stockinged, dandified men-milliners of the city."

I never look at a farm-house, whether it be a substantial building of old gray stone, with no end of odd gables and pointed roofs, and stacks of high and heavy chimneys; or of moss-grown brick, looking as ancient as stone; whether it have windows with stone mullions and diamond panes, an oaken door studded with iron, and a porch fitted up with settles; or is somewhat more modern in its general appearance, with its rick-yard, fold-yard, stables, barns, sheds, granaries, piggeries, and poultry-pens; I never look at such a building, without taking it for granted that the farmer who lives there, whether he be tall or short, stout or slender, is a blunt, honest, hard-working man, independent in his spirit, tenacious in his opinion, open as daylight, and unbounded in his hospitality.

A farmer's homestead of the better sort, with its spacious fold-yard of clean straw, and its ample rick-yard of wheat, barley, oats, beans, and hay, is certainly a heart-gladdening sight—a horse-prancing, cattle-lowing, pig-squealing, turkey-gabbling, poultry-cackling prince of a place, and the farmer is just the very man that ought to own such an establishment. But, though this is the case, the poet and the philanthropist cry aloud—and they say with some reason—against large farms; and the former paint lovely rural pictures of times gone by, that are framed, if not glazed, and hung up in memory's hall. Such a one is the following, painted by Pratt, in his "Cottage Pictures:"—

Time was, when twice ten husbandmen were fed,
And all their wholesome progeny found bread,
And a soft home, each in his modest farm,
By tillage of those lands, and raiment warm ;
Then took at plough the son and sire their turn,
The wife then milk'd the cow, and work'd the churn ;
And many a mile the daughter trudged with ease,
To vend her butter, chickens, eggs, and cheese ;
And, home returning, heavy laden, brought
Full many an article at market bought ;
And though she bow'd beneath her basket's weight,
Would blithely sing the country maiden's fate ;
And haply too, the swain, who ambush'd lay,
To ease her load, would join her on the way :
Well-pleased was he, that useful load to bear,
Yet saw, with fond presage, the damsel's care :
Of future helpmate there good signs were shown,
And, as he smiled, he mark'd her for his own ;
Whisper'd his wish to share her toils for life,
Purchased the sacred ring, and call'd her wife.

Nor came she portionless, nor to his arms
Brought only innocence, and native charms,
Though love's blest wealth—but kin, on either side,
Enrich'd the bridegroom, and endow'd the bride !
Of kine a pair to each, of sheep a score,
The parents furnish'd from their well-earn'd store ;
A waggon one, and one a team bestow'd,
While from the heart's pure source each love-gift flow'd :
Of linen, too, a stock, and spun at home ;
And a best bed, to deck the nuptial room ;
The quilt and curtains by the matron wrought,
And nothing but the wood and ticking bought ;
From their well-feather'd flock the pillows down,
And all the toilet ornaments their own :
The polish'd looking-glass and pictures gay,
For parlour, used alone on holyday,

Or Christmas time, or merry-making sweet,
When the kind landlord deign'd to share the treat;
And joy'd to see the harvest-barn was fill'd,
And felt at heart how well his farm was till'd:
His little farm, which ease and health display'd,
And happy tenants, happy landlords made.

The farmer is fond of a visitor, and he loves to walk over his lands with him, and show him his stock, and talk of his drainage, his grass, his turnips, and his growing corn; and this he does with the most perfect civility and good humour, though any one accustomed to read human character cannot help seeing that he undervalues his guest if he happen to be ignorant of farming. With the currier in the fable, nothing was "like leather;" and with the farmer nothing is like farming. He will enjoy your company, if you make yourself agreeable; laugh at your jokes, if you have any to crack; and listen to your book learning with respect, if you carry him out of his depth; but in the midst of all, you are evidently deficient in what a man ought to know. What can a man be good for who knows not how to grow a turnip?

William Howitt—and here, though he be unknown to me, let me offer him a word of honest praise; for whether roaming the stormy fields of Culloden, Flodden, and Edghill—visiting Hampton Court and Stonyhurst—indulging a rapturous reverie at Tintagel—strolling through Staffa and Iona, Bolton Priory, Coombe Abbey, and Walton Hall—carried away by the architecture of Winchester, the associations of Stratford-on-Avon, and the retired loneliness of Compton-Winyates, or revelling in rural scenery, the same clearness of intellect, elasticity of spirit, and ardent love of nature, art, and antiquity are in him ever visible—William Howitt, than whom a more truthful or more graphic writer on rural scenes is not to be found, says:—

"There is no class of men, if times are but tolerably good, that enjoy themselves so highly as farmers. They are little kings. Their concerns are not huddled into a corner as those of the town tradesman are. The farmer's concerns, however small, spread themselves out in a pleasant amplitude, both to his eye and heart. His house stands in its own stately solitude; his offices and outhouses stand round extensively, without any stubborn and limiting contraction; his acres stretch over hill and dale; there his flocks and herds are feeding; there his labourers are toiling; he is king and sole commander there. He lives amongst the purest air and the most delicious quiet. Often when I see those healthy, hardy, full-grown sons of the soil going out of town, I envy them the freshness and the repose of the spots to which they are going. Ample, old-fashioned kitchens, with their chimney-corners of the true, projecting, beamed, and seated construction, still remaining; blazing fires in winter, shining on suspended hams and flitches; guns supported on hooks above, dogs basking on the hearth below; cool, shady parlours in summer, with open windows, and odours from garden and shrubbery blowing in; gardens wet with purest dews, and humming at noontide with bees; and green fields and verdurous trees, or deep woodlands lying all round, where a hundred rejoicing voices of birds or other creatures are heard, and winds blow to and fro, full of health and life-enjoyment. How enviable do such places seem to the fretted spirits of towns, who are compelled not only to bear their burthen of cares, but to enter daily into the public strife against selfish, evil, and ever-spreading corruption.

"When one calls to mind the simple abundance of farm-houses, their rich cream and milk, and unadulterated butter, and bread grown upon their own lands, sweet as that which

Christ broke, and blessed as he gave to his disciples; their fruits ripe and fresh-plucked from the sunny wall, or the garden bed, or the pleasant old orchard; when one casts one's eyes upon, or calls to one's memory, the aspect of these houses, many of them so antiquely picturesque, or so bright-looking and comfortable, in deep retired valleys, by beautiful streams, or amongst fragrant woodlands, one cannot help saying, with King James of Scotland, when he met Johnny Armstrong:—

'What want these knaves that a king should have?'

"But they are not outward and surrounding advantages merely, which give zest to the life of the farmer. He is more proud of it, and more attached to it, than any other class of men, be they whom they may, are of theirs. The whole heart, soul, and being of the farmer are in his profession.

"The farmer invites his friends to dine with him. He will have a party. The guests have been enjoined to *come early*, and they come early with a vengeance. They will not come as the guests of night-loving citizens and aristocrats come, at from six to nine in the evening;—no, at ten and eleven in the morning you shall see their faces, that never yet were ashamed of daylight, and that tell of fresh air and early hours. Then come rattling in sundry vehicles, with their cargoes of men and women; lively salutations are exchanged; the horses are led away to the stables, and the guests into the house, to doff great-coats and cloaks, hats and bonnets, and sit down to luncheon. And there it is, ready set out. 'They 'll want something after their drive,' says the host. 'To be sure,' says the hostess. And there is plenty in truth. A boiled ham, a neat's tongue; a piece of cold beef; fowls and beef-steak pie;

tarts and bread, cheese and butter; coffee for the ladies, and fine old ale for the gentlemen.

"The dinner hour arrives; and a sound of loud voices somewhere at hand announces that our agricultural friends are returned punctually to their time, with many a joke on their fears of the ladies' tongues. Not that they seemed to want any dinner—no, they made such a luncheon; but they had such a natural fear of being scolded. Well, here they all are; and here are the ladies, all in full dress. Hands that have been handling prime stock, or rooting in the earth, or thrust into hay-ricks and corn-heaps, are washed, and down they sit to such a dinner as might satisfy a crew of shipwrecked men. There are seldom any of your 'wishy-washy soups,' except it be very cold weather, and seldom more than two courses; but then they *are* courses! All of the meat kind seems set on the table at once. Off go the covers, and what a perplexing, but unconsumable variety! Such pieces of roast beef, veal, and lamb; such hams, and turkeys, and geese; such game, and pies of pigeons, or other things equally good, with vegetables of all kinds in season—peas, potatoes, cauliflowers, kidney-beans, lettuces, and whatever the season can produce. The most potent of ale and porter, the most crystalline and cool water are freely supplied, and wine for those that will. When these things have had ample respect paid to them, they vanish, and the table is covered with plum-puddings and fruit-tarts, cheesecakes, syllabubs, and all the nicknackery of whipped creams and jellies that female invention can produce. And then a dessert of equal profusion. Why should we tantalise ourselves with the vision of all those nuts, walnuts, almonds, raisins, fruits, and confections? Enough that they are there; that the wine circulates—

foreign and English, port and sherry, gooseberry and damson, malt and birch, elderflower and cowslip; and loud is the clamour of voices, male and female. If there be not quite so much refinement of tone and manner, quite so much fastidiousness of phrase and action, as in some other places, there is at least more hearty laughter, more natural jocularity, and many a

'Random shot of country wit,'

as Burns calls it. A vast of talk there is of all the country round; every strange circumstance; every incident and change of condition, and new alliance amongst their mutual friends and acquaintances, pass under review. The ladies withdraw, and the gentlemen draw together; spirits take place of wine, and pipes are lighted.

"But after tea there must be a dance for the young, and there are cards for the more sedate; and then again, to a supper as profuse, with its hot game, and fowls, and fresh pastry, as if it had been the sole meal cooked in the house that day. The pastor and his company depart; the wine and spirits circulate; all begin to talk of parting, and are loth to part, till it grows late; and they have some of them six or seven miles to go, perhaps on a pitch-dark night, through by-ways, and with roads not to be boasted of. All at once, however, up rise the men to go, for their wives, who asked and looked with imploring eyes in vain, now show themselves cloaked and bonnetted, and the carriages are heard with grinding wheels at the door. There is a boisterous shaking of hands, a score of invitations to come and do likewise, given to their entertainers, and they mount and away! When you see the blackness of the night, and consider that they have not eschewed good liquor, and per-

ceive at what a rate they drive away, you expect nothing less than to hear the next day, that they have dashed their vehicles to atoms against some post, or precipitated themselves into some quarry; but all is right. They best know their own capabilities, and are at home, safe and sound.

"Such is a specimen of the festivities of what may be called the middle and substantial class of farmers; and the same thing holds, in degree, to the very lowest grade of them. The smallest farmer will bring you out the very best he has; he will spare nothing on a holiday occasion; and his wife will present you with her simple slice of cake, and a glass of currant or cowslip wine, with an *empressement*, and a welcome that you feel to the heart is real, and a bestowal of a real pleasure to the offerer."

CHAPTER V.

ON BIRDS, FLOWERS, AND OTHER THINGS.

Sunbeams and sunny scenes.—Tall trees.—The upland lawn.—Morning, mid-day, and sunset.—The cuckoo, lark, thrush, blackbird, and nightingale.—Field flowers.—The heath-flower.—Animals and reptiles.—Death of a spider.—Sketch in a retired lane.

AND are you really yearning for the calm, the beautiful, and the delightful? Away then to the country; the healthy, the pure, the lovely country! Mountain and valley, hill and slope, river and rivulet, spring and torrent, wood and down—these, though always varying, are still the same. "They come forth in the morning as fresh and as beautiful as on the day of their creation; their loveliness is eternal, they are all the handiwork of God, who said that they were good, and they are good."

If you love sunbeams, and sunny scenes, and rainbows, and green and sere leaves, and mossy banks and gushing waters, and moonlight walks, the country is the only place where you can enjoy them. There you may revel unwearied with pleasure, and unsated with varied sweets. To the country we may say, as we would to a dear friend whom we love,

> **While years in quick succession flee,**
> **Whate'er my end and aim,**
> **While seasons change around, to thee,**
> **"Je suis toujours le même."**

Have you never stood among a group of tall trees, and looked upwards, your eyes wandering in the intricacy of

dark sprays, and of green boughs fluttering in the wind, till you have longed to be a squirrel, a bird, a bee, or any other of God's lesser creatures capable of revelling in the leafy labyrinth above you? If you have not done this, I have done it repeatedly.

If you have never walked on the upland lawn when sunrise with its gorgeous glory has awakened joyous and enthusiastic emotions—never sought the shade and shelter of the wide-spread oak, when the southern sun has flung around his unbearable beams, gilding the heavens and the earth with his glory—and never gazed on the western sky glittering in all the effulgency of the retiring orb of day, feeling it, enjoying it, revelling in it, till excited with ecstasy you have clasped your hands in thankfulness, and offered the incense of your heart to the great Giver of sunshine and sunny thoughts, then you can hardly conceive the delight that such scenes have the power to call up in the mind.

What a strange sensation of deep-seated joy is that when, the sun shining gratefully on the rejoicing fields and foliage, the first note of the cuckoo is heard in the spring! what bygone seasons does it recal! what sweet associations it awakens!

"Thrice welcome, darling of the spring!
E'en yet thou art to me
No bird;—but an invisible thing,
A voice, a mystery!

The same whom in my schoolboy days
I listened to:—that cry
Which made me look a thousand ways
In bush, and tree, and sky.

To seek thee did I often rove
Through woods and on the green,
And thou wert still a hope, a love
Still long'd for, never seen.

And I can listen to thee yet;
Can lie upon the plain,
And listen till I do beget
That golden time again."

Of all the day-singing birds, the lark has the first place in our affections. His matin song impetuously gushes from his warbling throat, as though his little heart had more happiness pent up in it than he could bear. Up! up! he goes as near heaven as he can reach, and had he strength of wing equal to his ardour, he would present his thanksgiving at his Maker's throne.

The speckled-breasted thrush, and the blackbird, are masters of song, and hymn their happiness most harmoniously. Oh, what a robbery would it be to the country to take away either its fruits, its flowers, its green leaves, or its singing birds!

We owe much to linnets, bull-finches, gold-finches, and starlings, for their carolling and daily madrigals, and something to our favourites the robin and the wren, whose harmony is pleasant to our ears. These favoured musicians being chartered from injury by the hands of man, put confidence in us, and thereby win our love.

Sparrows, kingfishers, and buntings, with the larger birds, ravens, rooks, crows, magpies, owls and daws, are not highly talented in voice, yet are their several notes full of interest in particular situations. What would the brook be without a kingfisher? the grove of elms without a rookery or crow's nest? the barn without an owl? or the church-spire without a daw? The first of singing birds among us is the nightingale, and very delightful is her plaintive strain.

"Sweet bird, that shunn'st the noise of folly,
Most musical, most melancholy!
Thee, chantress! oft, the woods among,
I woo to hear thy evening song."

What sweet associations are oftentimes blended with field flowers! I love the woodbine, and the dog-rose, and the foxglove, and the corn-flower, and the poppy, but more than all I love the heath-flower! The purple heath-flower is associated with a moon and a mountain; a sweet cottage, by-gone seasons of joy, a book-case ornamented with trellis-work of brass wire, the portrait of a bard, the sound of a piano, a mild-looking child, with soft and influential eyes,—talent, worth, and kindness.

> **And it breathes of other things to me;**
> **Of mountain air, and of liberty;**
> **Of tower, and tree by lightning riven;**
> **The storm, and the warring wind of heaven;**
> **Of mossy cairn, and cromlech grey;**
> **Of mad'ning sounds of feud and fray;**
> **Of stern contention, hope forlorn,**
> **And banner rent, and tartan torn.**

Much might I say of hedgehogs, badgers, and cunning foxes, hares, rabbits, and half-starved weazels, rats, ferrets, and drowsy dormice, for in rural life they all perform a part, as well as the flitting bat and the burrowing mole. Reptiles, also, might be spoken of at length; scaly snakes, yellow frogs, bloated toads, and long-tailed lizards, as well as the unnumbered insects which abound,—armed hornets, honey-bees, and stinging-wasps, cockchaffers, glow-worms, beetles, gnats, and shining dragon-flies, but I will merely now describe the death of a spider.

The day was a stormy one, for the wind blew in sudden gusts, while the drenching rain descended without intermission. In passing near a small recess, in part occupied by a wooden spout, erected for the purpose of conveying the water from the top of the house into the water-course,

I observed a spider, which had incautiously ventured from his safe retreat behind the spout. I paused, as with difficulty he dragged himself along towards an oyster-shell, beneath whose friendly shelter I expected to see him crawl. Hardly had he strength to reach the shell, for the drops of rain struck him so frequently, knocking him first on one side, and then on the other, that he was, indeed, in a pitiable case. Though I pitied, I could not relieve him; on he went, weak and staggering, towards the shell.

I have seen horses reel and fall when the death-shot has passed through their foreheads, and witnessed the staggering steed, when the pointed weapon has found its way to his heart: the staggering spider reminded me of these things. True, the horses were large, and the spider was small; but the struggle was the death-struggle in both cases. The oyster-shell was half full of water, and the staggering insect, instead of crawling beneath it, ascended its side. There was now no hope of escape; he paused a moment, was again struck by the rain, once more exerted all his strength to move onward, and then fell into the watery pond in the oyster-shell, where he was drowned.

I cannot refrain from here introducing a sketch in a retired lane, by the pen of old Humphrey.

"There was a keen sense of the fair and beautiful in nature, and a warm rush of grateful emotion, that made my uplifted eyes swim again. I could not look on earth or heaven, without being struck with the profusion, the almost prodigality of goodness, manifested by the Father of Mercies. The earth was overhung with an azure canopy, and clouds of dazzling white, edged with glittering gold. In my walk mine eye had glanced around on a distant prospect of hills and plains, and woods and water, that gave back the sunbeam; while around me stood, at different

distances, the venerable oak, the towering elm, and the romantic fir; but I had now entered the shady lane, where in my pathway, and almost beneath my feet, glowed the yellow-blossomed furze bushes, absolutely dazzling me with their yellow glories.

"My very delight became painful to me, through its excess; nor can I hope to impart a sense of my emotions to one altogether a stranger to such feelings. Every object appeared as a picture, not executed by the puny pencil of a mortal being, but painted by the almighty hand of the Eternal.

"There I stood, bending over a furze bush, as if I had never gazed on one before. Through its interstices might be seen the brown and faded parts of the shrub, with here and there a ladybird, with its hard red wings, dotted with black, crawling among them; but on the upper part, its myriads of fresh green thorns were studded with almost an equal number of pure and spotless flowers, spangled with dew-drops. It seemed as if the blooming, beaming, and almost blazing bush, had been called into existence and clothed with beauty to give me pleasure! It was regarded by me as a gift from the Father of Mercies, and I stood over it with a heart beating with thankfulness.

"A little farther on, the long, straggling branches of the blackberry bramble hung down from the high hedge: the sight was a goodly one, a perfect picture: the fresh green leaves, mingled with others somewhat sere; the red-coloured stems, with their white-pointed thorns, short, hooked, and strong; the fruit partly unripe, green, and red; and partly ripe, rich, juicy, and black as ebony, waiting to be gathered. The melons and pines of the banquetting board could not have surpassed, in my estimation, the bounteous feast that was thus spread before me.

"The next object was a hawthorn bush, entangled in whose long spiky thorns grew a wild rose, rich with scarlet hips. The parsley-shaped leaves of the bush, the ten thousand red bright berries that adorned it, together with the wild rose, was another picture glorious to gaze on.

"Close to the hawthorn bush sprang up a wild young plum-tree, gorgeous with a profusion of colours; for the sharp night air and the bleaching winds had changed the verdure of its leaves, so that faded green, yellow, ash-colour, white, red, and deepest purple, vied with each other.

"Below the plum-tree, and close against the bank on which the hedge grew, stood a thistle, four feet high. It was a glorious plant: such a one that, if thistles were not common, would be transported to the gay parterre, tended with care, and exhibited with pride; yet there it was, with its pointed leaves and purple flowers, now blooming unnoticed, save by my admiring eyes.

"At the very foot of the thistle grew luxuriantly the romantic-looking fern-root: divide it as you may, to the very last its fragments bear a resemblance to the whole plant. It gave a character to the spot, for, in my estimation, it is one of the most elegant plants that grow. A spider had woven his filmy web across it, thus imparting to it an additional charm.

"I was absolutely bewildered with the amazing freshness and beauty of every object around me. I cast a hurried glance on the furze-bush, the bramble, the hawthorn, and the wild rose; the plum-tree, the thistle, and the fern; I looked up to the snowy clouds in the blue sky, and the language of my heart and soul was, 'O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.'"

CHAPTER VI.

THE COUNTRY BOY.

Variety occasioned by the seasons in rural objects and occupations.—Approach of summer.—Advantage of good temper.—The country boy.—He swings to and fro on the gate, and eats his bread and bacon.—The pocket-knife.—Light-heartedness.—The fine ladies.—The country boy's rural knowledge.—Speculations on his future prospects.

AS a fire cannot be kept up without fresh fuel, neither can enjoyment be continued without fresh sources of pleasure. In this respect the change produced by the seasons on rural objects, and rural occupations, is a greater blessing than is usually supposed. Hardly do I know which would be the greater trial, to be ever in the sunshine, or always in the shade. Pleasant as are the flowers of spring, and the sun of summer, we could but ill spare the fruits and sere leaves of autumn, or the bracing air of frosty winter.

I have been rambling in the fields, breathing the fresh air, listening to the singing birds, gazing on the bright blue sky, and enjoying the hilarity of creation; for at the approach of summer, Nature seems to hold a sort of rejoicing festival; true it is, that we have not yet the ripened fruit on the tree, nor the golden grain upon the ground; but we have the promise of them both; and the sun-lit vault above us, the balmy breeze around us, with

the green leaves, buds, blossoms, flowers, birds, bees, and butterflies, that animate and beautify creation, delight the eye, the ear, and the heart.

I suppose that my ramble has given a freshness to my feelings, and made my pulse beat with a healthier throb; for I certainly seem to be in better temper than ordinary. Oh, what an abundant source of enjoyment is good temper! and what a continual cause of trouble is ill temper. The one is sunshine, the other is shade; the one is honey, the other is vinegar; the one is harmony, the other is discord. Were all the people in the world, young and old, good tempered, life would resemble a holiday, much more than it now does. Good-tempered people are not only happy, but they make other people happy too; while such as are ill-tempered do much towards rendering those around them as miserable as themselves.

Some people run into the error of supposing good temper to consist mainly in playing off silly jokes, and in relating laughable stories; but these have nothing whatever to do with it. An ill-tempered man may do these, and a good-tempered man may do very well without them. A good temper is a healthy cheerfulness, that looks on the sunny side of every circumstance that happens, and takes the rough things of life, as well as the smooth, with a good grace. Good temper is at ease, when ill temper is in a rage. Good temper breathes the gentle breeze, while ill temper is blown about by the whirlwind.

Hardly do I know which is the most unlovely, an ill-tempered boy, or an ill-tempered old man. I have a perfect dread of ever becoming the latter. What! after partaking of unnumbered blessings from my earliest youth, to become peevish, ill-tempered, and repining! The very thought is hateful to me. Though not highly-favoured in point of

temper, I love good temper with all my heart, and can hardly separate ill temper from sin: fain would I in my latter day show forth, more than at any former period of my life, the sober cheerfulness of my spirit, and the thankfulness of my heart. How little we deserve, how much we receive! A becoming temper and a grateful spirit should be visible in our thoughts, our words, and our deeds!

E'en like the glowing sun, that flings
A glory on terrestrial things;
Would I, where'er my feet are found,
In cheerful light and life abound,
And shed a grateful influence round.

In the country there are ever to be found points and pickings of human character, of a different kind to those we observe in the city. The country boy and the town boy are different beings, and the aged rustic and the grey-headed mechanic can hardly be compared together.

Let me tell you of a little country lad that I once saw, in one of my rambles, sitting on a ricketty gate by the highway side; for not soon shall I forget the chubby rogue, who was the very picture of independence. He reminded me of Bunyan's shepherd boy in the Valley of Humility, who had more of the herb called heartsease in his bosom than those who were clad in silk and velvet. The young urchin seemed to breathe the air of that happy valley; he was, indeed, bred in it, and that was the reason his eye was so bright, his cheek so red, and his heart so merry.

He felt the glowing, gladdening sun,
And feared nor shade nor shower,
Nor past mishap, nor future ill—
His was the present hour!

It must have been just such another boy as he, who once was asked, as the story goes, what he would do if he

were a king? "Eat fat bacon and ride upon a gate," was his unhesitating reply. Now the boy before me was in full possession of these enjoyments, without the incumbrance of a crown; for as he pushed open the swinging gate, by placing his feet against the post, one of his hands held the fag end of a piece of bread and bacon, while the other clutched an uncouth pocket-knife, on which a cutler might have blushed to have seen his name. In truth it was not

"Sheffield made in haft and blade;"

but that did not lessen its value, for its happy possessor was altogether ignorant of the surpassing productions of the Yorkshire hardware town. His hobnailed shoes were old and clouted; but they answered his purpose, for they were useful, if not ornamental; he knocked them against the gate, in the gaiety of his heart, and whistled when his mouth was empty. He had, no doubt, seen soldiers march with, perhaps, a recruiting sergeant at their head, and with whistling and shoe-music he tried to imitate the spirit-stirring sounds of the fife and drum. His ragged clothes would have suited a scare-crow, fluttering as they did in the wind. Had I met a company on the highway, clad as he was, I should surely have said to myself,

"The beggars are coming to town;"

but the lad had a lighter heart than broadcloth ever bestowed on those who are "buttoned to the chin" in Spanish wool doubly dyed. I will be bound for it that he had not a farthing in his pocket to change for gingerbread, but the huckster's window was far away, and no longings tantalised the young rogue. Now and then he chaunted fragments of a homely ditty, in strains that to me were musical, for they were the outpourings of a happy heart.

Some ladies, visitors I suppose at the Great House on the hill, clad in gay attire, and rustling in silks and satins, passed by the very gate: he saw them coming, but did he hide himself behind the hedge, abashed at the sight of them; or hang down his head, ashamed of his ragged jacket? Not he. His elevated position was maintained, and from it he looked saucily down on silken splendour. He did not even remove his tattered hat, and though he was scornfully regarded by the fair ladies, he comprehended not the meaning of their looks, but whistled louder than before, enjoying the sight of gay garments, as though they were purposely put on for his amusement. Manners he had not been taught, and was, as yet, unoppressed by the awe of the world.

But though his manners and his modesty were in so small a compass, he was not without his points; for as a naturalist he would have ranked with Buffon and Linneus, far above fifty of your bowing and scraping skippers of the counter. The birds that fled within sight were narrowly watched by him, and, no doubt, he thought of their nests, and wished that he knew whereabout they were, that he might empty them of their eggs, sucking their yolks, and stringing their shells on a bent of grass.

He knew the habits of the wheeling hawk, that he saw spirally ascending, before he hovered stationary in mid air; and could have given a shrewd guess as to the moment when, with closed wings, the bird would pounce down on its prey. He was proud, too, of what he knew of the feathered race, and would have laughed you to scorn had you called a hawk a kite, a rook a crow, or indeed given any other names to birds than those contained in his nomenclature.

He knew where blackberries and nuts grew thickest, and was a clever searcher among the hazel boughs. He

could have brought you, at a few minutes' notice, the sourest sorrel from the bank of the field, and the freshest water-cress from the brook. He could climb a tree, make a whistle from the withy bough, and a pop-gun from an elder slip. Young as he was, those clouted shoes had often made the football rebound, and the holes in the knees of his tattered trowsers proclaimed him to be a "dabster at taw." These are but a part of the many rustic acquirements, that sweeten the leisure hours of the country boy; while we, with superior knowledge, sigh at scenes that would make him smile; and with greater foresight, groan at coming events, which cannot check his laughter.

While I regarded the country boy, a tattered companion approached him, sending his voice on before, when friendship brought down our hero from his perch. He gave up the gate for a companion, and together went the two play fellows, hastening towards some favourite haunt, with mirthful antics and unrepressed laughter; leaving me, not altogether without a suspicion of being the object and subject of their mirth; for while the young urchin occupied the gate, he surveyed me, more than once, with a leer from the corner of his eye, and likely enough, as he walked away, he was at my expense making his playmate merry.

And now let us ask, what part on the "world's wide stage" will be performed, in future years, by the country boy? Will he, with his hard hands, apply himself to honest labour, or become familiar with the bludgeon and the air-gun? Will he be skilful at the plough and the reaping-hook? or expert in setting traps and gins, in following the craft of a poacher, in grappling with gamekeepers, and in shedding human blood? Will his clear brow ever be wrinkled with sinful thoughts, and his brain become fertile with fell expedients? Will he sullenly

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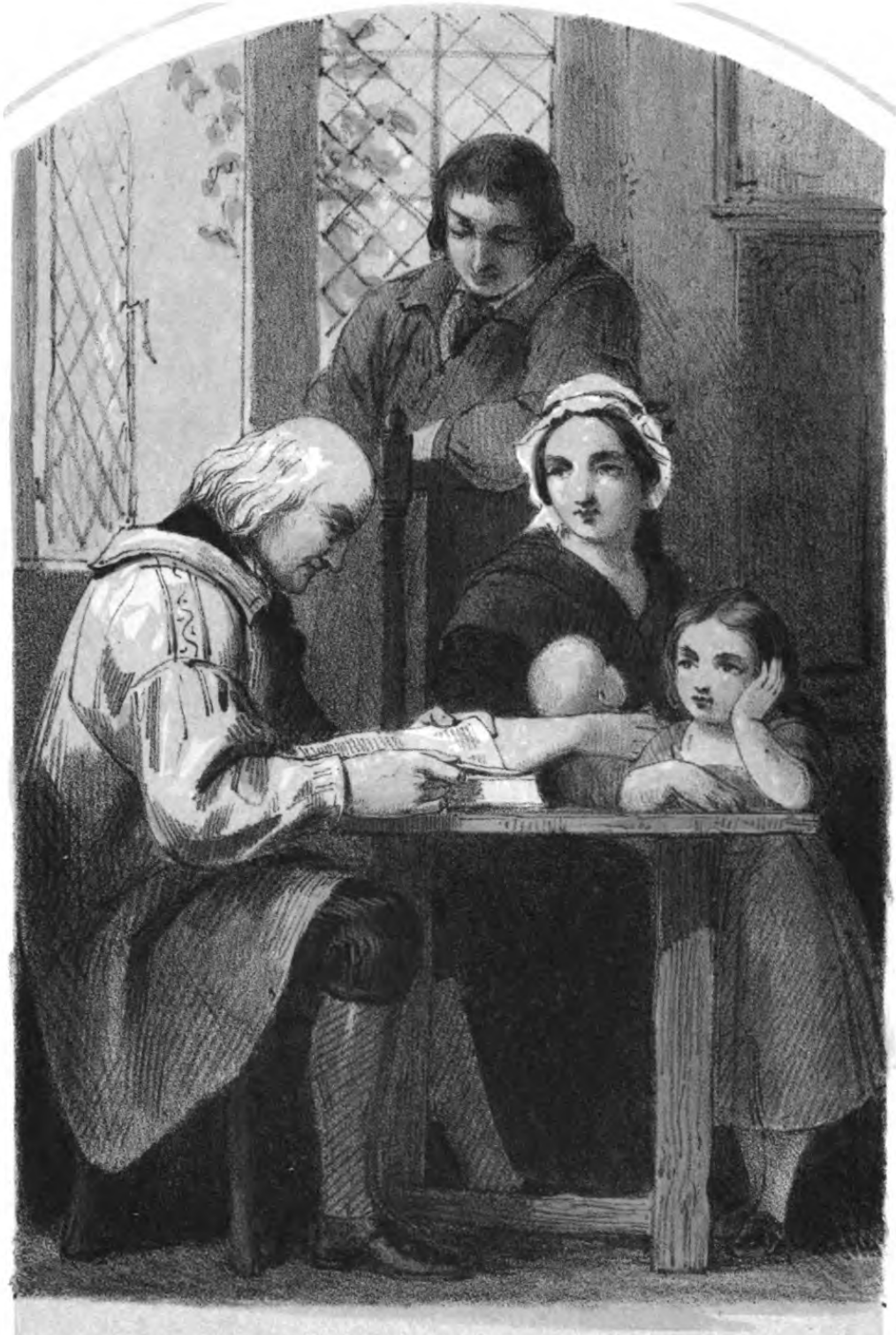

READING THE BIBLE

skulk in the darkness to set the Squire's barns and ricks in a glare, and end his days on a gallows, or be transported as a felon to a distant land? Away with such gloomy forebodings! the cawing and croaking of the rooks and crows above me must surely have given birth to them; let us adopt a healthier tone of feeling, and a more cheerful view of things.

Let us suppose that the country boy will fall into good hands, get a little schooling, and walk in upright ways. Why not? Why should he not be taken notice of by some honest-hearted farmer, who adopts the motto, "Hard work and good wages?" Yes, yes! He will see the advantage of good conduct, tread in the steps of those who set him a good example, and, as he adds to his years and strength, rise in the good opinion of his employer. And now, if we give him a neat cottage, a pleasant garden, an affectionate and industrious wife, two or three healthy children, and a bible, we give him the elements of as much—aye, of more happiness—than he would enjoy by being made Lord Mayor of London.

CHAPTER VII.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT OLD HOUSES.

New attractions given to rural scenes.—Interesting spots no longer to be identified.—Old houses.—Fragments only of their history to be obtained.—Way in which they are occupied.—Elizabethan old English manor-houses.—Terraces, balconies, halls, chambers, furniture, tapestry, and paintings.—The armoury and associations it calls forth.—Wolverley Court.—Tradition.

DELIGHTFUL as rural scenes are, they are rendered much more so by circumstances of a favourable kind. The society of an agreeable friend gives new attractions to the sweetest spot, and the knowledge that some remarkable event took place there, clothes with additional interest the most entrancing scene.

It is really afflictive to think of the many spots of an interesting kind, which now can no longer be identified, and of the many goodly old houses, whose history is involved in obscurity. How many old, antiquated mansions are there scattered through the country, about which their present tenants know nothing. Their ancient proprietors resided in them in all the rigid state and rude hospitality of bygone days; but their descendants no longer inhabit them, nor any one interested in their history. You may find, perhaps, in the chancel of the neighbouring churches a few monuments in black or white marble, inscribed with

the names of these ancient worthies; and the villagers are not without some wild and improbable tales of the Hall, handed down to them by their forefathers, but for the most part, no more than these scanty records can be collected by the passing stranger. As you look on one of these venerable mansions, and think of the different inmates that have occupied it, you are forcibly reminded of the remark of the Dervis to the King—"Ah, sire! the dwelling that changes its guests so often, is not a king's palace, but a caravansera."

Now and then may be seen houses of this kind, on a less ample scale, uninhabited, yet partially occupied. The neighbouring farmer is the tenant, and he knows little, and cares less, about carved chimney-pieces, and tapestry, and family portraits; but the old house is useful to him; he has put a cottager in one end of the crazy dwelling, erected a shed in the court-yard, under which he keeps his carts, and waggons, and ploughs, and harrows; the hall is turned into a lumber room, and the very chamber where Sir Edward and Dame Dorothy his wife slumbered in peace, is occupied as a granary.

Old mansions, however, there are, yet tenanted by the descendants of their original proprietors. You have seen, perhaps, many a real Elizabethan old English manor-house; grey, weather-stained, faded, and venerable. You have walked along its trim terraces, and leaned on its carved balconies and sculptured balustrades. A thrill of strange interest has run through your frame when pacing its spacious halls, its echoing passages, and door-ways with gloomy arches. You have surveyed thoughtfully the heavy, lumbering, unwieldy furniture; the large, antique sofas, covered with flowered damask; the upright, long-backed, low-seated chairs, with their arms and legs ribbed and black; the grotesque shapes and grinning faces of the uncouth

carved figures, dim and doubtful as they appeared in the dubious light; and the high, canopied, crimson damasked curtained beds. You have trodden softly on the old, dark, slippery oaken floors; you have gazed awfully on the faint and worn tapestry, crowded with stiff, stalking personages, large as life, and felt, when looking at the stern-faced paintings, as though the entrance of the owner's grandfather's grandfather, gliding in through some moveable pannel of the wainscotting, or from behind the arras, was a thing far from improbable.

Kneller and Sir Peter Lely are not yet departed, for they live in the painted beauties of the reign of Charles, that still adorn these olden mansions. The lustrous eye, the peachy cheek, the antiquated dress are there; and the mail-clad baron frowns from his oaken frame. You have seen the wide hearth in the hall, the gilded hatchment, and the stag antlers on the walls, and the pointed and groined projections from the roof above.

You may be a lover of peace, but the armoury has made you feel like a warrior. First, you have taken a glance of awe and wonder at the profusion of helms, and hauberks, and hard habergeons, and suits of armour gambuised, and mail, and plate, plain, fluted, black, bronzed, graven, inlaid, and embossed. Then you have regarded a single suit, from the steel clog to the skull-cap; sabatynes, greaves, cuisses, breech-mail cuillettes, cuirass, vambraces, rere-braces, gauntlets and helmet, lance, sword, dagger, and shield.

You have wondered that men had strength enough to move and mount their steeds, and fight with such a weight of harness on their backs; and a brazen helm and coat of mail have brought before you the figure of Goliath of old:—

"And there went out a champion out of the camp of the

Philistines, named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. And he had a helm of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass. And he had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and one bearing a shield went before him."

A strange confusion of dates and personages has no doubt taken place in your mind; for clubs and maces, and hammers and battleaxes, and buff coats, and huge boots and spears, and matchlocks and petronels, and inlaid pistols, were hung round the walls, and you could not clearly remember when gunpowder was invented, and when armour was set aside.

You thought of the heroes of Homer; the knights of Spenser's Fairy Queen; the old Crusaders, the Howards and Essexes; the Warwicks and the Wiltons; the Douglasses and the Percys; and were, at last, bewildered and lost among castles and convents, battles and tournaments, pageants and pilgrims, the Black Prince, the wars of York and Lancaster, the Holy Land, and the Tourney of the Field of Cloth-of-Gold.

Once more you have gained the court-yard, and the spirit of old times has come over you. Centuries have flown back, and the rigid state of other days has surrounded you. Knights were harnessed for the tourney, and the balcony was crowded with "ladyes fayre." Or the rude and rough riders of bygone days, with their dogs and hog-spears, were about to beat up the woods, and rouse from his shadowy hiding-place the shaggy and bristly boar. Or the hawking party was about to go abroad; manly forms and figures of feminine beauty were mounted on steeds,

with ringing horns, and jingling bells, and falcons, with their hoods and jesses. Or the mummers and merry maskers were dissipating the tardiness and gloom of night by their strange gambols in the high-roofed hall, lit up with sparkling faggots and flaming torches.

As poets describe the scene—

> In days of yore the gladsome day was spent
> In joust and tournament, and courtly glee :
> Then, castle roofs re-echoed with the peal
> Of midnight revelry and festal mirth.
> Oh, what a glorious time was that to live in !
> When knights were faithful, ladies true and fair ;
> When pageantry and pleasure hand in hand
> With innocence, danced through the circling hours !
> Where grief, and pain, and guilt were never known :
> And all was loyalty, and life, and love !
> But was it so ? Too closely question not
> The fairy dreams of gay, romantic youth !
> He that from records of the past would draw
> A portrait fair of frail humanity,
> Must be content, with hurried glance to pass
> O'er blotted pages of distress and grief,
> And many a painful paragraph of crime.
> Men were, of olden time, as they are now,
> The slaves of passion, pride, and follies vain.

Many years ago, I remember spending some time at Wolverley Court, Worcestershire. Wolverley, anciently called Ulwardelei, Wlwardeley, Wlverslawe, and Wlfreslowe, is in the division of the hundred of Oswalddeslaw, and the deanery of Kidderminster.

"The most ancient family in this parish was that of the Attwoods, sometimes called from the Latin, de Bosco, and from the French, de Bois. One of this family had considerable estates in Kidderminster, Rushock, Nordwyke, Worcester, and

other parts. Their arms were a lion rampant, seizing on a conquered dragon. Afterwards they bore a lion queue furchèe (or with double tail), which, as the lion's strength consisteth much in his tail, denoteth a double force. The arms are often seen with an abbot's mitre on the lion, denoting that one of that family was Abbot of Evesham. The heiress of Attwood married Beauchamp, and the arms were painted in the church of Holt. In the reign of Henry the Sixth the Attwoods were escheators of the county, justices of the peace, and esquires of the better sort. The Attwoods were great benefactors to the church of Worcester. Abel Attwood, Gent., and eldest son of Henry Attwood, Esq., late of Wolverley Court, being the last male heir of that elder house, died Oct. 8th, A.D. 1726, aged 66."

To the above account, which is extracted from Nash's folio edition of Worcestershire, I shall subjoin a tradition which has long passed current at Wolverley. As Wolverley Court was for some time uninhabited, the tradition lost somewhat of its interest and influence; but many of the elder inhabitants of Wolverley have pleasure in dwelling on the miraculous relation, which they assuredly believe to be true.

I had the following relation from the lips of an aged tenant of Wolverley Court, while she occupied the mansion. The fetters mentioned in the story were then hanging over the window, and it would have been considered an offence, almost unpardonable, to have doubted for a moment the miraculous story.

"During the time of the Crusades, one of the ancestors of the Attwood family resided at Wolverley Court. Engaging in the Holy War, he divided a ring with his lady, in token of remembrance, and crossed the seas. Being made a prisoner, he was confined for many years in a Turkish

prison, from whence he was occasionally taken, like Samson of old, to furnish amusement to his enemies. On the eve of a certain festival, having a fearful expectation that he should again be called forth to endure the cruel derision of his tormentors, he prayed earnestly that God would deliver him from his enemies, and permit him once more to see his native land. On the morning he found himself within a few miles of his own mansion, reclining in a ditch with his fetters and chains by him, where he was discovered by a servant; the servant knew him not, but an old dog fawned upon his master. Making himself known, he made inquiries after his lady. His hair and beard were much grown, and his appearance so altered by his imprisonment, that his lady did not know him; but when he produced the part of the ring which had been broken between them, she was convinced. He passed the remainder of his life at Wolverley Court, and lived retired, like a hermit. The place where he was found in the ditch at Horsley is called Park Attwood to this day. The carved figure of a dog was placed in Wolverley church, but is now removed; but the fetters, as you see, still hang over the drawing-room window of Wolverley Court."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ASCENT OF MOUNT MUCKLESTONE.

Turning natural scenery to a good account.—Perseverance a valuable quality.—Ascent of Mount Mucklestone.—The solitary traveller.—Lake Crystal.—The rock gives way, and the traveller falls.—Steepness of Mount Mucklestone.—The second accident of the traveller.—The cavern.—The ridgy ledge.—The traveller loses his footing, and rolls over the arch of the cavern.—The escape.—The summit gained.—Remarks.

IT is one of the many objects I have in view in these Rural Pickings, to sprinkle freely my rustic descriptions with good feeling and kindly suggestions that may be turned to account. Hills and valleys, woods and waterfalls, fields and flowers, ponds and brooks, will only be the more beautiful if we can get from them aught that will dispose us more gratefully to enjoy, and more patiently to endure; aught that will nerve our hearts in danger, knit us more closely to those we love, and call forth kindly emotions for all around. What if we could wander for ever amid daisies and daffodils, breathe nothing but fresh air scented by violets, and hear nothing but the singing of larks and the murmuring of waterfalls! dreaming away our lives in listless ease and unenviable uselessness! A generous heart and a kindly spirit would shrink from such selfish enjoyment; but when we turn the fair things of creation to account by improving

our own hearts, and connecting our own good with the good of others, we obtain a healthier, if not a holier, gratification.

There are very few qualities of more value than that of perseverance in the different positions and relations of life; those who possess it have, as it were, in most undertakings, Success written on their foreheads; while those who possess it not have but a poor prospect of obtaining their ends. The cavern of Antiparos is deep, but Perseverance descends to its lowest recess. The Alps are high, yet Perseverance places its foot on their cloud-capt heads.

You have heard of Mont Blanc, and have read that it is one of the highest mountains of the Alps—

> "Snow piled on frozen snow the mass appears,
> The gather'd winter of a thousand years,"

lifting up its giant head more than seventeen thousand feet above the level of the sea. What romantic and sublime varieties of beauty are presented by mountainous scenery! The grand and the grotesque, the stern, the sterile, and the arresting, with all that is lovely and attractive, are to be found among its solitary recesses, its craggy ridges, its rugged rocks, and its jagged peaks.

> "High the Alpine summits rise,
> Height o'er height stupendous hurl'd;
> Like the pillars of the skies,
> Like the ramparts of the world."

The ascent of Mont Blanc has ever been considered an achievement of no ordinary kind. It has been boldly undertaken, and gallantly executed, by many, with more or less difficulty; but under the most favourable circumstances, the enterprise has required resolution and perseverance, and ever been attended with great danger. If you have ever read of the ascent of Mont Blanc—

"Monarch of the scene,—
Mightiest where all are mighty,"

by Paccard, Saussure, Beaufoy, Jackson, Clarke, Sherwell, Barry, Waddington, and others whose adventurous feet have attained its summit, you must, in a degree, have drunk into their ardour, admired their perseverance, and been moved at one time by fear, and at another with delight. The timid may blame the rashness of jeopardising life: and the prudent may inquire, what useful end is attained by the accomplishment of such enterprises? but some allowance must be made for those who unite with an adventurous disposition an ardent love of natural scenery. To see the sublime creations of the wonder-working hands of the Eternal, and to communicate that knowledge, which is otherwise unattainable to mankind, are not of themselves censurable objects. But now, having said so much of Mont Blanc, I must draw your attention to the ascent of another eminence, which I myself witnessed with an intensity of interest.

It was in the summer of 1844 that a solitary traveller arrived at Lake Crystal, at the foot of Mount Mucklestone. The scene was of an imposing kind, and many would have been arrested by its romantic beauty, but the traveller hastened on towards the mountain, winding along between the grotesque, craggy fragments, twenty times his height, which having rolled down from the mountain, lay scattered around the borders of the lake. For some time he was partially hidden by these irregular masses of rock, but soon after he emerged from them, and began to ascend the base of Mount Mucklestone, close to the water, carrying with him a rope for protection and assistance. Hardly had he ascended his own height, when a part of the rock above him, rolled down, bearing him with it into the lake. Un-

daunted by his accident he regained the shore, and again began to climb.

Between the lake on the left, and the trees of various kinds which towered above him on the right, the traveller zig-zagged his way up the craggy steep, until he had gained a considerable height, and here dangers began to thicken around him. True it is, that no slippery glacier lay beneath his feet, and no threatening avalanche hung over his head, but then he had no guide, and had eminences before him, untrodden by the foot of man! The face of the mountain up which the traveller slowly climbed, was diversified with stony strata of varied colours, a kind of red granite, and grey limestone at different points appeared to prevail, while, here and there, trees whose slenderest branches were thicker than the traveller's body, sprang from the rifts and fissures of the steep ascent.

One of the greatest impediments in ascending Mount Mucklestone, is its extreme steepness, it being at a certain height, for the most part perpendicular, so that, were it not for its projecting ledges, the face of the mountain to the north would resemble a mass of masonry. Nor is the difficulty arising from the variable nature of its surface to be disregarded, for while one part appears to possess the firmness and solidity of marble, another loosens and crumbles down at the slightest touch, falling into the lake below. Who has ever seen a mass of stone fall from a giddy height, precipitating itself on the rocks, or plunging headlong into the deep waters below, without a sensation of terror?

After attaining a shelf of rock somewhat broader than the other ledges he had trodden, the traveller proceeded cautiously, for the shattered crag up which he had to toil was loose. Already had he mounted three or four times his

height, when the crag, to which he clung, gave way, and down he rolled on the broad shelf below. Had not this shelf of rock interposed, he must have been, once more, precipitated into the lake. Short was the pause that this accident occasioned, and again the traveller renewed his efforts with better success.

At a point, which is more than midway up the steep, there is a cavern of such dimensions, as to occupy no inconsiderable part of the mountain. The projecting arch of this cavern gloomily frowns on the precipice below, looking down upon Lake Crystal. A ridgy ledge of rock running irregularly up one side of the cavern, and leading to its summit, appears to afford the only footing for an adventurous aspirant. With undaunted intrepidity, and without the least hesitation, the traveller took the rough and ridgy pathway, if such it might be called, which overhung the precipice, and slowly laboured up the steep, hardly allowing himself a moment's respite. Once he paused, as though unable to proceed, and twice his foot slipped, but he recovered himself and toiled on.

After much fatigue, he attained the summit of the ridgy path, but, scarcely had he paused on the archway, that crowned the mouth of the cavern, when he lost his footing, and alas! rolled over. It was well for him, that he had fastened his rope to a jutting part of the crag; clinging tenaciously to this, he swung for an instant to and fro, over the mouth of the fearful void. Above him were the craggy heights, the summit of which he could not see, on account of the beetling brow of the cave, and beneath him yawned an abyss, of a depth almost equal to a thousand times his height.

Why, traveller, didst thou take the dangerous track? Why did thy reckless foot essay a path of such imminent peril?

The steadiness and self-possession of the traveller in his perilous position were admirable. It is not in common cases an easy undertaking to climb up a rope, but the traveller was accustomed to exploits of this kind, and inured to danger. For one moment he remained immovable, but the next, he slowly ascended the rope. What if his strength had failed him; or his brain had turned giddy; or the rope had broken? Let us not think of it!

Having once more gained a footing on the arch of the cavern, he proceeded onwards with mingled caution and determination. Sometimes he met with dangers, which it was necessary to avoid, and now and then, he had occasion to retrace his course, but, finally, by perseverance in defiance of all dangers, and in despite of all difficulties, he gained the summit of Mount Mucklestone.

And now let me admit, that, in drawing this sketch of the ascent of Mount Mucklestone, I have taken the liberty, which an artist always takes, of representing my picture on the scale best suited to my purpose. My scale has been a large one. I have amused myself, and I hope somewhat interested you. Mount Mucklestone is the rocky side of a stone quarry. Lake Crystal, at its base, is a spring, and the adventurous traveller was *a diminutive spider.*

Is there any reason why a lover of nature, should not admire the minute, as well as the vast? and gaze on the side of a stone quarry with delight, as well as on Mont Blanc? When it pleases the Almighty Creator of all things, to concentrate in a few square yards, as much beauty as can be discovered in as many square miles, may we not gaze on his wondrous handywork with delight, and ought we not to adore him with unfeigned thankfulness?

And is it right, think you, that we should bound our admiration to human qualities? Ought we not to admire

sagacity in the elephant, fidelity in the dog, industry in the bee, and perseverance in the spider? If aught on which the eye can gaze, enhances our love and admiration of our Great Creator, or binds us with kindly affections to his creatures, be assured it is worthy of our regard. Consider this aright, and you will feel somewhat indulgent to the account I have given you, of the ascent of Mount Mucklestone.

There is something so truly disgraceful to draw back, and something so truly noble, in the face of difficulty and danger, to persevere in a praiseworthy undertaking, that I would willingly derive an illustration from any source, if, by it, I could call up in others and myself a spirit of perseverance. Whether we look at the traveller ascending Mont Blanc, or at the spider climbing Mount Mucklestone, the lesson before us is the same; difficulties and dangers are to be overcome by perseverance.

But however exciting and encouraging it is to see, or to hear, of instances wherein perseverance attains its object in the more public, and more glaring enterprises of life, such instances are often not equally honourable to humanity, as others of a more secluded kind. To do or to suffer, when the world is looking on, ready to mete out its honours and rewards as the recompense of success, is comparatively easy, but to persevere in doing and suffering in a good cause, when no eye is open to admire, and no hand is extended to reward, requires qualities more exalted. These are the qualities we should strive to possess.

We are naturally attracted by the actions of heroes and heroines, for these are held in high esteem, and kept before the public eye; but there are heroes and heroines in private life, who, unrecompensed and unknown by the world, go on to the very grave, patient and persevering. Rather would I rank my readers among these, than inscribe their names

in monumental marble as the sackers of cities, and the conquerors of distant lands.

Perseverance is a noble quality, that may be practised in private, as usefully as in public. We may never be called on to ascend Mont Blanc, to discover the source of the Niger, nor to visit Timbuctoo, but to persevere in usefulness, benevolence and virtue is a noble undertaking, an enterprise that would not derogate from the character of an angel. Let us then persevere, neither dismayed by dangers, nor overcome by difficulties; for, as I said before, the Cavern of Antiparos is deep, but perseverance descends to its lowest recess. The Alps are high, yet perseverance places its foot on their cloud-capt heads.

CHAPTER IX.

COTTAGES AND COTTAGERS.

Cottage of Mother Hollins.—Mother Hollins's cat.—The Wanderer.—Cottages of the poor and of the rich.—Our cares increase the value of our comforts.—Cottage children.—A cottager's love of natural beauty. Trials and afflictions of cottagers.—Poor Widow Gill, and her wayward Son.

I LIKE to look at cottages, cottagers, and cottage children, for there is so much simplicity about them all, that they dispose the heart to peace and contentment. That cottage on the little slope yonder, with the garden and orchard of pear-trees, belongs to good Mother Hollins, a simple-minded, honest creature, as ever spun a ball of flax, or mended a pair of lambswool stockings.

Look at Mother Hollins's cat travelling across the meadow! I wonder where she has been wandering so early this morning, and now she has to go back through the dewy grass. See how she shakes her paws as she takes them up and looks as if she did not know when or where to put them down again. Now she stops and stares around, with her great eyes, to see, I suppose, if there be any other way. No, pussy! you are in for it, and on you must go. You take good care to hold your tail out of the wet, but you cannot keep your whiskers from the dew-drops. That is

right! Another good jump or two will soon bring you to the end of the field. I dare say that Mother Hollins's tea-kettle is singing by the fire, and that her cup and saucer are placed ready for breakfast, so that you will not lose your drop of milk.

Mother Hollins is fond of her cat, having brought it up from a kitten. Oh! it was a dear, little mischievous thing then, pulling up the daisies in her small garden; jumping at the weight of the cuckoo clock; tangling the worsted ball belonging to her knitting, and scratching under the tattered cushion of her arm-chair. Good Mother Hollins, though she liked not to see the weight of her cuckoo clock swinging so furiously from side to side, nor the heads of her red and white daisies lying scattered on the ground, bore all this very patiently, for she knew that pussy was unconscious of doing any harm, and that her frolicsome days would not last for ever.

Ay, and Mother Hollins was right, for Pussy is now as grave and sedate as any tabby in the parish. You may generally find her stretching before the fire, sitting in the window, climbing up the pear-tree, or perched upon the garden wall, purring in the sun, with her tail curled round her legs. The other day as she sat on the old stone wall, Jem Painter, who was passing by with his terrier dog, pulled her down backwards by her tail, and set his dog on her, an ill-natured trick by which he got no good, for his terrier had a well-clawed nose, and he himself a couple of sharp lashes, from the whalebone whip of John Fowler, who came up at the time with his waggon. See! Pussy has scrambled up the garden wall, leaped down inside the gate into the little court, and scampered into Mother Hollins's cottage with her tail in the air.

Mother Hollins's dwelling is just the place to set one

who lives in a garret in the town, sighing after a cottage in the country. It is just such a dear, sweet, little homestead as Campbell had in his eye, when he penned the following beautiful lines :—

"And, mark the wretch, whose wanderings never knew
The world's regard, that soothes, though half untrue ;
Whose erring heart the lash of sorrow bore,
But found not pity when it err'd no more.
Yon friendless man, at whose dejected eye
Th' unfeeling proud one looks—and passes by,
Condemn'd on penury's barren path to roam,
Scorn'd by the world, and left without a home—
Even he at evening, should he chance to stray
Down by the hamlet's hawthorn-scented way,
Where, round the cot's romantic glade are seen
The blossom'd bean field, and the sloping green,
Leans o'er its humble gate, and thinks the while—
Oh ! that for me some home like this would smile,
Some hamlet shade, to yield my sickly form
Health in the breeze, and shelter in the storm !
Then should my hand no stinted boon assign
To wretched hearts with sorrow such as mine !—
That generous wish can soothe unpitied care,
And Hope half mingles with the poor man's prayer."

The term cottage has varied significations. The cottage of the poor is usually scanty enough in space and conveniences, and oftentimes it is little better than a wretched, ill-provided, smoky,—raftered hovel or shed, while that of the rich is, comparatively, a mansion, comprising numerous apartments of comforts, and many luxuries. Those who live in cottages for the poetry of the thing, trying to blend the elegancies of high life with the simplicity of rural manners, are deficient after all, in the principal elements of cottage character. Their wants and desires are anticipated; but

the cottager has his bread to win with hard labour, and he is not without anxiety, how he shall feed and clothe those who are dear to him. Now it is this labour, and this anxious care and uncertainty, when not in excess, that make his mouthfuls pleasant morsels, and add value to his bits and drops. The lights of life without the shadows are imperfect. By an all-wise and merciful arrangement, our cares impart a value to our comforts—

> "And every want that stimulates the breast,
> Becomes a source of pleasure when redrest."

Toil sweetens repose; hunger gives a relish to our food, and thirst renders the cool draught doubly pleasurable.

Cottages there are neat and clean, which in reality, and not by way of poetic figure, may be called the abodes of peace. There Health resides with lusty Labour, and Simplicity and Contentment dwell together, but cottages, even of the industrious, at the present day are sadly deficient in the flitch, the gammon, and the cask of home-brewed beer that once were "plentiful as blackberries."

Happily has the pen of William Howitt hit off the children of the cottager. "The girls help their mothers—the labourers' wives—in their cottages, as soon almost as they can waddle about. They are scarcely more than infants themselves, when they are set to take care of other infants. The little creatures go lugging about great fat babies that really seem as heavy as themselves. You may see them on the commons, or little open green spots in the lanes near their homes, congregating together, two or three juvenile nurses, with their charges, carrying them along, or letting them roll on the sward, while they try to catch a few minutes of play with one another, or with that tribe of bairns at their heels—too old to need nursing, and too young

to begin nursing others. As they get bigger, they are found useful in the house—they mop and brush, and feed the pig, and run to the town for things; and as soon as they get to ten or twelve, out they go to nurse at the farm-houses; a little older, they "go to service;" there they soon aspire to be dairymaids, or housemaids, if their ambition does not prompt them to seek places in the towns—and so they go on scrubbing and scouring, and lending a hand in the harvest field, till they are married to some young fellow, who takes a cottage and sets up day-labourer. This is their life; and the men's is just similar. As soon as they can run about, they are set to watch a gate that stands at the end of the lane or the common, to stop cattle from straying, and there, through long solitary days they pick up a few halfpence by opening it for travellers. They are sent to scare birds from corn just sown, or just ripening, where

They stroll, the lonely Crusoes of the fields—

as Bloomfield has beautifully described them from his own experience. They help to glean, to gather potatoes, to pop beans into holes in dibbling time, to pick hops, to gather up apples for the cinder-mill, to gather mushrooms and blackberries for market, to herd flocks of geese, or young turkeys, or lambs at weaning time; they even help to drive sheep to market, or to the wash at shearing time; they can go to the town with a huge pair of clouted ancle-boots tied together, and slung over the shoulder—one boot behind and the other before; and then they are very useful to lift and carry about the farm-yard, to shred turnips, or beet-root—to hold a sack open, to bring in wood for the fire, or to rear turfs for drying on the moors, as the man cuts them with his paring shovel, or to rear peat-bricks for

drying. They are mighty useful animals in their day and generation, and as they get bigger, they successively learn to drive the plough, and then to hold it; to drive the team, and finally to do all the labours of a man. That is the growing up of a farm-servant."

A cottage life seems to set forth that our real wants are few, for little more than food and raiment does the cottager possess, and yet, where do you find finer forms, sweeter faces, and healthier constitutions than in cottages? Luxury never enters, and revelry is seldom heard there, but lovely domestic scenes are lit up by the cottage ingle.

"If men did but know," says Jeremy Taylor, "what felicity dwells in the cottage of a virtuous poor man—how sound he sleeps, how quiet his breast, how composed his mind, how free from care, how easy his provision, how healthy his morning, how sober his night, how moist his mouth, how joyful his heart—they would never admire the noises, the diseases, the throng of passions, and the violence of unnatural appetites, that fill the houses of the luxurious, and the hearts of the ambitious."

As the poor greatly outnumber the rich, and labour for their benefit, they cannot under any sound system of principle or policy be neglected. Man has no charter from heaven to enjoy prosperity, and to leave his poorer brother, who has helped him to obtain it, in adversity. In exercising as a right, that which is in itself wrong, he may add to his own selfish gratifications, but he must do it at the expense of his integrity. The policy, philosophy, religion and legislation that seek not the comfort, enlightenment, morality, piety and happiness of the poor, must necessarily be defective. Nations as well as families, and parishes as well as individuals, should take heed to the words of Holy Writ, "Blessed is he that considereth the poor, the Lord will

deliver him in time of trouble." Rural scenery, amid all its passive cheerfulness, is ever impressive, and to the reflective mind, full of practical admonitions.

> "The evening cloud, the morning dew,
> The withered grass, the faded flower,
> Of earthly joys are emblems true;—
> The glory of a passing hour!"

There is that in the heart of man that loves adventure and rural scenery, and I verily believe that where dishonesty has made one poacher, a dozen have been made by a love of the pursuit of wild creatures, and by the delight experienced in night watching and roaming at liberty, with a stimulating motive, the pathless woods and solitary glens. After all, however, the garden of a cottager supplies him with his safest out-door pastime, his most innocent and productive enjoyment. This is his antidote to the brawling beer shop, and an unfailing source of quiet pleasure. Honour and profit to the farmer who by his industry supplies his own homestead with plenty, and practises hospitality; but double honour, and double profit be his, who adds to the comfort of the labouring poor. May his "barns be filled with plenty," and his "presses burst out with new wine!"

Akenside says—

> "Ask the swain
> Who journeys homeward from a summer day's
> Long labour, why, forgetful of his toils,
> And due repose, he loiters to behold
> The sun shine gleaming as through amber clouds,
> O'er all the western sky! Full soon, I ween,
> His rude expression and untutor'd airs,
> Beyond the power of language will unfold
> The form of beauty, smiling at his heart:
> How lovely! How commanding!"

Akenside to witness this scene, must have been more fortunate than most of us. Never yet did I behold a cottager, in the attitude of voluntarily observing, much less admiring, the rising or the setting sun, yet do I not from this draw the conclusion that cottagers and country people have not the love of nature, and of natural objects in their hearts.

A cottager's love of natural beauty is not expressed by the excited start, the uplifted hands and eye-brows, nor by the ejaculations "beautiful! wonderful!" It blends with his peaceful feelings, and becomes unknown to himself, a part of his existence. This is proved by his restlessness when in towns and cities, and by his yearnings after those things, without which, though he has never burst into rapturous exclamations about them, he cannot be happy.

The same thing may be said of his affection for his wife and children. This affection is not told in gazing on them, and telling them they are angels, but in cheerfully toiling for them, hour after hour, and year after year, in the dry and the wet, the hot and the cold, the summer and the winter. True he may be found dandling his little ones on his knee, and carrying them in his arms, but his love is to be seen mostly in his labour, and in the wages that he brings home to the partner of his cottage.

In my rural pickings I would not pass over without a word, the simple and pathetic relations that are sometimes given by cottagers, of the trials and troubles that cast a shadow on the dwelling of the poor. Cottagers oftentimes bear patiently and silently, what would fill the mouths of many with continual repinings, and go on, labouring day after day, enduring bodily afflictions that would consign the rich to a sick bed and the doctor.

One has a blind father; another a bed-ridden mother. A

third has a son who has turned out wild, and become a wandering vagabond; or a daughter, once the light, the life and sunshine of the cottage, is now an inmate of a lunatic asylum: with all its peace and contentment, the cottage has its cares.

Poor widow Gill, who lives at the cottage by the common, had a son, the only one she ever had, and he went to sea. Oh Harry! Harry! It is a bitter thing to forsake a widowed mother, and bitterly, I fear, hast thou paid for it! Harry went as cabin boy, on board the good ship *Rover*, and soon after the *Rover* was "missing." Some say the vessel was wrecked in the West Indies; others that she was crushed by two icebergs in the Frozen ocean. There are reports, too, of her running adrift on the coast, among the cannibals who slaughtered her crew, while it may be that the ship was destroyed by fire. Whichever of the reports may be true, widow Gill, at different times, believes them all, and yet cherishes the fond hope, that Harry may yet come back again. Years and years have rolled away, but on stormy wintry nights the poor widow still watches and weeps in her lonely dwelling, thinking of ships and shipwrecked sailors.

> The Rover is "missing!" her mariners sleep,
> As we fear, in the depths of the fathomless deep;
> And no tidings shall tell if their death-grapple came
> By disease, or by famine, by flood or by flame.
> The storm beaten billows, that ceaselessly roll,
> Shall hide them for ever from mortal control;
> And their tale be untold, and their history unread,
> Till the dark caves of ocean shall give up their dead

CHAPTER X.

ON SERVING-MEN, OR MEN-OF-ALL-WORK.

Usefulness of serving-men.—George Glossop.—His varied occupations and great strength.—Proud of his talent in hair-cutting.—George hives the bees and plays the parts of farrier and butcher.—Harvest time.—Robert Hadley.—Edwin Horton.—Old Samuel Green.—John Andrews.—John's occupations.—The garden, the stable, the carriage-house and the cellar.—John Andrews always to be found when wanted.

WHOEVER has moved about much in the country, with an ordinary degree of observation, must have felt some interest in the serving-men, or men-of-all-work, which are found in different situations. This class of men are, I think, among the most useful of any, and when integrity and skill are united, as they frequently are, in their character, they can hardly be too highly valued. Your labouring man pursues his accustomed employment in the fields, varied only by the change in the season; the shepherd attends to his flock, and the cowherd to his cattle; they have their distinct duties to perform, but your man-of-all-work, however occupied, can never tell in what he may be engaged the following hour. This peculiar position; this continual liability to be called upon in all emergences and on all occasions, makes him a man of resources. He who is expected to turn his hand to everything, has need to understand everything, but I must here indulge in a few sketches.

A friend of mine, a gentleman of independent fortune, lives in a village, where his neighbours are mostly farmers; he must needs, therefore, do a little in the farming way himself, and succeeds as most men do, who merely make an amusement of that which requires great attention. He loses money every year by agricultural pursuits, but annual losses cannot make him relinquish farming. These losses puzzle him not a little; for, as he takes credit with himself for being a wiser man than his neighbours, he cannot account for his want of success. When farmers turn gentlemen, or gentlemen turn farmers, they very seldom reap any advantage by the change.

George Glossop is his man-of-all-work; his employments are varied, and he is seldom kept long at the same kind of labour. George is suddenly summoned in all domestic exigencies; whatever may be his work at the moment, he leaves it, and obeys his call. Sometimes he is despatched with parcels and carpet-bags to the nearest town, and carries burdens more fitted for a horse than a man of moderate strength; but he laughs at burdens that many would sink under, and is proud of displaying the great strength he possesses.

Lighter employment, too, is reserved for his ready fingers, for George can clean boot-tops excellently; fix a square of glass when wanted in the kitchen windows; take a lock to pieces, and put it together again; and cut hair: sometimes, indeed, he crops the head of his master. He is very proud of his acquirements; and once—but this was when he was younger—he was about to leave his place, and seek his fortune in London, where he thought of succeeding as a hairdresser; even now, when in his cups, he shakes his head, and thinks he threw a chance away by neglecting to try his fortune in the great city. But George is a shrewd fellow

when sober; he knows when he is well off, and will not leave his place in a hurry. George taps the cider-casks, sets the rat-trap, rings the pigs, and is a famous hand at carving the heads of sticks. The bees once swarmed on a gooseberry-bush by the garden-gate, and no one would venture near them; but George swept them off with a wing into an empty hive without fear. The great yard-dog was afflicted with the mange, and no person liked to touch him, the animal was so fierce and surly; but George tied the creature to a post, laughed at his growlings, and rubbed him well with healing ointment. George is something of a farrier, too, and is disliked by the village butcher, because he sometimes practises his occupation.

But it is at harvest-time that George is in his glory. His daily allowance of cider, always ample, is then much increased. He superintends the men hired to work at that season of plenty, and enjoys his brief authority; for his master asks his advice, and what George says is law at harvest-time.

His master owns a field where the ground is very uneven, and the loaded waggons totter dangerously, as they are drawn along, upheld by labourers with supporting pitchforks; but George directs their movements, and once, when a waggon toppled over, his ready shout warned the rustics, and prevented their being crushed by the falling load.

It would give you an appetite to see George at his meals. He thinks more of quantity than quality at the dinner-table. He is none of your nice ones. Plain dishes appear as dainties to George Glossop.

George can get a job done better than his master; for the labourers impose on the ignorance of the latter, as he often discovers to his cost; but they cannot cheat his man-of-all-work. They know very well that George's skill is greater

than their own, and slovenly work cannot pass under his critical eye; besides, he works with them, uses the same implements, and is at once their overlooker and fellow-labourer.

A robust man is George Glossop; he has not an ache or pain about him. He loves a joke, and often whistles and sings as he is at his labour. With the fine health he enjoys he cannot choose but be cheerful; his light-hearted laugh is contagious, and those around will laugh with him.

George is ready to travel through lonely lanes at midnight, on foot, or on horseback, at his master's bidding. Though deep the mire he will go through, and rain and sleet are defied by the hardy man-servant. His master values his services, and would be sorry to part with him, and George is likely to remain in his place, for he is, as I said before, a shrewd fellow, and well knows that he has got a kind and liberal master.

I might speak of Robert Hadley, of Edwin Horton, and of old Samuel Green, as each of them presents a distinct variety in this species of man-servants; but as John Andrews is a favourite of mine, I will give him the preference. John values his place, the duties of which he has discharged many years, and is justly estimated by those he serves, as a trustworthy and hard-working man.

John has the whole management of a large garden, in which he takes much delight. His asparagus, peas, cabbages, and cauliflowers, are not to be surpassed, neither is his onion-bed ever to be equalled. His flowers are superb. There is nothing like them for miles and miles around.

In the stable are always three or four hackneys or carriage horses under John's care. Then there are the carriages in the coach-house, which take up a great deal of time: plenty of wheel-mopping, panel-cleaning, and harness-rubbing.

Add to these things the care of the cellar, with shoe-cleaning, clothes-brushing, marketting, driving the four-wheel carriage, fetching and taking visitors from and to the neighbouring town, errand going, and twenty other occupations, and it will appear plain enough that John Andrews has no time to be idle.

John is almost always in sight, or within hearing. If you do not see him, you hear him talking with one of the servants; or digging in the garden; or watering the horses; or cleaning out the stable; or tapping a cider-cask in the cellar; or catching the young pigeons; or killing a rat in the duck-pen; or mowing the garden-walk; or clipping the hedge; or polishing a pair of boots; or brushing a great-coat; or engaged in some other of his multifarious employments.

But the thing most remarkable in John Andrews is this, that he is always ready at hand when wanted. It is a common saying of many, that if you want them they are sure to be out of the way; but the reverse of this may be said of honest John. I hardly ever knew such a thing as for his services being required, and he not to be there to render them. Send him of an errand, and call out "John Andrews!" ten minutes after, and you will find either that he has not set off, or that he has been and come back again, just as if he had anticipated that he would be wanted.

On twenty different occasions when I could have declared that he was absent, has he proved himself to be present. Only call out his name, and down the garden steps he will come. He surprises me, too, by never being in a hurry. Call him patiently or impatiently—as though you hardly wanted him, or as if the house were on fire—there is no delay in the one case, and no hurry in the other—wait one minute and you will see John Andrews.

John has been ordered to a neighbouring town with a

letter, he saddles and bridles the hackney he is to ride, and you actually see him set off at a good sharp trot up the lane. Presently he is wanted, and you hear his name screamed aloud by one of the house-girls in the direction of the garden. "Ay!" say you to yourself, "you may call for John long enough, for by this time he is a mile or two off;" but on going to the window, you see John coming, just as usual, leisurely down the steps from the garden into the fore court. He was called back after you saw him set off; or, he overtook a lad who was going to the town; or, he met the gentleman to whom the letter was directed; or, some occurrence or other took place that enabled him to return to his work in the garden, and to answer to the call when he was wanted.

It is Sunday, and John, in his spruce blue coat, clean gloves, and best brown leggings, the buttons turned round to the front, brings to the gate the gig, or the four-wheeled carriage. In you jump, and off you set, and after a sharp run to the church, you expect to wait a quarter of an hour for John; but instead of this, he is standing by the churchyard gate waiting for you. He has come by a nearer cut across the fields, and is ready to hand you out, and to take charge of the carriage just as usual.

During divine service, and even while the minister is giving his blessing, you may see John in his customary seat in one of the narrow pews—yet, when you arrive at the churchyard-gate, there is John Andrews waiting with the carriage. Ay, and do which you like, walk, trot, or canter back again, John Andrews will be there before you, without any appearance of hurry.

There is to me a something that amounts to the mysterious in John Andrews being thus always in the way when he is wanted. You may send him where you like, and the

distance may be small or great: but be sure of this, that he will be back again by the time he is wanted. You shall choose your own season—spring, summer, autumn, or winter—your own day, except Sundays, from the first of January to the last of December, and your own hour, from sun-rising to sun-setting, whether the house be quiet, or full of company, and if you will only stand by the pigeon-house and shout out "John Andrews!" I will undertake that he will appear. As sure as you have called out his name, so sure, in one minute after, if you look towards the gate, you will see, coming leisurely down the garden steps, the figure of John Andrews!

CHAPTER XI.

ON COUNTRY KINDNESS.

Sketch of spring.—The trees.—The birds.—The cattle.—The young colts.—Children.—Grey-haired age.—Kindness.—The Duke of Portland and his tenant.—Kindnesses and unkindnesses.—The rat-trap.—Kind thoughts, feelings, intentions, words, and deeds.—A call on a country friend.—Kindness to those who need it is of double value.

I WILL speak of country kindness; but first let me give you a sketch of spring, not drawn with the pen only, but with the eye and the heart.

It was spring; the sun was bright, and creation seemed newly born, as though it had just burst into being. The young branches of the trees shot upwards towards the skies, seeking that heaven whose dews had watered them, and whose soft breezes had nurtured them, as if to read a silent and holy lesson to man. The earth appeared strewn with flowers.

The children of nature rejoiced. Birds which had disappeared during the winter months, were now seen perched among the green foliage of the trees, or skimming the clear air alone, while those that had remained behind, seemed to welcome the new arrivals with a song of ecstasy. The cattle appeared to crop the fresh-sprung grass with a relish that only fresh spring grass could impart; and the young colts

that had never seen a spring before, and were far too happy to eat, kicked up their heels, whisked their tails, and galloped round the pasture in their delight.

Children, little children, who had been cooped up for months past, were now abroad in the arms of their nurses; while such as were a little older, were running about prattling of daisies and primroses, laying up in their infant minds scenes that would flash across their memory in after days, when childhood, and childhood's mirth, would be long gone by. It was a time for joyous and pure and holy thoughts, and for wishing to spend the rest of life with peace and joy in the country, revelling among the beauties of creation, and praising its Almighty Creator.

Age, with his grey hairs, was pacing to and fro; and Sickness, with her sallow cheek, leaning on crutches, her tearful eye raised heavenward, grateful for the sunbeam that fell upon her, and for the balmy breeze that tasted like returning health. Spring was, indeed, abroad; the heavens were lit up with sunshine; the earth teemed with happiness; and everything that had breath seemed to praise the Lord.

I hope you like my sketch: and now for country kindness. In towns and cities people are so hurried, and have such a world of things to do, that they seem hardly to have time to practise kindness: it is not so in the country. There kindness thrives like a tree, and grows, and buds, and blossoms, and bears fruit abundantly.

I love to meet with kindness in common life. Your high-flying deeds of generosity that happened a long way off, and a long while since, sound mighty fine in the ear, but they hardly come home to the heart. The caliphs of Bagdad, if what we read of them be true, flung about them their diamond rings, and their purses of sequins, as freely as if they had been pebble-stones, but these things do not speak to us

like commoner kindnesses; they say not "Go and do thou likewise!" The following account of a kindness that much pleased me, is related by a man of talent and integrity.

"The Duke of Portland found that one of his tenants, a small farmer, was falling, year after year, into arrears of rent. The duke rode to the farm, saw that it was sadly deteriorating, and the man, who was really an industrious farmer, totally unable to manage it from poverty. In fact, all that was on the farm was not enough to pay the arrears. 'John,' said the duke, as the farmer came to meet him as he rode up to the house, 'I want to look over the farm a little.' As they went along, 'Really,' said he, 'everything is in a very bad case. This won't do. I see you are quite under it. All your stock and crops won't pay the arrear in rent. I will tell you what I must do: I must take the farm into my own hands: you shall look after it for me, and I will pay you your wages.' Of course there was no saying nay; the poor man bowed assent. Presently there came a reinforcement of stock; then loads of manure; at the proper time seed, and wood from the plantations for repairing gates and buildings. The duke rode over frequently. The man exerted himself, and seemed really quite relieved from a load of care by the change.

"Things speedily assumed a new aspect. The crops and stock flourished: fences and out-buildings were put into good order. In two or three rent days, it was seen by the steward's book that the farm was making its way. The duke, on his next visit, said, 'Well, John, I think the farm goes very well now; we will change again; you shall be tenant once more. As you now have your head fairly above water, I hope you will be enabled to keep it there.' The duke rode off at his usual rapid rate. The man stood in astonishment; but a happy fellow he was when, on apply-

ing to the steward, he found that he was actually re-entered as tenant to the farm, just as it stood in its restored condition. I will venture to say, however, that the duke himself was the happier man of the two."

Now, believing (and I cannot but believe) this account to be true, it does me good to think of it. There are those who seem to think that none but great people can perform great actions; while others love to rail against those above them, as though every lord and every duke was of necessity a proud, parsimonious, flinty-hearted churl. These are mistakes that we ought not to fall into: there are bad and good, hard-hearted and kind, in all degrees of life; and we ought to give honour where honour is due, whether it be to the rich or the poor. This act of kindness on the part of the duke was performed with great discretion. Had he contented himself with simply lowering the farmer's rent, or forgiving him part of his debt, the man would, most likely, have struggled on a little longer, and have come to poverty at last.

Could the kindnesses of mankind be written in one column, and the unkindnesses in another, the latter would no doubt make the longer catalogue. This ought not to be the case; for surely there is more enjoyment in calling forth a smile, than a frown; in binding up, than in bruising; and in gladdening another's heart, than in breaking another's head! This remark will apply to all, but especially to Christians. Christianity without kindness is Christianity in disguise. A gentle child in a coat of mail, armed with a spear, and an inoffensive lamb furnished with a covering of porcupine's quills, instead of a soft woolly fleece, would be as much in character as a Christian with a churlish spirit. To my mind, a waggon without wheels would go along just as pleasantly as a Christian without kindness.

As shines the sun around on every hand,
And gilds with golden beams the sea and land;
So a kind heart with kind emotion glows,
And flings a blessing wheresoe'er it goes.

I like to examine the thing that I value. The boy in the fable, who killed his goose to get the golden eggs all at once, was a greedy grasp-all for his pains; and he who cut open his drum to look for the sound was no better than a simpleton: these carried matters too far. But still, I do like to examine the thing that I value, and to know of what it is composed; for, in many cases, brass looks so much like gold, and pewter so closely resembles silver, that unless we pay to them more than ordinary attention, one may very readily be mistaken for the other. It is just the same in regard to kindnesses. Words and deeds which appear unkind may be benevolence itself; and deeds and words that have the semblance of kindness may, in reality, be the bitterest cruelty. Reproof is unpleasant, and commendation is very agreeable; but it is kindness to reprove a fault, and great unkindness to commend it.

It might appear rather unkind to dash from the hand of any one the cup that he was raising to his lips; but if, afterwards, it was explained that the contents of it were poison, unknown to him who was about to drink, the kindness of the act would be apparent. There are many kindnesses of this description. The other day I saw a country friend bait a rat-trap: oh, how carefully did he cater for the appetite of the long-tailed tribe! It was a "dainty dish" that he set before them; a tit-bit, to draw them from their holes, and to furnish them with a delicate repast. Any one not knowing the end for which this was done, might have taken it for a deed of kindness, whereas it was

the lure of death, the bait of destruction. There are many rat-trap kindnesses in the world.

Kind thoughts, kind feelings, kind intentions, kind words, and kind deeds, are all delightful things; and if their abundance was equal to their scarcity, the world would be much more like a paradise than it is. It would ill become me to rail against the unkindness of the world, seeing that I have hitherto met with so much more kindness than I have deserved: but I speak comparatively; for I cannot but think, as I have before said, that could the kindnesses of mankind be written in one column, and the unkindnesses in another, the latter would make the longer catalogue.

An adventure that occurred to me last week, bears a little on this subject of kindness. Yes, it was last week that I called on a country friend, who paid me more than wonted attention. This was observed by the domestics in waiting, who instantly appeared to entertain for me all the respect that was so evidently manifested by their master. They seemed to have as much pleasure in bringing me refreshments, as if they were intended for themselves; there was a forethought, a foresight, and an alacrity visible, that was delightful. All my wishes were anticipated. Doors flew open when I left the different apartments, as if by magic; and it would have been a puzzling point for me to decide whether John, Thomas, or William entertained for me the greatest regard. In the midst of all this the thought struck me, how very different the demeanour of the domestics would have been, had their master treated me with neglect or incivility. This ill-timed reflection on my part took away much of the pleasure I before enjoyed. But thus it is with the world. With almost all of us, "from Dan to Beersheeba," ay, from the Polar regions to Polynesia. Odd

nations, and odd notions have I heard of, but I have never yet heard of a people so very odd as to pay particular adoration to the *setting sun.*

Real kindness will rather pay attention to those who need it, than to those who can command it; it will delight more to raise the fallen, than to hold up those who are firm on their feet; it will rather seek out the cause of the poor, than that of the prosperous. There is no kindness in setting a twig, that we may obtain from it a tree; or in giving a piece of silver, with the hope of getting back for it a piece of gold. Real kindness is a generous principle, as well as a warm-hearted feeling, and to make others happy is its best reward. We all love kindness, from whomsoever it comes, but when extended to those who need it, its value is doubled in our estimation.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PLOUGHING-MATCH.

Attractions of the ploughed field.—The ploughing-match.—Fawley Court.—The prizes.—The nine ploughmen.—Old Preese and the Prim-my.—The spectators.—The bait.—George Hodges' care of his horses.—The large knife.—Farmer Street the Umpire.—William Howell gains the first prize.—Old Preese's wheel within a wheel.—Another ploughing-match fixed for next year.

THE country without ploughed fields would be robbed of much of its interest, and Rural Pickings without some notice of a ploughing match would be very incomplete. If the meadow, the pasture, the hay-field, and the corn-field have their allurements, neither is the ploughed field without its attractions. The red-painted plough, the shining share, the team, the sturdy ploughman, the jingling of the traces, the shrill whistle of the jocund driver, the lark carolling in air, the many-coloured foliage of the trees and hedges, the spider's threads glittering in the sun as they stream over the ridgy furrows, the healthy freshness of the upturned earth, and the balmy breath of morn, are too pleasant in their influences to be spared. The heart is light and the spirit joyous amid such scenes; for health and cheerfulness are abroad, peace and contentment shed their influence around, exercise bounds along rejoicing, and lusty labour smilingly pursues his useful occupation.

Time was when tillage was so little known, when plough-

ing and sowing were so little understood, that such advice as the following was not thought unnecessary.

> "Forget not when you sow the grain, to mind
> That a boy follows with a rake behind,
> And strictly charge him, as you drive, with care
> The seeds to cover and the birds to scare."

Such advice, at the present time, would be smiled at by the rustic labourer. But now for the ploughing-match.

A well conducted ploughing-match is not without great advantages. It is an affair, too, of much interest in the country. I will therefore give a full account of one at which I was present last year.

As the most important part of our food is bread, and as bread cannot be got without ploughing, sowing and reaping, it is very necessary that these things should be done well. It is to encourage good ploughing, that ploughing-matches are made.

When I first heard of the match about to be described, I was sitting in the great hall in Fawley Court, with a few friends. Fawley Court is a large farm-house in Herefordshire, at no great distance from the river Wye. It is an ancient stone mansion, once half covered with ivy, but now the ivy is cleared away. It has old-fashioned projecting windows, a porch door knobbed with iron, a large court-yard, and a high pigeon-house. Report says that the brother of the famous Kyrle, the man of Ross, once lived there; and very likely this is true, for the porch door has an iron knocker, with the letters I K and the date 1635 on the round plate against which it strikes.

The great hall, the old pictures, the staircase of dark oak, and the turret-like windows to the upper rooms, are all in character. It was near Fawley Court that the ploughing-match took place.

The day before the match, the labourers at the different farms—Much Fawley, Little Fawley, Brockhampton, How Caple, and others, were all in a bustle. Some said that William Howell would be sure to win; others thought that George Hodges, or William Jones, was quite as likely a man; while old William Preese, who had been a soldier, set them all laughing by telling them they might do their best, but that he should be sure to get the Prim-my, by which he meant the premium, or first prize.

At the ploughing-match there were four prizes. He who ploughed four ridges quickest and best, won the first prize—a pound and a crown; the second prize was fifteen shillings, the third twelve shillings, and the fourth eight shillings; besides which, every man, win or lose, was to have a good dinner. A pound and a crown, a good dinner, and an increased reputation, are worth striving for. They are not to be often won by a ploughman.

Into the field called the Long Field, at Much Fawley, came nine ploughmen to strive for the prizes, their ploughs having been carefully taken there in carts, that the points of them might not be injured in the rough lanes. Farmer Powell, of Fawley Court, sent three ploughmen; their names were George Hodges, Thomas Hinns, and William Preese. Farmer Higgins, of Much Fawley, sent also three—William Howell, Thomas Jenkins, and James Cole; and the ploughmen belonging to farmer Gwilliams, of How Caple, were William Jones, Robert Powell, and William Edwards.

The ploughmen were dressed differently; for though every man wore a smock-frock, some had breeches and long gaiters; some worsted stockings and short gaiters; and others high-topped, hob-nailed shoes, with no gaiters at all. There were black hats, white hats, caps, and straw hats among them. To work they went, and in an hour or two

they made their horses, Dobbins, Blackbirds, Gilberts, Dingers, and others, brown, black, and dappled-grey, smoke famously.

The ploughmen had no drivers, but used their long cords for reins; with these they sharply flapped their horses sides when necessary. The ridges to be ploughed were marked out by sticks driven into the ground, with numbers upon them.

This ploughing-match was an unusual circumstance in that part of the county, and it seemed to be quite as important, in the opinion of the ploughmen, as a field-day, or grand review in the estimation of soldiers. It was a lively scene to witness the smoking horses arching their necks as they were hurried up and down the furrows; the ploughmen, all ardour, encouraging their teams; and the lookers-on walking about from one part of the field to another, giving their opinion who would be most likely to win. The sere leaf hanging on the tree, and the scarlet hip and the holly berry gave an added interest to the hedges, while the bright blue sky overhead was delightful.

The ploughmen were very free in cracking their jokes. One of them, who happened to see me occupied with my pencil and paper, cried out to Thomas Hinns, "Thomas, I 'll gi' thee my old hat, if all about this beant in Lunnon afore to-morrow night;" and old Preese again boasted that, do what they would, he should be sure "to get the Prim-my."

Every now and then country labourers came into the field from the adjoining farms, drest up a little more than commonly spruce, with a holiday smirk on their faces. And there came, too, among many more, the Captain from Fawley Court, in his shooting-jacket; and farmer Powell, and farmer Higgins, and an old man in a brown coat with big buttons, and George Seal, the carpenter, in his fiery red

waistcoat and white trousers; and William Townsend, the parish blacksmith, in his leathern apron.

While the ploughing-match was going on, three other ploughmen were busy in the same field, contending for a prize of twenty shillings, given by one of the members of Parliament for the county; so that twelve teams and twelve ploughmen were at work in the field at the same time.

It was the middle of the day before the ploughmen stopped to eat their breakfast, and to bait their smoking teams, and then George Hodges spread a bundle of hay over the backs of his horses, to keep them from catching cold.

When the men began to cut their bread and cheese, George Hodges had no knife; and when a bystander offered to lend him one, which was very large, George said that he was "afeared a fearing on 'em wi' sitch a knife as that un." He was afraid of frightening his companions by using such a large knife: they might think him greedy.

After a while the ploughmen set to work again in good earnest, every man doing his best. The horses worked none the worse for their bait, the ploughmen worked all the better for their breakfasts. By far the greater part of the field was already ploughed, and, at the rate they were going on, a few more hours would finish the remainder. The nearer the men were to the end of their labour, the more anxious were they about winning; very few jests were heard; and even old Preese himself, as he moved the quid of tobacco in his mouth, did not seem *quite* so sure that he should win the "Prim-my."

At last farmer Higgins was seen with farmer Street, a respectable man with some years on his brow, and possessed of much judgment in farming affairs, slowly striding across the furrows to examine the work done. Farmer Street was

the umpire; he had to determine to whom the prizes were to be given; and he seemed to be very careful in making his decision.

Take the ploughing all together, there never need be seen better. George Hodges had a sudden bend in one of his furrows, occasioned by his horses having been frightened, and most of the other men had committed some little fault; but, as I said, take the whole day's work together, it was excellent. The furrows were straight, of just the right depth and breadth, and well turned over. William Howell had no sooner finished his four ridges than he set to work to help his companions. How the horses did smoke!

William Howell won the first prize, George Hodges the second, William Jones the third, and Thomas Cole, or James Cole, (for I forget the right name) obtained the fourth. Howell and George Hodges were in fine spirits, and so were Jones and Cole. When old Preese found out that he had not won the "Prim-my," he said that he "knowed a thing or two: there was a wheel within a wheel there." However, the prospect of a good dinner kept both winners and losers in good spirits, and old Preese declared that he would make farmer Higgins's "bif" (beef) suffer for his losing the "Prim-my."

The ploughing-match next year is intended to come off at Fawley Court, so that, all well, the Captain in his shooting-jacket, Seal, the carpenter, in his fiery red waistcoat, and the parish blacksmith in his leathern apron, may again be seen among the assembled labourers. William Howell, perhaps, will once more enter the field; George Hodges, William Jones, and Thomas Cole strive for the prize; and old Preese have another opportunity of winning the "Prim-my."

CHAPTER XIII.

BLACK JACK.

Common Patch.—The Graingers.—Black Jack.—His cruelty, ignorance, idleness and immorality.—The two mastiffs.—Jack ties a canister to the tail of one of them.—The distress of the poor animal.—Jack kills him.—The farm-house.—Black Jack commits a burglary, and is seized and held fast by a mastiff dog.—He is tried for his life and condemned.—The gallows tree.—Black Jack is hung, while the mastiff dog barks for joy.

IN many villages there are strips of waste ground, on which inferior cottages stand, and in most rural districts there are a few poor people of bad repute, who have inherited, from those who have gone before them, a reputation for idleness, dirty habits, drunkenness and dishonesty. Of this description of land is Common Patch or Rushy Green, for it is called by both these names, and of this kind of persons are the family of the Graingers, of whom I am about to speak.

There is a saying in Holy Writ to which the family of the Graingers have paid but little attention: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it." Children, honour and obey your parents! Parents, with kindness instruct your children!

Watch o'er them well, come grief or joy
'Tis but a prudent plan;
For rest assured the tyrant boy
Will prove a tyrant man.

The Graingers have lived in one of the cottages on Common Patch for three generations, in spite of poverty, bad habits, and bad character. No one willingly employs any of them, if other hands are to be had, and how they manage to live, is a puzzle to many. Their cottage is a mere wreck, with scanty furniture, and the dunghill before the door is a forbidding object. It must be nearly fifty years ago since Black Jack, one of the Grainger family, the subject of the following stanzas, finished his disgraceful career, but there are old heads and garrulous tongues in the village, that yet love to narrate his adventures.

BLACK JACK.

Black Jack was an ill-favoured swarthy child
That acted a cruel part:
With a will that was stubborn, and wayward and wild,
And a hard and a wicked heart.
It pleased him well to impale a fly,—
To tear off its wings and to see it die;
He climbed the tree in wanton mood,
To take from the nest the callow brood
As they stretched out their naked necks for food;
And he laughed aloud when the deed was done,
As he plucked out their pin-feathers one by one.
It was sad to see his cruel glee
As he placed them on the ground,
With a push of his toe to make them go,
Or to turn them round and round.
At the yellow frog and the speckled toad,
He loved a stone to fling;
And he was the first to crook the pin,
To make the tortured cockchaffer spin,
And to pull off the butterfly's wing.

Jack never was taught, in the days of his youth,
By his parents to read or to spell;

He counted the boy, at the best, but a fool,
Who attended his class at the Sunday School,
And learnt his lessons well.
The Holy Bible was a book
In which he never wished to look :
He never bent the knee
In solemn prayer that God would hide
His sabbath-breaking sin, and pride,
Nor sought the Saviour's grace who died
For sinners on the tree.
He never was taught to work at a trade,
That his bread might be fairly won ;
In idling where reckless companions abound,
In sauntering and skulking the village around,
And in picking up all that there was to be found,
His day's occupation was done.
Deceit and cunning lurked upon his brow ;
He got his daily food—no one knew how.

Black Jack grew older, and stouter and bolder,
Till he was a stripling tall ;
A hectoring, loud-talking, cowardly slave
To his passions and vices ;—a hard-hearted knave,
Suspected and hated by all.
His dark, scowling eye had the leer of a lie,
And thick was his wiry hair ;
It grew down his back,
Stiff, bushy, and black,
Like the hide of a shaggy bear.
Oaths, wrangling, and strife were the joy of his life,
The glass and the drunkard's song ;
The pothouse and cockpit were still his delight ;
How gleeful was he when he got up a fight,
Or joined with the bull-baiting throng !
Dark rumours spread the country round—
E'en yet the tales survive ;
It was whispered he wore a murdered man's hat,
And though some in the place threw a doubt upon that,
Yet as for the widow's poor tortoise-shell cat,
It was certain he skinned her alive !

The sun was bright in the southern sky,
And his beams were flung afar;
And two mastiff dogs, in playful mood,
Were engaged in a mimic war.
With eager haste they ran, they raced,
Now lost, now plainly seen;
Their tails they waved, and their tongues they lolled,
And over and over again they rolled
On the grass of the village green.
'Twas a pleasant sight to see their sport;
Their pastime lasted long:
The one was small, the other was tall
And bony and active and strong;
And Jowler loved his lesser brother
As much as one dog can love another.
Black Jack the weaker mastiff caught
When his strength began to fail;
He held him fast, poor hapless thing!
With savage grasp, and tied with a string
A canister fast to his tail.

Away the dog flew, with a wild halloo
From Black Jack as he led the chase!
And peals of laughter, long and loud,
Burst echoing from the reckless crowd
That joined the cruel race.
Halloo! Halloo!—Right on they flew,
O'er pathways rough and wide,
While brickbats, bones,
And sticks, and stones
The hapless cur pursued.
Black Jack was glad, but the dog went mad,
For his blood was set on fire;
Heat, toil, and pain had scorched his brain
As he scampered through the mire.
The wretched thing ran, till he staggering stood,
Bedappled with foam and sweat and blood;
The crowd soon came in view,

And Black Jack laughed,
As his knife, to the haft,
He plunged in his side with brutal pride,
And cried, Halloo ! Halloo !

Black Jack was a burglar.—At dead of night
He entered a farm house door ;
The stout-hearted farmer the robber withstood,
And the hand of the burglar was dripping with blood
As he tried to escape with his store.
As fierce as a dragon a mastiff sprang—
His hair stood up stiffly with ire ;
His mouth was full wide, and his teeth were well tried,
And his eyeballs flashed like fire.
No need was there for a loud halloo—
It was Jowler, the strong, the trusty and true ;
He knew Black Jack, at his throat he flew,
He cleared the brick wall at a bound ;
He seized his throat and twisted him round,
And held him tight, as he lay on the ground.
Jack wrestled amain,
But he struggled in vain ;
His calls of distress that were heard that night
Were drowned in loud howls of exulting delight ;
Black Jack in the morning was ta'en.

The news of murder flies apace,
And the tale soon spread afar :
Against Black Jack a bill was found ;
The day of assize came quickly round,
And the burglar was brought to the bar.
In sullen mood in the court he stood,
But his words were muttered low,
And his haggard cheek and hollow eye
Made known his inward agony,
And the big drops fell from his brow.
He forced a smile, but his courage fled
When the judge put the terrible cap on his head.

The words that he spoke coldly thrilled through his heart:—
"To the place whence he came let the culprit depart,
Then let him be dragged to the tree in a cart,
And be hung by the neck till he's dead!"
From the burglar's cheek the colour flew:—
No heart had he for a wild halloo!
But all was sobs and sighs.
He felt that his cruel course was o'er:—
He flung himself on his dungeon floor,
With death before his eyes.

The morn, the fatal morn arose,
And the heavens with clouds were hung;
And the gallows tree, when the sun had power,
Its fearful shadow flung.
The Sheriff and his men were there—
With many a strong and pointed spear
In grim and gloomy state!
And old and young, together,—drest
Some in their worst and some in their best,
By thousands on each other prest
To see the murderer's fate.
'Tis hard a shameful death to die
While shouting thousands joyfully
With smiling faces stand—
But cruel hearts deserve the smart!
Black Jack stood upright in the cart
With an orange in his hand.
Remorse, without repentance prest
Full heavy on his hardened breast;
He sobbed without control;
But oh! the agony within!
The grinding, crushing weight of sin,
That prest upon his soul!

Jack mounted the ladder with trembling step,
And uttered an inward groan;
He had loved the defenceless and weak to oppress,
He had freely delighted in others' distress,
And had, now, to endure his own.

There arose, as the hangman the ladder withdrew,
A hubbub, a shout, and a wild halloo ;
The tumult was great and the cry was loud
For a dog was forcing his way through the crowd ;
It was Jowler the mastiff, the bold and the strong ;
With a courage resistless he dashed through the throng,
His eye-balls were bright with the hate that he bore,
For he knew Black Jack by the clothes that he wore ;
And he knew him, too, by his wiry hair
That grew down his back
Stiff, shaggy, and black,
Like the hide of a shaggy bear.
The dog was glad as a dog could be,
For he barked, and licked his lips with glee,
And he wagged his tail overjoyed to see
Black Jack as he hung
And writhed and swung,
To and fro on the gallows tree.

My tale is told, and all is o'er :—
The cruel bosom beats no more,
And death has had its due.
Then let the moral be imprest
On every ardent, youthful breast,
Humanity pursue !
Alas ! for the suffering creation around,
How many Black Jacks in the world may be found !
The deeds that cruelty has wrought ;—
The punishments the crime has brought,
Are enough to make us start.
Who wickedly impales a fly,
And gazes with unaltered eye,
Has murder in his heart !
Of inhumanity beware !
The hard unfeeling deed forbear,
And kind and tender be !
Think of the tale that I have told,
Of honest Jowler, true and bold,
Black Jack, and the gallows tree !

CHAPTER XIV.

FARMING DUTIES.

The Bible read.—The bell rang.—The maids called.—The horsekeeper roused.—The horses fed.—Calves suckled.—Cowhouse cleaned.—Garden visited.—Ferry boat scooped dry.—Plough team examined.—The water-trough filled.—The hogs fed.—Malt ordered.—Wheelbarrows set to work.—Victuals cut for boys.—Wooden bottles filled.—Set ploughs to work.—Ditching.—Attending to the manure.—Weeding wheat.—Set carpenter to work.—Hedging.—Picking thistles.

PERSONS unaccustomed to the country can form but a poor opinion of the great diversity of things that require the attention of the industrious farmer. In all seasons and in all weathers; at sunrise and sunset; in the house and out of the house; on foot and on horseback; at home and at market, there are little things and great things that continually lay claim to his care.

The late Rev. Mr. Robinson of Cambridge was much attached to farming, and entered into it with great ardour. The following letter, written by him, will at once show his industry, and exhibit a specimen of the varied lesser duties to which farmers, in the course of a single day, have to attend.

"Rose at three o'clock; crawled into the library, and met one who said,—'Work while ye have the light; the night cometh, when no man can work: my Father worketh

hitherto, and I work.' Rang the great bell, and roused the girls to milking; went up to the farm; roused the horse-keeper; fed the horses while he was getting up; called the boy to suckle the calves and clean out the cow-house; lighted the pipe; walked round the garden to see what was wanted there; went up to the paddock to see if the weaning calves were well; went down to the ferry to see if the boy had scooped and cleaned the boat; returned to the farm; examined the shoulders, heels, traces, chaff and corn of eight horses going to plough; mended the acre-staff; cut some thongs; whip-corded the plough-boys' whips; pumped the troughs full; saw the hogs fed; examined the swill-tubs, and then the cellar; ordered a quarter of malt, for the hogs want grains, and the men want beer; filled the pipe again; returned to the river, and bought a lighter of turf for dairy fires, and another of sedge for ovens; hunted out the wheelbarrows, and set them a trundling; returned to the farm; called the men to breakfast, and cut the boys' bread and cheese, and saw the wooden bottles filled; sent one plough to the three roods, another to the three half-acres, and so on; shut the gates, and the clock struck five; breakfasted; set two men to ditch the five roods, two men to chop sods, and spread about the land; two more to throw up manure in the yard, and three men and six women to weed wheat; set on the carpenter to repair the cow-cribs, and set them up till winter; the wheeler, to mend the old carts, cart-ladders, rakes, &c., preparatory to hay-time and harvest; walked to the six acres; found hogs in the grass; went back and set a man to hedge and thorn; sold the butcher a fat calf and the suckler a lean one. The clock strikes nine; walked into the barley-field; barleys fine; picked off a few tiles and stones, and cut a few thistles; the peas fine, but foul; the charlock must be topped; the tares

doubtful; the fly seems to have taken them; prayed for rain, but could not see a cloud; came round to the wheat-field; wheats rather thin, but the finest colour in the world; sent four women on to the shortest wheats; ordered one man to weed along the ridge of the long wheats, and two women to keep rank and file with him in the furrows; thistles many; blue-bottles no end; traversed all the wheat-field; came to the fallow-field; the ditchers have run crooked; set them straight; the flag sods cut too much; the rush sods too little; strength wasted; show the men how to three-corner them; laid out more work for the ditchers; went to the ploughs; set the foot a little higher; cut a wedge; set the coulter deeper; must go and get a new mould-board against to-morrow; went to the plough; gathered up some wood and tied over the traces; mended a horse-tree; tied a thong to the plough-hammer; went to see which lands wanted ploughing first; sat down under a bush; wondered how any man could be so silly as to call me *reverend;* read two verses in the Bible of the loving-kindness of the Lord in the midst of his temple; hummed a tune of thankfulness; rose up; whistled; the dogs wagged their tails, and away we went, dined, drunk some milk and fell asleep; woke by the carpenter for some slats which the sawyers must cut, &c., &c."

In rural retirement we sometimes pick up local narratives of an interesting kind—tales that mingle much of the romance of life with its more sober and common-place realities. Such a tale I met with years ago, and as I loitered alone on the hill and in the valley, and wandered by the brook side and in the coppice, I weaved it into poetry. It affected me when related in plain prose, and is, therefore, not unlikely in verse to affect some of my readers.

A TALE OF LIFE.

I sat beside that man of years,
  His busy fancy idly dreaming
Of by-gone days, and hopes, and fears :—
  All flaxen white his locks were streaming.
He told me many a tale of truth,
  Of hatred, love, revenge ;—and dangers
That he had pass'd in earlier youth,
  When I and this fair world were strangers.
He told me, too, a tale of woes,
  So truly sad, so full of sorrow,
It fill'd my heart with grief, and rose
  To cloud my thoughts on many a morrow.
That aged man, infirm and frail,
  Was wise, and good, and tender-hearted,
And thus he told his mournful tale,
  Then wrung me by the hand, and parted.

A little rosy Girl and Boy
  My pensive memory retraces,
With holyday, and hope and joy
  Depicted in their happy faces :
Along the winding brook they stray'd
  And pluck'd awhile the flowery heather ;
Then on the sunny hillock play'd,
  And built their houses there together.
Mid sterner care's engrossing power
  How sweet it is—surpassing measure !
To witness childhood's holier hour
  Of innocence and guileless pleasure.
My feet had there enchanted been,
  Till from mine eyes a tear had started,
But, while I gaz'd upon the scene,
  They kissed each other, and they parted !

They met again, when years had flown ;
  In different paths their feet had wander'd,
And many a summer breeze had blown,
  And many a task at school been ponder'd :
With more of boyishness than grace
  He seized the silken band that bound her,
And, gazing on her smiling face,
  He wreath'd his playful arms around her.
Too young to blend their love with fear,
  What had their hearts to do with sadness!
Then burst away the wild career
  Of frolic, fun, and sportive gladness.
But Time—that moves with heavy tread,
  Trips lightly with the happy-hearted,
And soon their hour of pleasure fled ;
  Too soon alas ! and then they parted.

Again they met, in passion's hour ;
  In manly youth and beauty's bearing ;
When feeling reign'd and love had power,
  And every tender thought endearing.
'Twas not such love as bears the sway
  When Sister meets a loving Brother ;
They could have sigh'd their souls away,
  And lived and died each for the other.
Then rose the generous purpose high ;
  Affection's softer spells had bound them,
And visions bright came flitting by,
  And the fair future gather'd round them.
But, while the secret subtile flame
  Through both their conscious bosoms darted,
An unexpected evil came—
  It cross'd their love, and thus they parted.

They met again ;—but oh ! how chang'd !
  Their cheeks had faded ere that meeting,
And each fond thought had been estranged ;
  Cold was their glance, and short their greeting :

As though the one in grief had sigh'd,
" Alice ! Is thus my love requited ?"
As though the other had replied,
" My love—my life—by thee were blighted !"
The past came o'er them, and the darts
Of youthful love their breasts were rending,
But in their wither'd, wilder'd hearts,
Anger, reproach, and pride were blending.
Some fancied wrongs they could not brook ;—
Though desolate and heavy-hearted,
They turned aside—and with a look,—
A look of keen reproach, they parted.

Again they met ;—the silver hairs
O'er his deep furrow'd brow were flowing ;
And in her heaving breast of cares,
No burning thoughts of love were glowing.
I mark'd their glance, with keen distress,
For ill their smile with pleasure suited ;
It was a smile of bitterness,
And told of hatred deeply rooted.
And can it be where love has been,
That deadly hate can find a dwelling !
Is there on earth so sad a scene
As human heart 'gainst heart rebelling !
It seemed a solace to their grief
To think each other broken-hearted ;
A sweet revenge that gave relief
To their deep woes ;—again they parted.

Once more they met :—The churchyard ground
With shadowy pall and plume was clouded ;
And he was wrapt in thought profound,
And she in sable coffin shrouded.
With sudden frensy flash'd his eye,
And, as from horrid dream awaking,
He utter'd that unearthly cry
Which told us that a heart was breaking.

Speechless awhile he struggling lay ;
  Nature gave way beneath that sorrow,
For senseless he was borne away :—
  He was a corpse, before the morrow !
Where slumber age, and youth, and pride ;
  The tender, and the iron-hearted ;
They lie together, side by side,
  And they will never more be parted !

CHAPTER XV.

PICKINGS OF FIELDS AND MEADOWS.

Love of country.—Odd names of fields, with their significations.—A corn-field.—A grasshopper's garden.—Ploughed fields.—Turnip fields.—Brook-side meadow.—The fisherman.—Sunny-bank field.—Hop ground.—The pretty meadow.—Winds.—The rocky meadow.—The Haws.—Broad flat meadow.—Adventure of the mourning ring.—The river.

AND can it be that any one born in England can stand upon her verdant hills, and gaze on her lovely valleys, without a thrill of delight? Can he look on the land of his birth, with her fair fields, her waving woods, her running brooks, her tall grey spires, her wealthy homesteads, and pleasant cottages, without ranking her in his heart as the first country under heaven? Go tell the Indian that the land of his birth is no better than other lands! Tell the Switzer that his native mountains are like the mountains of other climes; but their hearts will rise up to gainsay you. All that has been dear to them is blended with their native haunts; and the Indian will not quit the wilderness that is his home, nor the Switzer the mountains where he has been cradled in the storm, for all that the wide world has to bestow. Be England, then, as dear to Englishmen as other climes are to those who inhabit them. Whoever has stood on a mountain-top near the sea, on a summer's morning,

and gazed on the rural landscape, has enough to describe. No wonder that Beattie should exclaim—

> "But who the melodies of morn can tell?
> The wild brook babbling from the mountain's side;
> The lowing herd; the shepherd's simple bell;
> The pipe of early shepherd dim descried
> In the lone valley; echoing far and wide
> The clamorous horn along the cliffs above;
> The hollow murmur of the ocean tide,
> The hum of bees, and linnet's lay of love,
> And the full choir that wakes the universal grove."

Oh, how fresh, how soft, how sweet, how delightful is the breezy, balmy air! My very spirit seems to breathe it and enjoy it. The gale is abroad, winnowing the fields with its viewless wings, and the clear, blue sky is peaceful and lovely to look upon.

Last night the moon was gliding through the firmament, and stars without number studded the sky, and now the sun is journeying in his strength; purple and gold are his robes; he flings around him a glory that blinds the eyes, and the wide earth is lighted up by his beams.

How cool and refreshing to the eye is the verdure of the fields! How beautiful the green foliage of the trees, and blossoms of such as bear fruit! The distant hills and mountains seem to blend with the sky beyond them, and Nature is arrayed in her loveliest attire.

The cattle low from the meadow, and the sheep bleat from the pasture, while the delighted lambs race in the knolly field. The beetle hides in the grass, the bee and the butterfly are on the wing. The feathered fowl and the warbling bird rejoice, and all created things seem to hold a jubilee of joy.

The shrill call of chanticleer is mellowed by the distance

into music; the cuckoo's voice is heard from the neighbouring valley. The lusty husbandman pursues his labour; the milkmaid is singing; and, early as it is, children are prattling by the side of the cottage.

The earth is adorned with beauty, and the heavens are bright with glory; grateful scents, and lovely sights, and melodious sounds prevail. Men, birds and beasts, and creeping things partake of Nature's festival; cheerfulness smiles on all; laughter is echoed from the hills, and health, and peace, and joy, are rejoicing in the Spring.

There are sweet pickings to be had of fields and meadows. Some are liked on account of their forms, some are loved on account of their situations, while others hold honoured place in our memory and affection, because they are connected with some pleasant circumstance, or agreeable association.

Odd as the names of fields frequently are, many of them are full of meaning, while others are derived from their local position, or from occurrences which have taken place near. In former days it was a common custom to cut measuring thongs from a bullock's hide, and as much ground as one skin thus cut into strips would inclose, was called "*A hide of land.*" When William the Conqueror was king, a hundred acres was called a hide of land, but, since then, smaller portions have been called by the same name. The names Great Hide and Little Hide, when given to fields, refer to the ancient custom above described. In some parts of England, a *Hoppet* means a small piece of ground near a house, and in others a Paddock has the same signification. Hurst, or Hyrst, is the Saxon for grove, so that *Pole-hurst side*, or Pole-hurst-top, is a field by the side, or above a coppice. *Little Go* is a short cut to a neighbouring turnpike road. *Steeple Land* is a hilly field, whence a church with a spire

may be seen. *Bury* is a residence, so that *Abbotsbury* has some connection with the dwelling, or the history of an abbot. *Sted* is a place, and *flam* a flame, so that *Flamsted* indicates a destructive fire, the memory of which it is intended to perpetuate. *Washy Bottom* is a low marshy field. *Broom Hill* is a steep piece of land where broom grows, or once flourished, and *Forty Acres* is too significant to require explanation.

I wish I could paint a corn-field that I once saw of five-and-thirty acres, bright and beautiful, ripe and ready for the sickle! Fair as the sky was above it, and rich as were the sere leaves of the hedges and trees around, yet I could not dwell upon them. No! the corn-field, the rich, glowing corn-field with its ruddy, golden-headed stalks waving in the wind, rendered yet more attractive by a profusion of scarlet poppies and blue corn-flowers, altogether absorbed me: it was more than beautiful!—

> Abundance was abroad, and rosy hours;
> A flood of sunshine, and a field of flowers!

Oh, what a garden has a grasshopper! He can roam over the meadow, crowded with buttercups; and the knolly field decked with the daisy, the primrose, the cowslip, and dancing daffodil. The blossomed bean-field and the sweet-scented clover are his; and to him the mowing grass is a thicket, and the standing corn as a forest of goodly cedars.

> "Happy creature! what below
> Can more happy be than thou?
> Sipping o'er the pearly lawn
> The fragrant nectar of the corn,
> Thine the treasures of the field;
> All thine own the seasons yield;
> Nature paints for thee the year,
> Songster to the shepherd dear."

I could dwell for an hour on pleasant ploughed fields, with broad-breasted, sleek, black horses, arching their necks and slowly walking along the furrows. Even now, I hear the jingling of traces, the song of ploughmen, and the light-hearted whistle of youthful drivers. I could talk of green turnip-fields and of Brook-side meadow, a complete carpet of buttercups; the place is dear to the fisherman.

"Beneath a willow long forsook,
The fisher seeks his customed nook;
And, bursting through the crackling sedge
That crowns the current's caverned edge,
He startles from the bordering wood
The bashful wild duck's early brood."

I might tell you of the appearance of Sunny-bank field, with the spreading oak in its centre,

"When spring's first gale
Comes forth to whisper where the violets lie;"

or of the hop-ground, such as it is when the ripe, bossy bunches and curling tendrils hang from the hop-poles, forming a field of bowers; but I must not tarry.

I know a field called the Pretty Meadow, surrounded on three sides by a hanging wood in which, day and night, through the bird-singing season, an unbroken harmony prevails. The pendant branches of the different trees hang over from the wood, and the grassy slope faces the western sky, so that what with the redundant foliage, the warbling birds, the grazing cattle, the azure heavens, and the broad blaze of the setting sun, it deserves, indeed, the name of the Pretty Meadow. Here, when the foliage is sere, and the winds are abroad, may be seen the leafy aeronauts voyaging high in air across the sunny slope.

"Harp on, ye winds! in glad content,
Your hymns on every instrument
Of rock, and mount, and cave:

The trees their joyful notes will bring,
Each flower, each blade of grass, will sing
  Your measures glad or grave.
Who, who may tell whence ye arise ?
In what far region of the skies ?
  In what high forest tree ?
Ye come as rustling hosts of war ;
As loosened cataracts afar ;
  As thunders of the sea."

There is a meadow in which I have loitered many a pleasant hour, called the Rocky Meadow, and hardly can any thing be more romantic than its appearance. Five or six huge cliffy eminences start up abruptly from the level below, crowned with brushwood and large trees, while creepers, and falling plants, and wild flowers festoon the sides of the grey rocks most fantastically. There may be a more romantic field, but I do not know one. Beauty and fancy and picturesque loveliness have built there their summer bower, and sweetly dwell together. It is a place for the artist, or the poet, or the man of contemplation who finds delight in rural scenery.

The youth and modest maid may meet
In that secure and fair retreat,
The joys of converse sweet to prove,
And breathe the breeze, and talk of love.

The Haws has already been described by a friend of mine, and I can hardly do better than avail myself of the description. "Along one side, continuing some distance by the hedge, was a sweep of lovely green grass, flat as if a garden-roller had passed over it, with neither tree, root, nor flower, save a daisy or a buttercup visible ; and then began the wood of the Haws, or Hawthorn—in some places growing thick and high, in others low and stunted, and, between the

prickly trees, a confusion of, I could almost think, every wild plant, shrub, lichen, and flower, that grows.

"Gorse, moss and briar, root, branch, twig, thorn and thicket, and, above all, high, straggling blackberry brambles, stretched, tangled, and tied themselves across and across every part which had any appearance of a path, so mingled and matted together, that the cows and colts best knew what was to be found further on, in this mazy labyrinth. To me, the paths, if there were any, were impenetrable; and I could, and would, and did push and pull myself as far as most people, in those days.

"Amid this wilderness of shrubs and wild flowers, the blue hyacinths or wild scillas prevailed. The place, where they were in bloom, seemed a very fairy-land. Blue, such lovely blue over head and under foot; above, the light summer sky, and below, the deep blue hyacinth; the latter continuing as far as the eye could penetrate—in some parts hiding and in others overpowering every other colour.

"At the end of autumn the scene changed; all the blue disappeared, and the whole wood was mottled and spotted with red and black. Never, in my life, did I see such a place for haws, hips, and blackberries. The latter covered every brier, clustered in every opening, and straggled over every bush. Turn where you could, look where you would, nothing but haws, hips, and blackberries! blackberries! blackberries!"

During a visit in the country last Autumn I went into the meadows to gather mushrooms. How well do I remember the broad, flat meadow, reaching from the by-lane down to the precipitous brink of the river, plenteously strown with mushrooms. There they were, great and small, flat-topped and globular; some brown, some almost inky black, and others white as the driven snow. Reason

have I to remember that meadow—but I will relate the adventure.

While in the act of getting over the gate of the field, I dropped a mourning ring from my finger. Now this ring was highly estimated, being the gift of an aged relative, whose memory was dear to me. It had inscribed upon it the last sentence that fell from her dying lips in my presence, and I would not have exchanged it for a diamond. My desire to recover my lost treasure was in proportion to the extent of my loss; so, drawing a circle round the place, I proceeded to inspect, with a microscopic eye, the ground beneath my feet, every inch of which I challenged with the strictest scrutiny.

The hedge, close to the gate-post, was choked up with dried leaves, so that there were a thousand intricacies into which my ring might have fallen. A good hour, at least, if meted by the "Shrewsbury clock," I spent in my fruitless search. While gazing on the spot, a mouse ran out of a cavity in the bank and disappeared down a hole in the ground by the gate. On examination of this hole, it appeared to be highly probable that my ring had fallen into it, and I kept watching the place, under the fanciful impression that little Brighteyes might possibly again make his appearance with the ring around his neck. Alas! my fanciful expectation was not realised. Reluctantly I quitted the place and entered the meadow, where I soon filled a large handkerchief with mushrooms.

In the meadow I was joined by four young ladies, three of them belonging to the family of my worthy host, and the other a Major's daughter who, like myself, was a visitor at the farm. To them I communicated my loss, and in a jocose way, partly real and partly assumed, descanted on the advantages and disadvantages of losing a mourning ring.

To them I made known my design of giving half-a-crown to a quick-sighted lad to look for my lost ring, with the promise of another if he found it. My fair friends directly replied, that their eyes were as sharp as those of any boy on the farm; and as four pairs of eyes would have an advantage over one pair, they would at once proceed in the search.

It was a pleasant picture to see youth and beauty ardently exercising their bright eyes in a kindly undertaking.

A churlish word and an act unkind
Will be as darkness to the mind;
While a generous deed shall a glow impart,
To light the eye and glad the heart.

With me it was almost a hopeless affair, but with my kind friends it was otherwise. Hope, ardour, and perseverance animated them, and at last, the young lady, the officer's daughter, who had taken a more extended circle than the rest, under an impression that the ring might have rolled farther than I had expected, gave the joyous exclamation, "Here it is!" In the fullness of my heart I proffered my acknowledgments, and impressed my thanks upon her lips. Thus was my lost treasure recovered, and an additional interest imparted to my mourning ring.

I said that the broad, flat meadow, so thickly strown with mushrooms, reached down to the precipitous bank of the flowing stream, and fair is the wooded height on the opposite side of the running water.

Who stands upon the steep may learn
A lesson from the river;
How still *deep water* glideth by,
The *shallow* babbleth ever.

Thus oft affection in the heart,
Constant and strong abideth;
And onward rolls as silently
As the deep water glideth.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SPRINKLING OF RURAL ATTRACTIONS.

The dry ditch, old stone quarry, and lonely lane.—The grasshopper, corncrake, and blackbird.—The ploughman, shepherd, hedger, mole-catcher, mower, haymaker, and reaper.—Field flowers.—Moors and mountains.—Oaks, streams, and insects; sheep and horses, clouds, orchards and clover field.—The frosty morning.—The moon, owlet, weasel, and rat.—Sea-shore, ruined abbey, and country churchyard.

TO a lover of nature the gratifications of the country are unbounded. Spring, summer, autumn, and winter; heat and cold, wet and dry; morning, noon, and night; all add to the great variety presented to the eye and the heart. Beauty reigns around, the skies are lit up with sunshine, and unseen hands scatter our paths with flowers.

> In summer-tide the laughing hours
> Exult in sunbeams, fruit and flowers;
> And glittering diamonds adorn
> The earth, when winter looks forlorn.

From the first streak of morning light to the last gleam of closing day, one source of pleasure succeeds another. To number up my own delights in the country would be impossible. To use the words of an old friend,—I like to sit on the edge of a dry ditch, where the dog-rose, and the bramble, and wild convolvulus are seen; and the chickweed and hayrif grow together, with the dandelion. I like to stand in an

old stone quarry, gorgeous with hanging creepers. I love to mutter to myself in the lonely lane, to speak aloud in the fields, and to sing on the wide-spread common, with my heart as well as my tongue,—

> "When all thy mercies, O my God,
> My rising soul surveys;
> Transported with the view, I 'm lost
> In wonder, love, and praise."

I like to listen to the simmering sound of the grasshopper; the rapid tapping of the woodpecker against the hollow tree; the creaking cry of the corncrake in the mowing grass; the mellow pipe of the blackbird in the brake; the melodious song of the throstle in the copse, and the sweet melancholy music of the nightingale in the wood.

I like to see the ploughman at his work early, whistling a sprightly tune, while the lark is warbling above him; the shepherd, as he goes forth in the grey of the morning, with his shaggy dog; the hedger, with his mittens, boots, and bill-hook; and the mole-catcher laden with his traps. I like to look on the mower as he scythes down the long grass; to hear the laugh of the merry haymakers; and to see the reapers cutting the corn, and gathering the sheaves into the garner.

I like to gather field-flowers, the pale primrose, the yellow cowslip, the purple violet, and the daffodil, dancing in the breeze; to pick up the snow-white mushroom from the dewy grass, to pluck hazel nuts in the coppices, and the ripe blackberry from the straggling thorn. He who cannot feel thankful to God for a blackberry, has no right to pluck it from its thorny stem.

I like the heath-covered mountain and the moor; the broken ground, thick with the bright yellow-blossomed furze; the red sandy rock, festooned with pendent plants and

clinging ivy; and the lonely pond, choked up with long grass, flags, and bulrushes. I like to slake my thirst at the spring in the hollow of the green bank; to see the yellow frog leap from the brink into the crystal water, gracefully diving to the bottom; and to gather fresh green water cresses in the limpid brook.

I like to steal behind the old oaks in a park, approaching unperceived the stag, the deer, and the timid fawn, as they lie in their lairs among the fern, or browze among the moss and tufted grass;—to hide myself in the wood, that I may see the nimble squirrel mounting the tall trees, and creeping into his warm nest, or leaping from branch to branch, poised by his spreading tail.

I like to sit in a retired nook, on the brink of a stream, overhung with tangled brushwood, watching the fish leaping from the waves, and the moor-hen plashing among the roots of the trees, under the high bank; and to stand on the edge of an old moat, whose dark and neglected waters are covered with the broad leaves of the waterlily, when the rat ventures forth, pushing his impeded way to the island in the midst, or plunging suddenly beneath the water.

I like the singing and the flight of birds; the waving of the yellow corn in the wind; the breezy, whispering sound of the leaves on the trees, and the sedge on the river's side; I love the fresh foliage of spring, the ruddy glow of summer, the rich tints of autumn, and the bracing air of a winter's day.

I like to sit on a stile, under a spreading oak, when the sun is somewhat declining in the west; to watch the busy world on the wing; the birds warbling above me, the butterfly fluttering joyously in the sun, the gnats dancing in the air, and the dragon-fly darting along the surface of the running stream. I love to fling bits of paper into the running

brook, and to watch their course; to gaze on the clear bright water as it ripples over the red sand, or polished pebble stones; and to follow, with scrutinising glance, the sharded beetle as he hides himself in the grass

I like to wander in a wood, when the winds are abroad; when the trunks of the trees bend, the branches creak, and the rattling sere leaves are rudely scattered by the blast; to watch the rooks at eventide, as they skim along over farm-houses and church spires, hills and valleys, woods and water, on their way to the distant rookery; to stand on the brow of the hill, as the shadows of evening approach, and to listen to the tinkling of the sheep-bell, in the valley below.

I like to note the different features of the sheep, as they move about in the fields; to breathe the sweet breath of the cows as they graze, or chew the cud in the meadow; to watch the calves as they uncouthly run their races, scampering along with their tails in the air; to gaze on the broad-chested, heavy-heeled waggon-horses, neighing and kicking up their heels on the green turf; and to muse and moralise on old blind Dobbin, as he stands half asleep under the shed, his ribs and hip bones sticking out, his lower lip hanging down, and his off hind foot resting on the tip of his shoe.

I like to pluck a bud from an overhanging bough, and musingly pull it to pieces, admiring its wondrous construction, and thinking to myself, "No mortal eyes but mine have beheld these hidden beauties;"—to gaze on the sunlit clouds of heaven, till my cheeks are wet with tears, and my heart yearns for light, and life, and immortality.

I like to see the acorns and oak-balls on the knotted oaks; the fruit on the orchard trees; the wiry stems and clustering hops in the hop-yard; the straggling poison-berry plant, with its red and yellow berries; and the flowery

honesty on the hedges. I love to lean on the gate of the clover field, where the bossy purple blossoms are pleasant to the eye, and grateful to the scent; to watch the bees on the flowers of the peas and beans; and to gaze on the ten thousand green tops that cover the acres of turnips around me.

I like to start off, buttoned up to the chin, with my stick in my hand, on a frosty morning, when the trees and hedges are fantastically hung with rime; when the snow crackles under my feet; when the glossy-leaved, red-berried holly bush looks cheerful; when the fieldfare is abroad; when the redbreast is tame and almost companionable; and the snipe rapidly wings his way along the half-frozen brook.

I like to gaze on the moon as she glides tranquilly through the sky; to watch the changing clouds as the night wind hurries them along the heavens, and to think how much of peace, and joy, and happiness there is beyond them. I love to hear the owlet hoot from the hollow oak; to see him winnowing his way, with his long wings, to the old barn; and to witness the stealthy rat and the weasel prowl about the outhouses, and steal among the roots of the hedge-row bank.

I like to stand at the foot of a craggy precipice, and still better to ascend to its very crest, and there seating myself, to look down on the fearful depth below. I love to listen to the turbulent roar of rushing and falling waters; to explore caverns, to descend to great depths in the earth, and to witness the awful sublimities of a midnight storm.

I like to loiter on the seashore by moonlight, and to look over the wide expanse of water at mid-day, to mark the fisher's skiff and distant sail; to gaze on the swelling fringed waves, till they exhaust themselves on the sands; to follow with my eye the seagulls as they rise and fall; and to watch the progress of the coming tempest.

I love to visit the mouldering walls of a ruined abbey or castle, without a guide; to ascend the broken steps of the towers; to gaze on the dry ditch below from its battlements; to descend into its gloomy "donjons," and to stand "alone, alone, all, all alone," in the grey silent hall, and call upon those who cannot answer.

I like to visit a country churchyard, to find out the oldest headstone, to clear away the moss that covers the name of the occupier, and to make out the date when he fell asleep. I love to lean on the old sun-dial; to muse under the old yew-tree, and to read the inscriptions on the tombs, from "Afflictions sore, long time I bore"—to "The Lord giveth, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

I might draw out a much longer bill of fare of the banquet provided for every one who delights in rural scenes; but here is enough to quicken the pulse with pleasure, and make the heart exult in its varied sources of gratification. Lover of nature, get thee among the buttercups; freely partake of the rustic feast set before thee; drink in the "spirit of the golden day;" revel in delight, and let the upward breezes bear on their viewless wings the incense of thy joy.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE SKIES.

The influence of the skies.—A clear blue sky.—A mountainous sky.—A peaceful sky.—A fleecy sky.—A threatening sky.—An iceberg sky.—A stormy sky.—A glorious sky.—A wild and fitful sky.—A burning sky.

IN treating on rural pickings, it would be a sad omission not to dwell on the skies. In towns and cities, however beautiful the heavens above us may be, they are shrouded by smoke, or partly hidden by interesting objects, while in the country the clearness of the air, the unbounded prospect, and the beauty of the scene, enable us to enjoy them with peculiar pleasure.

The influence of the skies on the mind of the thoughtful spectator is almost as varied as the forms they assume. We are soothed and excited, pleased and impressed, as the case may be, by the aspect above us; and one glance at the bright blue heavens above us makes us enjoy more the green earth, and thankfulness mingles with our joy.

With what varied beauty the heavens are adorned! One while the sky is clear, bright, and blue; at another it is wavy, streaky, freckled, or fleecy; and then come clouds of all kinds, snowy-white, silver-edged, dun, dark, and black. Now the vault above is burdened with the coming tempest;

and now, wondrous bright and fair, goodly, glowing, and glorious.

Sometimes the clouds are near, and at other times distant; now hurrying across the sky, and then slowly sailing, almost motionless in their course. The wafted clouds that curtain the space above us, gently floating onward, form but a part of the picture.

> "For yet above these wafted clouds are seen,
> In a remoter sky still more serene,
> Others detached in ranges through the air
> Spotless as suns, and countless as they're fair.
> Scattered immensely wide from east to west,
> The beauteous semblance of a flock at rest."

As "Old Humphrey," who has paid some attention to these things, truly says, "There is a *clear blue sky*, when the cloudless firmament imparts a tranquil cheerfulness, a peaceful gladness to the gazer."

The wide-spread azure canopy, from the zenith to the horizon, presents the same unwearied yet lightsome character: lovely is the blue expanse, and lovely the light that mingles with it so harmoniously.

There is a *mountainous sky* where, from a sea of ether, rise eminences of all kinds, hill, and cliff, and craggy steep; pile above pile they recede, and fade away in the dimly-descried distance. The eye and the heart may revel in such a scene as this, till a voluntary tribute to such unequalled beauty rolls down the cheek, and words of praise break forth from the tongue. The winds hurry on the pointed hills, and the sun comes and goes, giving a fitful variety to the goodly group of moving mountains, till a giant eminence is seen advancing.

> Vast, huge, and high, the mountain mass is given
> To lift from earth its awful height to heaven:
> Wrapt round with gloom it sails along, and now
> A sunny glory gilds its burning brow.

There is a *peaceful sky*, so delightfully calm and quiet, that you cannot look upon it without thinking of angels, and happiness, and heaven. The blue expanse is not vivid, the motionless clouds are not silvery-white, neither is the sunbeam seen upon them; but all is sweetness and repose. The heart is made soft, and the eye inclined to be tearful, when such a canopy is above us. It may be that the days of our childhood come gently stealing over us, and the soft voice of our mother teaching us to lisp our evening prayer; or, perhaps, we hold communion with the spirits of those we love, who are gone to glory, imagining their peaceful joys and uninterrupted repose. An hour spent thus is more profitable to the heart, and grateful to the affections, than a day of feverish impulse, and thoughtless joy.

There is a *fleecy sky*, where the feathery flakes of one part of heaven lie lightly on the blue beyond them; while another part of the firmament exhibits "the beauteous semblance of a flock at rest." The musing mind is led on by such a scene to quiet and consolatory thoughts. The thorny cares of the day are unconsciously extracted, oil and balm are poured into the heart, and rural associations embody themselves in the words, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." When we turn our eyes heavenward our hearts often follow in the same direction.

There is a *threatening sky*, whose fearful and overwhelming aspect imparts, even to the thoughtless, a sense of danger, and oppresses, with a sort of horror, the moody and desponding. A sultry stillness prevails, and a gathering of dun, dusky, and dark masses is fearfully visible. There is a rolling onwards of the burdened heavens, as of a thick cloud of black dust raised by the approach of a turbulent and hostile multitude. Onwards it comes, and yet onward, till suspense becomes painful. The firmament seems, even by

its portentous stillness, to proclaim that the tempest in his strength is about to walk abroad.

There is an *iceberg sky*, whose mountainous masses, lit up by the sunbeam, for purity, whiteness, and brightness, would shame the very snow on the head of Mont Blanc. There is every conceivable degree of repose and excitement in such a sky, varying as it does, from the calm and lustreless vales of snow at the base of the pointed crags, to the unbearable blaze that rests on the summits of their sunny peaks.

There is a *stormy sky*, when the gathered artillery of heaven is at length ready to pour forth its thunders. The huge black clouds can no longer bear each other's weight; the lurid glare in the south gives a deeper gloom to the frowning sky; the wind rises, and in fitful sweeps, whirls round and round, bending the giant trees, while the big drop falls heavily, here and there, on the thick foliage. Thus, for a moment, the tempest withholds his rage, toying with the things of earth, till, all at once, the lightning launches itself from the ebon clouds; crash comes the thunder-clap, as if it would rend in twain the heavens, and down comes the drenching deluge from above! Fearful is this by land, but unutterably fearful where the tormented waves of mighty ocean, lashed into fury by the winds, rise in resistance to the storm.

There is a *glorious sky*, when the "king of day" advances from the east, "as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber," right royally arrayed in glittering robes of purple and gold. The kindling light shoots far and wide, and hues of all kinds beautify the glowing heavens. At last, burning his way from the horizon upwards, comes the sun, blazing with intense and concentrated effulgency. The sky, at the close of the day too, is often like this; and I have seen, on some

occasions, such streams of brightness pouring down through the openings in the clouds, as to suggest, to my fancy, the thought that angels were letting out a flood of glory from the reservoirs of heaven! I have noticed, also, not unfrequently, the setting sun looking out from a line of light, with a dark cloud just above and below him, so that the declining orb has appeared to my fancy, like the pupil of a seraph's eye, to give a parting glance at the world. If you are a lover of the works of creation, these things may be familiar to you.

There is a *wild and fitful sky*, when the shadowy masses in the heavens appear in confusion, and the light comes and goes suddenly. The moon is seen gliding swiftly through the sky, as on an urgent errand, ever and anon hidden by the shadowy hills through which she journeys; and the changing clouds hurry on in an opposite direction, as though time-pressed, or scared by the impelling blast. The accustomed peaceful aspect of the vault above is gone. The agitated heavens appear alarmed, and the imaginative mind grows enthusiastic. There is much of beauty, but more of sublimity in such a sky; I love to gaze upon it.

There is a *burning sky*, so red, and bright, and glowing, that one might almost suppose the clouds had caught fire, and the wide-spread firmament was in a blaze. I have stood picturing, in the vault above me, villages, and towns, and cities, seemingly in a conflagration; and then another fanciful thought has struck me, that heaven was specially illumined, and angels holding a jubilee of joy. If mortal men have such glowing scenes spread before them, what must angels and glorified spirits have to gaze on?

Such scenes as these are not to be looked on by him who revels in the works of his great Creator, without having his

mind moved with high-wrought aspirations. The bright, the beautiful, the glowing and glorious skies influence his heart, and selfish thoughts give way to those of kindness, love, and peace, and purity, and heaven.

CHAPTER XVIII.

COUNTRY STROLLERS.

Beggars.— Pedlars. — Chimney-sweeps. — Sailors. — Man with bears and dancing dogs.—Showmen.—Gipsies, with their character and occupation. —Gipsies in Spain.—Gipsy girl.—Gipsy adventure.

I COULD never help regarding among the pickings of the country, the strollers of different kinds that visit, at uncertain periods, the villages and farm-houses. Often have I wondered how it could answer the purpose of a beggar to trudge into a retired and thinly-populated neighbourhood, where a few scraps of broken victuals, and an occasional mug of beer or cider would be the utmost of his gains, for it is not often that money is given away at farm-houses. There must be a real love of wandering in the case. True it is that they may, now and then, treat themselves with a fresh turnip from the fields through which they pass, and with a little fruit from the orchards, but even with these advantages, the profits of the day must be but small.

The beggar, however, is but one among the many strollers, who, in different ways, lay their contributions on the farms and villages. The light-hearted pedlar, with a pack on his back, and a box before him well supplied with skeins of silk, balls of thread and cotton, pins, needles, stay

and boot-laces, thimbles, penknives, scizzars, pincushions, ribbons, kid-gloves, small looking-glasses, and jewellery, very like gold, makes his way to many a back door, hoping to find a customer in the cook or the housemaid. There he stands, now cracking his ready joke, and now recommending his glittering tinsel.

There is that in a pedlar's box which, of itself, when exposed fully to view, is quite enough to affect wiser heads than those of Sally and Susan ; no wonder then, that when assisted by a seducing tongue, the pedlar should be irresistible. Give him fair play, and he will not only contrive to sell a yard and a half of blue ribbon to the cook, and a pair of earrings to the housemaid, but, also, put off a shawl to their mistress.

Chimney-sweeps are fond of visiting farm-houses, going from one to another as a matter of course ; taking money, eating a meal, and carrying away their soot on a rough pony or shaggy donkey ; sometimes sleeping in a barn, and at other times bivouacking under a hedge or tree.

Now and then a sailor makes his appearance with a ship on his head, her sails set, and her sky-scrapers streaming in the wind. His blue jacket, check shirt, and black silk handkerchief, work wonders for Jack among the simple-hearted villagers, and all that he tells them is listened to with attention.

Some strollers make more noise than others : the dull, heavy, thumping sound of the tabor, and the shrill tone of the pipe are heard. Then comes a tall, thin man, in a cocked hat and loose great coat, leading a bear by his chain. On the back of the bear sits a monkey in a red jacket, and two or three dancing dogs are slowly walking in the rear, with yellow and blue petticoats. In ten minutes the whole village is in an uproar.

THE PUPPET SHOW

There is another country stroller, whom all must have seen, and that is the old showman: with his raree-show on his back, he limps into the village, stumping along on his wooden leg, and soon he has a goodly troop of children at his heels. I love to see the sturdy little rogues in all their glory.

I love to gaze upon a noisy throng
Of childish madcaps, for their boisterous mirth
Instructs me, ere the heart has learned to brood
On future ills, how little is required
To make the cup of happiness o'erflow.
It was but yesterday that such a throng
Peopled my path, and in the midst a man
That bore a puppet-show upon his back.
His fustian coat and doublet, in their day,
No doubt had other wearers, for they hung
Loosely upon his lean and lanky frame.
His hat, of many shapes, but ill concealed
A brow of wrinkles, and the two thin locks
Of flaxen hair, that gently rose and fell
As the breeze altered, told a tale of years.
His face was thin and sharp, and looked as though
The wasting hand of time had not alone
Disfeatured him, but want and daily care.
His hollow eye, familiar with distress,
Was fitful as it wandered to and fro
In quest of childish customers; at last
He fixed his puppet-show upon its stand.
I paused and gave the needy wretch a piece,
A silver piece, and bade him treat the throng.
Oh, what a sudden glance of joy he gave!
And what a rush took place amid the group
To gaze upon the wonders he described;
The old man laughed, and showed his toothless gums,
And patted one, and set another up
Upon his little stool, and pulled the strings
Of knotted catgut with a readier hand.

The man was happy, and the childish throng—
I happier still in having made them so.
" O, then," thought I, " if one poor silver coin
Can chace away the gloom of want and care,
And gild with joy and sunny smiles the brows
Of youth and age—it were a sin to leave
An unturned, useless tester in my purse !
In kindly deeds a niggard is unwise ;
For we are happier when we freely give,
And richer when we spend than when we spare."

But of all country strollers give me the gipsy, with his sparkling eye, Indian complexion, and coal-black hair. Gipsies are a strange people, and exercise a strange influence wherever they go. Hardly is there a wilder or a more romantic scene than that of a gipsy camp in which old men and young men, women, girls, and children are mingled together ; the women, with their brown faces and sparkling eyes, habited in red cloaks, black beaver hats, or black bonnets with handkerchiefs on their heads, tied under the chin. Gipsies still retain their wandering and predatory habits, but they seldom indulge now in the fearless enterprises and daring deeds in which they formerly took delight. Their encampments in the shady nook by the way-side, on the edge of the common and skirt of the wood, may yet be seen, but, for the most part, their delinquencies are confined to hedge-pulling, poaching, and petty thefts. Seldom indeed do their outbreaks include a burglary and deed of violence. Find them where you may, in the summer months, they are sure to be living in tents, dealing in horses, mending pots and kettles, selling baskets, fiddling, and telling fortunes. There is a place in my heart for the gipsy tribe ; for though I cannot tell whether they are Indians or Hindoos, Egyptians or Arab Ishmaelites, I know that they are " strangers within our gates." For more than three thousand years

have they been wandering fugitives in all countries, speaking an Oriental language, and following out their own customs.

"Now came in groups the gipsy tribes,
From northern hills, from southern plains;
And many a panniered ass is swinging
The child that to itself is singing
Along the flowery lanes.

"Stout men are loud in wrangling talk,
Where older tongues are gruff and tame;
Keen maiden laughter rings aloft,
Whilst many an under voice is soft
From many a talking dame.

"Their beaver hats are weather stained;—
The one black plume is sadly gay;
Their squalid brats are slung behind
In cloaks that flutter to the wind,
Of scarlet, brown, and grey."

In Spain gipsies are called Gitanoes, and often are their swarthy fingers employed in striking the guitar in the romantic woods of that country. A passage in Cervantes, freely translated, would be something like the following:—

"We gipsies are lords of the fields and of the flowery meadows, of the woods and of the mountains, of the streams and of the rivers. The woods offer us fuel for nothing; the trees, fruit; the vines, grapes; the garden, herbs; the streams, water; the river, fish; and the plains, game: a shadow, the mountains; fresh air, the rifts in the rocks; and the caves, habitations. For us the inclemencies of the heavens are pleasant airings; the snows are refreshing, the showers are baths, the thunder is music, and our flambeau is the lightning flash. To us the hard ground is pleasant as softest feathers, and the tanned skin of our bodies is an

impenetrable armour that defends us. Our light limbs are at liberty, and neither rugged path nor barrier repels us. Honour, ambition, and faction disturb not our repose: dearer to us than gilded ceilings and sumptuous palaces are our movable tents. Instead of Flemish paintings in gilded frames, we have those given us by Nature in these lofty mountains and snow-topped rocks, extended plains and thick woods, which meet our eyes in every direction. In a word, we have all that we desire, and are content with what we have. We are rustic astrologers, sleeping in the open air: we know the hours of night, for the stars are our time-piece. We sing in the prison, and we are silent on the rack: we turn the same face to the sun and to the storm, to barrenness and abundance."

Among gipsies, models of beauty are sometimes to be found; the fresh air they constantly breathe, their daily exercise and freedom from restraint, all conspire to give them a peculiarity, a wildness and witchery unseen among other classes. I once came suddenly upon a young gipsy, in the act of pulling a hedge; as she hastily turned towards me, scared by my appearance, she seemed to me the most perfectly formed of all created beings mine eyes had ever gazed on—her red petticoat, stays, and loose handkerchief, were almost her only clothing, but her sunny brow, and ruddy cheek, heightened by a blush, her raven hair, and exquisitely formed foot and ankle, arm, neck, and shoulders, were beyond description beautiful. Paintings have I seen of gipsies, that were considered lovely, but they were all shadows compared to the sun-bright gipsy girl I have so imperfectly described.

I remember hearing a strange account of three gipsies, which I will relate. It happened that a gentleman had an unusual abundance of fine grapes in his hot-house, and his

gardener boasted, far and near, that such grapes were not to be had in the country. This information soon reached the ears of a numerous gang of gipsies, who had encamped on the skirt of the common hard by.

The gipsies had boiled their evening pot, suspended from three sticks—they had supped, played on the fiddle, and retired to rest, some under the tent, some stretched at full length under an old oak tree, and some lay round the cart, by the side of their donkeys.

The old mother gipsy was very ill, indeed it was thought she was at the point of death, but that did not restrain the rest of the gang from following out their reckless pursuits and light-hearted mirth. For some time the old woman could eat nothing that the gang could bring her; at last she cried out for grapes.

At dead of night, when the stars were glittering in the sky, and all was silent around, a stout young fellow gently stole from the encampment, passed down the dark lane, and, tearing a stake from the hedge, proceeded on his way to the gentleman's garden. The wall was high, but he soon clambered over it; in another minute or two he had found his way to the glass door of the hot-house.

No sooner had the young gipsy placed his stake under the door, and wrenched it open, than a wire fastened to it, set a large bell at the top of the hot-house ringing. The gipsy turned round hastily to make his escape, but was confronted by two men, who at that moment arrived at the spot. Accustomed to danger, he lost not his self-possession, but resolutely attacked his enemies. A blow from one of them dashed him back against the glass door, but in a moment he again grappled with them both, and all three struggled for their lives.

The ringing bell, and the jingling glass, soon brought

half a dozen servants to the scene of contention, when the light of a lantern discovered to them three men throttling each other on the ground.

The servants dragged them asunder, and led them away, one by one, to different places of security for the night—what was the surprise of the culprits in the morning to find, when placed together, with their hands tied behind them, that they all belonged to the same gang. The old father gipsy had resolved, cost what it would, to get a few bunches of the best grapes in the country for his dying wife, and his two sons, unknown to him, and to each other, had also formed the same resolution, for the sake of their dying mother.

It was a daring enterprise, and one that under common circumstances, would have been visited with great severity, but so pleased was the gentleman with the attachment of the gipsies for their aged and dying relative that, after a suitable reproof, in which he pointed out to them how much better it would have been to have made known to him the object they had in view, than to break the laws of God and man, he pardoned their crime in admiration of their affection, sending them away laden with the best grapes his hothouse would afford.

CHAPTER XIX.

LONELY PLACES IN THE COUNTRY.

Lonely houses.—Lonely lanes.—Lonely pools.—Lonely clumps of trees.—Taggard's Tump.—The cluster of elms.—The school girls.—The pie-finch.—Robert Andrews.—Alice and her lover.—The robbers.—The wounded horseman.—The booty.—The quarrel.—The widow Allen.—The idiot boy.—Above the stars.

THERE are in country places, here and there, lonely houses, tenantless and in ruins, standing in lonely situations. The roofs are fallen in, the windows are broken, the doors hang on one hinge, and the hollow wind mournfully moans through their gloomy chambers. The villagers say that strange sounds have been heard, and strange sights have been seen there in the midnight hour.

> What time the timid traveller hears
> His cheek is seen to change,
> And breathlessly he doubts and fears
> A tale so wild and strange!

These deserted dwellings have the reputation of being haunted, and even the labourers of the neighbouring farms at night-fall avoid them. The "haunted house," the "ragged windows," and the "unked hall," are dreary in the day, and night almost dreadful.

> The unked mansion is a gloomy place—
> Old men in whispers tell a fearful tale
> Of the last tenant, and the listening ear
> Drinks in the dread narration greedily.

There are lonely lanes leading to nowhere, and narrower avenues branching out from them, ending in patches of rough common land, which the very owners seem to have forgotten. There you may stand or sit, read or muse by the hour, without fear of intrusion. The chaffinch chatters there at your approach, and the rook, or the crow, winging his way above your head, scared by your unexpected appearance, caws aloud, and suddenly wheels round from his intended course.

There are lonely pools in deep hollows, whose dark waters are covered with the leaf of the water-lily, and choked with bull-rushes and sedgy grass, with overhanging trees and straggling bushes on either side. Here leaps the pike, and heres plashes the moor-hen and the water-rat, but rarely does a human foot approach the shadowy spot. Such places are not without their attractions.

There are lonely clumps of trees on the high hill, or on the common, or by the way-side, to which strange, wild stories are attached, but I must tell of one of these more at length, and for this purpose will give you a sketch from the pages of the "Visitor."

On the skirt of a village of some note, and at about bow-shot distance from the toll-gate road, stands a romantic mound of earth, called Taggard's Tump. From time immemorial it has borne this name, and many wild traditions are current among the olden inhabitants of the village, concerning its origin; but as these are very vague and very improbable, it is hardly worth while to dwell upon them.

At the present day, Taggard's Tump, which is a knoll, or round hill of small dimensions, is partly covered with a group of ancient elms forming a circle, whose diameter may be some eight or ten yards. The spreading branches of these trees canopying the green sod in the circle beneath, render the place attractive; and many a stranger, before be

passes on, pauses there, and turns aside for a moment to meditate in the grateful shade. It is, indeed, an imposing spot; and a lover of nature will not stand unmoved in that natural temple, whose living columns, shooting far upwards, terminate in a roof of verdant foliage fluttering in the breeze; every interstice admitting the grateful brightness of the azure heavens.

The elm is, and always has been, my favourite tree; nor have the gigantic stems, the goodly branches, the beauteous bark, or the flaky foliage of other forest trees won away from it aught of my fondness and regard. I find in it—taking it altogether—more grandeur, picturesque beauty, and variety, than in any other British tree. No wonder that, with so strong a predilection for the elm, I should frequently, in my rambles, have sought the friendly shelter of Taggard's Tump, both from dazzling sunshine and the passing shower! I have stood alone, surrounded by those bulky stems and aspiring branches, when the morning dews spangled the grass with pearls, and when the shades of evening were gathering around: when the midday sun was blazing in the south, and when the midnight hour prevailed; and all around was obscurity, stillness, and solemnity.

The clustering elms on Taggard's Tump are the first to catch the beams of the rejoicing sun, and the last to lose his retiring rays—among their branches. the feathered songsters warble their early matins and retiring vespers! The busy world goes by unheeded—the beggar with his wallet, the peer with his goodly equipage; beauty in her gay apparel, and want in rags; joy with his smiling face, and sorrow with her brow of care; as well as the passing pageants of the gay bridal party, and the solemn funeral procession.

There is that in natural and rural scenery which always

excites me; and whether it be the stately tree, or the bladed grass and tufted moss beneath my feet, that attracts my attention—in either case my heart opens to pleasurable emotions. Had I no more gratifying object to call forth my admiration and joy, I could ponder with pleasure on a bed of stinging-nettles, and rejoice over a toadstool.

Having just returned from a summer ramble, I have left the high-road, and sought the imposing shade of the goodly elms on Taggard's Tump, waving, as they do, their redundant foliage in the breeze. All is still, but the whispering of the goodly grove above and around me. Not a footfall, nor a distant sound, breaks upon my ear. As I gaze upward at the leafy canopy, that bold and striking metaphor of holy writ comes to my remembrance, "The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."—Isa. lv. 12.

Many, in such a place and season as this, would be a little fanciful; and, to own a truth, I feel that I am becoming so; my mind is presenting to me figures, such as may have stood where I am standing, and painting scenes which may have occurred, by day or by night, beneath and around these trees. While I am in the mood, I will note down such of these imaginary scenes as have an air of probability.

It is the afternoon of a summer's day, and three or four schoolgirls are sitting beneath the grateful shades of the overbranching elms, learning their lessons. They have had a scamper around the Tump, and one has occasioned another to fall. A hasty word of reproach from the fallen, and a declaration from the offender that she did not intend to throw her schoolfellow down have passed; the dusty frock has been shaken; a reconciling kiss has been given; and, with good-humour in their faces and peace in their hearts,

they are conning over the lessons they will soon be called on to repeat.

It is spring, and a piefinch has built her nest in one of the branches of the elm, ten or a dozen feet from the ground. There she has sat on her speckled eggs, and there she has hatched her little ones. Who can tell the fondness of the feathered race for their young! Alas! the nest is robbed, and the poor, unfledged helpless ones, after being pushed along the ground, by the foot of their oppressor to make them tumble over, are being inhumanly pelted with stones from a distance, to the great anguish of the parent bird. It is Robert Andrews that does this cruel deed; but little does he get for his pains, for a companion, in throwing at the birds, has struck him in the face with the stone, and quenched the sight of one of his eyes for ever. Months have passed, there is a dog-fight beneath the trees, and one of the dogs is just worried to death; the fight was got up by Robert Andrews, whose thumb has been bitten half off in the scuffle. Years have rolled away, a battle is being fought in the green circle by the two young men; one of them, a brawling and blaspheming reprobate, has his collar-bone broken: it is Robert Andrews! Again it is summer, and a ruffian-like fellow is being taken by in handcuffs—he has committed a burglary—the burglar is Robert Andrews! It is autumn, and an inhabitant of the place is reading the newspaper to a friend; and among the names of the felons who have been transported for life is that of Robert Andrews!

The yellow leaves of October are hanging on the trees, and it is a fine clear night. The church clock has struck ten, and the moon is shining in the blue sky. A young man, with a bundle in his hand, has arrived in breathless haste, as though he were fearful of having trespassed on an

appointed time. It seems to be some relief to find himself alone; but he now begins to pace backwards and forwards as one impatient of delay. Fretful ejaculations escape him, as at every two or three turns he pauses a moment to listen. A light footstep is heard, and a youthful female glides hastily to the spot.

The young man is angry, and reproaches her; the whole world, he says, is against him. He has quarrelled with his parents, and, in wrath and bitterness, has quitted the dwelling of his childhood, determined never again to return. He has contrived to let Alice know that if ever she wishes to see him again it must be at ten that night, beneath the overshadowing boughs of the elm-trees of Taggard's Tump. Alice has stolen away from her father's house with some difficulty and many qualms of conscience, running all risks to keep the appointment;—and there they are together.

Excited, unreasonable, and implacable, he rails against his father, and entreats Alice to accompany him in his wanderings through the world. Again he paces to and fro, smiting his forehead with his clenched fist, urging his distressed companion to share his mad-headed career. But oh! how sweetly does she reply! For a time she opposes not the wildfire of his anger, but by degrees she wins upon him by her gentleness. She mildly sets before him his madness and his folly, conjures him to bear with his parents as they have borne with him, and asks him, if he cannot forgive his earthly parent, how he can hope his heavenly Father to forgive him? With such meekness, fidelity, affection, and piety does she address him, that, like a chastened child, he resolves to return to the habitation of his father.

Seven years have passed, it is a summer's evening, and two rosy-faced children are playing on the grass, while their happy parents sit together on the seat beneath the trees.

"Alice," says the father, "do you remember that night?" "Indeed I do," she replied, looking upwards with a thankful tear in either eye, while her grateful husband grasps her affectionately by the hand.

The wind is high, the night is terribly dark, and two men with hurried feet turn aside from the road; one stands leaning against a tree, while the other seats himself on the ground, and draws up the slides of a dark lantern to examine the flint of his pistol. By the light of the lantern, one dressed as a sailor, with a black beard, has a ferocious aspect; the other wears the faded jacket of a soldier: and both are armed with deadly bludgeons. Their faces are flushed and their hearts are inflamed with drink. "Snug quarters, Jack," says the sailor, pulling off his cap and drawing the sleeve of his jacket across his hot and reeking brows. "Snug enough," replied the other, "but be handy with that barker of yours. There 's no time to throw away."

As he speaks, the clatter of a horse's iron hoofs is heard between the fitful blasts of the wind. The slide of the lantern in an instant is shut down, the sailor starts to his feet, and hurries forward to the road with his companion. The report of a pistol follows, a horse gallops by, riderless, and soon after the two men return to the shade of the trees. They have wounded the horseman, and robbed him of a few coins; but a quarrel takes place in the division of their spoil, and they grapple hard together, grasping each other by the throat. The lantern is crushed beneath their feet, the coins are lost, and the blaspheming ruffians empty-handed, denouncing bitter imprecations against each other, take different paths. Truly "the way of transgressors is hard."

Come, I have given free liberty to my fancy; let me draw one more imaginary scene; let me relate one more ideal history, and I have done. The widow Allen once lived in a

cottage near, which has long since been removed from the place. The poor widow was what mankind called deformed, but He who made all things knows best what form to give them. Men think this outer tree deformed; but the birds never thought so, for they have built their nests in it, and sung in it their morning and evening songs; the sun never thought so, for he has shone upon it as favourably as upon others; and spring never thought so, for she has ever given it a leaf as green as those of its companions.

The crooked and poverty-stricken widow had a son; but the poor lad, frightened by his playmates at school, at the age of nine years became an idiot. This was a heavy affliction, though not without some alleviation, for her son grew up affectionate, tractable, inoffensive, and happy. To roam about with younger children, and to do as they bade him do, was his delight, but if ever he was scared, he ran off directly to his mother. It was a strange sight to see a human being run to so weak a thing for protection; but, weak as she was, to him she was a tower of strength.

The poor widow was pious, and though her son showed it not as others do, yet what he had been taught in his earlier days of holy things clung to his heart in his idiocy. When his mother knelt in prayer he knelt beside her; when she went to the house of God he went also, and was as her shadow. Her Bible, though he never read it, was to him as a holy thing. Twenty times a day, at least, did he repeat the words, "Above the stars!"

Often did the poor widow come here with her son; but once she came in great distress, for the few articles of furniture she had were about to be taken from her for rent. "Where is the friend that will help us?" said she, for a moment giving way to her grief. Her son directly gave utterance to his accustomed expression, "Above the stars!"

The widow wept, but her tears were not tears of grief. Her wavering faith had been revived by the words of her son. She returned home; relief was at hand; she was not forgotten by Him who watches over the widow and the fatherless.

Let such as have children weak in their intellects receive patiently the mysterious visitation, looking upwards. Such children are usually made happy by trifles which otherwise would yield them little pleasure. They are strangers to many solicitudes, and in their weakness they are under the care of one who is mighty. If the widow's son afflicted his mother by his helplessness, he comforted her by his affection.

The widow died—as all must die—and her weak-minded, inoffensive son came to this place alone, looking about as though he would find her. "Where is your mother?" asked one of his playmates; his eye glanced upwards for a moment, and then burst forth from his lips his wonted words, "Above the stars!"

The sun is now getting westerly, and I must bid farewell to Taggard's Tump. Haply many a musing wanderer, tempted by the pure breath of heaven to walk abroad, here drinks in the glories of creation, till he feels as I have done his heart to be filled with thankfulness, and his spirit to be lifted up—"above the stars!"

CHAPTER XX.

SOMETHING ABOUT WOODS AND COPPICES.

Entrance of the coppice.—The shade, the sylvan seclusion of the leafy labyrinth and the wild wilderness of young trees.—Flowers.—Cottage children.—Gathering nuts.—Fall of the leaf.—The wood.—The giant trees.—Productiveness of the oak.—The adder.—The varied tones of trees in the wind.—The storm.

THERE is peace in the green grassy field, daisied and buttercupped—and something more in the knolly slope where grow the cowslip and the dancing daffodil; but they are not like the tangled coppice. I am about to enter the latter. With a prodigal hand has the High and Holy One strewn our paths with pleasures! A thousand leafy bowers invite me, rich in shade, in solitude, and in sylvan seclusion —ornamented with the overhanging hazel, whose tortoise-shell stems and redundant foliage are more than lovely. These are temples where peace and quietude reside, and where joy offers up to the Eternal, with a full heart, the incense of praise.

Already am I lost in the leafy labyrinth—the delightful intricacy of sprays and foliage, sunny openings, and shadowy recesses. Shall I seat myself on the dry grass that has covered this little mound? Shall I lie at length on the green moss that has clothed the slope? Within my reach

is the wood-sorrel, sharp and pleasant to the taste; the luscious and juicy blackberry, the wild strawberry, the shining scarlet hips, and the ripe, brown-shelled clusters that are gathered and cracked with equal delight. Could fairy hands realize the creations of fancy, what could they do more than is already done here!

What a wilderness of young trees, flaunting honeysuckles, and sweet-scented briers! Here blooms the rose, there hangs the woodbine, yonder breathes the violet. Angels on their mission to beautify the earth with flowers have profusely decorated the coppice.

"God might have bade the earth bring forth
Enough for great and small,
The oak-tree and the cedar-tree,
Without a flower at all.

Then wherefore, wherefore were they made,
All dyed in rainbow light,
All fashioned with supremest grace,
Up-springing day and night?

Our outward life requires them not;
Then wherefore had they birth?
To minister delight to man;
To beautify the earth;

To comfort man; to whisper hope,
Whene'er his faith is dim;
For who thus careth for the flowers
Will much more care for him."

My eye is admiring the beauty and my ear drinking in the music of the coppice. This is freedom! This is a real revel of the heart! This is indeed enjoyment! After all, princes are poor; and the bare-headed, bare-legged, liberty-

loving peasant lad has a park that monarchs may sigh for in vain.

Again have I reached the skirt of the coppice, where a sweet cottage is seen in the distance; and yonder is a group of ragged cottage children, pulling down the brown-shelled clusters of the hazel with their nut-hooks, half of them with their faces besmeared with blackberries. Happy childhood! A nut bough and a blackberry brier are to thee abundance and delight.

The ground is here and there strewn with yellow and crimson leaves, while some are borne by the breeze in the air.

"How call ye this the seasons' fall,
That seems the pageant of the year?
Richer and brighter far than all
The pomp that spring and summer wear.
Red falls the westering light of day
On rock and stream and winding shore;
Soft woody banks and granite grey
With amber clouds are curtained o'er.
The wide, clear waters sleeping lie
Beneath the evening's wings of gold;
And, on their glassy breast, the sky
And banks their mingled hues unfold.
Far in the tangled woods, the ground
Is strewn with fallen leaves, that lie
Like crimson carpets all around,
Beneath a crimson canopy."

I must now enter the wood. Oh, what can exceed the cool, the balmy, the soft, the soothing influence of forest scenery! The bulky stems and spreading branches of ancient trees are goodly objects. The ivy climbs high among them, the squirrel springs from bough to bough, and the crow is cradled far up towards the skies.

On the skirts of the wood are a few trees standing apart: like lonely eremites, they seem to have left their companions. Look at those pollard beeches of enormous size! What mighty boles and branches! Huge and distorted as they are, one cannot gaze upon them without being flung back to distant days. Age, and influence, and solemnity are theirs.

> Might, majesty, and grandeur stern and rude,
> And silence deep, and sylvan solitude.

Ay! now the wood thickens and bids defiance to the sunbeam. Nature here revels in seclusion: the axe of the woodman is unheard, and long has solitude inhabited the place. When once a solitary old man, as he sat on the stump of a tree, was asked who planted the wood? "Planted!" he replied: "it never was planted: these trees are as old as the world."

What noble oaks! Were speech given to that stalwart old forester yonder, gnarled and twisted as he is, what tales might he not tell of by-gone tempests; of grey-headed gaffers sheltering in the storm; gipsies bivouacking in the glade; and ruffian robbers hiding themselves in the leafy labyrinth of the wood! Bravely has he stood against the storm. The hero of a thousand battles, never yet has he been vanquished when rocking, writhing, and struggling with the tempest.

"Few people are fully aware of the productiveness of the oak, or of the extent to which the poor are sometimes benefitted by it. The following remarks will throw some light on this subject:—'I was driving three or four weeks ago, on the road from Daventry to Badby, when I saw a boy, apparently about sixteen years of age, with a sack under an oak-tree. 'Are you picking acorns, my lad?' said I. 'Yes, sir,' said he. 'What do you get for them?' 'A shilling a

bushel, sir.' 'How long are you collecting a bushel?' 'Oh, sir, I can pick up a bushel a day, but not unless I am allowed to go into Sir Charles Knightley's woods, which all the poor of Badby were allowed to do, till a few days ago.' 'But if you can collect a bushel now, how much could you collect earlier in the season?' 'Oh, about four bushels a day.' 'Indeed!' 'Yes, sir, but that did not last long.' 'How long? six weeks think you?' 'Yes, I should say that it lasted as long as that, but not much longer.' Here our dialogue ended, and as I was going to Sir Charles Knightley's, I mentioned to him what had passed between me and the Badby lad. Upon this Sir Charles took me to his wood-yard, where he showed me seventeen hundred and forty-five bushels of acorns, lying on the floors of two barns, which had been collected for him by the Badby poor. He had paid seventy pounds for the collecting. In addition to what Sir Charles Knightley had thus bought for his deer, the farmers in the neighbourhood had been extensive purchasers of acorns to keep for their pigs."

Now and then there is an opening in the wood where the sun flings his rays on the trodden pathway with power; and sometimes here is seen the harmless snake, or the harmful adder basking in the glare.

> How proudly does this wood-clad height o'ertop
> The rugged cliffs that skirt the river's side!
> How bright the winding waters, and how broad
> The expanse of arid earth that meets the eye!
> This is a glorious prospect, but my boy
> Draw back thy venturous foot; the faithless ridge
> Is straight and perilous; the slaty earth
> That shivers down the steep incessantly
> Has undermined the pathway. One false step,
> We fall a hundred fathoms. Never yet
> Did heaven blaze fiercer on the torrid ground.

The soaring lark would blink amid the sky,
The sun-adoring eagle could not brook
The insufferable beam. 'Tis sultry hot;
Subdued, the cattle seek the shade, and stand
In tame submission; meekly tolerant.

What seest thou, that thy foot is turned aside
So promptly, and thine eager gaze, intent
With high-wrought admiration, earthward fix'd?
I see it now! 'Tis very beautiful!
No marvel that it wins thy fond regard.

How joyously it basks beneath the beam:
How brightly tinged with ever-changing hues,
Its tiny net-work scales fling back the light!
Its eyes are glistering with a spark that mocks
The diamond's blaze. Nay, touch it not my boy!
'Tis a young serpent of a poisonous kind,
Its fangs are sharp and venemous. Take this staff
And crush its crested head; in killing him
We crop a deadly harvest ere it ripen,
A subtle dangerous race, and the tired traveller
While slumbering in the shade may dream his thanks.

There! Now 'tis harmless, for the writhing body
Ceases to play its gambols in the glare,
Tremulous alone with faint expiring life.
Now let us moralize, for Nature's book,
Like others, may be read for good or ill.
This passage should not teach thee cruelty,
But when a new, and yet unpractised sin,
Crosses thy path, all gay and beautiful,
As lately this scaled adder, pause not, strike!
Slay it in all its immature deceit,
Lest, haply, as this venom'd cockatrice
Would soon have done, it prove a scaled fiend,
And, wreathing round thee in thy careless moments,
Dart deep its poisonous fangs into thy soul,
And sting thee into everlasting death.

Martingale, in his "English Country Life," though somewhat fanciful, is very striking in his remarks on trees. "Every tree has its particular tone, which evinces its peculiar character, elicited as both are by the midnight winds. Through a dark mass of Scotch firs, a deep roar prevails, like to the eternal surge of the mighty ocean. The light flutter of the aspen, trembling with fear and with the agitation of perturbation, forms a striking contrast to the deep cathedral diapason of the solemn yew unmoved amid all scenes. The oak is firm and manly in its voice, and hurls the tone of defiance against all its enemies in the tempestuous struggle. The linden and the hornbeam are shy and timid, uttering a more softened murmur. The elm is a note or two higher; and the ash, firmly clasped by the pertinacious ivy, is higher still. The graceful larch breathes around a tone, somewhat higher than the diapason of the fir; while the willow, with her drooping tresses, utters a mournful sob."

Impressive, too, is the sketch of Old Humphrey. "I gaze on the oak with pleasure when it flourishes in its prime, and I regard it with a yet deeper interest, when it has been rifted by the bolt of heaven. There it stands, like a paralytic giant, smitten for waging war with heaven, howling out, as it were, the words, 'who hath resisted the arm of the Holy One?—who hath hardened himself against him and hath prospered?' There is fearfulness in its ruin, majesty in its very helplessness, and sublimity in the magnitude of its desolation." And again, "As I gaze on the massy trunks around me, I think of cathedral piles, of Gothic arches, and goodly arcades; my fancy is busy with the scene, and brings before me a mixed confusion of sunshine, acorns, dried leaves, and golden fern; of timid hares and antlered stags, dappled deer, and fawns and foxes; of polecats, bats, and bristled hedgehogs; of tree-climbing

squirrels with spreading tails. I hear the cooing of the wood-pigeon, the wild cry of the screech owl, the mellow pipe of the blackbird, and the hum of the busy bees. Now the sun is piercing with his mid-day beams the interstices of the wood, and now the silvery rays of the midnight moon are coldly glittering through the ebon branches. Imaginary scenes flit rapidly before me. The report of the sportsman's gun comes sharp upon the ear, the wounded pheasant flies heavily across the glade; and hark! the beagles are abroad, and the forest resounds with the wild cry of the hunters, and the murderous music of the clamorous dogs."

But hark! the storm-king is abroad, and the war-cry is heard in the woods. First comes the whistling winds, next the sweeping blast, and then the bellowing tempest, against which the chieftains of the forest howl their proudest defiance. The wild commotion spreads, and the tall elms and the gnarled oaks are up in arms grappling with the storm. The big black clouds launch their lightnings, and pour out their descending floods, while the gathered thunder breaks forth with aggravated roar. Flash follows flash, and peal after peal in quick succession adds to the deafening discord. The boisterous winds break into the dark recesses of the woods, that hoarsely echo back their boasting cries. The hooting owl is scared in her ivy bower. The onslaught has begun, the artillery of the skies is playing on the devoted wood, the crackling of the branches and the crashing of the broken trunks mingle with the wild raving of the storm. There is an ash twisted round as though it were but an osier; there falls a bulky elm, crushing in its descent the smaller trees; and yonder, with upturned roots, a giant oak is prostrated on the ground, and the tall pines on the ridgy eminence are rifted as the dry reeds by the sedgy brook; clamour, uproar, and destruction, are winning their way.

Darker grow the frowning heavens, louder raves the infuriated blast, and fiercer flames are flashing athwart the skies. Fell has been the fight, but the sturdy champions of the woods are victorious. They maintain their ground, the tempest is retiring, and the discomfited storm-king is drawing away his baffled legions o'er the distant hills.

CHAPTER XXI.

COUNTRY SPORTS AND EMPLOYMENTS.

By appropriating the gifts of creation we increase their value.—Pastimes of the common people influenced by the amusements of their superiors.—Jousts, tourneys, and running at the quintain.—Wrestling.—Quoits.—Skittles.—Cricket.—Fishing.—Archery.—Sporting terms.—Boating.—Skating.—Sketching.—Botanising.—Gardening.—Walking.

WHEN we regard trees, foliage, and vegetation, from the cedar to the hyssop on the wall, and all other objects of the natural creation, as the express handiwork of God, for our pleasure and profit, it not only increases the value of the things around us, but also binds us with links of love to our Great Creator. All things were made by him.

> The sun in his glory, careering on high;
> The moon, as she tranquilly glides through the sky;
> The storm and the whirlwind, his creatures are they,
> And the proud waves of ocean his whispers obey.

By appropriating to ourselves the general gifts of nature, we think more highly of the gifts and of the giver.

> For me the kindling sunbeams brightly shine!
> The breezes blow for me, and they are mine!

It has been said, with much truth, that the sports and pastimes of the common people of England have always been influenced by the amusements of their superiors; and as the amusements of the latter have altered, so have the

sports and pastimes of the former changed; we have now no jousts and tourneys among the higher orders, and no running at the quintain among the lower people.

One by one the processions, mysteries, pageants, mimings, masks and frolics of the great, and the sports they created in lower life have subsided. The more brutal games of single-stick, cudgel-playing, bull-baiting, badger-baiting, cock-fighting, dog-fighting, and throwing at cocks on Shrove-Tuesday are almost extinct, and hurling, foot-ball, bandy, club-ball, and trap-ball are but little practised. There is still wrestling in Cornwall and Devon; I myself have seen the fine athletic figures of the Canns, and the gigantic proportions of Jordan and Polkinhorne, writhing and grappling in strenuous contention. In most counties there is yet a little quoit-playing, with skittles and cricket. In order to do away with the objectionable noise of the pins and bowl in skittles, they are now to be had made with a thick covering of caoutchouc. The additional expense incurred is the only inconvenience.

Fishing is the recreation of all classes. I am no fisherman, but yet can I drink into the quiet joy and deep delight of the lover of the angle, seated on a summer's day by the Coquet, or some other Northumberland stream; or it may be by the banks of the Derbyshire Dove, the Herefordshire Wye, the Trent, the Tweed, or the Yarrow. He may be surrounded with romantic scenes of sweet repose, or seeking the Teith and the Leven, he may breathe the green heather of Scottish moors, and gaze on the glory of Scottish hills.

I can fancy such a one an enthusiast of the brook, standing on a jutting rock beneath a tree, or seated on a velvet bank up to his ankles in cool grass and fragrant flowers, following his absorbing pursuit, lightly dropping his artificial

fly upon the water, or laying in his larger baits, now hooking the spotted trout, and now drawing from his retreat beneath the roots of the overhanging alder, the grayling, or the pike.

There he sits by the hour in the shadowy seclusions of the flowing river, or the running brook, indulging his quiet thoughts, breathing the odorous gale, gazing on the sailing clouds, and comparing the turbulence of a city life, with all its idle pomp and useless riches, to the peace and quietude of rural scenes. While listening to the lark, the throstle, the nightingale, and other wild warblers of the woods, well may he say with old Izaak Walton, the angler of anglers: "Lord, what music hast Thou provided for the saints in heaven, when Thou affordest bad men such music on earth." But even fishermen, as well as others, complain of the times. "Talk o' fishin," says the Northumberlandshire fisherman, "there 's no sic fishin in Coquet now, as when I was a lad. It was nowse then but to fling in and pull them out, by twee-es and three-es, if ye had sae mony heuks on; but now, a body may keep threshin' at the water a' day atween Halystane and Weldon, and hardly catch three dizen, and mony a time not that. About fifty years syne I mind o' seein trouts that thick i' the thrum, below Rothbury, that if ye had strucken the end o' your gad into the water among them, it wad amaist hae studden upreet."

Though the amusement of fishing can hardly be said, under any circumstances, to be carried on without cruelty, yet do I really believe that many of the amiable of the earth are fishermen.

To point out the exact lawful limits of inclination in sports would be perhaps impossible; but if on the one hand it be an error to indulge in severity towards those who delight in the gun and the angle, it is unquestionably a greater error

to recklessly pursue amusements unmindful of humanity. The cruel battues that occasionally take place, put a black mark on the brows of those who engage in them.

The amusement of fishing has many attractions to the lover of quietude and rural scenes; but I am not about either to justify or condemn fishing, my object being merely to present an illustration of the fact, that we sometimes lay claim to more credit for humanity than we deserve.

On taking my seat in a railroad carriage I was almost immediately joined by a gentlemanly man of agreeable manners and conversational powers. He spoke fluently of the scenery and customs of the different countries he had visited, and then dilated much in praise of many parts of England and Scotland. It was clear that he was a lover of the moor and the mountain, the thick wood and the running river. At last he had evidently hit on his favourite topic.

By his sparkling eye and the enthusiasm with which he spoke on the subject of fishing, he was evidently a brother of the angle of some standing, and, I doubt not, an adept at what is sometimes called the "gentle craft." Quite at home with hiccory rods, winches with spring handles, hair, silk and Indian-rubber lines, pike flies, spinning tackle, gaff hooks, gimp of all sizes, baits, fish bags disgorging needles, swivels and shot boxes, he added much to my information on such matters. Never had I before heard a more eloquent discourse on fishing.

My companion freely admitted that hooking the worm was more than he had nerve to accomplish. This cruel, though necessary operation, he said he had invariably performed for him by a servant; of course on this account he took some credit for humanity.

In the course of his remarks he described with much animation his success in hooking and capturing the largest

pike that had been caught the last season: it was in a Scottish river that this feat had been performed. There was something very striking in his vivid narration, especially in his account of the adroit way in which he succeeded in getting to land a fish of so extraordinary a size.

"I took advantage of his distress," said he, in one part of his description; "I allowed him no respite," he said, in another; and "I drove him to extremity," added he, in a third; at which moment I looked at him, and exclaimed, "What a Turk! though, perhaps, I am libelling a Turk by my exclamation."

On being requested by him to explain the cause of my exclamation, I told him that it appeared to me a very natural one, when I heard a fisherman who had too much humanity to hook a worm declare, that he had *hooked a huge fish* in his watery haunts, taken *advantage of his distress,—allowed him no respite*, and mercilessly *driven him to extremity*.

He admitted that my ejaculation was warranted; that I had caught him with his own line, and fairly trammelled him in the meshes of his own net. He bore my observations with all the meekness of a second Izaak Walton, and we parted, after a pleasant ride and a discussion by no means disagreeable, with mutual regret.

It may at first appear singular that the same person who could not hook a worm, should without remorse or difficulty hook a large fish; but a little consideration will convince us that most humane people, in many things, act quite as inconsistently, eating of turtles that have performed a painful voyage nailed in agony to the deck of a ship, banquetting on turkeys which have shed their blood drop by drop only, and revelling on cripped salmon, roasted oysters, or eels fried alive. It will be well if we can avoid both inhumanity and inconsistency; but certain it is that we are much more

expert in discerning these errors in others, than in discovering them in ourselves.

Here and there are places in the country where archery is feebly kept up. Mrs. Loudon, in her "Lady's Country Companion," has given on this subject, as well as on hunting, some very useful explanations, of which, as well as my memory enables me, I mean to take advantage. The ground where archery is practised is called the *Butt ground*, and the framework set up to shoot at, the target, or butt. The gilt spot in the middle of the rings on the target is the *bull's eye*.

Much as the English *yew* bow has been spoken of, foreign yew is a better and more elastic wood for a bow, than the yew of this country. Little yew, however, either British or foreign, is now used in archery. Bows now in use are of two kinds—the *self bow*, made of one kind of wood; and the *backed bow*, formed of fustick, partridge, lance, or some other ornamental wood, with a back carefully joined to it, of ash or elm. Italian hemp, dressed with Indian glue or gum, forms the most serviceable bowstrings.

The strength of a bow is called its *weight*. The common standard weight of a man's bow—that is the weight which, if suspended to the string of the bow when strung, will draw it the length of an arrow from the bow, is fifty pounds, but many bows are much stronger.

The arrows consist of three parts, the *head* or *pile*, the *shaft* or *stele*, and the *feather*. The wood most in repute for arrows is the ash, and after this come the birch, the hornbeam, the aspen, and the lime. The arrow case, sometimes carried on the back, is a *quiver*, and twenty-four arrows are called a *sheaf*.

The strong piece of polished leather buckled round the bow arm of an archer, to protect it from the action of the string, is called the *bracer*. The finger-stalls of strong and

flexible leather worn by the archer over his gloves, and fastened round his wrist, is called a *shooting glove*. The band buckled round the waist, with an arrow pouch on the right side, is the *belt*, and the dangling ornament, on the left side, with which the heads of the soiled arrows are wiped, is the *tassel*.

An archery ground with well-equipped archers of both sexes in their imposing attire exhibits a striking and agreeable scene. Such a scene have I now in my fancy, and my hospitable host is the leader of the woodland revel.

> Here he comes, like a yeoman of old from the wood,
> As gallant in bearing as bold Robin Hood,
> And gathers his archers around him; they stand
> Equipped for the target, with tassel and band;
> And lovely ones moving among them are seen,
> Dianas in stature, in arms, and in mien;
> More fair than their plumes with the zephyr that rise,
> And their arrows less keen than the glance of their eyes.

There are but few people in the country who are not fond of hunting, coursing, and shooting; and to know where the birds lie, the hare squats, and the fox is likely to be found, is valuable information. The wood or coppice where Reynard usually resides is called *a cover*, and trying with dogs to start him from his retreat is *drawing the cover*. If the fox has started, they say he is unkennelled. The scent left by the fox, which enables the dogs to follow him when he is far out of sight, is called *the drag*. When a sportsman speaks of a fox, he calls his feet the *pad* and his tail the *brush*.

When a hare is found, she is said to be *started from her form;* and if she turns back again it is said she *doubles*. The tail of a hare is called *the scut*, and that of hunting dogs, *the stern*.

The dogs used in fox-hunting are *harriers*, and those that

hunt hares are beagles, a lesser kind of harrier. *Greyhounds* are used in coursing. In the language of sportsmen, when harriers are spoken of, two dogs are called *a couple*, and three, *a couple and a half;* but when greyhounds are the subject of discourse, two are called *a brace*, and three, *a leash.* The beagles used in hare hunting, taken together, are usually called *a pack*, while the harriers that follow the fox are frequently called *a kennel.*

A day's hunting is called a day's sport, and a long chase is *a hard run.* The cry given by the dogs when they *find* or scent their game is *giving tongue;* and when the whole pack join in it, and go off, they are said to be in *full cry.* If the dogs go off very fast at the beginning of the chase, it is a *sharp burst;* and when the scent is lost it is *a check*, or the dogs are said to be *at fault.*

Among the quieter recreations of the country are boating, skating, botanising, gardening, and walking, each of which is productive of great enjoyment. But pleasure, either in country or city, cannot be lasting without being mingled with duty. He who lives for himself alone, is altogether unworthy of his enjoyments. So long as there is ignorance to be instructed, inexperience to be guided, misfortune to be commiserated, merit to be rewarded, and distress to be relieved, so long ought the active duties of life to be diligently performed, and its charities to be cheerfully administered. There is enough in every rural district of England to call forth the tender sympathies and employ the best energies of kindness, patriotism, and Christian philanthropy. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble."

CHAPTER XXII.

CHARACTERS TO BE MET WITH IN THE COUNTRY.

Travellers.—Men of science.—Painters.—Literary characters.—Military and naval officers.—Influence of a visit at a hospitable farm house.—The Major and the hawk.—The exciseman, clerk, lawyer, doctor and village pastor.

HARDLY can I remember having been in the country without meeting with characters of a striking kind. Some traveller of celebrity, or some scientific professor, has visited the place; some painter of eminence, some lion of literature, has happened to be roaming abroad; or some distinguished officer, in the army or navy, has been rusticating in the neighbourhood. Again and again have I been located with captains, majors, and colonels, and once for some weeks, if not for months, a general companionised with me in roaming the fields and in wandering the woods.

This sprinkling of striking characters in rural life has a spiriting influence; for men, whose talents or qualities have rendered them conspicuous in general society, appear to great advantage in the country, where they stand out in bold relief, without the rivalship of any that approach them in the scale of their endowments and attainments.

Man is essentially a social being, and to whatever grade of society he may belong, he cannot enjoy the country without some kind of familiarity with those around him. To this

circumstance must be attributed the fact that many who are high-minded and forbidding in the city, become very agreeable and attractive in the country. This remark will equally apply to the ladies, as well as to the lords of creation. A residence of a few months at a hospitable farm-house is wondrously influential in stripping us of self-estimation, and in calling forth our more amiable qualities.

On a visit, last summer, at an hospitable old homestead, I fell in with a Major of the East India service, a gentlemanly and agreeable companion, who was also a visitor at the same dear old mansion. On our first interview, habited as he was in his shooting dress, I took him to be one of the resident gentry of the neighbourhood, but the British officer was not long hid by the habiliments of the sportsman. His cheerful sallies and interesting anecdotes enlivened our circle, and added a charm to our evening gatherings.

On farther acquaintance, I had reason to congratulate myself in a great addition to my country enjoyments, for the major was as frank and free in his communications, as he was well informed on general topics, and practical in his remarks. Had he been from the north, I should have called him an iceberg of knowledge and an avalanche of information; but being from the east, I jocosely designated him the prince of palanquins, the rajah of ghauts and jungles, a tide of romantic adventures, and a very torrent of tiger hunting.

From the general conversation that passed between us, I gathered a few points of his career. When a boy, the narration of his friends around him, who had been abroad, of Indian battles and adventures, mingled with elephants, sepoys, pagodas, and rupees, together with the model of a ship, carved ivory balls, chintz curtains, and Chinese and East Indian curiosities, belonging to his father, so wrought

upon his youthful mind, that abroad he was determined to go. On two points he was resolved; the one to be a soldier, the other to get a fortune.

Though his boyish project was opposed by his parents, it was not abandoned. An opportunity of obtaining a cadet-ship occurred, which at once overwhelmed his mother, and called forth remonstrances and reproaches on the part of his father, not, perhaps, unmingled with some degree of satisfaction. The letter that summoned him to London was received with joy, and he soon embarked in the *Duke of Richmond* merchant-ship for India. This was an important era in his life; he remained in India thirty years, was actively engaged in the Burmese war, and rose to the rank of major.

Among other departments of knowledge, the major had an extended acquaintance with natural history. He seemed to take a strong interest in all living creatures, especially in birds, of which he possessed an excellent collection, both English and Indian. To add a few specimens that he did not possess to this collection was an object of some importance.

Rarely do we associate with one ardent in any pursuit, and eloquent in its praise, without feeling some interest excited within us. The ardour of the major in his admiration of the feathered race was very influential, and I listened to his glowing descriptions with increasing pleasure.

The major was a keen sportsman, and his dogs and his gun were in daily requisition. One evening, when the dusk prevailed, returning with a companion from his favourite pursuit, in passing through a turnip-field, a bird rose, and was instantly hit by a shot from farmer Bradstock. The major, who saw that the game was a noble hawk, called out to the farmer, vehemently, not to disturb a single

feather of the fallen bird. To his great delight it proved to be a hawk of an unusual size, and of a kind that he was particularly solicitous to obtain. Never was man more overjoyed. The naturalist burst forth with enthusiasm.

"I shall go wild," exclaimed he, as he proudly displayed to me his prize, for farmer Bradstock had willingly placed it at his disposal. "I shall go wild with joy," cried the major, as he drew my attention to the beauty of the noble bird, and the amazing spread of his wing and tail. It was the subject of animated conversation for the evening, and had a lac of rupees come suddenly into the possession of the major, hardly could he have manifested more enthusiasm and delight. On the morrow, a man-servant was despatched to a neighbouring town for a supply of poison, that the bird might be skinned, and its fine plumage put in a state of preservation, till it could be stuffed with care, and added to the major's collection.

Not soon shall I forget this little adventure; for it was my occupation, standing in the bay-window of the old hall, to hold the bird suspended by a strong string and large hook, while the major, *secundum artem*, went through the nice operation of stripping off and poisoning its skin, with as much care and precision as an anatomist manifests in the dissection of his subject. The undertaking was beautifully achieved, amid a burst of enthusiastic remarks, which interested me much, and greatly added to my slender stock of ornithological information.

In a village there is often an exciseman, who, from having resided in different places, has picked up much information. The village clerk, too, is frequently a character; while the lawyer and the doctor are personages in much repute; but the most important, and the most influential character in a country village is, unquestionably, the clergy-

man, and in many cases his wife follows next in estimation and usefulness. On the conduct of these two personages much of the peace, good-will, and kindness, existing in a village, depends.

Many are of opinion that country clergymen often err grievously in not availing themselves of their advantages. It is in vain, say they, that a minister attempts to excuse himself from those courtesies and kindnesses which seldom fail to affect the roughest and the rudest. The sculptor forms the best figure he can from his block of marble, and casts it not aside because of its veins and cracks; how much less, then, should he who ministers in holy things, neglect those under his care, because of their imperfections! Why, it is to correct these imperfections that he resides among them. Are country people coarse, uninformed, and careless of religion;—then is it his duty, as it should be esteemed his privilege, to soften them, to enlighten them, and to lead them in the way to heaven. If he be deficient in Christian graces, how can he expect his people to practise them?—If he lack that kindness, patience, forbearance, and perseverance in well-doing, which he expects them to exercise, is it likely that they will either love or honour him, or become wiser or better by his ministry? Farmers and country people may not understand the grades and shades of religious doctrine, but they do understand when they are undervalued, and when they are treated as men. One act, nay, one word, of good-will and personal kindness, will win their hearts more than a dozen sermons of reproof, and it is only when the Christianity of the pulpit is embodied in the private life of the minister, that it is likely to be extensively influential.

A highly respectable farmer, much attached to the clergy,

lamented to me that the ministers around him stood so high in their own estimation, and so low in that of the farmers of the neighbourhood. As a wealthy farmer he had nothing personally to complain of, but, on account of his neighbours, he much deplored the absence of that common civility and attention on the part of the clergy, which he felt sure would be attended with the happiest consequences.

Perhaps there is a mutual error committed. The minister may be too high in his bearing, and too keen after his own interest, while the farmer may be too apt to take advantage of the occasional familiarity of his minister. Certain it is that in many cases there is less love between them than there ought to be; the minister regarding his people more in the light of ignorant tithe-payers, than in any other point of view, while they regard him as one who runs away with the profits of their labour, and who had rather at all times, except at church and on tithe-day, "have their room than their company." The farmer touches his hat to his minister, who hardly condescends to acknowledge the salutation, and then talks to the first person he meets of "the upstart pride of the parson." This is much to be regretted.

There is another cause of ill-will that sometimes extends itself in rural districts, and that is not merely the evident coldness, but the visible dislike, that exists between the clergyman and the dissenting minister. In some cases this dislike is carried to great excess. More than once have I crossed a river on the Sabbath in the same boat with the pastor of the church I was about to attend, and a dissenting minister; and though I conversed with both, not one word have they exchanged with each other.

The "Village Pastor" of Goldsmith may, or may not have been sketched from the life, but the poetic description

is too loveable, not to live with the English language. A thousand times has this description been quoted, yet here, once more, shall the latter part of it appear :—

" At church, with meek and unaffected grace,
His looks adorn'd the venerable place ;
Truth from his lips prevail'd with double sway,
And fools, who came to scoff, remain'd to pray.
The service past, around the pious man,
With ready zeal each honest rustic ran ;
Even children follow'd with endearing wile,
And pluck'd his gown, to share the good man's smile ;
His ready smile a parent's warmth express'd,
Their welfare pleas'd him, and their cares distress'd ;
To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,
But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven—
As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,
Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,
Tho' round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head."

CHAPTER XXIII.

COUNTRY PICKINGS KNOWN TO EVERYBODY.

All seasons of the year grateful to a lover of nature.—Influence of sylvan scenery.—Nature is ever beautiful.—The stone quarry.—The glow-worm.—Cattle among the buttercups.—The way-side spring.—Lambs at play.—The rookery.—Coppices.—The gnarled old oak.—The secluded lane.—Moss-covered walls.—Violet banks.—Old ruins.

THERE is no day of the year, nor hour of the day, in which the country, in the eye of a lover of nature, is not interesting to gaze on; yet are there seasons and moods of mind, when the heart yearns with more than common ardour for moors and mountains, green fields and woods and waters, and then, sweet it is, indeed, to give up our whole being to the peaceful and joyous influence of rural scenery. What is there in wealth and splendour? What in the pomps and vanities of the world, with all their feverish excitements, that yields us half so much pleasurable tranquillity and deep delight as the calmness, the ever-varying beauty, and the gathered glories of sylvan solitudes? In quiet scenes how the delicious stillness sinks into our souls!—and when the warbling of the grove bursts upon us, or the wind rises, or the rejoicing sun lights up the East, or the West, with a flood of effulgency, what delight animates the eye, and what thankfulness comes gushing up into the heart! O nature, I love thee dearly!

Whether I view thee in the lonely glen;
Where vales recline, or prouder mountains rise;
What time the moon is gliding soft, or when
Thy glorious sun, careering through the skies,

Throws round creation, his resplendent dyes ;
Or where wild ocean's endless wonders be ;
Still art thou beautiful to my 'rapt eyes :—
Thy mighty Maker in thy face I see,
And in my secret spirit bend and honour thee.

Though no rural spot could be found the exact counterpart of another, yet are there many scenes so like in their general features, that they instantly bring before us other scenes of a similar character. This general resemblance is rarely observable in a whole landscape, it being, almost always, limited to an individual part. We have never seen two prospects agreeing in all things, but we have seen hundreds of trees, rocks, and ponds bearing a strong likeness to what we have seen before.

Every one has seen in the middle of a sloping meadow a dry stone quarry with a jutting sandstone rock overhanging it, surmounted with an oak tree and brushwood, and prickly shrubs of various kinds, the sides of the quarry being richly hung with creepers and pendant plants—the whole forming a cool delightful shelter in the blaze of day, and a sweet and alluring solitude at eventide. There the throstle warbles, and the blackbird pours his melodious music,—and there the lover of nature muses, and moralizes and marvels at the beauty of the place.

Every one has seen, at night, a glow-worm on the mossy bank below the wood, shining like some distant taper in a cottage window, while the grey mist has partly hidden the objects around. I love to gaze on the tiny flame deep in the moss of the green grass.

"There is an unobtrusive blaze
Content in lowly shades to shine ;
How much I wish, while yet I gaze,
To make thy modest merit mine!"

Every one has seen cattle in the meadow amongst buttercups, clearing away the fresh grass, sweeping it into their mouths with their tongues; lying down in the hilly pasture, chewing their cud; standing up to their knees in the brook, slaking their thirst, and in the wantonness of profusion, letting the water run down in silvery streams from their mouths; we have watched them too, struggling up the steep acclivity from the river brink, one after another, showing with magic suddenness their beautiful forms, their dappled bodies and their snow-white bosoms; and waiting in the fold-yard till blithesome Betty made her appearance with her pail.

Every one has seen by the way-side, a spring scooped out of the sandstone rock, overshadowed with spreading hawthorn, hung round with lichens and creepers of green and crimson, and adorned with slender hare-bell and other flowers. The moment you approach the spot, a frog who seems almost to sit there for the purpose, leaps plump into the water, and gracefully striking out with his long yellow legs, finds his way to the bottom. Could the fountain speak it might say,—

> "Gentle reader! see in me
> An emblem of true charity;
> For while my bounty I bestow
> Unheard, unseen, I ever flow,
> And I have fresh supplies from heaven,
> For every cup of water given."

Every one has seen lambs at play in the hilly field; nor is a simpler, a more joyous, or a more heart-affecting rural sight to be gazed on.

> "A few begin a short, but vigorous race,
> And indolence abashed soon flies the place;
> Thus challenged forth, see thither, one by one,
> From every side assembling playmates run;

A thousand wily antics mark their stay,
A starting crowd, impatient of delay.
Like the fond dove from fearful prison freed,
Each seems to say, 'Come, let us try our speed!'
Away they scour, impetuous, ardent, strong,
The green turf trembling as they bound along;
Adown the slope, then up the hillock climb,
Where every mole-hill is a bed of thyme;
There panting stop; yet scarcely can refrain;
A bird, a leaf, will set them off again:
Or, if a gale with strength unusual blow,
Scattering the wild-briar roses into snow,
Their little limbs increasing efforts try,
Like the torn flower the fair assemblage fly."

We have all seen a grove of tall elms, with a colony of rooks settled in their tops. The wind has been blowing, the trees have been rocking, the boughs have been bending, the young rooks have been cawing, and the old ones have been feeding them with worms and grubs obtained from the neighbouring ploughed fields.

We have all seen coppices full of secluded nooks, of shady bowers and pleasant pathways, so abounding in straggling blackberries and clustering hazel-nuts, that we could have built ourselves a hut there, and dwelt as happy hermits, wandering and musing, and listening to the throstle's song.

"There primrose groups are yearly seen
Peeping beneath their curtain green,
With aromatic mint beside,
And violets in purple pride.
In gay festoons, o'er hazles thrown,
Hang many a woodbine's floral crown;
The briar-rose, too, that woos the bee,
And thyme, that sighs its odours free;

The lark, the blackbird, and the thrush,
Hymn happiness from every bush ;
In friendly harmony they strive,
And make me glad to be alive."

We have all seen a stunted gnarled old oak growing on the top of a high stony bank, with enormous roots clinging round the huge stones, writhing themselves out of the ground, and hanging bare down the bank ; the deep green of the redundant foliage, the dark-brown colour of the twisted roots, and the shattered stony bank, altogether forming an impressive picture.

We have all seen winding and secluded lanes, where fungusses of surprising beauty grew, shooting upwards their clear white stems, six or eight inches high, their snowy tops having an elegant, feathery, double fringe of a lilac colour hanging from them. We have all bent over those beautiful fungusses, drinking in their beauty.

We have all seen old walls covered over with moss of different kinds, so intensely beautiful, that there was no getting by them without indulging in a pause. Whether we regarded a single tuft of moss by itself, or took in the effect of the velvet-like verdurous whole, in either case it carried us away with delight. Velvet-like is but a poor expression ; velvet was never half so beautiful !

We have all seen banks in shady lanes, so bestrown with violets, and sunny hills so adorned with primroses, that we have revelled on them both. To say that they were

Lovely banks of verdant green,
Where creeping thing was never seen,

would be indulging in poetry at the expense of truth ; but we may say, without misrepresentation, that they were so

extravagantly beautiful, that they compelled us to utter an ejaculation of delight.

We have all seen old ruins whose grey, mouldering stones were so adorned with wall-flowers that they made us think of the hanging gardens of oriental countries. The ruins were enough to make the mind of the spectator pensive, but the glowing, golden wall-flowers lighted up the spirit with sunshine and pleasant thoughts.

"Flower of the solitary place!
Grey ruin's golden crown!
That lendest melancholy grace
To haunts of old renown:
Thou mantlest o'er the battlement,
By strife or storm decayed;
And fillest up each envious rent
Time's canker-tooth hath made.

Sweet wallflower, sweet wallflower!
Thou conjurest up to me
Full many a soft and sunny hour
Of boyhood's thoughtless glee,
When joy from out the daisies grew,
In woodland pastures green,
And summer skies were far more blue
Than since they e'er have been."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CAPLER WOOD ROBBERS.

A cheerless autumnal night.—The alarm.—The gang of gipsies.—The supposed murderers.—The ruffian at the house of Molly Prosser.—Preparation to pursue the gang.—Bradeley Coppice and the fields.—Capler Wood.—The shrill whistle.—The gipsy robbers found.—The dark shed and the furious bull-dog.—The summons.—The dark shed entered.—The capture.

THERE are in rural life but few adventures compared with those which take place in cities and towns, but on this very account, when they do occur, the interest excited by them is the greater. The following adventure, which took place years ago, when I was paying a visit at Fawley Court, Herefordshire, is not likely to be forgotten by any of the parties engaged therein. Read in the glare of day, it will fail to create the sensations it called forth when acted in the gloom of night; yet even with this disadvantage it will hardly fail to interest the reader.

It was on one of those cold and cheerless autumnal evenings, when the inside of a farm-house becomes more than usually comfortable, and when the flaring faggot and the fireside have especial attractions, that tidings arrived at Fawley Court of a daring gang of gipsies, who, after demanding cider and committing excesses among the cottages, had, it was supposed, pitched their camp in the neighbourhood for the night. Rumour, among other things, said that a robbery, if nothing worse, would certainly have been com-

mitted at old Molly Prosser's, had it not been for the timely arrival of Harry Burton, a labouring man, who grappled with the ruffian that had entered the cottage. The struggle was said to have been so severe that the broad stone at the cottage door was half covered with blood; when the ruffian left the cottage, he gave utterance to a savage threat, that the night should not pass without having his revenge.

As a panic had spread among the women and children of the cottages, it seemed a measure of necessity to form a party at once for their security. To call at every cottage, to quiet the fears of their inmates, to proceed in quest of the robbers, for such the gipsies were said to be, and convince them that the neighbourhood was on the alert, was instantly resolved on.

While I and the brother of my hostess were forming a plan in the sitting parlour, in came suddenly from the great hall the honest farmer, accompanied by Captain T——, a friend, carrying a halberd, a sword, bludgeons, guns, and pistols. These they laid before us on the table, and directly began to load the pistols. It appeared that, having heard of what had taken place, the farmer had hastened home to make preparations to pursue the robbers.

It happened that a little time before, a murder had been committed, and a reward was offered for the apprehension of a female gipsy, a suspected party; and as a woman accompanied the gang then in the neighbourhood, it was thought probable that she might be the guilty person.

The night promised to be a dark one; but though a cheerful fire, a good supper, a pair of warm blankets, with a night-cap pulled over the ears, would have been much more in keeping with comfort than prowling about in the woods in search of gipsy-robbers, yet was there no disposition to enjoy them. One determination seemed to prevail,

and that was to capture the man who had entered the cottage of Molly Prosser.

Had there been any inclination to back out of this perilous adventure, the circumstances of the case appeared sufficiently formidable to justify such a prudential course. It was no light affair to sally forth at night, the wind keen as a razor, and the narrow lanes dark as a coal-hole, to attack a set of pilfering cut-throats in the middle of a wood, with a supposed murderess among them; but, as I said, no one wished, for a moment, to absent himself from the enterprise in hand.

Our worthy host, the honest farmer, was a man of resolution, and then he had served as captain of a company of volunteers. But Captain T——, as a veteran soldier, accustomed to hairbreadth escapes in the Peninsular war, where he had manned the trenches after they had been repeatedly swept by the enemy's murderous fire, was chosen as our commander. Captain T——, the farmer, our hostess's brother, two men-servants, and myself formed our gallant band, all armed with bludgeons, in addition to which Captain T—— and the farmer carried pistols; the halberd, the sword, and the guns had been laid aside.

We first called on the cottagers to know if the rumours that had reached us were correct, and also to get a description of the man who at Molly Prosser's had played the ruffian. The information we gained was that the affair had been a little coloured; that the gang was made up of six sturdy, ill-looking scoundrels, with their donkeys, accompanied by a woman; and that the fellow we wished to secure was dressed in a great-coat, with a light patch on his shoulder. Having agreed to obey in all things the directions of our commander, we set off on our hazardous enterprise.

The reality of our adventure was now apparent. It was

no child's play in which we were engaged. To suppose that half-a-dozen thorough-bred ruffians, and such we considered them to be, would allow one of their number to be captured without a struggle was not a probable supposition; more likely were they to fight like tigers. Every heart, however, was firm, and every hand ready to do its duty.

As the general impression was that the gang would be found in Capler Wood, we proceeded in that direction; two of our party keeping the lane, two others entering Bradeley Coppice that skirted it, and the remaining two scouring the fields on the right, with the understanding that a whistle from any party should instantly bring us together.

The night, though not pitch dark, was sufficiently overcast, the hanging trees and bushes adding greatly to the gloom. We proceeded in silence, not a sound being heard but the moaning wind as it wildly swept along from the direction of Brockhampton, or from the river at the bottom of the wood, and the occasional crash of a hedge, or of a breaking branch as we forced our way through the coppice. No place was left unexplored, no spot unchallenged, till we assembled near Capler Wood.

Here we again divided, three of our band taking the lane and fields on the right, while the rest entered the wood. As Captain T—— and our good friend the farmer reconnoitred the middle, and the lower part of the wood, the upper part remained to me. Silently and stealthily we glided through the leafy labyrinth under orders to meet again at the gate, in ten minutes, should no discovery be made.

As I proceeded towards the highest part of the wood, full of the enterprise in which we were engaged, and anxious to discover the enemy, I came suddenly upon what appeared to me in the gloom to be the encampment we were in quest of; but while cautiously endeavouring to approach it,

or rather, just at the moment that I discovered my mistake, a shrill whistle rang through the wood. We were soon assembled at the gate. The field party reported that they had discovered the ruffian gang, which had taken possession of the cattle-shed at Bennet's Barn, the entrance of which was defended by a bull-dog. We instantly set off for Bennet's Barn.

And now the trying part of our adventure was at hand. It was no longer doubtful whether our enterprise was a perilous one. Six thorough-bred ruffians, in a dark shed defended by a bull-dog, were now to be grappled with; but we had no faint hearts among us. The self-possession and cool intrepidity of Captain T—— was beyond all praise, and the ardour of our good and excellent friend, the farmer, increased rather than diminished with our danger. It was a settled thing that, come what would, the ruffian in the great-coat, with the light patch on his shoulder, should be taken.

No time was lost in reaching the scene of action, which was a fold-yard of considerable extent, occupied on two of its sides by a cattle-shed. There was no house near, and the place was of the most lonely description. The fold-yard being littered with straw, rendered objects within it visible, but the shed was dark as midnight. The instant we approached, the bull-dog fiercely rushed forward, but the bars of the gate were close enough to defend us from his attack.

As the savage animal was bent on mischief, and as nothing could be done till he was disposed of, after some ineffectual attempts had been made to strike him on the head over the gate, Captain T—— cocked and presented his pistol to dispatch him; but I arrested his arm at the moment, urging on behalf of the dog that he was only doing his duty in defending his masters, and suggested the plan of summoning the ruffians from the shed.

For some time no answer was given to the summons, and the silence being ominous of evil, once more our leader presented his pistol to destroy the dog, when a rustling was heard in the straw, and a dark figure came slowly forth, yawning as if he had been aroused from slumber. Our captain commanded him to lay hold of his dog on peril of having the animal shot; but as it was possible that the fellow might slip the dog at us when he pleased, he was ordered to take off his neck-handkerchief, and tie the furious animal to the gate. Scarcely was this done before we all leaped into the foldyard.

On being asked how many there were in the shed, the fellow sulkily replied "two;" but this was considered a ruse on his part, and we were not to be thrown off our guard. Had we been without a commander, most likely we should have blundered on altogether in our attack; but Captain T—— directed three of the party to enter at the farther end, while the remainder of us stood ready at the mouth of the shed to prevent an escape, and to resist the rush we expected to be made upon us.

On again interrogating the fellow about his companions he stoutly declared there were but two in the shed; and when asked about the others, he replied there were no others: that he was a sweep travelling about the country with his wife and child, and that he knew nothing about a gang of gipsies. We were not however to be deceived. We had come out armed against a gang of gipsy-robbers; we had discovered the place of their retreat; and anything less than the capture of the man in the great-coat was not for a moment to be thought of. A sweep indeed! Yes, yes! if we allowed such a trumpery tale as that to deceive us, we should deserve to be well buffeted with a soot-bag about our ears for our folly.

As the three who had entered the shed proceeded in

their search, the captain from time to time cried out—"Is all right?" to which the reply—"All 's right," was regularly returned. Now and then a sally was made from the shed to the fold-yard, by a bullock, which added to the interest of our position and increased our watchfulness. At last a shout was raised. The critical moment had arrived; but instead of the rush of half-a-dozen robbers, our three companions issued from the shed, bringing with them a woman and child. Yes, positively a woman and child! All "the pomp and circumstance of war!" all the ardour and heroism of our adventure! all our hair-breadth escapes and deathful dangers had dwindled down to this,—we had captured a sweep with his wife and child!

What a "falling off was here!" Was there ever such a ridiculous adventure? Think of our preparation and parade! the halberd, the sword, the bludgeons, the guns, and the pistols! Think of the coolness and promptitude of our captain, and of our own self-possession, courage and determination. Think of six ferocious villains in a dark shed, guarded by a bull-dog, and then think of the glorious result of all our achievements, the discomfiture of half-a-dozen bullocks, and the capture of a sweep and his wife and child! We were panic-struck! The mountain in labour was a fable, but this was a reality! And then, to return to Fawley Court, not as conquerors, with our prisoner and the spoils of victory, but as crest-fallen, would-be warriors, to be laughed at for the whimsical termination of our memorable campaign! Since this affair, our good friend the farmer has been called away from the world, with, I think, another of our party, but the captain and the rest of us yet remain to talk over the events of days gone by, and to relate among them the famous, but somewhat ridiculous adventure of the Capler Wood Robbers.

CHAPTER XXV.

COUNTRY SIGHTS AND SOUNDS.

The love of natural scenery favourable to cheerfulness, virtue, and piety.—A rural scene is a library.—Pleasant scenes in the country.—Riotous noises in the farm-yard.—Sounds in the fields.—The rookery.—The warbling of birds.—The voice of the thunder storm, and the whispering of the breeze.

IT ought not, it must not, nay I think it cannot be reasonably doubted, that a love of the country, and of natural scenery, is favourable to cheerfulness, to virtue, and piety, yet are there many admirers of rural scenes and natural objects, who pay but little attention to their Almighty Maker. The gift is enjoyed, while the Giver is forgotten; but this is not the way to get good from the beautiful world we inhabit. Until we can see not only the hand of God, but also the goodness of God in his works, our profit will never be equal to our pleasure. When an eye quick to discern the beauty of natural objects, and a heart prompt to acknowledge the goodness of our Heavenly Father, go into the fields together, the glowing landscape becomes a glorious scene, the hills appear to "break forth into singing," and the trees to "clap their hands."

"Thou art, O God! the life and light
Of all this wondrous world I see;
Its glow by day, its smile by night,
Are but reflections caught from thee;
Where'er we turn, thy glories shine,
And all things fair and bright are thine."

A rural scene is a library, and the skies, the clouds, the hills, the valleys, the brooks, the animals, the birds, the insects, the trees, the flowers, the leaves, and the blades of grass are books of prose, poetry, elegant extracts and sound information, by which we may improve in natural history, botany, science, and philosophy, and in which we may read essays on simplicity, lectures on economy, and profitable sermons on the greatness and goodness of God.

There are a hundred things that make the country delightful, and one of them is, that, go where you will, you can never look about you long without something that would make a pleasant picture meeting the eye. A cottage, with a vine or a honeysuckle climbing up the front; an old oak tree, whose goodly branches are laden with acorns and adorned with ruddy oak balls; a pool, where ducks are swimming, or flapping their wings, and diving under the water; a high hedge, beautiful with wild roses, hips, haws, and blackberries; a clear spring, at the bottom of a sand-bank, down which are hanging lichens and creeping plants in rich abundance; a little brook, where a country girl is lifting water with a wooden bowl; a knolly field, where the young lambs are racing in the sun; a retired pond, half-grown over with bulrushes and sedgy grass, where the dragon-fly is skimming swiftly around, with his green net-work wings; a coppice, where the nut boughs are laden with clusters of brown shellers; a wild common, where a donkey is grazing, and a flock of geese are stocking up the grass; a shady and retired nook, where a party of gipsies are boiling their kettle, hung from three crooked sticks over the fire; a paddock, in which four or five cart-horses are cropping the herbage, and swinging their long tails over their backs, to drive away the flies; a sunny meadow, where the merry hay-makers are at work, or a waving corn-field rich with golden

grain; a hedger in his thick boots and cumbrous mittens, pleaching a thorny hedge; a high elm-tree, with a crow's nest built in the upper branches, the old crow sitting on the topmost spray; a ridge of broken ground, glittering with the yellow flowers of the furze-bushes; a green meadow, where cows of different colours are breathing sweet, as they sweep the grass with their rough tongues, and tear it off with their teeth; these, and a thousand other such pleasant pictures, are to be seen in the country.

> "The leafy glory of the woods,
> The rushing of the mountain floods,
> The wind that bends the lofty tree,
> All yield an inward joy to me."

Quiet as the country may be, and hushed in deep repose, there are seasons when the farm-yard appears to be almost in a riot. It is even now, in my fancy, for the brown gelding is neighing in the stable; the loud cackling geese are flying to the pool; the peacock is screaming discordantly from the pent-house top; the loud "gobble! gobble!" of the turkeys is heard from the rick-yard; shaggy Jowler is rattling his heavy chain and barking; the thrashing machine is clattering in the barn; an empty waggon is rumbling along the rocky lane; the pigs are squealing in the foldyard; old Thomas is sharpening his scithe on the grinding-stone; the farmer's eldest son has just let off his gun; a hawk with a young pigeon in his claw has tumbled into the road; and the farmer with his full-bodied voice is shouting aloud "Keep the old sow and pigs from routing through the hedge of the back garden!"

Farther a-field, too, the sounds are various, for the lark is singing in the air; the corncrake is crying in the mowing grass; the rooks are cawing over the high elm-trees; the wild ducks are splashing in the water; the sheep are bleat-

ing and the lambs baaing in the meadows; the ploughboy is whistling among the furrows; Trim, the black and tan terrier, is barking at a hedge-hog, rolled up on the bank, by the hollow tree; the huntsman's horn is heard from the coppice; and here come the dogs in full cry, loud and clamorous, waking the echo of the distant hill. There! I thought the sky was stormy,—what a clap of thunder!

The sight of a rookery on the tall elm-trees, and the sounds made by the feathery colony, are equally attractive. Strange it is, that notwithstanding the incessant cawing made by both young birds and old, the cawing of the rook is much more associated with silence, than with sound. The striking of a church clock in the night has the same effect, it renders more apparent the silence it has for a moment broken.

> "Should I my steps turn to the rural seat
> Where lofty elms and venerable oaks
> Invite the rook, who, high amid the boughs,
> In early spring his airy city builds,
> And ceaseless caws amusive, there well pleased
> I might the various polity survey
> Of the mixed household kind."

The following description of a rookery, by William Howitt, will find its way to the heart of every reader, and revive his recollections of the past.

"Who that has been brought up in the country has not been accustomed from his infancy to hear the cawing of the rookery; to witness the active labour and cares, and schemes of these birds in spring?—has not stood by his father, or other old friend, while the young have been fetched down from the lofty elm by the cross-bow?—has not run to fetch it as it fell?—has not clambered into the green tree in which it has, perhaps, lodged in falling, and hooked it down?

—has not helped the keeper to carry to the house the black feathery bunch of young rooks thus shot, for the cook to convert into the most savoury of country pies; or to be despatched in different directions as presents to friends? Who has not in bright summer days, when the young have got abroad, seen them in almost every green meadow, when the country was all flowers and sweetness, with fluttering wings, demanding food from their busy parents? And in the still, broad, quiet sunshine of summer evenings, as he has sat in garden arbour, or at open window, with the dear old friends of his youth, has not often seen them come soberly homewards from their day's wanderings, in a rustling and jetty array, from whose wings the light of the setting sun glanced, seeking those ancient and towering trees, which had overspread the hall for ages? Who in the days of warm feeling and expanding affections, when life was a long summer of happiness and gaiety; when, perhaps, the attachment of a life was growing, as he has ridden home in the sweet dusk of a June midnight, has not heard them in their lofty nest, half roused by the horse's tread, give a rustle, a caw, and then all quiet again? Or when he has looked out in the profound quiet of such a midnight from his chamber-window, and felt, as it were, the unseen odours of mingled flowers floating up to him from the garden below, from beds made beautiful by the fair hands of sisters, still more beautiful than their flowers, and now perhaps dead or dispersed into wide countries, or pulled down, and all their loveliness gone, like a dream of such a night, with heartless husbands and luckless children, and has not heard from the tree-top some faint mutter, some drowsy cry, as if the side-by-side-nestled rooks were talking in their sleep, or were complaining of being crowded by some heavy old fellow on their bough—sounds which provoked laughter at the moment, but are

preserved in the memory for long years? In short, what Englishman recalls the dear old home of his birth and his youth, with all its affections and delights, and transactions; who recalls its garden nooks, its bee-hives by the sunny wall, its fields, its woods, its friends, its favourite animals, its sorrows and its merriments, its gay meetings and its partings to meet there no more,—everything which makes that spot what no other spot on earth besides ever can be by any magic, even the most powerful magic of love,—and does not find the English rook a part of his retrospect, uttering his joyous, rough John-Bullish caw, or his laughable midnight muttering, insignificant as he is in himself, an indispensable dweller in the paradise of the past? Nay, the very blue air of a summer's afternoon does not seem right to me without the high-soaring, solemn wing of the rook; the fairer landscape is not complete without the rook; the flowery, deep grassy, full fields of most glad spring would be melancholy without the rook. The rook, with all its attendants of pert jackdaws, and circling starlings, who love his sedate and judge-like company, is dearer to an Englishman than he is aware of."

The warbling of birds is among the most joyous of country sounds, the voice of the thunder-storm the most arresting, and very sweet is the whispering of the winds.

> " Not rural sights alone, but rural sounds
> Exhilarate the spirits, and restore
> The tone of languid nature. Temperate winds
> That sweep the skirt of some far spreading wood
> Of ancient growth, make music not unlike
> The dash of ocean on his sounding shore,
> And lull the spirit while they fill the mind."

The breeze! the breeze! how delightful is the fresh breeze, when it blows round the hill, or gently sweeps along

the valley, laden with the balmy odours of fragrant plants and herbs! All our senses are regaled at once by the breeze, —hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and feeling, are at the same time gratified.

Hark how it whispers among the sedge of the brook, and the bulrushes and high grass of the lonely pond! How it rustles among the dry leaves and brittle reeds in the hedge-rows, and how sweetly and soothingly it swells on the ear from the full foliage of the tall trees, now loud, and then low, dying away in the distance till it becomes inaudible!

Look at the influence of the breeze on the objects around; the high grass is bending; the ripe corn is waving, and the boughs of the forest trees are gently swaying to and fro, turning up the under sides of their many-coloured leaves. The breeze makes lovely things more lovely.

What a fragance prevails when the breeze, scented with the perfume of the new-made hay, of heath-flowers and wild thyme, of beans, vetches, and clover in blossom, breathes around its varied sweets! It is pleasant then to roam abroad, and amid nature's gentle excitation to rejoice.

To the taste the breeze is delightful. How fresh and sweet it is, and what a sense of purity it imparts! We swallow health in breathing it.

> Be mine, when waving trees
> And summer skies are given,
> To taste the balmy breeze,
> And drink the air of heaven!

Nor is the breeze less bountiful to the sense of feeling, than to other senses. Oh, how gently it fans the face! how soft it is to the touch! how cool to the fevered brow of exercise! and how refreshing to the toil-worn and the faint!

How shall we thank the great Giver of all good for the breeze? He can "bring the wind out of his treasures" to

bless or to curse, to strengthen or to destroy. The breeze is a viewless dispenser of pleasure—an invisible physician, ministering to the enfeebled body and mind—an elemental Samaritan, going about on errands of mercy, and a messenger from the throne of the Eternal, to give health and happiness to mankind.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE OLD CHURCH PORCH.

Aged country people.—Their quaintness and quietude.—The village churchyard.—The old church porch.—The aged rustic's narrative.—The group of graves.—Abel Haycroft and his three sons, Ambrose, Gideon, and Gregory.—Ambrose goes to sea and returns.—Gideon goes abroad and comes back.—Gregory receives them both.—Death of the two brothers, Ambrose and Gideon.—Gregory, the aged rustic, finishes his story.

THERE is a quietude and quaintness of demeanour among aged people in the country, that renders it pleasant to converse with them. You may, perhaps, if you look for him, occasionally find, in farm-houses and cottages, a loud-talking, bustling old man, with an air of importance on his brow; but such an one is but an exception to a general rule. Grey-headed and bald-headed country people are usually grave, silent, and unpretending. There is, indeed, no reason why they should be otherwise; mingling as they do among their equals, or with those who have always acknowledged them their superiors, there would be no object gained in affecting importance.

While making this remark, I have at least a score of silent, thoughful-looking country characters in my eye, every one of which has some demand on my respect, and many of them on my affection. I am fond of old people; for though age is not wisdom, it has so long been the companion of

experience, that it can hardly fail in many things to be wise. There is

> "The quiet stillness of a thinking mind
> Self-occupied"

often very visible in aged country countenances, so that you listen to the man of years, as to one on whom you can depend. He will neither talk learnedly nor eloquently, nor will he enter into matters too high for him; but in the common things of life he is well instructed and will well instruct you. Some time ago I met with the following description, evidently drawn by one of my own way of thinking:—

"I love to talk with the aged man; to enter into communion with him of the grey head and the wrinkled forehead. Pleasant are the joyous gambols of light-hearted childhood; grateful are the hopeful anticipations of ardent youth; and full of interest are the matured and stable attainments of manhood; but in the hour of solitude and reflection, more pleasant, more grateful, and fuller of interest is the chastened experience of the graver brow. There is that in the straggling locks, the subdued features, and the quiet demeanour of old age hopefully looking onward, that harmonises with my spirit. No wonder then, that having a full hour to spare, I turned my steps to the old church porch.

"I had walked, as a stranger, through the pleasant village, and loitered for some time in the churchyard among the tombs, gazing on the uncouthly-sculptured stones, and reading their simple inscriptions, when turning towards a group of hillocks by themselves, one of which was unturfed and unbriered, I observed an old man, with a strip of black crape round his hat, sitting alone in the porch. The declining sun shone upon him as he sat bending forward, leaning on his stick, which he held with both his hands. In a little space I was seated beside him.

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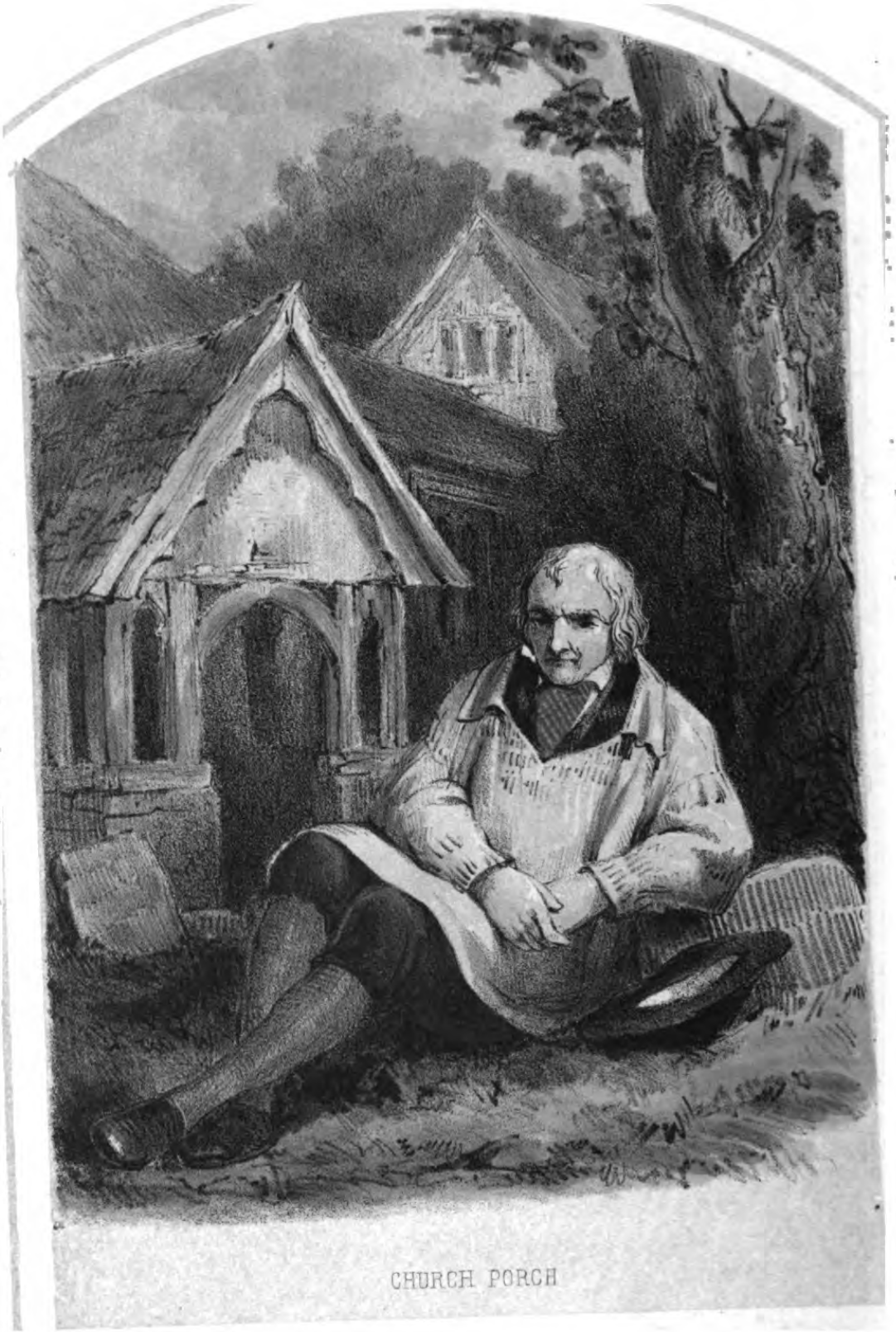

CHURCH PORCH

"It was a lovely evening; for not only was the green leaf on the tree, and the birds singing in the bush, but the pleasant breeze was abroad, and the snowy clouds in the blue sky, as well as the churchyard, the fields, and the distant hills, were lit up with sunshine. Some say that man, on his pilgrimage to a better world, has no time to muse on the natural creation; but let them say what they will, where a holy influence has led the eye and heart to regard earth and skies as the handiwork of the Holy One, a deeper reverence will be felt, and a warmer glow of thankfulness will be enjoyed. That old man, in the quiet musings of his mind, sitting, as it were, in the garden of death, seemed to enjoy the beauty and calmness of the summer scene. There was no despondency on his brow, but hope and peace were there visibly portrayed. True are the words of the prophet, 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee.'

"For more than fourscore summers, and as many winters, had that aged man lived in the village, rarely roaming a dozen miles from the place. He had whistled in the fields as a ploughboy in his childhood, guided the share through the soil in his youth, and ploughed, and sowed, reaped and mowed, with a lusty arm, in his manhood, the broad acres which had been tilled by his fathers before him. From his discourse I soon gathered that he had been one among the better class of cottagers, looked up to by those below him, and respected by those above him, and that then, in the latter end of his days, his trust being in Him, whom to know is eternal life, he was looking 'for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.'

"While we sat together in the porch, my grey-headed companion ran over the names of the several pastors who, in his time, had guided the village flock. Some of these

ministers had removed to better benefices, and some had 'fallen asleep.' He had seen in his day the church once new-roofed, and the spire twice new-shingled. There were but three men in the neighbourhood who were older than he, and not one among them, like him, could walk about in the sunshine and inhale the pleasant breeze. 'There were,' said he, 'Gaffers and Gammers in my younger days, but such names are now seldom or never heard of.'

"He spoke of the monuments in the chancel of the church; some had been erected in the life-time of his grandfather, and that of the knight in chain armour, lying on his back with his two-handed sword beside him, was much older. He spoke also of the broad flat grey stones inlaid with brass, that were so much worn away by the foot, across which the shepherd and part of his flock frequently walked, and over which the little lambs of the Sunday-schools were continually passing.

> Marble shall moulder and decay,
> And solid brass shall wear away;
> While God's eternal word, secure
> Mid rolling ages, shall endure.

"Many were the green hillocks and graven stones of the village churchyard, and not a few of those who slept beneath them had been known to the aged cottager, who seemed to take a pleasure in relating what he knew about them, and in looking back on days which had long gone by. He told me of the old squire who lived at the hall, and of Madam Bloxham, who once inhabited the large house called the Rookery. She had considered the poor, and the Lord had delivered her in the time of trouble, strengthening her upon the bed of languishing, and making all her bed in her sickness. The squire was lying in the vault with the marble tomb over it, at the north end of the church; and the dust of

Madam Bloxham reposed beneath the plain monument near the belfry door, surrounded by the iron palisades.

"As the old cottager sat talking, his eyes were often turned to the group of graves clustered together as though they belonged to the same family. One of these, as I said before, had neither brier nor green turf upon it. 'Tell me,' said I, 'who are lying there?' There was that in the manner of my aged companion, as he entered on his account, which led me to suppose he had more than a common interest in his narrative; I remained silent while he gave me the following story:—

"'Those who lie there, sir,' said he, 'as you seem to suppose, all sprang from the same stock, and I humbly and heartily trust that their names are all "written in the book of life." Abel Haycroft was an upright hard-working man, fearing God and acting a kind part to his neighbours. Such a man ought not to have had an enemy in the world; but he had one, and a bitter one too, who wronged him, forced him to go to law, and ruined him. When I say ruined him, I mean that he took from him his earthly property; for Abel had a heavenly inheritance that no one could take away. It seemed a hard thing that he, who had owned land as a master, should be compelled to till it as a servant; but so it was, and Abel left the house on the farm to live in a cottage. Where the fear of God is, no one can be altogether unhappy. Abel repined not at the loss of his lands. "The Lord gave," said he, "and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Abel, after all, was a richer man than he who had oppressed him; for "better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right."

"'Abel Haycroft had three sons, Ambrose, Gideon, and Gregory. "The lads must work, as I have done," said he;

"but that will not hurt them, for the sleep of a labouring man is sweet. They have learned to read God's holy word, and I hope some of it is in their hearts." Abel lies under the third hillock yonder; for the first, with the head-stone, is the resting-place of his father, and the second that of his uncle. He died as he had lived, a humble disciple of the Redeemer, and I can fancy, though I was but a lad when he left the world, that I now hear the minister giving out the text for his funeral sermon,—"The Lord giveth and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

"'Ambrose, Gideon, and Gregory, loved as brothers should love one another. "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" While they were together they felt strong—for "a threefold cord is not quickly broken;" but a time came when they were to part.

"'A man visited the village who had been at sea, and he talked so glibly about gallant ships and studding-sails, and the white foam and the green ocean, and ivory and gold-dust, and sunny islands, and macaws, and cocoa-nuts, that the head of poor Ambrose was fairly turned, so that nothing would do but he must go to sea. To sea he went, and however it might be with the other matters, right little of the ivory and gold-dust came to his share. Of the sun, poor fellow, he had enough; for he came back, after living in India twenty years, with neither health nor wealth. It was well that his brother Gregory had stuck to the plough, and got a little beforehand, for it enabled him to give Ambrose a home in the cottage of his father.

"'Before Ambrose came home Gideon went abroad, for he had heard that in the West, land was to be had for little or nothing—a labouring man was sure to prosper there, for food was cheap and they had no taxes. Childhood is the proper time to blow bubbles, but some people are

inclined to blow them all the days of their lives. Poor Gideon was one of this sort, but even he was tired of the sport at last. He had a log-house, with abundance of swampy land that he could not drain, and plenty of fir-trees that he could not fell. Hard was his struggle, but at last the hot sun and the swampy fog were too much for him; the fever laid hold of him, and he came back to the land of his fathers poorer than he left it. Gregory opened his cottage-door wide to receive his broken-down brother, and, to make a long story short, the three brothers dwelt together in affection and peace, and the blessing of God rested upon them.

"'Whatever else we may forget, sir, it behoveth us never to forget God, for his mercy is in the heavens and his faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. The three brothers, as I said, dwelt together. They read God's holy word, bent their knees together at a throne of grace, and would have continued to walk together to the house of God in company to their lives' end, had not the infirmities of Ambrose and Gideon gained upon them; but their faith was strong in Him who lived and died for sinners, and they trusted in him. It is fifteen years come Bartlemas since Ambrose was carried to the grave, and his brothers, knowing that he had looked onwards to a glorious resurrection, were enabled to say, with submission to God's holy will, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

"Having thus spoken, the old man stood up, and walked gently to the hillock which had neither brier nor green turf. 'And here lies Gideon,' said he, his voice a little faltering, 'for yesterday he too was carried to the grave, the "house appointed for all living," but he knew in whom he trusted. It becomes us all, sir, to be ready to depart, but especially such an old man as I am, for there is but a step between me and death. "All the days of my appointed time will I

wait, till my change come." "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." '

"'And what became of the remaining brother?' said I, more than half suspecting that I was talking with him. 'What became of Gregory?' said I, as he lifted his broad-brimmed hat, with the crape round it, from his hoary head, and bent to me, about to take his leave. 'He remains,' said he, 'in the village still, preparing for the future, for though he is yet able to hobble about the scenes of his childhood, and to sit at eventide in the old church porch, looking on the graves of his brothers, he well knows that his time is short. Many have been God's unmerited mercies to me,' continued he, wiping away with his sleeve, the tear that had risen in his eye, 'and this is not the least of them, that, rejoicing in the hope set before me, I can still say, though health and strength have departed, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."' "

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE VILLAGE INN.

Rural scenes, however varied and variable, are essentially the same.—Jeremy Taylor's description of the rising sun.—Sketch of summer.—The softening effect of distance on a landscape.—The beer-shop.—The Village Inn.—Its attractions.—Its occasional visitors.—Poor Mary.

AMID all the changes of this mutable world, country scenes, varied and variable as they may be, are essentially the same. Talk of old times! These are the same, old times, new times, and all times. We may change, and manners and customs may change, but the birds, the trees, the flowers, and all the pickings of rural life, remain the same. The air is fresh, the sky is blue, the sun is bright, the leaves are green, the flowers are fair as they used to be, and he who wanders among them will never be weary of their delights. He will look around him with love and joy, and find, from the rising to the setting sun, objects of delight.

Jeremy Taylor says of the rising sun,—"When the sun approaches towards the gates of the morning he first opens a little eye of heaven, and sends away the spirits of darkness, and gives light to a cock, and calls up the lark to matins, and bye-and-bye gilds the fringes of a cloud, and peeps over the eastern hills, thrusting out his golden horns like those which decked the brows of Moses, when he was forced to wear a veil, because himself had seen the face of God; and

still, while a man tells the story, the sun gets up higher, till he shows a full, fair light and a face, and then he shines one whole day, under a cloud often, and sometimes weeping great and little showers, and sets quietly; so is a man's reason and his life."

Let me here, while the fit is on me, give a slight sketch of summer:—

It was summer, and lovely Nature, decked in her loveliest dress, was keeping holiday. The trees were rich in foliage, the full-blown flowers flung around their sweets, and the bee and the butterfly, with myriads of other winged insects, were abroad on the same errand—to make the most of the joyous hours.

The fields gave promise of a goodly harvest, and the heart felt that the pledge would be redeemed. The landscape was soft yet radiant; a rich hazy golden light was abroad. The windows of the distant houses seemed in a blaze, and a sparkling star glittered on the weather-cock of the village church.

The horses in the pasture lands had sought the shade of the large trees, shaking their heads to get rid of the gnats, and lashing the flies from their flanks with their tails; the cattle were standing in the brook or in the buttercupped meadow of green and gold. The heart of the husbandman was merry, the voice of laughter rang from the hay-field, the patient angler sat in the shady nook, and the shrill chirp of the grasshopper was heard among the blossomed clover. "Oh what a garden has a grasshopper!"

Hope, expectation, and promise pervaded all things; that summer was come was a truth that every heart acknowledged, for it was inscribed on all created things—the hot breeze breathed it around. The fruits and flowers declared it; the birds sang it, and the bright, glowing, glorious sun

wrote legibly, in letters of gold, both on the earth and in the heavens, "Summer is abroad!"

The effect of distance on a landscape is very pleasing. Before we can discover the individual beauty of shrubs and flowers, and moss, and sedgy grass, and green leaves, we must approach them; but on the bolder and vaster objects of natural scenery, distance bestows an additional beauty. The rifted rock, the rushing river, the hanging wood, the rugged cliff, and the cloud-capped mountain, are the more agreeable when seen from afar. Distance smoothes their ruggedness and renders the prospect so harmoniously sweet, so meltingly soft and fading, that you cannot tell the mountains from the skies, nor earth from heaven.

> "At summer eve, when heaven's aerial bow
> Spans with bright arch the glittering fields below,
> Why to yon mountain turns the musing eye,
> Whose sunbright summit mingles with the sky?
> Why do those cliffs of shadowy tint appear
> More sweet than all the landscape smiling near?
> 'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view,
> And robes the mountain in its azure hue.
> Thus with delight we linger to survey
> The promised joys of life's unmeasured way;
> Thus from afar each dim discovered scene
> More pleasing seems than all the past hath been!
> And every form that fancy can repair
> From dark oblivion, glows divinely there."

The Village Inn must appear among my Pickings of Rural Life, being too important an object to be altogether neglected. The pot-house, or beer-shop, which has sprung up of late years, called Tom-and-Jerry in the Midland counties, and Kidley-Wink in the West of England, is very different to the Village Inn or alehouse of more ancient standing.

That there are alehouses enough of an objectionable character, where neither the host nor his usual customers can reasonably lay much claim to sobriety or morality is certain, but the quiet, thriving, old-fashioned, well-conducted road-side Village Inn, is not to be spoken of in so light a manner.

Houses of this latter description, in the midst of their endless variety have some general features, of so agreeable a kind that few people are altogether proof against their attractions. They may stand on a flat or a sloping green, or on a gentle rise, a little removed from the road. They may be called the King's Head, the Green Dragon, the Golden Crown, the Royal Oak, or the Malt Shovel. The painted sign may be fastened over the door, or suspended from two high posts, or swing from one that resembles a gallows, or it may have for its support the large spreading tree growing in front of the house. There may be, or there may not be, a malt-house attached to the premises, with stables for horses and a shed for a spring-cart or two, or a chaise. In these things they may differ, but in others they are sure to agree.

Whether they are large or small, timber-framed, white-washed, stuccoed or brick, they are tolerably certain to have an attentive host and hostess; a good fire in the kitchen; a clean, quiet, cheerful parlour; a neat bed-room; a comfortable bed with snow-white sheets; fowls, bacon, fresh eggs, butter and vegetables, with a good garden well stocked with gooseberry and currant trees, and a pleasant arbour.

Who is there who has not spent an agreeable day or two at one of these rural caravanseras, where "good entertainment for man and horse" is provided on reasonable terms? Who has not been bowed in by the bare-headed Boniface, and welcomed with a smile by the good-tempered hostess

and her daughter? And who has not marvelled again and again at the freshness of the air, the brightness of the fire, the cleanliness of the rooms, the excellence of the meat, the sweetness of the bread, the fineness of the ale, the thickness of the cream, and the low charge that has been made for them all?

At such houses as these, magistrates often meet, sportsmen and fishermen drop in for a meal, and, now and then, there a new-married couple take up their temporary abode. Being in one of these wayside Village Inns now, I will give a poetic sketch of poor Mary.

Mine host is much to mirth inclined,
  In manner and deportment free;
Mine hostess vigilant and kind,—
  A kinder creature cannot be!
But 'tis not manners free and fair,
Nor all their kind officious care;
Their crackling faggot's cheerful blaze,
Their wholesome food and cleanly ways;
Nor yet the flavour of their store
That lures me to the Pot-house door:—
To gaze, with mingled hope and fear,
Mary! thy form has brought me here.

'Tis not of health the blooming flower
  That fills the stripling's heart with glee,
'Tis not the momentary power
  Of beauty that enamours me;
For though a secret, silent grace,
Tempt me to gaze upon her face,
Yet every charm that draws me near,
Sorrow and pain have planted there.

Not twenty summer's suns have roll'd
  Their radiant glory round her head,

Yet Mary's earthly years are told,
And all her youthful charms are fled.
What though her wants may be preferr'd,
And now and then she quits her chair,
Her silent footsteps are not heard,
Her voice scarce undulates the air.
No smile on Mary's face may cling,—
A listless, lifeless, living thing.

While yet of tender years and weak,
Affliction bade her frame decline;
And, legibly upon her cheek,
Consumption wrote—"The maid is mine!"

There is, when earthly troubles cease,
A world of light, and love, and peace,
And boundless joy—and long ago
Poor Mary! I have told her so;—
Yet still, so free from hope and fear,
My voice she hardly seems to hear:—
Nor seeking joy, nor fearing pain,
No warning words have waked her brain:
Though I have watch'd her well, and stood,
Fostering in sympathetic mood,
Emotions strong as I do now,
No thought has settled on her brow,
And not the slightest, faintest streak
Of inward feeling stain'd her cheek.

I never saw a face so pale;
I never knew a form so spare;
It seems as though her body frail
Would melt and mingle with the air.

There is a soul-absorbing smart,
A pensive pang that thrills the heart,
When, gazing on our kindred clay,
We see it hourly waste away:—
But Mary, with an earthward eye,
Steals to the grave so silently,

One might suppose, so calm her breath,
That life had nought to yield to death.
The spring and summer gales have blown,
But they are over, past and gone ;
And winter's warring winds are near,
For autumn's dropping leaf is sere,
And Mary's lot is symboll'd there.

But, I must mount my weary beast,
Though anxious thoughts disturb my breast.
Poor Mary ! well, it must be so !
A little more of weal and woe,
Of shine and shade, of joy and pain,
Will pass, and I shall call again.

Yes ! I shall call again with fear,
And gaze upon a vacant chair,
And of mine hostess kind, inquire
Why Mary sits not by the fire ?

And I shall hear the dame reply,
A tear-drop starting in her eye,
While mournfully she shakes her head,
" Ah ! well-a-day ! Poor Mary's——dead.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CHANGE AND VARIETY IN RURAL SCENERY.

Rural Changes.—Reflections.—The frosty morning.—The elm, the birch, and the holly.—The copses, the sand-bank, and the valley.—Horses, cattle, sheep, colts, and pointer dog.—The covered waggon.—The stage coach.—The pedlar and the Irish tramper.—Boys sliding.—Tracks in the snow.—Peggy and her patten.—The hawthorn and spring.—The pollard oak.—The field, the lane, the coppice, and the common.

THOUGH the country in its general features is ever the same, yet it is ever changing. Its hills, its woods, its brooks, and its farm-houses are, for the most part, stationary, but its fields present us with a continual variety. The mattock, the spade, and the plough, tear up the earth where stood the coppice, and where grew the clustering nuts that we gathered with delight. The sunny hay-field in which we gambolled at one time, is covered with buttercups, and stocked with cattle at another. Where the golden grain waved gracefully in the autumnal breeze, the green turnip spreads its verdant leaves, and the high picturesque hedges in which the pie-finch built her nest, are made monotonously low and regular. Some changes afford us joy, while others induce reflection. Let me for a moment indulge my thoughts.

In a world that is given to change, we should prepare for changes. Folly sees no wisdom in this, but wisdom sees much folly in neglecting it. Though we discern our path by day, we require a lantern by night. Though we go thinly clad in summer, we stand in need of a thicker garment in winter.

The ostrich which hopes to escape danger by closing her eyes and burying her head in the sand, is a lively resemblance of him who, in youth, never thinks of age—in health disregards sickness; in life reflects not on death; and in time prepares not for eternity.

What a goodly and glorious orb is that which is now lighting up the skies, and gilding the earth with its golden rays! And what a change would take place were it suddenly to be blotted out from the firmament! This world would, indeed, be changed then, for the twinkling of a few stars would be but a sorry substitute for the blaze of day. We might look for spring, and summer, and autumn, but we should not find them. The ice-bound earth would no longer present us with grass, and trees, and fruits, and flowers; hunger and cold would pinch us, and never-ending winter, and visible darkness, and dreary desolation would reign over the earth. The very thought should make us grateful for the simplest flower that adorns our path; yea, for the meanest blade of grass that springs beneath our feet. But though such a reflection as this may not be valueless, it will hardly answer my purpose to pursue it. Changes that are certain, have a better claim on our attention than those which are unlikely.

To remain on the exposed heath when the tempest is approaching; to loiter on the sea-sands when the overwhelming tide is rushing onward with all its waves, is no proof of discretion. The coming tempest and the returning tide are not more certain than the changes of the world. The boy of seven years knows this, and the old man of seventy has it graven on his heart. Have I not seen the proud man humbled to the dust?—the rich man receiving pay as a pauper?—the wise man prattling in second childishness?—the strong man tottering on two sticks? Have I

not seen the proud, the rich, the wise, the strong, and the beautiful, pale and motionless as marble, shrouded and coffined, ready for the tomb? I have! If then the gold of the world becomes "dim," and its "fine gold changed;" if things that we value so highly, thus change and become valueless, we ought to prepare for the change by seeking to attain what changeth not. Though I speak to myself, the reflection is suited to all; to him who abounds, and to him who suffers need; to him who is young, and to him who is bending with age; to him who receives, and to him who imparts instruction.

Prepare for changes, is the language of reflection, for changes are ever coming on the wings of the wind. The fairest must fade; the dearest must die; the pyramids themselves will moulder away, and the everlasting hills crumble into dust.

The sun, that one moment shines in unclouded glory, is, in the next, obscured. The clouds, that sailed along the skies in one form, soon assume another. There are pleasant changes, as well as those that are painful; the corn blade turns into the ear; the blossom into the fruit; the crawling grub into a butterfly. Without change creation would lose half its beauty, and mankind, much more than half their enjoyments. As human beings we are dependent on change.

> "Change is the very spice of life which gives
> It all its flavour." * * * *
>
> "Change is the diet on which all subsist,
> Created changeable, and change at last
> Destroys us."

There is nothing on which the eye can gaze that remains stationary. Everything is either imparting, receiving, gaining strength, declining, freshening, fading, moving,

changing its form, or growing old. The heavenly bodies revolve in their courses; the sun ariseth and setteth; "the wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north;" the rivers "run into the sea;" the wide ocean continually ebbs and flows; the animal, mineral, and vegetable world present new appearances; the dust of man returns to the earth as it was, and his spirit into the hands of God who gave it.

My moralising mood being now over, let me just touch on the variety in rural scenery, even under circumstances by no means favourable. We will not look around us in spring, summer, or autumn, because we know that then the most charming variety is presented to the eye. We will take a less favourable season.

Let us go abroad now the ponds and the running brooks are frozen, and a fall of snow, four inches deep, lies on the ground. "But," say you, "there is no variety." No variety! Look at the blue heavens above, one part bright and clear, another dappled and freckled with cloudlets; to the north a solitary island seems bedded in a sea of azure, while the south is spread with white drapery-like masses of such dazzling beauty, that one might think the very angels had hung them up on high, and gilded their edges with sunbeams to call forth the admiration of mankind.

No variety! The tall elms are of themselves a picture, their dark and stately trunks whitened over on one side, with every branch and spray powdered to its very tip. The beauteous birch, the fairy of the woods, hangs its head and laden boughs as if ashamed of the dinginess of its silvery bark. The bright-leaved red-berried holly exults in the wide-spread wintry scene, and the almost buried bramble, overcome by his burden, seems to bow down his head to the ground.

No variety! Look at the snow-streaked hedges and the copses—the low shrubs and the high trees—the sand-bank near, and the distant hill—the clear pathway, swept by the winds, and the snowdrift in the valley. Here is a piece of timber—there lies a new plough, and yonder stands an old hovel, all diversifying the scene.

No variety! See the horses in the fold-yard with their frozen manes and tails—the cattle with their powdered top-knots—the sheep in the field scooping out the inside of the turnips with their sharp teeth—the shaggy colts in the bushy broken ground, and Dash the spaniel, and Pompey the pointer dog, running and rolling themselves in the snow half wild with joy. I could find in my heart to thank God for them, seeing that they cannot thank him for themselves.

No variety! Look at the turnpike road where the broad-wheeled, covered waggon, a moving avalanche, glides down the hill, preceded by eight broad-breasted heavy-heeled horses, and attended by the great-coated driver on his grey pony. Look at the stage-coach and four bays, for there are now not many such sights to be seen,—the passengers in their cloaks, Petershams and caps, and the coachman with his worsted comforter up to his ears. Look at the traveller in his gig—the pedlar with his pack; and there goes a blue-coated Irish tramper, with his honey of a wife, without stockings. Whether they are the best, or the worst people in the world, this is not the morning to inquire. I will be after them, and they shall have a mug of warm ale any how, at the Queen's Head, to drink "to the honour of ould Ireland."

No variety! Have a peep then at the pond, where a dozen boys of different ages, sizes, dresses, and dispositions, are assembled at their slide: one in a smock-frock leads the

way, spreading out his arms like a finger-post, due east and west; he is followed by a youngster in corduroys, who, in attempting to slide on one foot, falls at his full length—over him tumble in succession the motley, happy-hearted throng —shouts and laughter ring through the air, and hobnailed shoes, ragged jackets, caps without rims, hats without crowns, heads, legs and arms are huddled and heaped up together in strange confusion.

No variety! Why, look at the tracks in the snow,—horse-tracks, cattle-tracks, sheep-tracks—here a hare has run through the hole in the hedge—there a dog has dashed across the ditch—and all around are the footprints of clogs and hobnailed shoes. See here! Peggy has lost her patten! but she shall have it again if I can find her out, with a new pair of strings, too, for the one in the patten is broken.

No variety! Gaze a moment on the mottled hawthorn there, hanging over the spring in the sheltering sand-stone bank, every spray, and pointed thorn dappled with snow; and look at the ivy-clad pollard oak beside it, all bark and touchwood, and hollow as a drum. There! a mouse has run from the clustering ivy into the hollow tree. A black-bird has sprung from the mottled hawthorn, shaking the bush, and there is now a silvery shower of descending snow—beautiful! beautiful!

No variety, indeed! Is there no variety in the field and the lane, the coppice and the common—the dry crimp snow under your foot—the walk and the run—the pure, keen bracing air that freshens the spirit, and the healthy exercise that brightens the eye, reddens the cheek, gives a glow of pleasure to the heart, and sends the warm blood spinning to the very toes! Oh yes! Go abroad when you will in the country, and you will find variety.

The other day I met with the following lines on winter,

and as they are full of points, I will just introduce them here, among my Pickings of Rural Life.

" Old Winter, he ne'er puts a fire on,
A sturdy soul and tough ;
His flesh as firm as hammered iron,
No blast for him too rough.

He is the hardiest of men—
He burns no sick-room tapers ;
His house it freezes " but and ben ;"
He feels no sweats nor vapours.

He makes his toilet out of doors—
He never airs his shirt ;
He has no colics, toothaches, sores,—
By nothing is he hurt.

Him no sweet flowers, nor summer tints,
Nor song of birds can charm ;
He shuns hot fires, drinks " nae het pints,"
Hates everything that 's warm.

When foxes bark upon the heather,
Wood crackles on the grate,
And all rub hands through stress of weather,
And show their shivering state ;—

When rocks are split, and bones are brittle,
Clothes rustle, pitchers break,
The rogue, he disna care a spittle,
His sides are like to crack.

His winter palace far away,
He builds upon the pole,
His summer-house he rents in May,
High up in the Tyrol.

Where'er he rules, bound hard and fast,
His soldiers stand at ease ;
And as his sledge steals swiftly past,
We catch a glimpse and freeze."

CHAPTER XXIX.

MOSSY BANKS AND GURGLING STREAMS.

Soothing influence of rural scenes.—Goodness of God set forth in the harmony, peacefulness, and beauty of creation.—The retired valley.—The wood.—The brook.—The pools.—The falls.—Mossy banks and gurgling streams.—Miniature cavern.—Wayside objects.—Christmas.—Old observances.—The village church.

AS rural scenes soothe the spirit, so do they incline the heart to kindness. What is the world, and what are the world's treasures without affection? Oh, spirit of love, thou smoothest the roughest and gildest the darkest pathway! It is thine to pour balm into every wound and to half reconcile us to our heaviest afflictions.

> "Thou makest all things sacred by thy touch
> Of hand or foot; there 's not a leaf or flower
> That meets thy gaze, but owns thy magic power,
> And breathes thy name in perfumed accents—such
> As beauty's titled daughters never knew. How much,
> Let the warm heart speak, that gusheth hour by hour,
> Though tempests crash and threat'ning storm-clouds lower."

What a spirit of love has the Almighty Giver of sylvan delight manifested to mankind in the general harmony, and peacefulness, and beauty of creation! Heavenly hands have beautified the earth with verdure, decorated it with sunshine, and profusely scattered our paths with flowers! Who has not felt this, and who has not gazed on the glory of the setting sun, with heart visibly beating and pulse throbbing

wildly, carried away by the indescribable glory of the western sky, till the insufferable brightness has blinded the vain idolater, whose soul, for the moment, has been erringly offering incense to the creature instead of the Creator? The bright breezy hills purple with flowers; the heart-expanding valleys gushing with rivulets of crystal clearness; the rich garniture of fields and woods, vocal with melodious sounds, and the sweet, cool, shaded and secluded mossy banks and gurgling streams of the country are more than beautiful; they call forth emotions of delight; they demand the tribute of praise!

Oh, sweet is the retired valley that is now before me, where the mossy banks are manifold, and the hidden brook is heard gurgling in its meandering course! What a spot is this to muse alone in summer-tide, or when the sere leaves of autumn are trembling on the bough!

> "At the close of the day, when the hamlet is still,
> And mortals the sweets of forgetfulness prove;
> When nought but the torrent is heard on the hill,
> And nought but the nightingale's song in the grove."

The little vale is bounded wholly on one side, and partially on the other, by a wood; and a narrow brook, skirted with all the wild entanglement of reed and fern, and bramble and wild rose, now winding its way tortuously, and now falling in foamy cascades, runs along the deep hollow that is hidden by the overhanging brushwood. Here and there the banks of the brook are openly seen, and choice and beautiful plants, set by the fair hands of a baronet's daughter, a dear lover of sylvan scenes, who resides in the neighbourhood, give an added charm to the sequestered scene!

In tracing the course of the brook, I have found in the smooth pools that occur in its course, miniature Lake Lo-

monds and Genevas; and in the tumbling torrents, infant cataracts of the Nile and Falls of the Niagara.

"O Glory! Glory! mighty one on earth!
How justly imaged in the waterfall!
So wild and furious in thy sparkling birth,
Dashing thy torrents down, and dazzling all;
Sublimely breaking from thy glorious height,
Majestic, thundering, beautiful and bright.

"How many a wondering eye is turn'd to Thee,
In admiration lost! short-sighted men!
Thy furious wave gives no fertility;
Thy waters, hurrying fiercely through the plain,
Bring nought but devastation and distress,
And leave the flowery vale a wilderness.

"Oh fairer, lovelier, is the modest rill,
Watering with steps serene the field, the grove—
Its gentle voice as sweet, and soft, and still
As shepherd's pipe, or song of youthful love.
It has no thundering torrent; but it flows
Unwearied, scattering blessings as it goes."

I could sing in the joyousness of my heart of the influence of mossy banks, gurgling streams, and sylvan scenery. "I am standing," says a lover of nature, "by the side of a high bank, on which the setting sun is shining. The receding earth has formed a hollow, a kind of cavern on a small scale, from the roof of which are hanging thousands of slender roots with little dry clods of earth adhering to them. The breeze has put the slender roots in motion, and they and the suspended clods are fantastically moving in all directions, apparently mingling with the shadows they occasion against the farther side of the hollow. There is something exquisite in the wild witchery of this scene.

I have gazed delighted on many an excavation of nature and art,

> Chambers fair and glorious halls,
> Sparkling roof and glittering walls;

but this is entrancing. Caverns of Derbyshire, ye are outdone! Grotto of Antiparos, here is thine equal!"

Whether in the vast or minute, Nature is indeed beautiful, and sweet are her salutary influences. In her seclusions the littlenesses of life prevail not; the envious and hateful emotions, the over-reaching, grasping, money-clutching artifices that disfigure humanity are in abeyance, for nothing calls them forth. Natural scenes are favourable to peaceful emotions and kindly aspirations. When man compares himself with pigmy man, he is proud; but when brought fully into contact with the works of God, his pride is humbled and brought low. Solitude has given birth to many a high-wrought and ennobling plan of benevolent action. The very absence of our fellow-creatures promotes a love for them in our hearts, and the philanthropic suggestion of the poet is in unison with our desires.

> "Some high or humble enterprise of good,
> Contemplate till it shall possess thy mind,
> Become thy study, pastime, rest, and food,
> And kindle in thy heart a flame refined.
> Pray Heaven for firmness thy whole soul to bind
> To this thy purpose, to begin, pursue,
> With thoughts all fix'd, and feelings purely kind,
> Strength to complete and with delight review,
> And grace to give the praise where all is ever due."

In rural rambling there are unnumbered minor sources of interest and pleasure—wayside objects and circumstances that arrest the eye and occupy different dispositions. A hare runs across the lane; a covey of partridges rises from

the stubble-field, or a pheasant from the copse; a gipsy-tent is pitched in the quiet nook under the high hedge; a jack-ass hobbles along the dry ditch with his fore feet chained together; here is a landslip, and part of a wood or coppice is seen, with the trees growing thereon, removed from the height it once occupied to the very brink of the river. There is a fountain by the wayside, where the pure water gushes up through the red sand at the bottom; and yonder is an old saw-pit half filled and overhung with nettles, with the rude frame-work yet standing above it, where the top-sawyer followed his useful calling.

The gates of the fields have all manner of strange fastenings, and the stiles, over which you have to climb, are of all possible constructions, some helping and others sadly hindering you in your progress from one field to another. In some meadows you find fairy rings of luxuriant grass in which fungusses often grow, but the cause and the effect you will hardly distinguish; whether the fungusses have formed the rings or the rings have given birth to the fungusses you will find it difficult to decide.

Stone quarries, common as they are, are often better worth the observation of the naturalist than a museum. Indeed they are of themselves museums, complete cabinets of natural curiosities. Then, beside the hedge or under a bank, often lies a felled tree or log of timber, and if the whim to turn it over should be indulged in, you will see a strange collection of slugs and snails, caterpillars and ants, beetles and spiders.

The old hawthorn-tree that stands in the old green lane is not passed by without a thought. We speculate on its age, and conjure up the old Gaffers and Gammers that in days gone by conversed together at the spot, when it was in flower. The lane itself too is full of interest, being the old

packhorse-road of old times, and we think of the driver's song :—

"Far over the hill-top and through the deep dale,
Through the twisting glen and the wide-spread hollow,
Thrice-cheered by the sun-beam, the spring and the gale,
Our long string of horses all merrily follow :—
We reach the old hall and the old village inn,
With its cumbrous sign on the old hinges swinging ;
Then trudge along cheerly our journey to win,
And stow in the warehouse the stores we are bringing :
And we merrily sing to our bell's sweet chime—
Huzza !—huzza, for the baiting time !"

The old finger-post is an object of attraction ; for though it has ceased to assist and inspirit the weary traveller on his way, its arms being broken and its inscriptions illegible, it still, in its ruins, possesses a friendly appearance. Time has been when it did its duty, and this is not altogether forgotten.

When turnings and windings our path incommode,
'Tis a source of enjoyment to know the right road.

The old hovel through whose broken roof the descending rain finds its way with little impediment, is a relic of an order of things passed or passing ! Farms are tilled differently to what they used to be. The old hovel has been an old hovel the better part of the last twenty years.

The old common where geese yet cackle and stock up the grass, and where donkeys browse on the thistles ; the old ferry where the horse-boat lies moored, and the old ford where farmers ride through the water in their way to and from the neighbouring town are places of interest, and the river itself is an object of especial regard.

"The lapse of time and rivers is the same ;
Both speed their journey with a restless stream :

The silent pace with which they glide away
No wealth can bribe ; no prayer persuade to stay :
Alike irrevocable both, when past,
And a wide ocean swallows both at last.
Though each resemble each, in every part,
A difference strikes, at length, the musing heart ;—
Streams never flow in vain ; where streams abound,
How laughs the land with various plenty crown'd !
But time, that should enrich the nobler mind,
Neglected, leaves a dreary waste behind."

The old stone-cross, with its worn steps, figureless niches, and broken top, arrests the eye of the stranger; and the pedlar with his pack, the traveller with his bundle, and the weary soldier and sailor make the spot a resting place. The old bridle-road is not without passengers, especially on market-day.

" O the bridle way, the bridle way
Is a merry path on the bridal day."

People say, and with truth, that old customs are dying away; but, oh, there are merry times in the country yet, for though May-day is now rather chary of her garlands, and Easter and Whitsuntide keep more within doors than they did, even when the clubs meet, yet old Christmas still survives, not so lusty as he was perhaps, but yet joyous and merry. Other seasons there are that have their share of mirth, but, of all merry-making times, Christmas time, when the banquet is on the board, is the merriest. We will not enter into the revels of Christmas, but only just observe that the family gatherings, the open-hearted hospitality and liberal charity of this festive season ought not to be lightly estimated. " Keep up," says an author, " all those old seasonable observances which time has hallowed, which create good feeling and fellowship, and which consist of those innocent recreations, in which the young join as

actors and the old enjoy as spectators. Decorate your house with holly. Evergreens are nature's promise of returning summer and a fruitful season. The scarlet berries are pretty and cheerful, and the prickly leaves are excellent weapons to drive away melancholy and repining, which, with proper management, will become extinct at Christmas time. Make up your mind to do some little good every day. Farthings make pence, pence shillings, shillings pounds, and pounds a rich man. Small charities, in like manner, soon mount up, and with care a good capital of happiness may be realised. Pay off every debt of kindness that you are able, and call in, by gentle remembrances, all that are owing to you. Be not content with giving your blankets and coals to the poor. Warm their hearts with kind language, as their bodies with good clothing. Establish a court of equity in your heart, wherein to pronounce sentence against yourself on any of those domestic errors and crimes of which the law can take no cognisance. Make your good sense the judge, and the wholesome commandments of scripture your jury. Examine and cross-examine the witnesses; listen to the counsel for the plaintiff (Mr. Feeling), and the counsel for the defendant (Mr. Passion). You already know the evidence, and if the jury return a verdict of guilty, lay a heavy fine on the delinquent, and bind him in heavy sureties to keep in future the moral peace which he has violated."

I have been to a country church, and nothing could surpass the deep and unbroken repose of the village churchyard. It yet lacked an hour of the accustomed time to begin the services of the sabbath; not yet had the solitary bell, the only one that the tower of the church contained, sounded through the neighbouring valley; not yet had the first coming country rustic scraped his shoes and smoothed down the hair of his forehead at the porch; nor even the

aged clerk arrived, bearing the ponderous key to open the studded door.

I stood on an old tombstone, amidst the silence and solitariness of the place and looked around me. The church was a simple and humble edifice. It had a low tower, small windows, and white-washed walls.

The great hollow yew-tree to the south must have stood there the better part of a thousand summers and winters. The old mutilated cross, a remnant of popery, still stood upright on its pedestal of time-worn stones; a monument on one side bore the simple inscription, "Be ye also ready," and a tombstone on the other, that of "Prepare to meet thy God;" here was a brier-bound hillock, and there the long grass and the nettle mingled together, untrodden and unheeded.

While the simple edifice, the aged yew, the decayed cross, the rudely-sculptured stones, the long grass, and the mouldering heaps of the uncommemorated dead met my wandering eye, a quiet musing of the mind came over me.

Most of the hillocks near me were green, not having been disturbed for a long time by the spade of the sexton; but one, a very small one, was evidently fresh; not a brier had been bound over it, nor even a turf been laid on the heaped soil; the dew of the last night was the first that had fallen on that infant's grave.

I turned to the church, and peeped through the small panes of one of the low-latticed windows. I looked at the pulpit, and not only saw, but felt that it was empty.

The cawing of a rook or crow always renders the silence of a lonely place more impressive; it is like the striking of the clock in the middle of the night, when you feel the weight of the long and dreary hour that must be endured before you will hear another sound. It was so while I

stood by the little church; for a crow, flying high, very high above the tower, gave a solitary caw, and then winged his way in the direction of the river.

And now, what was it that had drawn me to the place at so early an hour, so long before the service of the Sabbath began? You shall hear.

Not a month had passed since I had attended a funeral in another parish, following the breathless clay of one that was dear to me to the house appointed for all living. It was the funeral of the minister of the little church I have already described. One of his last sermons was preached from the words, "My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

Often had I seen him on the back of his black pony, coming up the hill by the wood, on his way to the little church; and often had I entered the porch with him, after a friendly greeting and the interchange of kindly inquiries, to "worship and bow down," and to "kneel before the Lord our Maker."

The first time that I attended the little church, he joined me in the churchyard, half an hour before the service, and pointed out to me the graves of such of his aged parishioners as he had committed to the ground. The last time that I attended, we, as usual, shook hands before we entered the portal of the house of God.

It was when full of these remembrances, that I had walked so early to the little church; that I might recall to my mind the more vividly the recollection of him, whose friendly society I should no more enjoy. The past, the present, and the future, came over me, as I lingered among the tombs; and the uncertainty and fading nature of life led me to reflection.

I thought on the aged minister of the Most High, whose

funeral I had so lately attended. His death repeated the admonition graven on the stone by the old cross, which I have already noticed, "Prepare to meet thy God." He was a man far advanced in years.

He passed a life of mingled cares,
Such is the lot of man below;
Till age's grey and silvery hairs
Were thinly scattered o'er his brow.

He lived, through many a grief to prove
That God could guard and guide him well;
He died, to find that God is love,
And with him evermore to dwell.

Impressed with solemn thoughts, I lingered till the congregation had assembled, and then entered the little church. The service of the Sabbath was conducted in a simple and devotional spirit. I heard a sermon from the text, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom;" and then walked slowly away from the place, meditating on the words, "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold thou hast made my days as a hand-breadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity."

CHAPTER XXX.

RURAL PICTURES.

The homestead of Luke Holmes.—The ruined thatch, broken windows, shattered cart, and empty rick-yard.—Old Dinger.—The Fifth of November bonfire.—Feeding the poultry.—The last load.—The thrasher.—The rainbow.—The woodman.—The rimy morning.—The rising sun.—Hunting scene.—Sunset.—Reflections.

LET us select a few sketches of varied character from the picture gallery of rural life. The more unconnected they are, the better will they be suited to our purpose.

One of the most melancholy pictures of rural life, is that of the homestead of a small farmer who has struggled in vain against calamity. I remember looking with a sigh on the farm-house and farm-yard of Luke Holmes, when he was said to be "going to the dogs," and when all things around him seemed already gone to wrack and ruin.

Luke was always a farmer on a small scale; but then his little farm and homestead were his own. He worked hard to win an honest bread, and to hold up his head among his neighbours; but it all would not do; he could not stand up against losses and hard times.

"His cattle died, and blighted was his corn,"

so that he was obliged to mortgage his little inheritance, and from that moment Luke Holmes was never the man he was before.

As I looked on his homestead in passing, I saw the ruined

thatch, and the broken panes of the windows, and the grass springing up, here and there, in the fold-yard. These things were not as they used to be, and they told a sorrowful tale. A broken plough lay by the cowhouse, and a shattered cart and wheelbarrow were under the shed. The cart had but one wheel, where the other was I could not tell. There was neither wheat, barley, oats, nor beans in his rick-yard, and the hay-stack was all gone within a few trusses. I saw no cattle about the premises. There must have been a pig in the sty, for I heard him whining for food; and there were a few long-legged pullets doing their best to scrape up a living in the desolate fold-yard.

The wind was blowing about the top-knot and fetlocks of Luke Holmes's old horse. There he stood in the lane, with his back against the gate, his mane tossing about over his ears, and his tail driving in between his hind legs.

The trees in the hedge were bending to and fro, and the crazy gate was shaking and creaking backwards and forwards, yet poor old Dinger looked as if he neither heard the gate, the trees, nor the wind. How he could give way to drowsiness in such a blustering scene I cannot tell; but there he stood, drooping his head, and resting his hind foot on the top of his shoe; his eyes were more than half shut, and his lower lip hung down as if it hardly belonged to his mouth.

Poor old Dinger had done some hard work in his time, but his working days were almost all over. It was quite as much as I could do to imagine him what he once was, a frolicksome young colt, with a mane and tail like silk, and a skin smooth, soft, and bright, the flank and shoulders shining like a polished boot. Poor old Dinger, like his master, was evidently "standing on his last legs." "Ah!" thought I, musing as I walked away, "Luke Holmes will be soon looking out for a place of service."

"The needy farmer when his crop is sold,
Sad and reluctant takes the tempting gold;
And as each day still makes his little less,
Though nature's smiles the growing plenty bless,
The prospect seems upon his eye to lower,
And vain the soft supplies of sun and shower;
No more he views the scene with fond delight;
Thick fill the ears, he sickens at the sight;
And when ripe autumn brings her harvest on,
Languid he works, his spring of toil is gone;
Sold are his golden hopes; no more the field,
Though crown'd with sheaves, a master's joy can yield;
Abash'd he takes a hireling servant's place,
His wife and children share the deep disgrace;
Till sunk at last, and spent his scanty store,
He stoops to glean the lands he farm'd before."

It is the fifth of November, and the night is dark, wild, and windy. A big bonfire is at its height, and a group of happy boys are around it. Squibs and crackers are hissing, bouncing, and bursting in all directions. Here a small cannon is let off, and there a pistol. Now for it—a grand volley is fired; a dozen fiery serpents are mounting upwards; a kick against the dry post that is burning makes it flare up with ten thousand sparkles, and a loud huzza bursts from the delighted throng.

How well do I remember
While I was yet a child,
The Fifth of bleak November,
When the wind was loud and wild.
The leaves were flying in the blast,
The night was dark and cold;—
But many a year since then has past,
And I am growing old.

The farmer's daughter, the very picture of innocence and simplicity, is feeding the poultry, throwing wide the barley

from her apron; cocks, hens, and chickens, ducks, geese, guinea-fowl, and turkeys, are greedily devouring the scattered grain, picking, pecking, snatching, and gabbling. The ducks, with their broad bills, now and then pluck a feather from the fowls; the geese in their turn make the ducks waddle out of their reach; while the gander himself is put to flight by the old turkey cock: fluttering and flying, cackling, and screaming, there they are all together!

Oh, it is a pleasant thing to see the last load of wheat carried, while the sun looks on with his brightest beam, and the farmer and his people are all happy together. The load is brought from the farthest field, where the gleaners are busily employed; a green bough is stuck up in the middle of it; laughing women and children are seated on the ripe and ruddy sheaves. The horses, Smiler, Blackbird, Jewel, Whitefoot, and Ball, with a boy or two on each of their backs, are half covered with garlands. On they go, till they reach the farmer's homestead, and then a man, mounted on the high wall by the pigeon house, waves his hat triumphantly above his head, and shouts out with a voice louder than the town-crier,

> "We have ploughed! we have sowed!
> We have reaped! we have mowed!
> We have brought home many a load:
> Hip! Hip! Hip! harvest home!"

The well-thatched wheat-stacks in the rick-yard speak well for the harvest that is past. Pleasant is the sound of the thumping flail, for the rain is pattering on the penthouse, and the wind is raving round the barn. While other people get wet to the skin, Old Robin Roughhead stands up to his knees in clean, dry straw, every stroke of his flail making the hard, ripe grain fly about him like hail.

Winter may be personified in a variety of ways, but I

hardly remember a more vivid representation of the season than that afforded by a group of water-cress gatherers, habited in cloaks of different colours, each carrying a bunch of water-cresses, tied to the top of a stick. There was a novelty in their appearance itself, and the severe frost, the cold biting north-wind, and the heavy flakes of snow that thickly fell upon them, imparted an additional interest, which otherwise would never have been excited by them. One of them bore in her arms a young child, wrapped up in her cloak. The ditty they sung was both homely and cheerless, and it was doled forth in a most melancholy manner:

"We 're all frozed out!
We 're all frozed out!
We 're all entirely frozed out!
Pity poor water-cressers!"

There they stood at the gate, their bonnets plastered with snow, and their cloaks flying about loosely in the wind, screwing up their faces in all manner of forms at the cold, and chaunting their dismal ditty very discordantly, every now and then, seemingly more by accident than design, harmonising one with another. "We 're all *frozed* out," cried one; "We 're all *frozed* out," repeated another; "We 're all entirely *frozed* out," chimed in a third; and then the whole group united their voices in the concluding chorus, "Pity poor water-cressers."

The wintry tale told by the group was perfect in itself, even without the assistance of their melancholy song. The falling flakes of snow sufficiently testified the inclemency of the season; the frozen water-cressers brought the icy brook in the full view of the spectator; the fluttering cloaks proclaimed the strength of the searching blast, and the red and pinched-up faces of the singers confirmed the intelligence

that snow-spreading, water-freezing, finger-tingling winter was abroad.

The tempest has exhausted its rage, the retiring storm is seen retreating o'er the distant hills, and the bright-coloured rainbow is spanning the sky, announcing, like an angel of gladness, that the season of sunshine is at hand.

> With glowing hues, the earth and heavens are crowned,
> And light, and life, and joy are beaming round.

It is the fall of the leaf, and the woodman with his strong arm and sharp axe is making the white and bright chips fly around him. See! the tree is bending. Oh! with what a murderous crash the giant oak has fallen to the ground!

The morning is chill, the grey mist hides the distant prospect, and the trees, and shrubs, brambles, thorns, and blades of grass are thickly covered with dew. Well might a spectator exclaim, "How poor are the pearls on the neck of beauty, compared with the coruscations of this spreading hawthorn! How dim the diamonds in a monarch's crown, in competition with the myriad gems that are sparkling on these frosty straggling brambles! The most elaborate workmanship, the costliest carvings of human hands, is a coarse and blundering performance, in comparison with the more than magical creations that are profusely flung on every brake and brier. Every leaf is in itself a study for the reflective mind; every shrub a museum, and every bush a cabinet of curiosities."

It is early morn, and the eastern heavens are kindling with burning light; radiant hues, and beams unbearable are spreading abroad, for the all-glorious sun, the ambassador of the King of kings, gorgeously clad in purple and gold is careering over the hills, in his triumphal car, crying aloud to half the world: "Awake thou that sleepest!"

What dazzling streams, yon glowing skies unfold!
Rivers of light, and floods of molten gold!

Hark! the clamour of the deep-mouthed dogs, and the winding of the huntsman's horn come up from the valley, now dying away, and now bursting out afresh, echoed by the distant hills. Here comes the hard-run hare, her body dappled with mud, and her eyes starting from her head, so hotly is she pursued. Poor puss! thy hours are numbered. No more shalt thou banquet on the young corn, or squat in thy ferny form—thy merciless pursuers are upon thee! The hedges are crashed, the gates are overtopped, and reeking horses and open-mouthed dogs, and exulting hunters are suddenly assembled—the barking of the beagles, the cheers, halloos, and echoes, are strangely mingled.

The deafening din the valley fills,
And mounts amid the rocks and hills:
But hills and rocks refuse the strain,
And rudely fling it back again.

It is evening, the sun is setting in the western skies, and a pleasurable pensiveness is stealing over the spirit. The influence of rural scenery is felt, and calmness, and quietude, and sober thought are absorbing the mind. "Evening," says Dr. Drake, "when the busy scenes of our existence are withdrawn, when the sun descending leaves the world to silence, and to the soothing influence of twilight, has been ever a favourite portion of the day with the wise and good of all nations. There appears to be shed over the universal face of nature, at this period, a calmness and tranquillity, a peace and sanctity, as it were, which almost insensibly steals into the breast of man, and disposes him to solitude and meditation. He naturally compares the decline of light and animation with that which attaches to the lot of humanity;

and the evening of the day and the evening of life become closely assimilated in his mind.

"It is an association from which, where vice and guilt have not hardened the heart, the most beneficial result has been ever experienced. It is one which, while it forcibly suggests to us the transient tenure of our being here, teaches us at the same time, how we may best prepare for that which awaits us hereafter. The sun is descending, but descending after a course of beneficence and utility, in dignity and glory, whilst all around him, as he sinks, breathes one diffusive air of blessedness and repose. It is a scene which marshals us the way we ought to go; it tells us, that after having passed the fervour and the vigour of our existence, the morning and the noon of our appointed pilgrimage, thus should the evening of our days set in, mild, yet generous in their close, with every earthly ardour softened or subdued, and with the loveliest hues of heaven just mingling in their farewell light.

"It is a scene, moreover, which almost instinctively reminds us of another world; the one we are yet inhabiting is gradually receding from our view; the shades of night are beginning to gather round our heads; we feel forsaken and alone, whilst the blessed luminary, now parting from us, and yet burning with such ineffable majesty and beauty, seems about to travel into regions of space, interminable happiness and splendour. We follow him with a pensive and a wistful eye, and, in the vales of glory which appear to open round his setting beams, we behold mansions of everlasting peace, seats of ever-during delight. It is then that our thoughts are carried forward to a Being infinitely good and great, the God and Father of us all, who, distant though he seem to be, and immeasurable, beyond the power of our faculties to comprehend, we yet know is about our path, and about our

bed, and careth for us all; who has prepared for those who love him scenes of unutterable joy, scenes to which, while rejoicing in the brightness of his presence, the effulgence we have faintly attempted to describe shall be but as the glimmering of a distant star."

Such thoughts as these are sweetly soothing and sustaining. They are in harmony with rural influences; they lead us to look inward and upward, and dispose us gratefully to turn to the best account, the peaceful, as well as the glowing scenes of creation. Pleasant and dear, and delightful as it is to gaze on rising and setting suns, on foliage and fields, and woods and waters, man has a higher destination; onwards are his hopes, and upwards should be his desires. Happy is he whose thankfulness to the great Giver of good is called forth by rural scenery, and still happier they who in culling the green leaves and fresh flowerets of time, fail not to weave a garland for eternity.

THE END.

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